



Anna Price (left) with fellow members of the Recovery Orchestra, Zoe, Naomi and Cynthia. ©Irene Carter

My BSO

Anna Price, Recovery Orchestra

Music can provide a lifeline for many of us during difficult times, and for Anna Price, being part of the Bristol Recovery Orchestra has helped her to heal and find joy in life again after a long struggle with addiction.

“I was lost in those 20 years – who I was, what I liked, what I enjoyed – and I had a horrible relationship with myself,” Anna said. “I graduated with a first class degree in Philosophy from Warwick, but after leaving university I felt ill-equipped for life and went through some very dark times.”

Originally from Corsham in Wiltshire, Anna moved to Bristol to focus on her recovery. After joining a choir set up by Bristol Drugs Project (BDP), she found she was able to reconnect with herself through music, and when she got involved with the Recovery Orchestra in early 2019, her life was transformed further.

“I discovered the power of sharing music with people, the special thing that happens when you’re playing in that one moment all together. That feeling started in the choir and it took off even more in the orchestra. So much of recovery, for me, has been about getting back inside my body, back into the moment. And that’s what making music is, isn’t it? You’re in that same moment, sharing it together,” she said.

The Recovery Orchestra, led by Bristol-based BSO Associate Musician Dr Jon James and run in partnership with BDP, meets weekly for rehearsals and performs at the end of each term with BSO musicians. During lockdowns, the group continued rehearsing on Zoom, with sessions including a quiz at the start and, sometimes, a lesson on musical notation. Anna, who plays percussion, said it was vital the group continued to meet online each week, although her “connection to drumming and the music really went up a notch” when in-person rehearsals resumed at the beginning of this year.



“Every week with the Recovery Orchestra I’m struck by how immediate the sense of community is; how much we learn from each other when we stick at something over time, and what an anchor music can be in all sorts of situations. It’s been touching to see how deeply the work affected the BSO musicians who’ve joined us for our concerts too.” Dr Jon James, BSO Associate

“One of the things common to all people struggling with addiction is isolation and disconnection. Part of recovery is to reconnect with other people – we’re doing that through the medium of music.”

“Jon is amazing and so authentic – his whole body is music,” she continued. “At the start of each session, we do a check-in where we find out how everybody’s week has been and what music we’ve been listening to, then we do some warm-up exercises, before going straight into rehearsing. We usually work on two different pieces of music in a session.”

The orchestra’s repertoire spans multiple genres, including classical, jazz, and pop, and this term, they are performing an intricate cover of Radiohead’s *Paranoid Android*. Jon also inspires the group to improvise and create their own compositions.

“It’s amazing when we perform to the public. I look around and I pinch myself that I’m part of something so incredible,” Anna said. “I feel so lucky to be in the group, and we all love Mondays as that’s orchestra day!”

Anna and her fellow players were joined by BSO musicians Robb Tooley [Second Trombone], Joan Martinez [Tutti First Violin] and Ben Lewis [Percussion] for two public performances in July. “Robb Tooley said afterwards that he loved playing with us as it was a vulnerable and raw, but beautiful, experience. It seems to go two ways – the musicians enjoy playing with us as much as we enjoy playing with them,” she said.

Anna, who is now five years in to her recovery journey, described being part of the orchestra as “crucial” to her sense of wellbeing and positivity. “One of the things common to all people struggling with addiction is a sense of isolation and disconnection. Part of recovery is to reconnect with other people – we’re doing that through the medium of music,” she said. “The Recovery Orchestra is giving me joy in my life, which means I don’t have a relationship with drugs or alcohol anymore.”

A new documentary film about the Recovery Orchestra by Irene Carter was premiered at the Bristol Beacon in November and is available to watch on BDP’s YouTube channel.

Bristol Recovery Orchestra started in February 2019 with an eight-week pilot funded by the BSO that culminated in a performance at the end of March

The weekly group is open to anyone who has had issues with drugs or alcohol, or is in recovery, and can play an acoustic instrument

The Recovery Orchestra is one of several creative support groups run by Bristol Drugs Project; others include Rising Voices Recovery Choir and Stepladder Drama Group

You can watch the group’s July performance of their original composition *Reconnect* by searching for ‘Recovery Orchestra’ at bsolive.com