

Dark Peak Music Foundation
Principal Musical Director's Report to the AGM
7th November 2017

The music centre ran its very first session on 19th October 2001 with a group of 19 children, the most advanced being Grade 2. 17 years later we are a flourishing organization with 9 groups operating, providing opportunities for around 150 players, ranging from near beginners to students moving on to music college and university level music.

Thanks in large part to Derbyshire Music Partnership we are in the fortunate position of being financially secure enough that we can continue to develop groups, roll out ambitious and innovative projects and strive to add ever increasing value for our members.

Our three-pronged approach is Progression, Adventure and Inspiration. Our family of ensembles support every individual's PROGRESSION; their personal journey of artistic development from their very first notes, right through to preparation for higher education at music colleges or universities. Through our concerts, collaborations and bi-annual foreign tours we offer musical ADVENTURE, giving young players those experiences that they will carry with them throughout their lives. And our new INSPIRE series presents a series of events which go beyond the core work of the music centre and provide another whole level of inspiration, not only to our young players, but also to parents, friends and the wider community. The events include:

- Professional Concerts: this year we had a stunning concert by Maria Snowdon and En Hudson, "The Magic Harp".
- Masterclasses: bringing in experts to give additional/specialist advice to players of all levels.
- Workshops: Giving sections of the orchestra and bands a chance to explore their own family in greater depth, as well as new offerings such as jazz improvisation.
- Performance Platforms: A chance for students of all standards to perform solos and small ensembles with a friendly and informal audience.

Some of the highlights of the last year included an invitation to the Concert Band to perform in the national final of the National Concert Band Festival in Warwick. The ensemble gave one of its best performances so far and achieved a Silver Award. Also taking part for the first time was our Intermediate Wind Band, who are taking part again this year.

Another major development was the formation (or re-formation) of our orchestra, focusing on our younger generation of players. With a major re-structuring we effectively "sandwiched" the orchestra between the Intermediate and Senior String groups. This has worked very well, encouraging all to join in and also making it easy to have a team of tutors on hand all the time. It has also provided a chance to develop some smaller chamber ensembles, including a brass quintet and a wind quintet, giving valuable additional coaching to aspiring principal players.

I am pleased to report once again that we have a happy, healthy and successful music centre with all groups running smoothly. I would like to make a special tribute to Tom Elliott who stepped down at the start of the year as Director of Strings to move onto his new career in orchestral management. Tom has been pivotal in bringing the Glossop String Orchestras into the wider Dark Peak family, enabling us to be far more ambitious in our musical plans. I am thrilled to welcome Emma Dixon as our new Director of Strings and Helen Parkes to lead our young string ensembles. Both bring a wealth of experience to our team of directors and have already started to make a major impact. Emma is developing an enhanced role in close collaboration with

make a major impact. Emma is developing an enhanced role, in close collaboration with Tamandra Ford, our Area Leader, to bring forward initiatives to develop string teaching, forging closer links between the music centre and wider opportunities groups, schools and teachers. We hope that Emma will soon also be extending provision to the pre-instrumental stages, with the introduction of a Dalcroze and Kodaly session for very young children.

As I have said, all our groups are flourishing, but we cannot be complacent. Our ability to provide quality experience in a progressive family of well-run ensembles depends entirely on our continuing recruitment. Whilst there are initiatives which should result in a massive increase in uptake, these often fail to address the important step between first access and moving onto more formal lessons, promoting a “have-a-go” culture amongst younger children, their families and schools. Schemes intended to open access to all, regardless of economic, cultural or social background, do not always move us closer to that goal as they do not extend much beyond the first access stages. Learning to play an instrument requires significant time input and individual attention. It requires a skilled professional teacher, supportive families, a network of opportunities both in school and out, and a high level of commitment from the student. It is a major financial investment on the part of a family and cannot be done quickly, any more than learning mathematics or becoming a champion swimmer can.

As a music centre we are committed to ensuring that every child can develop their interest in music with access to the best quality tuition and opportunities to work and perform with others at their own level. I believe that we should be doing all in our power, not only to provide our core activities, but also to be proactive in the bigger picture; encouraging children to progress past the early stages, lobbying for more teaching in our area, engaging with all local teachers and students to encourage membership of the music centre and always re-evaluating our own work to ensure that we are providing the best experience for our students.

Music is and always has been a great social force for good in the world. Most of the children in our music centre were not even born when it all started in 2001, and I for one am immensely proud that they are now able to grow up in an environment with such an inspiring and professional team of mentors and a vibrant musical organization at its heart.

Jeff Snowdon
6th November 2017