

Principal Musical Director's Report to the AGM

October 2018

First of all I'd like to thank Andy for his introduction and add my thanks to our great team of Trustees and Parent Helpers, without whose enthusiasm, hard work and support nothing could happen. Thank you all for giving your time, expertise and energy. I'd like in particular to thank Rachel, who is stepping down from leading the Intermediate Wind Band. Rachel is a one in a million and we thought it would never be possible to replace someone who had the perfect blend of musical skill, patience and mild insanity necessary to take the group. But we have once again fallen on our feet with Sarah waiting in the wings; exactly the right person at exactly the right time. I'm pleased to say Rachel won't be leaving us totally as she will still be on hand in an advisory role.

One of my students said to me last week when I told him about the new Dalcroze School "It's getting pretty big isn't it!" The look on his face was one of pride at being part of something which has become such an important part of so many people's lives. I said to him that he should be proud, as should all the others who have gone before over the past 18 years since the affectionately nick-named "Band from Hell" was formed. It is the collective contribution of what must be approaching hundreds of children and parents over those 18 years that has led to the music centre we have today.

We now have the largest number of members ever, with nine ensembles running across the area. Our Concert Band achieves consistently high standards, achieving recognition in national festivals. We keep the orchestral flame burning with our lovely little orchestra on Monday nights and the occasional bigger scale Orchestra of the Peaks projects. We are considered to be model of good practice, with ground-breaking ideas which address the ever-changing music education environment. Through our INSPIRE series we draw the professional world into this environment and coupled with the additional projects such as the theory lessons and the new Dalcroze School we aim to offer a full compass of musical training. We have a superb team of professionals who bring a wealth of experience from diverse areas of the music industry, all of them passionate about inspiring and encouraging a love of music in our youngsters. We aim to nurture musical aspirations from the pre-instrumental levels right through to university and music college preparation.

Turning to last year, one of the highlights was the success of our Intermediate Wind Band who entered the NCBF for the second time. Achieving a Gold Award in the regional round, they were invited to the RNCM for the national final and achieved a Gold Award at this as well. Congratulations to our rising stars and to Rachel for guiding them to this level.

The Concert Band and members of the Sinfonia also had an exciting culmination to their year with the Italy tour. This was the third of our tours to Europe, which have become a biennial focus for the music centre. 56 students took part with 8 staff, including two ex-members now studying music at college and university, and the camaraderie and cooperation between the players was a joy to behold. With trips to the great cultural cities of Venice and Verona and performances high in the Italian Alps to large and appreciative audiences in beautiful venues, it was an unforgettable experience for everyone. We had the widest age range yet for a tour and I'd like to record my thanks to the brilliant team of staff who kept all the youngsters safe, happy and in the right place at the right time. I'd also like to thank ACFEA Specialised Travel for their professionalism, ensuring that that every detail was meticulously planned.

The other major project last year was the collaboration with PDMC on the "Windows of the World" project. Not to be thwarted by the Beast from the East, the performance eventually went ahead a month later than planned. Drawing together the three music centres of PDMC, Wirksworth and Dark Peak, the project included a series of orchestral workshops, a combined wind band and a percussion workshop to create a spectacular performance in St John's Church, Buxton. Together with the friendship we have with Gareth Widdowson (who is now very much part of our touring team) and Gavin Usher, the collaboration cemented our close relationship with our twin music centre PDMC.

As well as these specific projects the music centre has seen major structural developments this year in particular with the work of our Director of Strings, Emma Dixon. Emma and her team have worked closely with the North West Leader of Music Development, promoting string playing in the area by a series of publications, PR events and

roadshows in and out of schools, and liaising with string teachers to widen engagement with the Foundation and its ensembles. As a result we have seen a staggering three fold increase in numbers in our junior string groups, giving us a firm base to our pyramid for the future.

2018-19 brings a whole raft of new developments which have already begun with the launch of the Dark Peak Studio and Dalcroze School. Responding to the need for out of school teaching facilities, the Studio is already being used by a number of teachers and will grow into a thriving hub for music tuition, specifically for children who cannot access lessons through schools, such as sixth formers travelling into Manchester, or children from schools that do not offer instrumental lessons. It will also give us the opportunity to focus on developing minority instrumental tuition such as oboes and bassoons. Connected with this we hope over the coming year to publish a prospectus as a one-stop guide for parents, setting out the opportunities for their children to do music from the earliest ages right through to sixth form.

Our INSPIRE series has already got off to a flying start with the highly successful Jazz@St. Lukes with Carl Raven and his quartet, with special guest appearance from our own Emma Dixon. Later in the year we are planning a percussion workshop with Bradley's Hitmen (Chris Bradley is principal percussionist of Opera North) which will be open to young people from across the area, including Chesterfield.

We will be presenting three concerts. As well as our traditional end of term Christmas and Summer Concerts we will be organising a large-scale event in the Octagon in Buxton, featuring all the ensembles in the music centre, and hopefully including an orchestral project along the lines of the Orchestra of the Peaks.

Music in education faces unprecedented challenges at the moment with the emphasis slipping away from creative and performing arts in the school curriculum. The EBacc system of exams is leading to fewer young people opting to take music at GCSE and A Level, with the very real possibility that these courses could disappear completely in many schools. This against a political backdrop which threatens a very uncertain future for many industries which are currently thriving, including the UK music industry. One astonishing estimate puts the creative industries at being worth £8 million per hour to our economy. The music sector alone is reckoned to be one of the biggest export contributors after financial services, with an estimated worth to the UK economy of £4.4 billion. And yet it is relegated to the status of a fashion accessory, with music services being closed and having to go cap in hand just to keep going. Against this short-sightedness we are incredibly lucky to be part of a well-structured music hub, led by the Derby and Derbyshire Music Partnership who are fantastically supportive of area music centres. With this financial security we are committed to responding to change, ensuring that the opportunity to enjoy and develop through music is alive and well in our corner of Derbyshire.

A phrase on our new website says, "At the heart of our ethos is the belief that children can develop themselves through the wonderful gift of music". Music is not just a hobby, or an extra credential to put on the cv. It is an essential part of growing up; of being human! Music is and always has always been a vital part of our social fabric and our development as individuals. Through learning music children develop confidence, social skills, teamwork, and above all the self-affirming satisfaction of taking part in one of the highest forms of collective human creativity, nowhere better summed up than in this short passage written by a music teacher:

"Not because I expect you to major in music
Not because I expect you to sing or play all your life
Not so you can relax
Not so you can have fun
But, so you will be human
So you will recognize beauty
So you will be sensitive
So you will be closer to an infinite beyond this world
So you will have something to cling to
So you will have more love, compassion, gentleness, good - in short more life".