

2020 Season Report

Introduction

It is instructive to step back to 1997 when Music for Life was formed “to encourage a lifelong love of music within our young people” with an initial tranche of 13 schools and 1000 pupils.

It was formed using Live Music Now (established in 1983) as a model which had been set up with Yehudi Menuhin’s backing and encouragement - his philosophy was that *“Music, amongst all the great arts, is the language which penetrates most deeply into the human spirit, reaching people through every barrier, disability, language and circumstance. This is why it has been my dream to bring music back into the lives of those people whose lives are especially prone to stress and suffering... so that it might comfort, heal and bring delight.”*

Although much of LMN’s remit is much wider than ours and they cover a massive range of recipient organisations, Yehudi’s underlying philosophy is just as applicable to Music for Life..... but life has moved on:

- The Music Services as we knew them were just beginning to undergo a severe and continuing retrenchment
- Increasingly, music has been sidelined in delivery of the National Curriculum
- Some of our schools no longer carry a member of staff with even a basic musical knowledge
- The parents of the current Primary School generation have largely passed through their school life with very little music input.
- The internet, mobile phones and the multiplicity of social media has taken over our lives and music is now delivered in short bursts and “classical” traditions are only one step away from extinction.

..... but Music for Life carries on funded by the generosity of our Patrons to the tune of about £9,500 plus Gift Aid. The schools contribute on a per capita basis which recovers about £5,500 of the cost

Delivery

This year we have used 8 sets of artists. These are all highly professional musicians, many of them playing at a national level and some of whom have been with us for many years:

- Laura Connolly (clog dancer) and Stewart Hardy (fiddle/violin)
- Janet Fulton (percussion)
- Barbara Grunthal (cello) and Ryan Breen (tuba)
- Ruth Rosales and Ben Hudson (bassoons)
- 6Pac Jazz Trio with Gavin Barras (double bass), Ben Gray (drums) and Andy Stamatakis-Brown (piano)
- James Stretton (brass)
- Voces8 Scholars (a capella singing)
- The Vennart Quartet (string quartet)

The last two are new to us with the specific remit of introducing unaccompanied singing and string playing to the children’s sound-world.

Recipients

There has been a partial fall-off, then recovery in the last couple of years caused mostly by funding issues in the schools and also by several changes in heads who have not necessarily been au fait with what we are trying to do. That said, 27 schools participated this year with about 3,300 pupils.

They are: Mill Hill Community, Husthwaite CofE, Brafferton CofE, South Kilvington CofE, Dishforth Airfield, Huby CofE, Sowerby Primary Academy, Alanbrooke Community, Sessay CofE, Kell Bank CofE, Thornton Watlass CofE, Brompton Community, Alverton Community, Osmotherley, The Dales School, Aiskew Leeming Bar CofE, Burneston CofE, Kirby Hill CofE, Romanby Community, Broomfield Community, Mowbray School, Colburn Community (New for 2020), Carlton Miniott Academy, Ainderby Steeple CofE, Pickhill CofE and Applegarth Community. Sadly, lockdown intervened before we could get to Thirsk Community.

Administration

Many thanks should go to Vicki and John Farby for the administration of this exercise. Essentially, each school has a concert and either one or two workshops and quite often an end-of-day share. Trying to negotiate the schools' and artists' diaries at the same time as avoiding duplication is testing - that's without any changes of mind!

Our Objective

Within the boundaries of our mission statement, I think we are trying to give the schools high quality live music that, hopefully, children will respond to - whether it is sound, feelings, release of emotion, stimulus etc. We are also getting them to participate through call and response activity, questions, demonstrations, donning some clogs, blowing a trombone - whatever.

This is something that they will take away with them either consciously or sub-consciously and will add to their learning and experiences:

"Thank you - I loved that we created our own music. I also loved the music you played" - Charlotte at Brafferton

"The children absolutely adored it as did all of us staff. Thank you so very much and we look forward to hopefully doing it all again next year." - Admin at Osmotherley

"I just wanted to say thank you for organising the Music for Life event again this year. I wasn't in school on Wednesday so missed the jazz trio but talking to the children they really enjoyed it and got a lot from it." - Head, Romanby

"It was great, children and staff loved it and lots were talking about it afterwards. Hopefully it will help teachers to be inspired to teach more music to their pupils! Look forward to seeing which ensemble we get next year!" - Jen, Music Lead, Colburn

From the comments above and from talking to staff at the schools, we are also performing to the staff who undoubtedly get a great deal from the music and from the examples and attitudes of the performers.

Given the factors that have crept in over the last 20 years mentioned above, the notion that not every school can now automatically be expected to sign up to Music for Life AND the new Head of Ofsted's (Amanda Spielman) announcement that the schools should now pay as much attention to Music and the Arts as they do to Maths and English, I decided that I would attempt to visit every school this year to find out how Music for Life sits in their lives. This is what I have found.

Visits

As I write this, I still have half a dozen or so schools to catch up with after their M4L day plus another couple who dropped off the scheme this year for reasons that are, as yet, unclear - unfortunately Covid-19 has now precluded this in the short term. I have written private notes on each school but have seen sufficient now to be able to make some significant points.

My initial questions to the school (usually the Head but sometimes the Music Lead) are:

- A. What is your view on what we deliver?
- B. What is your current “music scene” within the school?
- C. Are you trying to expand it?
- D. Is there any more that Sowerby Music can do to help what you do either by facilitation, extra sessions, special projects or practical help

It has to be remembered that Sowerby Music has a lot of varied musical expertise on which it can call, a certain amount of money and, historically, an ability to raise it BUT a distinct shortage of its own pairs of hands. Beware of promising what we can't deliver!

- A. There is no doubt that we consistently score very highly in what we deliver:
 1. The music is of excellent quality
 2. The children and staff are engaged and absorbing basic rhythms, pitch and, in some cases, notation plus an insight into the workings of the instruments.
 3. The workshops are appropriate to the ages involved and there is visible improvement, collaboration and energy.
 4. It is fun.
 5. Anecdotally, there is always at least one child whose behaviours change in response to musical stimuli.
- B. Here, the story is very different. There is a big disparity amongst our schools.
 1. At one end there are a few schools where music has been part of their DNA for many years - the curriculum is taught throughout the school using either “in-house” staff or by buying in through NYCC. There are small group activities, participation in Young Voices in Sheffield and the preparation attached to that, choirs and a range of individual instrumental lessons. Quite often recorded music is played at the beginning and end of Assembly.
 2. At the other end, musical provision is hard to find. Until Ofsted recently changed its stance, music has been allowed to fall away with only the barest attention paid to the curriculum. Many of these schools have no-one with a musical background to deliver the requirements. In some cases, new Heads and/or Music Leads are trying to stem the tide but the children are undoubtedly starved of listening and participatory activity.
 3. Somewhere in between a number of schools are using on-line resources such as Charanga to deliver the curriculum with as much extra bought-in expertise as their meagre budgets allow.
- C. Most schools - especially those in B2 and B3 - are trying to do more, but doing more costs money. Currently NYCC charges £69.80/hour for musical services. There is remission for those pupils that are on Pupil Premium but this is not widely known about - the basic premise is “we can't afford it”.
 1. Individual Lessons. It might be felt that children learning instruments is a sign of the school's musical health and, in some schools, we find a whole year group (quite often Yr5) learning clarinet or violin. Questions arise from this approach:
 - What is the chance of them continuing through into Secondary School?

- If the school funds these lessons then they are inclusive. If the school isn't funding them, then they discriminate against those that either can't or won't pay or where there is a lack of parental support - an all too common occurrence. As we know, talent will surface anywhere and not necessarily in line with the money.
 - I have met a couple of heads who would prefer to invest in - say - a set of African Drums which can involve a whole year group, makes music a team-building exercise, is financially non-discriminatory and can be passed on from year to year. Problem - funding the acquisition and funding the best tutor.
2. Young Voices - some of the schools in the southern end of our patch use this. For about £20 a child they receive a pack containing a medley of pop songs to learn and the culmination is a concert in a Sheffield stadium with (in 2020) Tony Hadley (Spandau Ballet) as the star attraction. Parents buy lots of tickets and the children have a very long and exciting day. Depressingly, about half the money goes on the coach. Head teachers like it as it ticks the music participation box and the children get to sing in a really big "team" at a spectacular event. Where there are Friends organisations in the Schools, this is an obvious thing for them to support (as is Music for Life) BUT is this singing?
 3. Pupil Premium is a sum of money given to schools each year by the Government to improve the attainment of disadvantaged children. This is based on research showing that children from low income families perform less well at school than their peers. Currently, the national average is that about 23% of pupils in each school attract PP and the schools receive £1,300 for each pupil who has qualified for free school meals at any time in the past 6 years.
 - It is a mistake to think that deprivation is an urban problem. Some of our schools are in the 40's% and one exceeds 50%.
 - You can look at any of the school's websites and a bit of digging will turn up the latest Pupil Premium report.
 - You are unlikely to find the word "music" as something that the schools are putting this extra money towards - for them, there are more important fish to fry.

D. What more could/should we - Sowerby Music - do given that we have limited resources?

1. I hear you say "It is the Government's job to fund, equip and staff the schools so that music is delivered in the way that Amanda Spielman wants". Yes - it is, but, for some of our schools music provision is inadequate and it is not the children's fault. There are new Heads and Music Leads desperate to do more. Some are stifled by lack of qualified staff and all are stifled by lack of money.
2. We can explore more groups of artists to deliver more sessions outside the normal "season" - the schools would welcome this if they could find some funding.
3. Some schools could be helped by writing a cheque to buy some classroom percussion or pay for a subscription to Charanga.
4. We have never approached the corporate sector because we have never had the need. Companies exist in communities that include schools which their staff's children attend. Many of the big companies have websites professing responsibility to the community.
5. A lot of the schools want to get a choir going on a regular basis, that being the cheapest form of "team music" and something that can indeed be the beginning of a "lifelong love of music".

Thank you for reading this.
 Graham Merriam
 March 2020