



Where is music going?

Stephen Williams reports on a collaborative conference on the music crisis in schools

Make no mistake, serious question marks remain over the future of music education in the UK. Only through unprecedented collaboration and a genuine commitment to share best practice will it be possible to continue to help aspiring young musicians to fulfil their true potential. Following widespread financial cutbacks and a downgrading of creative subjects like music, the onus is on all schools and all professional music organisations to collaborate, share resources, learn from each other's experiences and to champion the cause for tomorrow's musicians and performers.

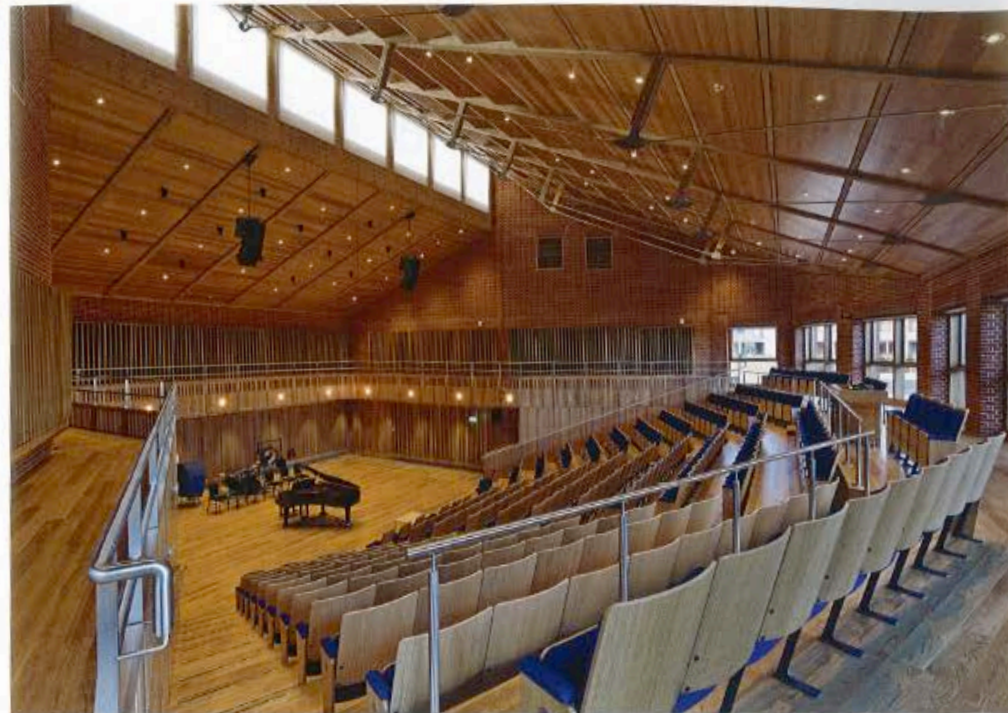
It was with this crisis in mind that we arranged a special Music Education Conference, attended by over 60 music teachers from both the maintained and independent sector, as well as leaders of music hubs in the South West and national music organisations. Growing concern about the serious underfunding in music education is highlighted in the national media and by the Royal College of Music and Royal Academy of Music, and it was the aim of the Conference to promote the value of partnerships, and to showcase initiatives to help arrest the decline.

It was fitting that Bryanston School's Music Education Conference on the themes of *Partnerships and Engagement* was itself a partnership with the Dorset Music Hub and the Music Teachers Association (MTA), and it was undoubtedly an

engaging day, culminating in a lively debate and open discussion involving delegates and many of the invited speakers.

Sixty delegates from far and wide enjoyed a high-octave talk from Cathy Lamb (leader of Lichfield Cathedral's TES award-winning singing programme) on the subject of *Singing in the Community and Classroom*.

President of MTA, Simon Toynce, led a compelling session entitled *Music Teachers as Influencers*, encouraging the group to consider those significant moments that define one's career and make teaching music so rewarding. 'At a time when there is a very real and well-publicised threat to music education, with significant falls in the number of pupils taking GCSE and A level Music, this event is the first of its kind in the region and has provided a real boost for everyone as well as a wake-up call for parents and the teaching profession as a whole. The positive impact of music on the behaviour and achievement of pupils is without question. It is clear that music education has a very influential role to play in not only developing musicianship, but also in the cognitive development of all young minds. It is extremely encouraging to witness the enthusiasm of teachers, local communities and professional music hubs to work together and add further impetus to the future development of music education in the South West – something that will be of very real benefit to the next and future generations.'



Simon also talked about his work as Executive Director of Music in 34 academy schools of the David Ross Education Trust (DRET), offering examples of the excellent work taking place in the DRET Academies. Delegates were fortunate to be hearing, some for the first time, Jimmy Rotherham's talk about his uniquely transformative work at Feversham School, with recordings of some extraordinary lightbulb moments, which elicited spontaneous applause from the audience. Feversham Primary School, where Jimmy teaches music, is located in an impoverished area of Bradford. His unique and transformative approach is to saturate the school curriculum with music. Such an inspirational and ambitious programme has played a central role in helping the school to secure 'outstanding' status following many years in special measures. As Tim Garrard, Head of Partnerships for MTA, said, Simon and Jimmy's videos are evidence of what surely has to be some of the very best music teaching in the country.

After lunch Professor Robert Saxton, back at his old school, shared the fruits of many years of accumulated wisdom as a teacher of Composition at Oxford. A naturally charismatic speaker, he also gave an insight into the whys and wherefores of accessing and studying Music at Oxford. Returning to the Partnerships theme, Lisa Tregale from the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's comprehensive and impressive outreach programme, *Resound*, outlined exactly what a professional orchestra can do to support learning in schools. Although Bridget Whyte, CEO of Music Mark, was sadly unable to join us at the last minute, Dan Somgyi and Clair McColl led delegates through her presentation about developments in the new music

curriculum and at OFSTED. And finally, writer-and-thinker-on-music par excellence, Paul Harris, kept everyone captivated as he talked about *Increasing Engagement*. The result of many years of detailed research and teaching, Paul helped everyone in the room to reflect on their teaching methodologies, language and beliefs.

A rewarding and re-booting day ended with a broad conversation on the theme of the power of Partnerships to arrest the decline in Music Education. At a time when concerns about Music Education have made it to the BBC News at Ten, it was powerful to hear so many constructive comments and ideas from delegates. A similar Bryanston Music Education Conference is planned for 2020, incorporating links with the National Youth Choir, the Nicola Benedetti Foundation and Music Hubs from further afield.

We're delighted with the feedback from this Conference and the enthusiasm and shared commitment to provide pupils with the best possible classroom and extra-curricular music experiences. Musicians are creative and used to finding solutions. We've already committed to hosting a GCSE workshop with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra for the Dorset Music Hub in January and there certainly seems to be an appetite for the Conference to become a regular annual event. Soundstorm (the music hub for Bournemouth and Poole), Wave Music and Arts Education have all indicated a willingness to collaborate with the Dorset Music Hub, the MTA and ourselves to build on the success of this year's event and report on our progress at a 2020 conference.

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