

As we come towards the end of Term 2, I always take stock of what has been achieved and how far down our musical pathway we have travelled since starting in September. What accomplishments have there been and where can we improve? We find ourselves in uncharted waters somewhat regarding music education – after an enforced hiatus of nearly two years we have spent the last two terms building up ensembles, remodelling schemes of work and actively encouraging ALL pupils that it is ok to get involved and to enjoy music making again both inside and outside of the classroom. There have been some rather large bumps in the road along the way, and I am certain, we are not quite out of the woods yet with restrictions for ensemble playing and performances. We have started to learn to adapt and from that, some rather wonderful classwork, collaborations, and musical success have started to emerge again.

This academic year started with a concert (actually before term properly started – gold stars for the pupils and music staff involved) – with our delayed Summer Picnic in the Park. A concert where we celebrate all the work pupils have achieved in the previous year – although we were very much hampered by Government restrictions – music making did happen regularly in bubbles last year. With these restrictions lifted, we came back together for not only an outside event but a concert which gave opportunity to say a huge thanks and goodbye to lots of Year 13 leavers (and some Year 14 “leavers” who never got the chance of a final performance the year before!!). The weather was kind and the bands sounded wonderful – a lovely way to start the year and a huge positive step forward.

In the following months we have delivered well over 2500 individual instrumental lessons courtesy of our wonderful team of Instrumental Teachers. We have also had a massive number of ensembles rehearsing each week, some before School, some at lunchtime and a few after the school day finished to put pieces together for our concert schedule. All pupils were rather tentative to begin with and in desperate need of some musical interaction. Some of our elite ensembles fitted back together quite seamlessly whilst efforts were focused on our junior musicians and getting them up and running – some pupils had not had opportunity to perform as of yet at Secondary School.

Since those early days of term, we have put on two more concerts – ‘A Night at the Movies’ and our Christmas concert ‘A Winter Wonderland’ both huge successes. Our top Big Band achieved a Platinum Award at the Regional event for NCBF (National Concert Band Festival) and we are planning for our next concert with the wonderful BBC Big Band.

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat will follow as our musical this year with other performances scheduled for the Spring and Summer Terms. We have learnt to adapt to the new “normal” but one thing remains constant and that is the importance and benefit live music making has on all of us.

We have been beyond fortunate that our curriculum lessons have been relatively unscathed since the pandemic began with the only limitation and restriction being small group work. Pupils have been working through a spiral curriculum in KS3 learning both practical and technological skills that will expand their abilities. Pupils have consolidated theoretical knowledge, composed short pieces on both the keyboard and computers as well as delving into a world of different styles and genres. Pupils in Year 9 have been studying Electronic Dance Music (EDM) and have utilised some of our software in the KS3 Computer Suite. Check out our twitter feed (@NSBMusicDep) for examples of the work from all pupils.

GCSE Pupils have been working through the KS4 course studying diverse composers from Bach to John Williams via the music of Esperanza Spalding and Afro Celt Sound System. One of our talented Year 10

pupils, Charlie Taylor has been enjoying transcribing other melodies and tunes (with his own expanding youtube channel). His work, Steppin' will also appear on our twitter feed.

Advanced Level music pupils have always led by example and shown the younger boys what can be achieved with dedication and a passion for the subject. Almost all of the older pupils are heavily involved with School based music making and ensembles run by NMPAT. Our Year 13 music students have also been finalising their UCAS and UCAS Conservatoire applications which we hope will yield some impressive offers come the new year. Music is everywhere within the Department – it is never quiet and that is just the way it should be in any School.

Although this is a snapshot of what is done throughout the Department, I am sure you can see how busy we are. The Department want to ensure that all pupils have opportunity to learn instruments, participate in ensembles and enjoy their music making each lesson, day, week, month and term.

If, having read through this subject spotlight, and having listened to some pupil's work, your son/daughter is interested in getting involved, do please get in touch.

Have a happy Christmas and a safe, prosperous new year.