

Musique Report

British Federation Of Youth Marching Band Organisations



The national lottery funded 'Youth Music' agreed in 2008 to fund a two year Federation pilot initiative involving four youth marching bands. Titled 'Musique' (Music & Physique) the initiative was based on raising musical ability, experience and membership through liaison with music professionals and other local music groups. The bands involved are Concord (Sheffield), Medina (Isle of Wight), Upton (Worcestershire) and Essex Marching Corps (Braintree). These bands broadly represent the different styles within the UK activity. The grant programme ends in May 2010 after which the experiences of each of the bands will be made available to the wider activity. The Federation hopes that other bands will use these experiences to make independent developmental applications for funding based on active liaison with local musicians and music groups. As an interim indication of the benefits gained by participating Bands, Concord and Medina have provided the following observations.

Report On Funded Activities By Concord Youth Music, Sheffield

Introduction



The period of the Musique project has been a very busy and significant time in the history of the Concord organisation. Not only have we made a fairly drastic change of direction with our music-making and performance styles, but we have undertaken some quite different approaches to our training and promotion through the opportunities provided by the "Musique" funding.

We have taken part in a total of 17 public performances (a vast increase on previous years which averaged between 5 and 8 outings) and have presented 6 external workshops and clinics.



The appointment of a professional musician as Music Leader has given an insight into a whole range of brass playing and rehearsal techniques which have undoubtedly improved our performance levels. Rob Straw, a very experienced brass band and jazz performer and conductor of a local brass band, has been able to take a critical 'outside' look at our performers and has contributed a great deal of advice, wisdom and encouragement. He has contributed to the arrangement of several pieces of music and has composed some additional fanfares for our Ceremonial Fanfare Team – one of which we performed at the DCUK National Finals in September 2009.

Our Trainee Music leader, Steve Wright, has worked closely with Rob over the year and has helped in both the development of our musical arrangements and the teaching of younger players. Steve has also led the way in introducing the electronic component of our performances, providing the amplification services to our bass guitar player and also providing and operating electronic input via computer and mixer desk. Steve's task has additionally included the organisation and presentation of some of our school workshops for younger children. Finally he is one of the principal teachers of Concord AllStars brass players.

Probably one of the most significant areas of progress has been in the establishment of relationships between ourselves and Sheffield Music Service (who provide all music tuition in schools and in their own central ensembles). Previously all doors between our two groups had been firmly closed with the stereotypical view expressed by SMS that marching bands did not offer a creditable form of music education.



However, with the introduction of a new managerial team at SMS and the intervention of our 'Musique' appointed Music Leader Rob Straw, and his wife Rachel, we were able to meet and strike up a very good relationship with the new SMS director of development who is much younger and very open to new ideas. He is also very keen to establish links between SMS and the local community and to open up channels of communication and extension so that youngsters undertaking music education in schools can be given information about Concord and similar groups as a recognised means of progression.

It has been through Ian Naylor that we have been able to arrange a series of in-school workshops and to perform to a very influential group of music educators and managers (who I think we greatly impressed). The next step in this liaison is that Concord will be one of a small number of community organisations that will be taking part in a major SMS concert performance in Sheffield City Hall in March. This will provide us with an opportunity to perform to a sell-out audience of 1200 who will almost all be new to our particular form of entertainment. Great local "PR" and perhaps an opportunity to welcome new members.



We are hopeful that this and other discussions will lead to an even closer working relationship that will encourage many more youngsters to try out marching music as an alternative.

With the encouragement of our Music Leader, Concord has developed a more widely ranging repertoire of musical styles and genres.

For the 25th anniversary celebrations of Concord in October we put together a full 40-minute performance of music, dance and drama (compared to the 10 minute competitive marching show that we used to spend all year perfecting).

We have introduced a range of new instruments to our performances – flute, French horn, trombone, sousaphone, flugel horn, electric bass guitar and drum kit. Our recent performances have featured amplification of flute and keyboard instruments. We plan to add to this by introducing a vocalist to some items in our next concert and we are currently looking to add a keyboard player and additional guitarist to our membership.

Sample videos of recent performances may be viewed on the Concord website at : www.concord.org.uk.

Musique funding has enabled us to:

- Rent premises for the presentation of workshops – as a direct result of which we have gained a good number of new members
- Purchase electronic amplification equipment to extend the repertoire of our performances
- Retain the services of our Music Leader and Trainee Music Leader

Both our senior ensemble and junior marching band have seen benefits from the project – the former in the improvement of techniques and the extension of repertoire and the latter through an increased membership to currently around 32 youngsters aged 8 – 13 years and through the improved music arrangement and teaching skills of our TML.

What next?

- We intend to further the liaison with SMS with the aim of attracting many more pupils from local schools who have had an initial introduction to playing a musical instrument and to whom we can offer a whole new range of learning and performance opportunities.
- Concord will continue to explore a whole range of different approaches to their music-making in an attempt to bring our performances to even wider audiences and to show young people that making music can be great fun in addition to all the spin-off benefits that are now beginning to be more widely acknowledged.
- Our Music Leader has expressed a wish to remain connected with Concord when the project ends and, through him, we aim to help all our members to both further develop their individual and group performance skills and to begin to develop other skills of teaching and music arrangement.

Medina Marching Band – Isle of Wight



All sections of our Island band have shown a steady improvement since the appointment of Maria, our 'Musique' Music Leader. With most of her experience in the brass band world, Maria has been with us since the start of the programme. Mainland work and family commitments can easily disrupt our leadership, and this proved the case with our Trainee Music Leaders. We have had three during this programme – Will, Stephanie and now Marie.

Maria and Marie (not to be confused!) have worked so well together that they have managed the rehearsals with little input from the longer serving team – a gratifying result.

Musique funding has allowed us to introduce several new and challenging pieces of music to the band which are being played well. These new pieces will form part of our concert repertoire for two early 2010 Concerts. One of which is with the Island Youth Musical Festival and the other with The Hampshire Constabulary Band in April.



We have managed several workshops away from our headquarters working with the Rural Community Council and I.W County Council and have reached different areas of the Island. Importantly, this has brought the band new members. Additionally, this has also brought us new parent volunteers.

Recently our Drum Corps have performed on stage to an audience of mainly disabled people of all ages and we are planning a workshop for disabled young people. We know from a recent visit to our rehearsals by a disabled lad and his parents that a workshop would be beneficial to our band members and those they involve in the workshop.

With the new styles of music being introduced thanks to the 'Musique' programme our 'what next' for the future is the need for additional instruments – bass clarinet, french horn and oboe. We already include violin and bass guitar to several pieces.

Throughout this programme we have not forgotten that we are a Marching Band and consequently many of the music pieces have been arranged so they can be adapted to use on the march.

We are pleased that Georgie Goddard, Regional Youth Music director, has visited us during this initiative. We are being increasingly acknowledged in the wider community – not least when in November of 2009 we were officially affiliated with a British Legion Branch on the Island.

From: MEDINA'S TRAINEE MUSIC LEADER – Marie Smith

Working alongside our ML Maria as part of the 'Musique' programme has developed my confidence and given me good work experience, enabling me to give more support to our young members. The whole programme has been very challenging as I have had to learn a lot of new music, but I believe my enthusiasm and commitment has transferred to members of the band and shows in their rehearsal techniques and in their playing.

All members of Medina have been very supportive and are happy to approach me with any problems or questions regarding the music, which either I or together with Marie, we resolve. Introducing different styles of music has helped with marches as we are looking more closely at technicalities such as dynamics and accents.

The 'Musique' programme for me has expanded my knowledge and improved how I interact with other leaders and members. I have been introduced to conducting, which links to my current Open University course content so it has had a wider personal benefit. Working alongside Maria I have learnt so much more than I expected when I agreed to be Medina's Trainee Music Leader, and I am very grateful to have had this opportunity.