



Maidstone Youth Music Society
Registered Charity Number 297018

ANNUAL REPORT – MYMS AGM – 29 NOVEMBER 2019

Concerts - MYMS has completed yet another very successful year of music-making and our congratulations go to all our wonderful players and conductors. The schedule of concerts in the past year at Invicta GS has included the Winter Concert 2018, the Spring and Summer Concerts in 2019, the Bandstand Concert in Brenchley Gardens in June 2019 and – a new innovation – a ‘Music at Night’ students’ concert in March. In addition, this term, we have been busy preparing for this year’s Winter Concert 2019.

Bandstand Concert - MYMS provided the first of four concerts in the MBC bandstand season in Brenchley Gardens, organised by the Maidstone Area Arts Partnership. It was the best attended of the four and included the Alpha Band, Beta Percussion Ensemble, MYWO and – for the first time – MYMS Voices massed choir. The singers did very well, amplified successfully by a sound system. We are awaiting information from MBC about whether there will be another bandstand season in 2020.

“Music at Night” Students’ Concert – this was an unqualified success. The students who took part – some individuals and some in small groups – performed brilliantly. The concert was compered expertly and very amusingly by Kyle Siwek – it was like having Donald Trump in the room... A cake sale also was very well supported. We will be holding another “Music at Night” in 2020 and we hope even more students will take part.

Year 13 Leavers - We are always delighted when students stay loyally with MYMS until the end of Year 13 but, regrettably, they then have to leave us. This summer, we said goodbye to a 16 of our senior players. Again, they all did extremely well with some outstanding results and have gone off to various universities.

We suffered only a handful of additional losses in the autumn with a further five students deciding not to return to MYMS in September. Students face increasing pressures on their time from schools and universities demanding higher examination grades, as well as various competing interests on Friday evenings, including gymnastics, dance, karate, swimming and a performing arts academy. MYMS provides many benefits for students who attend and along with high-quality staff who conduct and coach, we believe that the ‘downtime’ we provide is the safe and secure environment the students deserve. We urge our young people to maintain their loyalty to MYMS and to reap the benefits of all their hard work by remaining senior members right up until the end of Y13.

We wish to reiterate two key points from this:

- Students can still gain excellent exam success in their studies AND remain members of MYMS right up until the end of Year 13;
- Only one of Y13 leavers has gone on to study Music at university; they are therefore not all elite musicians who are off to music conservatoires; they are gifted, all-round students who simply enjoy being part of MYMS and having fun making music each week.

Once again, we want personally to thank and pay tribute to the students [and their parents] who have remained with us, to continue their music-making and further to strengthen their friendships each Friday. We are recruiting heavily and would welcome your support in your schools / friendship groups.

Website and Marketing - We have now commissioned a new website for MYMS and we will shortly be linking the design of that with a new MYMS logo to a new publicity flyer and interactive links with schools' and other organisations' own websites.

This will become a centre point for all communications and relevant information and news and represents us as the organisation we are striving to be – one focused on providing young musicians in the area be the best they can be.

Our Two Wind Bands - the Alpha Band and the Maidstone Youth Wind Orchestra continue.

Beginner Brass Group - We have experimented in the autumn term 2019 with a Beginner Brass Group [pre-Grade 1] under the direction of Nigel McDonald. We are looking forward to its membership growing in the new year. The MYMS Voices core choir has also trialled a new arrangement this year with Ciara Considine: their session has been split into a junior and senior chamber choir; they each performed very well at the Summer Concert.

Orchestra for All and Alpha Band - we now have two ensembles which encompass exactly the same ability range of grade 1 up to approximately Grade 4/5:

- Our 'Orchestra for All' provides an opportunity for orchestral playing and includes players of all strings [violin, 'cello, double bass and harp], plus woodwind, brass, recorders, bass guitar and percussion;
- Our 'Alpha Band' plays wind band music with a combination of brass, woodwind and percussion instrumentalists;
- The choice of which ensemble individual players join first is made with the players, their parents and the MYMS Manager, who then liaises with the conductors.

MYMS Young Student of the Year 2018-19 - This summer, we presented the award to Ruby Haigh. She has been a wonderfully loyal member of MYMS for many years. Her main instrument is the double bass but she has contributed to the Youth Strings and MYO at various times on both the violin and the 'cello. We congratulate her and wish her much success with her studies in Edinburgh.

MYMS Staff Team - One of the strengths of MYMS is the musicianship and loyalty of our staff team. We are pleased to have this public opportunity of thanking our current conductors – Peter Ashwell, Ben Knowles, Ciara Considine, Kay Gretton, Graham Mann, Nigel McDonald, Jeremy Shoobridge and Jonathan Vincent for all their commitment to MYMS. We also remain enormously fortunate - and thankful -to have Tania Dowd as part of the musical team: Tania gives her time and skills in accompanying both MYMS Voices and Orchestra for All every week on a voluntary basis.

Kate Ord left us last year and was replaced by Ben Knowles with the Youth Strings. Joe Mathers' other professional percussion commitments were more frequently clashing and so he has been replaced with the Beta Percussion Ensemble by Peter Ashwell. We pay tribute to Kate and Joe and welcome Ben and Peter – indeed, we are welcoming them back to MYMS as they are both former MYMS students themselves.

Instrument Projects - The two remaining members of the double bass project have continued to progress impressively under the guidance of Kay Gretton. They are all playing music of Grade 5/6 standard and play in our ensembles. We are continuing with our small 'cello project with two students, both of whom now play in our Orchestra for All. We began a clarinet project directed by Jeremy Shoobridge in January with four students from a local primary school. We recruited a separate group of two from another school in September. Unfortunately, none of the four original players has remained with the project and we are looking into other models of recruitment which might yield greater stickability.

MYMS is also taking part in an exciting new bassoon project which will start in January 2020. This is being subsidized heavily to start with by the Jeffrey Vaughan Martin Bursary Fund. Jeffrey was not only the founder

of MYMS 45 years ago but also a bassoon player and teacher. MYMS will be working with two [or possibly three] pupils under the care of local bassoon teacher Mary Tasker.

MYMS Visit to Royal Albert Hall 2020 - We are currently organising a further visit to the Royal Albert Hall on Saturday 9 May 2020 to see the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra play a 'Film Gala'. It will again be compered by Tommy Pearson, a former MYMS student.

MYMS Committee – the Committee has again worked very hard in lots of behind-the-scenes ways, supporting the staff: Elizabeth Rees continued as Chair until October, when she chose to step down; [we shall be making a presentation to Elizabeth during the AGM to thank her for her work as Chair]; she was replaced at the next meeting in November by Damian Pevy; Graeme Dowd as Vice Chair; Polly Williamson as Secretary; and Peter Runting as Treasurer. We wish to pay particular tribute to their support and wisdom throughout the year, especially as both Graeme and Polly have given notice that they will be stepping down in June 2020 when respectively their daughter and son reach the end of Year 13. We shall therefore be looking for replacements, either from the current committee or from outside. Do think about joining us and helping MYMS in this way.

During the year, we said goodbye to three of our student reps – Abbie Bristow, Henry Brown and Harvey Crease. We are especially grateful to Abbie who made a very generous personal donation towards the cost of purchasing our new drum kit. We welcome Chris Haywood and Charlotte Worrall as new Student Reps, who join Ella Pevy.

We remain very grateful for the tremendous amount of behind-the-scenes support that all the MYMS Committee officers, members and trustees give to MYMS in so many unseen ways.

The wider arts community in Maidstone - MYMS continues to work closely with other music and arts organisations in Maidstone, including an active involvement in Maidstone Area Arts Partnership [of which Richard has just been re-elected as the MAAP Secretary]. We have maintained our strong links with the Medway Youth Trust [to be called MY Trust] who provide very helpful training [including first aid certification], safeguarding advice and policy support.

We maintain our links with local schools and are always looking to recruit additional members. We continue with our 'bounty' scheme by paying £10 to any current member of MYMS who introduces a new player or singer [payable when the new member pays their subs....], so please spread the word to any musical families you may know. Recruitment therefore remains a serious challenge, particularly from an ever-decreasing pool of children learning musical instruments.

Invicta GS – We do truly appreciate our relationship with our hosts at Invicta Grammar School and we are particularly appreciative of the support from Julie Derrick, Head of IGS, Mark Heaton, Director of Music, and Suraj Gurung, the Site Manager on Friday evenings who is ever-helpful. The school help us with additional tasks such as the lighting and sound at our concerts and PAT testing our electrical equipment.

Concluding Remarks - We know this has been said before, but it is true again to say that we still have a superb team at MYMS – the students, the staff, the committee and the parents – and we continue to provide unique music-making opportunities for the youth of Maidstone. Sadly, many other large towns in Kent no longer have such facilities and are considering ways in which they might be resurrected – we are therefore justly proud of what MYMS achieves each year; we just wish we achieved it all with a larger number of students.

These are challenging times for all organisations like MYMS as we look to compete for individuals time and resources, yet we are confident with your support that we will continue sustainably long into the future.....

Richard Gretton
MYMS Manager

Damian Pevy
MYMS Chair

November 2019