

Music Dinner – Report 2018

This year has been one of great excitement for the Music Department. Following on from the success of last year's St. George's concert, our first joint musical venture as Redmaids' High, I know that many of us were tremendously excited about the possibilities of combining the musical talent from within our schools, but none of us could have predicted just how exhilarating this year would be! With over 20 different ensembles rehearsing weekly, and over 50 different performance occasions and a staggering 8,190 individual music lessons taking place over the course of the year, there is certainly a real buzz in our busy department. In addition, the opening of our wonderful new hall and the purchase of our new Steinway piano (which you may have heard us mention!) has really given us the platform in which to showcase the tremendous levels of talent you all possess.

The year started with many of you coming together to perform for our crowd of visitors at opening morning in September. In addition to the many choral and chamber music performances, as well as the first performances on our new piano (!) a highlight has to be our very first Redmaids' High flashmob of "Rather Be" – it was fantastic to see and hear our musical theatre singers come together with our string players and very own Swing Band to amaze our audience - I have even had music scholarship applicants for next year's Year 7 refer to it in their applications!

Musical Theatre continued to blossom as the term progressed, culminating in our wonderful production of the RSC's The Wizard of Oz at Christmas. As some of you know, I am not ashamed to say that music theatre is a big love of mine, and so conducting the production was a real joy. So many of you were involved, not just on stage, but playing in the orchestra and helping with the many other aspects of costumes, staging, lighting, hair and make up. It really was an enormous achievement and the performances from every single person involved were superb.

It would be impossible to continue listing all of the performances that have taken place, but I'll try to cover some of the highlights.

One of my proudest moments of this year was at Founder's Commemoration Day. To hear the chamber choir sing Holst's Ave Maria so beautifully, particularly having just walked straight in from the cold procession through the streets, was truly spine-tinkling. It was so exhilarating to hear it sung at its very best in that one moment. I could not have been happier, as was demonstrated by my borderline unprofessional behaviour in the form of silent cheering which looked something like this..... The Chamber Choir has continued to give many beautiful performances throughout the year, including at the Cheltenham regionals of Music for Youth in March, with the adjudicator saying it was a "highly disciplined and focussed performance" from a "very accomplished choir who are technically assured and very musical". In fact, they were so impressed that just last week we

found out that they have been invited to sing at the Nationals of Music for Youth in Birmingham's Symphony Hall in July.

Another highlight of Founder's Commemoration Day was to hear you all sing "I Was Glad" with such gusto, accompanied by our wonderful brass players and timpani, although some thought me mad to take the timpani down to the cathedral. It is really exciting to see the brass playing at the school continuing to go from strength to strength, with not one but two brass groups now running on a weekly basis. It was a real privilege to hear you play at the public Remembrance Service as a combined brass group in November, and I know that the many hundreds of people at that service were very moved by your playing, so much so that I was asked to put the date in the diary for next year the following day!

It has been wonderful to see lots of other performances taking place with the wider community too. Close Encounters once again performed to delighted family audiences in Henleaze at Christmas, with so many youngsters simply staring at them in awe, desperate to be a part of the group, a feeling I certainly share! And on Saturday, several members of our chamber choir joined our community choir for a Come & Sing of Faure Requiem, with wonderful solos being given by Jenny in the Pie Jesu and Minty on the violin. I very much look forward to hearing the Swing Band's collaboration with the Community Choir in June for their Vintage themed concert.

There have been so many other wonderful performances too. Our two largest concerts this year in the Autumn and Spring included almost a third of the students in the school taking part. It was fantastic to see and hear so many students enjoying music-making in a range of ensembles, including both choral and instrumental groups. There were so many highlights including Pomp and Circumstance, the Chamber Orchestra's Vivaldi Double Violin Concerto with Molly and Grace, Wind Band's performance of The Incredibles, the Musical Theatre group's performance of Forget about the Boy and Elgar's Fly Singing Bird.

It has also been a real joy to see so much Chamber Music going on this year, with several string quartets, as well as a wind quintet, piano trio and many more groups rehearsing on a regular basis. Last week's chamber music concert was a real testament to your hard work and proof that you have many strings to your bow!

And there are still more performances to come! In just a few weeks' time, nearly 50 of you will be heading off to Barcelona to perform choral and chamber music in a variety of venues, including Gaudi's Crypt, and will be giving a concert before we go in Redland Hall. In addition, we have the Year 10 GCSE Concert and towards the end of term some of you will be involved in a Chamber Music Concert at the Lord Mayor's Chapel.

We have also been hugely privileged to have many visiting musicians to the school in the last year. Highlights have included a recital from Allan Schiller on our new piano (!) a Baroque String workshop led by Simon Kodurand, a lecture on Film Music by Dr Jon Godsall, a lecturer at Royal Holloway, and we still have a workshop with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra to come in June. And of course, we have been incredibly fortunate today to have Elin Manahan Thomas as our guest for a masterclass and to speak to you shortly. Elin, we have been so excited about your visit in the department, so much so that Mrs Trump nearly had to enforce a £1 jar for every time we mentioned you or the royal wedding. I am a huge admirer of your singing and cannot really believe that you have been in school today coaching our students. Thank you so much for giving them that wonderful opportunity.

In addition to having excellent visitors, we have also enjoyed many trips, particularly to the theatre, including *Wicked*, *Marriage of Figaro* at London Coliseum, Jason Robert Brown live at the London Palladium, the GCSE concert at the Victoria Rooms, and we still have *Miss Saigon* and *Hamilton* coming up the next few weeks!

There have been so many individual successes too. There are too many to mention, but overall we have had 70 of you taking ABRSM exams in just two terms, with 76% of results at either Merit or Distinction. We have also had tremendous success in Musical Theatre, with 80% of results at Distinction! Many of you have been also performing in county and national ensembles, including the National Youth Choir and our very own Lucy Keeley was a runner up in the semi-finals of the Rotary Young Musician. A huge congratulations to all of you.

I don't want to take up much more of your time, but I would just like to take this opportunity to say a few thank yous.

Firstly, to our amazing team of visiting music teachers. We are so lucky to have such committed, enthusiastic and talented musicians and teachers working in our school. YOU make this department what it is. Without you, we would not be able to even begin achieving what we do with your support. We really appreciate your continued efforts to go above and beyond, not just in teaching our many talented students, but leading ensembles, supporting sectionals, going through ensemble music with your pupils, and for always helping this team to be the best it can be.

I'd secondly like to thank everyone else in our wonderful music team. I feel incredibly lucky to work with such a wonderful group of colleagues who all work so hard to make this department the absolute best it can be. We are so lucky to have had Mr Ferla this year, our first Graduate Musician, who has been able to share his amazing musical talent with us all, as was evident in his recital on Friday. Mr Wyatt, for whom nothing is too much trouble and who always makes everything look and sound fantastic, particularly from his new den in Redland Hall. Mrs Trump, who I have no idea how we ever managed without, who has joined us this

year and supports with the many administrative demands of the department, but is always going above and beyond, as the balloons, musical napkins and musical confetti at this dinner shows! And Mrs Woodman and Mrs Killick, who both work so unbelievably hard in everything they do to continually seek out the best opportunities for you and do all they can to make them happen. #bestteam

And finally, the biggest thank you must go to you, our students. For seizing every opportunity, whether that be playing in an Informal Concert or in assembly, signing up for a masterclass, or stepping into a solo opportunity at the last minute. For your tremendous enthusiasm for all things musical, both in and out of the classroom. For your incredible sense of fun and, most of all, your amazing musical talent which you share with us as your teachers. It really does make our job the best one in the world (...aside from perhaps singing at a Royal Wedding!).

On a serious note, I am very realistic in knowing that you are all waiting for me to stop talking so that you can hear from our guest for this evening. So without any further delay, I have the greatest pleasure in asking you to formally welcome Elin Manahan Thomas.