

# Musical events and tutoring at our school

Mrs Smith is a class teacher within the school who has developed a locally renowned orchestra. She teaches approximately 30 children at break times to play the violin. The school has a passion for making music available to all and there is never a break time or lunchtime when music is not being made and enjoyed somewhere in the school.

Barnsley Music Service supports the school by providing cello, guitar, clarinet and flute lessons to small groups of children. There are currently 30 children in the orchestra, which is a third of the KS2 children. The orchestra takes every opportunity to perform and always has a busy calendar of events. Last school year they played twelve concerts in the local and surrounding area.

The orchestra has also enjoyed great success competing in the annual Co-op Music festival, winning the orchestra and ensemble classes for the last six years.

## 2011

In 2011 they entered the Music for Youth Festival for the first time where they won a place in the National finals held in Birmingham Symphony Hall. The orchestra were told that they *"far exceeded what was expected of them musically"*. It was in August 2012 that Mrs Smith heard that the orchestra had been invited to play at the Schools' Prom being held in the Royal Albert Hall in November 2012. The orchestra was only one of three primary school groups in the whole country to have been asked.

In November 2011, Mrs Smith was selected by Classic FM as the Primary School Music Teacher of the Year. She was presented with the prestigious award at the Royal Albert Hall in London on 7 November 2011. The judges citation stated that Mrs Smith has built up a string orchestra to an amazing standard. The judges warmly congratulated her for achieving such a wonderfully mature and musical sound with children of this age.



## 2012

In 2012 they were again invited to Birmingham for the National Festival and were awarded with an outstanding performance award for the second year running.

### Our visit to the Royal Albert Hall on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> November 2012

At 6.00 am on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> November our extremely excited school orchestra met at school to board the coaches that were taking them to London to perform in the Schools' Prom in the Royal Albert Hall!

#### *How did this come about?*

Back in February 2012 we played in the Music for Youth Regional Festival in Huddersfield. Music for Youth offers young people the opportunity to perform live in music festivals across the UK, celebrating the breadth of music-making by young people both in and out of school. The MFY season is designed to inspire musicians at every level of experience, in a supportive environment. When the orchestra performed in Huddersfield it was given a very positive feedback from the adjudicators.

Later on in the year, due to the children's high standard of playing, the orchestra was invited to perform in the MFY National Festival which was being held in Birmingham. We set off early one morning in July for another wonderful day of music-making. The children again played brilliantly and the adjudicators' comments about how we had performed were excellent. The opening comment from them was 'WOW!' and was followed with some very positive feedback saying that we were, amongst other things; 'immaculately presented, had precise intonation, sensitive phrasing, all the tools that musicians 10 years older than you haven't quite mastered yet, we were bowled over, you exceeded all expectations musically'. We won the special outstanding performance award for our playing for the second year in a row!

Music for Youth encourages a festival atmosphere at all its events. There are however stages of progression within the season between the Regional Festival Series, National Festivals and Schools Prom, through a carefully considered selection process. Typically, in any one year, 1900 groups (c. 75,000 young musicians) take part in the Regional Festival series, with up to 400 groups then being invited to perform at the National Festivals in Birmingham and Scotland, and a final 40 groups in the annual Schools' Prom Concerts at London's Royal Albert Hall. With this in mind, you will understand how totally thrilled I was when I heard from MFY in late August that we had been chosen from thousands of children to take part in the 2012 Schools' Prom. What an honour to have been asked!



Ten weeks later, after many rehearsals, we were finally on our way to the Royal Albert Hall! Three coaches left Silkstone Common Junior and Infant School in the early hours. The atmosphere on the coaches (two of which were filled with family and friends of the performers) was full of excitement, apprehension, happiness and pride!

After a few hours of travelling we stopped at Watford Gap Services for a break and it was here that I was telephoned by Radio Sheffield to give a live phone interview with Toby Foster, much to the amusement of our children and the public walking past. Having chatted to Toby about our success as an orchestra, we then continued on the final leg of our journey.



It was at 11.20 am that we arrived opposite one of the most prestigious music venues in the world, the Royal Albert Hall. The children's eyes nearly popped out of their heads at the sight of its grandeur and vastness! After a quick group photo it was time to go in and register our group.

On arrival we were shown to our dressing room (the first time we'd ever had one of those!) Here we were told to tune ready for the collaboration rehearsal that we were going to have with three other groups to practise a piece commissioned by MFY that was written especially for young players who are at the beginning of their musical journey. Tuned and ready, the children then had half an hour to eat their lunch before the rehearsal, whilst I went off to a production meeting.

On my return, at 1.00 pm, we met up with the other schools involved in the collaboration piece and worked hard for an hour. The piece called Jigsaw Jam came together well and everyone felt comfortable about the evening performance. It was time then to grab some fresh air, so we left the building and the children had a run around in front of the Albert Memorial. Freshly energised, it was soon time for our sound and lighting checks and for our first steps onto the actual stage. The excitement was immense! After another hour of playing whilst all the technical checks were being made, the orchestra could finally put the instruments away and meet up with their own families for a bite to eat and chat about the day so far.

At 5.45 pm the children returned to the stage door in order to change and tune ready for the evening's performance. After a quick interview in our dressing room with Classic FM the concert started. The atmosphere was electric and we couldn't wait to get out onto the stage to perform!

Finally at 7.38 pm it was our turn. We played two pieces written by a composer called Helen Butterworth, who was in the audience, followed by the collaboration pieces. What an amazing experience it was, to stand on that stage and perform to a 6,000 strong audience. It was a truly magical occasion and a once-in-a-lifetime experience for us all! The children played exceptionally well and I was so very proud of each and every one of them.



We enjoyed listening to the varied programme in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the concert, which finished with a rousing rendition of Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance March no.2 played by the City of Belfast Youth

Orchestra.

Balloons and fireworks then marked the end of what was the best musical experience any of us had ever had!

At 10.30 pm, with instruments in hand, we waved goodbye to London and arrived back at school at 2.30 am.  
What a tremendously brilliant day!

***Kathryn Smith***

*Visit our Flickr site for more photos of our trip to the Albert Hall*