



MAY, 2008

Dear Parents and Pupils,

We are in the throes of another very busy term, but have been impressed by the commitment of a large number of pupils and parents alike to maintaining regular lessons and practise, as well as taking part in our growing programme of extra activities. With so many ongoing assessments, coursework submissions and examinations, making steady progress with a musical instrument is not always easy for pupils of school age. We want to encourage both pupils and parents firstly to keep going - even if it is only with short but regular practise times between lessons - and secondly to discuss any time-management issues with your teacher as soon as they arise. We will always do our utmost to work with you in the most productive way possible.

ABRSM Exams

Our latest Special Visit was held at St John's, Ranmoor and has again yielded good news for the candidates: 4 Passes, 8 Merits and 1 Distinction. The examiner's comments reflected the effort that many of you put into shaping and delivering your music effectively.

We are grateful to St John's for providing a warm and inviting venue for these exams and other events; most pupils of the Milsom School have now taken part in concerts and workshops in the church and we are thrilled to see people starting to perform with a real sense of 'occasion' in this beautiful building.

Workshops and Events

The School's programme of activities has widened this term to encompass participation (for advanced string players) in a semi-professional orchestra, a Harpsichord Workshop for pianists and the first of what we hope will be termly Singing Workshops.

Six of our violin and viola students, along with teaching staff David, Ruth, Ching and Ilias, formed the core of the upper strings in the **Hallam Choral Orchestra** at a recent concert. This was a great experience for all of us, as we worked with two different conductors and only had one rehearsal with the choir and orchestra together before the performance itself. As you can see from some of the participants' comments below, it was a challenge being conducted by the composer of one of the pieces! The concert was very well received and our students rehearsed and performed with professionalism – we are very proud of them.

“This event was great fun because it was low key enough not to be stressful while still containing the excitement of performing. It was interesting to play a relatively new piece of music with an entirely new group of players. For me though, the most challenging and entertaining experience was trying to follow a conductor who brought smiles to performers and audience members alike.” (Matthew Field)

“The concert was great fun; it was exciting to have the composer conducting us, even if we weren't quite sure what he meant some of the time! I enjoyed playing in such a small violin section, as we were really able to listen to each other and stay together. It was certainly challenging to practise being the accompaniment rather than the main part, though watching the music, conductor and soloists demanded more eyes than I have!” (Charlotte Simons)

“I thought that the Hallam Choral Concert was interesting and useful because I have never played for a choir before. But some of the conducting was interesting!” (Rachel Carlile)

“The piece was unusual and it was interesting being conducted by the composer. Quite a useful experience because it's the first time I've taken part in something on such a big scale with such limited rehearsal time so the rehearsal technique in the morning was really different to anything I've done before. I thought the difficulty of the music was probably about right given the short time span. The choir were really good, especially the soloist.” (Narthana Ilenkovan)

Derek Grover, assistant organist at St John's, Ranmoor, tutored five brave piano students in a **Harpsichord Workshop**. Each participant brought along a short Baroque piece that they had prepared on the piano and we all discovered some surprising differences between piano and harpsichord in both playing technique and the resulting sound.

“Musically, this was a very challenging experience and really changed my outlook on the preparation of baroque music on a keyboard instrument. Having prepared a piece to play on the harpsichord I had been guessing and trying to anticipate how the instrument would react differently. When it came to actually using the instrument it was a much more foreign experience than I had expected with articulation being even more vital than I had thought. However, despite this weirdness my

ornamentations were much more successful on the harpsichord than on the piano which I found quite amusing! The instrument was beautiful and the tutor was really helpful in conveying the mechanics and physics of the instrument and how this applied musically in producing the varying sounds.” (Matthew Field)

“I walked into this, naively confident that one keyboard instrument would be fairly similar to any other, and of course, was proved wrong. It was totally different to the piano. My inability to find middle C, place fingers carefully on the narrow keys and assimilate rapidly the reversed black/white keys - should have sounded warning bells. But, launching into the well-prepared piece, my brain was immediately thrown into disarray: all tactile and auditory feedback cues were utterly different to those expected....Let’s just say I was challenged. But enormous fun, and I could have sat there all day, relishing such a unique instrument. Enormous thanks to the tutor for communicating his love of the harpsichord, and giving us the opportunity to play.” (Marysia Placzek)

“Much less intimidating than I thought. I found it a really useful and enjoyable experience.

The size of the keys was what was the hardest and when I was playing on the bottom keyboard it was hard to look up at the music. I liked the sound and how it made the music sound so different to playing on the piano.

[The instrument and its repertoire were] very different to my preconceptions. I was really surprised by the repertoire [the tutor] played for it as it was so different to what I expected. It was interesting to learn about the instrument in its historical context at the beginning as well.

[The tutor was] really well informed and a good speaker, but I would have liked to see him play more examples of actual repertoire especially at the start when he was talking.” (Narthana Ilenkovan)

“A wonderful opportunity to learn something about the instrument and have a go at playing it. It made me think about the interpretation of baroque music in particular.” (Anne Celnick)

Our first **Singing Workshop**, attended by roughly equal numbers of students and parents (aged 6 to 60+), was a resounding success. **Peter Taylor** tutored us expertly through the fundamentals of vocal technique, with lots of fun warm-up exercises, some African part-singing and finally a rehearsal and ‘performance’ of the *Vicar of Dibley* theme song in full harmony! Pete showed us all how we could sing well beyond our expectations and each of us left the session with more confidence in how to use our voices.

“This workshop taught me more about the voice and how to control it in two hours than I have learned in all my years in a choir. And it was great fun.” (Anne Celnick)

“This was probably the most surprising of the workshops. I didn’t realise how many ways there were to warm up, breathe and produce different sounds. It was like going to the gym but much cooler

and more relaxing in a large stone church! I learnt a huge amount about the voice and learned to perceive it more as a musical instrument rather than a part of your anatomy. I think the most challenging activity was extending your range and volume. I found the snippets of information about the differences between singing in choral music and musical theatre extremely interesting. The tutor was really friendly and I was really impressed with his ability to engage people of all ages and standards.” (Matthew Field)

“Loved the singing workshop. Great tutor.” (Julia Meakin)

“[The tutor was] brilliant! Pete was very clear and well-organised in his structure, and managed a disparate group very well. It was good to sing something together at the end.” (Nick Field)

Staff News

We are pleased to welcome **Peter Taylor** to the Milsom School team; he is joining us as a vocal tutor, as well as to lead our new [Singing Workshops](#).

Pete is Musical Director of Hallam Choral Society, whose enthusiastic performance of Handel’s *Messiah* some of you will have enjoyed last November at Christ Church, Fulwood. He also directs the University Singers’ Society (SingSoc) and will be conducting them in a monumental sell-out programme (500 tickets sold in a week!) – David Fanshawe’s *African Sanctus* and Carl Orff’s *Carmina Burana* – at St John’s, Ranmoor on 17th May.

Pete is also Head of Music at SLP College near Leeds (a specialist musical theatre training institution), where he gives vocal training to young adults who wish to pursue a stage career. Whilst Pete offers musical theatre technique as a speciality, he is equally at home with classical vocal styles and takes intermediate to advanced pupils in either genre. A fuller biography is available on our website.

Congratulations go to Michelle Bentley, who has been appointed Subject Leader for Music at All Saints Catholic High School. This is an excellent development for Michelle, who is deeply committed to raising and maintaining standards in music teaching. In September she will also be commencing studies for a postgraduate MA degree in music education.

As she was one of our first associate teachers, we shall be sad to see **Vicky Moran** go at the end of June. She has had her nose to the grindstone since Easter, completing her Finals in a dual Music and English degree. We wish her every success in this and in her future plans, and extend a very hearty vote of thanks for the work she has done with us and the valuable contributions she has made over nearly two years.

Finally, please note the date of our **Summer Concert – 5th July**. It would be helpful for us to know now whether you will be coming to the concert, so that we can plan the event as well as possible.

Best wishes,

David & Ruth Milsom

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