

## Newsletter #3 September / October 2023

# Ensemble Recovery

For a long time, Wales has had a reputation for producing musical talent. Children and young people who have experienced the thrill of being members of ensembles over the years have benefited enormously – musically, and in terms of their well-being as individuals.

Over the last decade or more, there has been a significant decline in the number of opportunities for children and young people to create music together. Hosting an ensemble through local music services - and in particular a regional ensemble - was extremely financially challenging with declining numbers, and the COVID-19 pandemic shrunk those opportunities even more. Now the National Music Service is working alongside a wide variety of organizations to restore these opportunities - and develop new ones - to ensure easy opportunities for children and young people to participate and create music, in schools and venues throughout Wales.

Over the past few months, the local music services have been focusing on restoring some of these opportunities for children to work together, and we can now reveal that three regional ensemble plans are underway this academic year. One of the main strengths of the National Music Service (NMS) that we can enable everyone to work on many levels. With the arrival of the new NMS regional meetings, we have been able to identify gaps in ensemble work, and work together to restore cross-county ensembles, which are an important step on the path of musical and social development of our young musicians.



### The South East:

For two days over the October half term the Regional Choir of the National Music Service met at Cardiff High School, where children in years 8-13 from schools in the south-east received voice training, and sang together in a concert.

### Mid and West:

It is good to report that the Six County Orchestra will be restored next summer.

### The North:

The plan in the north is to restore the Wind Band, the Choir and the Percussion Band during the spring term of 2024.

Community Choir for young people over the age of 16 rehearsing for a special Christmas Concert. And these types of developments are happening all over Wales now.

Some county music services decided to partner with other organizations to offer additional experience to our young musicians. One example of this is the **Ceredigion Wind Band**, which has started practicing alongside with the Aberystwyth University Wind Band, under the direction of Rhys Taylor. At the beginning of October, members of the Neath-Port Talbot Youth Brass Band took part in a Side-by-Side project with music students from the Royal College of Music and Drama Wales and the Cory Band.

And there have also been several other examples of dynamic collaboration between the local music services and other partners, which show the variety of opportunities that are available and are organized for the children and young people of Wales. In Wrexham members of the Bellevue Youth Community Brass Band have joined the **Wrexham City Brass Band**. Due to the increase in the number of brass players in the area, since the investment in musical education through the Wrexham and Denbighshire Co-operative Group, the numbers of this young band have swelled, with some of the children developing their ability on their chosen instrument as a result.

But the work of restoring ensembles has not only been taking place at a regional level. Many ensembles have been created, or restored, in individual counties across Wales. Since September rehearsals of wind bands, string groups, primary and secondary orchestras, choirs, vocal ensembles have been going on. And there are several examples of new ensembles this season as well. In Gwynedd and Anglesey there are two new ensembles - the Orchestra for orchestral players, and then a brand-new guitar group. If you live in the Neath-Port Talbot area they have a new Choir. And in Pembrokeshire there is a new



## Ensemble Recovery – Caerphilly Music Service Non-residential Ensemble Course – 4th & 5th October 2023

Caerphilly Music Service held a two-day ensemble course at Llancaiach Fawr Manor in October 2023. The course was open to years 6 - 13 pupils who are currently working at a Grade 1 standard and above. Incorporating Strings, Woodwind, Brass, Harps and Percussion, the course aimed to offer an ensemble experience to those children having instrumental lessons within CCBC, but not presently accessing the free weekly county ensembles. The hope was to encourage new county ensemble members whilst offering current ensemble pupils a more immersive experience.

The course was a tremendous success, with over seventy pupils attending both days. The County String Orchestra, Wind Band, Harp Ensemble & Percussion Ensemble all worked with experienced Caerphilly Music Service tutors to not only learn group pieces to perform to parents, but also to come together to play as a full orchestra.

The impact on the county ensembles was instant - numbers at the weekly county groups grew in the following weeks and Caerphilly Music Service are confident that with encouragement, this trend will continue.

There are plans for further courses this academic year for Rock and Pop groups, along with a beginners course and an end of year county ensemble course.

**Andrew Mantle**  
Assessment and Learning  
Lead & Music Tutor



## The National Open Youth Orchestra

In September the **Cardiff National Open Youth Orchestra Ensemble** started rehearsals for the first time. The National Open Youth Orchestra (NOYO) is the world's first disabled-led national youth ensemble, promoting musical excellence and giving some of the UK's most talented young disabled and non-disabled musicians a progression route. It's a partnership between the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales. It is wonderful to see an opportunity here for

young people with learning needs to practice and perform together as part of an inclusive ensemble.

This group, aged between 11 and 25, will also come together with musicians from other NOYO Centres in London, Bristol, Birmingham and Bournemouth for an annual residency, and to hold whole ensemble concerts from the Spring 2024 season.

You can find out more information about the orchestra by visiting the Royal College of Music and Drama Wales [website](#)

## National Youth Arts Wales

It was an exceptionally busy summer once again for the members of the **National Youth Orchestra of Wales**, the **National Youth Brass Band of Wales** and the **National Youth Choir of Wales**, as they performed for a total of 3,400 people in concerts across Wales. These National ensembles are for young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who were either born in Wales or who now live here.

In July, the **Welsh National Youth Brass Band** performed in concerts in Bangor, Aberystwyth, and Cardiff. At the beginning of August, the **National Youth Orchestra of Wales** came together to rehearse and perform in Bangor, Lampeter and Cardiff, as well as two festivals in St David's. And to top off a summer of events for the young performers, the **National Youth Choir of Wales** performed in concerts in Bangor and Cardiff, as well as a festival in St David's.

It was also positive to hear that NYAW received more applications for 2023/24 ensembles than ever before! After the closing date at the beginning of October, 124 young people had applied to join the Choir



this year - including many who had not sung in a choir before, and who had been receiving support through the NYAW 'Choir Skills' program'.

214 young people applied for a place in the Orchestra and Wind Band, which is an increase of 18% since last year. This is fantastic news! Our intention through the ensemble restoration work is that those numbers will rise even more in the coming years as more and more children get the experience of working together in ensembles closer to home.

To read more about it visit: [Record number of young musicians throughout Wales apply to join National Youth Arts Wales – National Youth Arts Wales \(nyaw.org.uk\)](#)





## D.S.

In our newsletter we want to give you the opportunity to get to know those involved in music education in Wales. Over the summer, Evan Dawson was appointed as the new Chief Executive of National Youth Arts Wales. Thanks to Evan for agreeing to be the first to answer our questions!

Name:  
**Evan Dawson**  
Position:  
**New Chief Executive of  
National Youth Arts Wales**

### 1 Where did you grow up?

*I'm a Cardiff boy. I went to Melin Gruffydd and Glantaf schools, which are both Welsh-medium. I spent many happy summer holidays in Gower and Breconshire, where most of my family are based. I still love walking in the*

*countryside there, which I do at every opportunity. My son Rufus is now 13 years old, so it's been wonderful to re-discover Welsh nature and wildlife through his eyes.*

### 2 Do you remember your first musical experience?

*My mother ran the Brecon Jazz Festival when I was very young. I met some world-famous musicians like Sonny Rollins, Gerry Mulligan and Pat Metheny long before I understood who they were. It still seems amazing to me that these huge American stars came all the way to Brecon to perform in the market hall, which still had signs for fresh fish and homemade cakes hanging on the walls. It was hearing Sonny Rollins play that made me want to learn the saxophone myself.*

### 3 You are now the Chief Executive of National Youth Arts Wales. What do you hope to achieve over the next few years?

*Involvement in music and the arts has transformed my life. During*

*my career, I've met hundreds of children and young people for whom it's been the same - from housing estates in London, to special schools in Scotland, to remote communities in West Wales. However, I'm worried that far too many young people are still missing out on this opportunity and might instead spend all their time playing computer games or 'doom-scrolling' through social media. We currently run the National Youth Choir, Orchestra and Brass Band, and a wide range of other ensembles and projects. Over the next few years, I want National Youth Arts Wales join forces with other organisations by inspiring, supporting and connecting young people through the arts, at all levels of ability, throughout all of Wales.*

### 4 How do you think the National Music Education Plan for Wales will help your organisation?

*The National Music Education Plan is a vital part of how we can work with schools, regions and local authorities to inform young people*

*about musical opportunities, and to understand how young people are already developing musically in different parts of Wales. Working in partnership is always the best way, being really clear about what's working well already, so everyone can learn from each other. It's a very exciting time.*

### 5 What was the best concert you've ever been to?

*Two recent concerts spring to mind... The Dovetail Orchestra in Bristol is a group of refugees and asylum seekers, who rehearse, co-create and perform regularly with UK musicians. It's incredibly moving to hear their stories, through this unique blend of instruments and genres, and see the friendships that have resulted... And another incredible concert I heard recently was Jacob Collier with his band. I've been a fan of his for many years, since his early experiments on YouTube. The sheer joy that pours from him, through such seemingly effortless virtuosity, is totally inspiring.*



## Llyn and Eifionydd National Eisteddfod

We had a very special week at the **National Eisteddfod** in Boduan, Gwynedd, in August. We must thank Gwynedd and Môn Schools Music Service for letting us share a stand with them in order to share our news and developments to the thousands of people who visited.

There were instrumental workshops with artists such as Gai Toms, Ukulele sessions, performances, practices, and a lot of fun and noise in the tent that week. It was also wonderful to welcome the Minister for Education, Jeremy Miles, to the stand, where we had an extremely positive and beneficial discussion with him about the successes of the Music Plan so far, our plans for the future and the challenges that our music services face.



## First Experiences

Our **First Experiences** work program is going from strength to strength, and the local music services must be congratulated for cracking on with the commitment to ensure that children can create music together in the classroom accompanied by a professional musician. The aim is to reach all our primary schools before the end of 2025, but our first year's data shows that we have already reached well over half of our primary schools in Wales, and that's only up to Summer '23!

And as 'ensembles' is the focus of our newsletter this half term, there are several wonderful stories about the journey from First Experiences to ensembles, which really proves the value of this important programme. Three children who completed First Experiences at Ysgol Bro Ingli and Ysgol Llanychlwydog in Pembrokeshire, and then progressed to our Second Steps Ensemble at Ysgol Bro Gwaun, have moved to the Pembrokeshire Youth Training Orchestra! We are very proud of them all, and of the Pembrokeshire Music Service who have facilitated this journey for the three young musicians.

Similar experiences are shared with us by our Wales-wide music services, and the next task for us as a National Music Service is to ensure that the next steps are put in place to ensure the continuation of pupils' musical journeys.

## Open Forum

Our first ever **Open Forum** was held in Pontio, Bangor, on Tuesday, 14 November. The purpose of these Forums is to provide a space to learn more about the work of the National Music Service, and to share news, opportunities, and developments within the wider musical community. The forum will also provide an opportunity to discuss current topics in the field of music education, and to network.

### During this session in Bangor, we had:

- an update on the work of the National Music Service
- a workshop on music within the Curriculum for Wales.
- a panel discussion on children's and young people's paths through music education.
- presentations from some of the NMS's key partners.

We also had some wonderful performances arranged by Conwy Music Service and Gwynedd and Môn Schools Music Service, as well as an opportunity for attendees to network with other partners. If you missed the event a video of the highlights will be on the Open Forum section of our website.

The next Open Forum will be held in Pontypridd on 28 Feb 2024. Keep an eye on our socials and website for details.

## Our website

Over the next few weeks, several new sections will be opening on our website, so remember to go to [www.music-service.wales](http://www.music-service.wales) regularly to see what's new there.

We share all kinds of news on our Social Accounts, so look for us on **Facebook, Instagram** and **X**. We now have a new YouTube channel, which has a video of the exciting first year of our work programme, First Experiences. There are links to all these sites on our [website](#).