



MUSIC FOR LIFE



***Music for Life* is a very successful and large outreach programme bringing live music performances and workshops to children in a mainly rural area. It was the brainchild of Martin Hooper and subsequently won a BT Innovation Award.**

What is Music for Life?

Sowerby Music's outreach programme for 35 primary and special schools in the Hambleton District of North Yorkshire originated with the society's aspiration 'to encourage a life long love of music within our young people'. It is the largest and longest running programme of its kind in the country to be organised by a music society.

Rationale

It began in 1997 when nationally driven curriculum and financial pressures were conspiring to minimise music in schools. Sadly the protracted recession has led to ever more drastic cuts in opportunities for pupils to learn instruments. Local primary schools are relatively small and seldom have access to a part-time specialist music teacher. The schools are often located in rural communities with no easy access to live music performances. In this situation, head teachers enthusiastically responded to our *Music for Life* initiative whereby Sowerby Music has organised and funded annual participative concerts of mainly classical music and workshops in schools.

Continuous development

The scheme began in 13 primary schools involving approximately 1000 children between the ages of 7 and 11 with smaller schools coming together to make a viable event. Now, *Music for Life* supports approximately 3,800 children in 33 primary and 2 special schools. Younger children between the ages of 4 and 7 are now included in the activities. Each session consists of an hour's participative concert for the whole school followed by workshops for smaller groups of children culminating in a sharing session for other pupils. Every school, even the smallest, hosts a *Music for Life* session for either a half day or full day according to its total number of pupils.

We have endeavoured to help teachers build on the visits by providing concert programmes listing learning objectives and suggesting follow up activities.

A more recent development has been the organisation of six workshops for school staff to help them gain confidence and skills when working with their classes. Approximately 400 staff have participated in percussion, vocal or graphic notation workshops. It is hoped that similar workshops will be organised annually.

Four schools have been invited to spend a memorable day at The Sage Gateshead when pupils were taken on a tour of this prestigious and internationally acclaimed music venue as well as participating in two workshops and sampling an orchestral rehearsal. A similar opportunity will be offered to other schools in the future.

Performers

The careful choice of professional musicians has been crucial to the success of *Music for Life*, most of whom are well known to us in our network of performers. As well as being accomplished musicians, they are all excellent communicators with children. Newcomers are inducted into *Music for Life*, whilst longer established artistes are encouraged to adapt their contributions to the needs and interests of individual schools. We endeavour to bring to each school a range of instruments and vocalists as the programme evolves - such as percussion, saxophone, guitar, harp, all of the string, woodwind and brass families, piano, accordion, as well as jazz music and clog dancing.

Evaluation

At least one member of Sowerby Music represents the society at each school session so that there is a visible and supportive partnership between the performers, school and the society. These representatives also monitor the sessions and their comments complement evaluation visits made to a sample of schools each year. All of this focused feedback helps to develop the programme for the following year.

Funding

Initially, *Music for Life* was mainly funded by grants from charitable organisations. Now the Patrons who are Society members donate on a regular (monthly/quarterly/annual) basis usually by gift aided standing order. Their generous support of this £13,000 programme enables planning for future developments to proceed with financial security and confidence. Schools make a donation of £1.20 a child attending a concert and £1.70 for each pupil attending a concert and workshop. They consider this to be excellent value for money.

Benefits to the community and Sowerby Music Society

1. *Music for Life* provides the Society's members with an opportunity to share their love of music with approximately 3,800 young people in our locality each year, thus investing in a future generation of adults with an interest in music.
2. The school sessions also generate interest amongst teachers about Sowerby Music when they attend workshops or learn that many of the *Music for Life* artistes have featured in our monthly concerts programme.
3. *Music for Life* gives members an additional interest in and promotes a loyalty to their Society fostered both through their first hand experience of inspirational school sessions and by their appreciation of the schools' high regard for our outreach programme.

Would you like to know more?

We receive many appreciative comments each year from pupils and teachers about the stimulating concerts and workshops which promote a wider musical experience for children. Additional information about the benefits of *Music for Life* can be found in the annual report for 2012.

If you would like to find out more about the organisation of *Music for Life* contact the organiser at www.sowerbymusic.org.uk.