



DURHAM JOHNSTON SCHOOL MUSIC DEPARTMENT

Friday 5th July, 2024

Dear Musicians and Parents/Guardians,

Thank you for all your support over what has been a very successful year of music making at Durham Johnston School. The extra-curricular music programme continues to be a great strength of the school and a real opportunity for our pupils to take part in excellent ensemble music-making. Weekly rehearsals began in September with Junior, Senior and Chamber Choirs, Junior and Senior Orchestras, Wind Band and Big Band welcoming members new and old and looking ahead to the repertoire for the year. Lunchtime support sessions for Music Theory, Aural Skills, Keyboard Skills, and GCSE performance and composition also were also soon up and running.

Preparations for the Christmas Concerts and the Carol Service began, with staff soon complaining of 'Jingle Bells' ringing through the atrium in October! The Christmas Concerts took place over two evenings, the 6th and 7th December, and as ever, were filled with festive favourites from 'Walking in the Air', 'Jingle Bell Rock' and 'White Christmas', to Benjamin Britten's hauntingly beautiful 'Hymn to the Virgin', featuring a solo vocal quartet. The Carol Service is a highlight of the school's year, and the only time the whole school (or at least as many as fit in) gather in one place. After missing out on this event in 2021 and 2022, we now feel that we have re-established it as strong as ever, and musical highlights this year included a rousing introit 'All my Heart this night rejoices' from Chamber Choir, 'African Crib Carol' from the Junior Choir, and 'Make we Merry' by Andrew Carter as a massed choral item. Senior Orchestra sent us on our way with 'A Vaughan Williams Christmas' as the voluntary.

Chamber Choir were delighted to return to Durham Cathedral to sing the service of Evensong on Monday 29th January. Very few members of Chamber Choir had ever sung Evensong before, and it was a great experience for them, inspiring some of them to explore the possibility of Choral Scholarships in their university applications.

The new year saw many of our more senior pupils juggling mock exams, revision, practice and rehearsals, but we are always grateful that our musicians show such a high level of commitment and see their music-making as an important contribution to school community life. The theme for the Spring concerts was 'water', and again this generated a diverse range of repertoire, some strongly linked to the theme ('Wade in the Water', 'Candle on the Water') and some linked more tenuously ('Little Brown Jug' – apparently it contained water!). The spring concert is also the last time our Y13 musicians play together, and it was time to say thank you and wish them luck for the future. It was superb to see that the tradition of the 'Y13 Song' has not died out, and this time the Holmes's responded with a surprise item of their own, singing 'The Water is Wide' to an accompaniment of 'singing' wine glasses played by the Y13 pupils!

In May, Junior Choir took part in a performance of 'Captain Noah and his Floating Zoo' in the Gala Theatre alongside musicians from Durham University. This was exceptionally fortuitous, fitting in perfectly with our Spring theme of 'water', and a chance for our pupils to work with young aspiring professionals.

The Summer term is somewhat quieter without rehearsals for the main ensembles, but this term saw many pupils taking ABRSM exams, and we know that there have been lots of excellent results, testament to the many hours of practice that go on each week. To provide soloists with a chance to perform in public, and to receive feedback, we again held our annual 'Music Festival'. This takes the form of a competition with mixed-instrument classes for three levels of ability. Our winners this year were Sandy Scholar (Class 1), Bartosz Pytko (Class 2) and Leo Bruce (Class 3). They were each presented with a trophy by our adjudicator Mr Iain Anderson. Our final event of the year was *Music for a Summer Evening* – a cabaret-style evening for sixth-form musicians, parents and friends. This is a chance to celebrate the support and commitment of our musicians over their time at Durham Johnston, to recognise what an important part of their time at school music has been, and how they have helped to pass on a love of music and the enjoyment of it to the younger years. We thank them, and we thank you for your continued support of the Music Department and we hope to produce many enjoyable evenings of music for your pleasure over the coming year.

Yours faithfully,

Mr E Holmes