

CASE STUDY

Swing Band Tours

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ABSTRACT

An entry-level project which sees swing bands from an independent school going on the road for a day each year to give concerts in local primary schools.

PARTNERSHIPS

King Edward’s School, Birmingham
King Edward’s High School for Girls
Primary Schools

OVERVIEW

This is a very easy partnership / performance project for any school with excellent music to get off the ground. It delivers outstanding performance opportunities for pupils, and can be a starting point for generating strong musical relationships.

BACKGROUND

King Edward’s School and King Edward’s High School for Girls have two joint swing bands, which play a repertoire of jazz classics. In the autumn these tend to be Christmas-related; in the summer, a less seasonal repertoire is developed. The Junior Swing Band features boys and girls at the outset of their performance careers. Better musicians will graduate to the Senior Swing Band during their time at the schools.

The ‘swing band tours’ are now an established part of school life. The senior swing band, which has pupils in exam classes from Years 11 and 13, spends a day just before Christmas visiting 3-4 local junior schools and performing half-hour concerts in each; the junior swing band, which has more boys from non-examined years, does the same in the final week of the summer term. On a typical ‘tour’ day, the band will play to over 1,200 primary school students.



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The project emanated from intersecting objectives from the Director of Music and the Director of Outreach. The Director of Music wanted pupils to be able to access more – and different – performance opportunities, especially the type of opportunities that require resilience and adaptability to make them work. The Director of Outreach was keen to develop relationships with primary schools across the city, especially those in far-flung areas such as Walsall, Sutton Coldfield and Solihull.

PARTNERSHIPS

Typically, a tour will involve 3-4 primary schools. Some ask for two or even three concerts to be run consecutively, depending on venues and size of school. Particularly for the summer tour, some schools are very keen to run outdoor concerts. When the weather is fine, this is lovely – but can result in scheduling difficulties when it rains. Again, this reinforces the resilience and adaptability needed from the musicians.

Over four or five years of swing band tours, visiting over 20 schools, not a single school turned down the opportunity of a concert.



FUNDING

The costs of the project are minimal – clothes pegs for outdoor concerts and portable music stands. Clearly, these can be used repetitively! We did find that it was well worth hiring two ‘roadies’ for each tour – either boys who had recently left or members of the school community who could be suborned into manual work! This meant that the musicians could concentrate on looking after their instruments when arriving at a new school, and that the piano, drums and amplifiers could be set up quickly and efficiently. One never knew where the parking space was likely to be.



It is a very non-threatening way of starting a relationship with a school.



NARRATIVE

The concerts would be animated by the band leader, a teacher. He would elicit sometimes surprising responses from the pupils, notably:

‘So we have two different types of guitar in this band. Does anyone know what they’re called?’

‘An air guitar, sir?’

IMPACT

The project worked really well, and led to various other outreach links with the schools that we visited – art projects, maths projects or other music projects. It is a very non-threatening way of starting a relationship with a school.



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Over 1,200 pupils might be exposed to music on each of these days. Some will have taken their music studies more seriously as a result: certainly, head teachers, in our experience, are always keen to have more music performance within school. Often concerts were written up in the weekly parental newsletter or tweeted from the school Twitter account, which helped to spread our reputation of King Edward's as a school actively involved in partnership.

As for the musicians, it was an exhausting and tiring day: but one that they welcomed as a useful and interesting experience.

Tom Arbuthnott

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BIOGRAPHY

Tom Arbuthnott Schools Together Group

Tom Arbuthnott is Chair of the Schools Together Group, 2017-18 and Director of Outreach and Partnership at Eton College. Formerly Director of Outreach at King Edward's School, Birmingham, he believes passionately in the power of partnership to drive excellence in education.



BIOGRAPHY

Martin Leigh

King Edward's School

Martin Leigh is Director of Music at King Edward's School in Birmingham.



Taken from the publication:

ALL TOGETHER NOW...

How to set up outstanding music partnerships between schools

One of eight case studies from cross-sector partnerships

To view more case studies, or the full publication,
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