



## Maidstone Youth Music Society

Registered Charity Number 297018

### ANNUAL REPORT – MYMS AGM – 30 NOVEMBER 2018

MYMS has completed yet another very successful year of music-making. The schedule of concerts in the past year at Invicta GS has included the Christmas Concert 2017, the Spring and Summer Concerts in 2018, and we have been busy preparing for this year's Christmas Concert 2018. There was no bandstand season in Brenchley Gardens organised by Maidstone Borough Council in 2018, although we are in discussions with MAAP [Maidstone Area Arts Partnership] and Maidstone Borough Council about plans for one on Sunday 23 June 2019. MBC have withdrawn funding from the Proms in the Park in May and some of it has been made available for the bandstand season.

In addition, MYMS Voices took part in the Mayor of Maidstone's 'Raising the Roof' Concert at All Saints Church in May 2018. The students who took part sang beautifully and were a credit to MYMS throughout the rehearsals and a very long concert.....

We have as always said goodbye to a number of summer leavers from MYMS. Seven students stayed with us to the end of their Year 13 and they all did extremely well with some outstanding results and have gone off to various universities. I wish to reiterate two key points from this:

- Students can still gain excellent exam success in their studies AND remain members of MYMS right up until the end of Year 13;
- none of our Y13 leavers has gone on to study Music at university; they are therefore not elite musicians who are off to music conservatoires; they are gifted, all-round students who simply enjoy being part of MYMS and having fun making music each week.

These losses were again exacerbated this autumn with a further fifteen students deciding not to return to MYMS in September. Students face increasing pressures on their time from schools and universities demanding higher examination grades, as well as various competing interests on Friday evenings, including gymnastics, dance, karate, swimming and a performing arts academy. We still believe that MYMS offers excellent 'downtime' and we urge our young people to maintain their loyalty to MYMS and to reap the benefits of all their hard work by remaining senior members right up until the end of Y13.

Recruitment therefore remains a serious challenge. We are in the process of commissioning a new website for MYMS and linking the design of that to a new publicity flyer and interactive links with schools' and other organisations' own websites.

We have had some success recruiting at the younger end of our membership, and are hoping that we will be able to persuade a much larger number of Invicta students to stay at school on a Friday to be part of MYMS. I will also be speaking to two County Singing Groups in early December, as many of the singers are also instrumentalists. We have continued with just the two wind bands: the Alpha Band and the Maidstone Youth Wind Orchestra. There are also smaller numbers in some of the sections of the main Youth Orchestra, particularly on minority instruments.

Once again, I want to pay tribute to the students [and their parents] who have remained with us, to continue their music-making and further to strengthen their friendships each Friday. This is a period of restructuring and rebuilding but MYMS remains very much alive and kicking.

This summer, for 2017-18, we presented FIVE young student of the year awards: these went to the five senior percussionists at MYMS – Finn Barker-Flower, Chris Haywood, Dominic Hodgson, Harry Micklewright-Taylor and Kyle Siwek. They have made an enormous contribution to the musical and social life at MYMS – their percussion skills have developed impressively from when they were first recruited to our fledgling Beta Percussion Ensemble and they have developed a remarkable ‘team spirit’ over their time at MYMS. The percussionists always have the most equipment to set up and put away at the end of a rehearsal or concert. They consistently do this willingly and with good humour. We are proud of them – just sad that they grow up and two of them are now in Y13 and will leave us at the end of this academic year.

One of the strengths of MYMS is the stability in our staff team. We are pleased to have this public opportunity of thanking Ciara Considine, Kay Gretton, Graham Mann, Joe Mathers, Nigel McDonald, Kate Ord, Jeremy Shoobridge and Jonathan Vincent for all their commitment to the core mission of MYMS and to the sense of fun they bring to their rehearsals as well as their impressive musicianship. We are also enormously fortunate to have Tania Dowd as part of the musical team: Tania gives her time and skills in accompanying both MYMS Voices and Orchestra for All every week on a voluntary basis.

Kate Ord will be leaving us at the end of the Autumn Term 2018 to spend more time with her family. I have appointed Ben Knowles to succeed her; he used to be a MYMS Student himself and is an accomplished player [mostly on viola], arranger and conductor. He will start at MYMS when we return in January 2019.

As discussed in last year’s Annual Report, we now have two ensembles which encompass exactly the same ability range of grade 1 up to approximately Grade 4/5:

- Our ‘Orchestra for All’ provides an opportunity for orchestral playing and includes players of all strings [violin, ‘cello, double bass and harp], plus woodwind, brass, recorders and percussion;
- Our ‘Alpha Band’ plays wind band music with a combination of brass, woodwind and percussion instrumentalists.

The double bass project has reaped great benefits for the four pupils taught by Kay Gretton. They are all playing music of Grade 5 standard and play in our ensembles. A small scale bassoon project yielded a new junior bassoonist this year and we now have two junior bassoonists in our ‘Orchestra for All’, who will be progressing to the Youth Orchestra and MYWO in January 2019. We are continuing with our small ‘cello project with two students, both of whom will be in Orchestra for All from January. Our clarinet project, we hope, is about to start with eight new students made up of two groups of four from two Maidstone primary schools.

We organised a visit to the Royal Albert Hall in April 2018 to see the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra play a ‘Film Gala’. Sixty students, siblings and adults enjoyed a brilliant concert, which was hosted by an ex-MYMS student [Tommy Pearson] and included our own percussion tutor [Joe Mathers] in the RPO Percussion Section.

The MYMS Committee has again worked hard, supporting the staff: Elizabeth Rees has continued as Chair; Polly Williamson as Secretary; and Peter Runting as Treasurer. I wish to pay particular tribute to their support and wisdom throughout the year. In the summer, we said goodbye to two of our student reps – Matthew Deacon [our oldest ever MYMS student at 21+] and Freya Wentzel. We welcome John Harris, Oonagh Jones and Claire Worrall as new Parent Representatives and Henry Brown and Ella Pevy as new Student Reps. We remain very grateful for the tremendous amount of behind-the-scenes support that all the MYMS Committee officers, members and trustees give to MYMS in so many unseen ways.

MYMS continues to work closely with other music and arts organisations in Maidstone, including an active involvement in Maidstone Area Arts Partnership [of which I am now MAAP Secretary]. We have maintained our strong links with staff at Young Kent, which has recently merged with the Medway Youth Trust [to be called MY Trust]. They are maintaining their office base in Maidstone and provide very helpful training, DBS & safeguarding advice and policy support.

I have also very recently completed [and passed] my 1<sup>st</sup> Aid Training on a day-long course run by MY Trust. In addition, I have just completed a 3-day course on creating a new Funding Strategy, organised by Stronger Kent Communities and Funding For All, which I hope will bear fruit for MYMS in the near future.

We maintain our links with local schools and are always looking to recruit additional members. We continue with our 'bounty' scheme by paying £10 to any current member of MYMS who introduces a new player or singer [payable when the new member pays their subs....].

Our relationship with our hosts at Invicta Grammar School remains a very amicable one and we are particularly appreciative of the support from Julie Derrick, Head of IGS, and Giles O'Connor, the Site Manager on Friday evenings who is ever-helpful. Giles retired in August [with an appreciative gift from MYMS] and we are now working well with his replacement, Suraj Gurung.

We still have a superb team at MYMS – the students, the staff, the committee and the parents – and we continue to provide unique music-making opportunities for the youth of Maidstone. Many other large towns in Kent no longer have such facilities – we are justly proud of what MYMS achieves each year. Long may it continue....

**Richard Gretton**  
**MYMS Manager**

**November 2018**