

# 2016

## *Will Michael Jazz Education Awards*

### **Introduction**

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Welcome to you all. My name is Ivor Widdison and I am chair of the Will Michael Jazz Education Awards Panel. My colleagues on the Panel are Dr Catherine Tackley, Bill Martin (both of whom I am delighted to report are with us here today) Andrea Vicari and Richard Michael.

With us, formally to present the Awards, is Leslie East, Chair of the Jazz Committee of the Musicians' Company, better known to some of you as the Worshipful Company, and significant supporters of jazz in the UK !

Diplomas are awarded annually to music Hubs and Music Services in England and Scotland. They matter because they are the only means of according national recognition to those Hubs and Music Services which demonstrate an outstanding commitment to jazz education. The Diplomas are named in honour of Will Michael who until his death in 2008 was a hugely respected jazz educator on the national stage; Will was also joint architect of the Awards Scheme.

It would be easy to allow our report this year to be dominated by depressing news about the struggles of our friends and colleagues to maintain effective music education policies. Inevitably, jazz education suffers in consequence. But there are beacons signalling all is not lost. For example, Arts Council England continues to offer some support, though pitifully small compared with classical music and opera, and bodies like the Ronnie Scott's Foundation now grant aiding NYJO and jazz education INSET. And within our own scheme there is joy in receiving three excellent first time submissions, and two of them based north of the River Trent!

My colleagues and I on the Awards Panel offer our warm thanks to the Doncaster Music Education Hub, the Doncaster Youth Jazz Association and NYJO for hosting this event and the Musicians' Company for their generous financial support.

Ivor Widdison  
Chair, Will Michael Jazz Education Awards Panel

Presentation at CAST Doncaster, 18 September 2016

## **The Awards:**

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A welcome return by **Aberdeen** who in 2010 were supplying young jazz musicians to the National Youth Jazz Orchestra of Scotland (NYJOS) and are now feeding both of Scotland's national youth jazz orchestras as well as the adult National Jazz Orchestra of Scotland. The nurseries in question are one particular secondary school, which has an established tradition of jazz education and its own big band, and authority-wide ensembles, viz the junior big band and the City Youth Jazz Band. The latter has an impressive programme of high profile public and private performances and festival appearances. The values embedded in the running of the Youth Big Band are genuinely inclusive. Thus, in addition to developing skills in improvisation, jazz language and conventions, leadership, communication, performance and presentation, the young musicians are encouraged to learn what it is like to be a gigging jazz musician in big band and small group settings.

Close links have been formed with the University of Aberdeen Music Department and Jazz Society.

We would like to see a greater proliferation of regular activities that will help build jazz skills and knowledge across the city and across all ages and ability boundaries; so we are pleased to read that there is recognition that increasing knowledge and confidence in improvisation and jazz performance practice through an increase in the number of workshops and generally embedding improvisation at an early age are among several worthy aspirations.

**Cumbria**, who are making their first-ever entry in the Will Michael Awards scheme, have a new jazz development programme delivered by Hub partner, BlueJamArts. The emphasis is on providing access to performance opportunities and to a range of progression routes relevant to young jazz musicians' needs. The promotion of improvisation is a key element in a county-wide approach to music education. A new relationship with the development agency, Jazz North, has been a positive influence. BlueJamArts has been delivering jazz on an inter-generational basis at all ability levels in regular programmes of after-school and holiday sessions as well as in schools and colleges for many years.

Building on "improvising in the classroom" CPD to 40 primary school teachers, an online improvisation resource is being compiled. The NYJC also delivered CPD sessions at NYJC weekends for teachers. Indeed, Easter, Summer and weekend workshops have been a feature of the year. Regular weekly sessions already established in some parts of the county are to be developed in other areas. And forthcoming NYJO workshops and collaborations with Lancashire Music Service will further consolidate the culture of performance imbued with improvisation.

We especially welcome an aspiration to look at what talented young women are doing, to listen to the way they want to work and the music they want to make, and to make a place for that within Cumbria's jazz environment.

**Devon** Music Education Hub commissions music organisations and appropriate specialists to deliver jazz education across the county. More than 6000 pupils and students take part in 27 ensembles which are supported by the Hub and jazz forms an important part of that support. The Hub provides training for teachers and other music practitioners in many genres including jazz. Pupils and students are encouraged to consider next steps from First Access to more advanced levels. Appropriate ensemble opportunities are signposted in the Hub website.

Devon Youth Jazz Association (DYJA) has a key partnership with the Hub. As well as offering a programme of high quality jazz education through the two Devon Youth Jazz Orchestras (DYJOs 1 & 2). DYJA provides outreach work in schools and other venues to introduce jazz to the wider community. DYJO 1 celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2015 and has always been recognised as one of the best youth big bands in the UK. Our reports, over many years, have chronicled the achievements of DYJOs 1 & 2. The Hub's support has enabled the established Jazz Ambassadors programme – this is the cream of the soloists of DYJOs 1 & 2 performing at and leading workshops in Devon schools – to continue and indeed to embark on development and expansion programmes to new jazz groups in different areas of Devon.

A new development is the Hub's support for the North Devon based Plough Junior Jazz Ensemble, which conducts weekly workshops for young musicians of all abilities in North Devon with the emphasis on jazz improvisation skills and ensemble techniques. In addition to regular weekend rehearsals the Group undertake school tours, performing in assemblies which as well as providing an exciting mini-concert is a valuable education and training experience for the members of the Group. Those appearances have led to an increased take up of instrumental lessons in the schools visited.

**East Renfrewshire**, once again the smallest authority by far to make a submission, but still able to boast about the high quality of its instrumental staff. For example, four members have the advanced Diploma in Jazz from St Andrews University. This enables the Service to continue its tradition of providing regular INSET on improvisation.

Another 100 plus primary school pupils comprising players of woodwind, brass, strings and percussion were introduced to embryonic improvisation during a week-long course culminating in performance before parents and friends.

The Senior Jazz Band, which recruits from all the authority's secondary schools continues to perform publicly at educational, corporate and charity events throughout the West of Scotland and to great acclaim. It was no surprise when they won the Jazz Band Class at the Glasgow Music Festival !

**Doncaster**, another first-time entry. To those involved in jazz education in the UK, the Doncaster Youth Jazz Association (DYJA) is synonymous with high quality youth big bands and matching performances and this over a period of 40 years. In more recent times the Doncaster Music Education Hub (DMEH) and DYJA have joined forces in developing opportunities for young people to access good quality jazz education both in and out of school. Partnerships benefit all concerned. Thus all DMEH ensembles including orchestras and windbands rehearse weekly at Doncaster Jazz Centre. Unsurprisingly there is cross-fertilisation for all the young musicians through access to opportunities for hands-on experience of different genres. Such a wide variety of musical choice is obviously a good thing. And there's an additional benefit in that some of the more stubborn myths attending the world of jazz can be dispelled. The proof of that lies in the number of young musicians who play across all the ensembles. There was further exemplification in the form of a public concert showcasing the Hub's top windband and the DYJA Swing Orchestra featuring musicians who moved seamlessly between the ensembles throughout the concert.

Another product of the partnership approach has been a number of jazz focussed initiatives run by DYJA, DMEH, Doncaster Music Service, and Doncaster Community Arts in the form of a pilot project over twelve weeks giving primary school pupils opportunity to play by ear, ie without traditional notation. A similar project was run in Doncaster's Pupil Referral Unit for those with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Such was the success of the pilot that the Unit has invested in a year long programme.

**Gloucestershire** Last year we drew attention to Gloucestershire Jazz Live's (GJL) PDF project featuring information on theory, practice strategies and ideas, guided worksheet and recommended listening. Already there is evidence of significant improvements among the younger pupils who are demonstrating a greater understanding of scales, chords and improvising ideas; and, importantly, a greater interest in and curiosity about listening to jazz. The booklet is being updated to include recommendations of jazz repertoire to learn as well as suitable band warm-up activities.

GJL provides four jazz ensembles for youth and adult members for over 90 musicians who have 30 sessions within the academic year. All four bands were featured in collective public concerts; and next year will see a collaboration with the Oxfordshire Youth Big Band in two joint concerts.

We welcome the introduction of an offer to secondary schools of "introduction to jazz" and improvisation skills workshops. A wider application of INSET and CPD for non-specialist teachers should, in our opinion, be undertaken as soon as resources permit.

Coaching is provided for all Jazz Orchestra members who express interest in composing and arranging. Indeed composition by Band member is actively encouraged with at least one impressive outcome, viz a GYJO student composition was performed at the Music for Youth National Festival to such good effect that the Band has been shortlisted for a Royal Albert Hall appearance in November. GYJO have also been featured in the Cheltenham Jazz Festival for the past eleven years.

**Kingston upon Thames**, is another first-time entry. Many years running a successful big band for advanced players, but a recognition that new recruits' improvisation skills were limited prompted a partnership project with adjoining Richmond upon Thames Music Trust and NYJO with a range of very relevant targets. We identify just a few here:

- To extend understanding of the jazz genre
- To increase visibility and raise awareness of jazz across the two boroughs
- To improve ensemble skills
- To introduce and develop creative jazz ensembles in each borough establishing progressive ensembles for beginners, intermediate (this band already up and running) and advanced students; and
- To provide CPD for existing jazz leaders.

The success of the project to date is apparently evidenced in the improved playing of the Kingston Youth Big Band. Another successful feature of the project was the bringing together of 100 primary pupils under the leadership of the NYJO Director to create aurally two pieces of music, a novel experience for most of them. The day was also attended by school music leaders for whom learning aurally would also have been a new experience! The "Creative Day" with NYJO is now included in the Music Service's annual series of events.

The Music Service also has the potential to draw upon the jazz resources of a particularly successful Saturday Jazz School at Richmond Adult Community College, though today's high fees are an obstacle to full community participation.

**Oxfordshire** County Music Service's (OCMS) impressive commitment to improvisation is demonstrated thus: improvisation is taught to all beginner instrumentalists as part of the First Access programme and the Music Service's assessment scheme; the programme is delivered to 146 schools which means that improvisation as a musical activity has been introduced to over 4,400 Oxfordshire primary pupils in this year alone. Evidence of a little more CPD and support for classroom music teachers would be welcome.

The proliferation of youth big bands and combos of varying ability levels in the County facilitates a clear progression route from First Access lessons to advanced performance. All pre-grade 3 pupils are expected to improvise simple melodies based on musical ideas played by their teacher. The process is part of the internal assessment that covers all instrumental lessons up to grade 3. For internal exams at grades 3, 4 & 5 across all pitched instruments improvisations are based on chordal, rhythmic and melodic stimuli.

As usual, the OCMS submission overflows with detailed information on the itineraries of the three "progressive" big bands, three smaller ensembles all of which are nourished by jazz groups from secondary schools and the five local OCMS Saturday music centres. This has to be seen to be believed !

## Conclusion

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We believe **East Renfrewshire** are deserving of a very honourable mention for their continuing commitment to jazz education.

For their first ever entries to our scheme we awarded DIPLOMAS to **Cumbria, Doncaster** and **Kingston upon Thames**.

And for their continuing outstanding commitment we awarded DIPLOMAS to **Gloucestershire** and **Oxfordshire**.

Our DIPLOMA OF SPECIAL MERIT was presented to **DEVON**, the sixth time this remarkable Hub has achieved this accolade!

IKW/September 2016