

Getting a Head Start - Music Manifesto Feature, 22 May 2009



What's a tenoroon?

Berkshire leads the way when it comes to bassoons and has been taking advantage of mini-bassoons and tenoroons specially designed for young players, to get kids started on the double reeds early.

"The main benefit to the tenoroon and mini bassoon is that people who want to play the bassoon can start younger," says Catherine Millar, who teaches for Berkshire Maestros. "This means we don't lose players to the other instruments quite so readily. If an eight-year-old sees an instrument and then gets told he has to wait three years to start it, he is likely to go elsewhere."

Six years ago, Catherine started three eager eight-year-olds on bassoon and tenoroon. Fast-forward to 2009, and Madeleine Millar (13), Harry Davidson (14) and Charlotte Wyatt (14) have all achieved Distinction at Grade 8. Madeleine and Harry have gone on to do Diplomas.

That's an impressive achievement for musicians barely into their teens, and while talent, hard work and good teaching must be the key factors, starting early definitely helped.

Madeleine and Harry were both beyond Grade 5 when they joined the Under 11 National Children's Orchestra. "This is very rare on the bassoon," says Catherine. "It is exceptionally difficult to reach that sort of standard before the age of 11 if you have only just grown enough to start the instrument. But if you have mastered the basics already on a tenoroon then your progress on the normal bassoon will be further advanced."

When another pupil, Fiona Russell, took up bassoon in Year 6 she was inspired by the idea of joining her classmates in the NCO and last year Fiona, Madeline, Harry and Charlotte became the complete bassoon section of the main NCO. "I'm not sure if a whole section has come from one county or one teacher before in a national orchestra, but I know I was very proud of them," says Catherine. She's clearly doing something right.

The four bassoonists play together as a quartet and recently won a local music competition where they impressed the bassoonist Gill Johnston with their talent. They've been invited to the finals of the National Festival, to perform at the [Federation of Music Services Conference](#) in June 2009 and at the [International Double Reed Society Conference](#) in Birmingham in July 2009.

"Fiona wants them to do Britain's Got Talent next year," says Catherine, "but she is still working on the others I think. I stay out of it!"

See the talented bassoonists for yourself. Watch Madeleine, Harry, Charlotte and classmate Megan Edmund on YouTube in their first concert in March 2004, and then again in January 2009.

youtu.be/v5-Yh-RB05M

And watch them in January 2009. Madeleine, Harry, Charlotte and Fiona play their National Festival programme:

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