



Music for Autism

Vision and aims

Music for Autism introduces young people with special educational needs to professionally performed classical music, in an informal and accessible environment where individual differences are celebrated. The Orchestra of St John's has been running Music for Autism interactive workshops, part of our community outreach programme, at special educational needs schools for almost two decades.

Our mission is to serve our communities by promoting artistic excellence and making classical music accessible to people of all backgrounds and cultures. The belief that music can be hugely beneficial in improving mental health and increasing wellbeing is at the heart of our work.

About OSJ and Music for Autism

The Orchestra of St John's (OSJ) conductor John Lubbock and mezzo soprano Christine Cairns founded Music for Autism in 2002. Having discovered the transformational positive impact that music had on their autistic son, the couple wanted to share their love of music with other families with autistic children.

OSJ has built up a substantial network of partnership SEN schools across the UK with whom we regularly work, delivering sessions on a termly basis. We visited 70 schools and engaged with over 6,000 young people during the 2018/19 academic year. We have developed partnerships with peer charities serving disadvantaged young people, such as Thomley Hall Centre and Clear Sky. The demand for school workshop bookings now exceeds our current capacity for delivery.

OSJ's outreach work with people with autism and dementia was recognised when John Lubbock was awarded an OBE for charitable work in 2015.

Music for Autism Workshops

We are invited by SEN schools to deliver workshops for pupils within their settings. Our workshops are integrated into the school daily timetable, OSJ musicians deliver workshops throughout the day. We aim to provide each young person attending the school with the opportunity to engage with classical music. We ask the school to divide their pupils into manageable groups, usually by age group; we offer each class its own workshop. School staff accompany the young people participating in our workshops and support them through the experience.

Workshops are held in school halls, classrooms and other familiar spaces; participants are invited to respond to the music with spontaneous dance and movement throughout. Our unique performances introduce SEN young people to world-class classical music in an environment designed to make them feel comfortable.

Music for Autism prides itself on being uniquely positioned to offer access to some of the most renowned professional musicians in the UK to those who might not otherwise have the opportunity to attend a traditional concert setting. Participants have the opportunity to engage with music performed by Tony Award winners, Grammy-nominated classical artists and Pulitzer Prize winners such as: the eminent soprano Dame Felicity Lott, violinist Tasmin Little and acclaimed cellist Steven Isserlis.



'Sometimes a child really needs to get up and run around, and most people don't understand that – they think they're just behaving badly, which means we can't take the children on trips to traditional concerts. So it's wonderful that this incredible orchestra can come to us.' Paula Manning, Director of Expressive Arts, Phoenix School, London

Music for Autism workshop, photography by David Smith

The need for our work

Many of the young people we work with would not otherwise have had the opportunity to see an instrument played, or to meet a conductor or professional musicians. OSJ is the only orchestra in Oxfordshire, offering specialist Music for Autism workshops, free of charge, to pupils in SEN schools. The general music provision on offer in schools is often restricted by lack of financial resource and specialist staff.

The pupils we engage with at SEN schools have diverse complex needs and a vast range of levels of ability and communication skills. We work with young people with: autism, learning difficulties, physical disability, speech and language difficulties. Responding to staff briefings we are able to tailor our sessions to meet individual needs of pupils, for example; we may decide to play pianissimo, legato pieces during a session with a severely autistic young person who finds loud sounds distressing. Our musicians adapt the programme on the spot, to be responsive

to the mood of the classroom, and to the preferences and needs of the young people. Workshops are people centred, led by the interests shown by young people during sessions; for example, we focus on conducting if a young person is engaged with this activity, we provide scarves to dance with for those who enjoy dancing, and microphones for those who enjoy singing along. We aim to help and inspire these young people to experience the joys of live music. One of our workshop musicians, Derek Paravicini, became a pianist despite his learning difficulties and loss of sight as a child.

The demand for our work is national. Without actively marketing our outreach programme we receive more requests for workshops than we are able to accommodate through word of mouth recommendations across the SEN school network: there are currently ten schools, in Oxfordshire alone, on our waiting list.

'It's wonderful'... 'We play Brahms to an audience of 400 middle-class people and you get stony faces until the end, when they break out into a polite clap. Here you can see the effect of the music on the children immediately – they laugh and dance or lie down and relax, depending on the piece, which is exactly how music is meant to make you feel.' OSJ clarinet player, Julian Farrell

'...A little boy who generally exclusively relates to an ipad, lifted his head and listening, waving his arm as you conducted. A profoundly autistic child was so engaged with the music that he stopped making his habitual noises and took centre stage to conduct....The delight on his face was just wonderful to watch.' Tracey Jameson, Assistant Head Teacher, Mabel Pritchard School, Oxford



Music for Autism workshop, photography by David Smith



Our impact

We engaged with over 6,000 school children (aged 5–18) attending SEN schools in 2018/19. For over almost two decades Music for Autism has touched the lives of tens of thousands of young people with autism with the joy of classical music. Families and schools have reported that workshops facilitate communication skills, greater movement and emotional wellbeing in young participants.

Our work positively impacts the young people we work by increasing:

- **Confidence:** experiencing live music and interacting in a group setting
- **Emotional wellbeing:** increasing positive mood states
- **Communication skills:** stimulating physical movement, both verbal and non-verbal responses to music

'Every single child and young person responded positively. In over 20 years of working alongside such young people at different events I have never before witnessed something that benefitted each individual child no matter how locked into their own worlds...The children that filed out of the Abbey were calmer and more responsive than they had been as they entered.' - Alice Langtree, Special Needs Consultant, Scripture Union, Member of British Council Disability Advisory Panel

Support Us

OSJ relies on raising over £70,000 annually from generous individuals, trusts and foundations to continue its Music for Autism workshops.

'Thank you for the lovely music. I enjoyed the concert and looking at the stained-glass windows. It was nice to see my Papa and make lots of noise' – Ali, young participant

'...the music made me feel happy and I enjoyed playing an instrument' – Jonathan, young participant

For further information please contact

John Lubbock OBE c/o 22 Anna Pavlova Close, Abingdon, OX14 1TE

admin@osj.org.uk

07775 904626