

MUSIC IN THE SCHOOL

"In sculpture and painting we look at beauty and experience it: in music we ourselves become beauty." – Rudolf Steiner

A case for the pedagogic value of music could be made at great length: it has a natural place in an education that values imagination and creativity; it challenges and rewards body, soul and spirit; it can play a significant role in cognitive, fine motor, emotional and social development; it enriches and enlivens classroom and home. Quite simply, making music is one of the great activities during which we are most human and most alive.

Take a walk around our grounds and buildings and it won't be long until you hear the strains of music. It pervades our school. But it is not a case of anything goes or the more the merrier. Our music programme is founded on our understanding of Rudolf Steiner's indications for the art of education and the developing consciousness of the child.

Learning experiences within a Steiner curriculum recurrently begin with, and are centred on, the human being. The music programme begins with the human voice: the voice of the Kindergarten Teacher or Class Teacher and the voice of the child. The rhythm of the day in our kindergartens and early classes is literally sung into being by the teacher, from the first morning song, through songs for morning circle, story, meal-time, tidying-up and so on, to the last afternoon song. The young children, with their age's characteristic facility for imitation, respond – even the silent child is inwardly singing.

The musical style of these early years is pentatonic, in keeping with the unselfconscious openness of the child to a world that is simple, good and beautiful. Pentatonic tunes lend themselves perfectly to poetic sections of *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, which provide the bulk of Class One stories, and the children warmly embrace any original pentatonic compositions of their Class Teacher.

At a point in Class One chosen by the Class Teacher, the children are told that they will in time receive their recorders. The teacher may say something along the line of: "I have sent a letter ordering our recorders to an instrument maker in a country far away. She has talked to the timber merchant, who has talked to the woodcutter, who says he knows just the tree: an old pear tree that has come to the end of its life in the ground and no longer gives fruit, but whose wood is just right and will come alive again in the shape of our recorders..." The children then wait with anticipation and reverence until, at last, their recorders arrive. The class now begins the task (which continues through Class Two) of playing pentatonic tunes in unison. The breath with which they sing now also makes their recorders resound.

Class Three is a wonderfully exciting year in many respects; music is no exception. In general terms, a Steiner curriculum recapitulates great stages in human development. The epoch of Class Three is that of the Old Testament. Accordingly, Jewish folk music resonates particularly well, and adds diatonic colour and depth to our formerly pentatonic repertoire. Singing in rounds is also well suited to Class Three.

In Class Three, the children begin individual lessons on cello, viola or violin. (The choice of instrument will have been made late in Class Two; the child is usually quite decisive, but where necessary there is consultation between parent and Class Teacher.) Thus the child has progressed musically from making music entirely out of themselves by voice, through touching a recorder to their lips and extending their breath therein, to holding the stringed instrument against their bodies, finding the note with their fingers and ears, and receiving the vibration of music into their very bones.

It is most important that the children truly share the experience of beginning a stringed instrument at the same point in their education. That point is Class Three. Most children are now physically, emotionally and cognitively ready. Moreover, as they approach what we refer to as "The Crossing" (the stage in development when one senses one's ego as separate from the world), the children can be guided from a supportive immersion in music towards an understanding of, and a love of music. It is, therefore, an expectation of the School that our students will not commence an instrument earlier than Class Three.

Each child has a weekly, half-hour, private lesson with a specialist Music Teacher. This lesson takes place on the same day of the week, but the time of the lesson varies according to a rotating timetable, so that a child does not repeatedly miss the same part of the school day. The learning of a stringed instrument

remains a compulsory aspect of the curriculum from Class Three to Class Six. From Class Three to Class Eight, the cost of the compulsory individual music lesson is built into the school fees and is not refundable. The number of lessons provided each year may vary due to circumstances. When a Music Teacher is absent, the school endeavours to supply a suitable replacement teacher. Only when the Music Coordinator deems excessive the number of lessons lost due to a Music Teacher's absence – where a replacement teacher could not be supplied – will the Music Teacher be required to provide make-up lessons. Lessons missed due to the absence of the student are not made-up. Naturally, music lessons cannot take place when the student is on camp or excursion.

Where your child's instrumental tuition is concerned, it is important to maintain good channels of communication with the Music Teacher, Class Teacher and Music Coordinator.

On rare occasions, a parent has inquired as to the possibility of their child changing Music Teachers. Depending on staff loads, this may be practicably impossible. If the possibility does exist, the Music Coordinator consults the relevant Class Teacher. If a change is recommended, the Music Teacher must be given five weeks notice.

The precious opportunity of the very first lesson should not be underestimated. The healthy Class Three child will approach this with a deep sense of anticipation and wonder. This is easily supported at home, for example by an appropriately reverential presentation of your child's new instrument.

It is of the utmost importance that parents truly love their child's practice, especially their early attempts and regardless of the quality of the sound achieved. With regard to practice times, your child's Music Teacher will be able to provide individualized advice. As a general guide, Class Teachers would recommend: in Class Three, 20 minutes, 5-6 times per week; in Classes Four and Five, 20-30 minutes, 6 times per week; in Class Six, at least 30 minutes, 6 times per week. In high school, as pieces become longer and more technically demanding, practice times will necessarily be longer. Establishing a routine and rhythm to daily and weekly practice is essential. A regular practice time before school and one more on the weekend works well as a regime. Your child will be best supported by your presence and enthusiasm. Initially, this may mean sitting by them and attending to their playing. Later, it may mean listening to them while you carry out a non-distracting task. If children regularly attend more than one household it is vital that instruments and music books travel back and forth with them.

Class Four is distinguished by the formation of the class string orchestra. How fortunate the children are to have such musical experiences – after all, not everyone has the opportunity to be part of a full string orchestra.

Class Five may include part singing and some musical and dance flavours of India, Persia, Egypt and Greece.

Towards the end of Class Six, the students make a music choice for the following year. Historically, there has been a large intake of new students between Classes Six and Seven, such that the one Class Six becomes two Class Sevens (Upper and Lower). Students old and new are given a choice of instrument from violin, viola, cello, double bass, guitar, piano, flute, clarinet, saxophone and trumpet. (Drum kit and electric base are options from Class Eight.) Many existing students continue with their stringed instruments. Some swap to a new instrument; others add a second instrument. New students chose one, or possibly two instruments. Students who wish to pursue a second instrument should possess sufficient maturity and motivation. Lesson time for second instruments must fall outside of class-time, such as certain morning-tea times, lunchtimes, before school or after school. Before a student commences a second instrument, approval must be given by the parents and also the school's Finance Group.

Learning an instrument continues to be a compulsory aspect of the curriculum until the end of Class 8, and the cost continues to be built into the school fees. The cost of any optional second instrument is additional and billed separately.

Where a student is engaged in non-compulsory instrumental tuition, and comes to a decision to discontinue, it is important to provide the School with as much notice as possible and no less than five lessons notice. Please advise the relevant Music Teacher, and the Music Coordinator (via the School Office).

Our classroom music program for Classes Seven to Ten is practically based, and during these years, in addition to individual lessons, students have a 45-minute ensemble period. Students from Classes Seven and Eight are grouped together according to choice in orchestra, guitar group, woodwind or singing. If there is an interest among students, after-school ensembles are formed. These are voluntary and are at an additional cost to parents.

From Class Nine onwards, the choice of pursuing a musical instrument is left to the student and parents. Many of our students continue with non-compulsory private music lessons.

The cost of individual lessons, non-timetabled ensembles and music theory are additional to school fees and billed separately on the fee statement.

A timetabled music period continues in Classes Nine and Ten. During these years ensembles offer mixed instrumental groups with a focus on a broad variety of musical styles. Teachers arrange these groups based on their knowledge of the students' interests and needs. At this level, more groups include electric instruments. String ensembles continue, with a choice of contemporary and classical. For those students not pursuing an individual instrument, African drumming and a cappella singing are offered as ensemble choices.

In addition to classroom ensembles, there is a vibrant culture of after-school groups and bands formed by students on a voluntary basis. For some students the social aspect of these groups is as important as the musical development. There is also a lunchtime non-compulsory middle school a cappella choir, offered once a week and provided by the school.

During Classes Nine and Ten, music theory is offered to students as a non-compulsory choice at an additional cost to parents. This is taught in groups and the focus is on gaining musical literacy for those students wanting to deepen their understanding of music, and as a preparation for those considering studying VCE Music. Classes are not geared towards AMEB grades.

VCE music extends the student's understanding of music by covering the principle developments in the history of musical style of Western music. Students intensively study aspects of music such as scales, harmonic systems, instrumentation, rhythm, timbre and musical form. They also explore improvisation and composition.

VCE music involves deepening self-expression and individual style, developing a greater appreciation of tone and a higher level of playing with accuracy and precision. Students begin to emerge as soloists and work to be able to present longer performances. The focus of the individual music lesson is usually on developing technical skills as well as learning the extensive repertoire set out in the VCE syllabus. VCE music students also participate in ensembles and bands to further hone their ability to play music with empathy, balance and understanding. VCE music students regularly perform, as both subjects are performance based.

Many VCE students continue with their instrumental lessons or after-school groups without doing Music as a VCE subject. These students are often exploring similar musical ideas in their lessons in a less intensive way.

All of this musical activity at the school is shared with parents and the wider community through regular performances and concerts. Class Teachers and String Teachers arrange concerts for Classes Four to Six. From Class Seven on, all class ensembles have a mid year evening concert and perform again on Open Day. After school ensembles also perform on Open Day. Concerts of individual performances are arranged by Music Teachers.

We know that you will enjoy these concerts and the other fruits of our music programme.