

St Mary's Music School are opening a community instrument library

The new St Mary's Music School Community Instrument Library has successfully raised £20,000 through community support to begin providing high-quality musical instruments to young musicians.

With the initial purchase of six instruments, including oboes and bassoons, the library is ready to begin lending this autumn, aiming to empower musicians with access to quality instruments that may otherwise be financially out of reach.

A spokesperson for the school said: "As a specialist music school, one of only five of its type in the UK, St Mary's can no longer sit back, basking in the warm glow of our illustrious alumni's achievements and hope that young musical talent will simply follow in their footsteps to our door. A fuller understanding of our place within the broader musical eco-system is required and this has meant a period of reflection and a change in attitude to collaboration and partnerships.

"We have begun to invest in initiatives to support early-years teaching, and now regularly invite pupils in the regional Instrumental Music Services to participate in our events. We have begun conversations to assess what it is that we can do to foster engagement, add value to, and help support existing

programmes.

“Despite our fee-paying structure (St Mary’s Music School offers up to 100% Scottish Government funding for pupils so that no-one is precluded from entry on the grounds of cost), our outreach and engagement activities have been received positively.

“We have been able to share resources and we have been engaged in work with schools and community groups in Composition and Improvisation Workshops. We have opened up our regular events to more and more people.

“In conjunction with key individuals throughout the Lothians and further afield, we are working to promote those instruments that have been termed ‘endangered species’. It may seem rather niche to invest time and effort on these large, difficult and usually expensive instruments but, without lower brass, we have no balanced wind band or brass ensemble let alone a full orchestra. Without bassoons much of the classical repertoire is incomplete (we regularly re-deploy our saxophone players as substitutes) and without the viola, nearly all string-based chamber music becomes forbidden fruit.

“It is not only the instruments designated ‘endangered’ that are lacking. Here at school, we have noticed a marked downturn in auditions for once-popular instruments like the flute and the oboe. One can speculate as to the reasons why, but an oft-cited cause is simply cost.”

Complex expensive equipment requires maintenance and parts and these parts are often highly specialised and expensive. There are a growing number of instrument libraries providing donated instruments to community groups. These welcome projects allow for that all-important first hands-on experience of a musical instrument but, quite understandably, rarely do they offer access to some more costly instruments.

The spokesperson continued: “We have successfully raised the

necessary funds to purchase a small fleet of quality instruments which we will place in the hands of trusted peripatetic teachers from this autumn. Instructors who might not be comfortable recommending an instrument to a prospective pupil on the grounds of cost will be able to do so with confidence.

“Additionally, we have set aside funds to keep these instruments in good working order with a rolling service programme so that they can remain with their keepers for the first three years of their instrumental studies. The question you might ask yourself is, “What is in for St Mary’s Music School?” and the answer is simple, all we ask is that the instrument is returned to us after Year 3 and during that period it is hoped that the pupil and their teacher would accept our regular invitations to sample a workshop perhaps, a masterclass, concert or performance class and take up the opportunity of playing in our ensembles from time to time. The option to extend the loan if the instrument is not required elsewhere will be made available.”

For information about the library [contact St Mary’s by clicking here.](#)

