

**Performing Arts Report**  
**The Commonweal School**  
**Term Four March 27th 2009**  
**Compiled by Josie Williams, Community Arts Development Officer**

It has been that busy this term, I don't think my feet have touched the ground! The Easter holidays are almost upon us and we will all welcome the break to recharge our batteries. I am project managing a number of projects this term including: Old Town Festival, Inter-schools Photographic Competition and the Swindon Festival of Literature Youth Poetry Slam.

**The Old Town Festival – Family Party On The Lawn Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> June.** We are heavily involved on this day of the festival week. All is shaping up well and promises to be great community event which addresses our community cohesion objectives and is a celebration of Old Town's cultural diversity. We have a music and a dance marquee and acts from schools and the wider community. Marquees are ordered and we have decided to go with a large marquee for dance, 40'x80' with a level stage 40'x25'. I am still gathering dance performers, but so far have the following groups: The Romanska School of Dance, The Friday Night Project, Lethbridge School, Even Swindon, Tanwood School For Performing Arts and Empire Theatre Company and of course dance from Commonweal.

Stagecoach are providing Street Theatre in the avenue leading. We also have use of Holy Rood Church where Swindon Young Musicians, Commonweal string quartet and Swindon Indian Association will perform. up to the Lawn and chamber music in Holy Rood Church. Swindon Young Musicians and Swindon Indian Association. We still need more performers to fill our slots and The Swindon Advertiser and Swindon Community Radio 105.5, along with local BBC Radio have been helping to promote the event. I negotiated with the Swindon Advertiser and Community Radio 105.5 and both are on board as partners to help promote the event. The BBC are going through a branding change, so they were unable to commit as partners, but even so, are active with our publicity. The Swindon Adver, 105.5 and Commonweal logo will be printed on all promotional material.

**Festival Procession.** Emma Jackson – Extended Schools Coordinator for the Commonweal cluster, is coordinating a cluster wide procession project with artist Tracey Baker-Stewart and dancer Claudia Stroud. There will be workshops in all our feeder schools and in Commonweal where parents and children will make their costumes and learn a dance routine. This will involve 80-100 people and the theme is the plight of the bumble bee. The procession leaves Lloyds car park at 11am on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> June.

**Big School Fete.** All schools who take part are being allocated free space in our Big School fete area. I went to see our student council at their latest meeting and suggested they arrange two stalls per house. I have given them the brief and they are designing posters and gathering stock to sell, gathered from parents, friends and family.

**Old Town Festival – Town Gardens Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June.** I have arranged for our partners Swindon Big Band to play in the band stand and also a performance slot from award winning youth band, Brunel Brass. Our other contribution on the Sunday is **the Art On The Fence** project which is open to all artists in Swindon irrespective of age. All participants will have a pitch where they can exhibit, work and sell their art. Tara Parker, Head of Art is arranging for Commonweal school to fill two pitches one from each key stage.

April sees the launch of our **Inter-schools Photographic Competition** in partnership with the Swindon Advertiser. This is a first for Swindon and I have been squirreling away to get the info to as many young people as possible! Normally we would just send out letters and posters, but this time I thought I would also utilise the web and have asked young people to forward the info to their friends via email and the Bebo young people's networking site. I thought that this could be a fun activity for young people to do on their own during the Easter holidays.

**Swindon Festival of Literature** Last year's Youth Poetry Slam winners from Commonweal were invited to perform at the official launch of the festival brochure, staged at the new central library. The girls were very professional and are a credit to the school. Thanks to you all for your hard work and dedication and also to their English teacher Clare Butler for her coaching and continued support. All schools, bar Ridgeway are on board this year for what promises to be another great event. The Grand Slam takes part on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> May, 11am, at the Arts Centre.

**Community Partners** Sadly the boys dance group who used to meet on a Wednesday evening, have fallen by the wayside. We hope to resurrect this when suitable dance deliverers can be found. Swindon Big Band continue to use Commonweal on a Tuesday evening and are playing at the Old Town Festival and hopefully on the Summer fare on 4<sup>th</sup> July, TBC. Rhythmworks meet regularly on a Wednesday evening and are starting a season of Saturday workshops in term five.

**Now That's What I Call Commonweal CD Vol 4** All is on track for this latest offering which is being recorded and compiled by our tech ace, Nick Weaver. The album is scheduled for release towards the end of term five. I have written to Robbie Williams to ask him to consider being a school patron and contributing a track, but as yet I have had no response. All of our feeder schools are scheduled to contribute.

**Big Hat Cabaret** This is a performing arts umbrella group for people with disabilities and is a cooperative between Commonweal, Reach, Swindon Dance, Upham Rd

Centre and Crowdy's Hill School. I managed to get The Swindon Advertiser on board as partners and they are helping to promote the event which takes place in July. Not much to report at present, but just to say all is on target.

**Swindon Does Art** The launch of this new initiative, instigated by Helen Miah, Swindon Borough Council's Head of Culture, was held at the Wyvern Theatre in March. As Commonweal are partners I offered my photographic services and took PR shots. We have branded our Family Sundays and the Old Town Festival with the Swindon Does Art logo.

### **Salsa-Fit**

Salsa, it seems, is proving very popular at Commonweal School. Emma Carter, Extended Services Cluster Coordinator and myself, arranged a series of Salsa Fitness drop in sessions at the school on a Tuesday evening and the Swindon Advertiser helped with publicity. We were expecting to attract 16 – 20 people, but were blown away when 93 people braved the cold wind and rain to take part in the first session! We are now offering two sessions on the same night to accommodate the sheer volume of interest.

"The feedback has been fantastic from adults taking part and include comments such as, 'It was so much fun', 'my friends want to come along next week!', 'the atmosphere was brilliant' , said Emma.

The sessions are led by Salsa expert Claudia Stroud and were initially as a direct response to Emma's extensive parent questionnaires. Feedback indicated some parents would like to take part in a fitness session.

"Love Salsa-Fit. Thank you. The best course ever! Would go twice a week if we could get another day?!" Catherine Mitchell, cluster parent

Following parent questionnaire responses about extended services activities back in 2007-08 both myself and Josie Williams set about working in partnership to create an opportunity for a fitness and dance based activity held on the school site. Josie's remit is to offer arts based opportunities to "the wider community, so we worked together," said Emma.

Following this mass popularity, the Salsa drop in sessions have been extended and there are now two sessions which run back-to-back every Tuesday evening. The first session is 5.30 – 6.30pm and the second session is 6.30 – 7.30pm.

This is a good example of Extended Services and Performing arts working together.

### **The Tempest**

"In March Year 9 were able to take part in an interactive presentation of "The Tempest. Four actors from the Young Royal Shakespeare Company brought the

play to life - especially Caliban licking his big toe to the disgust of most of the audience!

The first half of the production took the form of a workshop - students giving their views on how the actors should speak, move, dribble and generally interpret Shakespeare's text. The actors then took us through "motivation" - questioning the reasons why a character is included in a scene, what makes them "tick".

For the second half of the performance the actors took us through the play: Prospero's revenge, Miranda and Ferdinand falling in love, Caliban trying to get his island back, Stephano thinking he could be King of the island. In the end, all the plots came together in a positive way, students had a fantastic opportunity to see Shakespeare brought to life, and how actors develop their skills, as well as having a much clearer idea of the play itself," Jane Wier, English Department.

### ***Student Reviews....***

"Let's face it, Shakespeare can be dull, with actors droning and the audience falling asleep. The language can be difficult to understand and therefore the actors become melodramatic. However, Young Royal Shakespeare Company let the audience be literally part of the performance in their pre workshop, which explains the characters motivation.

The performance itself had the audience enraptured, with every eye on the story unfolding before us. Most would say that Shakespeare's plays could never capture teenagers this way. They would be wrong. Shakespeare can be exciting, with the audience on the edge of their seats and the actors living their roles. The language can be understood and the actors naturalistic," Ella Mc Cusker Yr 9.

"The play was quite entertaining. The characters got the audience involved and asked them what kind of characteristics a specific character would have," Tom Clarke Yr 9.

"The play was performed really well and had a lot of interesting points and techniques. The actors always stayed in character and were very believable. The plot was slightly confusing at times, because a few actors played two or more characters," Abigail Woods Yr 9.

"Shakespeare - what's the first thing that comes into our mind when we think of him? A play writer who uses language that none of us could really understand. That's where the Young Shakespeare Company come in. With their easy hands on approach to teaching Shakespeare this company is head and shoulders above the rest!

They were fun, witty and a joy to watch. This was what most of the Commonweal students were saying after the performance. If you don't understand Shakespeare as much as you would like then go and watch them," Alfi Laver-O'Sullivan Yr 9.

### **Boy Done Good**

On Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> March 30 students from Commonweal and other Swindon schools had the chance to be extras in a pop music video for up and coming band, The Boy Done Good. They worked with professional production company Oceanfall. Our budding star Jordan Ginger took a lead role as a rival for one of the bands girlfriends.

"I feel very honoured to have been selected to perform a lead role, it will add to my CV. It was an interesting day, exciting, but tiring. It was enjoyable having a hot girlfriend for the day," Jordan Ginger, age 16

"It was great, really exciting and fun to find out how the industry works," Babette Clarke, age 14

Leon Mitchell, producer Oceanfall, " I would like to thank everyone from Commonweal School who took part, it was a pleasure to have you all work on the set of the video. You were all very professional and I saw some real star quality in many of you. You should be proud to have this video on your CV as you well and truly deserve it."

### **News From Music**

**Clubs** All are working towards the evening of Broadway, the Old Town Festival and the PTA Summer Fair, which is staged on 4<sup>th</sup> July and has an American theme.

### **Outreach Spring term**

The music department have been busy as usual this term and have been out and about visiting the local feeder primary schools. Both Mrs Sutcliffe and Mr Robertson have been regularly teaching year 6 classes at Even Swindon and King William Street primary schools as part of our performing arts school objectives. Both schools have been doing work based around Samba music and the elements of music. The aim of the project is to record a track from each school to form part of the next 'Now That's What I Call Commonweal' CD. The students have learnt a samba-inspired song written by our indispensable, multi-talented technician – Nick Weaver. The song features the catchy chorus line "Carnival, Rio De Janeiro" and percussion sections featuring the students playing rhythms they have composed themselves. After Easter Mrs Sutcliffe will be going to Lethbridge and Robert Le Kyng to deliver a similar project to the year 6 students.

### **Spring concert.**

March 24<sup>th</sup> saw the culmination of extra-curricular music making activities since the new year. It featured items such as 'Joyful Joyful' and 'Oh Happy Day' sung by the ever-expanding senior choir as well as the newly formed soul band playing 'In the midnight Hour.' Concert band, as ever, played a large part in the event and are playing extremely well at the moment, however we will miss the current year 11s dreadfully when they leave in a few months time! As usual, the concert contained many soloists including year 8 trumpeter Casey Hindon and Sarah Read on the flute. Also performing were many of our year 11 students as they have recently been recording their pieces as part of the GCSE course. The evening was a huge success and really showed off the amazing musical talent that we have here at Commonweal. Mrs Sutcliffe would like to say a big thankyou to all the staff and students involved in making the evening run so smoothly and professionally and is looking forward to seeing you all again for the summer events.

### **Creative and Media Diploma**

This term, the students have been studying at Swindon College. The unit they are completing requires them to make a short film and so they are being taught how to use the specialist equipment owned by the college during this time. We have also now had confirmation that the Radio 1 Big Weekend is going to be held in Swindon in May. Our diploma students are going to be given the chance to work alongside the BBC professionals during the week leading up to the event and learn about the production of such a prestigious and large event..... Very exciting! Sophie Goldsworthy and Sam Wearing will be part of a team of young people who will be recording a documentary

### ***Mr Robertson***

This term, Miss Zylinski and I have been very lucky to have Mr Robertson working with us in the music department. As part of his teaching training he has taught a range of classes from year 6 to year 11 and has also helped out accompanying choirs and conducting rehearsals. We would like to wish Mr Robertson every success with his new job down in Southampton and with the rest of his training.

### **Year 11 Sitar Workshop**

Miss Zylinski has friends in high places and managed to get her hands on an authentic Indian Sitar during March. She competently demonstrated how to play the instrument to all the GCSE music students in year 11 as part of the world music element of their course and they all got to have a go on it. It is certainly harder than it looks and makes the most amazing, enchanting sound. It's not often one gets the opportunity to see let alone play a sitar so the students and I were extremely grateful!

## **News from Nick Weaver- Performing Arts Technician**

This term, besides the 101 things Nick does to help the school, he responded to a plea from ex student Matt Harris who attends New College. Part of Matt's coursework in music was to record a band performing a cover version of a popular song. Matt approached Nick and Nick arranged for the following students to go to New College and help out. Sam Cantlon (drums) 9R1, Tom Penfold (piano) 8R1, Casey Hindon (trumpet) 8R2, Jeremy foster (trumpet) 8R2 and Sian Francis Cox (trumpet) 8ST2. They performed, ' In the midnight hour', with brass parts written by Laurie (trumpet peri) and gary (piano peri). Nick Weaver played bass and sang.

"They recorded the track over a 2 hour session and the students were professional and efficient and well behaved. Matt has now to mix the track and has promised us a copy," said Nick

## **News From Dance**

### **KS3 Lunchtime dance clubs**

The KS3 dance clubs are going well, with students working on their own group dances. Lauren Martin and Ella Workman are continuing to lead Year 7 dance club on a Tuesday lunchtime.

### **KS4 Lunchtime clubs**

KS4 Lunchtime clubs have also been going well, with students using the designated KS4 times to rehearse coursework pieces, for their exams.

Clubs are working towards the Evening of Broadway, The Old Town Festival and Swindon Schools Dance Platforms.

### **Outreach at Lethbridge Primary School**

Two Year 10 GCSE Dance and Dance Leader's award students, Ella Workman and Lauren Martin have started running an after school dance club at Lethbridge. Organised through Emma Jackson, this is not only providing after school dance outreach at Lethbridge, but giving Lauren and Ella a fantastic opportunity to develop their dance leadership skills. The year 10's have taken part in an assembly at Lethbridge, to promote their after school club.

### **Outreach at King William Street School**

Outreach has continued at King William Street School. Year 6 students are using their topic of Brazil, to create group dances using a range of Brazilian Dance styles. Over the past few weeks, there has been an emphasis on Brazilian Carnival dance.

### **GCSE Dance exams / Dance showcase**

Year 11 students have completed the practical element of their GCSE dance exams. In preparation for these exams students performed their exam pieces at an evening showcase for family and friends. This was a hugely successful evening, which provided a fantastic opportunity for the year 11 GCSE dance students.

The GCSE exams and moderation day went well, with students achieving good grades for their practical work.

45 students from across the year groups went to the Olympiad in London in March. They watched professional dancers, participated in workshops, had the opportunity to buy new gear stalls and browsed further education stands to see courses that they can apply for on leaving school.

**Gifted & Talented Dance Day** On 24<sup>th</sup> February gifted and talented students in dance enjoyed challenging dance workshops led by Emma Carter and Louise Harman.

## **News From Drama**

### **Outreach**

Debs Browning continues delivering her outreach programme at Even Swindon. She is working with the two Yr 6 groups on The Jungle Book.

### **.Clubs**

“The Year 7 Drama group has been busy doing the following. We have watched the musical "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" and discussed what makes it a successful production. Our original plans were to produce some of the scenes. We are now working on some Readers Theatre scripts. Readers Theatre is a Performance style where the scripts are designed to be read aloud with dramatic expression. Students must rely on their voices and expressive reading abilities to bring the story to life for the audience. They do not have to learn the lines, which takes a great deal of pressure of the performer. We are hoping to perform some Readers Theatre pieces in future Year 7 Assemblies.”

### **Drama School Production**

This term saw the excellent three night sell out performances of A Vampire Story by Moira Buffini. “This was one of the most challenging and exciting pieces of work we have produced. Over twenty students ranging from 13 to 16 years were involved and each and everyone has given a 110%. I am really proud of them, their enthusiasm and talent is boundless,” Heather Birkbeck, Head of Drama, Commonweal School.

**Review of A Vampire Story by Ashley Heath, BBC Radio Swindon 103.6fm, DAB and online at [bbc.co.uk/Wiltshire](http://bbc.co.uk/Wiltshire)**

“Let’s be honest. Anyone who goes along to any school show, expects to exercise a certain amount of benign tolerance. The acting’s sure to be a bit wooden, or we won’t be able to hear them but never mind, it’s *‘for the children...’*”

Well, Commonweal’s ‘A Vampire Story’ by Moira Buffini superbly failed to tick any of the above mentioned boxes.

Even before the show began, the moody lighting in the auditorium gave audience members a wonderful feeling of what might be in store, and was only accentuated by the superb choice of eerie pre-show house music.

The technical proficiency continued with sound and lighting cues executed with aplomb. Scene changes too, were a joy, in that they were hardly noticeable. Like any good football referee, if you don’t notice the stage crew, they’re doing a very good job.

Incidental music from a live double bass could have been a nightmare but was handled with minimalist application; always adding to, and never distracting from, the acting on stage.

Speaking of which, I began circling actors’ names in my programme, to give them special mention, but so quickly did I find my page filling with circles, that the exercise became quite pointless. Suffice to say that the acting I saw was confident, sure footed and mature. Comedic lines too, were handled with deftness; so very often much harder to do than a straight dramatic delivery.

Oh, and I heard every word as well. Well done all.” Ashley

**Drama Trips.** This term drama specialist Debs Browning organised two trips to the West End to see The Lion King on March 4<sup>th</sup> and Oliver of 25<sup>th</sup> March. Both trips were full and all had a great time. Many thanks to Debs for her hard work and dedication.

### **Forthcoming Events**

**Salsa every Tuesday until 30<sup>th</sup> June** Session one 5.30-6.30pm and session two 6.30 – 7.30pm

**Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> April** Family Juggling/ circus skills with Robo the clown 2-5pm

**Week commencing 27<sup>th</sup> April** Yr 10 work experience with Big State Theatre Company

**27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> April** – Swindon Festival of Literature workshops in Swindon schools

**TBC possibly 7<sup>th</sup> May** Y9 project with dance company Dans Connect

**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> May** Swindon Festival of Literature Youth Slam at The Arts Centre, starts 11am.

**Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May.** Boys dance platform at Swindon Dance.

**Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> June** Yr 6 Dance Challenge Day at Commonweal

**Tuesday June 24<sup>th</sup>** – Evening of Broadway. Featuring music and dance inspired by West End and Broadway musical theatre. A must-see evening of entertainment!

**Saturday June 27<sup>th</sup>** – Old Town Festival, Family Party On The Lawn. Students will be performing items from the evening of Broadway and the Spring Concert programmes. The carnival procession leaves Lloyd's Bank car park, High Street, Old Town at 11am. There are two marquees one for dance and one for music.

**Sunday June 28<sup>th</sup>** Old Town Festival, Town Gardens. Swindon Big Band and Brunel Brass play in the band stand. Art On The Fence from local artists.

**Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> July** Secondary schools dance platform

**Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> July** – Commonweal art exhibition

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> May** – Old Town Festival family carnival workshop at Robert Le Kyng

**Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> May** – Old Town Festival family carnival workshop at King William

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June** - Old Town Festival family carnival workshop at Even Swindon

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June** – Old Town Festival family carnival workshop at Commonweal

**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> June** – Old Town Festival family carnival workshop at Lethbridge

**Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> June** – Old Town Festival procession, meet at Commonweal

**Saturday July 4<sup>th</sup>** – The PTA Summer Fayre – American theme and so the Broadway programme will be used once more.

**Friday 10<sup>th</sup> July** – Bradon Forest festival – Miss Clements, now head of music at Bradon Forest, has invited the senior choir to join the Bradon Singers in a concert as part of their music festival. They will join up to sing 'Joyful Joyful' and 'Oh Happy Day' from Sister Act.

**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July** Big Hat disability performing arts cabaret at The Arts Centre

**TBC** Performance project with New College BTech students

**TBC** Performance project with Ex students Catherine Johnson

Next steering group meeting Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June 5 – 6pm in the school library

