

**Performing Arts Report
The Commonweal School
Term Five May 20th 2009**

Compiled by Josie Williams, Community Arts Development Officer

www.commonwealarts.co.uk

Term five has been just as action packed as the term before, and with no sign of slowing down in term six! I have been involved in a number of exciting projects this term including project managing the **Swindon Festival of Literature Youth Poetry Slam**, where we were awarded first and second place! This is getting rather embarrassing, we have won four years out of five and I just hope that next year we get knocked off of our pedestal. The beauty of the Grand Slam, which was held at the Arts Centre in Old Town during festival fortnight, is that the identity of the school teams is withheld. A random selection of judges award marks based on performance, quality of writing and audience reaction. I must say, that this year's event was even better than the last. All schools performed to a very high standard and the marks were very close indeed! Also, all schools learnt their poems, so no nasty bits of paper in participants hands! I have added photos of all the teams and some poems I have received, to the Student Adver web site. The hard copy version, which comes out in the Swindon Advertiser on 4th June, will have the full report. Thanks to all staff and students who made this event a fabulous success! Thanks also to Artsmad for their £200 donation to purchase books for prizes and also to Deirdre Fitzpatrick from the LA for £500 towards running costs. Thanks also to Matt Holland, festival director, for giving us the opportunity.

Swindon Advertiser continue to support our school through community partnership projects and coverage in the paper and on the web. Many thanks to Dave King and his team for helping us to make exciting things happen in the community.

Swindon Community Radio 105.5 Our fortnightly programme on the 'School's Out' slot continues thanks to Nick Weaver and our small dedicated team of students. Many thanks to Shirley Ludford for all her help and support.

Another highlight this term was the excellent **Big State Theatre Company Work Experience**. I have project managed this annual event for the last four years. This is a partnership between Big State, our business partners and The Wyvern Theatre, our community partners. Held at the Wyvern Theatre, 15 Yr 10 are given the opportunity to work with this outstanding company who are just excellent at working with young people. The team created their own theatre company, filled in application forms to apply for funding, delegated roles within the group, wrote the play, performed the play, marketed the product and performed in the Wyvern's Studio One on the last day. This year it was a comedy, entitled 'Janitor', about their version of Britain's Got Talent. The team worked well together to produce an excellent play with

pace and perfect comedy timing. There was very little space on the night of the performance, in fact some of the audience had to stand!

The Inter-schools photographic competition, in partnership with the Swindon Advertiser, was a new idea that sadly didn't fly as high as I had hoped. Despite a massive amount of publicity and marketing, entries weren't that high. However, the standard of entries was very good. Nicole Cox, age 12, from Kingsdown School won first prize in the camera category and Nathan Ford and Tom Dickinson, both Yr 11 at Commonweal, were runners up.

Family Sunday Juggling and circus skills was the theme for this terms workshop, held on 24th April. In partnership with the Swindon Borough Council's Adult Community & Family Learning initiative, the event attracted 8 adults and 14 children from our feeder schools and Yr 7. The next event is on 14th June and is a carnival art/dance workshop to tie into the Old Town Festival. The carnival project, with our feeder schools, Commonweal and the wider community is being coordinated by Emma Jackson, Extended Schools Coordinator for the Commonweal cluster. The art workshop is being led by our artist in residence, Tracey Baker-Stewart and the dance is being led by Claudia Stroud. The Theme for the carnival, which takes place on 27th June, is the plight of the bumble bee. Bees are dying worldwide from Colony Collapse Disorder. No one knows why this is happening, but experts are continuing to research the use of agricultural pesticides and the increase use of mobile phones. Einstein was reputed to have said that if the bumble bee died out, then humankind would follow the same fate in four years. Hence, this is quite a serious issue. Swindon Bee Keepers Association will hopefully have a stall at the Old Town Festival to highlight how we can help the bees. This entails planting wildflowers and setting up your own hives as urban bees seem to be less affected than bees kept in vast agricultural areas.

Salsa Fit, a joint project with myself and Emma Jackson, is still proving to be popular. The sessions run every Tuesday during term time in the dance studio. Session one is 5.30 – 6.30 pm and session two is 6.30 – 7.30 pm. Each session averages out at 20 people, parents and staff from Commonweal, our feeder schools and beyond. The sessions have been extended until the end of the academic year and will resume in September.

BBC Big Weekend held at Lydiard Park on 9th & 10th May was a coup for Swindon, and congratulations must be given to Helen Miah, Head of Culture, for making this happen. A group of students from across the borough were invited to join a documentary team to record the event and interview the stars. Sam Wearing and Sophie Goldsworthy were selected from our school to participate. This forms part of their Creative & Media coursework.

Old Town Festival 20th – 28th June This year, for the first time, we are heavily involved in this local event which hits targets for our community cohesion objectives. I negotiated a community partnership with Swindon 105.5 and Swindon Advertiser to help promote the event in exchange for their logos to go on all promotional material. This was passed by the committee, but not adhered to! The Swindon Does Art logo is in the main brochure, but not on all posters. All logos are on posters I have designed. Working with community committees isn't the easiest thing in the world, but I soldier on sometimes through gritted teeth!

Family Party On The Lawn is on 27th June, 11am- 5pm. We are hosting, funding and running the Commonweal Performing Arts Marquee and I have invited all dance, drama and music groups in Swindon to showcase their talents. Not all have taken us up on this, but at least they have been asked. However, we have 12 groups on stage. This is a cross section of the community. We also have the Commonweal Rock Marquee and again a cross section of the community are represented. Stagecoach are providing street theatre and Emma Jackson, Extended School Coordinator for the Commonweal cluster has put in time and money to coordinate a cross cluster family project in the form of a Plight of the Bumble Bee carnival procession (see Family Sundays above for further info).

Sunday 28th June Town Gardens. I have coordinated bands playing in the band stand and also Art On The Fence. This is a showcase for Swindon artists and to date I have 25 people on board! Their work will be for sale and some artists will be working on art pieces throughout the day.

Big Hat Cabaret 18th July This evening event is staged at the Arts Centre and is a platform for local disability artists and national professionals to perform to the wider community. Tickets cost £5 each are on sale now at the Arts Centre Box Office. The event is run by a cooperative of representatives including myself from Commonweal, Jim Brown from Swindon Dance, Helen Whelehan from Reach Inclusive Arts, Angie Smith and Jill O'Shea Upham Rd Day Centre and Sue Welsh Crowdys Hill Schools

A Yr 6 After Schools Art Club, starts in term 6 with our artist in residence, Tracey Baker-Stewart and we already have 21 pupils signed up! This, and the Yr 6 drama club is a joint project between myself and Emma Jackson. Emma goes on maternity leave in June and we wish her well at this exciting time in her life. Emma is a highly organised and motivated person and it has been a pleasure to work closely with her on extended projects.

Term 6, and for a large section of 2009-2010 will be an interesting time for our school. Major refurbishments are afoot and will undoubtedly affect our teaching spaces. More info in on the school web site www.commonweal.co.uk, where the Head explains further. I will keep you informed about progress in the next report.

News From Drama with Heather Birkbeck

Yr 6 After School Club

Yr 6 from all our feeder schools have been invited to take part in a transitions after school club. This starts in term 6.

The Vampire Story was the drama departments annual production and was directed by Heather Birkbeck as part of her drama club obligations.

India Collins-Davies, Yr 10 reports...

A Vampire Story was performed at Commonweal School on March 19th 20th and 21st. It was performed predominately by Year 10 and 11 students but included some KS3 students who had acting parts, or who were involved in the technical aspects of the play.

The play was written by Moira Buffini for BT Connections who work closely with the National Theatre to ensure young people experience working on new pieces of theatre.

Auditions took place in October. The cast performed a scene for the Eve of Entertainment in early Dec. Intensive rehearsals began in earnest in January. We worked three or four times a week on certain scenes and then began weekend rehearsals to pull it all together. The group were completely committed to producing an extremely high standard of work.

The play was challenging to both audience and actors. The storyline shifted between certainty and uncertainty, leaving the audience to make their own conclusions as to what the play meant.

GCSE Drama students evaluated the play,,here are some of their responses:

“It worked so well because of the raw emotion that shone through in each of the intriguing characters.”

“I was left feeling quite stunned, not only by the shocking storyline but by the quality of the directing and acting.”

“I believe that ‘A Vampire Story’ is a deep, dramatic play which challenges social values, looks at how social segregation teaches people to react in certain ways to those who they believe are beneath them. It challenges the values placed upon human life.”

“A far cry from typical clichéd school productions and patronising, mediocre scripts. ‘A Vampire Story’ dealt maturely with issues such as loneliness, rape and insanity alongside introducing the gothic and fantastical theme of vampires.”

Drama Update by Debs Browning

Yr 7 & 8 drama club continue working on 'The Tempest' which will be produced as a radio play, to be broadcast on Swindon 105.5. Work continues on this, notwithstanding GCSE rehearsals and parents evenings!!

Even Swindon Outreach

We have completed The Jungle Book Scheme of Work. Baseline assessment of Yr 6 have been carried out.

To the latter part of this term the school held auditions for "The Wizard of Oz" and I will be working with them on production issues. The play is staged at Even Swindon until on 13th & 14th July.

Yr 11 GCSE Exams

This year there was a very strong field of candidates with some excellent performances which were an absolute pleasure to watch. The students really did themselves proud.

"Year 7 Drama club have continued to work on improving their Reader's Theatre performances. We are hoping to perform them and possibly do a workshop with Year 6 pupils in term 6. Attendance is consistently high, with a number of enthusiastic and talented Year 7 pupils taking part," Nancy Heath.

News From Dance by Louise Harman

KS3 & 4 Lunchtime Dance Clubs

The KS3 dance clubs are going well, with students working towards an Evening of Broadway, Old Town Festival, and the Secondary School's Dance Platform.

Outreach at Lethbridge Primary School

Year 10 GCSE Dance and Dance Leader's award students, Ella Workman and Lauren Martin are continuing to run an after school dance club at Lethbridge. They are working towards performances at Broadway and Old Town Festival.

Year 6 Outreach

This will take place as a Yr 6 after school club in term six. The Yr 6's will work towards a piece for the Old Town Festival

Yr 6 Dance Challenge Day takes place on Tuesday June 9th at Commonweal School. All Yr 6 will come up, either in the morning or afternoon session, to take part in dance workshops with Louise Harman and external professionals Helen Ganberg, Banxy and Mervin Jones. The pupils will experience workshops in street and contemporary styles.

Events / Projects /Trips

30 Yr 8 and Yr 9 students attended a half day workshop and performance by Dans Connect, at Swindon Dance. The workshop explored themes of the show, and the performance showcased a wide range of different dance styles. The trip was a fantastic opportunity for the Yr 9's who have opted to take GCSE. It gave them experience of working with a professional company.

Performance Project with Ex students Catherine Johnson

In term 6 the 'Catherine Johnson Project' starts, with students from Yr 7 – Yr 10. They will be working with Ex student Catherine Johnson to create a dance for the Old Town Festival.

Boys Dance Platform – 10th July

Swindon Dance are hosting a Boys Dance Platform in July. Our boys dance group will be working in term 6 to create a new dance for this event.

Secondary Schools Dance Platform

The dance teacher's network are hosting a Secondary Schools Dance Platform at New College on 2nd July. Swindon secondary schools have been invited to showcase their students work. This year, Commonwealths Yr 10 students and the Boys Dance Group will be performing.

News from Music with Ali Sutcliffe

Outreach - This term, and part of next, Nick and I are working with all our feeder schools to create recordings for the next release of the 'Now That's What I Call Commonwealth,' CD. This will be on sale in term 6. The songs at King William Street and Even Swindon were completed the week after Easter. Nick Weaver and I visited both schools to record the Brazilian Samba track that Nick specially wrote for the project. The students learnt about Samba music, carnivals and rhythm grids as well as composing their own drum patterns to play in the song. I have been to Robert Le Kyng and Lethbridge to begin delivering this outreach project for this term and continues in term 6. Nick has written a song for Robert Le Kyng based on their new school logo. Lethbridge are learning School Rocks and the Red Nose days song from 2007. The students at both these schools are also doing some listening and composing work with myself to link into their future work here at Commonwealth.

Clubs - All clubs are now preparing for summer events, particularly the Evening Of Broadway. Senior choir are hoping to keep hold of the Yr 11 students for these events and junior choir numbers are steadily increasing as the weeks go by. Junior band is now made up of students who are also in concert band, so next year, if numbers remain low, the two will be combined into concert band.

Staff Choir is being re-visited this term after popular demand and will be working on 'Diamonds Are A Girls Best Friend' to be performed at the Evening of Broadway. It will also feature a dance choreographed by Louise Harman.

Composition Club. This new club has been set up on a Monday lunchtime .This gives students from all year groups the opportunity to make use of the computer software in 08 and create their own music. It is hoped that many Yr 9s will attend this club to help them use the software before they begin GCSE compositions.

Exams - The GCSE listening exam took place on Wednesday 13th May and this year the examiners seemed to be quite kind to us! The questions ranged from Progressive Rock to minuets, western film soundtracks and Bhangra. All students seemed to complete it without any problems! Fingers crossed that their coursework was up to scratch and that some excellent grads will be issued in August.

News from Nick Weaver, Performing Arts Technician

With so much musical talent at the school, I thought it would be a great way to finish this term on a power chord! A dinnertime rock concert was arranged and I invited The Costellos, the Alternative Electrons, our rock trio, Joonas Kuusela and Megan Truscott (me on bass) and the Frosted Teacakes. Most musicians are Yr 8 and 7 and all are performing to a high standard of musicianship and their confidence is beginning to shine!

The audience were very receptive and cheered and clapped in support of the groups. We also had students Ed White doing the sound and Ben Walker, Neil Morris and Alex Herrington on lights.

Unfortunately with dinnertime reduced, the Teacakes only got 1 and a half songs, so I will make it up to them next term with a concert of their own, another excuse to hear great original music from our homegrown talent! Commonwealth Rocks!

Events coming up:

Salsa Fit - every Tuesday up until 21st July, in the Dance Studio. Session one 5.30-6.30 pm. Session two 6.30 pm – 7.30 pm.

Tuesday 9th June Yr 6 Dance Challenge Day at Commonwealth.

24th June - the Evening Of Broadway (plus tech and dress rehearsals on the 21st/22nd/23rd)

27th June - Old Town Festival

28th June – Old Town Festival

2nd July - Secondary Schools Dance Platform

4th July - PTA Americana Alfresco

10th July - Boys Dance Platform

12th July - Bradon Forest Big Top Festival

18th July – Big Hat Cabaret Evening – The Arts Centre

Next Steering group meeting 15th June in the Performing Arts Court Yard.