

**Performing Arts Report  
The Commonweal School  
Term Six 15<sup>th</sup> July 2009**

**Compiled by Josie Williams, Community Arts Development Officer**

[www.commonwealarts.co.uk](http://www.commonwealarts.co.uk)

Term six, year five, draws to a close and phew what a term it has been! The sheer amount of school and community projects has been phenomenal.

"The Commonweal Performing Arts Team have again excelled this year, with their tremendous passion & commitment creating so many fabulous opportunities for our students and the wider community. Josie has been outstanding in her networking & management of community events and what on earth would we do without Nick Weaver, who is now not only integral to the performing arts faculty, but the spirit of the whole school.

Great team work everybody and well done. Next year I'm sure we will have a few obstacles to face with a reduction in budget and all the building works to contend with, but with such a driven team I know that we will be looking forward to another very successful year." Sue Derrick, Head of Performing Arts.

Probably the biggest and most time consuming event I have managed this term has been our input into the **Old Town Festival in June**. Each year we contribute in some shape or form, mainly with music and on occasions dance. However, this year has been exceptional and was born out of my mullings whilst wandering through last year's festival. Community cohesion is a topic that has to be addressed, not just by us, but by the borough and indeed the whole country. With these thoughts in mind I got chatting to Patsy Maloney who is the entertainments chair and I was asked to join the committee.

The short of it was Commonweal hiring a large marquee and specialist dance stage in which all dance and music companies in Swindon were invited to take part. This also included primary and secondary schools in the area. Naturally not everyone took us up on the offer or we would have still been there now! The point is they were asked and 14 groups ranging from The Bollywood Dreamers to Even Swindon Primary School took part. The feedback was very positive:

"I would just like to say thank you for Saturday as the kids really enjoyed performing. Thought the day went really well. Many Thanks," Teresa School of Dance.

" Thanks for a great day! The kids had an excellent time and I'll be keen to get my Year 6 involved next year!" Louise Dunn – Even Swindon Primary.

"We had a fantastic time it was so much fun and such a great experience for all the troupes I worked with. If you do it again next year or if you need any dancers for

anything in the future ,The Friday Night Project crew are always up for a performance. The card was really nice thank you," Clare Jones

The Commonweal Rock Marquee was also a great success with bands from school and the community entertaining the crowds. As a counterpoint to this we had music in Holy Rood Church where Swindon Gospel Singers and Commonweal's String Quartet entertained.

I have been working closely with Emma Jackson on the carnival parade and she has project managed the Commonweal cluster bee procession which came second out of 28 entries in the parade! A series of workshops led up to this and were delivered by our artist in residence Tracey Baker- Stewart and dance by Claudia Stroud. This was an educational project which highlighted the plight of honeybees who are suffering great losses due to colony collapse disorder. Ross, a local beekeeper attended on the day and set up a stall to promote bees. Besides honey and educational fact sheets, and of course a mind of information, he brought along some live bees which helped the afternoon go with a real buzz! Many thanks to all staff, students, parents and members of the community for your support, without you all it wouldn't have been possible.

The Old Town Festival on Sunday was at the Town Gardens and we hosted the Band stand where our community partners Swindon Big Band played along with the award winning Swindon Brass. Another new idea I brought to this day was Art On The Fence. Artists, irrespective of age, from Swindon were invited to take part and on the day we had 20 artists displaying their work, much of which was for sale. Some artists even brought along their sketch books and easels. Swindon has so much talent and I can't think of a better mid-sized town to live in.

**The Evening of Broadway** on 24<sup>th</sup> June was just amazing! This is a prime example of how effective clubs can be as the whole event was born and nurtured out of them! Praise and armfuls of thanks must be given to the music and dance department for their never ending energy and ability to enthuse. The evening show was a sell out and the matinee performance likewise as all feeder schools filled the hall to the brim. Praiseworthy also are Yr 10 students Lauren Martin and Ella Workman who have been running an after school club at Lethbridge Primary School. The performance they choreographed with the youngsters was simply brilliant. The girls hope to continue at Lethbridge in the next academic year.

"A great evening in front of a full house saw performances including choirs, orchestras, dance troupes, solo singers, duets and ballet performing numbers from shows as diverse as Phantom of the Opera to Hairspray. The Compere for the evening was Josh Foyster, who showed true star quality, entertaining us with great links between performances. Staff performed too, and as always lighting and sound was well taken care of by Nick Weaver and his crew. Everyone deserves praise for their performances, both that night, again at the Old Town Festival and for many at the Alfresco Americana event too. I wonder what they'll do to top that next year..."

Andy Cantlon school governor.

**The PTA Americana Alfresco** was another noteworthy event that addressed our community cohesion objectives. Parents and staff played sports and we all enjoyed the fine weather, refreshments and music and dance. This was also open to the general public and the mayor and his wife who joined us for most of the afternoon. The art departments annual Yr 11 and staff art exhibition was launched on the same day. Presentations were made to Yr 11 artists who won prizes for their end of year work. These were provided by the mayor, art department and the PTA. The Swindon Advertiser Editor's Choice Award presentation was made the following week.

**Now That's What I Call Commonweal Vol 4** was released this term and features 21 tracks by students, past, present and future and staff. A total of 195 musicians were involved including all of our feeder schools! Ali Sutcliffe and Nick Weaver went into primary schools to deliver this.

**The Big Hat Cabaret** took place at The Arts Centre on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> July. This is a collective of agencies including myself representing Commonweal. The aim is to give disabled artists a platform to perform and to raise their confidence, aspirations and self esteem. The evening was fantastic and ran like clockwork. There were over 75 people in the audience. Thank you to Nick for getting the PI band back together for this unique event which I hope will happen each year at the Arts Centre.

**Swindon's Got Talent** Commonweal was a partner in this event in conjunction with the Swindon Advertiser, Swindon Community Radio 105.5 and The Arts Centre. We hosted the 'Open Mic' session held at Commonweal on the evening of 16<sup>th</sup> July. Nick Weaver and his tech crew provided the lighting and sound. 24 acts performed which included 20 students from the school. Sophie Rose Goldsworthy was one of the eight finalists on the night who go forward to the final at the Arts Centre in August.

**Yr 6 Clubs** We have been able to offer all our Yr 6 feeder school students after school drama and art classes. This is a good transitions programme so that pupils can get to know the school and teachers just that little bit better before coming up to us in September. Heather Birkibeck, head of drama, has taken this role on a Tuesday after school and Tracey Baker-Stewart, our artist in residence, has delivered on a Thursday after school. Both clubs have attracted in the region of thirty per class. Dance was offered via Polly Long, school's sports coordinator, but the take up was only two so this was cancelled. Music has been offered but not taken up. Next year we will put a programme together as a school and offer pupils a menu to choose from rather than individual letters for each club.

**News From Music by Ali Sutcliffe ( the music department have delivered 28 concerts over the last year both in school and in the community! Josie)**

### **Evening of Broadway:**

We began planning for this event back in July 2008 after the success of Little Shop Of Horrors - our musical last year. We asked the students for their ideas and then tracked down the music and began rehearsing in March this year. It is no mean feat to pull together over 140 students and staff dancing and singing but with the help of Louise Harman; Head of Dance, and Aniela Zylinski; music teacher we did it! The show featured music from stage and screen including Oliver, Joseph, Grease and Chicago and dance ranging from tap to ballet. We particularly enjoyed rehearsing for the staff choir item 'Diamonds are a girl's best friend'. The evening was a huge success!

### **Old Town Festival:**

The event was a huge success, not only in the way in which it allowed Commonweal music and dance departments to share their hard work but also in the way that it encouraged other community groups to work with us on the day and perform their work. All the groups that performed were of a very high standard and it was a wonderful day for all involved. My thanks go to all those who helped set up and decorate our Performing Arts Marquee and to all those who took part.

### **Americana Alfresco:**

As Keith said all along.... "the sun will shine" and it certainly did on the 4th July. Parents, staff and students worked hard to pull off yet another performing arts event featuring many music and dance items from the recently performed 'Evening of Broadway'. The BBQ burgers and drinks were well earned after the staff v parents baseball match that kick-started the afternoon and having the Swindon Big Band playing really gave the afternoon a special feel. I have had many positive comments about the day and people particularly enjoyed seeing our very own headteacher performing a specially written American themed set with his band 'Honeymoon Spaghetti'! Well done to all those who performed.

### **Pluck:**

On the 2nd July the comedy String trio 'PLUCK' came to the wyvern to perform their show 'Musical Arson'. Pluck began their journey busking at Covent Garden and have since become famous through appearing at the Edinborough Festival. They now spend their time touring theatres and doing corporate gigs of their three shows 'Musical Arson', 'The Specialists' and 'Titanic'. The group consists of a viola player, cellist and locally-born violinist Adrian Garratt who, as a long standing friend of mine, offered to come and run a workshop with Commonweal Year 10 students. The students were treated to a personal performance of various pieces from his repertoire and had many questions answered regarding how to make comedy out of

music. The students then came to the Wyvern to see the show and thoroughly enjoyed it. The show was hilarious and yet still featured a high class standard of music that was all delivered from memory. The laughs kept coming as wigs went flying, audience members were called up on stage and a violin was set a light! It was great to see this group back in Swindon again this year and I hope to see them back again next year with another show.

### **News From Nick (who helps out at all events – here are a few highlights!)**

This is the school that never sleeps! As usual, it has been a very busy time for all the staff at Commonweal, and though the bee population may be sadly in decline, I have been buzzing!

**The School CD Vol 4:** Over the year I gather student's music compositions, encouraged song writing and have recorded the current crop of bands. Our Year 7 have been particularly productive and creative, with outstanding potential from The Frosted Teacakes and The Understanding. Also included were recitations of a poem found in a 1950's Commonweal magazine, the winner of the school's Composition Competition and tracks from our feeder schools.

**Primary Feeder Schools:** For the school CD we asked what were the themes students were learning about, and both Even Swindon and King William came up with Brazil. I did a little research and came up with the Rio De Janeiro Carnival, and composed a pop song which we then took in for outreach work, and finally recorded some very lively classes for the final edit. Robert le Kyng offered their manifesto/mission statement about what they stood for, so I arranged a lyrical round robin version to an upbeat accompaniment. Lethbridge opted for a version of School Rocks, which has been featured before by our own choir.

We have also provided technical support for King William with lights and sound for their production of The Tempest, and Lethbridge requested some microphones to help with The Blue Bottle.

**Americana Alfresco:** Our annual PTA fayre was blessed with calm weather, which I was particularly grateful for, having taken all my equipment out on to the field, and carefully arranging staging!

The choir, concert band and dancers repeated most of the Broadway Show, and also the staff number (including pink boas!) 'Diamonds Are A Girl's Best Friend'. Mr Defter gave a rousing rendition 'Le Freak' and a collection of American covers with his band.

The finale was a fantastic, energetic performance by The Costellos who unfortunately are leaving for their future destinations, but left the music ringing in our ears, long after I had put away my speakers!

**English KS3 media extravaganza:** I was asked by the English department to help them on a very exciting event they were piloting, where students were given the opportunity to use ICT to be creative and make their own short documentary about a chosen theme. We decamped to St. Joes to use their excellent Mac suite and edit on Imovie, and the students rapidly excelled in using the software and managing their project.

The day has been judged to be an all round success and will now be an annual occurrence.

**Riffs / Rock bands:** As I write this we are about to have our final Riffs Evening for young bands. This season has been very much dominated by Yr 7/8 students (including contributions from Braden Forest and Warneford) and it has been great to see mums, dads and siblings coming along to attend the concerts.

It is a very relaxed atmosphere, and an opportunity to hone performing skills in front of a friendly supportive audience. With so much talent to show off I look forward to seeing what they offer in September when we bring that stage alight again!

Due to a cancellation, I have just been offered the chance to let 2 bands finish the term with a dinnertime concert, so Sweeter Than Peter and The Frosted Teacakes will be firing on all cylinders giving us chance to raise money for the London Marathon next year.

**Swindon 105.5 :** I continue to provide a fortnightly show and we have had a mix of poetry, literature and music programs. I am currently working with Chris Garlic and his Speakers Club on writing a play. We will perform this on our last show before the summer break. It is based on the CSI series but renamed, **Commonweal School Investigation!** After we return in September, Chris is setting up a Writers Club, which will provide more material and possibly lead to other performing opportunities.

**Yr7 Charity Performances: (This was orchestrated by Debs Browning as part of her PSHE and Citizenship programme. Themes were delivered using ICT, drama, English and music. All Yr 7 tutor groups and tutors delivered their projects to the rest of Yr 7)** Yr7 students have been working on adverts to highlight particular charities and showcasing their finished work in the hall. As I could not attend the first, I am very proud to say that the technical side of the day was managed by Ben Walker and Neil Morris (both Yr7), who are my events team, and they received an ovation and high praise from the teachers and IT staff, after organising both sound, light and 2 projectors!

**Future:** Ongoing projects include creating a Pocket Musical with a handful of students which we hope to perform next academic year. This is a short story (The Work Boy) which will include both drama, narrative and singing.

I continue to respond to the needs of the faculty, and also individual students requests for help with song writing and composition.

**News from Dance by Louise Harman ( despite being a one lady department Louise rises to the challenge and puts in hours of extra time to be at community events!)**

### **Broadway / Old Town Festival / Alfresco**

The Commonweal's Evening of Broadway saw over 60 students taking part in dances from a variety of musicals. Students have been working hard during lunchtimes since before Easter, and produced some fantastic performances. Year 10 students Ella Workman and Lauren Martin worked hard with both the Year 7 dance club and Lethbridge dance club to make two amazing dances. Year 10 dance students performed to Grease, and other students performed Ballet, Tap, and Jazz numbers. The dancers performed again at Old Town Festival and the Americana Alfresco.

### **Catherine Johnson Dance Project**

Ex student Catherine Johnson has been working with some of Commonweal's most talented dancers. This was a dance project which saw Catherine coming back to Commonweal to create a piece to be performed at several of our summer performances. Students also took part in a number of dance sessions over the past two months and performed the finished work at the Old Town Festival, and the Secondary Schools Dance Platform. This was a great opportunity for students to draw on the expertise of an ex student, who is currently study Dance A level at New College. A huge thanks to Catherine Johnson for her hard work in leading this group of students, and creating an amazing piece.

### **Secondary Schools Dance Platform**

The Secondary School's Dance Teacher's Network arranged their second annual Secondary Schools dance Platform, hosted by New College. This event saw dance performances from Swindon and Wiltshire secondary schools. Commonweal's Year 10 GCSE dance group and the Catherine Johnson Dance project group performed to a packed audience. Despite some last minute changes to the Year 10 piece, the performances for our students were fantastic. This performance opportunity allows our students to see the wide variety of dance going on in Swindon Schools, and was well supported by parents of the students performing.

### **Boys Dance Platform**

Five Year 10 boys performed their GCSE dance coursework at Swindon Dance as part of a Boy's Dance Platform. The Year 10 boys have been working hard in lessons to create this piece in time for the performance. Their piece explores the development of Hip Hop dance, and shows off their fantastic talents and abilities.

## **Cheerleading**

This term saw the start of a fantastic new Cheerleading Club, with a very enthusiastic group of Year 7's and 9's. A selected group of students performed at the Al Fresco, cheering for the Staff vs Parents softball match, and during *Le Freak* played by Mr Defter's band. Cheerleaders Club has been met by much enthusiasm by students and staff alike, with the club occasionally attended by Mrs Sutcliffe, Miss Hunt and Mr Hughes.

## **News From Drama (Debs Browning has arranged 12 theatre trips this year both locally and in London! )**

**Year 7 Citizenship/PSHE Charity Presentation Extend Project** Organised by Debs Browning this event has cross curricular links with music, drama, ICT, literacy and emotional literacy.

**Year 6 Outreach at Even Swindon with Debs Browning 2009 – 2010** It was a real pleasure to watch Yr 6 students give excellent performances of the Wizard of Oz, Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> July. Having had the opportunity to cast the play alongside the two Yr 6 teachers, Mrs Andrews and Miss Dunn, and helping in some rehearsals, the production came together. All students involved looked spectacular in their costumes and delivered the lines with enthusiasm.

It was a delight to be sitting on the balcony alongside the three lighting technicians where they were very professionally executing their tasks. I look forward to seeing the cast who come to Commonweal, progress even further having worked with them developing their drama skills throughout the year.

## **Year 7 Drama and Drama Outreach by Nancy Heath**

The Year 7 Drama club has worked hard to improve their skills in Drama this year. Their performance in "The Evenings of Entertainment " way back in December was highly praised. Throughout the year they have worked on improving their improvisation skills and have also been introduced to Readers Theatre. Readers Theatre is an opportunity to improve reading and voice skills without the pressure of learning scripts. The club has also been creating workshops using Introductory Drama techniques that they hope to take in to Primary schools next year.

Along with the Year 7 Drama Club, we have been working with the Lethbridge School Year 5 and Year 6's in a variety of fun Drama workshops. Before the end of term we will have done units on Shakespeare's "The Tempest" as well as delving in to The 1960's. Our Drama workshops are always well received and are really useful in supporting the Primary curriculum in a fun and interactive way. It also gives the Primary students a taste of what to expect in Drama when they move to Secondary School.

**Year Six Drama Club term six 2009 by Heather Birkbeck ( Heather is an excellent director and her Vampire Story production delivered earlier in the year was a sell out and earned high praise amongst students, staff and the general public! Josie)**

Students from all our feeders schools have been working on getting to know each other and building their Drama skills through drama workshops. I was supported by Year 10 Drama students which was a great learning experience for them. Year Six have been very enthusiastic and over thirty pupils from across our feeder schools have attended . They have worked on trust exercises and improvisation . For some students it is their first taste of improvised Drama.

The standard has been strong and I am impressed by their energy and commitment. I hope that the student' s continue to get involved in Drama in Year 7.

“I had great fun at drama club, I have made lots of friends and I have learnt many people’s names and their abilities. I might now take part in any drama, because I have more confidence in drama. My brother James Watts helped out and we played fun games with him. All the drama teachers are very nice and kind so I respect them! I loved drama club sooooo much it was fun and I love the mini rule that if you win a game you get a house point and I already have six from drama club,” Emily Watts, Lethbridge Primary school.

.