

**Performing Arts Report**  
**The Commonweal School**  
**Term Two 2008 December 15<sup>th</sup> 2008**  
**Compiled by Josie Williams, Community Arts Development Officer**

As Christmas zooms into focus we cannot rest on our laurels as we still have much to offer, notably the Carols in the Gym on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> December. Commencing at 7pm this annual event will see students and staff performances to a generally packed house of parents, governors, staff and students. The music department are very active this time of year performing at various events in the community. Mrs Sutcliffe and our new music teacher Aniela Zylinski really do pull out the stops to make Christmas special to all who benefit from their welcome efforts. Thank you also to Nick Weaver for all his help and dedication in making our events that little bit special, he certainly has a professional eye for detail.

May I take this opportunity to say a big thank you to everyone who has given their time and help to achieve yet another successful term in the performing arts. Without your input we certainly wouldn't be able to offer as much as we do. A very happy Christmas to you all and a prosperous New Year.

This term we have seen yet another successful Yr 7 Gambia Day of performing arts activities working with in house and external professionals. Info and pictures can be seen, along with a whole host of events this year on our dedicated arts web site [www.commonwealarts.co.uk](http://www.commonwealarts.co.uk)

We have had a number of theatre visits including Hairspray at the West End, organised by the Head and Ali Sutcliffe as a thank you to students and staff who were involved with the Summer musical, Little Shop of Horrors. A big thank you to drama teacher Debs Browning who has given up a lot of her free time organising theatre trips including the atmospheric play Lord of the Flies delivered by Pilot Theatre Company when they visited the Wyvern Theatre. She also organised a trip to the Arts Centre to see Forgotten Things by Red Ladder Theatre Co. She has several trips planned for the New Year!

Another exciting opportunity was for some of last years' Yr 11 GCSE art students who were given the chance to exhibit at the Great Western Hospital. This was initially arranged by myself and the hospital's art coordinator, and then Tara Parker, head of art, who arranged to get the work hung. Hopefully this is the first of many exhibitions in the community under the CAOS Youth banner ( Contemporary Artists of Swindon) on which we lead. The aim one day is for all secondary schools in Swindon to join and give young artists a much needed platform.

This term art teacher Sue Lucey led on an anti bullying poster competition in conjunction with the National Bullying Helpline and Thomson Local Directories. Three of our students won and are having their posters reproduced and displayed in

schools and doctors surgeries around the country. Commonweal School was the only Swindon school chosen to take part and was made possible through links with myself and Emma Jackson our Extended Schools Co-ordinator for the Commonweal cluster.

All of Yr 9 watched Last Orders, a pshe/citizenship, production highlighting the dangers of excessive alcohol. Their understanding was developed further by taking part in workshops after the show. Judging by the evaluation forms and students comments this event has made quite an impact on their understanding.

I am on the Big Hat steering group and we met this term to discuss possible future performance opportunities for this local disability dance group, whose steering group comprises of staff from Swindon Dance, Reach, Commonweal and the Upham Rd Unit. It was also thought to be beneficial for other Swindon disability groups/schools to join us so that everyone in Swindon with an interest in this area can take part. I will let you know how this has progressed in my term three report.

Progress is being made in planning our involvement with the Old Town Festival next year, notably the Family Party on the Lawn on Saturday June 27<sup>th</sup>, which addresses our Community Cohesion objectives. The committee have decided that any school that takes part in the parade will be given free stall pitches to raise funds for their school. Hopefully this will be like one big school fete with music, dance and drama to entertain the crowds! Patsy Molony the festivals Entertainments Chairperson, myself and Sue Derrick - head of performing arts and heads of music, drama and dance will go to the Lawns in early February to discuss and plan the various areas.

Ali Sutcliffe arranged for over 100 students from choirs across the year groups to take part in the national Big Sing in November. The Guinness Book of Records was broken with over 1 million students singing at the same time all over the country. This was led by pop star Des'ree who sang 'You Gotta Be' live via video links from the O2 Arena in London. Each student paid £1 to take part and the funds went to charities Youth Music, CLIC and Marie Curie cancer care.

The highlight this term was the Evenings of Entertainment which were simply brilliant. 200 students performed compared to 170 last year which is just fantastic. A big thanks to staff and students for their input, each year just gets better and better! Nancy Heath, who joined us this term, on maternity cover, directed three excellent Yr 7 performances rehearsed in a matter of a few weeks, which just goes to show what you can do when you put your mind to it! Thanks also to governors Mari Williams, Linda Peel ( her daughter Gemma) and David Skinner for helping on the bar. Thanks also to parents Caroline Black and Victor Chamberlain for their help on the bar, you all made our life just that little bit easier! Yr 6 students watched the dress rehearsal and clients from Cheriton Nursing Home enjoyed the performance on the Thursday night.

Our partners St Lukes Special School held a Winter Festival early December and were able to hire in Big State Theatre and Rhythmworks drum school with our funding. This two day event was well received and was of great benefit to the students personal development.

I represent the school on the Swindon Borough Councils NI 11, Swindon Does Arts' initiative which aims to enable a 3% increase in people 16 years and over participating in the arts. Talks are underway for partners to sign up and use uniform branding to promote all manner of arts activities over the next two years. This was discussed at the meeting at Swindon Dance on 11<sup>th</sup> November.

My photographic services for other areas of the school other than performing arts this term included the cross country on 12<sup>th</sup> November, Children In Need on 14<sup>th</sup> November, Helen Ogdens' tutor group, Kelly Holmes 19<sup>th</sup> November, art exhibition 21<sup>st</sup> November, Honda Challenge 12<sup>th</sup> December, Homeless non uniform day 12<sup>th</sup> December. We also have had a lot of media coverage this term. Many thanks to the Swindon Advertiser, BBC local radio and Community Radio 105.5.

We continue to broadcast once a fortnight on the Community Radio's 'School's Out' programme. In school we broadcast two times a week on Wednesday and Friday at lunchtimes. Monday lunchtime is set aside for training new recruits. One of our English teacher, Rose Little, has asked some of her class to record their poems for future broadcasts. The radio club meets every Wednesday and is led by Sharon Blackmore.

## **News from Drama**

### ***Big State Theatre Company Perform to Year 10 and 11***

On the 17th of October Big State Theatre Company performed to all students taking GCSE Drama. It was a fast paced comedy looking at the life of a very unorthodox man named William Price who lived in the 19th century in a small Welsh community. He believed in many things which we would consider very modern ideas but was viewed as a madman by many of his contemporaries such as being a vegetarian and nudism!

On the 22nd of October Julie Ash of Big State Theatre Company ran a workshop for forty Year 10 GCSE Drama students on developing character through improvisation ,it gave a valuable insight into how an actor can get into character. We look forward to working with Big State for Year 10 work experience in 2009. Heather Birkbeck, Head of Drama.

### ***A Vampire Story***

Rehearsals have begun in earnest for the school production to be shown in the Spring 2009.

“ I’ve really enjoyed being in such a creative working atmosphere. It’s a really interesting play and I can’t wait to perform it!” India Collins-Davies.

“I feel I have benefited and had a great time working in such a buzzing atmosphere,” Rose Maltezos.

“It has opened my mind to stimulating environment of working in theatre,” Ciaran Jones  
Heather Birkbeck

***Even Swindon Outreach – YR 6 Rowan Class – 28 pupils. Yr 6 Willow Class – 30 pupils***

Through drama outreach we are continuing work on Evacuees and experiences of British children during the Second World War, understanding and recreating experiences on The Home Front, which supported their literacy Scheme of Work on "The Secret Diary of Anne Frank" and "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas".

The aim of my sessions is:

- to Introduce them to basic drama techniques and performance skills.
- Help them understand and develop empathy skills.
- Develop cooperative and more independent group work skills
- Bring real life history to life in a way which engages and inspires an interest in Drama, English and History.
- Examine issues from through PSHE and Citizenship.

I aim to continue this after Christmas. Debs Browning.

“We have been absolutely thrilled with the input Debs has put in with drama this term and look forward to working with her in the New Year,” Kate Andrews, Even Swindon Primary School.

***Year 8 & 9 Drama Club – a core group of 10 students***

Auditions were held and initial casting undertaken for the Animated Tales version of Shakespeare's "The Tempest". Club members now want to invite Year 7 to audition for additional parts. We hope to put on a production which could be taken into feeder primary schools. A Year 7 will be assistant directing and an invitation will go out for technical support crew! Debs Browning

### ***Yr 7 Drama Club***

Nancy Heath leads this club which is held on a Monday after school. Numbers have increased by 10% since the Evenings of Entertainment making a total of 27 students attending this club who will be focusing on further performances in the New Year.

### ***Anti-Bullying Week***

The Year 10 Peer Educators have continued to work hard this term, planning, preparing and delivering a PSHE/Citizenship lesson to the whole of Year 7 as part of Commonweal's contribution to Anti-Bullying Week.

The aim was for Year 7 pupils to recognise and understand various types of bullying as well as exploring different ways to prevent it.

The Year 10s devised a variety of activities which saw Year 7s working independently, in pairs and as a whole class, looking at a fictitious scenario of bullying. Using a spiralling technique, Year 7s were encouraged to look at the situation from different points of view and identify specific times where intervention either by themselves or adults would change the outcome of the situation.

Feedback from both students and staff was extremely positive. The Peer Educators should be congratulated for their efforts. Well done! Debs Browning

### ***Last Orders***

Having piloted the first presentation of "Last Orders" at Commonweal in 2007, Solomon Theatre Company, once again delivered a powerful performance to all of Year 9, which examined underage drinking and alcohol use.

Developed by a team of Doctors, Police, NSPCC professionals and teachers, the performance looks at the consequences of binge drinking by two young girls. Based on true events, the production was written in an accessible, hard-hitting style that immediately captured the attention and imagination of its Year 9 target audience.

Research for the project noted that underage drinking and alcohol use are common factors that link anti-social behaviour, teenage pregnancy, STIs and illegal purchase of age restricted products.

Through the performance and follow up workshops with professional actors, Year 9 students were shown how alcohol affects the way people think – their inhibitions, attitude to risk and ultimately their self-control.

Follow up Drama lessons have also shown that our students retained a lot of factual information and were able to empathise with the characters. Post-show discussions

allowed them to form their own opinions regarding the scenario presented to them. It truly was a thought-provoking experience! Debs Browning.

### ***Blood Brothers***

During October 118 Yr 9 students attended a matinee performance of Willy Russell's acclaimed musical "Blood Brothers". The story is about two Scouse brothers separated at birth and flung to live on opposite ends of the social spectrum. However, their paths are destined to cross again in both friendship and anger, with tragic consequences.

Our students were able to gain an excellent understanding of the themes of the play and watch professional adult actors tackle the difficult task of playing 7 year olds. When we study the text in Drama lessons, they will be able to bring their experiences and further develop their own characterisation skills to good effect.

"I thought Blood Brothers was really good because the actors showed the characters' emotions effectively. The narrator was extremely sinister and provided a good commentary on the events but made the audience think at the same time. My favourite scene was the ending because it rounded off the whole storyline and was both shocking and heart wrenching," Callum Nunnery 9SA2

"I thought the musical was really good, they used the whole theatre and made the audience feel really involved. The sound was effective despite the hiccup and the singing fantastically powerful," Henry Wakelam 9W2.  
Miss Browning

### **News From Music**

The chamber choir have been out and about being ambassadors for the school this term. Their first engagement was providing musical items for a carol service held at Immanuel Church on Upham Road for A.E.Smiths' Funeral Directors. The students acted in an extremely professional manner and performed four songs. They were much appreciated by the members of the congregation.

Their second event was to sing Christmas songs at the PTA Christmas Craft Fayre held here at school on Sunday 30th November. The chamber choir will also be out singing carols on the 14th and 17th December when they are busking in and around Swindon to raise funds for the music department.

The concert band performed at a concert at Purton Village Hall which was a great success and raised funds for both the hall and the music department. The band was also seen recently at the PTA Craft Fayre alongside the chamber choir providing Christmas cheer! The next few weeks will see them performing at the Carol Service at Bath Road church, Lethbridge school, Carols in the gym and the final Christmas assemblies.

All clubs have been working hard towards this year's Evenings of Entertainment and should be exceptionally proud of their performances – especially due to the lack of

rehearsal time now that lunchtime is shorter. Well done to all involved.  
Mrs Sutcliffe, Head of Music

### ***The Creative and Media Diploma***

The students on the diploma have now completed the first unit of work and are underway with the second. This unit is entitled 'performance' and sees the students undertake the organisation of two school events with little help from teachers and support staff. The students are very excited about this project and no doubt they will make a huge success of it! Mrs Sutcliffe

### ***Clubs***

Club attendance continues to be strong and feed into concerts in school and the community. Concert Band has 21 members, Junior Band 53, Groovy Strings 13, Senior Choir 52 and Chamber Choir 16 members. Clubs run every lunchtime.

### **News from Dance with Louise Harman**

Much of this term was spent rehearsing for the Evenings of Entertainment and was fed by clubs

### ***Year 7, 8 and 9 Lunchtime dance clubs***

All KS 3 dance clubs have made a fantastic start. Two year 10 students, Dance Leaders Lauren Martin and Ella Workman taught the Year 7 group a street dance piece for the Evenings of Entertainment.

Year 8s and 9s also worked towards creating dances for Evenings of Entertainment.

### ***Boys Dance Club***

10 boys across the year groups also worked on a piece for the Evenings of Entertainment, 5 of which were also involved in the Yr 10 GCSE piece. It's great to see the boys making such good progress and enjoying their work in dance.

### ***KS4 Lunchtime clubs***

KS4 clubs are working well, with students coming on a drop in basis to work on class work, coursework, or develop their own dances for the Evenings of Entertainment.

### ***After school tap / Ballet club***

Both clubs have made a positive start, again working towards performances for the Evenings of Entertainment.

Ella Workman Yr 10 and Lauren Martin Yr 10 also run a Yr 7 dance club and choreographed a piece for the Evenings of Entertainment. They are excellent role models for our younger students.

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

Year 2

At present the outreach work for Year 2 is focusing on dance and movement based games. Their class topic is 'Its good to be me' and during term 2, pupils worked on dances that focus on different body parts. Year 4

Year 4 topic is second world war, and the class are exploring the jitterbug style. This scheme of work has been successful, and the Year 4 teacher has shared her new skills and knowledge with the other Year 4 teacher, who is also working on that same jitterbug dance with the other year 4 class. However, due to other commitments I haven't been able to deliver as many sessions as I would have liked.

"Our staff enjoyed working alongside an 'expert'-they were disappointed that this term it hasn't happened as much but If Louise is available again we'd snap her up-that is,of course, if she'd like to come," Margaret Clarke, deputy head at Lethbridge

### ***Lethbridge After School Dance Club***

"Ella and Lauren have been working alongside 'Banksy' from Swindon Dance with a group of year 3/4 boys on street dance. This has involved them being role models and then working with pairs, individuals, small groups to put together their own dance based on the moves introduced by 'Banksy'. From what I have seen they have enjoyed participating in this activity and built up good relationships with the children. After Christmas the girls are going to be the main lead for the club," Margaret Clarke, Deputy Head at Lethbridge

"For several weeks now Ella Workman and Lauren Martin have been working with a group of boys in an after school dance club in conjunction with Banksy. They have been superb, showing boundless enthusiasm and great skill. It's wonderful to see two of our ex-pupils come back to the school to pass on their expertise and we are looking forward to seeing them again after Christmas.," Ray Norman, Head teacher at Lethbridge

### **Other Community News**

We have just brokered a partnership with Graeme Goodwin from Rhythmworks who delivers drumming to the community in 017 on a Wednesday evening, whilst B Boys partners continue to deliver dance on the same night in the gym. Swindon Big Band

continue their partnership with us using 017 on a Tuesday night. They welcome new members so please give me a call at the school for further info.

### **Forthcoming events**

The ever popular Family Sundays programme continues on 25<sup>th</sup> January with our family dance workshops delivered by our in house specialist Louise Harman.

Billy Elliot the musical Thursday 29th January.

Family Valentines 40s night with Swindon Big Band in the hall on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2009. Tickets are £5 each or £15 for a family ticket for four. This includes a Ploughman's Supper and dance tuition from 6 – 7 pm in the annexe with Maria Howse

Lion King the musical Wednesday 4th March

Oliver Wednesday 25th March