

Maoin Cheoil na Gaillimhe

NEWSLETTER - Oct 2014 (Issue 25)

Dear Parent,

Welcome to the new academic year at MCnG. We are a bit slow getting this newsletter out to everyone and I do apologise for that. There has been so much to do and so many exciting new developments that have simply prevented us from getting to this sooner. We keep parents as up to date as we can through these newsletters and our Facebook page. I urge you to take the time to read it through. We frequently get situations where students miss out on some wonderful opportunities in the school because the newsletter was not read. We also recommend those of you that are a part of the social media world to take a look at our Facebook page and there you will find regular updates on school activities.

Lessons

The school is almost at full capacity for the year ahead. Our string dept is fully booked and the piano dept has some small spaces left but very few. There is also a little space in guitar and wind but again these are very limited. This also means that there is a huge demand on space in the school. For that reason it is worth explaining a few things to everyone now again.

Lessons are provided in semesters of 16 weeks. If a student misses a class then the class is forfeit. If a teacher misses a class then the teacher must make up this lesson at a time suitable for the student. In exceptional circumstances teachers will if possible try to make up classes for students that cannot attend, but this is at the discretion of the teacher and is equally dependant on their being space available to take the additional class. For this reason I would urge all parents that know in advance that they cannot make a lesson to call the office to advise the teacher of the absence. It may well be a slot they can offer to another student and in turn it may well be something they may be able to reciprocate later for you.

All members of staff work to the highest standards possible and treat their students with respect and courtesy. We expect nothing short of the same from our students in return. In the 5 years we are open there has never been a discipline issue in the school and that is a fact we take great pride in.

The school office is open Mon to Fri from 10am to 4pm and we are always available to answer questions for parents. Our current Administrator is Greg Mc Menamin and he is more than happy to help where it is required.

Fees

The response from families has been wonderful so far this year. One or two of the newer students may be awaiting invoices but the vast majority have been issued and responded to. There are some people we have not yet heard from and I would urge you to contact the

office to make arrangements as it may result in lessons being stopped without further notice. For those that have made payments we will be sending out receipts very shortly and thank you for your patience.

MCnG Prize



A regular and popular feature in the school calendar is the award night that has recognised those students that have embraced their studies far beyond the classroom lesson. This year there will be an added component, in that there will be a performance assessment linked to the award. All students will be invited to present for assessment and from that we will select a

shortlist that will perform for parents and staff on award night. From that shortlist we will be selecting three students who will receive financial bursaries towards next year's fees and one student who will win a substantial prize and be awarded student of the year. There will be more details on this as the year progresses but we urge all students to speak with their teachers now and look to put in the necessary preparation to qualify when we are making our lists in late spring.

School Exchange

Our trip to Paris in June was a huge success and the highlight for us was the performance in the opulent surroundings of the Irish Embassy. The Irish ambassador personally welcomed young performers from both MCnG and Ensemble XX. The concert itself was truly beautiful and was a testament to the remarkable work done by teachers in both schools in a short space of time. It would be remiss of me not to single out the conducting skills of Dr Haghjoo who brought our young and inexperienced ensemble to such a standard and Mr Solyom who gave so much of his time to training the wind section.

At this juncture we are looking at the possibility of furthering this exchange. There are initial plans to look into a summer school here in Galway next summer with a possible return to Paris the following year. Invitations have also come in from Toulouse so it looks like we are going to be very busy.

Dr. Haghjoo and Mr Solyom are currently making plans to get the school ensemble up and running for the year ahead. A new repertoire is in the preparation stage and so it has occurred to us that we need a name. The MCnG Ensemble is a bit of a mouthful so if anyone has a flair for this sort of thing and can come up with something suitable then do please let us know.



Cushion Concerts

One of the most popular features of last year's program was our cushion concert series, a concert season based around young people.

Concerts were timetabled to start earlier in the evening and the programs were tailored for younger audiences. Programs were a little shorter and children were encouraged to engage with the performers and where appropriate ask questions. After each concert

there were light refreshments for the children. The best part was that children came with a cushion to sit up with the musicians and feel a special connection. We are going to have more of these this year and at least one before Christmas. As soon as we organise them we will post the details on our Facebook page and the teachers will provide information to students at lessons.

Drum Line

We began a drum line in the school last year under the guidance of Mr Terry Cooke. They gave a stunning performance on Award night despite having been taught for a relatively short time. Classes are due to resume next week and Terry is going to accept new members in a second beginners group. Currently we have just three places available. Fees for 10 weeks are €60 to external students, but offered to students of the school at the reduced price of just €45.

Drum line is training in percussion that is considered a foundation to all drum styles and last year's group will shortly receive some training to help them to play the orchestral percussion parts with the Galway Youth Orchestra.

Colourstrings Kindergarten

The Colourstrings Department is excited to welcome all new Colourstrings Kindergarten parents and students this year. We are excited to start the new school year with Hazel and Joanna on board! Everyone has updated their training over the summer and are back with even more enthusiasm and new ideas. A visit to some of the Colourstrings Schools in London has also inspired and taught us a lot.

For those of you who are new. Colourstrings is a fully integrated approach to music education, that starts from the early years and goes through to instrumental teaching. The Kindergarten classes are pre-instrumental classes for children under the age of 7. They provide an enjoyable introduction to music using songs, rhymes, actions, games, percussion

instruments, puppets and movement to music. As far as the children are concerned this is part of their play time. The beautiful part of the system is that it does teach music literacy and does instill the larger musical gestures as part of the learning. It is a subtle and gradual process and these important facts are sometimes overlooked.



The whole program has been specifically designed, tried and tested to facilitate accelerated learning in instrumental classes. This year we will be introducing a bronze medal for everyone graduating the Kindergarten stage and who are ready to start with the instrument of their choosing. Our policy is to have the children to go through 2-5 years of the Kindergarten program and pick up instruments at the minimum age of 6. For some of parents it might seem late but it truly speeds up their learning process and produces wonderful musicianship skills from the start. It is also a good age in terms of physical development. Many systems do start children at an earlier age but the abundant posture related problems this has caused for many children means this is something we would discourage. Colourstrings teaching is quietly but assuredly changing teaching on an international scale and the levels of success we are having here in Galway is already producing young students of amazing promise.

Our teachers would love for you to participate in the classes where you are sitting in with the children. Tap, clap, sing and enjoy this precious time you have with your child together. Music is a wonderful uniting force. Don't worry if your children don't always participate on all the activities, it is perfectly normal and we encourage exploring and enjoying the classes each at their own speed. So much of it is going in on an unconscious level all the time, and we've had children burst out singing perfectly in tune after months of attending classes in complete silence.

I hope you will all enjoy the classes as much as we do, and never hesitate to come to ask with your questions or concerns.

London Calling

In August we ran Colourstrings training for primary school teachers as part of their in service training options. We took the opportunity to invite 2 international trainers over to Ireland and while they were here we used them to train our own staff in the final stages of qualification. We now have the most qualified teachers in the city and as qualified as they can be anywhere in the world. Furthermore the work being done here was considered to be of such a standard that to help us to develop it further we were invited to London to visit with some of the best schemes running anywhere. We sent two teachers over to London at

the start of this October. We were very fortunate to observe and have inspirational meetings with teachers who are teaching Colourstrings in Primary Schools as well as private Music Schools. The trip was hugely involved and very educational. We have come back buzzing with ideas and enthusiasm to get our own project to expand and flourish.

King Solomon's Academy and Gallions Primary School are incredible Public Schools in the most deprived areas in London who have taken on the Colourstrings music program in full, and it has completely transformed the schools. Children who would have previously never had even a remote possibility to study music are now all learning an instrument, going to musicianship classes and becoming musically literate. The effect on the children and their communities is indescribable. These children get to express themselves in ways they never otherwise would. Not only do they work together to produce beautiful music, but their



Maths, English, and general academic skills are benefiting, just as all the academic research has indicated for years now. Gallions School went from being one of the worst schools in terms of achievement 15 years ago to being the best school in London and the 7th best in England last year. This was a result of the wisdom of looking at a troubled community and realizing that the prevailing approach was failing the children. Introducing Colourstrings and a general arts policy has transformed lives.

We were also privileged to get to go observe private tuition in Roehampton University. It was a wonderful opportunity to see a well established Colourstrings instrumental school fully in action. We got to witness some incredible ensemble playing, wonderfully talented musicians with great enthusiasm and skill. This school was established by volunteers 20 years ago to provide a vehicle for Colourstrings training in London. Director Rachel

ErDOS is a professional violinist trained by Geza Szilvay. The ethos in the school is so welcoming, and yet so professional in its approach, that it is a dominant force in youth training with a huge number of its students already populating the national youth orchestras and ensembles.

Primary School Project

Our Primary School outreach project is growing exponentially. We are reaching 900 children in nine primary schools this year and the demand is growing. Our in-service training courses for Primary School Teachers ran with huge numbers this year. Twenty seven teachers

completed the first level and fifteen completed the second level. We are now providing the latter with some additional help and will have for the first time qualified Colourstrings teachers in Primary Schools all around Galway. What was hugely encouraging from our perspective in London was that the standard we have achieved in our schools is actually higher than most of the schools there. This is due to the commitment of our own staff but in also in a large part because of the willingness of the teachers in the primary schools here to engage with the music and back up the lessons weekly.

The next stage in the program will obviously be to look at setting up instrumental programs in the schools to provide the children with the chance to develop further the music skills they have been learning. All of the children will achieve a degree of music literacy that would have been unthinkable only a couple of short years ago. Who knows where an instrumental program might lead.

Plans have been laid and developed for three years now. As a policy we try to stay one full year ahead of ourselves so we can predict demand etc. Everything we do is however based on funding. To date a lot of the Colourstrings in schools program has been subsidised by the Galway Music Residency. Earlier this year they underwent a strategic review of their arts policy for the next part of their development and unfortunately due to budgetary constraints within their program they are no longer in a position to continue funding. Obviously this raises concerns regarding the continuing expansion and development of the program. For the level of contact hours and the quality of the service, Colourstrings is actually not an expensive program so we are very hopeful of raising the funds through the establishment of a charitable trust.



This trust will be established in the coming weeks. Its sole purpose is to help children in disadvantage areas to learn music. The five schools targeted have real social issues and the demographics of the students are poor. It should not be that poverty is the only reason these children are denied a proper education. That is a form of social myopia that can only have terribly consequences in later life. We decide the quality of our future society by how we treat and educate our children now.

Since opening the school I have become aware of what a hugely diverse and influential body of parents we have. At this juncture we are looking to see how best to put the trust together and to establish it as a legal entity. But if any parent knows of companies or individuals that might like to become involved in this social project or indeed has a particular skill set they feel might help with Fund Raising or wading through grant applications then we would be delighted to hear from them.

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