

MUSIC AT THE HEART OF WEARDALE // PROJECT REVIEW

ABOUT

Music at the Heart of Weardale (M@HoW) was a project commissioned by Northern Heartlands with the aim to explore how the existing model of youth folk music tuition delivered by M@HoT (primarily based in Barnard Castle and the surrounding area) could be replicated elsewhere.

Having identified the possibility to set up an after school group at Wolsingham School led by melodeon player Saul Rose, the first stage of the project's delivery focussed on researching potential sources of local music.

RESEARCH

Whilst M@HoT researcher Mike Bettison had scoured national archives and libraries in the early stages of Northern Heartlands delivery with little success, a final trip to the Beamish Archive uncovered the tune book of the Collingwood family of High House Farm, Stanhope (Weardale) containing some 180+ tunes, documented and recorded by John Gall in 1969. Some of this music were well known standards – others much less known/played, and more still that were seemingly unique, and this collection would form the basis of M@HoW's teaching and delivery in the coming months. What was fascinating to discover was that even amongst better known tunes, there were variations – or alternative arrangements – that distinguished them from otherwise 'standard' notation. It's important to note that this collection of music definitely deserves closer exploration in due course. It provides a fascinating insight into the music played locally over a 150 year period between several generations of one family.

DELIVERY

Our schedule of 12 x 1.5hr workshops were spread delivered either side of the Christmas Holidays 2020. Starting 4th November – 9th December, our initial 6 workshops saw a range of musicians of differing ages and abilities join in our workshops, with between 8-12 musicians attending each week. These first sessions helped to form the basis of the group, building dynamics and relationships between participants and the tutor team. In restarting delivery in the Spring Term, we had a staggered start whilst lead tutor Saul was away on tour in Australia. With a couple of sessions led by Rupert through January on alternate weeks, delivery was resumed on 10th February until 16th March, when activities were halted due to the UK-wide lockdown enforced because of the Coronavirus outbreak.

Through the period of delivery, the number of regular participants reduced to between 6-8 participants. I think this was due to a number of possible issues:

1. Transport / Access after school hours
2. Lack of direct communication with parents/participants
3. Delivery on school site lent it much more a feeling of an 'after-school' club, rather than something independent. At points the presence of teachers overshadowed participant's full engagement
4. Ability level of musicians/comfort with learning by ear – as a new method of working I think this presented barriers to some, who once disengaged with the process were difficult to bring back on board. The same applied to some intermittent attendees – who later feared the group would have "moved on without them" and wouldn't be able to catch up.
5. Contact time – whilst the workshop delivery mirrored that of M@HoT's other youth folk band Cream Tees – I think it is important to note that in establishing Cream Tees, M@HoT

spent significant time working with a larger group of musicians, with ½ day workshops and time out of curriculum to be able to lay the foundation of the group moving forward.

However, it is important to note that there were some big successes to the project too!

1. Establishing a working relationship with Saul Rose as lead tutor, and the support and guidance offered to myself as assistant. A lot of CPD as part of the process of delivery
2. The cohort that saw through the series of 12 workshops were dedicated and engaged with the process, this included a member of DMS per teacher team offering additional support on violin.
3. As mentioned before, the unearthing of the Collingwood Collection which will act as a rich resource for subsequent delivery
4. Securing additional funds from CDCF / #iwill to deliver a Summer Term of workshops, including collaboration with Cream Tees and Jack Drum Arts youth bands, helping to start build networks between youth-focussed music organisations in rural SW Durham (though this is currently postponed due to

LEARNING

This was the first time I had led the delivery of this kind working to establish a group of this kind, it presented a range of successes and challenges as listed above. I think some of the biggest learning has come through reflection after delivery, a reminder of the simple things that make such a big difference, like ensuring by all means possible you create an effective communication strategy from day 1 to help share information, remind participants of dates/delivery times etc.

It was also only through revisiting M@HoT's photo archive dating back to the launch of the project in 2011 (to create content for social media during lockdown), that I gained a proper insight into the depth of engagement that was facilitated in the early stages of Cream Tees by then project coordinator Neil Diment. Knowing this now, I have a better understanding of how I might approach a similar task in the future – even in re-engaging students at Wolsingham School after lockdown – as it will feel almost like we are back at square one.

WORKING WITH NORTHERN HEARTLANDS

M@HoT have been fortunate to work with Northern Heartlands regularly throughout the 3 years of its delivery, with 3 separate CIF-supported projects and this final commissioned project. It speaks volumes about their approach to work that they have always been there as/when needed – but recognising the space required by individuals/organisations to get on with things under their own steam!

FOLLOW-UP PLANS

As mentioned above, M@HoT were successful in securing funds for a further term of delivery from May – July 2020 courtesy of CDCF / DDCMS' #iwill fund. The idea behind this was to continue working with the group on a weekly basis, as well as building opportunities for them to meet and collaborate with other young musicians in SW Durham (from JDA & Cream Tees). Whilst this has been paused due to the lockdown, we are exploring options for some of the initial programme to still be delivered – perhaps during the summer holidays – or will approach a fresh schedule when social distancing is lessened. In place of our weekly workshops, we are hosting tune tutorials on our website & social media channels via youtube – these offer participants the chance to continue drawing on the expertise and guidance of our tutors whilst still in lockdown.

Engaging communities in the Heart of Teesdale through traditional music, song and dance.

M@HoT is funded by the Youth Social Action Programme & Arts Council England. The project is supported by Blaize Community Arts and affiliated to the English Folk Dance and Song Society.

