



SCOTTISH
YOUNG
MUSICIANS



Analysis & Review of Scottish Young Musicians 2023

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"Excellent competition and brilliant opportunity to encourage music making at all levels. Lots of support from the SYM team. Great opportunity to show the depth and breadth of music making going on across schools in Scotland."

- Robert Lamb, Inverclyde Council

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Aims & Objectives Overview

If 2022 was the year of getting SYM started, then 2023 was the year that it became truly established at the centre of the world of music in Scotland's schools. In only 2 years, SYM has become the largest and most important national music competition in schools, taking last year's winner on a journey from Stirling to play at No.10 Downing Street.

We were encouraged by the support and enthusiasm for this year's competition and were delighted that 30 local authorities participated, representing around 99% of the school population, an increase from 20 last year.

There was also a great response from the Independent Schools sector from which we welcomed entrants from 20 schools, doubling last year's number.

Covering almost all of the country helped us achieve our key objective of bringing opportunities through performance to all, especially those in low socio-economic areas of Scotland. One of the finalists gave feedback that highlights how the competition offered an opportunity that they clearly felt was outwith their reach –

On the day of the final, I felt daunted by the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Opportunities like the ones that SYM offer are very rarely acquired by people of similar background to me so I did struggle a little with that. However, I will take that feeling forward with me in the hope of not letting my own presumptions and background (my class if you will) get in the way of succeeding or even trying. I'd like to say that no one at the RCS or SYM made me feel this way – it's simply my own unjustified insecurity.

The life-skills that SYM provides by encouraging young people to practise hard and show them off on a public stage is a major component in our mission to break down these barriers. Every young person deserves an equal opportunity to participate and succeed and SYM seeks to bridge the poverty-related attainment gap. By offering every local authority as well as the independent school sector the support to participate, we enable every young musician in Scotland, regardless of their background, an equal opportunity to participate and to share each others' experiences.

Furthering this aim, SYM is proud to have partnered with Awards for Young Musicians to act as the conduit to provide direct support ranging from £200 to £2000 to musicians from families of limited financial resources.

SYM encourages young musicians to realise their full potential. One finalist gave an inspirational quote that demonstrates how the competition has given them the confidence to pursue their music education further –
















"The regional competition was a fabulous experience. An opportunity to play with a professional accompanist and be able to perform in front of people. I gained so much confidence and was overwhelmed that I was selected to perform at the final. Performing in the final was then another massive learning experience. Playing in such a venue, in front of so many people, and being with all the talented competitors from around Scotland was just amazing. An experience I won't forget. I want to study music further, and this whole experience has made my determination to get into the RCS even greater."

Music educators have again fully embraced SYM demonstrating how much they have put SYM at the core and as a destination for their young musicians to be part of. Covid recovery in schools is an ongoing challenge, but the talent and will of the young people in Scotland remains strong.

Once again, in offering career changing prizes, the music fraternity of Scotland and beyond have shown their enthusiasm in their support of the competition. All 31 finalists will have the opportunity to participate in a specially tailored musical activity, some working with the best musicians in the country. These range from masterclasses to engaging with a professional orchestra, behind the scenes visits to Scottish Opera and even recording studio sessions. SYM's goal is to offer students opportunities for life regardless of whether they go onto a career in music. The skills and experiences they will gain will be valuable for all.

Music Partners

SYM is grateful to the following music partners for the generous donation of career enhancing prizes

School Competitions Review

A key goal of SYM is to have the broadest participation in as many schools as possible. Thanks to the support of Heads of Instrumental Services in each local authority there was a significant increase in the number of secondary schools holding their own Young Musician Competition with the winner going on to compete in the local authority final.

Of the thirty local authorities who took part this year **249** out of **357** secondary schools held their own Young Musician competition (70% of Scotland's secondary schools). This exceeded a key goal of SYM and we view this as a major achievement.

This year 20 of Scotland's independent schools came together to select a finalist to represent their category an increase of 100% on last year.

Focusing on the most deprived areas was a key target of SYM the level of school participation in these areas has exceeded the average for the country and produced excellent musical output.

Four out of five of the most deprived areas took part in this year's competition with their secondary schools (% shown) all exceeding the national average of school participation.

Glasgow

77%

North Ayrshire

89%

Renfrewshire

100%

West Dunbartonshire

100%

Johnstone High School won the Renfrewshire regional competition and Kelly Adams, Principal Teacher of Music explains the process they used -

"At the beginning of November, our department held its annual Young Musician of the Year competition. We decided to establish an inclusive school competition open to singers/instrumentalists of all abilities and levels.

With a much larger uptake of entries than anticipated we divided the competition into Junior and Senior. We selected two Advanced Higher pupils to adjudicate the Junior competition and an external adjudicator for the Senior. Alongside the overall winner, the prize winners performed at our Christmas Concert, providing a further opportunity celebrate their achievement.

Our department has greatly benefited from running the Young Musician of the Year Competition. Our curricular uptake is higher than previous years, our extra-curricular clubs are bustling and we have a strong community feel across the whole department."

Prior to starting a degree in Engineering, Johnstone High winner and Renfrewshire Council's finalist Josh McMillan gave this feedback -

"The Scottish Young Musician Competition offers every learner the same opportunity to achieve, regardless of the instrument and grade, which inevitably encourages students to have a positive growth mindset, accept challenges and rewards them with a sense of personal accomplishment.

Despite not pursuing a career in music, the subject has equipped me with skills such as: critical thinking, resilience and teamwork that will benefit me in STEM subjects; enabling me and many others to successfully lead our own learning."

Regional Competitions Review

An incredible 31 regional competitions took place across Scotland to select their authority representative for the national final. Covered widely in the local press, they provided both the destination for the schools' competitions and a prelude to the national final. Considerable excitement and anticipation was built up.

Evaluation Feedback from Finalists

100% *were satisfied with the pre competition rehearsal time*

100% *were satisfied with the organisation of the competition*

95% *were satisfied with the competition venue*

100% *were satisfied with the communication*

Finalists reported the following principal benefits following participation in the competition

34% *increased confidence*

30% *increased musical skill*

10% *increased wellbeing/health*

26% *new connections with other young people*

We asked our finalists what competing in the competition meant to them -

It was a huge achievement for me and a way to thank everyone who has supported my musical journey so far.

It was an opportunity to refine my skill performance and share my love of music with others. It also allowed me to play at such an esteemed venue and somewhere that I hope to attend for higher education.

The competition meant a lot to me, as I was able to perform in a great venue with a large audience and I also was able to represent my school and region in this competition.

An amazing opportunity to perform in front of a renowned panel and meet other talented young performers.

It was a wonderful opportunity to perform, and also to hear the music from all the young people across Scotland.

I was mostly looking forward to the musical aspect of it, but I ended up meeting and socialising with lots of musicians my age and connecting with them!

The Scottish Young Musician competition was an amazing experience and opportunity. It made me feel talented and appreciated as a singer.

I loved experiencing such a welcoming environment from staff and other musicians and being able to represent where I'm from. Hearing all of the amazing musicians that competed has inspired me to take my playing to the next level.

It was a great opportunity for me and allowed me to close my school career on a great high note.

All of the finalists confirmed that they enjoyed taking part in the competition demonstrating that the young people found it to be rewarding. It allowed them the opportunity to showcase their talent in a regional setting and compete with other young people from different schools and backgrounds.

Competing in SYM has given all participating young people a life changing and unforgettable experience and the confidence to continue to compete at the highest level and to do so across all socio-economic backgrounds. SYM has provided an opportunity which would otherwise not have existed.

National Final Review

The Scottish Young Musicians Solo Performer of the Year Competition took place on Sunday 21 May 2023 in a sold-out Stevenson Hall of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. A total of 31 competitors travelled from as far as the Shetland Isles and performed across 19 disciplines including voice.

The event began with a powerful welcome statement "Music Matters, Music is Powerful" from Jenny Gilruth MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. A video message followed from Grammy Award winning violinist Nicola Benedetti CBE, a great SYM supporter, and a dedicated advocate of music education.

The performances were judged by a panel of highly respected adjudicators of international standing



Sarah Ayoub

Co-founded The Ayoub Sisters duo, whose debut album premiered at No. 1 in the Official Classical Charts. The Ayoub Sisters have performed across the UK, Europe, Middle East and Asia.



Ross Leighton

The frontman of indie-rock band Fatherson. An accomplished writer and musician with over 25 million streams.



Judith Howarth

One of the most sought-after sopranos in Europe. Judith joined the Royal Opera House Covent Garden as a principal aged just 21.



John Logan

In 1994 John was appointed Principal Horn with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and is an accomplished accordion player.



Heather Nicoll

Head of Woodwind at the RCS. Heather has a diverse performing career as a clarinettist, and held a principal position with Scottish Ballet for several years.



After a thrilling array of performances, the winner was declared to be 16-year-old clarinettist Emily Barron from St Columba's School, Kilmalcolm who represented the Independent Schools. Runners Up were cellist Will Archibald from Dumfries and Galloway and pianist Michael Gemmel from Scottish Borders.

Emily gave an outstanding performance of Solo de Concours by Andre Messenger and was presented with the Maid of Morven trophy by last year's winner Juliet Robertson. Emily will also receive a cash prize to spend on furthering her musical career and a tailored package of opportunities provided by the RCS including a coaching session, participation in a masterclass and a studio recording session. Emily has already given an interview on BBC Radio Scotland alongside her performance and she has been proposed to give a recital at next year's prestigious Lucerne Festival.

Last year's winner Juliet Robertson had an amazing year with some exceptional highlights. Juliet said -

"Winning the SYM Solo Performer of the Year was incredible and led on to so many amazing opportunities including being on Penny Smith's show on Scala Radio, visiting 10 Downing Street for Burns Night, playing in several concerts. It has been an absolutely incredible journey and a life changing experience. The finals day was great and inspiring so I really hope that all of this year's performers enjoy it too!"

[*\(Link\) 2023 SYM final highlights video*](#)

SYM Ensembles Competition Review

In parallel with SYM Solo Competition, SYM runs a smaller ensembles competition which is judged on-line. Playing in an ensemble gives students the opportunity to work and interact with others on stage. Last year it was open only to brass ensembles but has expanded this year to include all instrument types.

Scottish Young Musicians Brass Ensemble of the Year 2023

Stranraer Brass Ensemble won the Scottish Young Musicians Brass Ensemble for the second year.

Scottish Young Musicians Ensemble of the Year 2023

East Lothian Council Instrumental Music Service Senior String Ensemble won the Scottish Young Musicians Ensemble of the Year and gave a fantastic performance while the adjudicators retired to deliberate and select the SYM winner and runners up.



After their win and an invitation to tour the Scottish Parliament, the following parliamentary motion was signed.

"That the Parliament congratulates the East Lothian Senior String Ensemble for winning the Scottish Young Musicians Ensemble of the Year 2023; recognises the work of team leader Jonathan Gawn, from the East Lothian Council Instrumental Music Service, and instructors Fiona Smith, Carolyn Wilson, Pauline Hickman and Ewing Lauder, in coaching the ensemble to win the awards; further recognises the contributions of violinists Isabella Gold (Knox Academy), Brodie Wallace (Knox Academy), Lois Thomson (North Berwick High School), Lilia Villarreal-Forrest (North Berwick High School), Michael Hoole (Musselburgh Grammar School) and Thomas Bull (Ross High School), celloists Freya Harley (North Berwick High School) and Hannah Swinney (Dunbar Grammar School), double bass player Peter Stuart (North Berwick High School), pianist Hayden Way (North Berwick High School), and drummer Ben Gentil (Knox Academy) in winning the award; and thanks the ensemble and pianist Ivy Briggs for playing at Craig Hoy MSP's Community Champions Reception in the Scottish Parliament to thank volunteers from across the South Scotland region for their contributions to local communities."

Feedback from Music Educators Review

SYM would not exist without being embraced by Scotland's music educators

"The partnership we have with SYM just allows us to really celebrate music with other authorities across Scotland on a national level, and to allow our young people to see what's out there and really get that picture and raise a profile of music everywhere. It's just so important, especially at the moment with cuts going on. We really need to show this is important and what it means to our young people. We know that our young people love to perform and to give them the opportunity to come together and perform on a stage to each other and celebrate and support is just amazing, and they can take that back into school, encourage their peers to come back next year and it's just that whole sort of widening out of music and raising that profile and celebrating music. It's a joy."

- Pam Black, Education Support Officer For Music at Glasgow City Council, speaking to The Scotsman (03.02.23)

SYM is guided by their thoughts and seeks guidance at regular intervals

The predominant benefit to young people participating were formed of the following categories -

21% *new connections with other young people*

21% *increased mental health/well being*

24% *increased musical skill*

29% *increased confidence*

5% *other*

We asked for examples of the benefits the finalists will take forward from their experience -

- Performance experience and improved confidence.
- Increased confidence and broadening of musical experience.
- Raising the profile of music making opportunities out with the school and local community is of great benefit to the finalist.
- A greater awareness of musicians of a similar (or better) standard from across other areas of Scotland.
- The opportunity to perform and engage with other musicians from throughout Scotland. Greater self-awareness of level of players.

Press & Social Media Coverage Review

As maintaining and growing participation is a key objective of SYM, press and social media remains important. We believe that investing in content and getting it published is worthwhile.

Press coverage continued to be positive and SYM was present in all the main Scottish daily newspapers, with 76 online and 29 print articles published with a combined reach of 49.4m and 0.36m respectively. There were 5 BBC broadcast mentions and interviews with a combined listenership figure of 1.42m. Twitter has grown to 636 followers since joining the platform in September 2021, with a significant increase of growth since the last year.

Over the last year, Scottish Young Musicians has earned 95.4K Twitter impressions. Top tweets included the announcement of Solo Performer of the Year winner which achieved 28,187 impressions. Our Facebook page top performing post was also the announcement of the SYM winner reaching 9,980 people, with 125 comments. The Instagram page also performed well.

(Link) [Renfrewshire Instrumental Services](#)

(Link) [St Columba's School](#)

(Link) [Falkirk Instrumental Services](#)

(Link) [East Ayrshire Music Service](#)

(Link) [Midlothian Instrumental Music Service](#)

(Link) [Dumfries and Galloway Instrumental Music Service](#)

(Link) [South Ayrshire Council Instrumental Music Service](#)

(Link) [Live Music Now Scotland](#)

(Link) [Jenny Gilruth Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills](#)

(Link) [Benedetti Foundation](#)



Quotes from various media outlets

"It's wonderful to have been able to perform here today alongside all the other wonderful musicians from all the other schools. It's just an amazing experience. Today I played the flute and I played the First Movement of Poulenc's Flute Sonata. A wee bit nervous, so I really enjoy the piece, I really like getting to perform it for everyone. The atmosphere was really supportive and welcoming – although it's a competition I didn't feel like I was being judged it just felt like an opportunity for me to perform and show music to everyone."

- Caleb Reid, winner of the local Glasgow final, speaking to [The Scotsman \(Link\)](#) (03.02.23)

"I am continually amazed by the progress and success of these young musicians. Each rehearsal is filled with hard work, fun and laughter, making it a privilege to work with them. I look forward to seeing what the future holds for the Stranraer Brass Ensemble."

- Angela Miller, conductor of Stranraer Brass Ensemble

"It was heart-warming to see such an enthusiastic response to the ensemble and brass competitions. The overall winning entry, from East Lothian, and the winning brass ensemble, from Stranraer were remarkable for their musicality and panache. They were able to communicate their musical message through the microphone directly to the heart and soul as well as the ears of our adjudication team. Every entry had something special to say but these two were extra special."

- John Wallace, convenor of the Music Education Partnership Group.

"It was great to hear the high standard of all our ensembles at our regional Scottish Young Musicians event, and I'm delighted that our young people's efforts have been rewarded with this incredible opportunity to perform at the national final."

- Jonathan Gawn, team manager at East Lothian Council Instrumental Music Service

"It's been a really incredible opportunity to take part in Scottish Young Musicians and I never would have expected to win out of all these wonderful musicians. There's a lot you can learn by hearing other musicians play and I've taken away a lot today. I've been really inspired to continue playing music and I can't wait to see what lies ahead in the future."

- Emily Barron, Scottish Young Musician's Solo Performer of the Year

"Scottish Opera is delighted to be part of this year's Scottish Young Musicians Competition and we look forward to welcoming the winners in the vocalist category to a special tour of our rehearsal and production facilities to meet some of the artists, artisans and support staff who make, stage, promote and present our productions. The competition, as well as the preceding heats at local authority level across Scotland, are a wonderful way to encourage the next generation of performing artists and further proof, if any were needed, that music and the performing arts continue to be celebrated as a crucial element of school life."

- Jane Davidson, Director of Outreach and Education at Scottish Opera

FINANCES

Review

In line with previous years SYM continues to be run prudently. SYM has exceeded its overall targets have done so comfortably within the anticipated budget. This has been possible by drawing upon the existing physical and human resource available throughout Scotland, often provided pro-bono. We believe this will continue, meaning that SYM donors achieve significant leverage for each pound given. This has benefitted our budget principally through the local authorities requiring less than expected from SYM to run their local competitions, meaning that we have been able to spend more promoting the benefits of SYM at a national level where we can get good economies of scale. We spent marginally more on the national final which produced an excellent outcome. SYM also achieved a significant saving on the travel budget and needed to draw little from the contingency account.

We raised £77,038 last year from our donors and have committed £74,284, allowing us to modestly increase our reserves. Given the reach of this year's competition was around 50% larger than the previous year, we are happy that the money is going further.

In devising the SYM budget our intention is to make it both sustainable and fundable. We are all too aware that in the medium term that we will over time need to increase the central staff costs from their currently modest levels to something reflecting the size and status that SYM has become, and this can be done after a number of the permanent expenditures have been made, so as to smooth the overall running costs and fund-raising requirements.



We are enormously grateful for the generous support of the following Individuals, Companies, Trusts, and Foundations:

Founding Donor

THE
WILLIAM SYSON
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Keynote Donors

- Declan Doogan
- Hugh Fraser Foundation
- Alan Kerr
(supporting Renfrewshire and receptions)
- Colin McLean & Margaret Lawson
- Walter Scott Giving Group
- Anonymous Individual
- Anonymous Individual

Donors

- Geoff Ball
- Hugh Fraser Foundation
- The Inverclyde Trust
- The James Wood Bequest Fund
- The Jasmine Macquaker CF
- Dr Ursula Jones OBE
(Brass Ensemble of the Year & Best Solo Brass Player Prizes)
- Kilpatrick Fraser Charitable Trust
- Leng Charitable Trust
- The Meikle Foundation
- Jim Mellon
- In memory of Bobby Mitchell
- Penpont Charitable Trust
- Nicky Pritchett-Brown
- The Rhona Reid Charitable Trust
(supporting North Ayrshire)
- R J Larg Family Trust
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