



**SCOTTISH
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Scottish Young Musicians Review and Analysis 2024

Scotland's Leading Music Education Charity - Inspiring the Next Generation

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*I am very, very confident for the future of music
in Scotland - these young people are brilliant!*

John Wallace CBE

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A Word From The Chair

Scottish Young Musicians finished its 3rd year with a flourish, becoming even more established within Scotland's school and music community. Following hundreds of competitions nationwide, involving thousands of participants, the talent showcased at this year's national final was inspirational, highlighting our young musicians' impressive diversity and dedication.

The support for SYM has grown each year and the enthusiasm has driven the standard to a level that has far surpassed our expectations. Throughout the year, musicians representing 30 local authorities and independent schools helped us to achieve our key objectives of bringing opportunities through performance at the highest standard to all, especially to those in the lower socio-economic areas.

"It has given me a great set of skills and an experience that I will never forget for the rest of my life."

- Tomasz Meszka, Moray Finalist

SYM is proving that barriers can be removed through the medium of music. By offering young musicians from all backgrounds an equal opportunity to perform in venues from their local communities to the national stage, it is helping to break the barrier of poverty-related attainment.

"It has meant the world to compete in the final. It is just a prestigious venue and event."

- Jake Johnstone, South Lanarkshire Finalist

Our first SYM Solo Winner was recognised by being invited to play at No.10 Downing Street. Last year's winner, Emily Barron, enhanced her success, becoming guest soloist with The Glasgow Wind Band, Scotland's foremost concert band. Euan Kemp, our winner this year, was invited on live TV by BBC Scotland The Seven, where he gave an assured interview and a thrilling performance.

During the year, we have exceeded our goals by broadening and deepening SYM's reach. It would be hard to list everything that we've done, but I would like to focus on a few highlights:

- **We initiated the SYM Junior Competition, bringing SYM to primary schools for the first time.**
- **We offered a trophy to every secondary school, creating a daily reminder of SYM.**
- **SYM created an Alumni program to track and support those who have participated.**
- **Refreshed www.scottishyoungmusicians.com to make it more engaging, informative and visual.**
- **SYM enhanced the promotion of our partnership with Young Sounds UK to provide financial support to aspiring young musicians from low-income families.**

SYM would not exist without our many stakeholders: the music educators, our music partners, the incredible team at SYM and our donors. We never forget that donors have a choice, and we must constantly earn their support by demonstrating success by meeting objectives and using their money prudently.

We are proud of the fact that we delivered such a significant country-wide year-long program of activity for just over £92,000, a relatively modest amount. We think this is a feat that few can achieve elsewhere in the charity sector.

We begin the year as excited as we ended the last. SYM has many more plans, and we look forward to announcing them throughout the year. Our intention is to grow SYM in a steady and sustainable way. I am, along with all my colleagues, grateful for your continued support.

Alan Kerr
Chair



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School Competitions

1

National Competition

31

Regional Competitions

278

School Competitions

"At school, our own competition increased the confidence of participants, enhancing their performance and presentation skills. Funding our adjudicator fee, along with new trophies and certificates is greatly appreciated and really added value to the event. The East Ayrshire winner gained a unique insight into music competitions at a national level. A strong sense of occasion, along with the support from SYM, led to participants feeling valued. Thank you!"

- Greg McGuire. Principal Teacher of Music, Stewarton Academy

SYM starts at the school level. Our goal is to have the broadest participation in as many schools as possible and we are improving year-on-year. Schools often have dozens of students taking part, at all ability levels and ages. For many, it's a highlight of the year and something to work hard towards.

Johnstone High School

Johnstone High School's SYM Young Musician Final saw about 30 students compete in a thrilling end to a year's hard work. Notably, 41% of its students come from SIMD areas, and 47% have additional support needs.



SYM Trophy

As SYM has become a special fixture in the school calendar, we have begun a program to provide every school with its own trophy.



Garnock Community Campus has been selected as a case study to highlight how the school is embracing the SYM Young Musicians competition, not only to their secondary pupils but also with their primary school musicians. Garnock Community Campus is in one of Scotland's highest SIMD areas.

The Garnock Community Campus Young Musician of the Year competition has grown significantly over the past few years thanks to the support from Scottish Young Musicians. The competition now includes pupils from all schools in the Garnock Valley including all the associated primaries. This year's competition was attended by 120 pupils, giving them an amazing performance opportunity.

Pupils from P5 up to S6 can enter our competition which now spans over 2 full days. Pupils compete in a variety of categories: Voice, Woodwind, Brass, Piano, Percussion, Chanter/Bagpipes, Strings and Guitar. There are 3 different age/stage groups in the competition, Primary, Junior (S1-3) and Senior (S4-S6). An adjudicator awards 1st, 2nd and 3rd place for each instrument category and the 1st place of each category and stage go through to an overall final winner's concert.

"The winner's concert is a well-attended and exciting evening celebrating the success of all our young performers and an overall Primary, Junior and Senior winner is selected."

- Caroline Shedden, Faculty Head of Music and Drama

"I had a great experience competing in the Young Musician competition and I loved meeting pupils from other schools. I also enjoyed playing in the big auditorium and look forward to playing in concerts there when I start at Garnock."

- Primary school competitor

"I have entered the competition on multiple instruments and have been successful every year on at least one. This year however I was crowned the senior Young Musician of the year and represented Garnock in the North Ayrshire Council final."

- Secondary school competitor

Having grown their school competition from SYM's first year and hosted the SYM independent school final, Wellington School was selected as a case study. Although the independent sector represents a relatively small amount of SYM's work, we believe its presence within SYM is very important to allow for inclusion and collaboration with the state sector. Wellington School held its second SYM Competition in February 2024. It was open to pupils in P7-S6, divided into three different grade groups. We held an initial heat which finalised 7 competitors. This comprised two competitors in the Grades 1-3 category, two in Grades 4-5 and three in Grades 6-8 forming a mix of vocalists and instrumentalists.

"Part of our ethos at Wellington is to encourage performance and build confidence in our pupils, and this competition satisfies this very well. We invited two experienced judges who provided constructive feedback to our finalists and after much deliberation decided on our winner, Sarah, a trombone player in S6 who performed a beautiful arrangement of Stardust by Hoagy Carmichael."

- Susan Docherty, Director of Music

We asked school staff for examples of the benefits the competitors will take forward from their experience:

Increased confidence in preparation for their SQA exam.

Better coping mechanisms for anxiety issues.

Performance opportunity targeting focused practice on instrument and wellbeing.

Pupils shown resilience and grew in confidence.

Regional Competitions

1

National Competition

31

Regional Competitions

278

School Competitions

Thousands of students participated in the schools competitions, which selected the most talented 687 to compete in one of the regional events. The winners of these regional competitions qualified for the prestigious national final.

"This was my first experience of the Scottish Young Musicians competitions and although a daunting task to begin with, the whole process and experience has been great. Everything was provided in good time which helped with the overall organisation, and I felt supported by Mae Murray if I had any questions prior to the competitions. For the young people, to have an opportunity to showcase their passion and commitment to music and to be acknowledged for their hard work and progress by their families, friends and peers, was fantastic!"

- Joanne Thomson, Music Service Manager Midlothian Council

In parallel, the independent school sector ran its own final at Wellington School in Ayr. 16 schools took part including Hutcheson's Grammar, St George's and The High School of Dundee.

Supporting staff and schools in the most deprived areas in Scotland is a key goal of SYM and the level of participation in these areas continues to improve. The following authorities are in the top 5 most deprived areas of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)

We are especially proud that the level of participation in these areas within SYM has continued to increase and exceeds our national average level of (77%).

278

Scottish secondary schools participated in SYM this year through their school or regional event. This is in an increase from 249 last year, meeting a key goal which we view as a major achievement.



Glasgow 90%
(77% in 2023)



North Ayrshire 100%
(89% in 2023)



Renfrewshire 100%
(No change)



West Dunbartonshire 100%
(No change)



Inverclyde 100%
(No change)



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SYM 2024 has been an unforgettable experience, it has brought me together with like-minded people and given me the confidence to perform in-front of large audiences. It was astonishing to see the vast musical talent of all the competitors and ensembles which took part.

Tobie Etridge, Angus Finalist

It was my first competition and so I was really nervous but will feel better for next time. All the performers were fantastic, so I now realise that the gap in talent between us all wasn't that great but the gap in opportunity is. The competition helps give opportunities to all.

Ronan Toal, West Dunbartonshire Finalist

For me it's meant that something I've worked hard for has paid off and I can continue to strive to do well and improve.

Mariette Pose, Aberdeen City Finalist

It has been a great experience and something I will follow for years to come. I enjoyed every minute!

Nathan Ogston, Independent Schools Finalist (High School of Dundee)

It was an incredible experience to play with other musicians and hopefully deliver a memorable performance. It has motivated me even more to continue practicing piano and made me very proud to represent my school and local authority.

Reuben de Silva, Dumfries & Galloway Finalist

It's been a great opportunity to get performing in front of people and meet other musicians in my age range who otherwise I wouldn't have formed a connection with.

Ellé Colston, Midlothian Finalist

It has given me an opportunity to show my playing to a wider audience and to gain amazing performance experience. I'm proud to have been part of the competition.

Amelia Leishman, Edinburgh Finalist

The whole experience was just phenomenal to say the least, from being selected to represent East Ayrshire the whole journey was an emotional rollercoaster that was just a pleasure to be a part of, the journey of being in such a professional competition has allowed me to connect with likeminded individuals, meet incredible professionals and prove to myself that I can do it by boosting my confidence massively, this is something I will be immensely grateful for.

Aimee Sharp, Finalist East Ayrshire and Winner of the Vocal Category

It had given me great confidence and it was a great day. It has inspired me to forever play music.

Magnus Shanks, Aberdeenshire Finalist



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National Final

1

National Competition

31

Regional Competitions

278

School Competitions

"The year's final showcased of the depth and breadth of music talent across Scotland. The standard and level of performance continued to rise year-on-year. The facilities and venue are excellent. Well done to all who participated and organised the event." - Mark Traynor, Music Service Manager, Renfrewshire Council

The National Final of the Scottish Young Musicians Solo Performer of the Year 2024 took place on 26th May in the sold-out Stevenston Hall of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. A total of 31 competitors from the Shetland Isles to Dumfries & Galloway took to the stage and performed in 15 disciplines, including voice, expertly compèred by Jamie MacDougall.

The performances covered all genres and were judged by a panel of adjudicators of international standing



John Wallace CBE
Recipient of the Queen's Medal
for Music, Head Adjudicator



Jane Irwin
Soprano and Head of Vocal
Performance, RCS



Greg Lawson
Violinist, composer and
conductor



Sinae Lee
Pianist and Lecturer in
Keyboard and Collaborative
Piano, RCS



Adam Lee
Clarinettist, BBC Scottish
Symphony Orchestra



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After a day of outstanding performances, saxophonist Euan Kemp from East Dunbartonshire was declared the winner, followed by South Lanarkshire traditional accordionist Jake Johnstone and Aberdeenshire pianist Magnus Shanks as runners-up.

Euan gave an electrifying performance of Ryo Noda's Improvisation No. 1 and André Jolivet's Fantaisie-Improptu. Last year's winner Emily Barron presented Euan with the Maid of Morven trophy. Euan will receive a bespoke package of career-enhancing opportunities tailored to his specific development. Following his win, Euan appeared on BBC Scotland's The Seven Show and found himself on the front page of The Scotsman.

Thanks to the generosity of our music partners, we were able to offer tailored career-enhancing prizes to all the categories winners.

Vocal – Aimee Sharp, East Ayrshire

Percussion – Amelia Leishman, City of Edinburgh

Woodwind – Euan Kemp, East Dunbartonshire

String – Hannah Pringle, Stirling

Traditional Music – Jake Johnston, South Lanarkshire

Piano – Magnus Shanks, Aberdeenshire

Brass – Thomas Lamb, Clackmannanshire

Each prize will enable the participants to work with and learn from some of the leading professionals and orchestras in the UK. SYM's goal is to support the future development of students, regardless of whether they pursue a career in music.



Euan Kemp



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Emily Barron Winner of SYM 2023

Participating in the Scottish Young Musician Competition and winning in 2023, has opened so many doors for me. It has enabled me to participate in different opportunities that I wouldn't have had the chance too. A highlight of this for me was being asked to perform Weber's Concertino for Clarinet as a soloist with the Glasgow Wind Band, this experience was eye opening for me as I have never had the opportunity to work with a conductor as a soloist before.

The prize money that I was fortunate to win allowed me to pay for most my membership fees for the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland where I was able to play amazing repertoire with musicians studying at conservatoires across the country. It allowed me to develop greatly as a musician, being more analytical with encouragement from the amazing tutors on the courses.

I was also fortunate to be able to attend two classes at RCS, a one to one lesson with Heather Nicol head of woodwind and masterclass led by Nicolas Baldeyrou, one of the most prominent clarinetists of his generation. Both of these opportunities provided me with new feedback on my repertoire and I was able to take away new techniques I learnt and develop them further into my personal practice.

SYM Ensemble & Brass Ensemble Competitions

These two competitions provide schools and community bands with a platform to showcase their talents and compete with other school ensembles across Scotland.

There was an enthusiastic and increased response to the ensemble competitions this year as schools continue to recover and grow from the Covid pandemic. This year, 23 ensembles were judged online, around twice as many as last year.



Winner of SYM Ensemble 2024

Belmont Academy Woodwind Ensemble from South Ayrshire won the Ensemble of the Year competition and performed Two Slavonic Dances and Aragonaise from the suite "Carmen".



Winner of SYM Brass Ensemble 2024

Campbeltown Brass Ensemble won the Brass Ensemble of the Year competition and performed Puttin' on the Ritz and Lovely Morar at the final.

We expected the Ensembles competition to grow steadily after a slow post-pandemic start and we predict that 2025 will be the year it will enter its own orbit with a national final at the SYM.

The transition from "on-line" to "live" is a very exciting development for SYM.

Press & Social Media

SYM received extensive press, radio, and TV coverage across various media platforms throughout the year, showcasing the achievements of young musicians. The national final was featured in 26 print articles, including front page coverage of Euan Kemp in The Scotsman and prominent coverage in The Herald. There were 11 broadcasts reaching several million listeners/viewers, with notable mentions on BBC Radio 3's In Tune, Scala Radio, Radio Clyde and BBC Scotland's The Seven.

Social Media saw significant growth and engagement across various platforms. Since Twitter rebranded to X, the account has grown to 828 followers, with a notable tweet about Euan's win in 2024 garnering 8,795 views. On Facebook, impressions have increased to 50.3k. Instagram has also seen substantial growth, with reach up by 154% to 3.1k, content interactions doubling to 968, and followers now at 5414.



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Media Quotes

"If you are anywhere near the Usher Hall tomorrow in Edinburgh or indeed on Friday do see if you can catch the Scottish Chamber Orchestra as they perform Mendelssohn's Elijah with a really wonderful cast, and I have to say there's no doubt the Scottish Chamber Orchestra are now looking for new recruits among the players who have been competing in this year's Scottish Young Musicians National Ensemble Competition. Huge congratulations to the newly crowned Champions the Belmont Academy Woodwind Ensemble and Campbeltown Brass really well done"

– BBC Radio 3 In Tune, 8 May 2024

"The experience was really good. It was a really positive and friendly atmosphere around the whole place. I think everybody was just really happy to be there and chatting to all the other competitors. It was really fun. It was a really nice, nurturing experience."

– Euan Kemp on BBC Scotland's The Seven, 27 May 2024

"There is an East Dunbartonshire schoolboy who's seventeen, Euan Kemp goes to Douglas Academy, and he's won the Scottish Young Musicians Solo Performer of the year for 2024. Well done. He's been playing sax since he was eleven, so I mean that's still not that long really to get to that level. That's quite impressive as a prize. He's going to get a full package of opportunities from the Royal Conservatoire. That's my daughter's dream to go there. This is going to include coaching sessions as well as a studio recording session. The studio they have at the Conservatoire is apparently amazing, by the way. So, enjoy that."

– Clyde 1 FM, 28 May 2024

"On June 7th, I had the distinct pleasure of interviewing Euan Kemp, the remarkable 17-year-old saxophonist who recently won the prestigious Scottish Young Musicians Solo Performer of the Year 2024. This competition, held at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in Glasgow, brings together the finest young musicians from across the nation. Now in its third year, the event saw 31 participants representing nearly every local authority in Scotland, each performing before an esteemed panel of judges led by trumpeter John Wallace CBE."

– The QR, 19 June 2024

"The diversity of genres was impressive, and the other performers were amazing. I listened to the other two sessions I was in, and there were really fabulous people, including musical theatre performers and an amazing accordionist, Jake Johnstone, who was one of the runners-up. It was a great experience overall."

– Euan Kemp in The QR, 19 June 2024

"Hannah Pringle, a clarsach-player representing Stirling, won the string award with two pieces, 'Kate Martin's Waltz' by Blair Douglas and 'Nataliana' by Deborah Henson-Conant. There was subtlety in the way the waltz rhythm materialised in the first few bars and a feathery lightness throughout (usually absent from performances of the piece on accordion). Nataliana too was beautifully atmospheric with phrasing that drew the listener in. Engaging with the audience is an important part of being a 'performer' and all the day's winners demonstrated this quality admirably."

– Edinburgh Music Review, 1 June 2024

"In his closing remarks, compère Jamie MacDougall praised Scotland's local authorities, their schools, teachers, and tutors for embracing the competition and using it to drive the recognition, encouragement, and development of performing talent across Scotland's young people. But he also warned about the importance of sustained government investment in resources and support for music in schools for its future to be assured. Hear, hear!"

– Edinburgh Music Review, 1 June 2024

"This year we've got our largest numbers, every year it just gets bigger and bigger, and a wonderful performance opportunity for our young children. One of the things about it is the social element of it...we've got huge representation; I think almost all learning communities are involved in the competition this year. Even from a social point of view they'll get to see their peers from other schools working at a similar level, it's really nice – they're pals, and they chat only through this."

– Kenny Carlyle speaking to The Scotsman at the Glasgow Final.



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Finances

SYM continued its tradition of achieving value for every pound spent. Given that much of our expenditure is enhanced by pro-bono provided work and facilities, we achieve considerable leverage for our limited budget. During the year we raised around £90,000 against expenditure of approximately the same amount, and we hold reserves of around £15,000, which we would like to grow slightly over time.

SYM has grown considerably over the year in many areas and, for the 3rd year running, we have done so within budget, despite a period of high inflation. During the year, we have increased our expenditure on staff (all part-time) to rely less on any single individual, so making SYM more resilient. By saving money in certain areas, we launched the initiative to give schools their own trophies, a one-time but enduring measure.



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