

Parent Newsletter from the Director of Music

1st November 2023

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Thank you to all students, staff, parents and guardians for an excellent first half of the term. It has been a very smooth and musically productive start to the year. This newsletter is to help the whole school community manage the gradual increase in pace and intensity of musical activities in November and December.

Planning up to Christmas

All students must familiarise themselves with the schedule for each of the six weeks to Christmas. Google Calendar and emails will provide detailed information, and

notice boards will provide additional help. Students must take responsibility for their own advanced planning, managing homework, practice, concerts and assessments;

staff will support them. An overview of most additional events is below.

Academic Assessments

There is one week set aside every term to prioritise academic assessments. Mr Long and academic teachers will explain the detail of what is expected. Instrumental lessons will

continue to take place but will be arranged to avoid any clashes. Musical commitments will also continue as normal, but there are no additional concerts or external trips, and the week before is also

kept fairly free of musical commitments.

Orchestral Concerts

These have a big impact on the whole school as nearly half the students in Year 9-13 are involved, the music is ambitious, the rehearsal period (12th November onwards) is intense, and the two concerts in London and Birmingham (20th and 21st November) are prestigious and tiring. Homework expectations and other deadlines will take this into account. We have an eminent guest conductor,

Paul Mann, two recent alumni soloists, and the other three pieces are world premieres or London premieres. Students will enjoy this experience if they know what to expect, and take preparation seriously - practise at least some of the music at some point every day from now, and take it to your instrumental lessons, and ask your teacher to help. For this project, some younger string players are only involved in

half the concert, which should reduce workload and increase preparation time.

Musical Assessments

Each department HoD runs their own assessment routine and is responsible for making the schedule and expectations clear. The most important message for all students is that **these are not assessed as a pass or fail, and no mark is given**. It is expected that each student will show clear

progress throughout their time at school to bring their knowledge and ability in line with expectations of music college entry. The assessment is an opportunity for each HoD to check in 1-1 with every student and 'take their temperature' in the context of their ongoing development.

If there is anything to worry about, concerns will be followed up informally with the student and their teacher afterwards. Expectations are all within the abilities of students who are working normally, and last-minute cramming or stressing will not help anyone!

Year 11

At this time of year it is a good idea for students in Year 11 to be talking to their parents, tutors, teachers, friends and families about their plans for 6th form. As a general rule, most students expect to stay at Purcell for Year 12 and 13, embarking on A level courses that prepare them to apply

to Higher Education degree courses. However, this route may not be the best option for everyone, and it is very important to think about the possible consequences both of studying here and elsewhere. HoDs may invite some families to come in for a meeting about future options,

and may ask some students to audition formally for the 6th form next term. If you are even considering leaving Purcell at the end of Year 11 please talk to your tutor, a houseparent or teacher. We need to know, and there will be someone who can give you good impartial advice and support.

Lunchtime Concerts

A reminder that every student is expected to attend one lunchtime concert a week

unless they are really too busy to make it. It's an opportunity to support your peers; or just

take the rare chance to shut your eyes and meditate for 20 minutes with some live music.

Middle School Concerto Competition

Information about this will be available for Year 9, 10 and 11 classical students immediately after half term - please check your email. Application forms will be online and must be

completed by 1pm Friday 17th November. The competition will be held on Wednesday 6th December 3-6pm and after supper if necessary. Full terms and conditions are on the

application form. The winners will be invited to perform with middle school orchestra at a concert in school on Wednesday 6th March 2024.



Chamber Music Groups and Session Bands

We are in the process of securing more performance opportunities later this term and in 2024. Chamber Music groups will have the chance to audition in January for the most prestigious external concerts, and session bands will be invited to play some

gigs later in the year; but meanwhile do not hesitate to put yourselves forward for lunchtime concerts, and talk to HoDs about more informal sharing of work at school - I know that there is already a lot of really excellent music-making happening, which is

excellent so early in the year. Please make sure it is seen in public!

Week 1 beginning 30 October	
Monday	iGCSE Music exam; Drama trip
Thursday	Viola class concert; Voice masterclass; Woodwind sectional rehearsal
Students prepare for Academic Assessment week, and practise orchestral concert music	

Week 2 beginning 6 November	
Academic Assessment week; Normal music lessons, music blocks and rehearsals but no concerts	
Monday	Eric Crees brass masterclass at 4pm
Mr Hoskins, Mr Sewart and Mr Fong in China	
Sunday (12th November, 10am-5pm)	Full rehearsal day for whole Symphony Orchestra with guest conductor Paul Mann in residence from today

Week 3 beginning 13 November	
Y 13 Conservatoire auditions begin	
Orchestral rehearsals with Paul Mann on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in normal music blocks, plus Wednesday 15th evening	
Assessments for Pianists and String players through the week	
Tuesday	Songwriters gig in school, and Jazz gig at Bushey Synagogue
Thursday	Clarinet masterclass
Friday	Middle School concert at 3pm, then EXEAT!
Sunday evening	Please return from exeat at 6pm in order to begin orchestral rehearsal at 6.30pm. Food will be provided

Week 4 beginning 20 November

Y 13 Conservatoire auditions continue

Whole Orchestra out of school from 2pm on Monday, and all day on Tuesday

Monday	Concert at St John's Smith Square, London at 7.30pm
Tuesday	Concert in Birmingham RBC at 1pm
Wednesday	Woodwind Assessments; 6th form concert
Friday	Robert Saxton visit for composers
Sunday	Concert Stanborough Park Church

Week 5 beginning 27 November

Y 13 Conservatoire auditions continue

Monday	Composers and 6th form string workshop with Mira Benjamin, Joseph Bates and Daniel Fardon
Tuesday	Composers concert for Lower School and Middle School composers
Wednesday	Wigmore Hall recital
Thursday	6th form Lecture by William Caplin; Edward Tait and Aaron Stewart concert
Friday	RCS visiting to audition Y 13 applicants
Sunday	Woodwind 'Accelerate' Open Afternoon; Chamber Choir Advent carol service in Bushey



Week 6 beginning 4 December	
Percussion, brass and oboe masterclasses	
Tuesday	Edward Tait piano concert
Wednesday	Winter Jazz concert; Middle School Concerto Competition; Fenella Humphreys workshop for Y 12 composers and 6th form violin/viola & piano duos 'In touch with Nature'
Thursday	Community Carol Concert at 1pm; Philomel Concert at 7pm
Friday	Final Assembly including 6th form choir Bach Magnificat

With all good wishes

Paul Hoskins

Paul Hoskins
Director of Music

