

MARIAN BLAKLEY



Working with young bassoon players in Leicestershire

At that point they had only a handful of student players. Now they have 25, and every single ensemble has one or two bassoons in it.

Sewell began by setting up a mini bassoon club in one of her schools, attracting nine members, of whom five carried on with lessons. This success led to a free-to-schools tour, taking 25 bassoons into 15 schools. At every school 25 pupils got to play, and from that approach at least ten players emerged. She is insistent about the benefits of hands-on experience: 'If you just go in and demonstrate then the kids are just not interested, but if they can have a go, it can really grab them.'

Ensuring that the fee for hiring a bassoon is the same as for smaller

instruments like flutes (£15) also had its part to play. Other initiatives included getting the bassoon quartet Reed Rage in for a day of recitals and workshops; participation in a shopping centre flashmob set up by hub partner Chiltern Music Academy; and a workshop day on solo repertoire from the ubiquitous Laurence Perkins. All these generated further momentum.

### VOLUME CONTROL

The Buckinghamshire scheme, like the other two, is now suffering from problems of success: they are almost running out of instruments. In Leicestershire they may have to tackle the prospect of an overly bassoon-heavy

“ AS LONG AS YOU BLOW THE THING, IT IS GOING TO MAKE A NICE SOUND FROM DAY ONE ”

wind orchestra by creating a bassoon choir, and in Berkshire they have not had enough instruments for new projects. However, this September, for the first time in a few years, Berkshire Maestros hopes to have the funds and instruments to target another school.

Catherine Millar also points out that the knock-on effect of having lots of mini bassoons is the need for lots of short-reach bassoons for the pupils to progress to, and so on: 'Sometimes it's like a house-moving chain, waiting for pupils to have growth spurts so I can move people up a bassoon size!'

Having lived with the 'endangered species' label for so long, it is gratifying for all three schemes to be grappling with these issues rather than bemoaning the lack of bassoonists coming through. And the signs of such successes are to be seen elsewhere: the recent *Vibrant Sixties* play-day run in London by the British Double Reed Society was attended by more bassoons than oboes. Maybe bassoons really are on the rise. ■

### SUPPORTING THE SOUND

Where to go for more information

**Berkshire Maestros** Catherine Millar's team are very open to visitors wanting to observe or ask advice [www.berkshiremaestros.org.uk](http://www.berkshiremaestros.org.uk)

**Leicestershire Music Education Hub** [leicestershiremusicclub.org/video](http://leicestershiremusicclub.org/video)

**Buckinghamshire Learning Trust Music**

Contact area leader Carolyn Sewell for more on [csewell@learningtrust.net](mailto:csewell@learningtrust.net) [www.bucksmusic.org](http://www.bucksmusic.org)

**Berkshire bassoon flashmob**

[youtu.be/3LR30pg6As8](https://youtu.be/3LR30pg6As8)

**Laurence Perkins** Involved in several bassoon initiatives, including a weekend of bassoon ensembles in November 2017, and contributing to a five-day BDRS course on 10-14 April 2018 [laurenceperkins.com](http://laurenceperkins.com)

**British Double Reed Society**

[www.bdrs.org.uk](http://www.bdrs.org.uk)

“ REBECCA WONG, FRUSTRATED AT THE LACK OF BASSOONISTS AND HAVING TO TEACH FLUTE AND CLARINET INSTEAD, WAS RARING TO GO ”