



The Power of Music

William Goldsmith, Headmaster | Friday, 10 February 2017

Alastair Cook stands down as captain of the English Test side this week. At the tender age of 32, he has enjoyed a truly remarkable career: over 11,000 test match runs to his name (England's highest test match run-scorer of all time), 2 Ashes wins as Captain, and 59 test matches in charge of the squad. Showing the utmost humility in standing down now, and after four challenging years at the top, his predecessor, Andrew Strauss says of the former captain "he will go down as one of the greats".

So what has this got to do with Music? Well, it is well known that Alastair Cooke spent his prep school years mastering his cover drive on the Battersea Park playing fields as a pupil at St Paul's Cathedral School and chorister at the world famous cathedral. More famed for its boy trebles filling the vast dome with mass settings at evensong and singing for the Queen as part of their daily lives, it is remarkable that Cook managed to combine two great passions. Cook puts much of his extraordinary resilience as a batsmen down to his musical training, and once said "The musical training taught me to focus my mind, before playing in an orchestra taught me how to truly concentrate. If you miss your moment in an orchestra, there is no forgiving." Having spent a period of time as Director of Music at his Alma Mater, I can understand why he gives his chorister training great credit as he looks back on his extra-dentary career as a test cricketer. The choristers enjoy the immense privilege of performing stunning music daily in the inspiring cathedral, however what goes on day in, day out behind the scenes is what really develops a unique skills-set in the children: teamwork, the discipline of sitting through hours of rehearsals, services and performances, taking yourself out of your comfort zone on a daily basis, automatically putting your hand up if you make a mistake in rehearsal (this is second nature), maintaining the highest standards of professionalism, keeping up their morale even when things don't go to plan and generally understanding what excellence is.

You certainly don't have to be a chorister or attend a specialist music school to reap the rewards of music. This week at St Leonards, I have heard over 80 Junior School children perform in our two informal concerts in front of an audience of over 180 pupils, parents and staff. I have heard the children belt out hymns in assembly week after week, and I know the weekly congregational practice is a highlight for every single child. On Monday morning, one of our Year 6s stood outside the entrance to the school with me, serenading families in on the snare drum he plays in the pipe band; it brought a smile to each child. Pupils tear up to their class music lessons each week, our Year 2s inspire me with their group violin classes and music of all genres fills the senior school quad from the adjacent music school at all times. Being in St Andrews, we also have the joy of high quality music all around us, with plenty for families to enjoy with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra in residence. Quite rightly, music enjoys very high standing at St Leonards, and the impact this has on our pupils must never be underestimated. Just to add a little well known research into the mix, music acts as a trigger for the brain, enabling us to remember emotions, events and information. Music aids our co-ordination, supports children with dyslexia, supports self-esteem, boosts their ability to learn, builds teamwork, brings children together, notably increases confidence, but is also great fun.



St Leonards
St Andrews, Fife

Sadly, the relevance of music is underestimated in many schools as local authority budgets are cut, and this is cutting off a major artery of growing up: music is as vital as the nourishing food we give our children to eat; it needs to be consumed daily.

The joy children will have in playing music or singing with others as they grow up will never cease, whether it be local ensembles and orchestras, choirs, musical theatre groups, their own bands, or just playing the guitar on the beach with friends. The ability to genuinely appreciate and have a love for music will stay with children for life.

As St Leonards continues to celebrate our strong musical identity, I urge parents to expose their children to a range of different musical genres; introduce them to classical music from a young age; get your young children learning a musical instrument at a young age and keep the motivation going. Once your child develops a passion for music, grasp it, cherish it and never let that go, it will be one the greatest gifts you can give them.