

50¹⁹⁹⁸
YEARS OF
**YOUTH
MUSIC**
in Leicestershire



“ At the age of thirteen I had been playing the cello for three years, and had passed a number of Associated Board examinations. I was delighted when my Headmaster told me that the County Music Adviser, Mr. Pinkett, was setting up a County Youth Orchestra. It was to come together for the first time the following Saturday, and he would like me to attend. My cello lesson was on Saturday morning, and there was no time for the lesson to be changed. We agreed that I would go for my lesson and then on to the orchestra.

The lesson ended at 10.30 and after wandering around in the maze of streets in the Sanvey Gate area, I eventually found the school. I decided that I could not interrupt the rehearsal, so decided to wait outside. The hall in which the orchestra rehearsed was adjacent to the entrance from the school yard, with a number of windows looking out into the yard, or in my case, looking into the hall. I found myself a strategic point where I could observe the proceedings, and decided that it would be sensible to wait until the end of the rehearsal before presenting myself. The truth really was that I was too frightened to go in, and much too shy to present myself before so large a group.

I waited and waited. The rehearsal which should have finished at 12.30, eventually ended fifteen minutes late. This was to become standard practice for many years to come. Eventually, I plucked up courage and with considerable apprehension went in to introduce myself. Most of the musicians were waiting to collect their bus fares, and those who had been successful were scurrying around to make a quick exit to catch buses home. Since I was too shy to join the queue, I had to wait until all had been dealt with before I could present myself to the conductor. He looked at me inquiringly, and I stammered: “Could you do with another cellist?”

Eric Pinkett was younger than I expected, his twinkling eyes and impish sense of humour masked the outward signs of his morning's toil and effort. He greeted me with enthusiasm and a barrage of questions. Where was I at school? Where did I live? Who was my teacher? Finally, he agreed that I could join the orchestra, and would be pleased to see me the following week. By this time almost everyone had gone. However, many chairs and music stands were left to put away. I stayed on to help. This was a task which was to remain with me for many years.

For me, Eric Pinkett was one of the nicest men that I had ever met. From that moment he became the major influence in my life. His enthusiasm and drive, combined with his unrivalled talents as a teacher and animateur, influenced the lives of not only me, but many pupils in Leicestershire schools. If you were lucky enough to play in his orchestra, then you were doubly blessed.

Malcolm Fletcher March 1998

Cover portrait of Eric Pinkett, OBE, Principal Music Adviser for Leicestershire 1948 - 1976 by Bryan Organ. The portrait was presented to Leicestershire County Council's Collection of Works of Art by the Directors of Mays Audio Visual in memory of Samuel May, 24 May 1979.

1976
2011

Eric Pinkett rightly became a legend in the history of music education. His work in Leicestershire has been emulated by many Local Education Authorities since. In his book *Time to Remember* published on the 21st Anniversary of the County School of Music, he describes the beginnings of the first orchestra which Malcolm Fletcher joined on the first day. Pinkett writes "Thus in May 1948 there began the Saturday morning routine, which has continued without pause for these 21 years. There were about 60 players, mostly strings, with only one cellist and very few violas, one flute, one oboe and a host of brass wind..... week by week, I added fresh members to the orchestra, just as soon as they could blow or scrape well enough to make a tolerable sound" (*Time to Remember*). The Saturday morning tradition continues 50 years on with ten bands and orchestras, ballet and dance groups, Indian music and Dance, Steel Pans and Youth Theatre groups reflecting the wider brief of the organisation now known as Leicestershire and Leicester Arts in Education.

Pinkett found instruments in junk shops, friends' attics and by advertising in the press. We still have some of those instruments, added more over time through the good offices of the LEA and fund raising and of course the National Lottery. Pinkett's County Youth Orchestra soon made more than a 'tolerable sound'. Under his conductorship, the players achieved excellence both nationally and in Europe where the orchestra went on many successful tours. Many famous conductors and composers worked with the orchestra over the years and extended the range and quality of the musical experience for young people in Leicestershire. They included Sir Adrian Boult, Douglas Cameron, George Weldon, Norman Del Mar, Andre Previn and, above all, the late Sir Michael Tippett who worked with the Orchestra in the 1960s and continued to be its patron until his death in 1998.

Sir Michael Tippett



Stewart Mason, Pinkett's Director of Education, was an ardent supporter of the County School of Music and went on tours with the orchestra. In a postscript in *Time to Remember*, he writes: "What a great day it was when past members of the County School of Music after finishing their higher education in music started coming back to teach in our schools... We have seen over these 21 years, the musical life of the County at every level getting richer and richer - and at every level the programme becoming more ambitious and more creative." In 1998 there are ex members of past orchestras still teaching as peripatetic instrumental teachers and music teachers in Leicestershire schools. In 1976, Eric Pinkett finally retired. After such an inspiring reign, his successor had to be special. Andrew Fairbairn, Director of Education from 1971 - 1984, takes up the story.

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Eric Pinkett's last great accomplishment was the easy integration of the City of Leicester's bands and orchestras into the Leicestershire School of Music because of the reorganisation of Local Government in 1974. Such was the County School of Music's reputation nationally and internationally that the process was appreciated as being in the best interest of children and students.

1977 - 1984

With the great support of Nathan Harris, Chairman of the Leicestershire Education Committee in 1977, we were fortunate to appoint Peter Fletcher. Peter was then Chairman of the Dalhousie University's Music Faculty in Nova Scotia, and before that had been Staff Inspector for Music in the Inner London Education Authority. His recruitment of a first rate band of peripatetic instrumental teachers, the introduction of much contemporary repertoire, of Douglas Young as Composer in Residence, major overseas tours, concerts in St. John's Smith Square, recordings etc., and tireless development of the School of Music to a new pitch of excellence was legendary. Peter brought into focus the choral side of music which had tended to be obscured by the powerful development of the instrumental and curriculum aspects of the work. His establishment of the Leicestershire Chorale as a teachers' choir and of the Loughborough Singing Week are examples. He may have been a thorn in the flesh of the office, but the results until his move to be Principal of the Welsh College of Music & Drama in 1984, were outstanding and second to none in Great Britain.

To follow the Pinkett era, I reckoned that it was important to select someone charismatic, but different in character and approach; someone with excellent musical credentials, wide experience of music education and who would make an immediate rapport with students and insist on the highest possible standards. I wanted someone who would maintain and enhance the Leicestershire Schools' Symphony Orchestra's and the School of Music's reputation as the best in the United Kingdom.

Peter Fletcher



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**Andrew Fairbairn, Director of Education from
1971 - 1984**

Stuart Johnson



Peter Fletcher left the School of Music in 1984. His successor did not have to be sought in far off regions, he was near at hand. Stuart Johnson was Peter's Vice Principal at the School of Music and Head of Strings. Keith Wood-Allum, Director of Education from 1984 -1994, decided that the continuation of the County tradition would on this occasion be best in the hands of a man who knew the system and who was a distinguished performer in his own right.



Stuart Johnson was awarded an Associate Board scholarship to the Royal College of Music where he studied under Antonio Brosa, led all the major orchestras at the College, won the Tivadar Nachez and W.H.Reed prizes and the Vaughan Williams and Countess of Munster awards and was presented by Irene Truman with a Ceruti violin. He later won a British Council/Spanish Embassy scholarship to study the violin in Spain.

Stuart Johnson has enjoyed a distinguished career as a soloist, conductor, teacher, and orchestral and chamber music player. In addition to appearances on TV and radio and in film work, he has played in several professional orchestras. He joined Leicestershire from the Hallé where he played under Sir John Barbirolli.

Stuart Johnson was Principal Music Adviser to Leicestershire and Principal of the School of Music from 1984 to 1993. As Musical Director and Principal Conductor of the LSSO he has conducted the Chamber Orchestra and the LSSO in the UK and abroad and at such prestigious events as International Singing Weeks, the Montepulciano and Cheltenham International Festivals. He continues to retain a close link with the Leicestershire Arts in Education Service.

Stuart Johnson and I shared a commitment to the continuing development of music in the County and a determination to broaden musical opportunities for young people. This resulted in greater emphasis on chamber music, rising numbers of students on Saturday mornings, the expansion of Indian and Afro-Caribbean music, schools concerts for more than 10,000 pupils a year, and a review of the LSSO repertoire and the format of Gala concerts.

Highlights of our nine years' association included the unveiling of a bust of Sir Michael Tippett commissioned by the Friends of the School of Music at a LSSO concert at Loughborough Town Hall to celebrate his 80th birthday; the LSSO inaugural concert at the Bath Festival when

Sir Michael conducted the orchestra in his Ritual Dances; and a triumphant concert in Strasbourg when I was able to eavesdrop on a French audience astounded at the accomplishment of such a young orchestra.

I should like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the valuable support of Leicestershire's Appeal for Music and the Arts, the Michael Tippett Bursary Foundation, the Friends and the Governors of the School of Music and the parents.

None of this would have been possible without the excellent work of the staff of the School of Music and Stuart Johnson's enthusiasm, commitment and ability. His retirement in 1993 was a great loss but it has afforded him the opportunity to develop his career as a performing musician and soloist. His reward is to see so many professional orchestral seats occupied by former LSSO players and the many more whose quality of life is enriched by the enjoyment of music making acquired during their years at the School of Music.

**Keith Wood-Allum, Director of Education,
1984-94.**



1993 brought sweeping changes to the School of Music. With the government's directive to delegate the maximum amount of money to schools, it was decided that the Education Department should be completely restructured. There was to be a small Directorate and services would be reorganised as business units selling to schools. As part of this radical reform, it was decided to amalgamate the County School of Music with the School of Dance and Drama, a younger but equally energetic and respected service. The new combined service was to be known as Leicestershire Arts.

Business units required managers not Principal Music Advisers. Stuart Johnson and Maurice Gilmore, the Principal Adviser for Drama and Dance both retired and Bernard Powell, Vice Principal of the School of Music, was appointed unit manager. He had a formidable task. Firstly, he had, in a matter of a few weeks, to come up with a pricing structure to sell instrumental tuition and dance and drama to schools to recoup the arts money which had been delegated. Secondly, he had to weld two very different services together. Thirdly, he had to manage the transfer of the School of Music from the Rowans to the Dance and Drama base at Knighton Fields Centre. The pressure was immense but Bernard succeeded and, ironically, now schools and subsequently parents could pay for the service, the instrumental tuition expanded with many more pupils taking lessons. The LSSO was taken over by Don Blakeson, a distinguished trumpet player and Vice Principal of the old School of Music.

Don Blakeson



Despite the enthusiasm of the staff involved across the Education Department, the market philosophy began to show cracks. Some services almost became independent of the LEA, some competed with each other. It was time for a reassessment. Keith Wood-Allum retired as Director in 1994 and his successor was Jackie Strong.

“My move to Leicestershire in January 1995 was a very positive choice. It was an Authority with a reputation for good comprehensive education, a commitment to inclusive community education provision and with a record of creative initiatives including imaginative support for the Arts. Soon after my arrival I remember standing on the balcony in the large entrance at County Hall listening to a ten piece Brass Ensemble which had just won a major competition in London. The sound was wonderful! My throat constricted and my heart swelled with pride to think that I had inherited such a wonderful tradition fuelled by a commitment to young people's music making.

However, over the past fifty years times have changed. Music, dance and drama in education no longer receive financial patronage such as enabled their development in the past. The budget for making music has been delegated to schools under education legislation. With other pressures on the curriculum few schools feel able to support, financially, individual tuition but most facilitate parental, and thus pupil, partnerships with the high quality peripatetic music team based at Leicestershire Arts in Education. It says much for the interest of parents that the quality of music in the County remains at such a high level. With parental financial support, encouragement from schools and a small subsidy from Leicestershire County Council this professional team continues in the tradition started fifty years ago and manages still to feed top class musicians through continuing training into every quality orchestra in this country and many abroad. On the way these young musicians pass through Leicestershire's bands and orchestras producing glorious music for our pleasure and our pride.

Jackie Strong, Director of Education 1995 -

After steering Leicestershire Arts into the market place, Bernard Powell retired through ill-health. Jackie Strong asked Peter Baker, the manager of another education service to take over. Peter had been in the County for twenty years in a number of roles but he had always had a feeling that his first appointment in 1977 by Andrew Fairbairn to a post as Head of Educational Technology had not been uninfluenced by the part of the application form referring to other interests which stated Bass Trombone, Cambridge University Music Society (CUMS). His chickens had finally come home to roost.

As an ex English and Drama teacher and a former Head of Creative Arts in a teacher training college, Peter was particularly keen to make the organisation work as an arts service offering young people a wide range of performing arts opportunities and offering the schools curriculum support in the arts. As well as exceptional music expertise, the service also had a nationally recognised Ballet scheme, contemporary dance and youth drama groups. Programmes at the De Montfort Hall and other venues continued to develop an even more cross arts flavour. And then came another reorganisation.

In 1974, Eric Pinkett had the task of integrating Leicester City's music service into the county with local government reorganisation. With the perversity which plagues government reform, in 1997 it was decided to separate the county, the city and Rutland into three education authorities once again. This was not without its problems, but the City decided that it wished to continue to support the arts service and, with a change of name to Leicestershire and Leicester Arts in Education Service, the phoenix rose from the ashes to continue to serve the young people of both authorities. Don Blakeson retired at this point and Russell Parry, Head of Instrumental Tuition, took over the LSSO. Fittingly, in May 1998 as this programme goes to press, the LSSO has won the Sainsbury Youth Orchestra of the Year Award - a prize of £3,000 and a concert on Classic F.M.. And so we end where we began, with a member of the 1998 LSSO, fifty years on. Jon Hargreaves is Principal Oboe:

1998

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The Alarm Rings... Oh NO! Just another half an hour in bed please! It is the weekend!

A sentiment which I'm sure has passed through the mind of every member of the LSSO at one point or another, yet the weekly slog at Tchaikovsky and the like always wakes them up (at least during the rehearsal, if not before!) What is it then, that manages to drag 100 teenagers, without the energy to kick and scream, from warm beds every Saturday morning since 1948?

The main attraction for all LSSO players, and the network of younger orchestras, bands and chamber groups that has grown around it has to be enjoyment. The sheer thrill of playing music in such a large ensemble with friends is just one of the LSSO's gravitational pulls. Another of these forces is the experiences to be had with the orchestra, not just as a musician. The orchestra plays twice each year at the De Montfort Hall and often goes abroad to play in Europe (recently Italy, Belgium, Czechoslovakia.) Apart from being jolly good fun and jolly hard work, these are opportunities for members to experience the life of a touring musician, and to get to know one another both socially and musically.

The high standard of intensive coaching offered and received by members is extremely valuable for so many members past and present who have entered, and doubtless will continue to enter 'the profession' after having left the LSSO.

I wonder if I will be so pre-LSSO this Saturday morning as Mendelssohn summons me once again through my alarm clock.

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Acknowledgements

To Gillman & Soame for the centre photograph of the 1998 LSSO with their conductor Russell Parry at the De Montfort Hall.

To photographers unknown for the photographs of Sir Michael Tippett, Peter Fletcher, Stuart Johnson and Don Blakeson.

*To Leicestershire County Council for extracts from **Time to Remember** by Eric Pinkett.*

To Leicestershire's Directors of Education, Andrew Fairbairn, Keith Wood-Allum and Jackie Strong for their contributions.

To Malcom Fletcher and Jon Hargreaves for their contributions.

To all the present and past staff of the County School of Music, the County School of Dance and Drama, Leicestershire Arts and Leicestershire and Leicester Arts in Education for making it all work over the years.

To all our students since 1948 wherever you may be.

Acknowledgements

“I was quite sure that children everywhere should be given the chance to play instruments and thus be able to take part in music making.” Eric Pinkett, Leicestershire’s first Music Adviser on the beginnings of the County School of Music in 1948.

“The opening concert of the Leicestershire Schools Festival of Music at the De Montfort Hall was an exhilarating triumph for all concerned.” Leicester Mercury 1965.

“Arts in Education is now a combined performing arts service for music, dance and drama which has built on the traditions of the County School of Music and the County School of Dance and Drama. It has extended the opportunities for young people in the arts and given us new mountains of achievement to climb and new battles to fight to maintain what in 1948 was a unique service and in 1998 is no less unique in its range of provision.” Peter Baker, Head of the Arts Service on the 50th anniversary of the County School of Music 1998.

“Leicestershire Arts in Education staged their Spring Gala Concert on Sunday at the De Montfort Hall when all four orchestras performed, together with the Chanterelles Choir and the students of the Ballet Scheme, and what an excellent display it was. If this concert is an example of what is to come, then music and the arts are alive and well in Leicestershire.” Leicester Mercury 1998.



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