



'Making such a difference'... students in rehearsal for a forthcoming event.



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"I've got a dream for my students to perform at the Royal Albert Hall. I want to fulfil that dream," he confides.

They are well on the way to this goal, for they performed at the London Palladium in 2015: "the London Palladium in 2015 made people take notice, with 1,400 people in the audience."

This is important, for, as David explains: "it gives the pupils purpose and status. They are musicians."

David continues: "Rather than focusing on their disability, all

students are treated as musicians and Southend Mencap, the charity which runs the project, has only the highest aspirations for what can be achieved by everyone involved in this unique

innovation."

However, there are no formal music requirements for joining the project, just enthusiasm and a desire to work hard, which seem a very reasonable exchange.

They are now preparing for another show at the same prestigious institution, on October 15, 2017, called "Music is Magic," and David hopes to have at least 2,000 attendees this time.

Tickets are free and national charity Royal Mencap is supporting the event, so this is a great opportunity to show support for the cause and have a great evening of entertainment.

What's more, they are attempting to set a Guinness World Record attempt for the largest triangle ensemble, with 2000 triangles at the upcoming concert; not satisfied with ground-breaking outreach work, David is setting the bar higher with record breaking!

As a classically trained pianist that attended the Royal Academy of Music, he has all the credentials to ensure his pupils stay up to scratch technically. And it is perhaps this element of his approach that makes him so successful. His project does not stem from a desire to emphasise difference, but insists that everyone has the ability to engage in high quality and disciplined music making.

The project has been professionalised to such an extent that David is paid, they can pay for the hire of the halls, and each member pays a membership fee, which respects the participants autonomy: "it is an adult exchange" that respects everyone as individuals, he insists.

However, David still has frustration that the success of their project is nowhere near matched by much bigger, more resourced charities, who do not manage to put on the

shows of The Music Man's calibre, which is why he really wants the project to expand and improve even more.

Nonetheless, they are getting good exposure, and Sir David Amess MP is a patron of the project. As such they have played at all events in support of the Southend Alternative City of

Culture.

The group also had a stand where they played music to all participants of the London Marathon this year: "You could see the runners at the end of the race see this group of pupils cheering them on and playing chariots of fire."

You could see them smile and pick up again, because seeing these performers and their enthusiasm is so inspiring" just one example of the happiness the group spreads.

David explains that they have also received tremendous support from the community of Leigh, and they were recently in receipt of a donation from various local Rotary clubs, which contributed to their Palladium production and ongoing expansion.

David does maintain that is an innate musicality to certain people with learning difficulties, and he has been truly staggered by their abilities. When writing the music, he is "playing to their unique musicality. I create lots of patterns [in the music], and this bypasses certain parts of the brain."

Further, there is something for everyone to do; attendees that have partial paralysis have musical parts written for them, and every participant is essential to the final sound.

It is clear that David is at the cutting-edge of developing provision for adults and children with learning difficulties, and his approach has been both innovative and mindful.

One example that he cites is of an autistic pupil, who was so upset by the presence of others that she would scream, and who is now performing on stage with the whole ensemble.

"It takes a lot of patience and it is exhausting but you can make such a difference," he beams.

"I get very motivated by the parents too, seeing them so proud."

The project's success is largely down to David's focus and enthusiasm, and his refusal to see those with learning difficulties as less able to perform.

His energy and hard work are incredibly admirable, and goes to prove what a passion for your subject and an unquenchable

egalitarian drive can bring, making him a shining example and a truly outstanding citizen.

David is surprisingly modest in his achievements and it is wonderful to be able to report on a story so unbridled in hope, good will and not least, the prioritising of excellence.

Of course, music is so life changing and bringing the gift of this, not just to the performers but the audience too, is a very special one.

And here again, David is ahead of the game; charities are now following suit, writing of music's importance to wellbeing, which is obvious to anyone who has ever worked with it and in it.

Further evidence of their key role in current trends is that The Music Man Project supports doctoral research at the Royal College of Music into the effect of musical participation on health and wellbeing for people with learning disabilities.

The partnership, initiated through Maldon regional director and Royal College PhD student, Natalie Bradford, includes performances, workshops and undergraduate training to prepare the next generation of specialist music educators in this sector.

He is a unique and driven person, proof of which are his three priorities for all groups that follow The Music Man Project's lead: "it must be edifying, engaging, and lead to a performance."

He continues: "I have a dream that in 20 years time, I could go to any part of the county and hear people singing The Music Man Projects' songs in their own groups."

We can only hope that his dream, which started off in Leigh, will slowly spread, and continue to add colour to people's lives for many years to come.

If you are interested in donating to, or joining The Music Man Project, visit their website at [www.themusicmanproject.com](http://www.themusicmanproject.com), visit their twitter page @MusicManProject, or search The Music Man Project in Facebook. Be sure to support them at their concert in October.

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