

The magic of the Music

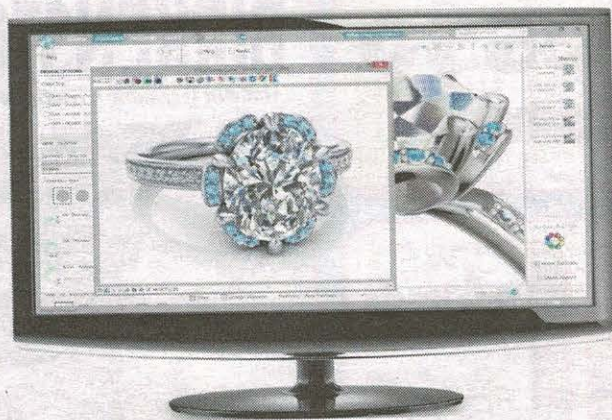


Leigh's David Stanley pictured with members of The Music Man project.

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Man Project

LEIGH'S most proactive music teacher is starting a small revolution all of his own.

Sixteen years ago, David Stanley, 39, began a journey that would lead him to create the UK's first full-time music education service for adults and children with learning difficulties.

A dad of two who lives in Western Road in Leigh, David was already a deputy head teacher at Eastwood School.

He decided to launch the specialist charitable position because, in his own words, he "wanted to develop the musical instinct within us all to instil confidence, self-esteem and as a vehicle for joy and emotional expression."

These are very admirable aims, and it was through his old friend Tony Pheasant that he had first began leading Southend Mencap weekend musical workshops with children and adults with learning difficulties in the early 2000s.

The group allowed David to enable everyone to "access their innate musicality, regardless of their learning difficulty or special educational need."

So popular did these sessions prove that David eventually made the decision to throw all his energy into the scheme, and started The Music Man Project full time:

"In 2012 I left my job at the mainstream school where I was a teacher. It was the best decision I ever made," David laughs.

With the regrettable cuts to music education occurring at schools nationwide, he decided his talent and energy would be better channelled elsewhere, and this daring decision has certainly paid off, not least in the way that it has become a veritable trail-blazer for similar groups.

"It's a real mission for me, I suppose!" he agrees.

Never before (somewhat unbelievably) has there been a formal music service for adults and children with learning difficulties, and David's sterling work has provided an invaluable and easy-to-follow template.

"Yes, there's nothing else like it," says David, smiling almost in disbelief that no one had thought of it before.

Report by SOPHIE SLEIGH-JOHNSON

The Music Man Project provides the same opportunities afforded to aspiring mainstream musicians by offering the best tuition, instruments, musical repertoire and performance platforms available.

Success

Testament of its success is that there are now groups in Maldon, Suffolk, Sussex and Kent. There is even a group operating in South Africa following David's teaching trip there last Summer to establish the first international branch.

Even more impressively, David himself writes all the music performed in the group, making this an astounding feat of creative work and continued effort.

This means that the group's output is all original material, and all the more impressive for it.

David has just self-published "The Music Man Project Songbook," which, developed over 16 years, contains his music and lyrics by Southend regional director Jenny Hitchcock.

It is designed specifically for adults and children with learning difficulties and to this point has been generously shared free of charge.

And its not just a book of scores; it comes packed with training mentoring and support to other musicians, schools, charities and arts organisations, making it an invaluable tool for other groups to use.

The group has been in receipt of much praise. They were winners of the 2016 "Kids Count Inspiration Award" for Most Creative Contribution, and finalist of the 2016 "Aviva Community Fund". David was also a finalist of the 2017 Music Teacher Awards for Excellence (Best SEN Resource). Further, the Prime Minister described the project as "tremendous" and OFSTED have also described him as "outstanding."

This is not surprising, and his cheery confidence and unstoppable enthusiasm is infectious. His patience is also immeasurable, and he always insists on excellent musical standards, a discipline that lends the proceedings professionalism and instils pride and self-reliance in the musicians.

David maintains that it is key to perform to large audiences to instil confidence in their abilities.

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