

Phoenix Singers' Friends – summary for 2022 AGM

As most will already be aware, we have been deploying the donations to the Phoenix Singers' Friends programme to fund group choral singing lessons for the junior Firebirds choir at Sir Robert Hitcham's Primary School in Framlingham for several years now – to great effect and for many young people! Whilst the pandemic put all of this on hold, choral singing lessons have now recommenced this academic year, led by the excellent singer and vocal coach, Megan Peel. William and I met with Helen Picton (headteacher) and Kate Mawson (head of music) at the primary school last week. The Firebirds junior choir has started well for this academic year, albeit with singer numbers down somewhat as the young students re-engage with a full curriculum and a fully reopened school after all the disruption. In addition to the ongoing choral singing lessons, we also discussed helping to fund in-school music workshops by external singing and instrumental groups as well as visits to professional rehearsals and/or concerts at Snape Maltings to inspire the youngsters, many of whom have not yet experienced the excitement and emotions of live classical music. The national curriculum will soon require schools to provide increased opportunities to experience live music and we hope that we can help to support and fund this for children locally. Kate and Helen will be coming to thank us for our support at our rehearsal on 2nd November – when we will also hear more about their plans for the young singers, including singing with us in our shared Community Carol evening at St Michaels in Framlingham on Wednesday, 14 December.

For those who may have missed it, here is Kate's lovely report on the Firebirds activities and successes over the last academic year, all generously funded by the Friends programme donations – with so much troubling news and uncertainty around, it's worth reading – again!

"This academic year we have had nearly 40 members of the choir ranging from Yr3 to Yr6 (7 year olds to 11 year olds). It has been interesting to see how they have dealt with being choir members - working together as part of a team - following on from the impact of 2 lock downs on these pupils' social, emotional and personal development. We are finding that our pupils are displaying behaviour expected of children perhaps a year or even 2 years behind what we would normally expect. Therefore, Megan is working with some children with "interesting" behaviours and a number of neuro divergent pupils. She is doing a brilliant job! Our trip to the Snape Maltings Celebration of Schools was an excellent opportunity for our pupils to gain a different perspective on life - a bigger perspective on which has inevitably become Framlingham centric and ego centric. The opportunity to sing with others in a world-famous concert hall has filled our children with a sense of awe and wonder which we have so missed. Missing out on performing the Christmas concert with the Phoenix Singers was sad but the children did become confident (performance standard) with a large repertoire of songs which covered a range of genres and emotions - allowing our children to use music as a fantastic mode of expression and a means of letting their emotions out. To work with such an experienced professional as Megan is a privilege for our pupils. She is building up a good relationship with them and extending their musical knowledge through all she does in rehearsals. The development of their singing technique is exciting to see too - they are making a very good sound now. It has been very beneficial to have the extra time with Megan this year - enabling us to consolidate and build upon skills in a consistent and constructive manner weekly.

It has been a shame that we have not been able to work with Rob Gildon this year - it was hoped he would be able to deliver some workshops with us but we have only recently invited non-essential visitors into school and this has had an impact on these planned workshops sadly. It would be really lovely to explore this possibility next year as singing is proving to have hugely beneficial effects on our pupils wellbeing and it would be great to offer this opportunity to work with Rob Gildon to all of our pupils not just those who are able to attend Firebirds rehearsals after school.

Here are some quotes from the Firebirds:

"Most exciting experience ever!"

"Quite nervous as I had to do a solo but as soon as I walked onto the stage my nerves disappeared" - this child dissolved into tears the first time she sang her solo in a rehearsal and through sheer determination and some nurture work, she felt so incredibly proud of her incredible achievement. This child has always had anxiety issues, so what an achievement!

"It felt really good fun!"

"I really enjoy singing in The Firebirds - it makes me feel good"

"I love singing with my friends"

"I really enjoy learning new music"

"It was entertaining and fun. One of my favourite days EVER!"

This term we are finding we are competing with after school sports clubs but still have a strong contingency of keen and enthusiastic singers. We are hoping to make a music video (!!!!clever Megan!!!!) and sing at a little concert once our music pod is up and running.

I would also like to say how much I enjoy working with Megan, she is a super addition to life at SRH. I feel incredibly lucky to have the opportunity each week to share and make music with such an inspirational expert teacher and coach with an exceptional sense of humour and huge heart - the children's best interests are always central to all she does. Thank you to The Friends of The Phoenix Singers for their continued support with singing at Sir Robert Hitchams'. We do all really appreciate it!"

This is a great way of us all giving young people their first taste of choral singing - with a great teacher - and help to keep alive the love of singing together - which is why we all meet on Wednesday evenings!

On behalf of the school and the young singers, we hope that you will continue to support or wish to join this programme where possible – as a guide, we suggest a minimum of £30 per individual, £50 per couple for a year's support please – a number of Friends have given generously in excess of this – and we are very keen to add to the existing choral training with workshops and exciting live music experiences at Snape Maltings concert hall.

If you would like more information on the Friends' programme, please speak to Peter Moorhouse or call him on 07767 320153. If you are a new supporter, please jump straight in and make payment on-line to Phoenix Singers at 40-25-31, account number 52495880, and please add Phoenix Friends/your surname to identify your payment. Alternatively, please let Peter or Keith have a cheque made payable to Phoenix Singers.

On behalf of tomorrow's young singers and music lovers, very many thanks for your support!

Peter Moorhouse

September 2022