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Tobin Music News

Warwickshire to Pilot Tobin Music by Julie Hall

September sees the beginning of the Tobin Music System pilot for Warwickshire County Music Service, the first music service in the UK to run a project of this kind. I will be training all the curriculum music teachers and other group and instrumental teachers throughout the year. They will have access to the lesson plan format Tobin Manual and new materials that am in the process of writing and I will be able to mentor and support colleagues throughout.

I began working for Warwickshire County Music Service last September, it's been a very good year and I've thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to visit so many schools. My work has mostly been with year 6 classes, I've been involved in a special project to help improve academic achievement through creative input. I've only been able to visit each of the schools for ten, one hour sessions. However, I like a challenge and decided that seeing as they were aged 10 and 11 I would have them composing.

At my interview I presented Simon Grimshaw and Diane Slater with my vision for a 10 week scheme:

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| Week 1 – Rhythmic Shorthand | Week 6 – Time signatures and beating time |
| Week 2 – Note Lengths | Week 7 – Primary Chords and Ear Training |
| Week 3 – The Great Stave | Week 8 – Harmony |
| Week 4 – The Musical Alphabet | Week 9 – Composing on the C chord |
| Week 5 – Coloured mnemonics and coloured shorthand | Week 10 – Composing short melodies using the primary chords |

I had set myself quite a task but, as ever, the system didn't let me down and the children were absorbing each concept quickly and thoroughly. The class teachers regularly told me they were amazed at how much the children had learnt, and themselves! Simon and Diane came to observe me on week 7 at one of my schools the children easily learnt all their simple time signatures and how to conduct duple, triple and quadruple time in 20 minutes. The lesson was assessed as outstanding; Simon and Diane were so supportive and encouraging and wanted the rest of the music service to benefit from the system.

Upon meeting Andrew Atkins, the head of the music service I was delighted to see that he was just as enthusiastic and he had exciting plans for the system. Imagine my surprise when Andrew invited me to speak to over 100 of my colleagues on the last day of term. This took place at Wellesbourne HRI not far from Stratford and I had 30 minutes to present the system. Tobin Trustee and teacher Maggi Griffiths, Tobin teacher Sarah Spare, Richard Tobin and Chris Hall kindly came to support me and the Gods of technology were smiling upon me. With the aid of a huge screen and my laptop I was able to present a series of animated slides and film clips to show how the system helps all ages and abilities; from a shy, reception child to an A* GCSE music student. Andrew spoke enthusiastically about the pilot year and said he is proud that Warwickshire is the first county to implement the system and to have access to the new materials.



The summer break gave me the opportunity to prepare for the pilot; there is a lot to do but I have a feeling it will be a great adventure.

Launch at Herts University a success

FDMX* at the University of Hertfordshire hosted the launch on Monday 13th July 2009 of a new series of DVDs demonstrating the Tobin System of Music Education. This exciting project is the result of a collaboration venture between FDMX and the Tobin Music Trust to revolutionize the way that music is presented in the classroom.

The Tobin Music System is a multisensory approach to the teaching and learning of music. Candida Tobin devised and implemented this unique approach to teaching music which removes the mystery from fundamental concepts, making music literacy accessible to all. Young children may learn quickly to understand, play and compose music after just a few weeks of tuition.

The eight DVDs show teachers demonstrating the various aspects of the system in the classroom. This four year undertaking was made possible by funding from FDMX's Innovation Fund.

Rob Francis, Chair of the Tobin Music Trust, thanked all who contributed to the making of the DVDs, especially Julie Hall, who directed, scripted, helped to edit and took part in the films, and Bo Lindstrom, the producer.

Martina Porter, Project Manager of The Innovation Centre, University of Hertfordshire, said: 'FDMX have been delighted to be involved with the development and production of the DVDs. We believe the DVDs are an excellent resource to support the work of the Tobin Music System.'

*FDMX is the Knowledge Exchange for film, TV and digital media. We work closely with industry and education partners to offer business and sector support, skills development, careers help and training, networks and research. For more information visit www.fdmx.co.uk

New Associate Teachers

We are delighted to report that the following teachers have completed and passed the Associate Teacher Course. Courses took place in Thaxted, Essex and in Tamworth, Staffordshire.

Congratulations to the following Associate Tobin Teachers:

Gabrielle Graham – Reading
Lee Op Den Brouw – Reading
Helen Whitehead – Royston
Caroline Blount - Chertsey
Catherine Begley - Essex

Charlotte Helsby – Horsham
Sam Harris – Tamworth
Faye Ellard - Chelmsford
Richard Jeffries - Derbyshire
Annabel Bradford- Royston

Julie Hall writes,

I was fortunate to train Lee Op Den Brouw on the course in Thaxted last term. It has been a pleasure to get to know Lee and her presentation was stunning. At the moment, Lee is visiting her home country of Australia and instead of putting her feet up and having a well deserved rest, she is voluntarily visiting a number of schools to share her Tobin skills with children and teachers.

You can see from the photograph that Lee has already made beautiful resources for the Saturday morning classes, the Tobin teachers were all enchanted and anyone with children aged 5-7 in the Reading area can be assured of a magical music discovery with Lee. It would be extremely beneficial for them to take a place in her class.

Saturday Morning Tobin Classes in Reading, Class leader - Lee Op Den Brouw
For a place in Lee's class call: 0118 9667541

Discuss how the system has affected your teaching and what the system means to you.

The following article by Lee Op Den Brouw was submitted as part of her associate course.

My first response to the Tobin System was one of relief, and then excitement. Here, at last, was a well-structured programme of learning that looked like it might be fun for both teacher and student. The system has transformed the nature of my piano teaching in three ways: it has affected the content of my piano lessons, given me the confidence to take on new aspects of piano teaching, and unleashed a steady flow of creativity.

With regard to lesson content, rhythmic shorthand seemed the simplest place to start. Students immediately enjoyed the challenge of writing down rhythm. The use of colour and the neat arrangement of grids on a page meant that students soon had vivid evidence of their own success. Using French time names also made rhythmic accuracy in pieces more achievable. In particular I am thinking of Kate, a less able Grade 1 exam student. Counting, keeping a pulse, or trying to echo each phrase played by the teacher at best met with partial or temporary success. With persistent encouragement to articulate the French time names as she played, Kate mastered the tricky dotted rhythms and learned to sustain the half notes and whole notes for their full length. She soon gained confidence in her ability to play rhythmically. Her sight-reading also improved once the French time names were articulated while playing. This is one of the things I appreciate most about the Tobin system: that it allows the less gifted child to experience success.

An understanding of the Magic Circle and Primary Chords has led students into improvisation and composition. In pre-Tobin days, these skills were only followed through successfully with students who instinctively sought to express their own musical ideas. Now improvisation and composition provide a practical and creative path for all students to understand the nuts and bolts of music.

Megan (Grade 3) is improvising. Sian is composing melodies. Philippa (Grade 2) is using chords and their inversions and a variety of broken chord patterns to create accompaniments for nursery rhymes. Of course the title and structure of the piece affect the choice of accompaniment too, so a discussion of character and musical form becomes necessary. The Tobin method and teaching materials enables all this to fall into place. Teaching harmonic principles has opened up new paths to explore; made piano lessons more varied; and improved the musicianship of my students. The Tobin System has given me the confidence to take on much younger students because it provides a wealth of ideas and activities that engage the minds and bodies of five year olds.

Success with a few individual students has inspired me to start a Tobin Music Class for youngsters. I know that these classes will be fun, stimulating and give children a firm foundation in musicianship skills. Using the G Clef, F Clef and five Cs as landmarks, and introducing tetrachord patterns within the first term means that young pianists explore the whole keyboard from the outset. Their confidence and visible pleasure in leaping round the keyboard speaks for itself. Transposition of easy pieces and knowledge of numerous scales allows children to develop facility on the black keys, improves their technique, and fosters confidence with accidentals and key signatures at an early stage.

More recently I have asked parents to take an active part in the lessons. They have joined with us to play the Coloured Shorthand game on chime bars, playing the scale and improvising within a given key, or taking their turn to conduct. Parents were surprised at the level of concentration required by these activities. There was laughter all round when they were the ones to interrupt the steady beat! Similarly, asking parents to try their hand at 'The One Man Band' has given them new respect for their talented children. This gives children a boost and, for the parents, highlights the value of what their children are learning.

The Tobin System demonstrates that colour acts as a simple and powerful magnet. So now colour takes centre place in the music room. As you walk in the door children see a magic circle of seven round cushions, chimes and blocks, or a large floor mat of the great stave with colourful notes splayed across both staves. Students and parents appreciate these attractive displays and voluntarily create their own versions at home once they see how the activities accelerate learning.

The use of colour and creativity throughout the system has inspired a steady flow of my own creative ideas. Over the years I've spent hours making various teaching aides – for example, a piano tutor using seven animal characters to teach the keyboard notes. So it is heartening to sense that my own creativity continues to thrive while implementing the Tobin system. This makes my teaching more rewarding and vital.

Let me elaborate. Beginners are asked to build an oversized keyboard from large pieces of coloured felt. This helps them learn the keyboard notes and think about the structure of the keyboard. Vivid colours, soft felt and the visually stunning result make it a popular activity. Rebecca's first question in the next lesson was 'Can I make the coloured keyboard?' Colour evokes a natural enthusiasm for learning.

To introduce conducting in 2,3 or 4 time, I made special batons with coloured ribbon attached at one end. Children enjoy producing a loud crack with a strong downbeat or choosing the colour that expresses the mood of the music: warm brown or bright yellow, fiery red or vibrant green, royal blue or magical purple. The ribbons make long flowing lines of colour, like a visual representation of the sound. Such multi-sensory activities enliven the lesson and have particular appeal to visual and kinaesthetic learners.

Since implementing the Tobin method, my students are more enthused and their parents more involved; my lessons are more varied and I teach with greater clarity and purpose; I am excited about teaching five year olds, and my own creativity continues to thrive. Little wonder Candida was so fervent that her method should mushroom. She knew that this method could transform the nature of music teaching, just as it has for me.



The Tobin Music Trust will be taking part in the following Conferences;

18th - 20th September National Association of Musical Educators (NAME), University of York

23rd -25th October Schools Music Association (SMA) Bristol

News Contributions

We would love to hear about your news and any outstanding pupils. Please send all contributions, of no more than 200 words, to:
newsletter@tobinmusic.co.uk

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