

GRAND UNION ORCHESTRA

visits Sawston Village College



Sawston
Village College

We are very grateful for the support of The Arts Society South Cambs which allowed us to host a visit from five musicians from the Grand Union Orchestra at Sawston Village College in March this year. It gives us great pleasure to present a short report on the day.



Pupils from the primary schools enjoy their concert.

First, the musicians gave a concert to pupils from two of our feeder primary schools.

150 pupils attended this concert from Years 5 and 6, and gave very positive feedback.

Following this first concert, the Grand Union musicians held a workshop for pupils studying Music for GCSE. There is a full report on this workshop on page 3.

The Concerts

Finally, Grand Union Orchestra finished the day with a concert for 240 Year 7 pupils.

All the pupils in Year 7 are currently completing the Bronze Arts Award, a qualification accredited by Trinity College London, for which they have to write a review of an arts event. (This is Part B: Be the Audience, one of four parts (A,B, C, and D) in the Award.)

After the concert, pupils wrote their reviews in their Music lessons. Below are a selection of these, together with some photographs.

My event was watching the Grand Union Orchestra play different instruments. This concert took place at the Henry Morris Hall on 15 March 2024. There were five musicians there, all playing different, unique instruments. Yousuf Ali Khan played the tabla and also used his voice; he also made us groove some moves along with a funky upbeat tune. Louise Elliott played the tenor saxophone and the flute; the flute helped to make the music elegant and peaceful. Andres Lafone played the bass guitar; this made the music have more depth and



sounds in it. Joshua Brandler played guitar. All these instruments helped the room to have a funkier atmosphere and they also worked well accompanying the other instruments. The last musician, Ruijun Hu, played the dizi and xiao (Chinese bamboo flutes). These helped the music pieces have different sounds. The musicians all came from different countries: Bangladesh, Australia, Uruguay, Jamaica/Switzerland and also China. I liked how the musicians involved the audience. I learned from the experience that even though people are from different countries and places in the world, you can still come together and play music.

I would recommend this event to others because it is a really good experience to listen to instruments that you probably have not heard before. I will share my review with my friends and my classmates. Next, I would probably like to go to a play or an art exhibition because it is a way to learn new things.

Beth Gilmore, Year 7



Everyone in Year 7 watched the Grand Union Orchestra play lots of different instruments. Yousuf Ali Khan showed us the tabla. Louise Elliot showed us the tenor saxophone and flute. Andres Lafone showed everyone the bass guitar. Joshua Brandler introduced Year 7s to the guitar. Ruijun Hu showed us the dizi and xiao. We attended this concert in the Henry Morris Hall on 15th March. There were five people in their band. Yousuf is from Bangladesh. Louise is from Australia and Andres is Uruguayan. Joshua is Jamaican and is also from Switzerland. Ruijun is from China.

Yousuf sang to us by saying random words in a rhythmic order that made them sound good. They showed us a fun dance that they taught us to dance to with their music. Louise walked around the Henry Morris Hall playing her saxophone. I liked the fact that they showed us loads of different instruments. I did not like that most of the songs sounded the same to me. I learned that there are loads of unique instruments that come from all around the world. I would recommend the concert to people who enjoy music because it was inspirational.

I will share my review by telling people I know about it. Next, I would like to go to a museum that is all about an artist because it is interesting to learn how they became who they are.

Zara Berry, Year 7



On Friday, 15th March in the Henry Morris Hall at Sawston Village College I listened to musicians from the Grand Union Orchestra play music from all over the world. There were five musicians and they were called Yousuf Ali Khan, who played the tabla, Louise Elliott, who played the tenor saxophone and the flute, Andres Lafone, who played the bass guitar, Joshua Brandler, who played the guitar and Ruijun Hu, who played the dizi and the xiao.

We listened to Yousuf Ali Khan sing some tabla bols, which are rhythms that he has learnt. We heard Ruijun play two different Chinese flutes. Finally we heard Louise Elliott play a few different songs on the saxophone and the flute.

I enjoyed how we got to contribute to the music by clapping to the beat and dancing. I also enjoyed listening to the unusual pieces of music. It would have been better if the musicians had spoken more clearly and loudly. I have learnt more about music from different countries. I would definitely recommend this concert to anyone who wants to listen to a unique kind of music.

I am going to share this review with a friend, and I would like to attend a dance performance or a poetry reading next.

Alice Davis, Year 7



The Workshop



During their visit, the Grand Union Orchestra musicians gave a workshop to GCSE Music pupils. Below, **Year 11 pupil, Shihua Zhao**, writes about her experience of this.

On 15 March, around 35 Music GCSE pupils from Years 10 and 11 welcomed five visitors from the Grand Union Orchestra, who are (as their name suggests), an ensemble with the most diverse musicians that I have personally ever encountered: from China, over to Bangladesh, to Uruguay, just to name a few.



They showed up with a most unusual combination of instruments, ranging from woodwinds and electric guitar to Chinese flutes and tablas. I initially wondered how these different instruments were going to fit together and create coherent music, but after hearing them play, I saw that they indeed were able to do so. They used the strength of every one of their instruments, adapting them whilst still maintaining the instrument's character, so to say.



After all, that is what the Grand Union Orchestra is about - to explore how "different communities can work together", create mutual appreciation and widen each other's horizons. This is an attitude that I think we can all benefit from adopting; it not only applies to music, but to our daily life, too.

The main part of the workshop was to learn and play a Classical Indian composition by one of the visiting group's members - Yousuf, a Bangladeshi tabla player. The Grand Union members taught us Yousuf's piece step by step, and we had to learn it by ear - a relatively new experience. Despite that, all of us managed to play it well within 1.5 hours; some of us even got to improvise a few solos, as is tradition in Indian Classical music. Even though Year 11 had learnt about North Indian Classical music as part of their curriculum, playing this style of music is a whole other level. The amount of detail that can only be learnt by playing Indian Classical is immense, so I am glad to have had this opportunity.

The Grand Union musicians were visibly enjoying themselves, as were we. Essentially, us 40 or so musicians in room MU1 became another 'Grand Union' (or 'Petit union', perhaps?), with everyone unified by this peerless experience of playing traditional music with a mix of modern and traditional instruments.

All in all, this workshop was a truly unique and enhancing experience. It pushed me beyond familiar boundaries and taught me a great deal about music, and what it really is about. I believe that I can speak for all of us, pupils and teachers, when I say that we walked away as more mindful musicians and richer human beings.



If you would like to share in our experience of the day, we have made a short film with footage from the Year 7 concert and from the GCSE Musicians' workshop.

You can find the Concert/Workshop film by following this link: - <https://vimeo.com/936600401>.

Below, you can also find the information that was sent to us by Grand Union Orchestra about their musicians in advance of the day.

Yousuf Ali Khan, Bangladesh. Tabla, Dholak, Voice: Yousuf comes from the same famous dynasty of musicians as Ali Akhbar Khan, and began playing tabla at the age of five, later studying in Calcutta. He came to England in 1980 at the invitation of Leicester music service, to help set up South Asian music teaching. He has worked extensively as a music teacher/workshop leader and performer ever since. An internationally-known performer and accompanist for Bangladeshi and Indian musicians visiting the UK, he has worked with GUO for over 20 years.



Louise Elliott, Australia. Tenor Saxophone, Flute: Louise was originally known for her work with cult rock outfits Laughing Clowns and Ed Kuepper. She has worked with distinguished African & South American musicians, including Mervyn Africa and the late Clifford Jarvis and 'Prophets of Jazz'. She has performed with British jazz guitarist Deirdre Cartwright and recorded with Annie Whitehead and Jah Wobble. Louise joined GUO in 1984. Her own ensemble The Jazzhearts, was described as an "African-inspired jazz explosion". Her compositions were premiered at Brighton Festival in 2006 and she often plays at Ronnie Scott's.



Andres Lafone, Uruguay. Bass guitar. Born in Uruguay but resident in UK for many years, Andy studied bass guitar, composition, guitar and double bass at Guildhall School of Music. He has recorded over 30 albums and appeared at all the major Jazz/World Music Festivals in Europe and other parts of the world including China, Japan, USA, Latin America and South Africa. He is the producer of several albums, and has had success in Spain and Italy with his compositions 'Cada Vez' and 'Aquela Esquina'. He has also written music for theatre companies, including play 'Maybe Tomorrow' for Kazzum Arts & 'El Pan de Maria' for Tierra Theatre.



Joshua Brandler (Jamaica/Switzerland) bass, double bass, drums, voice: Josh is a graduate of the Grand Union Youth Orchestra and now leads the Grand Union ReGeneration Band for emerging artists. He is a self-taught multi-instrumentalist and is a flourishing professional musician, teacher and workshop leader specialising in Caribbean music. He is also a record producer and works on his own material with his afrobeat and funk influenced band, and is also part of a jazz duo and his own jazz and soul group.



Ruijun Hu (China) dizi, xiao (Chinese bamboo flutes): Ruijun was born in the northwest of China. Initially self-taught, he has had a passion for *dizi* music since he was a child. After graduating in music in 1986, he worked as a *dizi* player in the Gansu Province Opera Troupe. He has been working in the UK since the early 1990s as both a musician and as a watercolour and calligraphy artist.



Grand Union Orchestra: <https://www.grandunion.org.uk>

Finally, we would like to thank The Arts Society South Cambs once again for the generous support which allowed this wonderful day of music to go ahead and bring pleasure to more than 400 young people.

Lesley Morgan, Arts Development Manager, Sawston Village College (19 April 2024)