

Education

St. Andrews pioneers transforming project for players and teachers

The oldest of Scotland's four most historic universities and The Sunday Times University of the Year 2020 – St. Andrews, is at the forefront of a community outreach project that is poised to provide a transformative legacy for, amongst other disciplines, the development of brass teachers and players in Fife – **Nicola Bland** reports

The University of St. Andrews in Scotland is spearheading the ambitious project dubbed StAMP (an acronym for St. Andrews Music Participation) with its Ensemble-in-Residence, the world-renowned Wallace Collection. The launch of the project coincides with the opening of the University's new, purpose-built Laidlaw Music Centre and builds on its particular strengths in brass performance, as well as upon the historic importance of brass bands to the former mining communities of Fife. The Music Centre is open to everyone, from absolute beginners to experienced musicians, whether they want to take lessons, play in groups, practice, or just go and listen, and StAMP aims to:

- Raise aspiration, attainment, and improve health and well-being by providing opportunities for children to participate in joyful music-making.
- Build strong, sustainable and supportive partnerships with schools and community groups across Fife that can nurture future music-makers.
- Energise and invigorate brass bands across Fife.
- Develop innovative methods of delivery and resources for supporting brass performance.
- Provide inspirational performance opportunities to young brass players across Fife.

The project, funded by a very substantial anonymous £500,000 donation, will run initially for five years and it is anticipated that further fundraising will see it thrive well into the future. Working in selected primary schools across Fife, P6 children will initially participate in 'Discovering Brass', a programme that uses polycarbonate natural trumpets (without valves) to teach not only music, but also aspects of history, anthropology, science and theology. When the programme concludes, children will then have the opportunity to continue their musical journey in their local brass band and several have already agreed to participate, including Kingdom Brass, Buckhaven and Methil Miners, Cupar Brass Beginners, Tullis Russell Mills and Dysart Colliery Silver.

Said Dr. Bede Williams, Head of Instrumental Studies at St. Andrews and Director of StAMP: "Brass bands across Fife have produced many fine musicians, and StAMP will reinvigorate their youth development programmes to ensure that this important form of community music-making can flourish well into the future. Joining the benefits of music education with parallel learning opportunities



Left - Dr. Bede Williams with John Wallace



from a world-class university makes StAMP particularly unique. StAMP will work with staff from across the University to develop the cross-curricular aspects of 'Discovering Brass'. Devised and delivered by those with the highest level of expertise and specialism, these projects will give pupils a chance to make connections to the wider world, develop skills and understanding, feel inspired and gain an enquiring mind."

Professor John Wallace CBE, Artistic Director of The Wallace Collection and Honorary Professor of Brass at the University of St. Andrews, forecast: "This project will not only be transformational for the young people who participate, it will also be transformational for brass playing across Scotland and further afield."

The project, which will also work very closely with the Fife Council Instrumental Music Service,

will see StAMP staff, The Wallace Collection and brass instructors from Fife Council launch Fife Youth Brass – a new flexible brass ensemble for talented brass players from across the region.

Each year, activities will be organised with the local brass band for project participants, and there will be at least three opportunities for pupils from all areas involved to come together at scheduled events as follows: In **June** for 'Summer Swarm' at the Laidlaw Music Centre; in **November** at 'Fringe of Gold' - Scotland's Wind, Brass and Percussion Festival at Laidlaw Music Centre; and at Spring Festivals in the communities of the participating bands in **April**.

Bede Williams revealed: "This is a really exciting project for children and young people across Fife. They will have the opportunity to develop their musical skills whilst also contributing to, and getting

involved in cultural activities in their local community. Learning a musical instrument can be hugely beneficial and participants of this project will get access to a range of different musical opportunities through the programme that will not only support their involvement in brass bands, but also contribute to their overall health and well-being."

Ellen Thomson Head of Outreach, University of St. Andrews Music Centre, also contributed: "The University's purpose-built Laidlaw Music Centre will be one of the finest buildings for music in Scotland, and a resource to be enjoyed not just by University students and staff, but also by the whole community of Fife and beyond. There could be no better means than StAMP to celebrate and develop the University's musical connection with the community it serves. The project harnesses both the traditional strength of brass playing throughout Fife and the Music Centre's more recent specialism in this area. It has the



Left to right: Dr. Michael Downes, Dr. Bede Williams and Ellen Thomson

potential to change the lives of hundreds of young people across Fife, thanks to the talents and energies of musicians, including the inspirational John Wallace, whom we were recently proud to appoint as our first Honorary Professor of Brass."

Meanwhile, Dr. Michael Downes, Director of Music, highlighted: "Playing music with other people is a primary source of human happiness,

and there is an enormous appetite and demand amongst young people to join together in harmonious music-making. Brass instruments possess an immediacy, which young people find attractive and our desire is to reconnect the enthusiasm of the young into a traditional Fife community strength. As Fifers, we want to develop something unique, made in Fife for Fife." ■



Laidlaw Music Centre

There are so many opportunities for brass players to continue studying their instrument alongside their main degree at the University of St Andrews. We offer:

- Outstanding visiting brass teachers and scholarships for individual lessons.
- Weekly brass chamber music coaching.
- Opportunities to perform in *Fringe of Gold* the University's wind, brass and percussion festival.
- Side-by-side performances and masterclasses with visiting professionals and The Wallace Collection, the University's ensemble in residence.

Visit www.st-andrews.ac.uk/music to find out more.



Principal euphonium of the Cooperation Band and St Andrews student, Chris Flynn.