

Lecture given by :

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## THE YEHUDI MENUHIN SCHOOL

Special Music Provision for talented young students.

The following paper sets out the facts and figures concerning the Yehudi Menuhin School.

It cannot begin to express the very special atmosphere of the school - an extended family, a community of musicians - staff and students together exploring the mysteries of music-making, attempting to reach the very highest standards, attempting to live up to the aspirations of its founder - our friend and mentor - Yehudi Menuhin - a very special musician and a giant of a figure in the twentieth century.

### **History**

Lord Menuhin was inspired by a visit that he made just after the Second World War to the Central School of Music in Moscow. He had a vision of creating similar musical provision for young musicians in the West, but it was nearly another twenty years before he was able to bring his plans to fruition.

He believed that such a school was needed for three principle reasons:

1. Young talented musicians should be brought up in an environment with other such children, and not in a lonely world surrounded by adults (a situation that many other young talented musicians had had to endure in the past)
2. Talented young players needed to be taught by the best teachers possible
3. Brilliant young performers needed to be protected from being exploited by the music world at too young an age - many young talents have been over-exposed in the concert world and not matured into great adult musicians

The Yehudi Menuhin School opened in 1963. In its first year, it had just 15 students, who were housed in a London hotel. In September 1964, the school moved, with double the number of students, to its present home in Stoke d' Aernon, Surrey (30 minutes from central London). Over the years, the school has gradually expanded. It now has 60 students, but does not intend to expand any further.

The school caters for young string players and pianists (aged 8 - 18 years old). Historically, it is the great string players and pianists who have begun their musical education very young, and it is certainly true that these musicians do have to train certain muscles at a relatively early age, if they are to fulfill their musical potential (whereas it could be argued, for example, that wind players need their second teeth all in place before they can develop their technique fully).

### **Funding**

In the mid 1970s, the Secretary of State for Education, Margaret Thatcher, instituted what has now developed into the Music and Ballet Scheme. Originally just for the Royal Ballet School and the Menuhin School, there are now eight institutions in the scheme.

These are:

The Yehudi Menuhin School Chethams (Manchester)

The Purcell School Wells Cathedral School

The Royal Ballet School Elmhurst School for Dance The Arts Educational (Tring)

St. Mary' s, Edinburgh

In all these institutions a quota of students may be funded by the government, depending on the parents' income. In the case of the Menuhin School, up to 45 of our pupils can be in the government scheme. In addition, students can remain in the scheme for a further year, if they stay at school for a third year in the Sixth Form. Thus in fact, this year we have 48 students on the scheme.

To be in the scheme, a student must either be British, or have been in the country for two full calendar years. It is a myth that the Menuhin School is a rich school, with children from rich homes. Our government money is determined by the income of the parents of those eligible for the scheme. Parents are means tested and a tapering system is used to decide parental contribution. In fact, at present, 80% of the school's annual income comes from the British Government. The fee for a student at the school is now approximately £23,000 per annum.

Students not eligible for the scheme must either pay their own fees or try to obtain scholarships or bursaries. The school, itself, raises funds for the equivalent of about six bursaries each year.

This year the school has 25 British students - other students come from China, Belgium, Switzerland, Korea, Austria, Russia, France, Holland, Ireland, America, Rumania, Iceland, Canada, Japan, Tunisia and New Zealand. This year we have 23 boys and 37 girls.

## **Entry**

On average, the Menuhin School has more than 200 enquiries each year about places at the school - last year it was able to offer 12 places. This number depends on how many students leave each year.

Prospective students usually send a video or audio tape to the Director of Music, or come to the school for a preliminary audition. The next stage is a formal audition in front of the Director of Music, Head Master and at least one of our principal teachers of the instrument in question. At the same time, the school will test (for information only) aural and theoretical knowledge, but it judges students solely on their potential as performing musicians on their principal instrument. If student and school continue to take matters further, then the student will be invited to stay at the school for 3 or 4 days, following the school's curriculum and having lessons on their instrument. This gives both the student and the school a better opportunity to ascertain if the Menuhin School is the right institution for that student. It is only at the end of this lengthy and painstaking procedure that the school would consider offering a place to a student, and it is only once the school is certain that it wants a student on musical/educational grounds that it tackles the practical problems of finance. That is to say, it offers total access to all potential students, irrespective of their family background.

Practicalities such as the balance of violinists, cellists, bass players and pianists in the school - currently 33 violinists, 10 cellists, 3 bass players and 11 pianists (all violinists play viola as well during their time at the school) - may need to play a part in the selection process - also gender, when we are sorting out living accommodation.

## **Staffing**

Senior management of the school comprises a Headmaster, Director of Music and Bursar. They report to an 18 strong Board of Trustees.

The school has over 50 members of staff.

The Music Staff:-

Director of Music

5 Violin teachers

3 Assistant violin teachers

2 Cello teachers

1 Assistant cello teacher

2 Piano teachers

1 Assistant piano teacher

1 Double Bass teacher

1 Chamber Music teacher

2 Piano teachers - teaching piano to the string players

1 Harpsichord teacher  
1 Harp teacher  
2 Accompanists  
3 General Musicianship teachers  
1 Composition teacher 1 Improvisation teacher  
1 Alexander Technique teacher 29 in total.

In addition, the school teaches English, History, Maths, Science, French, German, Russian, Art and Sport (see curriculum, below).

Our teaching staff also reflects the international flavour of the school, coming from Britain, Russia, China, Australia, Poland, Germany and Israel. Our principal instrumental teachers all either teach in addition at British music colleges and/or have careers as performers. Being so close to London, the school is able to draw on an incredible pool of great musicians. Three members of staff were themselves pupils at the school, and two others were pupils at Chethams in Manchester.

General Curriculum One of Lord Menuhin's guiding principles was that a holistic approach was necessary in the education of a young musician - that is to say that a student needs a good all round education, both musically and generally. The students spend approximately half of the curriculum on musical education and half on academic education. Each pupil has their own individual time-table, with practice time and instrumental lessons interspersed between their academic lessons.

The school is divided into 4 groups:  
A group - equivalent of Sixth Form  
B group - the two years of the GCSE course  
C group - 11-13 year olds  
D group - Primary school aged pupils

There are subdivisions within these groups for different areas of study, and most academic classes will contain 6-8 pupils. The school aims to provide its students with a minimum of 5 GCSEs and 2 A-levels. Many students take more examinations than this. Although students are not chosen in any way for their academic ability, and although they spend about half the time on academic work of their counterparts in regular schools, A-level results in summer 2000 were the best in the country (because our sample is so small, we are not included in the 'league' table published in the national press). This is no mean achievement when the amount of concert giving that we do is taken into account (see below).

Musical Curriculum Students have two (one-hour) lessons with their principal teacher each week. In addition, younger students will have at least one-and-a-half hours each week with their assistant teacher, who will supervise their practising on non-lesson days. All string players have a half-an-hour piano lesson each week, and several of our pianists have violin lessons. All the older students play in chamber groups. These have one one-hour lesson each week, and two hours time-tabled rehearsals. These groupings remain the same for one academic year. All the older string players play in the orchestra, which rehearses on Saturday mornings, with additional rehearsals during the week prior to our concerts. The school has just constituted a Junior Orchestra for the younger students. Creative music-making is at the heart of the school's work. All students have composition lessons each week and there is regular improvisation work as well. This is in addition to music theory and aural training classes. Several pianists also learn the harpsichord, and, in addition to the work of our two professional accompanists, piano students are encouraged to work in duos with string players. There is a Junior and Senior Choir, and there is a short collective musical activity (singing or rhythmic work) for the whole school, within our morning meeting each day.

Breakfast is at 7.30 each day. Students practise from 8.00-9.00am. The time-tabled curriculum ends at 6.30pm - Private Study (homework) is done in the evenings. Throughout the year, distinguished teachers visit the school to teach, give masterclasses and lead workshops. Academic staff understand that their work may be somewhat disrupted by such occasions and by the school's concert giving - this is the nature of the institution.

Concerts In the academic year 1998-99, the school gave some 160 concerts. 80 of these were internal, and 80 external. The school gives concerts as part of the educational development of the students.

External - These range from the orchestra, chamber groups or soloists playing in major concert venues in Britain and abroad, through events such as music club concerts and university concert series to 'out-reach'

concerts in schools, old-age homes, etc. The school also has a specific programme of concert giving for other school children, mainly centred around local schools in Surrey (see below). Internal - Two lunchtime concerts each week Composition concert each term Supporting Studies (second study pianists) concert each term.

## ***Outreach***

The Yehudi Menuhin School likes to see itself as a centre of excellence, able and ready to serve the wider community. Our outreach programme has several strands:- at the end of each term, our younger students perform in local schools for their peer groups and/or in local old age homes each summer, the school gives a Schools' Concert for more than five hundred school children from the local region.

These concerts are sponsored, so that the schools wishing to attend can be subsidised to do so. - Last summer we also gave a Schools' Concert in Oxford 'Menuhin's Children' - a project started by Lord Menuhin himself with 12 seven- year-olds in Guildford. One of our staff members has been overseeing this project, and the children on the scheme have become involved with the Menuhin School itself.

The scheme is about to be extended to a further three schools, and, as a result of this, the Menuhin School will be instigating Inset Training sessions for local peripatetic string teachers Music students from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama have visited and worked in the school as part of their own educational training in their degree course.

Life after School Virtually all students leaving the Yehudi Menuhin School continue their studies at a Music College. The student usually chooses the particular college in order to study with a specific teacher. A few students choose to study music at university, and occasionally a student chooses to study a non-musical subject at university. A recent survey showed that about 97% of students who studied at the school are working in the music profession. They include international soloists, such as Nigel Kennedy, Tasmin Little and Melvyn Tan, chamber music performers in quartets across the world, musicians in chamber orchestras, leaders of sections in orchestras world-wide, composers of music for the theatre and for TV and film, record producers, fixers, etc. The school would certainly not consider those not in the profession as unsuccessful students. As stated above, it is designed to give a good general education to those who are musically gifted; how each student decides to use that education is for the student themselves to determine.

## ***Plans for the Future***

Lord Menuhin died in Berlin on March 12th 1999. He was buried a week later in the grounds of the school he had founded. The great Russian cellist, Mstislav Rostropovich has taken up the baton as the school's Resident and artistic mentor. The school wishes to stay true to Lord Menuhin's educational vision. Funding from the British government seems secure, and the interest of great musicians across the globe seems as generous as ever. Murray Perahia, Andras Schiff, Zachar Bron, Bernard Greenhouse, John Lill, Bela Davidovich, Maurizio Fuks, Jeremy Menuhin and many others, have visited and taught at the school in the past two years. Applications for entry are as plentiful as ever, and there is a considerable list of potential students waiting to enter the school.

The school is not looking to expand in terms of numbers, but it is hoping to provide still better provision for its students. There are new plans to build the Menuhin Memorial Hall and Teaching Studios in the grounds of the school. At present, the school has no proper performing space and far from ideal circumstances for rehearsing the orchestra. The new hall will rectify this - a 350 seat hall with proper recording facilities and twelve additional teaching and practice studios. There are many hurdles to be overcome - planning permission, fund-raising, etc., but, at time of writing, it is envisaged that such a memorial to the school's founder might be in place by 2003 or 2004.

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