

Havelock Academy Faculty of Arts

Music Department

Initial Review of Success of new Gamelan – January 2011

We purchased our Gamelan from *Drums for Schools* in October 2010, with money very generously donated from some of our Academy Trustees. The project has had a significant impact from the very start.

In November 2010 both music teachers spent an Interaction Day (outside of the usual curriculum) delivering an introductory session to Form 1 (Year 7) students, resulting in performances to the rest of the year group. This was linked with complimentary work across the other arts subjects and technology, with the full day absorbing students in Asian culture.

From January 2011 the Gamelan has been introduced into the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP) curriculum across Form 1, to be extended upwards into other year groups shortly. It has been very well received by both staff and students. In addition GCSE students in Forms 4 and 5 have used it to enhance their ensemble performance skills.

Having our own Gamelan in the Academy has had a significant impact on our teaching of world music. The **innovative nature of the resource** is such that students can experience first hand the pleasures of playing classic Balinese instruments, creating an authentic sound that compares with the “real thing”. Instead of having to try to recreate the unique Gamelan sound on Western substitutes, we are now able to produce ensemble music comparable to that heard in Bali and across other parts of Indonesia. This is broadening the horizons of our students, raising levels of engagement and creating a genuine excitement in the classroom. **The impact on learning** has been significant, further raising the profile of music and the Arts and enhancing the international dimensions of our curriculum. I have yet to find a student who doesn't get excited about participating in live music making with this resource.

From the point of view of the teacher, the resource has hugely widened the possibilities in the classroom, making the teaching of world music far more accessible. The Teachers Guide that comes with the resource is an excellent starting point and very well written indeed, including a range of warm up activities, teaching ideas and complete pieces of music. This is probably the best approach to teaching Gamelan that I have ever come across, and I have tried or experienced many on Local Authority Gamelan instruments over the last decade.

Owning a Gamelan in the Academy always seemed unrealistic in the past due to price. However, thanks to the generous donation from our Trustees, *Drums for Schools* made it

possible with their far more accessible prices. The Premium range instruments are the real thing – and the students appreciate this. The quality of the instruments does help with the teaching of the history and traditions of Gamelan music, enabling the students to appreciate the individuality of the hand made instruments and the links with spirituality. Whilst the resource was obviously very expensive in terms of cost, it is a long term investment that will provide years of music making for hundreds of young people. Hitting the ageng (largest gong) and then listening to the beautiful, sonorous sound, is an experience that you never forget. The fact that the pack provides enough instruments for a full class does mean that you don't have to have any "observers", and everyone can be involved, which is so often not the case when going to play a Local Authority or Music Service Gamelan. The instruments are not just exciting to play; they are spectacularly stunning to look at – the quality of colour, painting and carving is outstanding!

The best quotation yet came from an eleven year old boy who said, after spending a double lesson learning the basics on the Gamelan with the rest of his class,

"Thanks for that Miss. It was like a trip across to the other side of the world. You could feel the spirit in the big serpent watching us and making us play better. We sounded wicked! When can we do it again?"

Best Supplier

The product range at *Drums for Schools* seems to be one step ahead of most suppliers at the moment. We have purchased Gamelan instruments and African Djembe from them, both of which have been of the highest quality. The class packs are ideal for any established or newly set up music department as they provide everything a teacher needs to get started straight away – from teaching guides with audio CD examples, to the full range of appropriate instruments. As a newly accredited IB World School we were very keen to dramatically expand our provision for World Music but very worried about the cost implications of doing this. *Drums for Schools* made this possible without going over budget, but without having to compromise on quality.

Drums for Schools are only a phone call or email away. The customer service is excellent, with fast responses to any enquiries and any problems resolved quickly. This is crucial when dealing with schools as time is so very precious. The website is very user friendly and easy to use, with a lot of useful teaching information in addition to the products. It is far more than an "online shop", but more like a useful teaching resource in itself.