

Saint Ultans Orchestra – A Dream Come True!

Even before Saint Ultans opened, the vision for this Education and Care project included affording the children a rich and varied experience in The Arts – Music, Visual Arts and Drama.

When Saint Ultans opened in September 2006, one of the first people to call to see us was Carmel Dunne, Director and Founder of CEOL Ireland. Carmel asked if we would like the school to be involved, along with the other primary schools in Ballyfermot, in the pilot phase of the CEOL music education programme.

Of course we were delighted and said YES! – That was the start of a great working partnership between CEOL and Saint Ultans. As our first music programme, CEOL set the bar very high in terms of the quality and richness of music education that all the children are receiving every week as part of the curriculum. They learn song singing, music composition, rhythm, pitch, listening and responding to music, how to read music etc.

But we have something else to thank CEOL for – when we went to look for funding to start an orchestra, Carmel and the CEOL team were right behind us and through partnership with the VEC and Kylemore College of Music, offered to part fund teaching hours for violin for our In-School Strings Programme.

Music is a central part of life and learning in Saint Ultans. Every child in every class from pre-school upwards learns to play violin at the weekly class lessons in the Music Room. With these lessons right through primary school, every child will be able to play violin at a proficient level by the time they are 12 or 13. Being able to play an instrument is a wonderful gift that can enrich a person's life right from childhood through adulthood. It is also a 'gift' that can be shared with and enjoyed by others – family, friends and the wider community. Parents of children in Saint Ultans can be very happy and proud that their children now have the opportunity that many of them didn't have to learn a new skill and develop their talents in music.

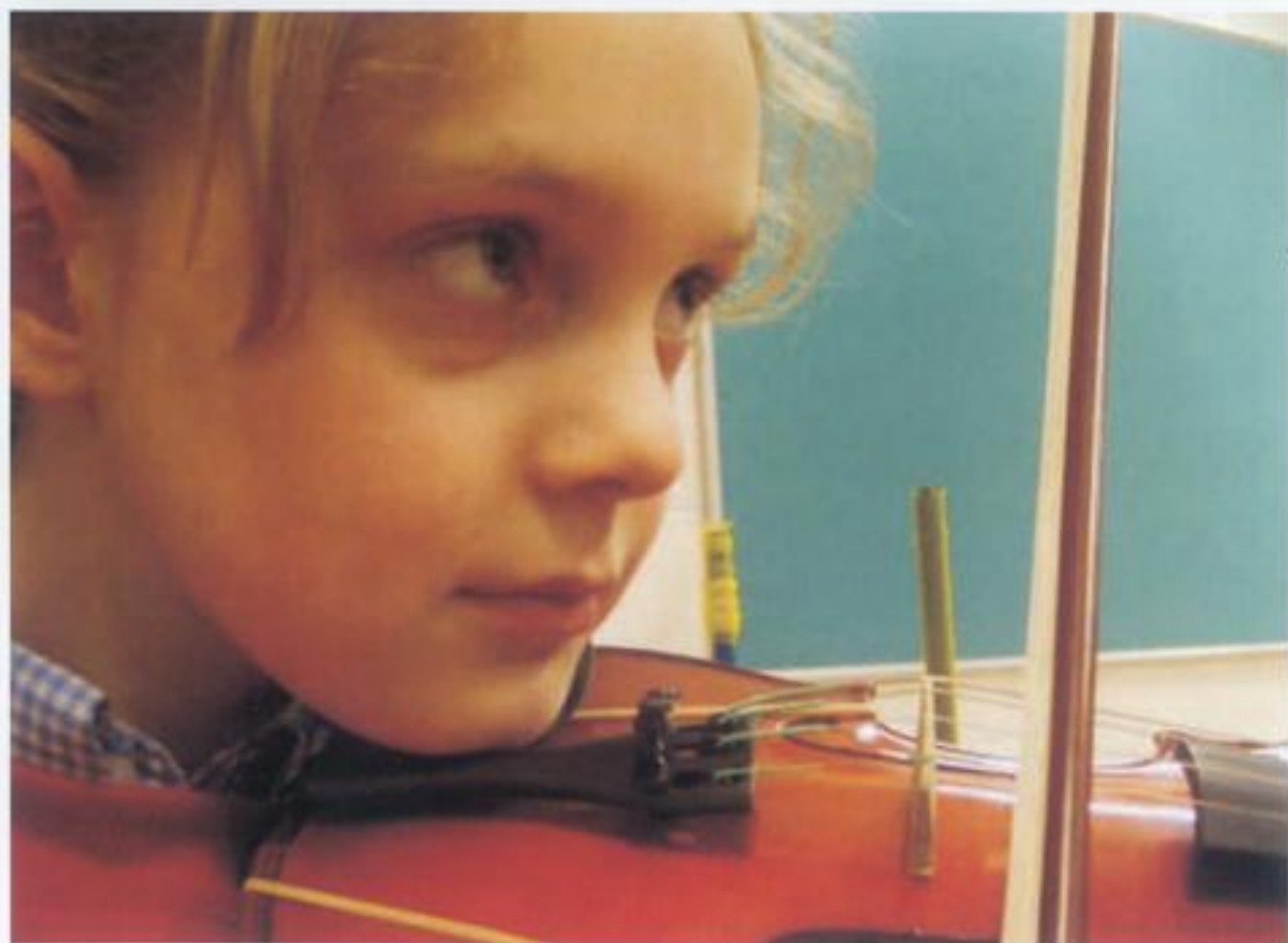


Learning violin is of course a wonderful end in itself – but the teachers have also noticed the positive effect it can have on all aspects of learning in school. The children are better at concentrating, better at maths (counting, fractions etc), and reading, their body coordination (balance, movements etc) improves and it helps them to mix well with others and enhance their emotional development. We all know the uplifting feeling of music – when we are tired or feeling low – music can cheer us up. It is the same for the children – we notice that they are in much better form and cheerful after music lessons!

Now, with all this talent in violin the children need a forum to come together and play and entertain others! So - thanks to the combined efforts of Dublin City Council, the School Completion Programme (Ballyfermot A), CEOI and the VEC (Kylemore College of Music) Saint Ultans Orchestra was born!...

All the children in 2nd Class are members of the Orchestra and children from the other classes will have the opportunity to join the orchestra next year and on into the future as the orchestra expands. Every Tuesday Sarah Lane (Orchestra Leader) takes the Orchestra from 2.30-3.30pm. The children love it! With the new shiny black music stands, their music scores in front of them – they lift their violins. Then, under the baton of conductor Sarah Lane, the orchestra begins to play – as if they were in on the stage of the Royal Albert Hall!

Saint Ultans Orchestra Committee (which includes staff members from the school and care service) help out at Orchestra lessons – tuning violins, arranging sheet music, music stands etc. Saint Ultans Orchestra will concentrate on establishing and embedding the Strings (violin, viola, cello and double bass) in the first 2-3 years. A little percussion will also be incorporated (xylophone, cymbals etc) slowly over time. When the orchestra is at the right



stage of 'development' we hope to expand to include the woodwind (clarinet, flute, trumpet etc).

Our first big public performance is in the National Concert Hall on the evening of April 27th. We have been invited by Gerard Flanagan (Head of Music, Kylemore College of Music) to make a 'guest appearance' at the Kylemore College of Music Concert. There is great excitement as we currently finalise our performance schedule.

Next year, we hope to offer violin classes as part of our Home/School Parents in Education Programme. Wouldn't it be exciting to have parents and children - two generations from the community of Cherry Orchard playing violin side by side? As the children grow up and further develop their interest in Orchestra, they will need a 'Cherry Orchard Youth Orchestra' to move on to. And indeed, when they have grown into adults they will need a 'Cherry Orchard Community Orchestra' !

Saint Ultans Orchestra IS the foundation and the breeding ground for a Community Orchestra. I have no doubt that in the future when people hear the name Cherry Orchard - they will immediately think 'oh, isn't that where they have the community orchestra' and 'aren't they big into music over there...'

The planning for / foundation of a Community Orchestra could be part and parcel of the Regeneration Process for Cherry Orchard. In Saint Ultans we will do everything we can to make that happen!

Ena Morley (Principal, St.Ultan's NS)

