

# London Music Masters: the sound of lives being changed

A new scheme set up by Victoria Sharp to address the lack of cultural diversity among performers and audiences of classical music is making music part of the core curriculum in primary schools.

By [Rupert Christiansen](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturecritics/rupertchristiansen/) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturecritics/rupertchristiansen/>)

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For the drought ahead, we will desperately need more people like Victoria Sharp. An American art historian married to a former Goldman Sachs banker and living in London, she isn't just some Lady Bountiful doling out money to artistic causes that take her fancy, but a creative and committed philanthropist on the model approved by the new government. Talking to her is humbling and inspiring.

Mrs Sharp describes herself with unnecessary modesty as "a bit of a classical music

nerd", who serves on the London Philharmonic Orchestra's trust and the Royal College of Music's council. Her three children all play stringed instruments – she had a proud-mum moment recently when two of them played Bach's Double Concerto at a relative's wedding – and, when she reflected on what pleasure their skills were giving them, she felt moved to help other children on to the same path.



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Through her RCM and LPO contacts, and with the success of Venezuela's El Sistema scheme to guide her, she has set up London Music Masters, which is focused on young people learning to play strings and designed to address both the absence of a major violin competition in London and the lack of cultural diversity among performers and audiences of classical music.

The LMM Awards scheme doesn't just give cheques to prize winners. Awards of three years' duration are made to three violinists in the 18-28 age group. As well as financial support and the chance of some prestigious engagements in major venues, the winners are also assigned mentors who can give both artistic and career guidance.

But there's a crucial element of payback, too. These violinists are also required to contribute to music in their communities (one of them is based in Hanover, another in South Bronx), and specifically to help with LMM's other scheme, the Bridge Project, which has adopted two highly challenged and ethnically mixed south London primary schools, Jessop in Brixton and Ashmole in Kennington.

Here music has become part of the weekly core curriculum from reception year, embracing more than 250 children. As well as a grounding in musicianship, each participant is given his or her own violin. They are then taught in classes through a mixture of Kodály, Suzuki and traditional methods, delivered by advanced students from the RCM, who earn some useful pocket money towards the expenses of their own training.

The schools are also visited periodically by the award-winners, and there are trips to hear classical music at another of LMM's partners, the nearby South Bank Centre.

The project, which has been running only since 2008, runs on a seven-year cycle: after three years, a second stage will select children who show any talent, give them more individual opportunities and offer the chance to change to the viola or cello. Quite how it will end, who knows?

Victoria Sharp has thought about it all meticulously, but she admits that she's still fine-tuning the model. "It's open to modification and the lessons of experience. But, whatever happens, I am absolutely determined to see it through."

One continuing problem is securing the active support of parents, many of them from African or West Indian cultures where European classical music rarely means anything: the Somalis have proved a particular struggle. A big boost came when Boris Johnson paid a visit earlier this month to a Bridge Project lesson at Jessop and had the children laughing hysterically at his characteristically inept attempt to join in.

"Incentive is important. We hand out stickers and badges galore," says Mrs Sharp. "But the goal isn't to

produce a clutch of super soloists. If one child went on to study at the RCM's junior department, that would be the icing on the cake. The point is to feed music into the holistic development of the child and nurture their discipline, concentration and confidence.”

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