

OPINION

Giving young people access to the arts will protect Jersey's amazing musical community

WITH great power comes great responsibility, or so the saying goes. Although usually applied to superheroes it is a phrase which could apply equally as well to the conductor or leader of any music choir or music ensemble.

As conductors we are entrusted with many responsibilities, not least the legacy of the group we stand before. Sometimes the longevity of these groups surpasses the age of the conductor themselves. Their history is part of the Island's rich and bountiful musical heritage, which needs to be protected and nurtured.

Earlier this month the Jersey Music Association organised a 'Come and Sing Messiah' at St Helier Methodist Centre. The assembled company came together from choirs across the Island to celebrate and share the joy of singing Handel's most famous composition, The Messiah, which was written in 1741. The iconic piece was performed from the balcony of the same church where, more than 65 years earlier, in May 1956, a similar performance took place by the choirs of the day – the Jersey Gleemen, Jersey Ladies Choir, Vauxhall Ladies Choir and the Jersey Evening Institute Choir. Reports of that event in 1956 extolled the quality and magnificence of the performance, citing it as 'the most outstanding musical occasion in memory'.

Music features at the heart of many significant annual events in the Island each year, as we mark occasions such as the Queen's birthday and Liberation Day. For the bands and singers taking



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part these events are important traditions. They are part of their heritage and provide their members with an opportunity to play a part in an important moment.

Other traditions include annual concerts, such as the Festival of Carols at St Thomas' Church, which has been taking place each December for more than 50 years. Each concert marks the passing of another year and is another entry in the musical history of the Island, not just for those taking part but also for



the audiences for whom attending these events each year is an important part of their cultural life.

During 2021 the Government of Jersey commissioned and approved a new five-year Arts Strategy for Jersey, committing to invest 1% of overall government expenditure in arts, culture and heritage from 2022. The strategy sets out many admirable objectives and priorities, including a vision that the arts are not just a key element of lifelong learning and wellbeing but also provide pathways to participation across civic and social life.

It recognises the value of coming together as a community to share in the arts; the benefits that come from bringing people from many different backgrounds together to share a creative experience. These benefits extend far beyond the direct experience for the individuals

involved, with the arts often being used as a means of much-needed fundraising for local charities. In the case of the Jersey Music Association's 'Come and Sing Messiah' money was raised for local children's charity Brightly, in keeping with the annual performances of The Messiah conducted by G F Handel himself every year from 1749 until his death in 1759 and which raised money to support the Foundling Hospital in London.

Music sits at the heart of our community in so many ways and has done for many years. It has helped raise spirits and raise funds; it has helped people of all ages cope with the problems they face and show support for others in need; and it has helped mark important occasions in our Island's calendar.

Recognition of all these things within the Arts Strategy is very welcome but equally important is the aim of the strategy to ensure that the arts be inclusive, affordable and equitable, and that every young person has the right to access arts and culture with school and community settings. It is these aims which will hopefully protect the future of the amazing musical community which exists in the Island and, in the hands of those who teach, lead or conduct, help nurture the next generation of performers who, in another 65 years' time, will come together on a balcony in a church in St Helier and raise the roof with the Hallelujah Chorus.

■ **Annette Blanchet is a member and treasurer of the Jersey Music Association.**

DO royal tours achieve anything? Does anyone really enjoy them? Is it not a bit weird for wealthy white rulers to be paraded for the well-rehearsed adulation of poor black citizens? The British government may see the Cambridges' tour of the Caribbean as a chance to extend old customs into a new century but if, as it seems, people don't want them there, what's the point?

THIS, if we believe our Prime Minister, is the outlook for Vladimir Putin: 'He has been in a total panic about the so-called colour revolution in Moscow itself, and that's why he's trying so brutally to snuff out the flame of freedom in Ukraine'. This is exactly what the world wants to hear. Snag is, Boris has form for presenting wishful thinking as facts. So is his assessment of Putin the whole truth, or just a Boris truth?

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SUPPOSING the proposed swap of fighter jets between Poland and the US had gone ahead. What would it have achieved? The Ukrainian air force would have acquired a few old Mig jet fighters designed to operate from modern runways. And in the age of cruise missiles, nothing is more vulnerable than a runway.

THERE once was a warplane designed to fly and fight from concealed woodland clearings. It was the British jump-jet, the Harrier. If some of them could have

been spirited into Ukraine, they might have been a game-changer in today's conflict. But like so many useful bits of kit, the Harrier was declared obsolete and scrapped.

IN the same way, some soldiers fighting the 1982 Falklands War thought how useful mules and barrage balloons would have been in that conflict. But they, too, had been abandoned years before in the name of progress. What happened to the Army's old mules? I am indebted to the website of The Army Rumour Service (ARRSE) for some answers. According to one old soldier, the mules are 'no longer used in the British Army but are still cooked'. Another suggests: 'I think the mules moved on to higher positions in command.'

PROUD grandad moment. Our live-in

grandson is two. He has no idea what a week is or what a player is. Yet at Rugbytots, he's just been named Player of the Week. It's called getting 'em young.



■ **The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge are on a tour of the Caribbean** Picture: JANE BARLOW/PA WIRE

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