

Cornish School Celebrates Benjamin Britten's Centenary

Pupils from an independent school in Truro played homage to celebrated English composer Benjamin Britten last week, when they held a lunchtime concert in his honour.

The school hall at Polwhele House was filled with voices as the children performed some of Britten's songs, in order to commemorate the centenary of his birth.

Involving various ensembles from the school, including the school choir, girls' choir and choristers, the pupils performed a selection of Britten's folksong arrangements, selected songs from his collection for children titled *Friday Afternoons*, as well as other individual songs.

Polwhele House's newly formed girls' choir performed two songs - *Be Gone Dull Care* (from *Friday Afternoons*) and *The Birds* – which saw their second public performance.

Nick Hawker, Deputy Headmaster and Director of Music at Polwhele House, commented:

“As a choir school we wanted Polwhele House to acknowledge not only Britten's outstanding contribution to the musical life of this country, but also celebrate his wonderful music for children's voices. We recognise the importance of singing and this sits comfortably with Britten's focus on children's voices – therefore it was paramount that we marked the occasion.”

In addition to the extensive music programme offered at Polwhele House, the school also educates all 19 of Truro Cathedral's boy choristers.

The concert featured their head choristers, who are currently preparing for their grade 8 singing exams, each singing one of Britten's folksong arrangements.

Alex McCullough, Headmaster of Polwhele House, was overjoyed by the event saying:

“We focus a great deal on music at Polwhele House, offering numerous extracurricular activities as well as timetabled music lessons. It was fantastic to be able to see the pupils combine all of their skills and celebrate the achievements of such an important and influential musician. The children performed spectacularly and I am sure all will agree it was a brilliant concert.”

Benjamin Britten was an English composer, conductor and pianist born on 22nd November 1913 who went on to become one of the 20th century's most recognised classical figures.

During his life's work, one of Britten's musical focuses was to write for children's voices - many of Britten's most sophisticated works such as *The War Requiem*, his opera *Peter Grimes* and his cantata *St Nicolas* have significant roles or parts for children.

It is said his mother was delighted to find that her son's birthday coincided with the feast day of St Cecelia - the patron saint of music, meaning there was a double reason to celebrate at Polwhele House last Friday.