

Performing Arts Update – Autumn Term 2010

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I would like to wish you a warm welcome back to Guangzhou and to The British School. As I write this update I can hardly believe that a year has passed already and what a year it was, filled with some fantastic performances, productions and musical events – the KS3 Fusion production still lingers as a fond memory from the summer term and I am now looking forward to making some more exciting musical memories in the year to come. This update is to give you some news on what will be happening in the department and to hopefully give you an insight into our work as we go through the year.

New Faces

The Performing Arts department has grown again as we expand our PIMS programme, 1-1 instrumental lesson programme and launch the Music GCSE course in Year 10. I am delighted to welcome the following new members of staff:

Jilly Witcomb – Teacher of Drama

Jilly was Head of Drama at The British School of Muscat for 7 years and is really going to bring Drama to the fore here at BSG as well as taking a key role in preparing and delivering our productions here at BSG.



Deirdre Graham – Music TA

A graduate specialising in folk music from the Scottish Academy of Music, Deirdre is going to be inspiring students in music across the key stages as well as teaching some Foundation Music and PE



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Jack Manning – Teacher of Guitar

Jack is an immensely talented guitarist and joins us on a gap year before heading off to the Royal Northern College of Music to study music – Jack's recent performance in assembly has already won him some new followers and we look forward to hearing his students perform in assembly during the year



Queenie Xu – Teacher of violin and PIMS violin

Queenie is from Hunan province and is a graduate from the esteemed Xinghai Conservatory here in Guangzhou. Queenie's enthusiasm has already infected our KS1 students and she shall be looking to spread her love for the violin to the upper campus too.



I am certain you will join me in welcoming them to the BSG community and helping them to feel welcome as they settle in to life at our school.

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New facilities

New faces and new facilities! Over the summer holiday a significant amount of rebuilding and investing was done to improve the performing arts department yet further. The existing Science laboratory was converted into a second fantastic music room and the former keyboard suite was converted into a Music ICT suite sporting the latest in iMac technology and music production software. Watch out for budding DJs, music producers and arrangers making the mark on the music industry from their initial experiences at BSG. The new technology is going to be key in delivering elements of the GCSE Music course and will transform the music department approach to composition at Key Stage 3.

In addition, our Theatre has been upgraded to a great Drama teaching space and students have already been enjoying a more active approach to the subject, exploring physicality and vocalising with great effect! We are aiming to expand Drama yet further next year with the addition of a new Drama studio at the end of the new Secondary school wing.



PIMS programme

The PIMS programme continues to go from strength to strength with excellent standards of teaching and a real sense of fun in the lessons too. Students receive two forty minute lessons per week with a professional musician and learn with their class and class teacher, experiencing the joys and frustrations of those first stages in learning an instrument. Students are learning the following instruments this year:

Year 1 and Year 2 – Violin

Year 3 and Year 4 – Flute

Year 5 – Trumpet

PIMS will expand again next year as we intend to introduce clarinet into Year 4 and cello into Year 2, as well as expanding PIMS upwards into Year 6. This is a real reflection of the importance BSG places on music education as well as a real commitment to helping every student to find an instrument that they enjoy. There will also be a PIMS showcase for all primary students at the end of the year and this will be an opportunity for you to hear what your child has been learning in their lessons. Further details will follow later in the year.

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1-1 peripatetic lessons

Student numbers taking 1-1 individual lessons continue to rise and this is a real testament to the high quality of teaching which is taking place in these lessons. We are now offering the following instruments for students to learn at BSG:

Lower Campus: piano, violin

Upper Campus: piano, violin, cello, trumpet, clarinet, saxophone, flute, French horn, guitar, bass guitar, drum kit, voice

It is our aim at BSG to help every student find an instrument that they love and with that in mind, we will be holding a series of taster lessons for any students interested, towards the end of this term. There will be no charge to parents for their children if they want to try an instrument out in a taster lesson, and indeed parents will be welcome to come and attend the taster lesson with their child if they wish to do so. More details will follow later in the term about how to sign-up for these lessons.



Choirs – seeing double?!

Last year the choir really improved and we witnessed their sparkling performances throughout the year. The Sing-Up performance was fantastic, an event which we intend to repeat in the second term and this year we shall see the choir going from strength-to-strength. This year there are two separate choirs, one for students in Years 3-5, and one for students in Years 6-10. By separating the students into two distinct choirs we aim to really focus on improving their vocal ability further, as well as allowing the older students in secondary, greater input into the repertoire they study, and the kind of events that they would like to perform at. The students will be ably led again this year by Mr. Sinclair on the baton and Miss Nima accompanying on piano. I have already heard Christmas repertoire being rehearsed and it will be a concert to look forward to! More details of the choir's performances will follow later in the term.

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Dracula Spectacula

Please make a note of 8th and 9th December in your diaries as Dracula is coming to town and if you are not in the BSG Theatre on at least one of those nights you may find yourself receiving a nocturnal visit from the evil man himself! Building on the success of Fusion in the summer term of last year secondary students have already auditioned and been rehearsing hard for a run of performances of the John Gardiner/Andrew Parr musical, “Dracula Spectacula”. Dracula Spectacula is a fantastic musical full of humour, up-beat musical numbers and there are even a few love stories woven into the whole. Performances this year are being opened-up to the whole of the Guangzhou expatriate community as well as local businesses, embassies etc. to really give students that sense of preparing for a public performance. Tickets will sell out so once they go on sale please do get yours sooner rather than later – any parents/students who want to get into the spirit of the musical are more than welcome to dress-up goth/horror/zombie style for the performances. Details on how to get tickets will follow after the National Holiday.

Drama news

I am very excited about joining BSG’s performing arts department and would like to fill you in on a few of the areas that the students will be covering this year. It is important that students feel comfortable in this area of study and each works as part of a performance company in lesson time.

Key Stage 3 experience different styles of performance throughout the year including Improvisation, Dance Drama, Script and Performance Poetry. All year groups have the opportunity to create their own original Shakespeare pieces and work as a whole class company on a Devised piece in the second term. Year 9 in their study of Romeo and Juliet will also be trained in basic stage combat. GCSE Drama started this year with three students who are already working on their first group devised exam piece using the practitioner Brecht as a basis for the style of the performance.

As well as lessons being structured to push the students to the best of their abilities we are also introducing a Drama Uniform this year. The tops will be arriving soon and can be purchased from school and each individual will be expected to buy black plain trousers. Uniforms will be worn for each lesson and performance assessments. I look forward to meeting you at all our events.

Jilly Witcomb

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Other news in brief

- BSG students attending Arts workshops at the British School of Nanjing
- Tour of Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra 28th November – 7th December
- Rainer Honeck – guitar @ Xinghai Concert Hall, 25th October at 8pm
- Gerhart Kaufmann - cello @ Xinghai Concert Hall, 28th November at 8pm

If you have any questions about any aspects of the performing arts at BSG please do not hesitate to get in touch at Andrew.Race@bsg.org.cn and I look forward to seeing you over the next term at one of our events.

Warmest regards,

Andrew Race
Director of Music & Performing Arts