

A New Youth String Orchestra for the Ripon Area

In the 1960s (some of us are old enough to remember this!) Ripon had an extremely good Youth String Orchestra, based at Ripon Grammar School, but with members from many other schools in the area. Directed by local string teacher, Gilbert Shufflebotham (ex Hallé Orchestra), they gave frequent concerts and won prizes at festivals up & down the country. Many of its ex members are now leading professionals – notably Andrew & Stephen Orton and Carol Corkish – and, during this period, Ripon boasted no less than eight string players who were members of the National Youth Orchestra! Ripon also provided most of the leading string players in the renowned West Riding Schools Orchestra. This Ripon Youth String Orchestra (Shuff's Band) folded when "Shuff" retired, soon after Ripon became part of North Yorkshire, in or around 1965. The West Riding Schools Orchestra also disbanded then.



In the early 1990s, when I returned to Ripon after working in Manchester for 20 years, I felt there was a need for something similar so, with the help of a few local teachers, we formed a new "Ripon Youth String Ensemble" – a small group of about 15 good young string players. This group flourished for a few years and, in 1997, we won 1st Prize at the European Festival of Music for Youth in Neerpelt, Belgium (the biggest youth music festival in Europe!). Katie Stables was a member of this group, as were Richard Fletcher, Joanne Almack, the Grenfell sisters, the Bradley sisters etc. Shortly after this, the group folded up – several key players went off to study at independent schools elsewhere and we could not find enough good younger players to replace them.

Since then, string playing in this part of the country has been rather in the doldrums! There have been plenty of youngsters learning string instruments, but no really effective structure of opportunity, incentive or high-quality experience to inspire and motivate them to achieve high standards. In recent years, the strength (quality and quantity) of string teaching in the area has increased significantly – there are now more young string players around, all (hopefully) looking for better and more challenging opportunities and experience – and we feel the time is now right to provide the incentive and the means by which they can be better encouraged and inspired to achieve their full potential.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this new orchestra, or if you require any more information, please telephone **01765 602856** or **07960 439594**.

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