

Orchestra of musicians from schools in deprived areas to play first ever concert at Warwick University

Talented teenagers from across the country to perform world premiere of new orchestral piece

An orchestra made up of children from some of the country's most deprived areas is to give its first ever concert at the Warwick Arts Centre on 3 August. The inaugural performance will include the world premiere of a new piece by former Royal Shakespeare Company musical director Nathan Theodoulou. The orchestra will perform to an audience of 500 Teach First teachers, staff, tutors and supporters during the charity's annual Summer Institute at the University, as well as representatives of education charity Achievement for All and family and friends.

Called the National Orchestra For All (NOFA) the group is made up of just under 50 talented 11-16 year olds who, while they share a real passion and talent for music, have had a restricted musical education. Obstacles which could include little or no practice space, or a disrupted education, have meant that these young people are not as accomplished as their more affluent peers and, as a consequence, are shut out of the more established musical networks and initiatives.

The brainchild of charity Music First, NOFA, which is free to all its members, was inspired by the revolutionary El Sistema music and social change programme in Venezuela, which believes that every poverty-stricken child should have free access to music and that their lives will be transformed as a result.

Unlike traditional youth orchestras, NOFA's approach is less reliant on its members reaching a musical standard before entry; instead it focuses on levels of commitment, understanding that there are benefits over pure musicality that come from being part of an orchestra, including learning to listen, to lead, to follow and to work with others.

NOFA members do not audition. Instead they are nominated by their music teachers who all work in challenging schools including Teach First schools. NOFA also enjoys the support of education charity Achievement For All and educators from schools across England.

Teach First works to break the link between low family income and low educational attainment by placing top graduates to teach and lead in schools in challenging circumstances and is creating a movement of leaders who are committed to raising the achievement, aspiration and access to opportunity of children from low socio-economic backgrounds.

NOFA's landmark concert will take place during Teach First's six-week Summer Institute at Warwick University, where a record 772 top graduates have gathered for the first part of their training to become high-impact teachers in schools in challenging circumstances from September.

Among other pieces, NOFA will perform arrangements of Saint-Saens's Danse Macabre and Holst's Jupiter from the Planets Suite.

Marianna Hay, Founder and Musical Director of NOFA and '07 Teach First Ambassador, said: "Even before these young people take to the stage they have taken giant steps towards proving that when they are supported, encouraged and believed-in they can do extraordinary things.

"Their performance is a culmination of a lot of hard work. It is a real achievement for our musicians to play together in public, to an audience of 500 that includes their friends and family, for the first time, and they should be incredibly proud of themselves for all they have achieved."

Brett Wigdortz, CEO and Founder of Teach First, said: "This is the first time that musically talented children from Teach First's partner schools from around the country have played together as an orchestra and I applaud the talent, skill and determination they have shown to get them to this point.

"The 772 newest members of the Teach First community, 15 of whom will teach music, are also currently gathered at Warwick University for the start of their training to raise the achievement, aspirations and access to opportunity of every pupil they teach in schools in challenging circumstances. The National Orchestra For All's concert is a wonderful opportunity for the new cohort to witness first-hand that, with inspirational teaching and hard work, children can achieve great things regardless of their socio-economic background".

Professor Sonia Blandford, CEO and Founder of Achievement for All 3As, commented: "The relationship between self-development and achievement is self-evident; I welcome the partnership with Music First and Teach First that has provided the opportunity for the National Orchestra for All to rehearse and perform together.

" Achievement for All 3As is currently working in partnership with over 500 schools to support the development of aspirations, access and achievement of the 20% of vulnerable learners and SEND pupils. The National Orchestra for All's inaugural summer school and concert exemplifies how music can be a vehicle for all children to succeed."

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Notes to editors

For media enquiries please contact Garfield Myrie in the Teach First press office on: 0203 117 2378 or 07866 436 014. Email: gmyrie@teachfirst.org.uk or Hannah McCullagh on 0203 117 2469 or 07739 147 841 Email: hmcullagh@teachfirst.org.uk

About Music First

Music First transforms young lives by providing an exciting music education experience for disadvantaged 7-16 year olds in challenging schools and areas that need it most.

Music education in the UK is highly unequal, despite the best efforts of many committed educators. The charity sets out to redress the balance by providing an alternative, innovative and relevant musical pathway for the disadvantaged. It is inspired by the internationally famous El Sistema music and social change programme that began thirty years ago in Venezuela and provides training in orchestral playing for children from the 'favelas'. Building on El Sistema principles, and with their full support, Music First has been set up in the knowledge that learning to play an instrument and playing with others from an early age brings a whole range of benefits far beyond music. It engages with children from 7 onwards right where they are in school and invites them into the exciting world of making music, knowing that if its teachers shine the light on what is possible, the children will grasp it with both hands (www.musicfirst.org.uk)

About Achievement For All

Achievement For All 3As is an independent charity that works to improve the achievement, access and aspirations of children and young people, in the classroom and beyond, particularly the 20% of the school population identified as being vulnerable learners or having special educational needs

and disabilities. Achievement for All is supported by the Department for Education, recognised by OfSTED; following the significant impact of the pilot in 454 primary, secondary, special and PRU schools, the programme is being rolled-out nationally to all schools in England. For further information and to register your school go to www.afa3as.org.uk.

About Teach First

Teach First is an independent charity working to break the link between low family income and poor educational attainment which is greater in the UK than in almost any other developed country. The scale of change needed is so great that it requires a movement of leaders to make a difference at a pupil, school and system level. Teach First is working towards achieving its mission by enabling its participants and ambassadors in the classroom to raise the achievement, aspiration, and access to opportunity of children from low socio-economic backgrounds, whilst developing a network of leaders with a life-long commitment to ending inequality in education from both inside and outside the classroom.

Since launching in 2002, Teach First has recruited and trained increasing numbers of participants - more than 770 new participants began their teacher training in June - and is working to place 1140 graduates per year by 2013, which would make it the largest graduate recruiter in the UK.

Teach First operates in six regions across England: London, West Midlands, East Midlands, Yorkshire & the Humber, North West and the North East.

The charity has expanded to work in the primary sector with the first cohort of Teach First primary teachers entering classrooms in September in London, the East and West Midlands, the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber.

Teach First is raising the quality and profile of the teaching profession and has made teaching in a challenging school one of the most prestigious options for top graduates. In 2010, Teach First was ranked 7th in the coveted league of Times Top 100 Graduate Employers. Interest in the programme continues to grow amongst top graduates, with the number of applicants rising from 3,000 in 2009 to over 5,000 in 2011.

Teach First primary schools must have more than 50% of their pupils living in the lowest 30% of the IDACI*, prioritising those schools with higher levels of deprivation.

Teach First secondary schools must have one of the following:

- A first criterion based on the IDACI - Teach First works in schools that have more than 50% of their pupils living in the lowest 30% of the IDACI, prioritising those schools with higher levels of deprivation;
- A second criterion based on attainment - Teach First prioritises schools with low attainment in regards to the 5+ A*-C (English & Maths) GCSE measure. Teach First works in schools whose results fall below the lowest 30% of the national distribution;
- Teach First also works in schools that have a Challenge status: either National Challenge or City Challenge.

*Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index.

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