Comparing notes

A new book by Adam Ockelford, which sets out to explain what music is, why we are all musical, and how abstract patterns of sound that don’t actually mean anything can in fact be so meaningful. The thinking is based on Adam’s four decades of work with blind children and those on the autism spectrum, the book draws lessons from neurodiversity to show how we all develop musically, and to explore the experience of music from the point of view of composers, performers and listeners – including children with special needs.

Could you organise an event to raise money for Amber?

Our fundraising guide provides all the information and support you need to raise funds for Amber. The pack also includes plenty of fundraising ideas, so there will be no excuse for not doing something to help our important charity!

Elation

Derek Paravicini’s latest album, in which he re-imagines some of the great songs of the 20th Century, including A Foggy Day In London Town, Georgia On My Mind and When I Fall In Love was released in June, 2017. Derek’s solo piano is enhanced with dazzling orchestrations provided by legendary producer Jon Cohen.

Other community fundraising

Congratulations to Theo Elwes who took part in the Richmond Autumn Riverside 10k run with his father Ben, finishing the race in 44 minutes and raising a fantastic £2,100. Earlier in the year, Theo volunteered at the Linden Lodge Summer School, and some of the most disabled participants were captivated with his mellifluous violin playing.

Trustee and other news

• Katie Johnson made a huge contribution to Amber as a committee member and more recently as a trustee, overseeing our communications strategy whilst we were developing a new website and rebranding our fundraising materials. Katie has stepped down as a trustee but we are delighted she will remain involved with events and thank her for all her support.

• Stephen Hough joined us earlier in the year as a volunteer fundraiser. He is now a very active member of the team having taken on the role of Company Secretary. We have also welcomed Annabel Martin and Isabel Bedford to manage the new ‘Little Amber’ scheme.

• Society of the Week! The Amber Trust was featured as the RNIB’s Society of the Week on 8 May 2017 when Julia Walport and Velma Creft, the mother of one of our beneficiaries, were interviewed about Amber’s activities and the impact of its work.

• During Small Charity Week, organised by the Foundation for Social Enterprise, The Amber Trust was one of four winners of an eBay’s Give@Checkout competition. Purchasers on eBay were invited to make a small donation when completing their purchase and in total it raised £4,100 for Amber.

Mark Critchlow

A tremendous personal challenge

Many congratulations to Mark Critchlow, who has a severe visual impairment, on completing a Channel team swim on Saturday 26 August 2017. This was a tremendous personal challenge for Mark. We are in awe of his achievement and incredibly grateful that he swam in aid of The Amber Trust, raising nearly £9,400 to help blind and partially sighted children to engage with music. Mark chose to support Amber as his church, St Michael and All Angels, Bedford Park, recently adopted Amber as one of its charities.

Mark told us: “We swam in turn for an hour at a time, negotiating jelly fish, four foot waves and huge vessels in the main shipping lanes ... My worst moment was having to swim my first leg in pitch darkness because I couldn’t see the pilot boat ... they had a light on the boat for me to follow but it wasn’t strong enough ... What a wonderful sense of relief and achievement it was to arrive safely on French soil!”

An Afternoon of music with Derek Paravicini and Friends

Amber’s second concert celebrating the musicianship of beneficiaries and supporters with a special screening of Michael House’s film Braille Music

of Tiger Tiger accompanied by John Paul Ekins. This beautiful song was written by Zoe Dixon and had been specially commissioned by The Amber Trust. Ashleigh entranced us all by playing the piano with growing confidence and maturity both alone and with Derek, and guest appearances by Lucy and Ronan made it abundantly clear to everyone present what fun they were having and how much their lives are enhanced through music. Finally, all the musicians came together for a rousing rendition of Fly Me to the Moon.

Later, Amber was delighted to host a private screening of Braille Music: a moving and insightful account of the lives of six blind musicians and the place that Louis Braille’s ingenious code plays in enabling them to access musical notation. Braille Music is now available to purchase from Amazon UK.

On Sunday 14 May 2017, Amber hosted a second concert bringing together some of the talented young musicians we support. In addition to Derek and his Quartet wowing the audience, highlights included James Risdon (a blind professional musician who later introduced Braille Music) playing a Telemann duo for two recorders with Amber’s star fundraiser Poppy; lovely performances on flute by Anna and cello by Iain and Hannah Davy giving the first performance.
Alexia - a recent recipient of an Amber Star

Alexia is an exceptional musician. She was born fully sighted but, at the age of two, lost her sight completely due to an optic nerve glioma. Since then music has played an important role in her life. She is an accomplished flute and recorder player and a uniquely talented composer. Since she was eight, Amber has helped at different stages in Alexia’s musical career with funding for recorder lessons and braille music lessons, and this year flute lessons, whilst she studies at the Junior Department of the Royal College of Music. Amber also co-funded the purchase of a silver flute for Alexia with the Florence Nightingale Aid in Sickness Trust (FNAIST).

Alexia is a member of the National Youth Recorder Orchestra, and a composer with the National Youth Orchestra – the first blind musician to join the NYO. She is achieving great success as a young composer. In 2016, she won Cambridge Young Composer of the Year, the first female composer to have won the competition in its 10-year history, and her piece was performed by members of the Hermes Experiment. Other recent successes include winning an RPS/Classic FM 25th birthday commission prize resulting in the performance by members of the RLPO on 11 October 2017. Amber is proud of Alexia’s musical successes and delighted to continue to support her.

Summer - a chance to experience live musical theatre for the first time

For music-loving Summer, who has complex needs and autism as well as being visually impaired, being given an Amber Music Award for a weekend in London to see the musical Aladdin and ride on the London Eye was always going to be a treat, but it turned out to be so much more than that ... First there was the coach ride to London, in the front seat, so Summer was aware of everything around her – affording constant interaction and stimulus, and giving her new confidence” says her mother Lorraine. Then there was the show itself. Summer was totally mesmerised by the singing, the music, the colours, the lights, the special effects ... particularly the flying carpet/singing act. And after that there was the excitement of a ride on the London Eye.

All of these were fresh experiences for Summer; they took her out of her normal lifestyle, says Lorraine and gave her something new – and boosted her confidence in doing it. Summer’s world can now expand. She can travel by coach; she can go and see as many musicals as she would like. ‘Summer’s world can now expand. She can travel by coach; she can go and see as many musicals as she would like. She can go to an opera, to a show, to a concert. And she’s enjoying all these experiences’ says Lorraine.

“Linden Lodge Summer School

A generous grant from the Wimbledon Foundation Community Fund managed by the London Community Fund enabled us to run music workshops throughout the two-week Linden Lodge Summer School, attended by some of the most needy children in Wandsworth and Merton. As well as being blind or partially sighted, most of these children have severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. The young people and their carers had a terrific time taking part in steel pan workshops and experiencing South Asian Music.

St Michael and All Angels, Bedford Park

Amber was delighted to be chosen as one of the three charities St Michael’s will support over the next three years, and has already benefited from a number of its fundraising events. Julia Walport enjoyed taking part in their Quiz Night and Adam Ockelford and others joined the Hymnathon, following which £1,695 was donated to Amber. In June, Amber took part in ‘Green Days’ at the Bedford Park Festival at which Derek Paravicini performed. We were grateful to Barclays Bank for donating £2,000 in matched funding of the £3,500 raised by St Michael’s for The Amber Trust during Green Days. More recently, Adam Ockelford spoke in church on Charities Sunday about Amber. He introduced Ashleigh, who stole the show, playing both organ and piano and giving the congregation a magical opportunity to experience the joy and conviction that she communicates through music.

Achievements to celebrate

- Catherine Howells, who is supported by Amber to study in the Junior Department of the Guildhall School of Music and Dance, has gained a DipABRSM on the ‘cello.
- Zoe Dixon, for whom Amber has provided funding to help her attend RNC music composition courses for two summers, was invited to compose the song for Bushfire Music, which was performed in the Salford Music Festival.
- Luca Gatta, who received funding for piano lessons over a number of years, has taken up a place to read Music at the University of West London.
- Ché Lindor, who attributes much of his musical success to being bought a drum kit by Amber seven years ago, has taken up a place at the University of Falmouth to read Music.

The Trustees are always pleased to hear news from young musicians we have supported. Please do keep in touch.

Oliver - starting to play the keyboard in his early years

Oliver was born at 24 weeks and due to a very aggressive form of Retinopathy of Prematurity (RoP) has no vision at all. He joined Amber’s RoP research project when he was three years old, from which time a music therapist visited Oliver and his family for 24 months to try out activities that would encourage his musical engagement and development. His love of music was apparent from the start and a keen sense of rhythm became evident too; he was always in time when he joined in with his favourite songs. Music proved to be a powerful means of communication for Oliver, and he learnt to converse with others through phrases of rhythm and melody. Perhaps most exciting was the emergence of his ability to play tunes on the keyboard introduced to the instrument in his first session. Today, music is an intrinsic and vital part of Oliver’s daily life, and, with the further support of an Amber Music Award, Oliver is continuing to explore and develop his musical skills by having piano lessons. This work with Oliver, and all the other families in the RoPProject, led to the development of resources that have become part of the ‘Little Amber’ Scheme.