Green Days Fair

This year was our third Green Days fair. It’s one of our favourite events, held in June in West London and we raised over £600. A huge thank you to St Michael and All Angels Church, who organises the fair, for their continuing support.

We have had an incredible number of other events supporting Amber through the year. Here is a selection:

New CEO

As Amber has grown exponentially over the last five years, the need for staff and infrastructure has become ever more critical. Amber is now delighted to announce Anni Martin has been appointed as our very first CEO.

Anni has already been working for Amber for over 3 years, originally employed to set up our music services Little Amber and AmberPlus. She also has a wealth of other third sector management experience, including the RNIB for seven years, Autism Sussex and Dyfed Drug and Alcohol service.

We also welcome Dr Hannah Marsden to the team. Hannah will be taking over running the music services from Anni and providing music-related support to all of Amber’s activities.

Amber welcomes a new Patron

One of the highlights of the year was the appointment of world-renowned concert pianist and long-standing Amber supporter, James Lisney, as a Patron. James has already raised over £3,000 in this last year for Amber from a series of stunning recitals at the 1901 Arts Club in London.

We also welcome Spanish conductor Pablo Urbina as an Amber Ambassador. Pablo has a growing professional career in the UK and abroad. For the last five years he has conducted the London City Orchestra, which, in January 2019, gave a fundraising concert for Amber at St Michaels and All Angels Church.

Workshops for schools

Amber’s workshop programme for schools, Music Makers, is our newest venture. Early on during the introduction of the AmberPlus scheme, some schools said that they would be interested in AmberPlus workshops for groups of their pupils so that they could support them with musical activities through the year. So we have taken the AmberPlus one-to-one model and extended it into schools through structured workshops with up to six children in a group, with their class teachers and support workers as well as parents.

Amber has been incredibly lucky to be supported by the Hall throughout 2019 via bucket collections at events, concert tickets for beneficiaries, volunteering time from staff, and fund- and awareness-raising opportunities. In return, Amber trustee and founder Adam Oskefield has provided training sessions for Hall staff around the positive impact music can have on visually impaired children.

At the end of 2018, we were absolutely delighted when Craig Hassall, Chief Executive of the Royal Albert Hall, told us that Amber had won an all-staff vote to be the Hall’s inaugural charity partner for 2019.

The Amber Trust - the Royal Albert Hall’s first ever charity partner

We launched this year-long partnership in May with a fantastic event, including some wonderful performances from our Patron Derek Paravicini and Amber beneficiaries Ashleigh and Lucy.

We also had a lot of fun!

"Ashleigh had an amazing afternoon at the Royal Albert Hall dancing and singing along to ABBAphonics." - Christine, Ashleigh’s mum.

On a number of occasions throughout the year, Amber’s incredible cohort of dedicated volunteers took over the Hall with their sashes and buckets. Not only have these bucket collections provided much-needed funds for our charity but Amber has made masses of new friends and supporters.

But perhaps the most important gift of all has been the concert tickets given to Amber’s beneficiaries for concerts such as Peter and the Wolf, ABBAphonics, and The Proms. Attending concerts like these in such an iconic venue provides life-changing experiences for Amber’s young musicians and their families. We are incredibly grateful to the Hall for their generosity.

AmberPlus workshops for families

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The Amber Trust brings music and fulfilment into the lives of blind and partially sighted children - a lifeline in a confusing world
Global's Make Some Noise funds Amber's new music service for children with complex needs

In April, our Chair, Julia Walport, and trustee, Adam Ockelford, had a wonderful surprise when they visited Linden Lodge School and were presented with a cheque for £88,000 by Classic FM presenter Aled Jones. The money is to fund our new music service, AmberPlus, for two years. We launched the service in 2018 and is for families who have a visually impaired child age 5-18 with complex needs. AmberPlus is currently supporting 47 families.

Hazel

‘Music is Hazel’s language,’ says her proud mum, Lenny, detailing all the ingenious ways Hazel finds to make music everyday. ‘She can create a rhythm by tapping a radiator, she can get a tone out of any object she finds around the house, and sometimes she uses her own body to make music, clapping, stamping and clicking to improvise musical sounds and patterns.’

Eleven-year-old Hazel is also an increasingly fluent pianist, thanks to her lessons at the Worcester Snoezelen Centre, which The Amber Trust have funded for over seven years.

Hazel is very proud to have played in The Amber Trust’s annual concert in London this year alongside several other of Amber’s beneficiaries — she really enjoyed performing to such a large and appreciative audience. Her mum, her teacher, Glenn, and everyone here at Amber are very proud of her too!

Minnie

Minnie was five months old when she joined Amber’s early years music scheme, Little Amber, with her mum Caroline. As a small baby she was diagnosed with Leber Congenital Amaurosis, a degenerative eye condition. Here she is at home having her very first music session with specially trained practitioner, Sarah, having a lot of fun playing the drum!

Minnie is now 18 months old and the family have had four sessions. Music is helping her develop her listening skills and her ability to focus; her mobility is improving as she is encouraged to move toward sounds, and she can recognise when people copy what she does in sound, which absolutely delights her! It is also important that Minnie develops her language and communication skills, and so Sarah has been showing Caroline how to encourage ‘conversations’ through music using a drum and other instruments. Minnie babbles and vocalises in response. Sarah encourages her to interact by giving her the time to express herself and be acknowledged in return. Adam Ockelford and Hannah Marsden, who now manages Little Amber, visited Minnie at home, and were very impressed with how music is helping her communication skills.

Caroline told us, ‘Minnie loves the lessons and we have really benefited from them — incorporating music into Minnie’s everyday play which she has responded fantastically to’.

Amber’s Annual Concert – Wathen Hall, St Paul’s School

Once again, we had a phenomenal afternoon in Barnes celebrating the talent of Amber’s young beneficiaries. The concert was a huge success and we’re incredibly grateful, as always, to Karenne Mills and St Paul’s School for making this important annual event possible.

Coming soon! Amber’s new teaching videos

Over the last two years, in partnership with the Applied Music Research Centre at Roehampton University, Amber has been developing a set of online teaching resources – Sound Touch – for those teaching blind children to play instruments and for those working through music with visually impaired children with complex needs. These resources will comprise a set of 13 videos and accompanying text relating to different levels of musical aptitude and physical needs – to be launched in 2020.

A Little Amber video is already available to watch on our website – three-year-old Seth and his family enjoying a Little Amber session with practitioner Gary Day www.ambertrust.org/littleamber

Please do take the time to watch – it’s a wonderful film.

Achievements to celebrate

• Congratulations to Jimmy Alderson who has taken up his place at Southampton University to read music. We wish him all the best.

• Well done to Lilly Kurata who gained Distinction in her ABRSM Diploma, won the JRAM Music Festival ensemble prize with her partner Thomas Wang this year and has won first prize in several other Music Festivals.

• We wish eight-year-old Eleanor the best luck as she is playing Tiny Tim in A Christmas Carol at the Old Vic in London this winter.

• On 1 April, Catherine Howells gave a beautiful performance of The Swan at the Queen Elizabeth Hall with the Fukushima Youth Sinfonietta. A fantastic achievement.

• The World Premier of Amber Alumna Alexia Sloane’s BBC Proms commissioned piece for VOCES8, Earthward, was given in the Cadogan Hall during the BBC Proms season. We are very proud!

Amber turns 25 in 2020!

Join us next year as we celebrate our 25th birthday. Look out for the celebrations throughout the year!
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  - Christine, Ashleigh’s mum.
- A huge thank you to all our hard-working and dedicated music practitioners across the UK who provide these valuable one-to-one music sessions and group workshops to families and schools.
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Amber welcomes Professor Pablo Urbina as a new Patron. The Trustees of Amber are pleased to announce that Pablo has joined the Board of Trustees from 2019.

Amber Plus workshops:

AmberPlus workshops provide one-to-one support to families and schools on a regular basis, including in West London, South East London and South West London. AmberPlus workshops are available in most schools and community groups in London over the course of the year.

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AmberPlus workshops have included:

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