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G

resham's boasts an impressive array of musical opportunities, from five choirs to nine different types of bands and orchestras, and pupils regularly getting the opportunity to perform alongside the National Youth Choir of Great Britain and the likes of the Laudibus and Rudolphus Choirs.

Every October, however, music dominates the whole school community as seven houses compete in the annual House Music Competition – a five-hour festival of creativity, performance and fun. While such competitions are not unknown in other schools, at Gresham's the event is one of the most important calendar events of the year and has been so now for several decades. The reason for this lies in its combination of inclusivity and creativity, for every pupil in the school plays their part but the standard of performance improves year on year.

The event is organised into three sections – Instrumental, Part Song and Unison. While the former events involve the very best instrumentalists and vocalists from each house, the latter

(Behind the Scenes)

Gresham's, Norfolk



community in anticipation of the event. Audiences top several hundred – and it sells out every year. House Music has a unique effect in bonding together the school – pupils new to the school in September are thrown into house music rehearsals, and the camaraderie and entertainment of the Unison throw together senior pupils with the juniors, boarders with day pupils and international recruits with those from East Anglia. The whole event is a celebration of both music making and the school's sense of community. A major feature of the Gresham's House

“Gresham's has produced alumni who have excelled as musicians and performers: **Humphrey Berney, Stephen Frears, Olivia Colman**”

involves every member of each house giving their all in a glittering showstopper of a piece. The most coveted trophies are for the house winning the Unison and the house which amasses the most points overall across all three competitions.

The special nature of the event at Gresham's can be seen in the excitement which builds across the whole school

Music competition in recent years has been the appearance of celebrity adjudicators such as Craig Revel Horwood, Matthew Kelly and Amanda Holden. Their presence has added a “wow” factor and sense of fun to the proceedings, and their comments on each performance are eagerly anticipated by each house. It is not unknown for the performers to

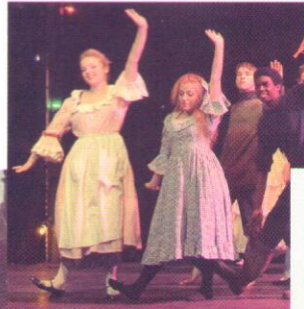


present gifts to the adjudicators or to incorporate them into their performance! Every judge comments on the amazing quality of the music making and how inspiring it is to see the entire school community confident on stage and having so much fun performing. The adjudicator in 2013 was Jo Goldsmith-Eteson, music director of the internationally award winning a cappella group The Swingle Sisters and she, like her predecessors, expressed astonishment at the high calibre of performance that a relatively small school in North Norfolk can muster.

The highlight of every House Music Competition lies in the Unison element in which anything goes – cross-dressing,



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A festival of creativity performance and fun

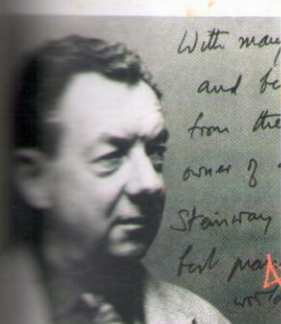


HOUSE MUSIC

An annual interhouse competition bonds the whole community at Gresham's School in Norfolk, writes Simon Kinder



Musical opportunities are embraced across the school, left, alumnus Sir Benjamin Britten



With many
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animal costumes, men in tights, hair dyes and wigs, pirates and no end of the spectacular. You never quite know what is coming next – a medley from Abba, *Chicago* or *Grease* perhaps, or the highly appropriate *Master of the House* from *Les Misérables* or perhaps something with a cutting social edge such as *Solidarity* or *Merry Christmas Maggie Thatcher* from *Billy Eliot – The Musical*. It is no surprise that Gresham's has produced so many alumni who have gone on to excel as musicians and performers – the likes of Humphrey Berney, George Stiles, Stephen Frears, Olivia Colman and many others. Each year, whoever wins, the victorious

house gains a standing ovation from the other six – however strong the sense of injustice with the result. Proceedings draw to a close with a rendition of *Jerusalem* and a collection for the school charity.

One of our Upper Sixth leavers this year wrote: "The first thing to understand about House Music is that it's loud. Partly from the music, but mostly from everybody's constant chanting! If you imagine a football match with seven different teams, each with their own fanatical supporters, held inside a large building that's been adapted so that everything can be heard really well, then you get a good idea of the atmosphere. Long live House Music!" ♥

