

**Folk Education Network
Folk Education Development Day**

**Northamptonshire Music and Performing Arts Trust
125 Kettering Road, Northampton, NN1 4AZ
Tuesday 25 June 2024**

Theme: Focus on the Midlands

Review by Elizabeth Weaver



Photo: Bodhran Bodhran - Northampton School for Boys Youth Folk Ensemble, © EFDSS, photo: Rachel Elliott

This was a Free Day presented by the Folk Education Network in partnership with Northamptonshire Music & Performing Arts Trust (NMPAT) at their home in Northampton (in what was in the past, Kettering Road Grammar School). My husband's grandfather was headmaster in the 1920's and both our daughters attended the Music School in the 1980/90's, so the building has a long history of music making.

Warmly welcomed by Kerry Fletcher (Folk Education Network Coordinator) and Beth Gifford (Head of Strings, NMPAT and ITP Facilitator for Young Sounds UK), we were inspired and informed of the folk input in education with a focus on the Midlands, and in particular, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire. Workshops, including practical sessions, took us through news of the National Youth Folk Ensemble (NYFE), NMPAT's work as a music education hub, ensemble curriculum work, dance development and satellite music centres in Northamptonshire.

These were the session and speakers:

EFDSS Update on the national work of the Education Department - with Rachel Elliott (Education Director), Hannah Mears-Young (NYFE Programme Manager), Charlotte Turner (Education Manager) and Jen Cox (Dance Development Manager).

Beth Gifford, (Head of Strings, NMPAT and ITP Facilitator for Young Sounds UK) gave us an outline of the role of folk music within NMPAT's work as a Music Hub. She also led a practical and creative music making workshop on using folk frameworks for improvisation and composition, which worked for all levels of ability.

Rich Stark (Director, Northampton School for Boys Folk Ensemble), less formally known as Bodhran Bodhran, this secondary school ensemble are playing at a high-quality level of musicianship from a global repertoire, including from the celebrated Goat Rodeo Sessions. Rich talked about how the ensemble developed and what impact it has on the students. Four of the students were there and took part in the morning's activities.

Katie Harris (Music for Wellbeing Coordinator and Folk Development Coordinator, Oxfordshire County Music Service and folk singer/songwriter) talked about her work with folk in the curriculum, in primary and first access settings, and about a new Oxfordshire Youth Folk Group in Barton, Oxford city centre. Katie led a practical session using songs and instruments to show her approach to whole class ensemble teaching (WCET), again, another very accessible workshop that got everyone singing and playing together very quickly.

Richard Leigh (Zingaresque Lead Director NMPAT) and Naomi Mitchell (Zingaresque Co-Director, NMPAT) talked about Zingaresque, NMPAT's global folk-fusion ensemble, and highlighted the great work that goes on in centres and around the county to support what Zing' does at county level. Richard led a short body percussion workshop, which was challenging and fun and it built on his ideas around 'soul values' of community and inclusiveness.

We sang, played instruments, composed and networked with friends, young and not so young and were treated to a splendid performance by Bodhran Bodhran, the student folk ensemble from Northampton Schol for Boys, led by Rich Stark. It was a most enjoyable day and I'm still talking to people about it, so watch out for news of the next one!

Elizabeth Weaver, folk dancer and EFDSS member

Elizabeth Weaver – ‘Back to school’

My folk history goes back to school, Ecton County Primary country dancing, and later I collected extra verses from our village May song which was published in “Green Groves” (Hamer). I was a protege of folk dance teacher Sybil Clark & worked with Barry Lewis, EFDSS Field Officer, and I was MC with his band The Allemanders, the Occasional Few (my late brother played in both), and later with our Weaver Family Band. I also helped the YMCA with their ‘Folk for All’ dances and Young Northants & Ecton Folk Club. I was on the District, Regional EFDSS Committees and in the 1970s, I was the youngest member of the NEC. I assisted Russell Wortley and Margaret Hamer at the EFDSS Anniversary Exhibition in Stratford-upon-Avon. Currently, I am a member U3a Country Dance Group. I am married to John Weaver, 60 years a dancer with Brackley Morris Men, having been a boarder at Magdalen School, Brackley where Roger Nicholls revived the 400 year old dance tradition.
