

MusicFirst NI

Northern Ireland · Charity number 104806

Details

Known as	MFNI
Status	Received
Registered	2016-04-20
Register	View on the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland register

Contact

Address	Musicfirst Ni 46 Botanic Ave (First Floor) Belfast Bt7 1jr BT7 1JR
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Activities

Purposes: MusicFirst Ni is to be a non-profit making association; the purpose of which is the advancement of music education for children and adults in Northern Ireland

What the charity does: The advancement of education

How the charity works: Arts,Cultural,Education/training

Who the charity helps: Adult training,Children (5-13 year olds),General public,Learning disabilities,Parents,Preschool (0-5 year olds),Youth (14-25 year olds)

Finances

Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees
2025-03-31	£7,833	£8,397	£0	0

Trustees

Name	Role	Appointed
Mrs Ruth Horgan		
Paul Garvin Clements		
Rebecca Hopkins		

MusicFirst NI

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Accounts

MusicFirst NI Annual Report 2024

Account Balance (01/04/25)	£2,869.06
PayPal Balance (01/04/25)	£1463.93
Petty Cash (01/04/25)	£105.94
Total (01/04/25)	£4,438.93

On behalf of MusicFirst NI, I, Garvin Clements have completed the annual accounts to be presented at the 2025 AGM.

In the tax year 2024/25, MFNI recorded an overall loss of £563.98.

During what remains a turbulent economic season, MusicFirst NI is financially stable, and has appropriate financial reserves in place. MFNI's main income stream is from Commission Fees paid by Tutors. The Commission Fees charged to Tutors rose from £7 to £8 per hour. It remained low, ensuring we can keep the talent pool of our teaching roster high. However, while I remain hopeful of MFNI receiving outside funding, preferably we would have the facility being used more often. I would also suggest that with the next tutor contracts, that we discuss the potential of another small increase in Commission Fees. However, MFNI's broadband cost £696.72 last year, that service has since been cancelled without complaint.

When exploring opportunities for outside funding, MFNI falls between a few stools, due to our revenue being under £10,000 per annum. I continue to explore alternative avenues of funding. While our overheads remain relatively low, even a modest contribution could have a significant impact. An application for funding submitted to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland for a new piano was unsuccessful this time. Discussions with SONOR stalled as we struggled to find volunteers for the Trading Subsidiary. Other opportunities include the ACNI, The National Lottery Fund, The British Council, and The Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Live Performance Events were much more successful this year, where each tutor was contractually obligated to be involved in the running of one or more events. While financially this made a modest difference to the charity, the reduced demands on volunteers was felt. Additionally, tutors had the opportunity to raise their profile and earn a little money through their events. A moral booster all around.

In conclusion, I am confident of MusicFirst NI's financial position, the foundations on which it was built, and its continued ability to meet its aims and objectives without financial restriction. However, even a modest cash injection would open many doors for us to do more to promote the arts and education in our community.

	Total Unrestricted Funds 2025	Total Restricted Funds 2025	Total 2025	2024	2023
Income					
Donations/ Fundraising	£757.19	£0.00	£757.19	£221.10	£274.62
Grants Awarded	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Daily Activities	£7,075.76	£0.00	£7,075.76	£7,681.11	£7,145.32
Total Income	£7,832.95	£0.00	£7,832.95	£7,902.21	£7,419.94
Expenditure					
Raising Funds	£20.85	£0.00	£20.85	£0.00	£0.00
Daily Activities	£8,158.60	£0.00	£8,158.60	£7,138.39	£7,951.05
Asset Purchases	£217.48	£0.00	£217.48	£241.67	£223.97
Other	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£135.00
Total Expenditure	£8,396.93	£0.00	£8,396.93	£7,380.06	£8,310.02
Net	-£563.98	£0.00	-£563.98	£511.94	-£890.08

MusicFirst NI

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Accounts

MusicFirst NI Annual Report 2024

Account Balance 01/04/2024 - £3693.19

PayPal Balance 01/04/2024 - £1019.61

Petty Cash 01/04/2024 - £385.89

Total – 01/04/2024 - £5098.69

On behalf of MusicFirst NI, I, Garvin Clements have completed the annual accounts to be presented at the 2024 AGM.

In the tax year 2023/24, MFNI recorded an overall profit of £511.94

While there were no big windfalls. During a turbulent economic season, this year was financially stable for MusicFirst NI, illustrated by the small profit generated. The Commission Fees charged to Tutors remained static, and low, ensuring we can keep the talent pool of our teaching roster high. The biggest change from the previous year was perhaps the electricity charges, which dropped from £99 per month to £18 per month. MFNI had previously been significantly overcharged, and the balance was being restored. In addition to that, MFNI was refunded £169.46 in March.

When exploring opportunities for outside funding, MFNI falls between a few stools, due to our revenue being under £10,000 per annum. However, as I write, I am exploring alternative means of funding. While our rent has risen from £4,500 to £5,200 our overheads remain relatively low, even a modest contribution could have a significant impact. An application to The Ireland Funds in May proved unsuccessful this time. We applied for Core-Funding, Orff Instrumentation, and enough for a quality piano. We are still in positive discussions with SONOR about a collaborative sponsorship opportunity involving our newly branded MusicFist Kids. Other opportunities include the ACNI, The National Lottery Fund, The British Council, The Foyle Foundation, and The Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Live Performance Events, while valuable in other ways, have not proven financially lucrative, and I would suggest a reevaluation of the processes involved. These events are a part of what we contribute to our community, but the drain on volunteer resources is significant. Speaking from a purely financial perspective I would propose exploring less demanding activities that meet our aims and objectives, reserving more volunteer energy for fundraising, and improving brand awareness. I would also suggest that with the next tutor contracts, that we consider a small increase in Commission Fees.

	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total 2024	Total 2023	Total 2022	Total 2021
Income	£	£		£	£	£
Donations/Fundraising	£71.10	£150.00	£221.10	£274.62		£1,446.71
Grants Awarded	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£7,572.90
Daily Activities	£7,681.11	£0.00	£7,681.11	£7,145.32		£2,848.68
Total Income	£7,752.21	£150.00	£7,902.21	£7,419.94	£7,190.63	£11,868.29
Expenditure						
Raising Funds	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Daily Activities	£7,138.39	£0.00	£7,138.39	£7,951.05	£6,634.99	£6,775.95
Asset Purchases	£241.67	£0.00	£241.67	£223.97	£71.36	£3,234.10
Other	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£135.00		£0.00
Total Expenditure	£7,380.06	£0.00	£7,380.06	£8,310.02	£6,706.35	£10,010.05
Petty Cash			-£10.21			
Net	£372.15	<u>£150.00</u>	£511.94	<u>-£890.08</u>	<u>£484.28</u>	<u>£1,858.24</u>

MusicFirst NI

Northern Ireland - Charity number 104806

Annual report

MusicFirst NI

Unincorporated Association Trustees' Annual Report Year Ended 31 March 2024

The trustees present their report and the independently examined financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Reference and Administrative Details

Registered charity name:	MusicFirst NI (MFNI)
Registered charity number:	NIC104806
Principle and Registered office:	46 Botanic Avenue (First Floor) Belfast BT7 1JR

The Trustees:

Ms R C (Becca) Hopkins: Secretary
Mr P G Clements: Treasurer
Mrs H D Hogg: Parent Representative
Ms D Quinn: Chairperson

Management Committee:

(In addition to the trustees above)

Miss S Giraudeau: Tutor Representative
Miss C Owens: Student Representative

Structure, Governance and Management

Governing Document

The organization is an Unincorporated Association established under a constitution on 11 January 2016. The Association is governed by its Constitution, which also establishes the objectives and powers of the Association. No member is entitled to receive a dividend payment or any other return of capital from the charity. The charity's members hold no monetary liability in the event of it's being wound-up while he/she is a member.

MFNI is in compliance with the legal and other governance obligations. The Association was formally granted charitable status by the Northern Ireland Charity Commission on 20 April 2016, its charity number being NIC104806.

Organisational Structure & Guidance

On 3 September 2020, MFNI passed a Special Resolution to amend the governing structure as previously constituted. The Charity is now governed by a committee of trustees and member volunteers appointed annually – The Management Committee.

Representatives were re-elected at the AGM in August 2023.

Management

MFNI's volunteer Managing Director, who reports directly to the trustees, conducts day-to-day management of the Association.

Objectives & Activities

The objectives of MFNI are for the benefit of the public by advancing music education for children and adults in Northern Ireland:

- Providing a centre for music lessons, classes and workshops
- Providing qualified and vetted tutors for music lessons, classes and workshops
- Arranging performance opportunities for developing musicians
- Entering developing musicians for examinations, festivals, and competitions

Studying music improves full brain function - nurturing creativity, problem solving, improved focus and reduced stress levels "Playing a musical instrument is a multi-sensory and motor experience that creates emotions and motions—from finger tapping to dancing—and engages pleasure and reward systems in the brain. It has the potential to change brain function and structure when done over a long period of time... intense musical training generates new processes within the brain, at different stages of life, and with a range of impacts on creativity, cognition, and learning". - Gottfried Schlaug, MD, PhD (*Neuroscience* 2013)

Further benefits include the fostering of self-confidence and personal discipline in setting out and achieving progressive goals within a supporting environment and community. These benefits are evidenced through the growing number of learners enrolled, feedback from students and their families via semi-annual surveys as well as students' personal exam results and successful performances.

Assets Purchased:

Only goods for studio maintenance – see 'Capital Purchases' in Treasury Return.

Strategic Report

The following for Achievements and Performance, Financial Review and Plans for Future Periods form the Strategic Report.

Achievements and Performance

Total Members: 104

- 99 Active (up by 12 from last year)

- 86 Students (down by 15 from last year)

Total Student Hours Taught: 1129.25 (up by 247.25 hours from previous year)

Children's Group Classes:

- 35 (for a limited time, 39) children were taught in 9 classes.

Children's Department (directed by Ms Becca Hopkins):

In September 2023, all classes were running face to face in the studio. On the very rare occasion when a family requested to do so, the option of online access was provided to facilitate joining the live class virtually.

Classes:

Kindermusik Our Time (ages 18 months – 1 ½ Years) – closed Sept. 2023 due to low intake

Kindermusik Imagine That! (ages 3 – 5 Years)

Kindermusik for the Young Child (ages 5 – 7 Years) with 7 “Graduates” June 2023

FUNdamentals (ages 7 – 11 Years)

MFNI Children's Dept. Benefits:

Evidence continues to emerge highlighting the benefits of music to promote child development. Unfortunately, the legacy of numerous lockdowns can be seen in the delayed development of specific skills in babies and toddlers born during this time. Face to face musical lessons encourage the children to socialise, develop their play skills, and promote their speech and language development.

Language & Literacy

- Prepare child with school-readiness skills: language, literacy and listening
- Build communication skills
- Provide structured routine and flexibility

Physical

- Promote physical development
- Build gross and fine motor skill
- Prepare child for physically active future

Creative

- Develop lifetime love of music and learning
- Creatively express and explore individual strengths: art, vocal, dance, and instrumental activities
- Engage curiosity and imagination

Social & Emotional

- Develop social skills through group communication
- Build self-esteem
- Learn to communicate to a group

Cognitive

- Advance brain development: spatial and complex reasoning
- Improve memory and ability to learn new information
- Follow directions and learn sequential order

Tutors (Individual Tuition)

Ms. Becca Hopkins (Singing)

Ended financial year with 44 students (14 fewer than 2022/23) – total singers & children's classes

Miss Sophie Giraudeau (Singing)

Ended financial year with 10 students (3 fewer than 2022/23)

Mr. Garvin Clements (Guitar & Music Theory)

Ended financial year with 15 students (1 fewer than 2022/23)

Mr. Ben McGarvey (Piano & Music Theory)

Ended financial year with 0 students

*Ben continues to offer online lessons only, and it would seem that as we distance from COVID the demand for virtual lessons has decreased. Ben however continues to state his commitment to the school, and do offer the option of online learning for those students who have a preference for it.

Miss E Lim (Piano & Violin)

Ended financial year with 10 students (7 more than 2022/23)

Ms Cristina Santana (Piano)

Ended financial year with 9 students

*Cristina joined MFNI in October 2023 as a piano tutor

Following the departure of 2 piano tutors in previous years, and the challenges of recruiting, many of MFNI's piano students had moved on. Edeline has been a great addition and by virtue of her growing number of students, the demand for piano lessons remains. In October 2023 MFNI welcomed Cristina as its newest piano teacher. As MFNI once again now have 2 piano tutors it is hoped that student numbers will continue to grow, and will allow for the transition of children from the Children's Department to individual lessons, as families often see piano as good choice for a first instrument.

As had been agreed by the Trustees in the previous financial year; tutor contracts were issued and signed in April 2023 for the academic year ahead (starting Sept 23). Should new tutors join after April, contracts are signed with them individually. This new policy for signing contracts ensures there is no overlap between contracts and also provides tutors with ample time to give notice if they so choose, allowing MFNI time to seek an alternative tutor. This protects and promotes the best interests of both the tutor and the charity.

Events

Forte Festival



The Forte Festival has always played a central role in MFNI's academic year; something that tutors and students alike work towards throughout the year. The event also offered the opportunity to bring all of our community together – a central part of MFNI. However as recognised in previous AMRs following COVID, the energy and impact of the Forte Festival has diminished and has never quite recovered, despite tireless efforts of MFNI. The legacy of COVID continued and was also accompanied by the increasing financial pressures of families in NI. The MFNI management committee spent time reflecting on the way forward: something that would promote the commitment and ethos of the

school in relation to performance opportunities and reaching out into the community, and balancing this with the costs, financial, practical, and personal, to the charity and its community, from running such an event. It was agreed that alternative venues would be sourced, and consideration of ways to mitigate the significant personal and financial impact on tutors and volunteers that came with the planning and facilitating.

MFNI secured space within 2 Royal Avenue, a community and creative hub that offers a creative space within Belfast City Centre. As the venue is multifunctional, it did not offer a separate theatre or stage, however MFNI had access to an area at the back of the venue, which included chairs and a grand piano. Whilst there was no cost to the hiring of the venue, MFNI subsequently had to purchase a stage, sound equipment, additional seating, and decorations/signage. There also was the requirement for a team of volunteers to be involved with transporting the equipment, and setting up and tearing down, on the day. Although there was no need to provide catering (an onsite café was available), run a ballot, or face-painting, the event did involve a significant amount of voluntary time from tutors, committee, and volunteers.

2 Royal Avenue did provide a great location, especially as the Forte Festival took place on a Sunday, meaning more free parking was available within the city centre, which was also accessible via public transport. However, as it was a public building, and therefore open for anyone to use, MFNI were unable to sell tickets for the event – the main source of income from any of our events. This presented the management committee with a challenge; why would families pay for a ticket, when someone could just come in and watch. It was decided that a 'seated' areas would be created, providing a good view of the stage. Seated tickets were sold to MFNI families via PayPal and in class, allowing them to have a guaranteed seat (and view of their performer) on the day. The seating area was roped off and tickets checked at the entrance of the building. Anyone without a ticket was able to stand behind the seats and watch. Whilst this was not ideal, it had been hoped that this could provide an opportunity to freely publicise and promote the work of MFNI. Throughout the building, including at the entrance, and at the performance areas, donation tubs and QR codes were available for people to also donate.

Unlike previous Forte Festivals, there was only one main stage, but the variety and diversity of performers was still present, alongside a relaxed atmosphere that enabled the little ones to stand up and run around if need. From toddlers, to adults, beginners to professionals, MFNI shone! As always it was a delight to see the children of the Kindermusik class of 2023 graduate, celebrating the end of their Kindermusik journey. During the interval Ms Becca facilitated a group class for everyone who wished to take part. As always this was a hit with all the little ones from the group

classes as they all adore Ms Becca! It was also an absolute delight to see the older kids, who have grown up in Ms Becca's classes, join in. Not only this this provide an opportunity for a movement break for the audience, it also served to show what happens at MFNI; an invaluable way to reach out to the people visiting 2 Royal Avenue who were not members of the MFNI community.

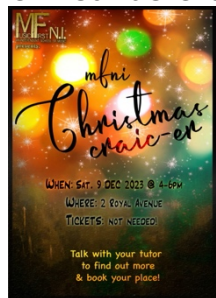
On the whole feedback from families, performers and tutors was positive, however there were issues raised that we had to share the space and that other events were also taking place. Positivity, one of the MFNI parents were so impressed by the event, that they wrote a promotional piece for Belfast Live, highlighting the success and community ethos of the school. Sadly, MFNI received limited donations, and despite the venue being free, the other costs, and issues with selling tickets, meant the event ran at a financial loss. Once again, the management committee are committed to discussing this further, weighing up the costs and benefits to the charity and the community: the event was such a positive and enjoyable experience, however how to facilitate this without financially disadvantaging the charity. This will be explored further in the upcoming financial year.

Summer Singing

This year instead of running a 4-6 week group course, Ms Becca provided the opportunity for students to continue their individual lessons through the summer term. Ms Becca offered a flexible approach to timetabling and this was positively received by students as it isn't always possible to commit in advance to a block of weeks, so this approach enabled them to continue their tuition over the summer.

Ms Becca also provided opportunities for her older Music Fundamentals students to attend for individual tuition/top up support with their summer project or other work they had been undertaking that year. Again, this flexible approach is attractive to families, as often it can be hard to commit to a set week or day of classes over the summer due to childcare and holidays.

Christmas Cracker



In keeping with the charity's aims and objectives, MFNI continued to explore opportunities for our students, regardless of age or skill, to perform. Following the feedback from performers and the families, we utilised 2 Royal Avenue again to host a very relaxed Christmas concert. Unlike the previous year's lounge evening, this was something for all the family, and also provided MFNI to reach out into the local community. Due to the low-key nature of the concert, the majority of performers were singers, peppered with some pianists and guitarists too. Ms Becca took the lead in organising and facilitating the event, and there was support from other tutors also. No tickets or programmes were sold for the event, although donation tubs and QR codes were available. Only £40 in donations were taken, again the event being a loss for MFNI. It was however a success for students with performers were from all ages and performance levels, and it was a lovely way to spend an afternoon just before Christmas. Whilst there was minimal cost to MFNI as a school, it must be recognised that the event did come at a financial, and personal time, cost to Ms Becca. It would be great to be able to provide further opportunities such as this within the heart of the community, but cannot be a detriment to any individual tutor. This will also be something the management committee will explore further in the upcoming financial year.

Lounge Evenings



Given the continued success of the Lounge Evenings in the previous year, two were planned for 10 June 2023; a junior concert for teenage students, followed by an adult concert. It had been previously agreed that it was more beneficial for tutors and volunteers, and more cost effective to have both the junior and adult concerts back-to-back on the same evening.

Tutors and trustees gave of their time to completely transform Studio A from a classroom into an intimate, fairly-lit performance space, with room for up to 35 audience members. Adult performers receiving individual tuition were given the opportunity to perform for an audience, promoting their self-esteem and confidence and allowing a showcase for the talent within MFNI

A nominal fee of £5 per ticket was charged to cover snacks and soft drinks provided.

After the main performers an open mic space was offered for any other budding performers in the audience. This enabled those students who didn't feel ready for the more formal performance opportunity, to still have a go and build their confidence for next time. It also enabled the tutors from MFNI to showcase their skills and talents, offering a prime opportunity to advertise the school. Finally, it also allowed those in the audience, who weren't students but were perhaps considering tuition, to experience the supportive and nurturing atmosphere of MFNI, to meet the tutors, and even have their moment in the spotlight. All of this contributes to promoting the reputation of the school as a place for all the community.

Feedback from students and families remains positive and the open mic session following the main performance, continues to give those students, and audience members, a chance to perform in a more informal atmosphere. The hope is that audience members will have fun and potentially consider taking up individual lessons.

A central goal of the Lounge Evenings continues to be focused on bringing the community together; to learn from one another, to socialise, and to celebrate each other's success. Ensemble work is an aspect of advanced formal music exams, and therefore encouraging relationships and promoting an open mic environment for collaboration, will be adding to the students' ensemble skills.

Parents and other family members are vital to the running of MFNI, therefore offering them the opportunity to see their young person performing, strengthens their connection to the school and the tutors.

10 Years of MFNI

At the beginning of 2024 we said Happy 10th Birthday to MFNI; created by 3 amazingly talented tutors who wanted to write and perform music together, whilst nurturing their students within a supportive community. We took the time to reflect on how MFNI has continued to flourish with the community at its heart, drawing on the knowledge and experience of tutors, students and families alike. Ms Becca took the opportunity to reach out to the MFNI community for any memories, stories, or photographs they wished to share, many of which contributed to a lovely memory wall display, visually depicting the 10 years of MFNI history! Having the time to think back over the challenges faced and overcome, the talent that was inspired and encouraged, and the friendships that were formed by families in the children's classes, had a positive impact on tutors and families alike, and reminded everyone of the values at the heart of the school.

Following the challenges presented over recent years, it has been great to be reminded of, and to celebrate all the achievements of the school. We are all hopeful and excited for what the next 10 years will bring.

Financial Review

Through the income raised from tutor room rental fees, donations, ticket sales and interest received, MFNI grossed a total income £7,902.21 leaving a net profit of £511.94 after running expenditure and assets purchased.

Changes and Improvements

The annual deep clean of the waiting room, studio A and studio B took place prior to the start of the academic year. Certificates, achievements and awards received by tutors are displayed on the walls within the studio, and educational posters were updated to reflect MFNI's aesthetic and pedagogy.

MFNI continue to have a growing presence on social media, enabling the charity to reach out to the community; sharing all about tutors, the programmes that run, and also snapshots of the students performing. The moments captured by the professional photographer at the Forte Festival, photos and video clips taken by families, students, and tutors of their lessons and time in the studio, are providing excellent content for MFNI's online platforms. As we move further into an era where people want information to be easily and instantly accessible, striving to develop MFNI's online profile is a key aim in promoting the charity. Having tutors' details available online also ensures that potential students can make direct contact with them regarding availability, rather than going through MFNI secretary, creating a much more effective and streamlined process.

Child and Adult Safeguarding training was provided to all tutors in February 2024. For some, this was a refresher, and for our newer tutors, their first within their time with MFNI. Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is a key responsibility of all tutors, volunteers and management within MFNI and it is essential that opportunities for learning and development are provided, and that everyone is clear of their individual and collective roles and responsibilities within the school. Training needs will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and further training provided when required.

Plans for Future Periods

In setting our objectives and planning our activities for the year, the trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities have helped to achieve the charity's purposes and provide a benefit to the beneficiaries.

MFNI plans to continue working towards the advancement of music education in Northern Ireland. Whilst we move further away from the time of lockdown, its legacy lingers, and its impacts amplified by the enduring cost of living crisis. MFNI continues to work hard to increase student numbers both within the children's classes, and individual tuition. Over recent years, the flux in tutors has created additional challenges to this, as families have found themselves on a waiting list, or have decided to look elsewhere for tuition. It is hoped now with some stability within the

tutor cohort, MFNI will be in a better position to undertake this task. It is acknowledged that our world is much changed, and that although music still remains an important part of people's lives, they may no longer be in a position to prioritise furthering their learning.

In the not-too-distant future, a very significant change will be coming into place within MFNI. In June 2024 will we say goodbye to Ms Becca's award winning Kindermusik programme. This decision has not been taken lightly and is with a degree of sadness. However, Kindermusik in recent years has moved away from its traditional format and approach to teaching, relying heavily on short term, online access to materials, including songs, storybooks, and other creative materials, as well as using digital apps to simulate playing a musical instrument. MFNI parents have shared the frustration with these changes and have not found them to be positive. Despite the lack of physical materials, the costs has increased. In addition to the disappointment expressed by parents, Ms Becca also feels that this approach to early music learning is not in line with her own values and practice, or indeed those of MFNI. Children need to be able to learn through their play; to hold storybooks in their hand; to build paper playgrounds, and dance with scarves. They also need to have the experience of touching and interacting with an actual musical instrument, not simply hitting a screen to hear the sound it should make. Consequently, Ms Becca has proposed that she will develop her own children's department, drawing on her significant and extensive experience of working with children in a musical and educational setting. To ensure that the MFNI is part of this evolution, focus groups will be held with parents throughout the children's department, to gather feedback, suggestions, and hopes for the new programme. This is going to be an exciting time for MFNI and also offers the opportunity for MFNI to have its own unique and individual children's department, that aligns with the school's values, and also promotes and integrates the benefits of engaging in both group learning and individual tuition. June 2024 will see the final children graduate from the Kindermusik programme.

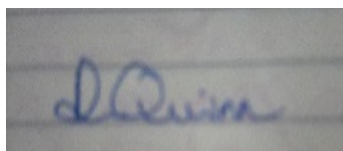
As already acknowledged above, the management committee will continue to explore alternative options for the end of year celebration, alongside thinking of other performance opportunities for our students.

The only private benefit flowing from this purpose is the heightened awareness, and increased brand recognition, of the tutors as both educators and performers. This is incidental and necessary, because without the tutors, the charity could not fulfil its purpose and objectives. The public awareness of the tutors' expertise brings an assurance of the quality of service provided. No harm arises from these purposes.

The Trustees' Annual Report and Strategic Report were approved on 29 January 2025 and signed on behalf of the Board of Trustees by:



Ms. Becca Hopkins
29 January 2025
2023-2024 Secretary



Ms. Denise Quinn
29 January 2025
2023-2024 Chairperson

MusicFirst NI

Northern Ireland - Charity number 104806

Annual return

The Trustees

Music First NI

46 Botanic Avenue

Belfast BT7 1JR

28th January 2025

Dear Trustees,

Independent Examiner's Report to the Charity trustees of Music First NI

I am a chartered Accountant of 35+ experience and the Trustees of Music First NI have asked me to conduct an independent review of their financial results for the year ended 31st March 2024.

As the charity's trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the charity's Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

It is my responsibility to:

- Examine the accounts under section 65 of the Charities Act.
- Follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Commission under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act.
- State whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of Independent examiner's report

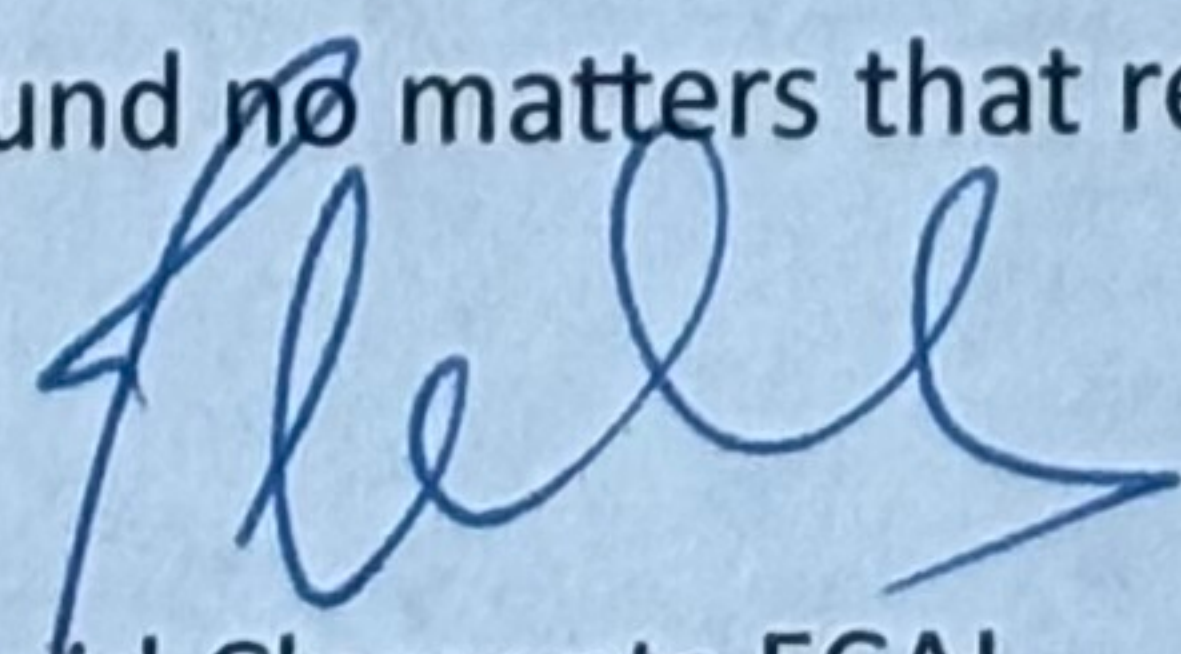
I have examined your charity accounts as required under section 65 of the Charities Act and my examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act.

My examination included a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with these records. It also included consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as charity trustees concerning any such matters.

My role is to state whether any material matters have come to my attention giving me cause to believe:

1. That accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 63 of the Charities Act.
2. That the accounts do not accord with those accounting records.
3. That the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements of the Charities Act.
4. That there is further information needed for a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

I have completed my examination and have no concerns in respect of the matters (1) to (4) listed above, and in connection with following the Directions of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, I have found no matters that require drawing to your attention.



David Clements FCAI

CAI

Culltra House, 6 Cultra Park, Holywood BT18 OQE

Accounts

MusicFirst NI Annual Report 2023

Account Balance 01/04/2023 - £3303.44

PayPal Balance 01/04/2023 - £887.21

Petty Cash 01/04/2023 - £396.10

Total – 01/04/2023 - £4586.75

Treasurer's Summary:

On behalf of MusicFirst NI, I, Garvin Clements have completed the annual accounts to be presented at the 2023 AGM. In the tax year 2022/23, MusicFirst recorded an overall loss of £633.30.

While expenses in daily activities rose by £1603.67, and the board have evaluated the £126 spent on Face Painting, the £400 spent on a promotional video, and the £150 spent on Independent Financial Examination. It would be prudent to limit these expenses in the coming year. Without these three activities alone, MFNI would have made a profit.

Expenses were not offset by tutor's commission fees in the way we would have hoped. They fell from £6807.62 to £5962.67. However, our events proved successful, bringing in £1030.00.

The issue that dominated discussion this year was the handling of a legal challenge by a tutor in breach of contract. This former tutor threatened legal action against MFNI over an alleged £135 credit, seemingly with the backing of Musician's Union. The distress this caused our volunteer team far exceeded the monetary value of the case, and was exceedingly time consuming. One result of this was that some of our highest paying tutors took more time off than in previous years, due to stress. While the tutor who left accounted for less than 10% of the gross income, the knock-on effect to moral and finances was significant.

Opportunities for outside funding were limited in 2022/23, and when reintroduced, often only available for organisations already receiving support. MFNI often falls between a few stools, due to our income being under £10000 per annum. However, as I write, I am exploring alternative means of funding, and in the coming weeks I will present a few options to the committee, such as The Halifax Foundation NI, The Foyle Foundation, and The Ireland Funds. With our overheads remaining relatively low, even a modest contribution could be significant.

Conversations need to happen to determine what can be considered a non-essential expense, and how we can make the best possible contribution to our community while lessening the strain on tutors and volunteers.

Profit/Loss Summary for the tax year 2022 – 2023

Income

Tutor Commission Fees	£5962.67
Events	£1030.00
Amazon Smile	£58.37
Donations	£216.25
Incorrect Payments	£152.65
Total	£7419.94

Expenses

Rent	£4500.00
Electricity	£702.00
Broadband	£472.32
Advertising	£400.00
Water Rates	£247.00
Access NI	£238.00
Insurance	£232.98
Capital Purchases	£223.97
Venue	£200.00
Refunds	£180.15
Financial Examination	£150.00
Zoom	£143.88
Ms Wishart Settlement	£135.00
Face Painting	£126.00
Website	£115.07
Nexus Upkeep	£81.26
Piano Tuner	£75.00
PayPal Fees	£53.89
Bank Fees	£33.50
Total	£8310.02

	Unrestricted Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total 2023	Total 2022	Total 2021	Total 2020
Income						
Donations/ Fundraising	£274.62	£0.00	£274.62		£1,446.71	£464.55
Grants Awarded	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00		£7,572.90	£0.00
Daily Activities	£7,145.32	£0.00	£7,145.32		£2,848.68	£6,688.06
Total Income	£7,419.94	£0.00	£7,419.94	£7,190.63	£11,868.29	£7,152.61
Expenditure						
Raising Funds	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£14.00
Daily Activities	£7,951.05	£0.00	£7,951.05	£6,634.99	£6,775.95	£6,497.88
Asset Purchases	£223.97	£0.00	£223.97	£71.36	£3,234.10	£2,081.35
Other	£135.00	£0.00	£135.00			
Total Expenditure	£8,310.02	£0.00	£8,310.02	£6,706.35	£10,010.05	£8,593.23
Petty Cash +/-	£256.78					
Net	-£633.30	£0.00	-£633.30	£484.28	£1,858.24	-£1,440.62

22-23 MFNI Bank Account

Month	1 April	2 May	3 June	4 July	5 August	6 September
Receipts						
Tutor Commission	£1,020.00		£282.50	£482.50	£120.92	£1,742.25
Interest (Bank)						
Events					£20.00	
PayPal Transfer						
Donations				£200.00	£16.25	
Fundraising						
Grants						
Gift Voucher Purchase						
Amazon Smile		£15.55			£13.52	
From Petty Cash						
Total Receipts	£1,020.00	£15.55	£282.50	£682.50	£170.69	£1,742.25
Payments						
Rent	£375.00	£375.00	£375.00	£375.00	£375.00	£375.00
Water Rates		£247.00				
Website		£115.07				
Electricity	£99.00	£99.00	£99.00	£99.00	£99.00	£99.00
Sundries						
Broadband	£35.88	£39.59	£39.59	£39.59	£39.59	£39.59
Access NI				£43.00		
Advertising						
Gift Voucher Payment						
Piano Tuner						
Nexus – Upkeep						
Access Insurance						£232.98
Zoom						
Bank Charges	£2.65	£2.85	£2.85	£2.75	£2.95	£2.80
Capital Purchases		£68.97	£155.00			
Venue Hire				£200.00		
PayPal Transfer			£31.50			
Financial Examination						
Out of Court Settlement						
Total Payments	£512.53	£947.48	£702.94	£759.34	£516.54	£749.37
Cashflow Surplus/Deficit	£507.47	-£931.93	-£420.44	-£76.84	-£345.85	£992.88
Opening Cash Balance	£5,027.63	£5,535.10	£4,603.17	£4,182.73	£4,105.89	£3,760.04
Closing Cash Balance	£5,535.10	£4,603.17	£4,182.73	£4,105.89	£3,760.04	£4,752.92
Closing Balance	£3,303.44					

22-23 MFNI Bank Account

7 October	8 November	9 December	10 January	11 February	12 March	Totals
£420.00		£175.00	£1,719.50			£5,962.67
						£0.00
						£20.00
						£0.00
						£0.00
						£216.25
						£0.00
						£0.00
						£0.00
	£12.80		£16.50			£58.37
						£0.00
						0
£420.00	£12.80	£175.00	£1,736.00	£0.00	£0.00	£6,257.29
£375.00	£375.00	£375.00	£375.00	£375.00	£375.00	£4,500.00
						£247.00
						£115.07
£18.00	£18.00	£18.00	£18.00	£18.00	£18.00	£702.00
						£0.00
£39.59	£39.59	£39.59	£39.59	£39.59	£40.54	£472.32
	£152.00				£43.00	£238.00
					£400.00	£400.00
						£0.00
	£75.00					£75.00
					£81.26	£81.26
						£232.98
					£143.88	£143.88
£2.80	£2.70	£2.85	£2.65	£2.95	£2.70	£33.50
						£223.97
						£200.00
						£31.50
					£150.00	£150.00
				£135.00		£135.00
£435.39	£662.29	£435.44	£435.24	£570.54	£1,254.38	£7,981.48
-£15.39	-£649.49	-£260.44	£1,300.76	-£570.54	-£1,254.38	-£1,724.19
£4,752.92	£4,737.53	£4,088.04	£3,827.60	£5,128.36	£4,557.82	£3,303.44
£4,737.53	£4,088.04	£3,827.60	£5,128.36	£4,557.82	£3,303.44	£3,303.44

22-23 MFNI PayPal Account

MFNI PayPal

	April	May	June	July	August	September
Gross Income	£0.00	£45.00	£795.00	£60.00	£0.00	£152.65
Fee	£0.00	-£3.12	-£36.80	-£2.43	£0.00	-£4.73
Expenditure	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	-£94.50	£0.00	£0.00
Refunds				-£7.50		
Deposit from Bank			£31.50			
Net	£0.00	£41.88	£789.70	-£44.43	£0.00	£147.92
Balance	£53.10	£94.98	£884.68	£840.25	£840.25	£988.17

Income Source	Event	Event	Event	Incorrect Payment
Expenditure Source			Face Painting	

22-23 MFNI PayPal Account

October	November	December	January	February	March	Total
£0.00	£45.00	£65.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,162.65
£0.00	-£2.51	-£4.30	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	-£53.89
£0.00		£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	-£94.50
-£152.65	-£10.00	-£10.00				-£180.15
-£152.65	£32.49	£50.70	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£834.11
£835.52	£868.01	£918.71	£918.71	£918.71	£918.71	£887.21

Event Event

Potential Funding:

Halifax - average £4,500

<https://www.halifaxfoundationni.org/programmes/community-grant-programme>

Foyle Foundation - £2,000 - £150,000

<http://www.foylefoundation.>

The Ireland Funds

<https://irelandfunds.org/>

MusicFirst NI

Northern Ireland - Charity number 104806

Annual report

MusicFirst NI

Unincorporated Association

Trustees' Annual Report

Year Ended 31 March 2023

The trustees present their report and the independently examined financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2023.

Reference and Administrative Details

Registered charity name	MusicFirst NI (MFNI)
Registered charity number	NIC104806
Principle office and registered office	46 Botanic Avenue (First Floor) Belfast BT7 1JR

The Trustees:

Ms R C (Becca) Hopkins
Secretary
Mr P G Clements
Treasurer
Mrs H D Hogg
Parent Representative
Ms D Quinn
Chairperson

Management Committee:

(In addition to the trustees above)

Miss S Giraudeau
Tutor Representative

Miss C Owens
Student Representative

Structure, Governance and Management

Governing Document

The organization is an Unincorporated Association established under a constitution on 11 January 2016. The Association is governed by its Constitution, which also establishes the objectives and powers of the Association. No member is entitled to receive a dividend payment or any other return of capital from the charity. The charity's members hold no monetary liability in the event of it's being wound-up while he/she is a member.

MFNI is in compliance with the legal and other governance obligations. The Association was formally granted charitable status by the Northern Ireland Charity Commission on 20 April 2016, its charity number being NIC104806.

Organisational Structure & Guidance

On 3 September 2020, MFNI passed a Special Resolution to amend the governing structure as previously constituted. The Charity is now governed by a committee of trustees and member volunteers appointed annually – The Management Committee.

Representatives were reelected at the AGM in August 2022.

Management

MFNI's volunteer Managing Director, who reports directly to the trustees, conducts day-to-day management of the Association.

Objectives & Activities

The objectives of MFNI are for the benefit of the public by advancing music education for children and adults in Northern Ireland:

- Providing a centre for music lessons, classes and workshops
- Providing qualified and vetted tutors for music lessons, classes and workshops
- Arranging performance opportunities for developing musicians
- Entering developing musicians for examinations, festivals, and competitions

Studying music improves full brain function - nurturing creativity, problem solving, improved focus and reduced stress levels "Playing a musical instrument is a multi-sensory and motor experience that creates emotions and motions—from finger tapping to dancing—and engages pleasure and reward systems in the brain. It has the potential to change brain function and structure when done over a long period of time... intense musical training generates new processes within the brain, at different stages of life, and with a range of impacts on creativity, cognition, and learning".

- Gottfried Schlaug, MD, PhD (*Neuroscience 2013*)

Further benefits include the fostering of self-confidence and personal discipline in setting out and achieving progressive goals within a supporting environment and community. These benefits are evidenced through the growing number of learners enrolled, feedback from students and their families via semi-annual surveys as well as students' personal exam results and successful performances.

Assets Purchased:

N/A

Strategic Report

The following for Achievements and Performance, Financial Review and Plans for Future Periods form the Strategic Report.

Achievements and Performance

Total Members: 319

- 87 Active (down by 12 from last year)
- 86 Students (down by 15 from last year)

Total Student Hours Taught: 882 (down by 400 hours from last year)

Children's Group Classes

A total of 40 children were taught in 7 classes. For the previous year there were 45 children taught in 9 classes and of the 10 classes proposed by Ms Becca at the start of the academic year, only 2 have reached the minimum number (4) of pupils needed to run the class. Of these 2 classes, only 4 children are enrolled in each. Whether it be the continued legacy of Covid or the result of the cost-of-living crisis, the Children's Department is not growing as it should.

Children's Department:

- Directed by Ms Becca Hopkins

In September 2022, all classes were running face to face in the studio. For families who require occasional online access, this is facilitated and they can log in to join the live class.

Classes:

Kindermusik Our Time (ages 18 months – 1 ½ Years)

Kindermusik Imagine That! (ages 3 – 5 Years)

Kindermusik for the Young Child (ages 5 – 7 Years); with 4 "Graduates" June 2022

Music FUNdamentals (ages 7 – 11 Years)

MFNI Children's Dept. Benefits:

Evidence continues to emerge highlighting the benefits of music to promote child development. Unfortunately, the legacy of numerous lockdowns can be seen in the delayed development of specific skills in babies and toddlers born during this time. Face to face musical lessons encourage the children to socialise, develop their play skills, and promote their speech and language development.

Language & Literacy

- Prepare child with school-readiness skills: language, literacy and listening
- Build communication skills
- Provide structured routine and flexibility

Physical

- Promote physical development
- Build gross and fine motor skill
- Prepare child for physically active future

MusicFirst NI

Creative

- Develop lifetime love of music and learning
- Creatively express and explore individual strengths: art, vocal, dance, and instrumental activities
- Engage curiosity and imagination

Social & Emotional

- Develop social skills through group communication
- Build self-esteem
- Learn to communication to a group

Cognitive

- Advance brain development: spatial and complex reasoning
- Improve memory and ability to learn new information
- Follow directions and learn sequential order

TUTORS (Individual Tuition)

Ms. Becca Hopkins (Singing)

Ended financial year with 58 students (3 less than 2021/22) – total singers & children's classes

Miss Sophie Giraudeau (Singing)

Ended financial year with 13 students (down 1 from 2021/22)

Mr. Garvin Clements (Guitar & Music Theory)

Ended financial year with 16 students (up by 5 since 2021/22)

Mr. Ben McGarvey (Piano & Music Theory)

Ended financial year with 0 students

*Mr. McGarvey joined MFNI in September 2022 taking face to face lessons. In early 2023 Ben moved to London and continued to be part of the charity, offering lessons online.

Miss E Lim (Piano & Violin)

Ended financial year with 3 students

*Miss Lim joined MFNI in March 2023 as a new piano tutor following the resignation of Miss Wishart in summer 2022.

Mr. Matty Irvine, drum tutor, did not renew his contract with MFNI for the academic year 2022/23. There were few enquiries in relation to drum lessons and Matty continued to have no students. This was a great loss to the charity, however Matty continues to support the school and would be open to returning in the future should circumstances change.

Miss Molly Wishart (Piano)

Miss Wishart made known to the trustees her intention not to renew her contract in August 2022.

Miss Wishart's unexpected resignation left the charity in a vulnerable position as she took with her all her students who had been registered as members of MFNI. The loss of 22+ students had a significant impact on the charity, affecting the numbers of children enrolled

simultaneously in Music Fundamentals. The school was also unable to offer piano lessons for the 6 months following Miss Wishart's departure; lessons which are extremely popular, and therefore this had a negative impact on the income of the charity.

As tutor contracts were annually signed at the AGM, the contracts for 2022/23 were to be signed in the middle of the summer term, splitting the term between 2 contracts. Whilst, MW had declared in writing via email her intention to sign the new contract (which included a noncompete clause), paid the projected commission fee, and had received full payment from students for the 7 weeks of the summer term. MW did not attend the AGM, and 4 days later, emailed to state that she was resigning from MFNI and would not be renewing her contract.

These commission fee payments are MFNI's primary source of income. And as per contract, tutors are expected to fulfil projected hours. At that time, MFNI's standard practice had been to offer a credit towards the following term for hours unfilled, but refunds were never given. In keeping with standard practice, MW could have received credits, however as she had decided to leave MFNI, she would not be able to avail of any credited funds. After being notified of this, MW threatened legal action to gain a refund of £135 commission fee. MFNI Management Committee met to discuss and review the attendance and payment records (on which the commission payments are based) submitted by MW.

Even though intention to teach through the summer term was clear, due to the quality of recording keeping, the committee were unable to establish a clear picture of attendance by MW's students that corresponded with previous commission fee payments. Therefore, the committee were unable to determine the exact amount either remaining to be paid to MFNI or credited to MW.

The Committee then ask MW to meet and review the records - giving her the chance to expound on the them. She refused and continued to escalate the threat of legal action. After consulting the Charity Commission of Northern Ireland and considering proportionality, the trustees agreed that in the best interest of the charity and the wider community, to resolve this matter as quickly as possible and move forward with the charity's aim and objectives, MW would be paid the requested amount of £135. The payment included the following conditions (that were accepted by MW):

- 1) Ms Wishart is debarred from the charity and no longer able to receive any benefit, monetary or otherwise (affiliations, performance / accompanist work, access to the premises, etc)
- 2) The payment (£135) is not a refund, and therefore does not set a precedent for refund of Commission Fees
- 3) The payment of £135 is payment to provide settlement; this amount has not been substantiated
- 4) Following receipt of the payment, MFNI request Ms Wishart cease and desist disruption of the charity's work, including personally contacting trustees
- 5) This payment does not set precedent and is an isolated situation for which measures have been put in place to prevent reoccurrence.

While this was a very difficult time for the charity, the trustees considered the damage done and ongoing disruption. They agreed there was greater public benefit to concede the £135 with the understanding that MW will not receive any more benefit, monetary or otherwise, from MFNI in

order that she will also cease and desist the disruption of the charity's ability to best serve the community.

To prevent re-occurrence of a similar incident, the trustees have reviewed and updated tutor contracts:

- 1) to include noncompete clause (from August 2022)
- 2) to include clarification of the credit policy for commission fees and unfilled hours (October 2022)
- 3) with a process for giving notice and a way for students' payments to be honoured within MFNI should their tutor leave mid-term (October 2022)
- 4) with adjusted signing dates to ensure overlapping annual contracts (April 2023)

As stated above Miss Lim was recruited in March 2023 following a number of unsuitable applicants. The delay in recruitment has had a negative impact on student numbers and it continues to be challenging to rebuild the cohort of piano students. Miss Lim is a positive asset to the charity and it is hoped her number of students continues to grow.

EVENTS:

Forte Festival



As we left Covid and lockdown in the not-so-distant past, the Forte Festival was back with a bang. As the previous venue was not available the charity investigated other possibilities which would facilitate the needs of the performers and also being cost effective for the charity. Belvoir Players Studio in Belfast was the chosen venue. Although it was more costly than anticipated, a significant donation of £300-£350 from the Forestside Christian Centre helped with this. On the day there were no studio staff available as had been agreed, to assist with set up, sound etc. and therefore a reduced rate was invoiced by the venue. A reduced fee of £200 was agreed and Forestside Christian Centre covered the full cost.

This was a large-scale event, with 2 stages and 65 performers, showcasing every level of Kindermusik, Music Fundamentals, and soloists young and old, novice to professional. Tutors also had the opportunity to share with MFNI families their own skills and talents. Tickets and programmes were sold, and a raffle was also organized, with prizes donated by local businesses. Face painting was also provided free to families with the cost covered by MFNI.

A team of volunteers comprising of tutors, committee members, families and students, took on the planning of the event. Wanting to promote a sense of inclusion and ownership, members were encouraged to take an active part in the running of the event. Volunteers were recruited to provide catering, whilst others helped with decoration, play area, setup/take down on the day. As a charity it is central to our ethos that everyone in the community feels included. There were challenges with securing volunteers as many of the families were new to MFNI and had no experience of the atmosphere and purpose of the Forte Festival. Evaluation of the event was

that whilst it provided and excellent opportunity for a wide range of students to perform; the children to graduate the Kindermusik programme, it was not as successful as previous years and donations were limited. It was however so lovely to once again see our graduates perform and for them to have their graduation ceremony. Both the students and their families were delighted with this and felt it to be a positive conclusion to their Kindermusik journey. The management committee are committed to exploring other options for showcasing talent and celebrating our end of year graduates in the coming year.

Summer Singing Course:

Once again Ms Becca returned with Summer Singing in July and August 2022. Teaching took place in MFNI and it had been agreed that a professional pianist (Ms Wishart) would be in attendance each week. The finale of the course would be a Lounge Evening to allow participants to showcase the song they had been working on. Participant numbers were down this year and attendance fluctuated each week.

Ms Wishart was to provide accompaniment at the Lounge Evening prior to the final weeks Ms Wishart had resigned and therefore the evening had to be postponed. This situation impacted the charity in a negative way in terms of reputation, professionalism and income.



Description:

Led by MusicFirst NI's Becca Hopkins, this series of vocal workshops / masterclasses is geared towards the advancing singer who wants:

- *Personal 1-2-1 coaching (or to observe and contribute to a 1-2-1 session)
 - *To achieve more volume and power as well as a clarity in softer tones
 - *To discover subtleties essential to defining a personal style
 - *To explore the art of affective performance
 - *To establish effective practice routines for continued development
- ...plus gain a big confidence boost knowing "you've got all the notes!"

Children's Department Kindermusik Playdates



30 July & 2 Sept. 2022

- Raising awareness of MFNI within the community
- Offering free class demos and expert advice on music tuition pathways in regards to child development

Given the low numbers of families who engaged in open days in 2021, Ms Becca implemented a new way of opening up Kindermusik to the community. A number of 'Playdates' took place prior to the new academic year commencing, allowing families to book a place in a special one-off class. This approach allowed families to experience the unique approach and structure of the class they could enroll their child in. This turned out to be a positive approach.

Lounge Evenings

MusicFirst NI

Unincorporated Association

Trustees' Annual Report (continued)

Year Ended 31 March 2023



Given the continued success of the Lounge Evenings in the previous year, more were planned for 22 September, 22 December, and 23 February. As explained above, circumstances resulted in the evening in September being postponed, and then combined with the next Lounge Evening in 22 December.

Tutors and trustees gave of their time to completely transform Studio A from a classroom into an intimate, fairly-lit performance space, with room for up to 35 audience members. Adult performers receiving individual tuition were given the opportunity to perform for an audience, promoting their self-esteem and confidence and allowing a showcase for the talent within MFNI

A nominal fee of £5 per ticket was charged to cover snacks and soft drinks provide.

After the main performers an open mic space was offered for any other budding performers in the audience. This enabled those students who didn't feel ready for the more formal performance opportunity, to still have a go and build their confidence for next time. It also enabled the tutors from MFNI to showcase their skills and talents, offering a prime opportunity to advertise the school. Finally, it also allowed those in the audience, who weren't students but were perhaps considering tuition, to experience the supportive and nurturing atmosphere of MFNI, to meet the tutors, and even have their moment in the spotlight. All of this contributes to promoting the reputation of the school as a place for all the community.

Junior Lounge evenings were also organized for 22 December and 23 February, however latter was rescheduled for 23 April due to tutor commitments. These junior lounge evenings enable our young students aged 11 years to 17 age to perform for one another and an audience. These performances allow students to build their confidence or perhaps use as a rehearsal for exam practicals. The evening followed the same format as the adult evenings, although starting a little earlier to allow for the age of participants and audience members. Ven the set up and organization required, alongside the time given by tutors, it was decided that both events would be held on the same date with time in between. Not only is this a more responsible way to use resources, it also opens up both to other audience members who may choose to attend both performances.

Feedback from students and families continues to be positive and the open mic session following the main performance, continues to give those students, and audience members, a chance to perform in a more informal atmosphere. The hope is that audience members will have fun and potentially consider taking up individual lessons.

A central goal of the Lounge Evenings continues to be focused on bringing the community together; to learn from one another, to socialize, and to celebrate each other's success. Ensemble work is an aspect of advanced formal music exams, and therefore encouraging relationships and promoting an open mic environment for collaboration, will be adding to the students' ensemble skills.

Parents and other family members are vital to the running of MFNI, as demonstrated by the success of the Forte Festival 22, therefore offering them the opportunity to see their young person performing, strengthens their connection to the school and the tutors.

Financial Review

Through the income raised from tutor room rental fees, donations, ticket sales and interest received, MFNI grossed a total income £7419.94, leaving a net loss of £633.30 after running expenditure.

With Ms Wishart resigning as piano tutor in August 2022 MFNI lost over 22 students, equating to a sizable amount of income and once again the school was in a vulnerable position. There followed a period of uncertainty, causing much stress for tutors. Given it took approximately 6 months to appoint another piano tutor, income was negatively impacted.

It should be noted that demand for individual singing lessons continued to be high during this period.

Changes and Improvements

A deep clean of the waiting room, studio A and studio B took place prior to the start of the academic year. New furniture was purchased for the waiting room to make it more welcoming, and certificates, achievements and awards received by tutors were displayed on the walls within the studio.

The promotional video which commenced filming in 2021 continues to be unfinished. The positive of this was that it enabled David Hughes (videographer) to attend the Forte Festival and create a mini video of the event. This was used on social media to promote MFNI. The main promotional video is in post-production, but as Ms Wishart had composed the background music, and also no longer is a tutor at MFNI, the video will have to be re-edited and new music composed/acquired. When completed the video will be used on social media to raise the profile of the school. MFNI are focused on increasing their social media presence and Miss Owens has specialist skills in this area and is going to take on this task.

Plans for Future Periods

In setting our objectives and planning our activities for the year, the trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland's guidance on public benefit to ensure that the activities have helped to achieve the charity's purposes and provide a benefit to the beneficiaries.

MFNI plans to continue working towards the advancement of music education in Northern Ireland. As a legacy of Covid and now the recent cost of living crisis, we recognize the challenges of increasing student numbers as we go forward. We also acknowledge that offering virtual lessons also adds an additional format for students and the community to engage with the school.

MFNI continues to promote ease of access for payments for events and Kindermusik via PayPal. This was the preferred method for purchasing tickets for the Forte Festival.

The Lounge Evenings will continue to be a prominent feature of the year ahead. Continuous feedback will be sought from tutors and students, and it is also hoped piano, violin and guitar students will feature in forthcoming evening.

It is uncertain at present will Summer Singing will return give the drop in numbers and increasing costs.

A number of 'Playdates' are also planned for Summer 2023 and individual tutors will offer lessons over the summer period.

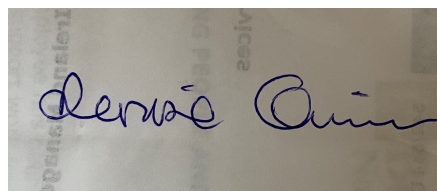
Given the expense of the venue used for this year's Forte Festival and the problems with support from the venue, other options will be explored for the end of year celebration. The management committee will evaluate the costs and benefits for the charity and its members of such a large scale event and will consider ways to evolve the festival ensuring performance opportunities, celebration of graduates, and reaching out to more of the community.

The only private benefit flowing from this purpose is the heightened awareness, and increased brand recognition, of the tutors as both educators and performers. This is incidental and necessary, because without the tutors, the charity could not fulfil its purpose and objectives. The public awareness of the tutors' expertise brings an assurance of the quality of service provided. No harm arises from these purposes.

The Trustees' Annual Report and Strategic Report were approved on 26 January 2024 and signed on behalf of the Board of Trustees by:



Ms. Becca Hopkins
26 January 2024
2022-2023 Secretary



Ms. Denise Quinn
26 January 2024
2022-2023 Chairperson

MusicFirst NI

Northern Ireland - Charity number 104806

Annual return

The Trustees
Music First NI
46 Botanic Avenue
Belfast
BT7 1JR

22 Jan 2024

Dear Trustees

Independent Examiner's Report to the charity trustees of Music First NI

I am a Chartered Accountant of 35+ years' experience and the Trustees of Music First NI have asked me conduct an independent review of their financial results for the year ended **31 March 2023**.

As the charity's trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts in accordance with the Charity's Act (Northern Ireland) 2008.

It is my responsibility to:

- examine the accounts under section 65 of the Charities Act.
- follow the procedures laid down in the general Directions given by the Commission under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act.
- state whether particular matters have come to my attention.

Basis of independent examiner's report

I have examined your charity accounts as required under section 65 of the Charities Act and my examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland under section 65(9)(b) of the Charities Act.

My examination included a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with these records. It also included consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as charity trustees concerning any such matters.

My role is to state whether any material matters have come to my attention giving me cause to believe:

1. That accounting records were not kept in accordance with section 63 of the Charities Act.
2. That the accounts do not accord with those accounting records.
3. That the accounts do not comply with the accounting requirements of the Charities Act.
4. That there is further information needed for a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.

Independent examiner's statement

I have completed my examination and have no concerns in respect of the matters (1) to (4) listed above, and in connection with following the Directions of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland, I have found no matters that require drawing to your attention.

Name: Peter Johnston FCA

Relevant Professional Body: ICAI

Address: 57 Station Road, Holywood, BT18 0BP

Date: 22nd January 2024

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Johnston', written in a cursive style.