Liverpool school to launch new national organ



Blue Coat School Volunteers celebrate National Lottery funding to restore the Father Willis organ Blue Coat School

The Liverpool Blue Coat School is to launch a national organ scholarship scheme, following a National Lottery-funded restoration of its historic pipe organ.

The Blue Coat For All project will restore the school's rare, museum-quality 1874 Father Willis organ with a £162,800 HLF grant, thanks to National Lottery players.

Initially installed in the original Liverpool Blue Coat School building (now Bluecoat Arts Centre) in Liverpool city centre in 1874, the organ would have been listened to daily by John Lennon's father Alfred, who attended the state school between 1921-29.

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Internationally significant due to its size, quality of workmanship and originality, the historic instrument has had little alteration in its 144-year history and will now be the subject of an exciting new music and social project at Blue Coat School.

Scholarship scheme

Once the organ is back to full working order, the School will launch the Blue Coat Organ Scholarship scheme as a legacy of the National Lottery restoration. Open to pupils from across the UK, the scheme will offer unsurpassed training at a national level and help address the shortage of organists, in particular female players.

The scheme is supported by Blue Coat alumnae - known as ‘Old Blues’ - Dr Chris McElroy and Lee Ward, directors of music at Liverpool Cathedral and Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral respectively. It will not only aim to keep playing organ music alive but will reinforce Liverpool’s place on the classical music map.

Musical opportunities

[quote=Nathan Lee, Head of HLF North West]“We are delighted that the young people of Liverpool will have the chance to take advantage of such fantastic music training opportunities thanks to National Lottery players.”[/quote]

With the help of community volunteers, the organ restoration project will also see:

- the 19th-century organ become the heart of regular public concerts for the first time
- formation of a 50-member community choir
- the school archive digitally catalogued
- a new website about the organ and the school

The Father Willis’ Wicked Workshops programme will feature the organ leading interactive music, heritage and science workshops for primary school pupils from disadvantaged areas of Liverpool and for specialist school pupils, such as Royal School for the Blind Liverpool.

This will include Willis’ Waves workshops, led by a retired physics teacher, which will use the organ’s mechanics to teach the principles of stationary sound waves.

Nathan Lee, Head of HLF North West, said: “This is excellent news for Blue Coat School. We are delighted that this historic Father Willis organ will be restored to full working order and the young people of Liverpool will have the chance to take advantage of such fantastic music training opportunities thanks to National Lottery players.”

Official launch

The official launch of Blue Coat For All will be celebrated with a Gala Organ Concert at Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, 7-8pm, 30 January 2019, hosted by BBC Radio Merseyside’s Roger Phillips. Free entry to all.



Bluecoat, Liverpool's oldest building and the UK's first arts centre Brian Roberts

Digital archive project to unlock hidden treasures of Liverpool’s oldest building