



Community Stories



Freya Ruskaanen

Freya, a cello student from Edinburgh, studying at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, came to Cambridge to visit her boyfriend - once the restrictions in Lockdown eased sufficiently for her to travel. This is her community story of her time in Cambridge



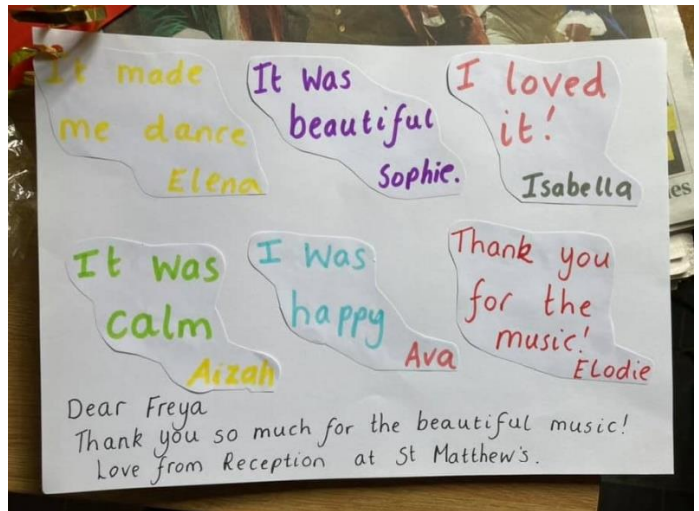
That's me in the general melee with cello playing a Nirvana cover!

I didn't realise that when I came down to Cambridge with my cello that I would be asked to get involved in a series of 'lockdown' concert performances in the street. Doing so presented all sorts of interesting challenges – how to rehearse, how to keep your music on a music stand in the wind, issues of ensemble when playing outside etc etc. However, one is used to these sorts of issues as a musician. What surprised me was the level of community engagement and the hunger of all those who attended for the sound of live music. Music seems to have awakened a deep nostalgia in everyone for the sound of music – as a musician we know about the power of music – but to see its power to unite and stimulate so demonstrably was very touching and inspiring. Everyone was SO grateful and supportive. If I could portray my experience in the form of cartoon it was like the sound of my cello was working as a spirit thread that was helping pull everyone together. I love music.



The same trio in the primary school playing covers and Neapolitan songs and Offenbach duets

In the street concerts I was involved in playing two covers – *Smells like Teen Spirit* and *Viva la Vida* with another cellist and a guitarist (who I later found out was the headmaster of a local primary school). My involvement with this unlikely and wacky ensemble led to invitations to perform in a local nursery school and at the local primary school! We ended up doing a total of four performances in the two schools – we performed for everyone there – the children of key workers, nursery children, and pupils in years 1, 2 and 6. We had a fantastic response and got lovely letters from the teachers and the children (see below).



Everyone talking about the concert yesterday afternoon here. It was really magical. I'm rushing but wanted to pass this on. It was there in my in-box this morning from Miss Keeling, one of my Year One teachers...

"Thanks f or organising the concert this afternoon Tony- it was so peaceful and lovely moment for reflection on all the madness of the past few months."

In case you wanted to pass on to the musicians tomorrow... XXXX came over after the concert and said that she nearly cried with happiness when they started playing because she is thinking of moving on to the cello (she is currently learning violin) and this has inspired her to ask her music teacher if she can!!" Isn't that amazing!

From Tony Davies, Head Teacher, St Matthews Primary School, Cambridge

*Dear Theo and Freya,
A huge thank you for bringing your music to our school today. You engaged and delighted the children. Even though they are only 3 and 4 years old they listened intently for more than 20 minutes. It was like therapy for us all. Please come back!*

Teacher at a maintained nursery school, Cambridge

I'm back in my hometown of Edinburgh but secure in the knowledge that I have found a home from home! It was lovely to see the community come together in such an open and friendly way.

Freya Ruuskanen