



Music Making in the University

The University of Birmingham enjoys one of the liveliest music-making scenes of any campus with a wide variety of groups, societies and ensembles run by both the Music Department and the University of Birmingham Music Society (UMS).

University Music Society

This is the biggest music-making society in the university and is open to all students and staff in the university. The society was founded over 100 years ago when Sir Edward Elgar was Head of Music at the university and currently has over 400 members. It is run by an elected committee of students and staff.

Auditions

Some ensembles are auditioned, others are open to all. Auditions take place in the first week of term and are based purely on ability; no preference is given to music students. A general guideline for the standard required is Grade 7 to 8, although it depends on the instrument and the number of people auditioning on that instrument. Orchestral experience is just as important as an exam result.

University Choir (unauditioned)

This large choir of approximately 200 voices gives two concerts per year with one of the university's orchestras, in Birmingham's recently refurbished and world-renowned Town Hall. It is conducted by professionals and members of the Music Department staff. Works performed recently include Verdi *Te Deum*, Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* and Elgar *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Philharmonic Orchestra and Symphony Orchestra (auditioned)

We run two full-sized orchestras of equal standing; each gives one concert with the University Choir (see above) and one concert on its own, and is conducted by professional conductors and members of the Music Department staff. Works performed recently include Mussorgsky *The Night on Bare Mountain*, Brahms *Symphony No. 1 in C minor* and Sibelius *Symphony No. 2*.

Jazz Orchestra (auditioned)

This small ensemble gives at least two concerts per year in a mixture of formal and informal settings. It plays a wide variety of music from early jazz classics of the 1920s and 30s right through to recently composed and arranged numbers.

Unauditioned ensembles

The UMS runs four more unauditioned ensembles; a **brass band**, a **symphonic wind band**, a **saxophone ensemble** and a **chamber choir**. They each give two concerts a year and are directed by students, who audition for the opportunity to conduct each term. They perform a diverse selection of music drawn mainly from standard repertoire, but often performing recently composed and newly arranged numbers as well.

UMS Chamber Music

A new addition to the society, UMS Chamber Music gives students the opportunity to form their own small chamber ensembles and select their own pieces! It provides a platform for the groups to

perform both informally, in internal sessions throughout the year, in public spring and summer term concerts. The informal sessions give ensembles the chance to perform to, support and help each other and also act as auditions in the run up to the concerts.

Non-UMS ensembles

In addition to the UMS ensembles, there are other groups run by the Music Department, although non-music students are welcome to join. The auditioned **Chamber Orchestra** gives two lunchtime concerts per year, conducted by professionals or professionally-coached students; recent performances include pieces by Mozart, Mendelssohn, Grieg and Beethoven. The **Birmingham University Singers**, also auditioned, give two concerts per year and sing regularly in churches, with a yearly visit to Tenbury, Worcestershire each Christmas and a cathedral residency each summer (Truro and Christ Church Oxford are the two most recent). The **New Music Ensemble** gives performances of contemporary music and performs student works in both concerts and workshop sessions. Recently performed composers include Stockhausen, Berio, Boulez and Reich.

Other musical opportunities in Birmingham

The UMS is not the only society on campus devoted to music-making: there are several more societies based in the Guild of Students, including the **Jazz and Blues Society (JaBSoc)**, the **Guild Musical Theatre Group (GMTG)** and the **Live and Unsigned Music Society (LUMSoc)**. Students at the university also manage and perform in the annual **Summer Festival of Music**, which takes place in the summer term between the end of exams and the end of term. During the festival students take part in intensive rehearsals over two weeks and put on several concerts and a full-scale opera in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, our on-campus concert venue. Recent operas produced are Strauss *Die Fledermaus*, Vaughan Williams *The Poisoned Kiss* and this year's duo of Blow *Venus and Adonis* and Purcell *Dido and Aeneas* which received rave reviews from the Birmingham Post.

Facilities

The University of Birmingham currently has 18 practice rooms, each containing a piano. There are two percussion rooms, a harp room and rooms containing early keyboard instruments. Music students have priority booking over practice rooms although non-music students who gain a place in an auditioned ensemble also have access. The UMS and Music Department also use the Barber Institute of Fine Arts on campus, which houses a 350-seat concert hall, the Music Library and an Art Gallery. Construction is currently underway on the university's brand new Music Department building, which will complete the red-brick semi-circle of buildings in Chancellor's Court (by the Great Hall and the Clock Tower). This new building will open in 2012 and will contain a 450-seat concert hall and new rehearsal and practice facilities. The auditorium will be the most flexible performance space at a UK university and suitable for performances from solo voice through electroacoustic music, to a full symphony orchestra.

Find out more at:

www.ums.org.uk

www.music.bham.ac.uk/making (more general information about music-making in the university)

Facebook pages: 'UMS – University Music Society', 'JaBSoc' and 'Live+Unsigned Music Society (LUMSoc)',