

The 16th Elmbridge Literary Competition



34

39 *Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind,*

44 *flight to the imagination and life to everything.*

The image shows a musical score for piano. It consists of three systems of music. The first system starts at measure 34 and features a treble and bass clef with various notes and rests. The second system starts at measure 39 and includes the lyrics 'Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind,'. The third system starts at measure 44 and includes the lyrics 'flight to the imagination and life to everything.'. The music is written in a style that suggests a lyrical and expressive piece.

MUSIC

Winning, Highly Commended &
Commended
Entries

11 (Secondary)-13 Year Old Category

The 16th Elmbridge Literary Competition 2021

MUSIC

*We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams...*

“Music is the art which is most nigh to tears and memory.” Oscar Wilde on how a song can roll back the years and take you to a forgotten place with friends long gone.

Literature and music have always gone hand in hand. Poets and authors, from Shelley To Shakespeare and Keats to Austen have woven it as themes through their works. 2021 is the 150th Anniversary of the Royal Albert Hall, a venue which has seen every style of music performed beneath its iconic dome. To celebrate this, the 16th Elmbridge Literary Competition was looking for poems and short stories that take music as their inspiration.

Following the success of 2020's 'New World', The Elmbridge Literary Competition was once more open to national and international submissions. Run in partnership between The R C Sherriff Trust and Elmbridge Borough Council, it was open to all ages.

2005:	Cook Up A Story
2006:	On My Way
2007:	A Life In Colour
2008:	Once Upon A Time
2009:	A Symphony of Life
2010:	The Elmbridge 100
2011:	Breaking The Barrier
2012:	A Dickens of A Christmas
2013:	One Act Radio Play
2014:	Dear Diary
2015:	Flights of Fantasy
2016:	Love
2017:	Luck
2018:	A Shiver Down The Spine/Things That Go Bump In The Night
2019/20:	New World

Category: Short Stories

Joint 1st Place: The Colours of Music – by Nina Truesdale

They say music is colour. That musicians are artists.

I do not think it was meant literally.

Music is the only colour in my life. I cannot see this page, the pen holding the ink that will make my thoughts more than intangible wisps of emotion and form them into words... but I understand light and dark. I can hear it. I can understand other's emotions, not through body language or facial expressions, but through their tone of voice, through the snatches of song they whistle and hum. I can be brought to tears by any movie or piece of theatre the same as you, through music. I can feel the sunny golden joy, I can feel the red-hot fury, I can feel the steel grey pain, I can feel the pale green peace... but gold, red, grey, green? To me, those are meaningless words. To me, colour is tempo, dynamics, chord patterns, legato, staccato, slurs, ties, vibrato, tonality...and the way a piece of music is played betrays to me not just the composer's emotional intent but the performer's state of mind. Elation, frustration...guilt.

My mum is a second desk cellist in the London Philharmonic Orchestra. It was their first concert with a guest conductor - so Dad stumped up for tickets for us both. At the interval, Dad took me downstairs to catch up with Mum, who had been absent much of the week rehearsing. Dad guided me through the infamous labyrinth that was backstage at the Royal Albert Hall and opened a door.

"The room's curved. Lockers to one side," he cautioned, placing my palm on cold metal. Dad turned me slightly and placed my white cane in front of me. "Lots of instrument cases on the floor, so be careful. Your mum's not here yet, she must've gone to tune up. I'll go find her, bring you a coffee. Just wait here for us, love."

His footsteps receded and I heard the door shut behind him. My cane bumping on musical luggage, I followed the long arc of lockers around, to a bench beyond a thicket of cello cases, and sat down to wait. The silence was broken by the door opening, and the sound of someone unzipping an instrument case at the other end of the room. Strange, because in the interval everyone usually goes to the green room first. The opening bars of Paganini's Caprice No. 1 followed – hasty, furtive, and not entirely accurate. Dark, bruised purple, threaded with black. A clunk, a curse, some more zipping, and footsteps hurrying to the door.

Five minutes later, Mum and Dad returned. I would have told them then and there, but I was so pleased to see Mum that I completely forgot...until, on the way home, Mum's phone pinged with the news that the leader's second Stradivarius violin had been reported stolen.

My house was searched, but nobody thought it was me, anyway. They always underestimate the blind girl. So I was taken to a police station in London to give evidence. I was their prime witness, after all.

My parents led me into the station, into a cacophony of coffee machines and rustling papers, a symphony of staplers, the timpani of tapping keyboards, the rumble of raised voices and footsteps coming from all directions. I tightened my grip on Mum's arm. Even though my other senses compensated for my loss of vision, the sheer volume of noise was terrifying because I couldn't gauge where most of it was coming from. A brisk female voice interrupted my thoughts.

“Mr and Mrs Everworth, Jacqueline. I’m DC Patel. Thank you for coming in - any evidence Jacqueline can provide about her time in the locker room will be extremely helpful.”

We made our way deeper into the station, leaving my parents waiting in the lobby, DC Patel taking over as my guide.

“We’ll take a shortcut through the custody suite. We’re holding an identity parade today. Not that you could help us with that, of course...” DC Patel commented, oblivious. I bristled. Another door opened. As we walked in, a foot tapping nervously caught my attention. The rhythm was familiar, but it took me a few seconds to identify it: the main theme of Paganini’s Caprice. Tapped out with no small measure of guilt and impatience. Laced with purple and black.

“You missed two appoggiaturas when you played it on Sunday,” The criticism slipped out before I could stop it. The reply was immediate.

“Paganini’s ornaments are optional!” a man’s voice snapped. I then heard the sharp hiss of sucking air. The sound of someone realising they had made a mistake.

DC Patel spoke up. “I thought the LPO performed the Elgar?” It was half question, half statement. Her whole body tensed, and her grip on me tightened.

“They did,” I confirmed, “but the piece I heard in the locker room was Paganini...”

DC Patel dropped my arm, and I heard her open the door. “Sarge...!” she called, the urgency and triumph in her tone bringing several officers running.

Emotion and music are tied by the strongest cords. Music can betray emotion, but also conserve it for centuries. When I first picked up my beloved cello, I felt that I truly belonged to something that wanted me. It is a feeling I will never forget. Music is distraction, music is peace, music is a retreat. And I believe I can understand it better than anyone, see all its colours, because music is what my life is. Would you trade your sight for such an incredible understanding of something so beautiful? Give your vision for music? Or your liberty?

That thief was no musician. No true musician would deprive a fellow artist of his instrument. Or risk deprivation himself. Which was a shame, I reflected grimly, as the shouting started, and the handcuffs clinked. He would have a lot of free time to perfect those appoggiaturas...but the colours of his music were never going to change.

Joint 1st Place: A Note From Istanbul – by Ammaarah Vohra

The sun broke through the clouds, but the city had never really slept. Women tottering in heels since ungodly hours, men wolf whistling in the street, the trundle of cars humming in the background, all of it, made up the melody of Istanbul. But this particular woman had no interest in what today would bring. Head down, she hurried through the humid streets, just wanting the day to be over. There being no time to spare, she headed to the nearest shop. Normally she wouldn’t go there. *He* never did.

The Grocer’s was a dimly lit store on the corner, filled with packaged products containing diseases of all kinds. The shopkeeper pulled at his long, curly beard as he studied a newspaper, his lips moving as he kept reading. In the background, a radio was playing some popular western song, crackling and fading every couple of seconds.

As soon as he saw her approaching, he rolled up the newspaper and tossed it to the side, smiling largely. His smile unnerved her, his teeth too big for his mouth and his mouth too big for his face. His eyes never left her as she walked around the shop, her gaze shifting between the floor and the shelves, never once looking at him.

'My sister, how are you?!' the man said, unnecessarily loud, as she made her way to the counter.

She studied him, silent.

He drew back, 'My condolences.'

She simply nodded and placed a vase, some rose water and some nuts in front of him, fiddling her hands.

'How much?' She asked, in broken English.

'For you, my dear, it's on me.'

'No thanks, I cannot accept that.' She placed some money on the counter and stepped back, feeling lightheaded. That western music was doing no good either, every beat making the pain in her head increase. Her stomach rumbled- she hadn't eaten all day.

'One more thing, do you by any chance have some parchment?'

The grocer gave her a curious look. 'Of course, my dear, my shop has everything you need. I never understood why your brother did not shop here more often.'

Back in her flat, she set the vase on the table and filled it with water. The cries of birds filled the air, the sounds blending together to create the loud, messy orchestra that was the sky. She took no notice. She could hear the faint beating of a drum somewhere in the distance, or was that her headache? She couldn't tell. She delicately placed the already drooping lilies into the water, bought from one of the only florists in town. Those were his favourite.

That night, they'd been eating some flatbread that she'd cooked. His throat was sore, and his lungs weak from the factory, but he pointed to a picture on the wall of their flat. It was a vase of lilies, painted by a friend. Although not the finest, the flat was charming, with its faded colours, high ceilings, windows that overlooked the whole street, and a balcony whose purpose was more aesthetic than practical. She was afraid any day it may fall, but the view was worth the risk. Every night she leant against the railings, smoking a cigarette, looking over the city in all its glory. Every night, she saw the same story, men taking women into hotels, cars zooming through the streets, so fast blink and you would miss them. The nightclubs, popular with the unpopular, had their own guests, from drunkards looking for a one night stand to priests with problems with their marriage, this was a world so different to the day. Tomorrow morning it would all be gone, and so would the memories of the night before. A city wiped afresh. The sins dug deep enough into the earth so that when they resurfaced, were mere shadows of what they were.

He had been a labourer, and spent his days toiling for a meagre sum of money, to come home, eat, sleep, and start the cycle again. Though hoarse, his voice was good, and he liked to sing. In a world he could never win in, music was the only joy free of charge. The labourers sang copiously as they worked, in Turkish, Arabic, Farsi, Urdu and in broken English. He taught his songs to her, each one more beautiful and sorrowful than the last.

She stepped out onto the streets once again, making her way to the northernmost point of the town, the cemetery. At some point in time, someone had the brilliant idea of sending the dead to the outskirts of town, to separate the living from the ghosts, as easily and effectively as separating yolks from whites. With the dead out of sight, out of mind, the community could get on with what it did best, partying, sinning, music and chasing the world. You could do it all and more if took your mind off the disturbing thought of being mortal.

He told her he loved flowers, and now she was placing them on his grave. She gently sprinkled the rosewater over the soil, an offering for his soul to be taken gently. She sat quietly and ate the nuts, cracking off the shells as she did so. On the parchment she had written a song. His song. She knew she would only be able to carry it for so long, and to preserve it this way was better. The song, in future, would outlive all its owners, weaving its way through people's tongues and lives, leaving imprints on all the hearts it touched. In the background, was the steady rhythm of the city going about its day, the indifference of people with nothing to lose. Tears streaming down her cheeks, she began to sing the song he had taught her, written on that very paper. And anyone who heard her that day would say it was the most angelic sound they had ever heard, in this city filled with ruse and regret.

2nd Place: Broken Memories – by Sophie Vincze

Dilapidated as it was, slow elegant music could still be coaxed from the old piano by the right hands pressing softly on the yellowed keys. Wild, fury induced music could still run like a raging red river of rebellion through the battlegrounds of broken memories, if the right hands played the melody. And these hands were mottled with age, curled into claws as she played. And the beautiful voice was now ruined and torn to a dry rasping whisper. Stopped and broken, gazing ahead with eyes long blind, she was a frail bird, fallen from the sky, her wings snapped. And with the heavy curtains at the low window drawn, she could feel alive again, waiting backstage, the comforting smells of sweat and costumes, the swelling music clinging to the roars of the expectant crowd. And if she pressed her worn, faded pink ballet slippers to her chest, she could be dancing again, swooping and soaring under the bright lights. The high ceiling, the wealthy people sat up high, in their suits and silk dresses, drinking champagne from tall glasses. And the girls, as the purple curtain rises, hearing the sweet charm of the music as they danced.

The gentle blowing of the elven horns and the hushed songs of the sea and sky, a thousand battle cries under the low moans of the wind, and the clinks of gold, the hum of silver and the voices of the stars. Music, so sweet serenaded to a girl at the window, shared by the birds while the morning is pearly fresh and the sky painted peach with the rising sun, to be heard on a grand stage, to be danced to at fairy balls, to be sung in the silence of the moon. To be played on an old, battered piano, by old small hands resting on the yellowed keys, remembering.

The theatre was shut for the night; even the old caretaker who came after performances and swept the soft rose petals tossed to the stage, was gone. He had left two hours ago, locked up and walked home with his dog snapping at his heels. He hadn't noticed the girl tucked into the pile of sheets in the corner, huddled on the filthy floor as he took the key from its hook and locked the large wooden doors. Now, she crawled out of her hiding place, taking in

the splendour of the serene darkness as it rusted the edges of the sky with silver moonlight. The high windows let a husk of light creep through and bathe the stage in starlight, the ropes above the stage creaked as the last remains of the sun straggled in the sky, clinging with streaks of deep burnt colours. She took from her pocket a crumbling piece of bread and some slightly hard cheese and ate it, leaning against a dressing table. Now she took from the wall a lamp, and lit it with a match from a drawer. The flame flickered eerily, throwing shadows onto the walls as it sputtered and whined and crackled in its metal frame. She walked across the room, stroking a hand along the plain glass mirrors and two benches where the girls changed.

It wasn't her first night staying behind. When the music moved her into a longing state, the melody twisting itself round her mind, running pictures and brilliant colours through her head, she would creep back into the theatre and hide amongst the old stage rags until everyone had left. It was particularly cold tonight, the wind moaned through the cracks as she changed into her silk costume and, fluffing up her white tutu, walked out onto the stage. She left the candle at the edge of the stage and walked herself through the steps of the performance, trying to imagine the music swelling and the rest of the girls beside her. She hummed quietly, trying to place how the music moved and quite suddenly found herself immersed in remembering the tune that the orchestra had played that night.

Perhaps she was too oblivious to the world around her, too wound up in the slow steps. Disaster struck. The wind dragged the curtain to the flickering flame and a tongue of fire billowed out into the empty theatre, sinking its teeth into the wooden seats and stage. She screamed, and rushed to the exit, feet slipping on the burning wood, lungs aching with the grey cloying smoke. Fire rushed at her from all sides, tossing her between them. Shadows laughed maliciously, sliming across the walls to greet her. She ran to the window, but the latch was too heavy to move, and she begged for air but slowly slipped unconscious. As the sparks flared shouts could be heard.

'The theatres on fire!'

'Is anyone in there- quick fetch some water...'

The fire held her in its heart, breaking her, twisting her, blinding her, charring her very skin, ripping at her hair. They thought they'd dragged out a corpse when they saw the blood and blistering, peeling skin. But the shallow breaths told them she was alive, if not dying now.

And so now she sits, old and lost, with no family. Just a pile of fragments from her dashed dreams. Just her withered hands and croaking voice. Her satin slippers still sitting on the windowsill. And, tucked in the corner of her room, an old piano.

3rd Place: A Concert For The Village – by Joshua Grant

I dropped a round pebble through a gap in the metal grill that covered our village's old sandstone well. As I leaned over anxiously to watch my stone fall, my worn guitar case shifted on my back. I would usually hear an echoing splash and see rings and glimmers in the darkness, but today I couldn't see or hear anything. The well level always became lower in summer, but the village had never been this short of water before. People were already

packing their things and preparing to leave. The day was swelteringly hot and I could feel sweat running down my back underneath my guitar. Honey coloured houses were set into the hillside, the terracotta roofs matching the slope of the hill. I counted the homes that were already unoccupied. Many of the slabs of the paved road were broken, with grass growing between the stone tiles. I saw Oliver coming towards me.

"I think the well is dry now," I said to him.

His already lined brown face wrinkled even more with worry. "Antonio, I saw Jorge and Alicia leave last night. They had everything loaded up on their cart. Rugs, chairs, the grandchildren sitting on top."

"There won't be anyone left here."

"Well, we can't manage without water. Perhaps we can do something to encourage people to stay a little longer. Everyone loves to listen to our music. We could have a concert."

His face lit up. Oliver played percussion. He had a big box of instruments to bang, scrape, click and rattle. He kept the beat steady when we played.

"Let's meet up at the hall in half an hour."

He went towards the houses of our friends in the band. I wandered slowly towards the hall where we practiced.

The hall was the biggest building we had. It was a three-storey building, with an open arcade of whitewashed pillars and stone arches at the front holding up a wide tiled roof which gave passers-by shade in the heat of the summer. The village held meetings there and sometimes there would be flowers in the street when a couple had got married. That hadn't happened lately as the village became more and more empty. I pushed the wooden doors open, and waited for the others. When Elena arrived with her fiddle, I took my guitar out of its case and sat down in my seat. We began to play together but we didn't need sheets of music. Instead, we had learnt the tunes and rhythms we knew from listening to the older players in the village. Soon after, Juan ran in, carrying his accordion. He was the youngest member of the group, but he was already strong enough to easily carry the heavy weight of his instrument. He listened for a moment, then joined in, pulling the bellows out and in.

I loved my guitar. It was made of ash wood, has catgut strings and was very old. It had snakes in darker wood that stretched out of the sound hole, crawled over the dark circles of the rosette and slithered up its neck. It was given to me by my grandfather. I held the body of my guitar close to my chest, its curved waist resting on my leg. The fingers on my left hand moved across the frets, while my right hand held a silver coin that I used to pick and strum across the strings. I played my part carefully, listening to the others. The twang of my strings echoed around the room.

Oliver came in, carrying his box of instruments. "I've asked everyone to come and hear us play today at dusk. It will be like old times," he told us.

I remembered the last time we had a concert. We had gone down to the nearest town and played in a taverna on a busy street. It was a long journey and we had travelled two whole days to get there, but everyone listening enjoyed it. There was dancing and clapping and the place had been full of energy.

That evening, as the sun set, we moved outside and set out a few rows of chairs that had been inside the hall. We then played together in the hall's arcade. The shadows of the pillars stretched across the road. Elena tapped her foot in time to Oliver hitting the side of his drum

with a jingling tambourine. Juan ran his fingers over his accordion keyboard and I strummed along with them, watching Oliver carefully so that I kept up and pressing my fingers down firmly between the frets to shape the chords. Even though the sun was going down, it seemed hotter than ever.

A family came out of one of the houses opposite the hall and settled in the front row. Their grandmother fanned herself in the heat. Gradually, more and more families arrived until almost everyone left in the village was there. Some were in party clothes and had their dancing shoes on. People began to dance in couples and then joined hands in groups, spinning and weaving in and out. As we played on, we heard a rumbling above us. A few people glanced up and mutters spread across the groups of dancers. A few seconds later, a steady downpour of rain began to fall onto the crowd. The dancing and music became even more energetic, with children holding their hands up in the air and the men stamping in time. When we finished our song, someone shouted out, "Let's see if the well has filled up again!"

I put down my guitar and sprinted along, with others close behind. The rain was running down my face and my hair was stuck to my head. When I got to the well, it was too dark to see down, so I dropped a pebble. We waited in tense silence, then I heard a splash, and then cheers all around me.

Highly Commended: The Saddest Song I Ever Heard – by Isla Hasler

Names aren't important. It's what's inside that counts. But it's a good way of introducing myself, so I'll tell you mine anyway. My name is Aina. I was born without the ability to see. Which shouldn't matter either. But somehow I always end up standing at the edge of the playground while the other kids race around like crazy. They think I can't play because I wouldn't know if the tagger was coming to get me or not. So I keep on finding myself standing on my own against a brick wall. Some days, I'm crying inside because it feels like no one can see me. Like I'm a ghost and not a real person. I'm not like some kids, though, who just mope around and hope someone will notice them. Instead, I thought about what sort of thing I could do at lunch instead of standing around. Then, suddenly, it hit me- music! Admittedly, I'd never touched an instrument before, but there was always a first time, right? The music room was on the top floor so I had to climb up a flight of stairs. I listened at each door to check if anyone was in there. The fourth room along was free. I pushed open the door and walked across the room, my hands outstretched to discover what instruments it contained. I felt a violin (I had heard one of those before- they're pretty screechy) and a saxophone (at the time, I actually didn't know what it was but I found out later. In the centre of the room, I came across smooth, silky wood and keys battered with the fingers that had played them. A piano. I loved the feel of it, so I perched myself on the stool and started pressing my fingers on the keys. Some of them made low grumbly sounds, like thunder on a stormy night. Some of them made sounds so high I could barely hear them. All of them sent a shiver up my spine. At the end of the day, my head was still buzzing

with those wondrous sounds. I returned to that room every lunchtime and every break- no one was ever in there. At first, my songs sounded wrong, all off-kilter. But in a couple of weeks, I had just got the hang of things. I had memorised the keyboard, and become so accustomed to it that my fingers found their own way in the music. I let my mood guide me. My happy songs sounded like the wind in the trees and made a smile creep onto my face. My angry songs were wild beasts. I found music the way to escape from an only life. It was the only way to express my feelings, too. One day, early in March, I think, I had had a terrible day. Everyone laughed when I dropped my plate in the lunch hall and I had to sit out of P.E for an hour because we were doing rugby. I managed to get to the music rooms at lunch and I sat down at the piano again. I took a deep breath and I started to play. It was the most beautiful and sad thing I have ever played. It was passionate and strong. It reminded me of the sea crying. Tears rolled down my face and I let the music pick me up and swirl me around. When I had finished, I heard someone whistle behind me. It was a low and impressed sort of whistle. I blushed and wiped my eyes so they wouldn't see me crying.

"You're good." the whistler said. He was a boy in my class, who sits at the back. His name's Rahul, I think. "You're very good. You could even play in the concert if you wanted to."

Was he serious? Or was he winding me up? I wondered. I asked him.

"No, no, I'm serious. You're really good! I'll ask the music teacher if you can take part! That is... if you want me to?"

"I'd love that!" I said. I was a bit shy around some people but I had taken to Rahul immediately. Inside, I was grinning like mad. All of a sudden, the bell went.

"Do you want to walk to our next class together?" Rahul asked, "French, I think."

I nodded in reply. We walked across the playground and the sun shone out behind a cloud. I smiled.

Highly Commended: The Old Man Next Door – by Tanish Kirodian

The old man next door was not someone to be crossed. He was a grumpy looking soul who lived in a large brown house. His name? Mr Brown. And if anything was certain, it was that Mr Brown hated visitors. Perhaps it was because he was scared that they would ruin his house? Maybe it was because he liked being in peace? Or maybe it was just because deep inside Mr Brown didn't want to face that he hated being alone.

Our story begins on a hot summer morning. Star, a young girl, and her family had just moved in to the house beside Mr Brown. As they drove towards the new house Star was turning in her car seat, excited to finally move. At last they had reached and Star jumped out like a bundle of energy. Mr Brown watched coldly as his new neighbours opened the door to their new house. His eyes were on the little girl. She seemed too active, too annoying by the look of it. At that moment Star met his eyes. She give him a pleasant smile that was returned with

an angry face. Mr Brown rushed out of view, leaving Star to wonder what was on the old man's mind.

That night Star couldn't take her mind off the old man next door. He just seemed so upset and enraged. There was one thought that was stuck in her mind; how could she help this man? That's when it hit her; she could use her talent to cheer the man up. Star promised herself to play the piano outside tomorrow and shine a light of joy into his life.

Mr Brown had a simple morning routine. He would get up with the sun, make himself a cup of tea, put in some toast and read his newspaper. However, that morning, just as Mr Brown was trying to read about the football match, he heard a faint sound outside. He could recognise it instantly; piano music. Beethoven's 5th Symphony in fact. But why was anyone playing Beethoven outside early in the morning? Mr Brown looked outside to find none other than Star playing her piano in her garden. She paused to give him a wave with a huge smile on her face. He gave her another annoyed look and rushed back to his newspaper. But before he knew it Mr Brown found himself humming along with the symphony! It was keeping him calm and the sudden rises in volume added a sense of excitement for him. Finally Mr Brown had found a passion, even if he didn't want to admit it! Star's plan was working!

Over the next few days Mr Brown was listening to Star's music more and more from Mozart's 'The Magic Flute' to Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. Music was slowly moving him out of his shell and Star was feeling greater than ever. Mr Brown was even beginning to wave back at Star and was grateful for her aural presents. They brightened his day and every note was giving him happiness.

One of his favourites was Frederick Chopin's Prelude in E major. He loved the subtleness of the piece and the slow piano helped him relax. The Magic Flute? A jumpy piece that put him in high spirits and filled him with energy. Canon in D was another uplifting piece that flowed calmly and put Mr Brown in his happy place. The repetition in Ave Maria put him in a joyous loop.

Then one fine day the music didn't arrive. Mr Brown was quite pestered by this and decided to go over to the house next door. He knocked on the door to see a tired looking lady come out. "Excuse me," he said politely. "I was just wondering where your daughter was? She plays the most beautiful music every day and today I couldn't hear or see her." A tear came to the lady's eye. "Star's been in an accident," she replied. "A car crashed into her and she is in a coma in hospital." Mr Brown's jaw dropped. This kind little girl, Star, had been... in a car crash? At once he rushed away and towards the local hospital.

"Visitor for Star!" The old man nervously walked into the ward, accompanied by a nurse. He could see Star, unconscious and cold looking. "Star?" Mr Brown said. No response. Now it was his turn to think of an idea to bring a smile to a face. *What would Star like?* Mr Brown thought. That's when an idea came to his head. Mr Brown rushed out of the ward into the hospital waiting room to find just what he was looking for; a music player. He grabbed it and ran as fast as his aged legs would take him back into Star's ward. Desperately, he searched through the playlist until he found the song he was looking for. Light piano music could be heard. At that moment Star slowly opened her eyes. A faint smile came to her face as she

said, "Beethoven's 5th Symphony?" Mr Brown couldn't stop grinning as surprised doctors ran into the ward.

Star fully recovered from her car crash. She continued to play the piano and eventually grew up to become a professional pianist. Her songs became famous all around the world. However, she never stopped playing music for Mr Brown. To this day, despite the fact that Mr Brown passed on she imagines that every time she plays the music is being heard by the old man next door.

Commended: The Piano – by Lydia Pannett

Notes thrum under my fingertips as I play a tune I hardly recognise anymore, my fingers moving of their own accord, the sweet melody ebbing and flowing gently. Memories forgotten drift into focus; they have been waiting, waiting, waiting.

A breeze plays outside, whisking up leaves and, silent like a church mouse, she comes. Her spirit swimming towards me, through a sea of crashing waves. She clasps my hand and we play together; my right hand restored. We play bars of the lullaby, chilling me and filling me with longing. Her hand falls and she kisses me on the cheek. Just once is enough to remind me as I slip back to reality. One more scale and I'm off again.

Muddy green wool layered on my skin makes my body heavy as rain pounds down drenching me and I realise where I am. A place I hoped never to visit again in my memories. An icy cold coil of dread snakes itself around my heart forcing me to gasp as I run with my mate. We stop behind a wall crumbling but intact enough to shelter behind. I watch on in absolute despair as I wish I could change that moment, that decision; to be able to wind back time. I nod - the biggest mistake I have ever made and will make - and he steps out and opens fire. I should have stayed with him to the end but I was too afraid, rooted to the spot. He was shot down; down like a dog, never to rise again. As I gaze up to heaven, I carry his body, a mixture of blood and guilt soaking through me. My tears mingling with the falling rain. When I nodded, I nodded for his death. I nodded for his life to cease. I nodded for pain; his pain; my pain; his family's pain. I nodded because I was a coward.

Melancholy chords drift about the room as I transport to another scene. My younger self has a box in his hands. What could it be? I opened it and gazed with awe and adoration. A wooden hobby horse nestled inside, longing to be ridden. I picked it up and I galloped triumphantly. An innocent child with no knowledge of what is to come. My grandson rides the same horse this very day and, though we looked different at that age we are one together now as he sits down next me. No more ghosts of my past haunt me and as we play together that last note of birth, life and death, and a glimmer of hope, he is my right hand. It will stay that way until death.

Commended: A Red Song – by May Vaughan

It was a beautiful day for the world to end. Isaac Rednon stepped outside to the sound of birdsong. He didn't like birdsong, it was a bit tweety for him, so he pressed the shuffle button on the side of his gaspods and smiled as music filled his ears. He reclined in a garden chair and nibbled a slice of overdone toast. Out of the corner of his eye, Isaac could see his neighbour, Peter Sparrow. The music was good, but Isaac felt obliged to turn it down and wave to his neighbour. "Morning Pete", he called. Peter smiled and waved back. He looked stressed and was biting his lip. Isaac almost called over the fence to ask if he was alright, but the longing for the lovely music was too much. Isaac nodded at Peter and turned up his gaspods. He didn't see Peter slip away, his eyes were closed and his ears were happy.

Peter cycled down to the train station as his lip began to bleed. He was very nervous about the state of the world. These days everyone he knew spent every waking moment listening to computer-generated music. They all walked around like zombies, eyes glazing over as artificial sounds soothed their sensitive ears. Peter locked up his bike and went into the station. It was probably just a fad that would be over in a week he decided. Besides he had more important things to worry about, like work. Peter boarded his train and wiped his lip with a tissue.

Peter Sparrow worked in a small office for a small salary. His official title was , Junior Telecommunications Energy Department Supervising Assistant Deputy Manager, which was just a long way to say 'guy who answers the telephones'. Despite his modest earnings Peter liked his job; every day people would call in with problems and he would do his best to help. He didn't receive many thanks, but every time he heard the distinctive nee naw of emergency vehicles Peter smiled a little harder. But he wasn't smiling now. Peter Sparrow sensed that something very, very bad was about to happen.

The day had passed uneventfully so far. A call to rescue someone's cat, some burnt toast setting off an alarm and an elderly man trying to order pizza. But now as Peter sat outside clutching his ham sandwich on an early lunch break, he felt a sense of dread. He gulped down his sandwich and ran inside. On his desk Peter's phone was ringing angrily. "Hello emergency Se..." He began.

"It's happening!" shrieked a voice.

"What is?" Peter asked.

"A red song." whispered the voice.

"A what?"

"A red song!"

Peter was very confused. "A red song?"

"Yes, you know a red song, the end of the world."

"Oh...Armageddon!"

Yes Armageddon. That's what I said!"

Peter swallowed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean the world is ending. It's those ear things!"

"Gaspods?"

"Yes. No one is listening to me. They've all zoned out to listen to weird robot music and now..." The voice swallowed. "Now everything's out of control. I work in a glass makers and a fire is burning down the building. There are people inside, but I can't stop the fire and they won't listen. And it's not just here. I've tried calling people but no one's answering please help."

The voice sounded desperate and Peter suddenly knew that to do. "One minute", he said and hung up, then he grabbed his phone and started recording.

Peter recorded everything he could find. The hiss of an angry office cat, the scrape of chairs, his footsteps, glass breaking, the wind blowing, a tap dripping, light switches turning on, birds singing. Not every sound was beautiful, but it was the music of every life. The human noises we don't always want to hear. The playlist of our lives.

After a few minutes of trawling through videos and blog posts, Peter understood how to upload his sounds. He pressed go and waited while his computer loaded. Then Peter smiled.

Far away, Isaac Rednod was enjoying his music when sounds blocked out the piano screeches, taps dripped, birds sang. He wanted to skip the song but his Gaspods were broken. So Isaac listened and Isaac couldn't skip anything. There was no fast-forward on life. As he heard the music of everyday life, Isaac smiled and looked up. Fire engulfed the city. Great! He took out his Gaspods and said to himself, too quickly so the words became jumbled - "It's like a red song." But Isaac was right. Life is like a colourful song with no fast forward. There are horrible sounds but it's life and you don't need headphones to listen!

Category: Poems

1st Place: In Time – by Esther Clifford

I met her on a Wednesday afternoon: the mist was her opera curtain as she conducted the
Roiling kettle drums of the sky:

Boom bada boom bada boom

She loped with an easy grace, feet tapping a delicate waltz:

Slow, quick, quick; slow, quick, quick

Her hair rippled like plucked strings. I could smell rosin and wood, warm and earthy.

I caught the glimmer of her eyes, quicksilver.

Humming, she picked up the air and danced with it. I watched her weave

Melodies out of the breeze and a shiver ran in perfect fifths up my spine.

I felt her rhythm, found her voice before my own.

And how sure was the lilting lullaby of her life! Until one March, her pulse stuttered.

Her heart missed a beat and the syncopation echoed strangely through the

Locked doors. She lost her balance on stage and fell into an audience no longer there.
Fading reception: she was not made to be spaced out, dislocated.
Mute, unmute, can you hear me? Can you hear me?
Nearly. Nearly. Nearly...

Soon, on some heavy Summer's evening, I will see her again and dusk will hold its breath.
Time will forget itself, just for a quaver.
For then I will hear her, and galaxies will right themselves in my head.
I am The Audience. I am the space she fills. I am the heart she keeps in time.
And on that night, as the world picks itself up, shakes itself out, she will open her mouth
And the many Nebulas will hear her.
They will all be singing her song.

Joint 2nd Place: The Rhythm of My Beating Heart – by Charlie Burnand

Music is the rhythm of my beating heart,
Music is the paintbrush for my soul's own art.
Music is the soundtrack of the life I live,
Music is that precious gift my mind can give.

That tender, soothing harmony can heal and calm my soul,
When times are tough and weather rough it gently takes control.
It gives imagination wings, and lifts it off the ground,
My thoughts can fly, they touch the sky – to music I am bound.

The glorious range of times and places music takes me to!
It overwhelms me, swirls around me – heaven, through and through.
A mirror of my state of mood, music quells all strife,
Yes, music is the moonlight in the gloomy night of life.

It burrows through my ears, and in no time finds my heart,
Then finds a way to bind it so it will not fall apart.
Music is ephemeral, its notes must dissipate,
But everlasting images it's able to create.

Soaring ever higher, music lifts the spirits too,
Carrying the weary to the most inspiring view.
Its melodies rise grandly like a monumental peak,
And those who hear its call enjoy a thrill that is unique.

It strikes me like a javelin, but still I feel no pain,
Music's weapon leaves no scar, imparting only gain!
Music was what made our world the thing it is today,
And the power that it held then shall never ebb away.

Music is the language that is shared by all,

Transcending every barrier, however tall.
Music binds humanity; gives everyone a voice.
Listening or playing, a reason to rejoice.

Joint 2nd Place: Feel The Beat – by Neha Narne

The music starts
I rise to demi pointe and extend
'Feel the music', the teacher says
I don't need to hear the music
To feel it
In the vibrations in the floor
In the atmosphere of the studio
In my bones
In my soul

I am the dancer
Who has never heard music
But Miss says I have the best musicality of all
I am the dancer
Who has never heard music
But when I dance my spirit roams free
I am the dancer
Who has never heard music
But when I dance I can finally be me

The music rises within me
Unleashing as I leap
The crescendo pours out as I rise to fifth
And I no longer have to yearn
To hear the music, when I can feel it
Guiding my steps in turn

3rd Place: City Music – by Jack Rayner

Car horns blare, robotic commuters trudge,
Rumble of traffic like thunder of hooves.
Takeaway coffee cups spill into the gutter like fallen soldiers,
Busy people with places to be, faces stuck to screens.
No one looks, no one notices, no one cares.
Headphones in, beat begins,
Everything changes.

Cars roll quietly, commuters nod in time to the beat,

The sun dances, the reflection casts rainbows.
The pigeon moonwalks up the street, and the cat's sway in the alleyway,
The subway bops in the tunnels,
Headphones in, drums kick in,
Everything changes.

Cars disappear, commuters smile and stop to chat,
The clouds breakdance across the sky.
A fresh breeze blows the smell of blossom,
People look, people notice, people care.
Headphones in, chorus starts,
Everything changes.

Music brings me to a different place.
Headphones in, I can be anywhere.

Highly Commended: A Raindrop Prelude – by A b Blue

a gentle patter of sound begins, an onset of raindrops on icy waters (Ab)
awakens my half-conscious soul, drowning in a lake of blackbirds' choke, (Ab)
turns to fill my emptied thoughts with recollections (in D_b minor) (Ab)
of falling heavily, pressing down petals of a snowdrop. (Ab)
C# minor raises me, comforts me, with its complication of drop-falls, (Ab)
of delicate sounds, dripping . . . echoes . . . stripped bare, (Ab)
something mutates, heaves my head, nips a bud of birds, (Ab)
and shakes like petals of a snowdrop. (Ab)
A torrent of A# floods awakeness as ferns fold down, (Ab)
feeling for water, no need for E minor, as all can be felt in A flat, (Ab)
goldfinches call, stripping petals of a snowdrop. (Ab)
An A# wetness wets all, as worms toil in sogged soil, (Ab)
and a chuckle of trickle, in C# minor, chirrup into flowers, (Ab)
light-fingeredly, as if petals of a snowdrop fall as ivory piano keys. (Ab)
Raggedly, in curving flight, a shadow of mist forms from a smoke of ravens, (Ab)
clawing at my dark thoughts, (Ab)
whose wingbeats call, in D_b major, (Ab)
crushing down petals of a snowdrop. (Ab)

Bowing to the ground, this last petal holds out, (Ab)
Ab, (Ab)
its sodden tip, heaving with melancholy drip, (Ab)
easing a harmless tune, of a procession of Monks chanting funereal matins, (Ab)
that treads down petals of a snowdrop. (Ab)

Highly Commended: Our Forever Song – by Maya Topping

Is it crazy,
That someone as hopelessly foolish at love,
Someone like me,
Could never let you go.

The music filled my ears,
The melody flowing like an angry river,
It was our song,
Everyone knew that the rhythm,
The lyrics,
Belonged to us.

And now you're dancing with someone who isn't me,
Your eyes locked,
The key thrown away,
I wonder how you can hear this song,
Without thinking of me,
Of us,
Of what we had.

Music brings many people joy,
But without you I have no rhythm,
No beat to my life.
When you left,
All the instruments fell to a million pieces,
And the song could never be the same again,
It will always be our forever song.

Highly Commended: In A World of A White Man – by Sam Van Mallaerts

In a world of the white man
Some have to overcome challenges.
Two men trying to make a difference

And a difference they made.

Two men from different ages
One rap and one jazz:
Each as great as each other
And the last thing they lack is pizzazz.

One man by the name of big Michael
And one by Satchmo
They couldn't even buy their own bicycle
Yet they rose through life's challenges.

Satchmo has a voice like gold
A bit rough
But no less bold.

With his trumpet and a voice like silk,
He is the best
And he can finally put food on his plate.

Stormzy at the Brits, winning all the crowd
His voice like gold
And lyrics like thunder.

Over the years there will be more
That will win over the people
And take the world by storm,
But you always need to remember the best.

Highly Commended: Music Is For Anyone – by James Wright

Music is in the wind and waves,
Under and over the seas;
Sounds of different sways or clicks,
In humans, insects and trees.

Crying in pain or screaming with rage,
In music feelings are shown;
Singing in sadness, hatred or love,
Fears and joys made known.

Oh how many sounds and delicate airs,
Roam freely in the breeze;
Alternative pop and rhythm and blues,
Notes for everyone's needs.

Young children's rhymes and toddler's tunes,
Old grandparent's sixty's songs;
Nothing can take our sounds away, for,
Everywhere music belongs.

Commended: The World of Music – by Aratrika Lahiri
Inspired by 'Riptide' by Vance Joy

It doesn't have to make sense
For you to fall in love with it.

The confusion
The remorse
The exhilaration

The way you'd sit there for hours,
Transporting yourself to a world where I don't exist.

The way you'd keep those headphones perched on your head,
As if it was where they belonged forever.

The way you'd turn away that day,
Leaving me to wonder if you'd ever come back.

That memory was an allusion,
The one where you sang till your throat was coarse
And you had a peculiar fascination
With how beguilingly the floods used to subside.

In my reality you stood there dewy-eyed,
Begging me to let you one last time
ride the riptide.

I often wondered where you went,
When you hid yourself too well
And refused to be found.

I thought it was grim
I thought it was bleak.

But for you it was glorious
But for you it was divine.

The world of music doesn't have to make sense
For you to fall in love with it.

Commended: Nature's Music – by Ella McDougall

Ebbing softly, slowly fading getting louder, getting harder,
A gentle beat, an undertone, the swishing of waves, a crowing crow.
The chirp of grasshoppers, the crunch of snow.
Now a tune, the follow on, its beauty gives our lives a song,
A Veery thrush sings in the trees, its chirping carried on the breeze,
A little mouse sits on a log, singing it's ultrasonic song.
There's music everywhere you just have to listen,
Just because it isn't written, doesn't mean it isn't with us.

Commended: Playing On My Heart's Strings – by Lauryn Okerago

Music is always playing on my heart strings,
Like a marionette with complete control over me
With each tug on my strings, the bass thuds, my heartbeat thumps
Each staccato note in harmony with the syncopation of my heart.
The high-hat sound that makes my blood sizzle
With each bar seamlessly melded together, an intricate tapestry
As the tempo slows the world around me does too, all is still.
That pause before the beat drops, I'm frozen.
Like broken doll hanging from dangling strings
My heart plummets with it.
Sounds wash over me like crashing crests of ocean waves.
Each note a spark that sends glowing fireflies flying into the dark.
Adding rhythms on top of melodies on top of symphonies,
Until a fire is ignited all over me, a blazing inferno.
My fingertips start drumming to the beat
In their own unique dance choreographed by Music.
Trilling on my heart strings as Music flits back and forth.
The climbing crescendo of my heart as the song speeds up
Causing the emotions in me to swell.
And I can't stop myself from moving as Music consumes me
My senses tingle with each strum, each pluck of an instrument
Because as usual, Music is always playing on my heart strings.

Commended: The Music Under The Moon – by Rebecca Parker

A melody drifted by the shore,
Spreading hope so light and pure,
The waves were swaying, as if to the tune,
No longer guided by the moon.

The birds began to fly down low,
As soon as the music began to grow,
Waltzing through the shimmering pool
Came a fish with colours ever so cool.

A crab did a quickstep across the sand,
As if dancing to the music of a seaside band,
The sand dunes whispered the merry song,
Joining together as a happy throng.

The dawn had come like a rainbow,
Spreading new light, as if to show,
That morning had come, and it was the boss,
And that all gentle music would now be lost.

The party was over, they began to disperse,
What a shame there wasn't one more verse,
The crabs began to run and hide, fearing the wrath of the seagulls behind,
Bringing a damper to a once happy night, the moon faded no longer in sight.

Commended: The Symphony of Society – by Megan Powell

A note, ringing through the buildings of busy cities and homes. Monochrome
Walls, echoing the melodies and harmonies, calm and loud. Clouds
Encapsulating the dense atmosphere. Years
Passing, as syncopated beats flow from ear to ear. Hear!
Songs bubbling in the music applications of our phones. Someone's
Radio in their car, blasting nostalgic pop tunes at the start of summer. Colour,
And mellifluous tracks seeping through the streets of the West End. Spend
Time glaring at the greens of the trees and yellows of the sunflowers. Flowers,
Ornating the notes and staves of musical scores. Outdoors,
Choirs harmonise, notes gliding into the air of a warm room. Room
For growth, connection and association that must come through. Through
The symphony of society.

The R C Sherriff Trust is an independent charitable trust, established through the terms of the Will of playwright, R C Sherriff. It has been promoting and developing the arts in the Borough of Elmbridge, for 25 years. Further details about the Trust can be found at www.rcsherrifftrust.org.uk

Elmbridge Borough Council's Arts Development seeks to increase opportunities for people to engage in the arts, culture and heritage of our Borough, either individually or through partnerships, such as those with the R.C. Sherriff Trust that make Elmbridge Primary Schools Festival possible. With the aim of engaging residents, Elmbridge Borough Council's Art Development supports arts organisations and presents arts-based activities that improve the physical and mental health of people who live and work in Elmbridge.

