

MTA Conference 2026

All the Joy, none of the Seating Plan: Reflections on Hosting the MTA Conference 2026



Stuart Thompson
Executive Music Lead,
Warwick Schools Foundation

The difference, of course, is that in this case the guest list numbered over 200 music educators, the speeches were given by nationally recognised figures and the conversations ranged from Key Stage 1 rhythm games to post-16 curriculum philosophy.

If the conference was a wedding, then being the host school comes with a very significant advantage: you get all the joy of the occasion, with the reassurance that your own expert “wedding planners” have carefully orchestrated the detail, whilst still allowing you to have an input into the overall vision. Here, the MTA committee fulfilled that role with extraordinary commitment and precision, executed tirelessly by Caroline, Laura, and Rachel. In short, they ensured that what appeared seamless really was, which is no small

Hosting the Music Teachers’ Association Conference felt remarkably like one’s own wedding, complete with anticipation, careful planning, moments of mild panic and that overwhelming sense of joy as everything comes together.

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The MTA Conference reminded me that ours is a profession filled with people who care deeply, think creatively and advocate tirelessly for the transformative power of music. Above all, thank you for reminding us that music truly is where we belong.

– Julian Whittaker, *The Crypt School, Gloucester*

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feat given the scale and complexity of the event.

The theme, **Music: Where We Belong**, resonated throughout the weekend, not simply as a title, but as a guiding principle. Crucially, though, this sense of belonging extends beyond the weekend itself. In recent years, the MTA has evolved into a significantly broad church, representing music educators across all sectors and stages of education, and across truly diverse school (and Hub) contexts, it is therefore really important that our host venues reflect that breadth and variety moving forward.

As with any wedding, the speeches mattered, and these were of the highest calibre. Sir John Rutter informed and entertained in equal measure with his “*Confessions of a Composer*”; Izzy Judd explored music’s transformative role in fostering belonging and wellbeing, and Sgt Rafique Dolor, representing the Royal Corps of Army Music, gave a powerful opening address at the Gala Dinner on the Saturday evening – combining musical authority with his undeniably pleasing stage presence.

The trade fair was far more than an exhibition; it was a meeting point, a discovery space and somewhere to exchange ideas, resources, and conversation over refreshments. Like a wedding reception at its best, it allowed interactions to unfold naturally: sometimes planned, often serendipitous, always valuable.

No wedding (or conference) succeeds without its support teams. Our equivalent of the ‘best men’ and ‘bridesmaids’ (though not necessarily in that order!) came in the form of the exceptional Estates, Events, and Catering teams, whose work underpinned the entire weekend. There is a truth universally acknowledged by conference organisers everywhere: excellent catering is not an added bonus, it is the backbone of sustained engagement, and the catering was so good, all of our rests were truly savoured!



Victoria Jane Photography



Perhaps the most striking feature of the conference was its tone: open, inclusive, thoughtful, and energising. Conversations flowed freely between new and experienced teachers, across phases of education and between classroom practitioners and sector leaders, both onsite and offsite in the wonderful setting of *The Terrace* in Leamington Spa, where conversations were gently aided by a glass or two well into the early hours.

By Sunday brunch, there was that familiar post-wedding feeling: a touch of exhaustion, a great deal of satisfaction, and the quiet recognition that something truly special had occurred. Delegates left with practical ideas and strategies, renewed professional confidence, stronger networks, and a deepened sense of belonging, perhaps a little tired, but artistically refreshed, renewed, and energised in their craft.

I would strongly recommend considering hosting the conference, its positive impact was palpable across the campus over the weekend and will continue to be felt for a long time to come. Our pupils thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to sing and play both for and alongside you, and the chance to perform for Sir John Rutter will remain with them for years to come. I too have made so many new contacts, as well as refreshing old ones, although the less said about my debut on 1st Pepper with the Vegetable Orchestra on the Saturday evening the better!

Each conference is different, and delegates gain so much by being immersed in the musical culture of another school or partnership of schools. Logistically, some of the key considerations are nearby accommodation, good catering availability, strong transport links, and reliable Wi-Fi and plenty of power in the trade fair area! A nearby hostelry for continued conversations is also always appreciated (!) but otherwise most perceived 'problems' can be turned into 'opportunities'



I really enjoyed the weekend and would like to thank everyone who made me feel so welcome as a first time attendee! The food and catering were so thoughtful. The session I enjoyed and gained the most from was the session on GCSE Music on the Saturday. I felt that the pitch, pace of session and relevance to my own development was there – especially as someone in a department of one.

– Sophia Smith, Swakeleys School for Girls, Hillingdon



during the planning stages. The team will visit and you can work together to plan the best timings, venues and format, to suit you and reflect your individual circumstances. If you're nervous about the idea and would like a chat first before expressing a formal interest to the MTA, I'm happy to talk from a host perspective and allay any fears.

To conclude: we, as hosts, had the joy of welcoming everyone and sharing in the celebration, but Caroline, Laura, Rachel and the MTA committee (our expert “wedding planners”), alongside the outstanding Estates, Events, and Catering teams here at the Foundation, made it all possible. They didn't just organise an event, they created a space where we could all recognise that Music is truly where we all belong.

Mark Aitchison
(Honorary Treasurer)

Highlights from the AGM...



We are delighted to share that the MTA is in an improving financial situation, following two years of deficits. This is due to a number of factors, including:

- Streamlined financial systems, giving a more transparent and accurate picture
- Continuation of partnership with Media Shed, to reduce the cost of producing Ensemble
- Introduction of a new contact management system, with website and event integration
- Increase in the number of schools looking to advertise within our Directory of Independent Senior School Music Departments
- Increase in individual and corporate membership numbers, following attendance at regional conferences and events, and development of partnerships across the sector

As we look to the future, with the aim of advocating for excellent music education provision for the children in our schools, and developing new opportunities for partnerships and participation in music making for all, we need your help to continue to grow.

I urge you to come into partnership with us – be our advocates as we try to reach every school in the four nations of the United Kingdom. With a new curriculum in Wales, and reviews taking place in England and Northern Ireland, this is the optimum time for us to be supporting those working in schools. Every hard-working music teacher is trying their best – often in isolation – to battle the challenges of misconception, and the restraints of school demands.

Reach out, and help us to share the love of music that brings us together.