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# Making music

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Matthew McCullough

*(G, 2013-15)*

Written by Charlie Peters

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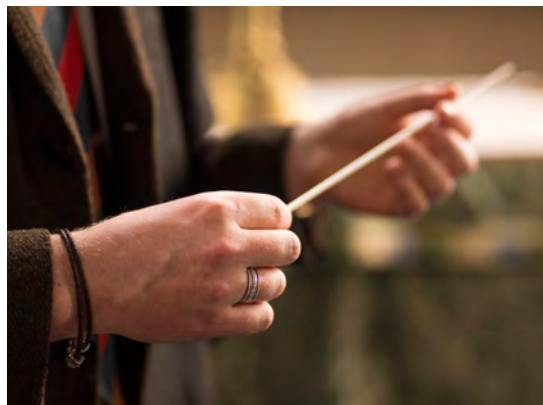
In November 2013 Matthew McCullough had never heard of Winchester College. Living in Belfast, he was frustrated with his school’s music department. When asked to describe his education in Northern Ireland, Matthew offers ‘not meeting my requirements’ and little else. Noting his frustration and considerable ability, Matthew’s director of music at St. Peter’s Cathedral mentioned a scholarship for Northern Irish students to study at Winchester.

Following some email correspondence with the Registrar, Matthew was invited for interview. He arrived on a Wednesday, stayed in Phil’s, and was interviewed in his four subjects – Mathematics, French, Music and Physics. He impressed. In little over a week, Matthew McCullough was a Wykehamist and a Philite.

The Northern Ireland Bursary was established to recover Winchester’s lost connection with the province. It was funded by James Ferguson (*D*, 1961-66), whose grandfather followed his time at Winchester with instruction in business at the Belfast Technical College, before enjoying a successful business career.

When asked to describe what affected him the most during his first visit to Winchester, Matthew immediately recalls three things: the serene architectural beauty of the school, the impressive commitment to hard work, and the ubiquitous kindness and helpfulness he received from both dons and students. When asked to summarise his experience at Winchester more generally, Matthew returns to these themes.

We spend much of the interview talking about the kindness of Wykehamists. Mr Herring’s introductory booklet to Toye’s life in 2009 started simply with



‘be kind’. From what Matthew told me, a similar impulse had been inspired in his cadre of Philites. Despite knowing him for just two weeks, many of his housemates offered to house him over the November Exeat. For the remainder of his time at Winchester, Matthew never once had to worry about organising a trip back to Belfast – Wykehamical camaraderie and kindness made sure that every Leave Out and Exeat was covered.

Matthew McCullough’s first academic experience at Winchester was as Wykehamical as they come. He was up to Dr Cramer for Div. After an opening salvo of Dostoyevsky, Dr Cramer announced to the class that someone had dropped off a pheasant at his house the day before. ‘Can anyone pluck it?’, he enquired. Matthew, by this point already quite unsure about what was going on in his bizarre new school, was surprised further when one of his classmates replied ‘Of course, sir’. And so his VIth Book Div retired for the hour to pluck a pheasant at Dr Cramer’s house.



*Matthew as Director of Music conducting in Hatfield Chapel, Durham.*

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Matthew correctly identifies Div as the experience that unites all Wykehamists, regardless of differences in their academic interests. It is in Div hours where he noticed that Wykehamists were their most confident and inquisitive selves. Their happiest, too. My headmaster, Dr Ralph Townsend, spoke brilliantly on this theme during a morning talk at Chapel. He outlined how other schools had sought to 'brand' their students whereas Winchester's radical tradition promoted individualism amongst pupils. Div has been the tool to achieve this function.

When I introduce this to Matthew, he immediately recognises it with his own experiences. Div allowed him to pursue his own interests within Winchester's academic structure. He used the Kenneth Clark prize to investigate the Waterhouse piece, 'The Lady of Shalott', which now rests above his bed at Durham University. Div allowed Matthew to look beyond his subjects and extra-curricular interests into learning Italian and engaging with introductions to politics. Despite his relatively short stint at Winchester, it is

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clear that the Div experience more than anything turned him into a Wykehamist.

Arriving at Winchester as a Jun Man is a daunting experience. You are thrust into an entirely different environment – where the school’s boundaries are marked by medieval walls and students interact in essentially a different language. That’s not a toilet it’s a fo, etcetera. This unnerving ordeal can prove difficult to overcome. Matthew, like me, believes that nowhere else can possibly be weirder than Winchester College. At 16 years old, having to adapt to some bizarre rules (–ā becomes –ation, but not with mathmā) was baffling, but Matthew appreciates this ‘beautiful eccentricity’ and tells me that it added to the ease with which he fell in love with Winchester.

As a fantastic musician, the school naturally catered to his musical skills and gave him the opportunity to flourish. He was lucky to be in a year that boasted both Charles Maxtone-Smith (*B, 2010-15*) and Henry Websdale (*B, 2013-15*), who are now organ scholars at Oxford and Cambridge respectively.

He has continued this excellence at Durham where he is a Cathedral Choral Scholar, delivering eight services per week and singing as one of the 12 men that make up the professional singing choir. In Hatfield College he is the Director of Music, organising all music in College Chapel, conducting the choir, and taking charge of evensong once a week.

Winchester nurtured Matthew’s musical prowess and scientific interest by merging them into something greater. Through his Wednesday afternoon Community Service obligations, Matthew was tasked with helping at the Sunrise

nursing home. Working with dementia patients, he observed the extraordinary difference that playing music would make. When discussing this phenomenon, Matthew – clearly moved by the memory – recalls observing how a usually still and silent man was inspired by his music. Previously, Matthew was told, the gentleman in question had usually sat motionless in his chair during visits, but after he heard performances from visiting Wykehamists, his behaviour changed. He would write down the names of the songs he recognised. Matthew, inspired by this episode, has pursued an academic interest in musicology and musical neuroscience at Durham. ■



*Cloister, Durham Cathedral*