



BENSLOWMUSIC
INSTRUMENT LOAN SCHEME

1932-2022

***A 90th year of celebration of the UK's oldest
Instrument Loan Scheme***

Benslow Music Instrument Loan Scheme (BMILS) celebrates its 90th anniversary in 2022. The scheme, which started humbly with a letter to *The Times* newspaper in 1932, has blossomed into a well-respected organisation whose operation over the last 90 years has offered thousands of aspiring young artists the opportunity to borrow high quality instruments to enhance and further their musicianship.

Official opening of new BMILS facility

Coinciding with this momentous anniversary is the official opening of BMILS' bespoke facility, the 'Aston Building', by **Judith Weir CBE**, Master of the Queen's Music and Benslow Music President on **23 January 2022**.

The Women behind the Loan Scheme

The brainchild of two pioneering and remarkable women; violinist, conductor, teacher and author, **Editha Knocker**, whose own pupil's included Sidney Griller, Gerald Finzi, Basil Cameron and Sybil Eaton; and fellow violinist, forward-thinking music teacher and philanthropist **Edith Croll**.

Knocker and Croll's letter, calling for "Good Violins lying Idle" to be repurposed for use by young musicians who could otherwise not afford superior instruments, was a ground-breaking egalitarian plan and was endorsed by leading music figures of the day including Sir Henry Wood, Sir Walford Davies and Samuel Courtauld.

The cultural impact of Benslow Music instrument Loan Scheme

Thousands of young artists have since benefitted from borrowing from the Scheme and this has had an impact on shaping British cultural life.

BMILS borrowers include in their ranks several BBC Young Musician of the Year finalists, an RPS award winner, a BBC Guardian Young Composer award winner, musicologists, teachers and conservatoire professors.

They perform as soloists and with orchestras and chamber ensembles throughout the UK and as far afield as Los Angeles and Mexico including: the Academy of Ancient Music, Barbican Trio, BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Britten Symphonia, Camilli Quartet, Carducci Quartet, Chineke Orchestra, Dunedin Consort, Escala, Halle, Irish Chamber Orchestra, London Mozart Players, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Manchester Camerata, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Philharmonia, RTE National Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra amongst others. BMILS Alumni even include a BBC Strictly Come Dancing professional!

Etta Dainty, Head of BMILS said *“Having benefitted from a similar scheme as a student, I’m fully aware of how important affordable access to quality instruments can be – and consequently how a lack of access can potentially stop a life of music in its tracks. There should be no barrier to young people pursuing their musical dreams, and at BMILS we strive to make ourselves visible and available to potential borrowers from all backgrounds. By increased collaboration with institutions including national Music Hubs and schools, and charities such as Awards for Young Musicians we aim to help as many young musicians as possible. Seeing a young player’s face light up when they first try an instrument of significantly better quality than previously available to them is priceless! A whole new world of sound opens up, and it’s magical...”*

The esteemed Professor Louis Carus was a staunch supporter and Patron of the Scheme, having himself been an early borrower in 1936; he in turn loaned back a French Leon Mougenot violin to the Scheme. In an interview given in 2009 he said *“the first time I played it I knew immediately, instinctively, that I could achieve so much more easily what the music in front of me required...I was playing like I never had before...it marked the beginning of my career.”*

Benslow Music Instrument Loan Scheme – Facts and Figures

- Available to UK resident students between the ages of 7 to 25 currently in full-time education and taking a course of musical instruction
- A current collection of over 1,600 musical items (instruments and bows)
- Collection comprises 50% items on loan to the scheme by private individuals, 50% donated items (now property of BMILS)
- Approximately a third of collection currently out on loan
- Over 475 current active borrowers
- Instruments include high quality violins, violas, cellos and double basses of all sizes, selected woodwind and brass, plus a small number of pedal harps
- Select senior borrowers currently studying in specialist conservatoires in Geneva, Moscow, Stockholm and Taiwan (by special permission)
- Borrowers pay an annual loan charge of 5% of the instrument and/or bow value capped at £400 (bursaries are also available)
- New bespoke facility the ‘Aston Building’ provides a monitored, secure environment for the instruments, try-out studio, workshop space for on-site luthier Marco Matathia as well as office and practice space
- BMILS is funded entirely by annual instrument loan charges and generous donations

Further 90th anniversary events are planned on **23 January, 10 April, 24 July and 10 December 2022.**

Ends.

Notes to Editors

**Press contact: Emma Menniss Head of Marketing & PR emma@benslowmusic.org
T: 01462 459446**

About Benslow Music Instrument Loan Scheme

Benslow Music Instrument Loan Scheme (BMILS) is an inclusive and unique UK charity which exists as a conduit to connect and provide talented young musicians with high quality instruments in order to further their musicianship.

BMILS was founded in 1932 by two remarkable and forward-thinking women, Edith Croll and Editha Knocker, who recognised the need for an organisation which could offer “incalculable value” to aspiring young musicians. Their letter to The Times newspaper called out for ‘Good Violins Lying Idle’ to be repurposed for use by promising students whose artistic development was being held back by the prohibitive cost of good quality instruments.

Croll and Knocker, both exemplary musicians and music teachers in their own right, put forward a simple yet effective strategy and their inspiring aims were endorsed by leading music and cultural establishment figures in inter-war Britain including Sir Henry Wood, Sir Henry Walford Davies, Sir Landon Ronald, Professor E J Dent, Walter Willson Cobbett and Samuel Courtauld. The scheme found a home, and shared aspirations, with the Rural Music Schools, established in Hitchin Hertfordshire in 1929, by another pioneering woman, Mary Ibberson, which would later become the Benslow Music Trust.

Today, BMILS is housed in a bespoke facility on the Benslow Music campus and has almost 500 instrument borrowers and approximately 1,600 music items in its care. These include high quality violins, violas, cellos and double basses of all sizes, selected woodwind and brass and a small number of pedal harps.

The scheme is constantly working to expand the breadth and quality of its collection, and is continually fielding instruments to add to the scheme from generous benefactors and donors. BMILS also aims to work with local and national partners to expand and diversify its reach, in an effort to assist as many eligible young musicians as possible. Over nine decades the scheme has had an immense impact on the lives of thousands of young musicians and subsequently, on wider culture.

Benslow Music Trust is the sole Trustee of Benslow Music Instrument Loan Scheme.

Registered Charity Number: 313755

Benslow Music Instrument Loan Scheme, Aston Building,
Benslow Music Trust, Benslow Lane, Hitchin, Hertfordshire SG4 9RB
+44 (0)1462 459446 • info@benslowmusic.org • www.benslowmusic-ils.org



About Benslow Music

Originally founded in 1929 by Mary Ibberson as the first Rural Music School (RMS) with the aim of providing music teaching for beginners and for lifelong learners in rural areas, the RMS Association (RMSA) was incorporated in 1947 to act as a focus for music teaching in rural areas and as a pressure group to address a deficiency in the general educational system at the time. This grew to 20 centres in throughout England with its headquarters in Hitchin.

Little Benslow Hills, a substantial Victorian house, was bequeathed to RMSA by Esther Seebohm in 1952 *'to be used in perpetuity for the support of music-making'* and became the permanent operational hub of RMSA. Over the decades since then, the organisation has evolved into the Benslow Music Trust developing its offering with the extensive grounds and campus giving opportunities for a wide variety of modern music facilities. The whole site includes The Peter Morrison Hall for intimate concerts, the Millennium Lottery Funded Waldeck building with a smaller recital hall and practice rooms, the purpose built specialist Instrument Loans building and rehearsal areas. The main house incorporates further practice spaces, a music library, and bedrooms for B&B, along with a restaurant and bar for course residents.

A sister organisation, the Benslow Music Instrument Loans Scheme, exists to offer and promising students the opportunity to play on high quality instruments to further their musicianship.

Today, Benslow Music Trust runs 224 immersive music courses every year for around 2,780 adult students, 30 concerts are staged in the purpose built recital halls on site and the loan scheme has over 800 instruments available for talented youngsters to borrow to advance their musicianship.

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