



**A**t a fundraising lunch just weeks before the London elections, the outgoing Mayor, Boris Johnson, amiably rumbled in an ancient blue suit, clambered through questions from city developers with the immaculate timing of a stand-up comedian. On his cycling superhighway project: 'It will reach a state of absolute climactic bliss, rather like taking your ski boots off, in about May or June.' And Crossrail 2: 'London was in a blind funk. Complete turmoil. And look at us today, the number one city on Earth by miles.' And whether the Queen, who, legend has it, once lectured Nick Clegg for being too pro-European, might be a Brexitter: 'The story I heard is that she almost passed out with boredom...'

But press him to name the lasting legacy of his eight-year tenure and his answer lies elsewhere. 'There was a kid I met four years ago at City

**'If you're asking me for my legacy, there it is: confidence and social mobility. And I'm very, very proud of it'**

Hall,' he says. 'He won a music scholarship and he went on to get an academic scholarship to study at Christ's Hospital school in Sussex and, as a result, his life has been totally transformed. That story sticks in my mind. But there are thousands of young people across the capital whose lives are better now than they were when I came into office. So if you're asking me for my legacy, hand on heart, there it is: confidence and social mobility. And I'm very, very proud of it.'

That 'kid' was Emmanuel Odujebe, now 13, who became one of the first children to be sponsored by the Mayor's Music Fund (MMF), launched in 2011 to support some of the most musically talented children from the least privileged backgrounds in the capital. They were provided with an instrument, weekly small-group tuition during the school day and, crucially, constant personal mentoring. In addition, there was compulsory attendance at music ensembles on Saturday mornings, as well as regular opportunities to perform in concerts alongside professional musicians.

The initiative was the brainchild of Johnson and one of his senior advisors, Veronica Wadley. In that first year, 100 of the poorest children

**Right** Charlie Browne plays both the cello and the piano



from 32 London boroughs were nominated by their music teachers to receive the four-year scholarships. These were awarded according to stringent criteria: children must demonstrate significant musical talent and come from a background where the cost of the instrument and tuition would prevent them from learning. Critically, they also needed to have 'full family support', since they were expected to spend a significant amount of their spare time practising and attending extra classes. In total, 335 scholarships have been awarded and the first cohort of talented children – three of whom I interviewed for the *Telegraph Magazine* in 2012 – has graduated.

Emmanuel's mother, Alice, works in HR and his father, Olasunkanmi, is a self-employed video producer. 'We realised as soon as he got to nursery that Emmanuel was quick to learn,'

**'I got a call at work to ask me if Emmanuel could stay behind to join the school jazz band. How could I say no?'**

says Alice. 'But they had nothing to offer him, so his reception-class teacher said, "Let's start him on an instrument to give him the stimulation he craves." Emmanuel began playing the violin and piano. Then in year 4, aged nine, he picked up a trombone for the first time. 'I got a call at work to ask me if Emmanuel could stay behind to join the school jazz band. How could I say no? But after paying for childcare – Emmanuel's sister Rachel was only four then – money was very tight and I was worried we wouldn't be able to afford all these lessons.'

Instrumental tuition in primary schools is provided by local-authority music services or 'hubs', which charge parents around £120 a term for group tuition. Provision is patchy, but most try hard to make learning an instrument a possibility for everyone by offering subsidised rates for low-income families. Even so, with instrument hire on top, it is more than many can afford. Emmanuel's head teacher at Holy Trinity and St Silas Church of England school in Camden, the late Annie Williams – who promised the best education possible for all her children, regardless of background – put him forward for one of the Mayor's music scholarships.

## A gift for music

Back in 2011, the Mayor's Music Fund was set up to help underprivileged London children fulfil their musical potential. Now, five years on, as Boris Johnson prepares to pass on the mayoral baton, **Caroline Scott** finds out how the chosen children are doing. Photographs by **Lydia Goldblatt**

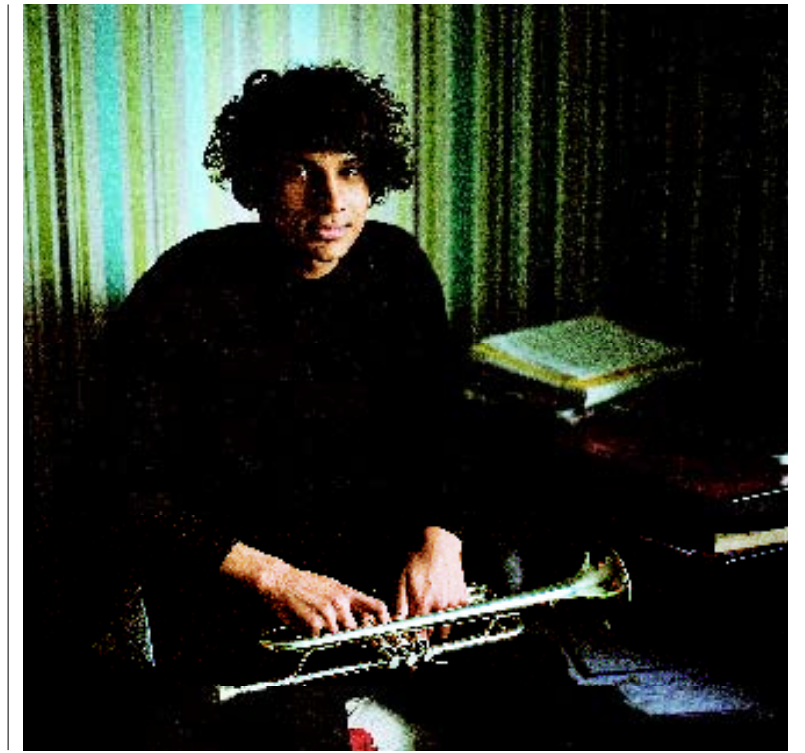
**Opposite** Emmanuel Odujebe, who has just taken his grade 7 trombone exam



**Left** Bishal Debnath in 2012, and with Boris Johnson last month



**Right** Bishal with his own trumpet: he's preparing to take his grade 8 exam



Fast forward four years and Emmanuel has just taken his grade 7 trombone exam; he has played at the Royal Albert Hall and LSO St Luke's with the Camden Philharmonic Band. And along the way, he's rubbed shoulders with professional musicians who have changed his perspective forever. His parents hoped he'd get in to a London grammar, but at 10, he had already decided he wanted to go to boarding school and found Christ's Hospital himself on the internet. He won an academic scholarship and joined at 11. Now 13, he plays the trumpet in Christ's marching band and he is mentoring other pupils.

'Without the Mayor's Music Fund, my musical presence would not be so great, and the people and professionals I have met along the road would just be strangers,' says Emmanuel solemnly. 'I would like to thank the Mayor for giving me the opportunity, and for believing in me. This is something that will stay with me for the rest of my life.'

Johnson had already founded the Mayor's Fund for London in 2009. Via a plethora of interventions – from breakfast, maths and literacy clubs to fill hungry tummies and minds, to the mentoring, apprenticeships and work placements that disadvantaged young people need to acquire the skills necessary to haul themselves into the job market – it has helped 50,000 young Londoners from poorer backgrounds to be, in the words of one primary-school club, 'the best they can be'.

So why did he consider music scholarships so important (bearing in mind he freely admits that at Eton he had 'all the opportunity to learn an instrument and none of the talent'). 'Because music is something that teaches kids discipline, hard work and teamwork,' he says emphatically.

'It's about practice, about failure, about keeping on trying – which is 95 per cent of the battle. The tragedy in London is that we have a lot of kids

who do very well until they're 11, but they don't carry their music through from primary to secondary school. And they're losing something huge. All the evidence is that if they're helped to keep their music up, the effect on their academic performance, and on their lives, is profound. It's a very good way of achieving social change.'

**W**hen I met Bishal Debnath in 2012, he was a tiny boy with big dreams and a talent for the trumpet that his brass teacher, Alan Goodall, described as 'outstanding natural ability'. Bishal, the eldest of five children, became one of MMF's first scholars and he thrived on the focus and attention, 'always arriving at Saturday school early, champing to go in'. But when he moved from the nurturing environment of the Green Dragon primary school in Hounslow to his secondary school, Lampton academy, he began to spiral downwards. His teachers reported difficult, sometimes challenging behaviour and he struggled to form relationships with other children. By year 8, Bishal was at risk of exclusion and his teachers were at a loss to know how to deal with his disruptive behaviour. His scholarship mentor explained that if he were permanently excluded from school, that would be the end of his trumpet lessons and attendance at Saturday-morning music school. 'That came as quite a shock to him,' says Stephen Davis, head teacher at Lampton. 'We have since seen a huge improvement in his attitude. In Bishal's case, music may just be the single thing that keeps him in school.'

**'I would like to thank the Mayor for believing in me. This is something that will stay with me for the rest of my life'**

Bishal's father, Bidya, who is unemployed, says the difficult behaviour is 'off and on... Maybe more off than on.' Bishal was awarded 'Outstanding Scholar' in the brass section at the London Music Awards in 2014 – the prize included a voucher towards the purchase of his own trumpet – and he's preparing to take his grade 8 music exam this summer – a phenomenal achievement for a 14-year-old. 'He's a big boy now; he made a decision to apply himself,' says Bidya. 'And he is more confident. He has a determination to succeed that I don't think he'd have without so many people believing in him.'

At 3.30pm on a Wednesday afternoon during the Easter break, Bishal himself, like most 14-year-old boys left to their own devices, is still in bed. Since I last saw him four years ago, he has acquired a foot or two in height, directional hair and a standard English accent.

Each MMF scholarship has cost around £4,000, raised from businesses and individuals. That's a big investment – what has it meant to Bishal? 'Every Saturday at music school I get to meet new people and other musicians – my horizons are widening all the time,' he says. 'I play with ensembles and the orchestra. It gives you a chance to be a member of a group, but also develops you as a soloist. I don't know what my life would've been like without the scholarship, but it's given me new experiences and taken me places I wouldn't have found on my own.'

Chrissy Kinsella, MMF's interim chief executive, says the pride children derive from their scholarships has moved her to tears on more than one occasion. 'Some of our children come from really challenging backgrounds,' she says. 'We have children from refugee families, some have lost parents, are in care or living in hostels. It's been inspiring to see the wider benefits – better social skills, concentration and vastly improved confidence and self-esteem – which

come partly as a result of simply being chosen.'

The scholars' progression is measured in a number of ways, including regular reports from mentors, music and school teachers. And there have been some amazing success stories: children have won scholarships to the Yehudi Menuhin and Purcell schools and junior conservatoires, to private secondary schools, and places in national orchestras. One of the original scholars, 11-year-old Louis Lodder from Hackney, recently performed as the Third Boy in ENO's *The Magic Flute* at the London Coliseum.

Of course, not all the children MMF supports will achieve these heights: 59 of the original 335 have dropped out altogether, in most cases due to lack of parental support. Hannah Elms, who I met four years ago at the age of 10, lost interest in her cornet at the end of primary school, a difficult time for most children. For Hannah, an only child who lived with her father in a housing-association maisonette in Richmond, winning was electrifying, but the ongoing demands of being chosen must have felt overwhelming.

**B**ut for those who've stayed the course, the scholarship has provided a world away from the everyday world – one full of possibilities. Aisha Jalloh, 14, who lives with her mother, Mariama, and three siblings in a tower block in Bow, says, as a nine-year-old, she originally chose to play the cello at school 'because you could sit down'. She had no idea how much it would come to mean to her.

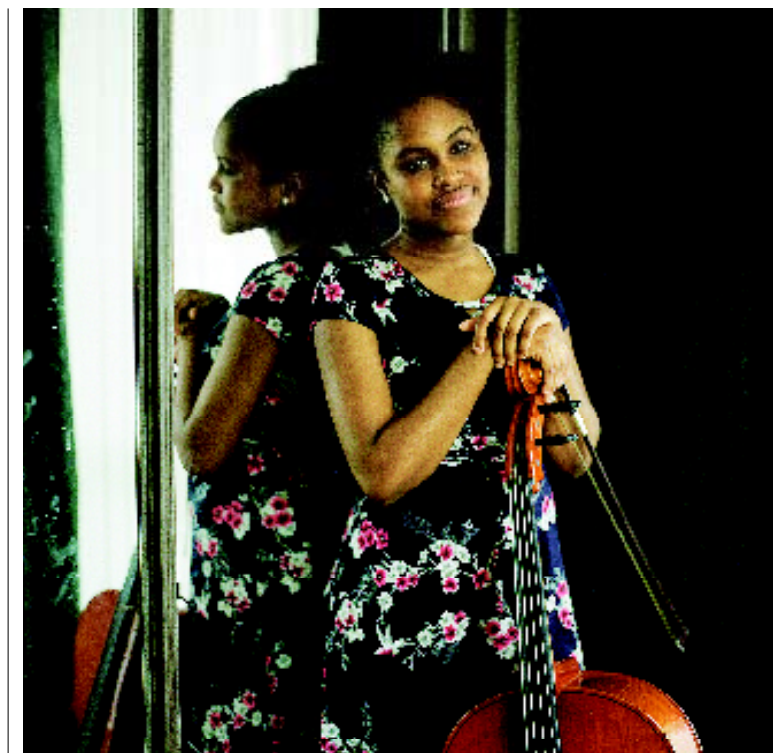
Aisha has now taken her grade 5 exam and is a member of Tower Hamlets Youth Orchestra. 'It's a blessing and a curse,' she says of her talent. 'I've made friends who understand where I'm at, but it's taken over my life. In some ways, it's never been harder for me, because the more opportunities there are, the harder I have to work.' Aisha has her sights set on the Juilliard conservatoire in New York. 'At first, I didn't know how to get there. Now I know my cello will take me – I just have to make it happen.'

Mariama, a single mum, works part-time as an accounts assistant for the Crossrail project in Farringdon. Her third child, Izzah, four, has autism and her youngest, Hawa, is only two. It's impossible for her to work more than 20 hours a week. Without the scholarship, she says she would not have been able to afford Aisha's tuition fees. 'She would have fallen by the way-side, for sure.'

Aisha's school, Bishop Challoner Catholic Federation in Tower Hamlets – where she is in top sets for English and maths – has continued to pay her tuition fees now the four-year MMF scholarship period is over, but for many families there is a question mark over how they'll carry on.

'MMF was set up to address a very specific gap in funding,' says Kinsella. 'We work closely with all music services, to ensure that alternative funding streams are available once the four years are up – some music services offer bursaries, despite their own budgets being under enormous pressure – and we'll continue to focus on this area, to ensure that robust exit strategies are in place.'

**Right** Aisha Jalloh originally chose to play the cello 'because you could sit down': now, she is a member of Tower Hamlets Youth Orchestra



In 2012, Charlie Browne, then 10 and having been recently diagnosed with mild autism, told me music was his 'comfort and constant companion, and a tool to express difficult emotions'. He is now playing the piano to grade 8 and the cello to grade 5 levels. And he is 'flying', his mother, Sally, says, in all his academic subjects at the John Fisher school in Purley. 'Without the scholarship, we'd be on a very different path.'

Charlie's father, Frank, works for a small charity but has just had his hours reduced to 30 per week and the family is finding it increasingly difficult to make ends meet. Now the MMF scholarship is over, Sutton Music Trust is subsidising Charlie's tuition, but it still costs £165 a term for his cello and £15 a week for piano lessons, with the cost of exams on top. Though a music tour to Austria next year and a trip to Paris with the school choir sound like fantastic opportunities for Charlie, the family was worrying it was an impossible dream. When the Brownes' eldest son, Ben, 18, goes to university in September, they are going to have to make some very difficult decisions. 'We asked Charlie would he mind giving up the piano, and he got really upset,' Sally told me. 'It keeps me awake at night, worrying about how we can help Ben and still support Charlie.' When I alerted MMF to the situation, one of their sponsors, the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation, stepped in and pledged to cover Charlie's fees.

The Mayor's charities, with their links to the great and the good, have been an incredibly effective way of finding talented children and

**'It has been inspiring to see the wider benefits – better social skills, improved confidence – that come from being chosen'**

supporting them, but what will happen now? Veronica Wadley, co-founder and chair of MMF, would like to see the programme replicated across the UK. 'The value of music education cannot be over-estimated,' she says. 'Over the last 20 years, large-scale studies of school achievement have found a strong correlation between learning to play an instrument and academic success. Some music hubs, certainly less than half, have brilliant leadership and achieve outstanding results, but provision across the UK is patchy.'

In Johnson's words, 'There are still far too many kids who are not getting a fair suck of the sauce bottle. But as far as London is concerned, I know all the mayoral candidates will continue the work. We live in a hugely prosperous and successful place and we have to go on finding ways to support them.'

Boris, as everyone calls him, has a natural affinity with young people. Ashana Green, 24, André Edwards, 21, and Mahfuz Chowdhury, 21, who are all receiving training and mentoring via the Mayor's Fund for London, gravitate towards him like magnets. They tell him what they've been doing and what they need. 'So what are you after – cash?!' he asks Ashana, rustling through his pockets. They're not in awe of him – it's difficult to be shy of someone who looks as scruffy and chaotic as Boris – and he seems genuinely delighted to hear their stories.

'I was very lucky: as a kid I had everything thrown at me,' he admits. 'But there's talent everywhere. It's all about confidence.' How do you give someone confidence if they don't have any to begin with? 'Oh but they do!', he booms. 'Show respect, love, interest, and children bloom. But it's not just about taking an interest. It's much more than that. It's about teaching them not to give up when the going gets tough.'

*mayorsmusicfund.org*