

East London Community Band

Together in Music



About Us

East London Community Band (ELCB) is a multi-generational community music organisation which welcomes players of all ages and levels. We host a range of ensembles offering a wide variety of repertoire.

We were set up as Tower Hamlets Youth Band in 1974 and have expanded over the years in numbers and age-ranges. Among our 100-strong membership are young children, adult beginners, improvers, accomplished players, and people returning to music-making after a break. Our youngest member is under 8 and our oldest is 80 years old.

In recent years we have established a number of new ensembles covering a wide range repertoire and now every Friday during term time we host a wind orchestra, big band, early music group, and drum line, as well as several other smaller groups.

We are a teaching and performing organisation with an integrated structure of lessons and group rehearsals leading to a regular programme of end-of-term concerts, recital showcases, bandstand and festival performances, as well as a variety of other one-off engagements. We are often asked to perform at events in the local area, including charity events, and we regard these as vital to our engagement with our local community.

ELCB has a store of instruments available for members to loan, and children are encouraged to explore the range we have available.

We are based at the Shadwell Centre, Highway, London E1, and our community is vibrant, welcoming, and sociable.

During the 2020-2021 Covid-19 pandemic, ELCB moved many activities online. Consistently throughout the pandemic, 50-60 people logged in each week to take part in play-through sessions, classes about different aspects of music theory, performance platforms, and special guest Q&A sessions. Our online presence was invaluable in helping our members to stay connected and keep their music-making going.

Our ethos

The ethos of ELCB is to encourage people, both young and old, to develop their musical skills and to play alongside, and interact socially, with their peers and across generations.

For a long time we have had families within the organisation and we have a significant number of parents and children learning and making music together. We have welcomed a number of children with learning difficulties into the Band.

Players and families that join ELCB become part of a warm and welcoming community. Our various groups allow members to meet new people and families and to make music together. In a big, fast-paced city like London, tight-knit, intergenerational, and diverse communities that are open to any new members are rare. This is what ELCB has offered for decades.

Tuition and on-going learning are crucial to ELCB's vitality. Giving young people in particular the chance to enjoy music making with others and develop their musical appreciation and skills was our founding principle and remains our driving force.

We provide individual and shared lessons of 15 minutes or 30 minutes to around 40 (mainly under 12 year-old) members, and we have a structure of groups and ensembles through which members can progress. We encourage all learners to join our Premier Band as soon as they are confident and have acquired sufficient basic skills on their instrument, and to move up to the wind orchestra or jazz ensembles as soon as they are ready.

Many of our members have gone on to play in ensembles such as the National Jazz Youth Orchestra, the National Children's Orchestra, and the London Schools' Symphony Orchestra. Some have become professional musicians, including Mark Mondesir (jazz percussionist) and David Jean-Baptiste (jazz reed player and composer). Ex-members have also taken up teaching positions, some within Tower Hamlets and adjacent boroughs.

Our Director of Music, Director of Jazz, and tutors are dedicated and highly regarded musicians, who together give committed and inspirational leadership to ELCB and encouragement and guidance to individual members.

Individual tuition

We currently have five specialist tutors (brass, percussion, and woodwind) who provide individual tuition, with priority given to children and young people. We subsidise the cost of childrens' lessons.

Ensembles

Our aim is to encourage young members and adult learners by providing ensembles that allow them all to participate at an appropriate level and to perform in concerts. The groups are organised into the wind orchestra and jazz strands, with two additional groups in Drum Line and Early Music Group.

Wind Orchestra Strand

- **Premier Band.** This provides beginners of all ages with experience of playing in a band, introducing and building basic sight-reading and ensemble skills. The band is the stepping-stone to playing in East London Community Band or any of the ensembles in the jazz programme.
- **East London Community Band.** This is the original ensemble around which our other musical activities have developed over the years. It currently boasts a 40-strong

membership and plays a variety of repertoire including movie themes, jazzy pieces, classical transcriptions, and more serious contemporary wind orchestra repertoire. Members play in this group as soon as they are proficient enough. The age range is 8-80 years old.

- **Chamber Band.** This is an ambitious smaller group which mainly focuses on works from the Western Classical repertoire. It is aimed at competent players seeking to extend their musical skills and experience. Bespoke musical arrangements are made each term to suit the ability of the members and typically the parts are more challenging than in other ensembles. Recent repertoire includes: *Boléro* by Ravel, *Danse Macabre* by Saint-Saëns, and Brahms' *Hungarian Dance No.5*

Jazz strand

ELCB's jazz programme was established in autumn 2018 to satisfy a demand for more jazz offerings. The three jazz groups grew very quickly and brought in a lot of new members. Rather than focusing on performance and exposure, as many other jazz ensembles do, ELCB's jazz programme is geared primarily toward learning. Under the leadership of ELCB's inaugural Director of Jazz, James Brady, the groups made enormous progress in their first three years.

- **Jazz Stompers.** This is a relaxed and fun group which learns tunes by ear. It is aimed at those looking for a first taste of playing in a jazz ensemble and focuses on the New Orleans Street Music tradition. All are welcome.
- **Big Band.** A traditional big band playing classic compositions and arrangements by the likes of Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Charles Mingus. Set up in 2018, this ensemble enjoyed very quick growth and now has a strong core membership. The group was awarded a Gold Award at the 2019 National Concert Band Festival (NCBF) and was invited to the Royal Northern College of Music to participate in the NCBF national finals.
- **Jazz Combo.** This is a smaller group for people looking to explore jazz repertoire in detail in a smaller setting. The music played is a mixture of smaller arrangements, lead sheets, and learning by ear, and its primary focus is developing individual improvisation skills.

Other groups

- **Percussion Ensemble.** Since its introduction in 2015, this ensemble has been very successful and extremely popular, especially with children aged 5-12 years. The focus has been on developing counting, coordination and listening skills, along with a bit of choreography!
- **Early Music Group.** This is an undirected chamber ensemble which primarily plays music of the Renaissance and early Baroque. Each week for part of the rehearsal the ELCB music director gives chamber music coaching.
- **ELCB Choir.** Watch this space for an exciting new project coming soon...

Performances, collaborations and initiatives

ELCB has a regular annual programme of three major concerts, one at the end of each school term. These take place in a local church and are a showcase of everything the ELCB groups have worked on during that term. Typically we also include a number of promising young soloists and

raise money for a partner charity. They are always popular events and attract a large, appreciative audience of family and friends.

The groups are also frequently invited to take part in various local community events. Over the years these have included the Brick Lane Festival, Docklands Festival, Mile End Parklife Community Fete, numerous school fetes, the Battle of Cable Street anniversary celebrations, Shuffle Festival, BBC Sport Relief, Victoria Park Bandstand performances, Love My Street Festival, and more.

The Band also supports fundraising by local, national, and international charities. These have included Amnesty International, Crisis at Christmas, Friends of Victoria Park, the National Autistic Society, St Joseph's Hospice, Shelter, the City and East London Bereavement Service, Proshanti, and Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park.

In recent years:

- ELCB and Big Band have regularly participated in the National Concert Band Festival (NCBF), achieving silver and gold awards respectively. As a result of their gold award, Big Band was invited to the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester to take part in the NCBF National Finals.
- We have collaborated with Tower Hamlets Arts and Music Education Service (THAMES) on a number of projects, including one at the Barbican Centre, in which we performed together on the main stage to a full auditorium.
- ELCB, Big Band, Premier Band, and Stompers took a day trip to Brighton to give a performance in the Pavilion Gardens.
- We took part twice in the Contemporary Music for All (CoMA) Festival, playing a range of brand new pieces, including two by ELCB members. These projects culminated in massed ensemble performances with other local community music groups.
- We took part in Making Music's Adopt a Composer Scheme, a national scheme for which the Band was one of only six ensembles chosen, and as a result of which we worked with composer Lee Westwood and premiered his piece *Barricades*, inspired by the Battle of Cable Street, which was recorded and featured on BBC Radio 3.
- Our Percussion Ensemble was invited to take part in the Royal College of Music's "Day of Percussion".
- We performed at the BBC Sport Relief Day at the Queen Elizabeth II Olympic Park.
- A number of members recorded for and appeared in the CBeebies show *Apple Tree House*, which is filmed in Bromley-by-Bow.
- We commissioned a new piece, *Shadwell Shanty* to celebrate ELCB's 40th anniversary in 2014

Management

The Band has always been a non-profit making organisation. It is a registered charity (1142255) with an elected committee and sub-groups focusing on finances, communications, and

programming. ELCB has policies on safeguarding and equality [diversity and inclusion], has public liability insurance, and carries out regular risk assessments. We hold an annual general meeting and a minimum of three management committee meetings each year. Interim committee, tutor, and general meetings are held as necessary.

ELCB has the following musical staff, all of whom are DBS checked:

- **Director of Music** - Matthew Hardy - leads East London Community Band and Chamber Band rehearsals and guides the musical direction of ELCB as a whole.
- **Director of Jazz** - [position open]- leads rehearsals of Jazz Stompers, Big Band, and Jazz Combo, and contributes to planning and development of ELCB projects and initiatives.
- **Percussion Tutor** - Isis Dunthorne - teaches drum kit and percussion lessons and leads Drum Line rehearsals.
- **Premier Band Leader** - Jonathan Ticher - leads this ensemble and supports members' progression into the more advanced groups.
- **Early Music Group Leader** - Kate Gould - plays in and leads this chamber ensemble.
- **Brass Tutor** - John Bennett - jazz trombonist.
- **Brass Tutor** - Angus Moncrieff - trumpet player.
- **Woodwind Tutor** - Simon McChesney - flute, saxophone, and clarinet player.
- **Woodwind Tutor** - Rachel Bartlett - flute, saxophone, and clarinet player.

Communications

We have a strong online presence as follows:

- Website: <https://www.eastlondoncommunityband.co.uk> (a new website with membership and database functions is under construction)
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/eastlondoncommunityband> (we also have an internal Facebook page for members)
- Twitter: https://twitter.com/elcb_social
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIWNmvgnvIO/>

We have a Friends of the Band scheme whose members we keep updated regularly on band projects and activities.

On Friday evenings in the Shadwell Centre a members' table and noticeboard with important information are situated in the cafe area near the entrance. The member of staff at the table can help members with registration, collection of fees, hire, return, and exchange of band instruments, and timetabling. It also used as an informal forum for taking on board and responding to queries and comments expressed by members.

We provide buffet food and refreshments during the intervals at each of our end of term concerts with a view to encouraging our members and their friends and family to mix and get to know one another.

Membership

Adults and children: ELCB is inter-generational in its service provision and management. This is particularly valuable in a society where there are few opportunities for people of a wide range of ages to come together for a common purpose outside of the family unit. ELCB breaks the mould by welcoming a wide variety of individuals and families who might not feel comfortable in a semi-professional music group or a group just oriented towards young people. While many adult music organisations in London are geared toward already experienced players to perfect their skills and get exposure, ELCB provides adult learners of all skill levels a welcoming space to start from scratch or pick up their instruments again.

Diversity: ELCB has around 100 playing members, about 30% of whom are under 18. Most are from Tower Hamlets and its adjacent boroughs in East London, but we have members from all over London. There is generally a good mix of members from the Afro-Caribbean, African, Asian, and European communities. The gender ratio is approximately equal.

Affordability and Concessions: Families, particularly low-income families, are encouraged to join and remain in our groups through concessionary fees and the free loan of instruments. The cost of membership is comparatively inexpensive and this is possible because of the generosity of ELCB's funders, supporters, and volunteers. It is testament to the importance of ELCB in its members' lives that many choose to donate their time and money to make sure the organisation functions.

Youth members: ELCB provides young people a warm and supportive place to learn and develop their musical and interpersonal skills, get to know others and grow their confidence through performance. It gives all learners the opportunity to try multiple musical styles and take advantage of affordable one-on-one instruction with professional music educators.

ELCB also recognises it can provide a unique opportunity for younger people to develop their citizenship skills. Our aim is to give younger members the widest opportunity to take on responsibilities and develop initiatives themselves. We have a youth representative on our committee and have run mentoring projects for young members in the past.

Partnerships

Over the years ELCB has collaborated in performance with a number of different organisations such as THAMES, Centre for Young Musicians, East London Late Starters Orchestra, Spitalfields Festival, Queen Mary University of London Music, CoMA (Contemporary Music for All), and the Formby Band.

Links with the local authority are important to ELCB. We share premises with the borough's Lifelong Learning unit and are always looking for ways to strengthen this relationship.

We have recently received a significant amount of funding from a local charity (see below) and we are very much open to developing closer relationships with the business community in the area.

The future

The band remains firmly committed to its founding principles and ethos. We see participation in music as an important part of education, particularly in developing children's and adult's confidence and social skills, as well as supporting learning in other areas. Equally the band will continue to encourage children and adults who would not normally have access to such provision - whether because of the financial burden, special educational needs, or other reasons such as low self esteem and self-confidence.

On a wider front, the band is continually seeking to increase and improve its activity and profile and to work with other agencies and organisations to ensure that it can make its fullest possible contribution to the development of music making within the local area.

Specifically, ELCB is recognised by the local music hub (led by THAMES) as offering a unique service in East London. As already indicated, the two organisations are working together to promote the Band's activities as the means by which local young musicians can enhance their musical development by experiencing music making in the company of their parents. This partnership offers the opportunity to assess the strategic value of such a relationship and of ELCB's approach to musical education as it relates to the National Curriculum.

ELCB will be 50 years old in 2024. We are looking ahead to make that a time to consolidate our progress, celebrate our collective achievements and community presence, and move forward with exciting new projects.

Finances

Overview

We have eight paid professionals working for the band. Their fees, although modest, are by far our biggest outgoing.

Other costs are associated with hire of our rehearsal venue, instrument purchase and maintenance, music purchase, hire of concert venues, insurance costs, and some minor overheads. The administration of the ELCB is undertaken on an entirely voluntary basis by a group of committed members.

Income is mainly generated through members' subscriptions. This has to be supplemented, when available, by grants, local authority contributions, and donations.

Until 2009 the Band was supported by Tower Hamlets Council which each year gave us a mainstream grant, paid for some of our tutors' fees, and let us have free use of the Shadwell Centre for rehearsals. When this support was withdrawn, the impact was to create a funding gap of around £10,000 per year.

Response

Since 2009, with the help of enthusiastic and committed support from members, we have

- Progressively increased the fees to almost double their 2009 level.
- Mounted several recruitment drives, more than doubling our membership, including the launch of our jazz programme. Together these initiatives have brought in around 50 new

playing members. This drive needs to be maintained to keep ELCB membership at its new level of 100. Our rehearsal venue offers some scope for further increases, particularly adult membership of East London Community Band itself.

- Adopted a new constitution and registered as a charity with the Charity Commission. This allows us to raise additional funds through individual gift aid donations, as well as strengthening our position when seeking grant aid from trusts and foundations, and when seeking corporate sponsorship and donations.
- Applied for and received grants from, among others, a number of City Livery Companies, and most significantly the Aldgate and Allhallows Foundation. This has stabilised our financial position and given us confidence to pursue our ambitions for the future.

Suzanne Gorman

Chairperson

Bob Whittle

Secretary

Richard Peat

Treasurer