

The Alderley Edge Festival is the celebration of a wealth of talent displayed by children and teenagers in the local area and beyond. Some travel from as far as Stoke, Liverpool, Wales and even Ireland in order to take part. The four day event is a showcase of music, speech and drama which includes a wide range of vocal, instrumental and performance work that highlights the vast array of talent that these young people have. Now in its ninety-second year, the Alderley Festival is continuing to go from strength to strength and over the last three years it has seen a twenty percent increase in entries.

Keith Lowe has been involved with the Festival for the past four years and took up the post of Chairman in 2007. He is committed to the progress of children and young people and his enthusiasm is evident. He has been on the Parent Teachers Association of three local schools where his children attended and is currently Captain of the under 18's tennis team in the village. "Every child has something in them that is good," says Keith "and it is my aim to encourage kids to get off the streets and into something they can enjoy."

The Festival is a registered Charity run entirely by volunteers. "Everybody helps to make decisions," says Keith. "It is hard work organising such a big event but I also think it's important to make it fun. The Committee is a happy band of people and we often go to the pub after meetings so we can relax and have a chat." There are twenty-four members and over sixty volunteers that help to organise this prestigious event. "The Committee are responsible for the safety and welfare of 1600 children over the four days that the Festival is on," says Keith "and with over 130 different classes taking place it is important that each area of responsibility has someone allocated to it. But in my mind we never have any problems – just challenges!"

The performances take place at various venues around Alderley - St Pius X Roman Catholic Church, St Philips Church, AE Methodist Church, AE School for Girls, AE Community Primary School and the AE Festival Hall. Upstairs the Festival Hall is host to the local Council Chamber and venue for the monthly meat market as well as being available for local events and parties. "The Festival Hall is specifically reserved for the Festival by Alderley Edge Parish Council," Keith explains. "They make sure that nothing else goes on at the Hall during our four day Festival." Keith values the support that the local area gives during the Festival. "Alderley is a special village and with an influx of so many visitors during this time it provides a great opportunity to encourage people to come and use our local shops and restaurants."

The Finale takes place on the final Saturday evening of the Festival at The Festival Hall. "The performers are mainly made up of winners from some of the music, speech and drama categories with around twenty performing on the night," says Keith. Amongst the two hundred and twenty guests is actor, Bill Roache and his wife, Sarah. Bill is one of the Festival's patrons and presents the William Roache Cup for the most outstanding dramatic performance of the Festival. "As you can imagine this evening event takes a lot of last-minute planning. Not only do our volunteers organise food and wine for everyone, but we also have to put together a programme of music and drama that enables a wide age range of pupils to perform on the night," says Keith. The evening is compered by

Anna Meadmore, committee member, music teacher at Pownall School and talented singer herself. “Anna does a fantastic job in ensuring that the entire evening runs smoothly.”

Keith is very grateful to the large number of supporters who give both in terms of money and time. “Canon Brian Young, recently retired Vicar of St Phillips Church in Alderley and past President is now one of our Honorary Patrons,” says Keith. “He is one of our great supporters.” Other valued assistance comes from the Friends of the Festival. “These are supporters outside of the committee who contribute financially to the Festival. In return they are eligible for a free ticket to all of the classes.”

Great value is placed on contributions from local business in and around the village, all of which are mentioned in the programme. The Festival Sponsors include *AstraZeneca*, who do all the printing as part of their Caring for the Community policy, *Ieg4* in Chelford who have designed, maintain and also host the Festival website free of charge. *Leap29* Recruitment based in Wilmslow, *Metier* in Alderley village and Pannone LLP Solicitors in both Wilmslow and Alderley who are an outlet for the Festival programme. “*Steinway & Sons* have also come on board this year,” says Keith. “We have entered into a partnership with them and they will be supplying the pianos to all the venues during of the Festival.” And finally, the Festivals longest serving sponsors, *The Emerson Foundation* are a greatly valued supporter. “Not only do they give financial support but they supply us with a ‘man with a van’ in order to transport items such as staging, lighting, fridges and advertising boards.”

But despite the undisputed success of the Festival, Keith is keen to inspire even more young people to get involved. “We now want to urge more State schools to come on board, including more local primary schools. The Festival encourages pupils to have the confidence to stand in front of an audience and perform and is a great opportunity for all young people. One of the most important classes is the Novices category as this is open to competitors who are new to the Festival and to those who haven’t won a certificate in previous years.”

And those pupils who aspire to become professional performers could be following in the footsteps of other young stars who have been part of the Alderley Edge Festival in the past. For instance, Chloe Twambley who is performing in a musical version of Cinderella at Disney in Paris and Laurence Jeffcoate, from Ryleys School in Alderley who is currently appearing in the BBC’s *I’d Do Anything* show, competing for a chance to play Oliver in the new Cameron Mackintosh West End production of *Oliver*. “Laurence brought the audience to their feet at the Finale last year with his rendition of *Electricity*,” remembers Keith. “It was a magical moment...”

The Festival organisers are always keen to take on new volunteers. For anyone interested in getting involved in The Alderley Edge Festival 2009 go to:
www.alderleyedgefestival.com