

# Jonny Webb 1970–2018

## Teacher, performer, accompanist and friend

JONNY WEBB attended the world renowned Chethams School of Music, Manchester, an independent specialist boarding school which admits students solely by music audition, from where he went to study at Trinity College of Music, graduating in 1994, a finalist in Trinity's top instrumental award, the Harold Clarke Prize for Woodwind.

His earlier musical career showed a number of impressive awards, including winning the National Festival of Music for Youth Open Jazz Competition in 1986, aged 16. It is clear that he was a young performer of considerable promise and no-one who knew Jonny in his years at MHCHS would be in the least surprised by that. After a short spell teaching privately and at the Music Centres in East Finchley and in Edgware, Jonny was appointed as a peripatetic teacher of woodwind at MHCHS in 1995.

A peripatetic teacher works in a succession of places but the term soon ceased to apply to Jonny, as the then Director of Music, Don McCanlis, recognising his qualities, gave him more and more pupils until MHCHS became his sole place of work. We are blessed with a number of instrumental teachers who, because of their length of service, their large number of pupils and their involvement in extra-curricular activities and in the wider life of the school, are thought of as regular members of our teaching staff, rather than as visiting teachers, and Jonny was undoubtedly one such. Over and above his teaching commitment he gave up countless hours of his free time in support of musical activities, not least as our resident expert on sound, acoustics and recording. Under the Directorships of Don and Maureen McCanlis and Jayne Barnes, Jonny was, for over a decade, a member of the staff contingent on our European band tours and, of course, a performer at countless school concerts. I think I attended every one of those concerts, since I arrived in January 2004, and I saw him leading ensembles, playing in ensembles and, perhaps most characteristically of all, providing piano accompaniments. He was the best of all of us at that smoky, late night jazz sound; of many memorable performances, his accompaniments at our last Singers' Night stood out.



Mrs Barnes, placed a Book of Condolence in Jonny's teaching room and it was filled with comments, a few quoted alongside, which show that he mattered greatly to both staff and students. I was surprised to see deeply felt comments not only from our musical stars, but also from students who were not particularly dedicated or even particularly musical. Clearly, some students thought of him as a teacher and as a friend. They felt that they could talk to Jonny, felt safe with him and knew that he liked them and cared about them. There also seems to have been a great deal of gentle humour.

I did not have very much to do with Jonny, day by day, but we had many a cordial exchange, passing in the corridor or waiting in the wings at concerts. He was an unassuming man who never pushed himself forward, but I found him to be invariably kind, courteous and good-humoured. He was always extremely gracious about any small service which the school was able to provide for him.

After the shock of Jonny's death, it is hard for us to adjust to MHCHS without him. It is odd to think that, apart from some periods of ill-health, his presence in the school had a sense of permanence about it: he was always there and it seemed that he always would be, doing the same things extremely well.

Jonny is survived by his brother, Matt, to whom we extend our sincerest condolences.

Jonny was a much-loved servant and friend of this school and its community. He will be sorely missed.

*Many students and teachers remember Jonny's invitation to enter his room: "Do come in. Do set up."*

*"Jonny, You've been part of 'the family' for many years. We shall always miss your sense of humour, the "goose" and "goat" jokes, the references to "not owning a phone" etc. We've been in awe of your talent and musicianship and the way you have helped and influenced your students who have admired and loved you dearly; your brilliant accompaniments in concerts; your fantastic clarinet and sax playing in the shows and your unfailing support and fun on the music tours abroad. So many memories."*

*(Colleagues)*

*"I could never have done a solo performance for the first time without one of the greatest freestyle jazz pianists I know and I can't thank you enough for being there to encourage me."*

*(Student)*

*"Jonny, life was fuller and better and lovelier when you were with us. We miss you. Thank you for everything."*

*(Colleague)*

*"You helped me progress not only as a musician but also, as corny as it sounds, as a person too. You were the only teacher to treat me as an equal and as my own person. I feel sorry for all the students who won't have the advantage of having a teacher like you. Thank you for everything you have done and I regret not thanking you sooner. Rest easy Jonny."*

*(Student)*

*"How I will miss your wicked sense of humour, your laugh, cups of tea in the corridor, your mad 'soprano' singing, our chats putting the world to rights or more often talking nonsense."*

*(Colleague)*

*"Webby, For the six years I knew you, you were more than a talented musician and excellent teacher; you were a wonderful person, someone I could laugh with, perform with, share memories with... Thank you for the good times, the memories and the music."*

*(Student)*