

# Minster Minstrels Annual Report 2024–25

Prepared by York Music Education CIC

*In partnership with the National Centre for Early Music*

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## Overview

Minster Minstrels is a long-standing collaboration between York Music Education CIC (YME) and the National Centre for Early Music (NCEM), offering high-quality ensemble opportunities for young musicians across York and North Yorkshire. The ensemble focuses on early and historical music, encouraging creativity, collaboration, and a deeper understanding of musical heritage through accessible, engaging rehearsal and performance experiences.

Originally established with support from NCEM through the University of York, the project has evolved to reflect changes in funding and provision. York Music Education leads on delivery, musical direction, safeguarding and coordination, while NCEM continues to provide crucial support by securing funding and offering performance opportunities through its established platform.

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## Structure and Participation

In 2024–25, Minster Minstrels operated as two ensembles to better support a range of ages and experience levels:

- **Intermediate Minster Minstrels**
- **Senior Minster Minstrels**

This two-tier structure allows younger and less experienced players to develop core ensemble skills while enabling more advanced students to take on musical leadership and explore more complex repertoire.

## Participants

- **Total students involved:** 13 (including one student participating in both groups)
- **Gender breakdown:**
  - Male: 9
  - Female: 4
- **Age range:** 8–16
- **Free School Meals (FSM):** 1 student



The ensemble remains inclusive, and YME continues to ensure that bursary support is available to help overcome financial barriers to participation.

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## Rehearsals and Special Events

Weekly rehearsals took place during term time at York Music Centre on Saturday mornings:

- **Autumn Term 2024:** 13 sessions
- **Spring Term 2025:** 10 sessions
- **Summer Term 2025:** 10 sessions

Additionally, students took part in a unique workshop on **Sunday 29 September 2024** at the National Centre for Early Music, led by members of an Iranian early music ensemble. This culturally enriching experience introduced students to new sounds and traditions, broadening their musical perspectives and strengthening the connection between young musicians and international artists.

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## Performance Opportunities

The ensemble performed at the following events:

- End-of-term concerts at **York Music Centre** (Autumn, Spring, and Summer)
- **York Early Music Festival** – July 2024
- **Cliffe Castle, Bradford** – March 2025

These performances gave students the opportunity to showcase their progress in high-quality public venues and to experience the demands and rewards of live performance. Being part of the York Early Music Festival, in particular, has reinforced the group's identity within the city's wider cultural offer.

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## About the Ensemble

Minster Minstrels occupies a distinctive place in the York Music Centre programme. It is made up entirely of young people and performs early music using contemporary instruments. This approach makes historical repertoire accessible to all, without the need for period-specific equipment, and complements the wider family of YME ensembles, offering a creative and inclusive space for musical exploration.

The ensemble nurtures students' ensemble skills, stylistic awareness, and musical independence, often through improvisation, creative arranging, and listening-based rehearsal techniques.



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## Next Steps and Awareness Raising

Over the years, Minster Minstrels has benefited from high-profile partnerships – such as with the **Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment** – which have brought national visibility and helped drive recruitment.

As we look ahead to 2025–26, we are keen to expand the group and reach more young musicians who would enjoy this unique experience. We would welcome support from **York Music Hub** in helping to raise awareness across the city’s schools, instrumental teachers, and families. Simple actions such as featuring the group in newsletters, websites, and Hub-led communications could significantly increase uptake and engagement.

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## Conclusion

Minster Minstrels continues to exemplify high-quality partnership working between York Music Education and NCEM. The project offers a musically rich and socially inclusive experience for young people and contributes to the diversity and depth of music education across the city.

We are very grateful to the **National Centre for Early Music** for their continued belief in the value of this project, and we look forward to building on this success in the year ahead.

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### Prepared by:

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*Nina Kumin – Ensemble Director (additional reflections available on request)*

