

## What Norwich School did for me – *Caitlin Obee*

Back in early 2016, I was set to take my GCSE exams at a local state school which I had attended since year 7. Knowing I had prepared well and was predicted strong grades, I had spent all of the previous Autumn looking around sixth forms across Norfolk. At the time, I knew that I was going to pursue music; I had gained a flute diploma in 2015, was set up with an established and knowledgeable teacher in London, and had my eyes set on a conservatoire place. I had eventually chosen a sixth form with the best music department I could find, attended their induction days and was ready to get through two last years of study.

Neither my family or I would have ever considered applying to Norwich School. In a sequence of events, through teachers knowing other teachers and being heard in local concerts, I was contacted by Norwich School who asked us to look around. Curious, my parents and I came in for a tour, I played for the music staff and spoke to the Head Master. We could clearly see that the amazing opportunities and facilities on offer were unmatched by anywhere else, but were expecting to be disappointed by a reality of little financial help. However, reassured by the admissions team and with nothing to lose, I sat the entrance exam and music scholarship audition.

Two weeks later a letter arrived in the post. Norwich School awarded me the music scholarship and were able to offer a bursary.

Fast forward to the following September; I arrived in the Close, dressed in my smart suit and with no idea how I was going to fit in or what my school life had become. I was scared that I wouldn't be able to deal with the pace or pressure, that I wouldn't fit in and I did not know anybody. In the end, I can honestly say that I had the most amazing two years at Norwich School.

Within three weeks of arrival we had the annual House Music Festival where I won the Bernard Burrell Memorial Prize solo competition and my House won the overall cup! I was part of the Chapel Choir, Gateway Players' Orchestra, Symphonic Wind Band, Flute Choir, the Musical - all of which had the resources and like-minded pupils which enabled us to produce concerts like I had never experienced before. I also joined the maths team, travelling to competitions in London.

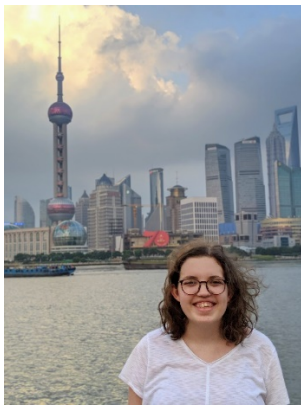


Throughout my time in the Close, I had so many experiences that I am extremely grateful for. To name but a few – the Chapel Choir trips to London to sing for the Dyers and to sing evensong in Cambridge, the rewarding choral outreach scheme I assisted as part of community service, playing the flute in Norwich Cathedral recitals, at the Norfolk Show Bandstand and in old peoples' homes. Perhaps the biggest highlight of my time was in Spring of my Upper 6 year where I was lucky enough to play the Chaminade Concertino with the renowned London Mozart Players in St Andrew's Hall, an opportunity I could never have even fathomed two years previous.

In my studies, I felt supported by all my teachers from the start. They were all so welcoming, actually looking out for my wellbeing, considerate of topics I may not have covered in my old school and very quickly I felt like I had always been here. At Norwich School you are not a grade on a sheet of paper to bump up their statistics, they know you for your individual talents outside of just exam results. My eyes were opened to a whole new way of thinking, and for the first time, I actually began to enjoy academic music. Having essentially tutored myself in GCSE music, it was refreshing to be taught by experts and it captured my attention so much that it changed my entire plan. I decided I wanted to go to university, with my eyes now set on Cambridge and a choral scholarship which I had witnessed in action on our Chapel Choir trip.



After interviews and entrance exams, much hard work and revision, all whilst keeping up with my extra-curricular music commitments, I made it through my A level exams, and with Cambridge offer pending I nervously awaited results day. I was utterly thrilled to pick up 3 A\*s in Music, Maths and Geography.



Fast forward to 2021, I graduated from Clare College, Cambridge, with a first in music. My university experience was intense, inspiring, and highly rewarding. It is amazing to be taught by people who are world-leading experts in their fields, and I am so glad that Norwich School opened my eyes to a discipline I had previously discounted as a career 'not for people like me'. I found a home in the college choir at Clare, making friends for life and sharing music across the globe. Having never ventured out of England before, I went on 20 planes and 5 ferries in 2019, exploring and performing in destinations from North America and Mexico to South-East Asia and across Europe!

As cliché as it may be, Norwich School did change my life. If you had told me back in 2016 that I would have achieved the results I did, attend one of the world's most prestigious universities, and thrive, I would have thought you were insane. But here I am, with a degree certificate in hand and with a plethora of possibilities now before me, largely thanks to the subject I truly discovered I wanted to pursue whilst in the Close. Norwich School really does welcome all, regardless of social or financial background, and if you can contribute to school life and enrich the community here, they try everything possible to make you a pupil who can thrive.



Whilst at university I decided that I really wanted to teach music at school level. After many interviews I decided to return to Norwich School from September 2021 in the Music Graduate position. I am really enjoying working with such a talented and diverse bunch of pupils, and especially leading groups such as the Junior Choir, Chamber Choir and Symphonic Wind Band. Norwich School is a lovely place, both to study and to teach, and it is wonderful to be back in the Close once again.