



Youth Voice

Mía Iles Pérez shares her folk music journey from London Youth Folk Ensemble newcomer to trainee tutor.

Over the past several years, the English Folk Dance and Song Society has been instrumental in my growth as a musician, from a beginner mandolinist to my current roles as a music educator, performer in the East Corner Trio, and Trainee Tutor for London Youth Folk Ensemble, alongside my master's degree in astrophysics.

I began as a member of London Youth Folk Ensemble (LYFE) in 2017. Joining LYFE was a significant step forward from my previous experiences in a small, local folk group. The ensemble was an encouraging environment where all members could learn to contribute to an arrangement regardless of skill level. It was essential in building my understanding of the folk tradition, having not come from a folk music background.

Playing alongside more experienced musicians and focusing on creating excellent music rapidly enhanced my playing. Multiple performances throughout the year were a driving force for the ensemble and a highlight of my time with LYFE. One year we even went on to receive an award at the Royal Albert Hall for our success at the Music for Youth competition in Birmingham.

During this period, I also became a member of the EFDSS Youth Forum, a platform for young people to have their ideas heard and to contribute to the organisation. Youth Forum was responsible for the creation of 'The Takeover', a now annual performance at Cecil Sharp House for young musicians and youth music groups. Even over COVID, the Youth Forum was able to run various online workshops, listening clubs, and other events that were all impactful during a challenging time.

In 2019 I successfully auditioned for the National Youth Folk Ensemble and remained a member for three years. The residential courses and various performances were wonderful and immersive. We were taught by leading folk musicians, who guided us in honing our arrangement and performance skills, with valuable workshops in musical techniques and various folk traditions from England and beyond. We were afforded one-to-one time with tutors whenever possible, as well as individual feedback over the course of the year. It was truly invaluable for musical development in a group, as well as on an individual basis. By the end of every year, I was astonished by the professional standard the ensemble had reached. The whole experience resulted in tight knit playing and a tight knit community.

After leaving both ensembles in 2022, I wanted to give back to EFDSS and further my music education experience. This year, I was excited to take on the role of Trainee Tutor for the London Youth Folk Ensemble. I look forward to inspiring more young people across the country to learn about and embrace folk music.