Peta Levi listens to music made by a double quartet of students at a school for the deaf

Breaking through the silence

ON MARCH 6 eight 13-[illegible] year-old deaf pupils at the Mary Hare School, Newbury, Britain's only grammar school for the deaf, will perform before Prince Charles at a Royal Festival Hall reception following conductor Lorin Maazel's fiftieth birthday concert.

Maazel decided to celebrate his birthday with all on behalf of deaf children after receiving a letter from Ann Rachlin asking if he would spare a thought for a child who could not hear. The Beethoven Brothers he had [illegible] conducted. Two years on she started "The Beethoven Fund for Deaf Children."

● Picture of the [illegible] school [illegible] by E. Hamilton West.

(affiliated to the National Deaf Children's Society) to draw attention to deaf children's problems and to help by providing electronic speech equipment and musical instruments, and since 1968 has developed her own method of teaching 3-11 year-olds to enjoy music through tea-and-story sessions after school.

I listened to the eight pupils who form a double quartet of recorders (two also play flute duets) perform some sixteenth-century pieces by Susato and Tabourot and a seventeenth-century piece by Phalese, in time, in tune, and expressively.

Seventeen-year-old Susan Williams, who is totally deaf, said: "Because I am deaf doesn't mean I can't make music — playing makes me feel better." Although she cannot hear the notes she enjoys playing with a group and giving pleasure to others. Most deaf children can hear something with the help of modern hearing aids, but may not be able to hear high or low notes.

There are many spin-offs: 16-year-old Barbara Brown says: "There is no other way I can express myself as well as I can on the recorder; it helps me get rid of my frustrations." She also felt that "tonguing" because of the additional exercise it gave to her tongue, had improved her speech.

The pupils at the Maazel birthday concert are among 40 musicians at this privately [illegible] boarding school for 185 [illegible]-year-olds, all of whom [illegible] paid for by LEAs. Bill [illegible], the history teacher, [illegible] head and amateur [illegible], introduced music [illegible] the school four years [illegible] asking sixth formers [illegible] would like to play [illegible] instrument — one [illegible] towards introducing cri[illegible] to an academic and [illegible] environment. "Feel[illegible] mixed," he said. [illegible] thought the idea was [illegible] crazy." But [illegible] 17-year-old boys [illegible] efficiently motivated [illegible] the guitar on their [illegible].

[illegible] music is part of the [illegible] for the first three [illegible] teaches percussion, [illegible] and rhythm, but [illegible] teachers must be able [illegible] to communicate their enjoyment of all kinds of music. Music teaches deaf children to listen and so maximise on any sound they are hearing. At lunchtime on Fridays anyone can join a band session, and the school cleaners regularly stand at the door spellbound as the rhythm gets under way.

Ann Rachlin recently invited the Schools for the Deaf and the Partially Hearing Units in the county to enter a painting competition. The best works are being exhibited at the Festival Hall until March 6. Sadly some teachers complained to her. "It is all we can do to teach deaf children to speak and sign their names — we have no time to do expressive work."