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Why Music?

Music in particular and the arts in general are too often considered 'extras' in the lives of our children. Music is a fine thing, the argument goes, but let's deal with the basics first – not only the core academic subjects but other, seemingly insurmountable barriers to children's development and full participation in society.

Our experience at Waltons New School of Music has been that music can – and should – play a far more central role in the education and development of our children, all of our children. We have seen its long-term effects on several thousand children and adults, from a wide variety of backgrounds, who have immersed themselves in music, sometimes for months, sometimes for many years. We have seen its short-term effects on hundreds of children and young people who have, through workshops, been exposed to – and excited by – musical genres, ethnicities and instruments of which they had no previous experience.

Due in no small part to the efforts of music advocates in Ireland we are – slowly, to be sure – moving in the right direction. We applaud, for example, the introduction of a new primary school music curriculum that encourages some active music making in the classroom. But how much training will teachers, many of whom have had little or no exposure to music themselves, receive to implement this curriculum, to really make it work? And why aren't more children – from all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds – given the opportunity to take music further, engage with it, learn to play it, make it themselves?

The answer to that last question shouldn't be money, or there not being enough of it to go around. The value of music in our society, to anyone who has truly experienced active music making, is so evident that it seems shocking not more has been done. The trouble is, so few of us have experienced it, the real thing, active music making.

Although we live in a country where a child's serious engagement with classical music is still largely determined by his/her parents' means, the experience of active music making isn't confined to one musical genre. It isn't confined to music schools or formal instruction. Irish traditional music thrived and developed for hundreds of years without music schools. Not to mention the young people who have picked up guitars or drums or started to sing, some of them going on to make music we've all heard.

But if we add all of these together – students taking formal instruction, children listening to their parents or siblings play and learning from them, young people listening to recorded or live music and wanting to make it their own – it accounts

for a surprisingly small proportion of the population. It is not until this generation of children has actually grown up with music, until its vital cultural thread has been woven deeply into the fabric of our society, that we will come to know what it can do. In the meantime, we'll attempt some answers to the question posed.

WHY MUSIC? Because: Music Nourishes the Mind

Music, by its very nature, requires a multi-faceted approach to problem-solving. This may pertain to the physical action of playing or listening; the mental processes of reading, counting or transposing; or the emotion involved in interpretation and expression. 'The general educational value of self-directed creative activity, exercising and developing sensitivity and imagination is self-evident. The medium of musical sound offers particularly wide scope for lateral thinking, because even modest and untutored efforts call for the same approach to the materials and problems as more advanced work.'¹

The eminent educational psychologist Howard Gardner introduced the theory of 'Multiple Intelligences' in his 1983 book, *Frames of Mind*. In it he proposed that there are seven different forms of intelligence: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal.

Gardner argues that each of us possesses all of these intelligences in varying degrees. It is interesting that he isolates musical intelligence as a separate category, as opposed to a more general 'arts' intelligence. The elements of this musical intelligence include an intuitive understanding of phrasing and nuance, as well as a sense of pitch and rhythm. Upon further examination, the category of 'musical intelligence' would also encompass many of the other intelligences. The practise of music requires linguistic ability, in order to speak or write about music and describe what is involved; logical-mathematical in the division of rhythms and realisations of figured bass; spatial in the use and control of registers and awareness of the physical body and instrument

¹ John Paynter, 'Music For All', article in *How Music Works*, Keith Spence (ed.) (London: Shuckburgh & Reynolds, 1981), p. 402

in the space they occupy; bodily kinaesthetic in the manipulation of an instrument or conducting of an ensemble; interpersonal in the cooperation with others in an ensemble and the communication of ideas, both in music and in words; and intrapersonal in the awareness of one's own state of consciousness and the effect it has on the music listened to, composed or performed. 'In my view,' Gardner writes, 'the purpose of school should be to develop intelligences and to help people reach vocational and avocational goals that are appropriate to their particular spectrum of intelligences. People who are helped to do so, I believe, feel more engaged and competent, and therefore more inclined to serve the society in a constructive way.'²

But music's importance to education is not only in and of itself; it can have a significant impact on other areas of learning as well. In 1992-1993, a study by Frances Rauscher et al. at the University of California at Irvine found that a small group of young children provided with several months of music training scored significantly higher than population norms on a task measuring spatial-temporal reasoning. Two schools participated in the study: a middle-income school and a school for at-risk children. Although the effect was significant for both schools, the at-risk school children improved dramatically – by 91%.³

This was followed in 1993 and 1994 by studies designed to determine if merely listening to music might improve spatial IQ. Another team led by Rauscher found that listening to ten minutes of a Mozart sonata gave a group of third-level students a short-term enhancement of spatial-temporal reasoning. This effect did not, however, apply to all styles of composition or to all areas of intelligence.⁴ The 'Mozart Effect', although controversial, is intriguing, and holds promise for further exploration into the transfer of musical processing to other types of thinking. However, the effect's limitations suggest that listening to music is probably not enough for lasting enhancement of spatial-temporal or other forms of intelligence. Listening is a passive experience for most of us, and does not require the involvement that active music making does.

In 1999 James Catterall et al. published an analysis of a U.S. Department of Education database that was used to track more than 25,000 students over a period of ten years.⁵ The study showed that students involved in active music making generally tested higher than those who had no music involvement. The test scores studied were not only standardised tests, such as the SAT, but also in reading proficiency exams. The study also noted that the musicians scored higher no matter what socioeconomic group was being studied. In fact, when he factored in economic status Catterall also found that students from underprivileged families who studied music improved their overall school performance at the same rate or faster than all others.

Music Integrates Mind, Body and Spirit

Laird Addis, in his book *Of Mind and Music*, explains how sounds can have such profound effects on those listening to them. He maintains that music is the only art form that can truly be said to be the 'image' of consciousness.⁶ Consciousness takes time; music takes time. Philosopher and

educator Suzanne Langer once observed that 'music is time made audible' and that a passage of musical time is measurable only in terms of sensibilities, tensions and emotions,⁷ all of which are rooted in our consciousness. As music is a 'moving' art form (in both senses of the word), it can represent different states of consciousness.

Exposure to music at an early age introduces and reinforces such essential academic and personal skills as critical thinking, problem solving and learning how to work cooperatively towards common goals. Every time we are actively engaged in music – whether listening, composing or performing – we are physically engaged. Minute shifts in weight, position and posture can have dramatic effects on what we play. Similarly, it is impossible to engage with music without a great degree of mental application, and coherent interpretation relies on, among other factors, aesthetic judgements. Musician and educator Atarah Ben-Tovin writes: 'There is only one occupation open to most children which offers the possibility of developing mind, body and soul in balance: learning to play an instrument.'⁸

Dr. Frank R. Wilson, a neurologist and member of American National Commission on Music Education, together with music Franz Roehmann of the University of Colorado, organised an international conference on music and child development in 1987. One of the conclusions emerging from the conference was that 'music has a profound influence on language [and] social and emotional maturation in children, beginning in infancy.'⁹ Wilson has also written that 'as contemporary neurophysiology and psychomotor research discover more about the rhythmic organization of movement, it is likely that musical experience will be shown to have important effects on motor skills development as well.'

'Music is an essential life-experience, and in our increasingly secular Western European society it provides an important source of spiritual experience for the majority of children in our schools. Such musical feeding of the spirit remains an important part of my own early memories. That transcendent sense of well-being and connection with something beyond the day-by-day experience of the world could be sensed in the humblest musical activities: in nursery rhymes and singing games, in hymns and songs and in listening to music of all kinds through mechanical reproduction.'

George Odam, Emeritus Professor of Music Education, Bath Spa University College and Research Fellow at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama¹⁰

Music Enables Self Expression

Music opens a door between our inner and outer selves. It can be a powerful means of expressing our own feelings and accessing our emotions. At-risk youth participating in music programmes learn to find alternative, constructive paths towards recognition, achievement and self-expression. They learn how to use the arts to communicate difficult thoughts and emotions. At the New York Alternative School in Tillson, a 'last chance' school for truant youth and drop-outs, the graduation rate has nearly doubled – to 83% – since an arts partnership with Mill Street Loft, a multi-arts educational centre, was initiated in 1992. And at the Boys Choir of Harlem, 98% of the members graduate from high school and go on to third level study.

Music as a therapy provides patients of all ages with an effective means of exploring and communicating a wide

² Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 9

³ Rauscher, Shaw, Levine and Wright, 'Music Training Causes Long-Term Enhancement of Preschool Children's Spatial-Temporal Reasoning', *Neurological Research*, 1997, Volume 19, February, pp. 2-8

⁴ Rauscher, Shaw and Ky, 'Listening to Mozart Enhances Spatial-Temporal Reasoning: Towards a Neurophysiological Basis', *Neuroscience Letters*, 185, 1995, pp. 44-47

⁵ James Catterall, Richard Chapleau and John Iwanaga, 'Involvement in the Arts and Human Development', *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (Washington, DC: Arts Education Partnership, 1999)

⁶ Laird Addis, *Of Mind and Music* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 57

⁷ *Ibid*, p.58

⁸ Atarah Ben-Tovin, *Children and Music* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1979), p. 11

⁹ Frank R. Wilson and Franz L. Roehmann, *The Biology of Music Making: Proceedings of the 1984 Denver Conference* (St. Louis: MMB Music Inc., 1988)

¹⁰ George Odam, 'The Experience of Music', article on the website of the International Society for Music Education (www.isme.org)

range of emotions.¹¹ Christopher Small, a music therapist, observes that 'relationships in the music therapy setting can model relationships between person and person, between individual and society, between humanity and the natural world and even perhaps the supernatural world.'¹² Through music, patients learn to make associative iconic and intrinsic connections. Music is especially important to non-verbal patients who find a vehicle for expression through this medium.

Music Celebrates Diversity

The Department of Education and Science's revised primary curriculum emphasizes music's unique ability both to celebrate diversity and to share commonality:

'Children of all ages and abilities have potential in music, and music education celebrates individual differences among them. The child's musical expression and responses to musical experience are valid, and his/her creations and innovations in musical compositions are fostered and valued. The ability to explore with guidance and to experiment and take risks with sound combinations is an essential aspect of musical growth. Music education also recognises similarities among children and the joy of shared experiences, which demand collaboration, concentration and discipline. Musical activity, alone or with others, contributes to the child's developing creativity and self-esteem.'¹³

Of course diversity also extends to culture and ethnicity, and listening to, performing and even composing songs and instrumental music from other cultural traditions – including those within Ireland – is arguably the most accessible and inviting way to explore unfamiliar cultures and embrace diversity. A *National System of Local Music Education Services*, Music Network's 2003 report, stated: 'The use of music from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds . . . has been shown to serve as a means for racial and cultural integration within the classroom.'

Finally, sensitivity to diversity must also extend to children's early exposure to music. Before children enter school, parents and caregivers have already shaped their musical development in a variety of ways:

'For example, children whose mothers have sung to them during their early years and who have been encouraged to sing are highly likely to enter school at age five as relatively competent singers. Not surprisingly, children who have had fewer opportunities to sing, or to be sung to, are more likely to enter school as less developed singers. Unfortunately, this latter group are more liable to be labelled as 'unmusical' by insensitive and ill-informed adults. Negative comments from such teachers on the basis of perceived singing ability generates public humiliation in front of friends and peers and a sense of shame and inadequacy that can lead to lifelong self-perception of musical disability.'¹⁴

Graham F. Welch, Chair and Professor of Music Education, Institute of Education, University of London

Music programmes in schools and childcare settings need to be sensitive to such difference.

Music Communicates

There are various forms of communication that music encompasses. Ensemble performers communicate as they play together. The instrumental soloist or singer communicates with her listeners. Members of a drum circle communicate rhythmically with one another. In 'Making

Music Together', an essay published in 1951, sociologist Alfred Schutz used the term 'musical tuning-in' to describe how making music together – and indeed performing music before an audience – involves the sharing of 'inner' or 'subjective' time. Schutz argued that this 'sharing of the other's flux of experiences in inner time' is a kind of 'intersubjectivity', a middle way between subjectivity and objectivity, and that the 'tuning-in' that music exemplifies is the 'indispensable condition of all possible communication'.¹⁵

Music is an art form that crosses borders of language, ethnicity, culture, gender and class. In many ways it is the perfect medium for demonstrating and transcending differences, as well as formulating a context for communication. One only has to look at a modern symphony orchestra to confirm the truth of this. Men and women, often from many different countries, play side by side, and the only prejudice present is that constructed by men and women. Music itself does not discriminate.

We live in an increasingly urban, fragmented society. Aware, the voluntary organisation for depression sufferers and their relatives, estimates that 300,000 people in Ireland suffer from some form of depression. One in five Americans are depressed and report high levels of stress, anxiety and sadness. Feelings of isolation and loneliness are common. Involvement in music making – whether through music lessons or participation in a choir, musical society or other performing group – brings people together and helps to combat this loneliness. Music contributes to our mental, social and emotional well-being.

Music Challenges

Active music making, like sport, has the singular virtue that if a child practices, she gets better. This is true regardless of 'talent' or physical or intellectual disability. It can be argued that all growth – physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual – requires challenges to be set, from within or without, and met. Music is a perfect means to do this.

Atarah Ben-Tovin: 'Achievement is a vital factor in developing the character of any child. Any process to which a child devotes continuing effort should provide a succession of achievements.'¹⁶ When engaged in the process of music making, it is possible for a child to assess his own progress. This contributes to the sense of achievement he derives from the process. The self discipline involved in daily practice is also hugely beneficial to the child, from a musical point of view and in his everyday life, and the habit of self management will last a lifetime.

The evidence is both more immediate and more apparent than in other school subjects. And for young people faced with other, seemingly insurmountable challenges, music has the potential to transform their lives, providing them with their first taste of focus, discipline, accomplishment and self-confidence. Student self-concept is a primary issue in education today, and low self-esteem is believed to underlie such diverse problems as academic underachievement, drug addiction, violent behavior and teenage pregnancy.

'No human society is known that has never had music', writes John Paynter. 'Music is everywhere in our world. The benefits of a music education in children's lives are many and varied. In the end music is not "about" technique, skill analysis and information, but is simply a natural human response, through delight, to the revealed expressiveness of sounds. It belongs to all of us. To be human is to be musical.'¹⁷

¹¹ Leslie Bunt and Mercédès Pavlicevic, 'Music and Emotion: Perspectives from Music Therapy', article in *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, Patrick N. Justin and John A. Sloboda (eds) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 181

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 183

¹³ Primary School Curriculum (Arts Education: Music), 1999

¹⁴ Graham Welch, 'We Are Musical', article on the website of the International Society for Music Education (www.isme.org)

¹⁵ Alfred Schutz, 'Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationship' in Arvid Brodersen (ed.), *Alfred Schutz: Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964), pp. 159-78.

¹⁶ Atarah Ben-Tovin, *Children and Music* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1979), p. 11

¹⁷ John Paynter, 'Music for All', article in *How Music Works*, Keith Spence (ed.) (London: Shuckburgh Reynolds, 1981), p. 400