

PTI – FINAL REPORT

Course Outline

The opening address and pupil panel set the tone for 3 days of intensive discussion, debate and consideration as to why music is so important to us as teachers and to the students that we teach.

The student panel on the first morning highlighted perfectly the enthusiasm that young people have for music (and art). Their comments were extremely informative as they spoke passionately about the importance their music teachers have on their music education. The students talked of a “defining moment” when a certain piece or musical experience shaped and changed their lives. They were also grateful for the “one to one” time they received from their music teachers and also mentioned the “buzz” that they experience when performing both in school and outside in the wider community.

Jools Holland was our first guest speaker/performer and spoke very entertainingly but also pertinently on how important his uncle and music teacher were in shaping and developing his early musical career. Interestingly his performance at the end of the session seemed to encapsulate his life story with a brilliant improvisation incorporating all his musical loves of Bach, Blues and Boogie Woogie.

Dan Grimly, Oxford tutor at Merton College, considered the phrase ‘What is Englishness?’ and debated whether it was possible to define an English style by investigating the music of the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Olympics and equating that with music of Elgar, Delius and Vaughan –Williams. His talk was eloquent and inspiring giving these iconic works a new perspective and slant. In the evening, we had the privilege of hearing these works in concert at the Philharmonic Hall, witnessing one of the most highly regarded interpreters of the Delius violin concerto, Tasmin Little perform. This reinforced the point that extending our experience and understanding of live music is as important for our own development as teachers as it is for our pupils.

During the 3 days, delegates were also given the opportunity to discuss in smaller groups ‘Why’ ‘What’ and ‘How’ we teach music as well as sharing and explaining best practice to each other. This is so important and a refreshing way of conducting professional development where music teachers, rather than being told what to do can, with colleagues, share and shape their own musical beliefs and teaching methods.

A series of practical workshops also took place in the course of the weekend. Tim Watts explored composition, whilst James Slimmings discussed vocal and conducting ideas. In both workshops, the lecturers cleverly created ambitious and challenging music using the simplest of ideas. Tim Watts’ composition relied on just 5 notes but he showed us a variety of ways in which the music could develop. Similarly one of James Slimmings’ vocal works fused 4 simple classical melodies with 4 contemporary phrases thus opening up a wealth of new possibilities and repertoire to young people.

The conference structure gave opportunity for listening, performing and composing; it stretched us; it provided inspiration listening to internationally famous musicians, and it gave time to reflect and evaluate – rather like a good music lesson!

The conference has given us the breathing space to reflect what, why and how we teach music, with the ability to step away from the day to day demands of the classroom.

Key Issues

All delegates agree that music forms a vital part of a students' learning and cultural education, ensuring a rich and balanced curriculum. Delegates are unanimous that as Music teachers we have a great responsibility in inspiring a new generation to appreciate and understand the diverse range of music that has been created over the many centuries. Indeed as we heard from the pupil panel, students studying music gain in self-confidence and self-esteem and develop creative, analytical and transferable skills. Music can give pupils a place in society and a sense of community.

Over the course of 3 days, key issues have arisen from delegate conversations, lectures and practical workshops. Fundamentally, Music education requires teachers to be capable of engaging in one of the most complex balancing acts: the balance between exploring creativity and practical skill, with theory and knowledge.

Delegates and speakers alike, highlighted the importance of practical inspiration- the musical 'hook'- and the need to open the door to secure progress through musical knowledge and understanding. Practical music is therefore vital to engage and inspire. Music Teachers believe that all students have an entitlement to learn a musical instrument and should be encouraged to do so. To ensure the consistency of high quality music provision, both extra-curricular music and instrumental provision should be recognised and rewarded as an intrinsic part of subject inspections, in order to ensure high quality and inclusive provision.

Teachers expressed a desire that all students be given the opportunity to be exposed to a wide range of musical styles. Teachers and speakers alike shared their experience of music that had moved and inspired them. This principle was reaffirmed through an inspirational session with Jools Holland, whose hook into music occurred when he heard his uncle playing Boogie Woogie piano. His own experimentation on the piano was enlightened by the theoretical training offered by his teacher, Mr Pixley. The defining moment for Jools was when his teacher gave him the theoretical knowledge that enabled him – to quote (Jools) - 'to open up a world of possibilities.'

Delegates acknowledged the challenge in balancing a music education that is relevant to students, whilst providing pupils with skills and knowledge to unlock stretching and less accessible music. There is a feeling that students should not be underestimated in their desire to understand and discuss unfamiliar music. As Scott Price, President of the MMA says: 'We need to encourage greater musical ambition for our pupils and help other music teachers to have the courage to lead students down avenues that they have previously not had access to'.

There is a commitment amongst teachers to ensure that students have constant opportunity to access live music and engage with professional musicians. The transformative power of concert going and live music was cited by both the pupil panel and Tasmin Little. A supportive and flexible approach to students accessing this valuable, and often free, resource should be encouraged wherever possible.

In summary, the principles of practical music-making, extracurricular provision and access to instrumental tuition should remain the focus of a broad, balanced and rigorous Music Curriculum. Teachers should feel empowered to deliver a curriculum where all these strands are interlinked and equally valued to enable every child to flourish.

The key issues are as follows:

1. The importance of Music as a vital part of a young person's rich and balanced curriculum
2. The value of practical skill and creative music making to engage students
3. To create a breadth of opportunity to extend young people's experience of music