

EDITORIAL

BJME 37-1 Editorial: Music-making continues during the pandemic

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Music-making, music(k)ing, and creating, are all words which have something in common – they are active, they involve activity, they are ‘doing’ words, and they are what music education involves in many schools and colleges throughout the world. Another thing they all have in common is that as the covid-19 pandemic continues, they are seen as being increasingly fragile in some quarters. We discussed music education in a time of pandemic in the last *BJME* (Daubney & Fautley, 2020), and here now is another editorial being written whilst the world is in the grip of this awful virus. We seem to have studies and reports on an almost daily basis telling us what we can, what we should, and what we might be doing with regard to music-making; because another feature that the list of words at the start of this piece have in common is that in normal times they often involve corporate and cooperative activity of joint endeavour. As guidance changes so regularly on what can be done, for example, whether singing is harmful, and whether brass and woodwind playing can take place in educational settings safely, it is perhaps pertinent to take a step back from the immediacy of ensemble activity, and think about what else is, and can safely, be taking place musically by children and young people and their teachers.

One of the big things we have seen is the rise of the technological solution. For teachers, academics, and researchers, on-line meetings have become the norm, with the webcam and microphone of the laptop computer being not just nice-to-have add-ons, but essential to the conduct of day-to-day work now. But it is not just the meeting that has changed, for many music educators and their pupils, music teaching and learning is now taking place remotely, with the computer forming the centrepiece of this interaction. One of the legacies of this pandemic – and may it soon be over – is that these ways of working which have perforce needed to be adopted may become embedded more deeply in the toolkit of the educator. Questions are already being asked in the press about the need for face-to-face meetings in distant cities, when we are able to do this from our own homes, without contributing to global warming, and without the concomitant wear and tear on us as people. But what of music education? Is the remote lesson, the distant engagement with a far-away teacher going to survive? Are there positives in this form of interaction? Certainly where educators have to travel to meet their learners, or the learners have to travel to meet the teacher, there can be time savings on all sides. It may be the case that we look to a more mixed modality when the ‘new normal’ is realised, in that both forms have their merits and downsides. But it is still far too early to say.

But away from the individual or group lesson, corporate music-making, whether with voices or instruments, is not so easily replicated in the virtual sphere. Concerts have been cancelled, or take place behind closed doors with no audiences admitted. This has not been such a positive experience, and we know for our young performers that the thrill of the crowd has been missed. Likewise for our young composers, the excitement of hearing a piece come to life, played by real musicians, and listened to by an audience has been sorely missed. These experiences have not fared so well under the impact of covid-19. We also have the sorry state of affairs the world over where public

venues, from theatres and concert halls, to pubs and clubs, are reeling from the financial impact, and may not be able to afford to re-open their doors whenever the new normal does begin.

All of these issues matter for our children and young people, as well as our music educators, and the myriad of backstage and behind-the-scenes staff who support them, and whose jobs are in now in question. We hear a lot in academic journals about the onward march of neoliberalism, and the ways in which even in times of a disaster there are people waiting to asset-strip and turn a personal profit. In music education we need a raft of supporting staff to help us with our activities, and the future for this, for these people, and their jobs, is all currently in question. All of these matters seem ripe for research, and as ever the *BJME* will be publishing papers and articles which investigate what is going on.

Which brings us to the current edition of the *British Journal of Music Education*. With the strictures of the publishing timetable, many of these articles were researched and written well before the current covid-19 measures were put in place. They serve as a reminder of what we had, and what we are looking forward to again in the new normal.

We begin the latest edition of the journal with an article from Spain, although the authors come from both Spain and Chile. In this piece Rolando Angel-Alvarado, Olga Belletich, and Miguel R. Wilhelmi discuss ‘Exploring motivation in music teachers: the case of three primary schools in Spain’. In this article the authors reach the interesting conclusion that “that the autonomous motivation of music teachers in classroom settings is satisfied or thwarted by ideas that the members of the school community have about music education”. This is an important finding, and seems likely to be the case that it is transferable to schools and colleges in other parts of the world too. From Spain we move around the globe (something travel restrictions in the current pandemic prevent many of us from doing in person at the moment!) to Australia, and an article entitled ‘The value of collaborative learning for music practice in higher education’ by Melissa Forbes. This article discusses the value of collaborative learning within a popular music programme. This is a useful study, as moving away from the one-to-one model frequently to be found in the conservatoire is becoming increasingly prevalent. We remain in Australia for our next article, where Megan Waters discusses ‘the perceived influence of the one-on-one instrumental learning environment on tertiary string students’ perceptions of their own playing-related discomfort/pain’. The transference from this article is likely to be important, as we know that many music students, as well as professional musicians, suffer for their art in very painful ways. There are some interesting – and worrying – examples given in this article of the issues and problems that some students have had.

From Australia we move to Hong Kong next, with authors based in Hong Kong and London. In this article, Lee Cheng, Paulina Wai Ying Wong, and Chi Ying Lam, discuss issues associated with ‘Learner autonomy in music performance practices’. Building on concepts from foreign language education, the authors describe how, through curriculum changes in a music education undergraduate programme, students were able to demonstrate the characteristics of autonomous learners. Again, this is a useful and important area for all those of us who work in music education to endeavour to develop in our students. From Hong Kong we move next to mainland China, where Chiao-Ting Feng explores ‘Chinese college chamber music education: a case study of students’ conceptions’. “Chamber music education” we are told, “is a relatively new teaching course in China”, and this article describes how attitudes in supporting chamber music learning can affect student learning outcomes. This is an interesting study of what is going on in China’s current music education environment. For our final article in this edition, we move to South Korea, where Moo Kyoung Song and You Jin Kim have an article entitled ‘Speaking of your own repertoire: an investigation of music performance during practice’. This interesting study takes as its purpose the investigation of performers’ cognitive behaviours, and how these are applied to music performance. This is done by observing foci in musical repertoires and thought processes during

practice. Again, there is much here that will be of interest around the world, and their findings certainly will be thought provoking for many.

As ever, it is hoped that there is something of interest here for all our readers, in whatever part of the world they are based. It is to be hoped too that this virtual world tour, visiting countries that we currently cannot easily do, will provide some light amongst the troubled times in which many of us find ourselves. But as ever, music education is shining beacon holding a promise of better things to come!

Take care, everyone

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Reference

DAUBNEY, A. & FAUTLEY, M. (2020) Editorial Research: Music education in a time of pandemic. *British Journal of Music Education*, 37, 2, 107–114.