Adult Music Learning

A manifesto

February 2020

Introduction

In September 2019 and again in January 2020, Making Music brought together individuals from across the music sector to focus on adult music learning.

The purpose was:

1. to describe and bring to life *what an adult music learner looks like*
2. to map *what adult music learning looks like*, and what makes it different
3. to capture what *adult music learners' specific challenges* may be
4. to explore *how some of those barriers could be dismantled* – and by whom

This document is the outcome of those workshops, summarising information on each of the points; and under point 4 giving some suggestions on how the manifesto, below, can be made reality.

Manifesto for adult music learning

A) Every adult in the UK is able to actively participate in music: access & inclusion
B) Adult music learning is supported with infrastructure, information, recognition
C) Under-18s education encourages lifelong music-making

But back to the beginning: how did the manifesto come about?

Background to the manifesto

Why adult music learners?

In the preoccupation of the music industry with issues in music education for under-18s and the talent pipeline, it is often forgotten that fewer than 5% of under-18s will go on to become music professionals (earning their living from performing, presenting or creating music). The rest could and maybe should (but many don't, and aren't encouraged to) become lifelong hobby musicians, continuing their under-18s music learning or embarking on it from scratch.

Why should adults keep or start making music?

Fun and new social connections! And there is now a significant body of academic research on the *positive impact of active participation in music on individuals' well-being*, including:

- prevention or improvement of physical or mental health conditions
- rehabilitation following illness or injury or significant life events such as bereavement, trauma, experience of homelessness or the criminal justice system
- these beneficial effects on individuals are also widely recognised as creating positive repercussions for communities and society in general

Find research: Cultural Health & Wellbeing Alliance

How many adult music learners are there now?

1) 'Our Creative Talent', (2008, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, Arts Council England):
- 10,000 music groups in England, extrapolated to the rest of the UK:12,000 groups
- average membership (Making Music data 2013) of 55 = at least 660,000 participants

2) 2017 Voices Now Big Choral Census:
- 2 million singers and 40,000 choirs in the UK, including school and church choirs

3) 2015 Europe-wide Singing Europe research:
- 2.2m singers in UK

4) Making Music has twice as many singing as instrumental groups, so 2m singers means:
- around 1m participants in instrumental groups

5) Government's 'Taking Part' survey (2017/8) (also captures 'lone' 'bedroom' musicians):
- 25% of adults (around 12 million) take part in music

6) ABRSM exams 2017-8 taken by 650,000 people of which 84,000 adults.
- 63% of those adults are retired and 75% of them have a teacher

How many adults are there in the UK?
- UK population (census 2011): under-18s - 13m, over 18s - 50m

1) What does an adult music learner look like?

1) Trained to be a professional performer, not earning a living as one, now plays as a hobby
2) Used to sing or play as under-18 and has continued without break into adult life
3) Used to sing or play as under-18 and has continued, adding one or more other instruments
4) Used to sing or play as under-18s and has stopped, usually between ages of 15-22
5) Used to sing or play as under-18, stopped and has started on same instrument again
6) Used to sing or play as under-18, stopped and has started again on a different instrument
7) Never given the opportunity to make music as an under-18, starts with no pre-conceptions
8) Had negative experience as under-18 (e.g. told not to sing), so has overcome reluctance

If people start or return to singing or playing – when do they tend to do that?
- post education/early career (5-15 years after stopping)
- mid-career/young-ish family (15-30 years)
- late/post-career/older family (30+ years)

Different kinds of learners and returners will have different barriers to active participation in music, and different motivations to trigger such participation.

People can be more than one type at the same time – e.g. type '7' for singing, type '4' for oboe.

Do people call or recognise themselves as 'adult music learners'?
Not necessarily, but whether they're having formal lessons or 'just' learning new repertoire with a band, developing existing skills and acquiring new ones will be part of their musical activity.

Note: whilst professional musicians obviously also keep developing throughout their career, this manifesto is for and about hobby musicians. Professional musicians are here defined as earning all or most of their living performing music. All others who play or sing, whether professionally trained or not, whether or not earning their living in other ways in the music industry (as teachers, music creators, publishers, suppliers etc.), are here classified as hobby musicians

2) What does adult music learning look like?

1. Formal/mostly with or based on professional teaching intervention:
   a) courses at adult evening colleges (usually group teaching/ensembles)
   b) one to one learning with an instrumental teacher (including voice)
   c) online tutoring or apps with interaction

2. Informal/DIY:
   a) learning by yourself, using materials without interaction – online videos, apps or books
   b) learning with help from friends or family
   c) learning as part of a group, from your peers, e.g. people next to you in a band
   d) learning as part of a group, from the conductor or musical director

What is different about adult music learning?

- ***There could be baggage***
  ◦ psychological (I've been told I can't play, I should/used to be much better)
  ◦ physical (posture or injury or illness-related, e.g. stroke/arthritis issues)
  ◦ musical (good – already reads music, bad – bad habits/fixed pre-conceptions)

- ***There could be resistance to change*** due to age (being more 'set in their ways'), so how instructions are taken on board can differ from how young people would receive them

- There could be positives or negatives to learning alongside their child, friend, colleague or partner: a potential ***'status reversal'/change in status could feel threatening*** (I'm the boss/parent, will my authority be undermined by being terrible on the guitar?)

- ***Motivation different*** to and often stronger than young people's (who are often 'signed up' by their parents); adults have decided to do this for themselves

- ***Expectations different*** about how quickly they feel they should be progressing, and what the 'magic' of a teacher can achieve; they are paying: are they getting value for money?

3) What are the specific challenges facing adult music learners?

Some pre-conditions need to be in place to enable successful adult music learning

- *permission 1*: **everyone can be a musician**, you do not have to be a specially trained separate type of person; there cannot be anything wrong with a parent singing to a child
  - everyday adults (parents, teachers, colleagues, friends) making music as role models

- *permission 2:* **you do not have to be technically flawless** before playing/singing with others and/or in public. 'Enjoying making music with others', and 'making quite a nice sound' are good enough reasons for doing so
  - Author Alexander McCall Smith famously plays in Edinburgh's 'Really Terrible Orchestra'

- *permission 3:* **you aren't expected to be better simply because you're older;** beginners can be aged 60; and you do not have to be better or as good as your 16-old self

- *permission 4:* **progress is not the only thing** worth measuring and it's not the right thing for everyone; you can stay forever happily at one level if you so wish
  - mixed age groups with different age-unrelated abilities need to be seen and heard

- *permission 5*: **failure is normal,** it happens to everyone, including professionals; people will still love you, your group will still love you, in fact probably more so because we all make mistakes, they make us human and enrich our experience, and we'll keep trying

Adults not currently participating need a trigger to get them going
What gets an adult across the door into making music is different for different people

  - **musical** (e.g. grade-1-challenge)

  - **charitable** (to raise funds)

  - **well-being** (good for me)

  - **opportunity** (it's here where I happen to be, I might as well try it)

  - **role models**, famous or not

  - **personal growth** and development (this year I will do yoga and learn an instrument)

Barriers to music learning specific to adults

- *Psychological*:
  - Confidence - belief that they can't do something. Becomes harder to break through this barrier the older/ more formed you are or the more experience you have
  - Expectation about where it might lead - may feel limited as to where they can get to
  - Vulnerability, fear of failure
  - Perceived pressure to progress

- *Time/life getting in the way* (career, family, significant events)

- *Cost* (of all aspects: instruments, accessories, teaching, materials, transport etc.)

- *Lack of / lack of awareness of*:
  - Local teachers or colleges
  - Local groups
  - How they could start participating (e.g. online)
  - Where/how to try out or find instruments, availability of adapted instruments

- *Physical*:
  - Where to practise
  - How to get to rehearsals or performances
  - Disability/additional needs (declining eyesight, e.g.)

- *No good reason or trigger to start*

4) How to dismantle barriers and make the manifesto a reality?

PART ONE: Making it accessible and inclusive

What needs to be made accessible and inclusive?

1) **Opportunities in everyone's area to:**
   a. learn one-to-one
   b. learn in a group class
   c. find a music group/band/choir

2) **Information about such opportunities:**
   a. in language which speaks to everyone
   b. with imagery that a wide range of people can relate to/see themselves reflected in
   c. on platforms that people trust (e.g. online; off-line: libraries, councils etc.)
   d. on a wide variety of platforms (accounting for different ages etc.)

3) **Resources for individuals:**
   a. Centrally available pooled information
   b. Kite-marked
   c. Signposting of learning materials: online tutorials, apps, backing tracks, etc.
   d. Signposting of teachers/classes/groups

4) **Instruments**
   a. physically suitable (e.g. adapted instruments)
   b. available locally
   c. affordable (borrow, hire, buy)

5) **Teachers (one-to-one or groups) and conductors/ensemble leaders**
   a. Support and trained to work with adults/not just under-18s
   b. Resources to help their teaching of adults: repertoire, online tools, offline resources

6) **Music groups/bands/choirs: the people who run them and 'ordinary' members**
   a. Helped to understand and implement inclusive practice on how they run themselves
   b. Helped to understand and implement how everyone in the group can contribute to the group becoming inclusive

7) **Costs (other than instruments)**
   a. Lessons (one-to-one or in a class)
   b. Participation fees in groups (e.g. weekly/termly/annual/PAYG contributions)
   c. Accessories (e.g. music, stands, lights, uniform, reeds, etc. etc.**)**
   d. Travel (to/from venues for rehearsals and performances)
   e. Spaces to practise, rehearse or perform

8) **Spaces (other than their cost)**
   a. Practise space (home may not be possible – work? Tenants' hall?)
   b. Rehearsal spaces (physically accessible, public transport, safe)
   c. Performance spaces (physically accessible, public transport, safe)

9) **Ways of recording/assessing progress or achievement**
   a. Traditional exams are not suitable for everyone – what alternative models can be offered and developed? E.g. timings, costs, location of centres, examiners

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What can YOU or YOUR ORGANISATION pledge to do?

Sign up now: email info@makingmusic.org.uk or see www.makingmusic.org.uk/manifesto

4) How to dismantle barriers and make the manifesto a reality?

PART TWO: Influencing

What is influencing aim to achieve? The three 'asks' of the manifesto

Who can help influence?

- Associations, Musicians Union, ISM, networks (e.g. ABRSM) = **organisations**
- Music industry suppliers, venues, manufacturers etc. = **businesses**
- Music professionals, performers and educators = **individuals**
- Adult music learners = **everyday musicians**
- Parents/grandparents (like Extinction Rebellion Elders: for the future) = **voters**

1. **Who needs to be influenced?**

   1.a) *Peer to peer*: friends, family, colleagues, neighbours, individuals' social networks

   1.b) *General public* - "everyone can", "we are all musicians" type campaign

   1.c) *MPs/MLAs/MSPs/AMs* and *government departments* (incl. education, health)

   1.d) *Local authority* councillors and relevant officers

   1.e) *Music businesses/music industry*: manufacturers, suppliers, retailers, publishers

   1.f) Large corporations/local *employers*

   1.g) *Schools/educational establishments*: non-specialist teachers and school leaders

2. **What tools do we need to make the case?**

   2.a) Good **data**

   2.b) Respected **research** and clear evidence of the benefits

   2.c) **Case studies** – for individuals (stories), for companies, for policymakers

   2.d) **Ambassadors** – different kinds to appeal/be credible to different audiences

   2.e) **Public campaign**, with policymaker backing ideally

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