Musical Progressions Panorama

Ideas, Answers and Questions
18th November 2014, City Hall, London

Event write-up

Musical
Progressions
Roundtable

Participants

Introduction

The Musical Progressions Roundtable (MPR), initiated in 2009, is a network of organisations and individuals involved in music education from across the UK, with over 250 participants to date. It is hosted by Awards for Young Musician and Ben Sandbrook, with funding from Youth Music. We have been looking at how, together, we can most effectively support all children and young people's musical progression, enabling them to fulfill their potential, whatever kind of music they make and whatever background they're from. The MPR is an open forum for generating ideas and exploring complex issues. However it's ultimately focused on action: creating practical outputs (including influencing strategy, producing online tools and developing training models) that will create genuine change for all young people's music making.

The Musical Progressions Panorama was a celebratory forum to bring together Roundtable participants, ideas and materials, as a culmination of the last six years of discussion, debate and research.

Common threads

The event was made up of small and large-group discussions, workshops and performances from young musicians. Some common threads emerged:

- As throughout the Musical Progressions Roundtable, we encountered the same message about the vital importance of journeys and environments for musical progression, musical fulfillment and musical success
- Progression routes, techniques and approaches all help, support and often structure musical progression, and they very often dominate discussions about it. But we've found that what's often missing is having the right attitudes and behaviours to enable young musicians to progress: believing in their potential, finding out what they can do to support themselves and each other, letting them work out their own musical identities and destinations.
- "Youthful" is as much a state of mind as it is an age; perhaps instead of focusing, as older people, on younger people, we should try to be more youthful: playful, spirited, creative, exploratory, fascinated.
- Co-working, collaborating, participating and partnering come through relentlessly as solutions and vital activities for supporting progression.
- Often we need to be looking at the questions we're asking ourselves and young musicians – often we need to be asking different questions.
- And we often need to remind ourselves that all of this work is generally motivated by a love of music and a belief in children's futures.

We have tried to match photographs to discussions where possible but photographs should not be used to infer participation in a particular discussion, nor to attribute comments.

Practical problems[1]

Managing measurements

"If we are genuinely to enhance every young musicians' musical pathway and progression, how do we measure and record the standards, progress, activity and aspirations of children and young people in a way that can practically and effectively be shared between all those who invest in each child?"

This question was approached by two groups in two different ways:

1) There seems to be what is perhaps an obvious opportunity to use technology to wire up the very many different ways in which a child's musical progress is measured. For example, technology, such as a web platform or protocol, could be used to bring together records about a children's musical aspirations, measurements and records around assessing the individual musician, records of musical activities, and achievement of musical standards. Specifically, this portfolio should be able to wire up Arts Award, Graded Music Exams, school records, Music Hub records etc., and perhaps also connect with social media such as Facebook, Sound Cloud etc.

   Such wiring together would enable the young musician, the parent, the teacher and others to be able to see a coherent and comprehensive picture of musical progress, as appropriate! Does such a thing already exist? Perhaps the Sounds of Intent framework, school-based learner management systems, or SoundCloud could provide solutions or inspirations.

2) The second group looked less at solutions and systems and instead at attitudes and behaviours: less a way of connecting musical *measures and records* and more an approach for coherent musical *measuring and critiquing*. Thus it is important to question who is setting a young person's musical goals – is it them, or a parent, a teacher, a facilitator, a friend etc.? Is the measuring that's in place used to develop young musicians' confidence? Can it be flexible for different people's different progression stories and journeys? For example, does a musical measurement take into account that a small step for one child might be a giant leap for another, particularly if they're in challenging circumstances?

Both groups came to the same conclusion about the need to bring together the many different measures, measurements, records and accounts of individual young musician's progress, particularly at times of difficult transitions (e.g. Primary—Secondary school).

Clearly the only thing that is common to all young musicians' musical journeys is the young person themselves being on the journey. So the more that young musician has access to and ownership of a good understanding of their own musical progress the more likely that set of measures is to follow them through their musical journeys.

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[1] Practical problems as submitted beforehand by participants. Names have been anonymised.

Ivory challenge

"Nerys Potts is a perfectly competent but generally uninspiring piano teacher of the last 30 years in rural Norfolk. Is there anything wrong with her carrying on with what she's always done? Either way, practically, how could she be influenced to enhance her teaching?"

Firstly, is being 'generally uninspiring' a problem? Inspiration is a key ingredient in environments for musical progression but that doesn't mean that the teacher has always to be the person who provides it. If Nerys has a good relationship with her students, meets the learning needs of her young musicians and supports other aspects of their musical development, she is likely to be doing good work!

But, regardless of age, no one should be 'written off'! Here are some ideas for how Nerys could be supported to develop her teaching practice:

- speak to her pupils and feed back their reflections, or encourage her to do this herself;
- look into peer-to-peer mentoring that would match Nerys with another compatible but complementary teacher;
- look into paired lessons and shadowing opportunities where one teacher sits in on another teachers lesson, then swaps round, with opportunities for constructive critique;
- encourage and support Nerys to film her lessons, so she can see herself in action;
- develop co-working teams of teachers, e.g. for piano teachers in a Music Hub, so that like-minded teachers can build on trusted relationships to learn together;
- help Nerys to seek out inspiring opportunities and performances, that she can recommend to her pupils;
- where appropriate, make professional development and improvement a contractual obligation.

Opportunity knocks

"The Aspiring Theatre Company, which runs music and theatre workshops for many different groups of children, particularly those with disabilities and other challenging circumstances, often finds it hard to reach the people who most stand to benefit from their opportunities. What should they do?"

Ensuring the effective communication of opportunities between providers and potential beneficiaries is surely a responsibility that Music Education Hubs should take on. This doesn't mean that the Hub has to communicate all the opportunities itself, nor that the Hub Lead Organisation has to build the system to do the communicating, but that the Hub as a whole, and as a network, should make sure that communication channels are available and effective.

Schools, teachers, internet, young musicians, parents, Music Services, arts organisations (like Aspiring Theatre Company), local authority departments, funders and others: all of these will need support and collaboration to share and find appropriate opportunities. All of them will also, perhaps, need to make it their responsibility to be sharing their own opportunities and to find out about other people's opportunities, if a network of signposting is ultimately to be effective.

Silent schools

"The new national curriculum is hard and it is difficult for the timetable not to be dominated by 'Core subjects', grammar rules and mathematical procedures. Some schools will have confident, far-sighted heads, staff and governors. Others will have become academies. What could be done for the remainder, for whom the arts will likely slip away?"

- Help schools to understand that the arts, sometimes seen as being economically unviable, is in fact one of the largest export sectors in the UK economy and a very significant part of the UK's global brand.

- Help schools to understand that virtually all young people care passionately about music. This makes it, ethically, something that they should have the opportunity to pursue and, strategically, something that schools could harness for their broader pedagogical and developmental remit.

- Help schools to understand the significance of student development beyond the aspects of development that are captured in exam results and UCAS applications. For example there was real concern that schools often misconstrued the lower A level grades required by conservatoires as indicating that the courses they would be offering would be of less value than traditional 'academic' courses.

- Support school music teachers and music departments, who often report feeling isolated, with networking, practice-sharing and opportunities for external individuals and organisations to visit, demonstrate and run workshops.

- Promote and support successful school music initatives, such as Musical Futures and Musical Bridges, Teach First's National Orchestra for All, Music Mark's Peer-to-Peer programme, and ACE's Artsmark

Lighting the fuse

"Charlie, an excellent and open-minded classical flute teacher often struggles to engage his capable pupil Ruby. She always seems to get distracted and expects him to spend a long time playing pieces to her to find one that she likes, before she'll really focus on learning. She's extremely good when she sets her mind to it. Where should he focus?"

- Ruby clearly enjoys listening, whether it's Charlie playing, playing herself, or someone else, so Charlie could capitalize on this: using listening more in lessons, perhaps experimenting with call and response, duets, improvisation etc.

- Instead of trying to find bigger 'pieces' to learn, they could focus on smaller exercises or simple folk tunes, exploring through these a range of different techniques and aspects of music.

- Charlie could ask Ruby to bring to the lesson YouTube clips or audio tracks of music that she likes, which could be used as a starting point – not necessarily as the goals.

- Perhaps they both have different expectations of the lessons – what they're for, what they're about. If so, this is unlikely to be resolved unless it is discussed together in some way and some mutually accepted way forward is developed.

Seeing beyond today

"John works mainly in professional development with primary school teachers, working with them to nurture children's ideas and creativity. The teachers are interested to develop their skills but he struggles to get them to envision beyond the here and now of what they see and do every day. What more could he do?"

- He could work to build teachers' confidence and trust so that they have room in their minds to take on new things and envision new places.
- He could encourage peer-to-peer learning and networking, with teachers working together to develop skills and conceptual understanding…
- … complemented by visits, talks and demonstrations from external organisations and individuals, sharing their stories and experiences, particularly from similar circumstances to those of the school teachers he is working with.
- He could endeavour to ensure that the schools' head teachers and senior leadership teams are on board, so the teachers feel they have a license and endorsement to take on new approaches.
- He could work with the teachers' pupils, and the teachers together, to explore and uncover their ideas and creativity.
- He should make sure he understands the teachers well, including their creativity, priorities and motivations.
- He should make sure he is doing what he can to develop his own professional practice and skills.

Workshops

Andrea Creech, Institute of Education: What needs to be done to help young musicians discover their musical self?

Andrea Creech presented the results of some recent research into developing musical self-concept in the context of Musical Futures work, and also of other recent research into musical self for older, adult music learners.

The discussion that followed, around helping young musicians to discover their musical self, started out asking how to support young musicians who don't play instruments: creative thinking is required on behalf of the teacher, but encouraging creative musical thinking in the young person too is an important part of them discovering their musicality.

Another key element of discovering musical self-concept is having relevant materials and opportunities, either that young people find themselves or that others provide for them. External, extra-curricular experiences, listening to music, being part of an audience, making or sharing music in groups, expressing yourself with or in music, performing - all of these experiences contribute to someone's musical self-concept and self-identity.

Developing musical self-concept often plays along a spectrum with conformity at one end and exploration at the other. Both conformity (social belonging, musical tribalism etc.) and exploration (self-discovery, finding new musics, self-expression) are important parts of musical self-concept.

Find out more about Andrea Creech at http://www.ioe.ac.uk/staff/CPEN_9.html and her research into Musical Futures at https://www.musicalfutures.org/resource/27646.

Adem Holness & Keron Gilpin, Wired4Music: Developing young people as designers, leaders and agents in their own learning can be hard to achieve. So when and why is it worth it?

Why is it worth it?

- Engaging young people in the design of projects and programmes means organisers will have a better and more authentic understanding of children and young people's actual needs from the project and real aspirations for it.
- In essense, it helps organisations and practitioners to plan and run better and more relevant programmes of work.
- When they are appropriate engaged and adequately supported, including young musicians as designers, developers and leaders of music programmes can have very significant outcomes for their development, as well as for the running of the programme itself.

When it is worth it?

- With a few exceptions, (perhaps submitting returns for an audit, for example), it is just about always worth it, if the conditions are right…
- It is perhaps most worthwhile when young musicians are involved as early as possible – at the point where they can have genuine influence before too much planning and decision-making has taken place.
- Youth consultation is only worthwhile when organisations / leaders / managers etc. are prepared to change their positions and views, perhaps radically, following the involvement of young people. Tokenistic youth consultation is by and large a waste of everyone's time.
- There will, however, be times when even the most malleable managers will disagree, often for good reasons, with what young musicians say so it is important that everyone's expectations are well managed.
- Engaging young people as designers, developers and leaders can often take a great deal of hard work and sustained effort, support and expertise. Children and young people will need adequate support, mentoring, time and opportunities to grow. As with anyone else, they can't be expected to be fully formed leaders, developers or designers, with the right tools and competencies, from the beginning.
- So it really only worthwhile, in essense, when the organisation has the capacity to do it well. But this shouldn't put people off – just find someone else who can help if need be!

Find out more about Wired4Music at www.wired4music.co.uk, www.sound-connections.org.uk and www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lfgpmx02dbU.

David & Christa Liggins, Ocarina Workshop: KISS: How can musical progression be simple?

After learning to play the ocarina, the group identified characteristics about the instrument and its simplicity that could perhaps be worked towards elsewhere:

- It's a very simple-to-play and accessible instrument – just about every child and adult leader or teacher can do it
- Its simplicity also means that it is possible for just about anyone to master the instrument. Moving from mystery to mastery is a key part of progression and self-satisfaction.
- Because of this, it can be an effective instrument for opening children at a young age to their own musicianship and giving them musical confidence.
- It's very common for children to end up teaching their teachers how to play the ocarina – it is a leveler and an instrument where children can quickly learn to teach and lead.
- As well as being an instrument in its own right, the ocarina is a good spring board for progressing on to other instruments, particularly woodwind and brass. It turns out many highly successful wind and brass players have started out on the ocarina!

Find out more about Ocarinas and Ocarina Workshop at www.ocarina.co.uk.

Pete Moser & Ashley Murphy, MoreMusic: What are the particular characteristics of supporting musical progression of children and young people in challenging circumstances (CYPCC)?

- **Personal relationships** are always important in supporting progression but particularly so when working with children and young people in challenging circumstances. Many CYPCC live very chaotic lives and many have had difficult backgrounds. Having familiar, trusted faces to work with is vital. CYPCC may also be particularly sensitive to having the right personal relationships. Everyone will find that they work well with one person and not another. Getting this right is very important.

- **Long-term support** is a very significant consideration. Working with CYPCC in particular, it can take considerable time to build trust, to help people come out of their shells, to help them manage behaviour, to help them to feel comfortable in their environment, to identify activities and approaches that work well with them. In some cases, only short-term interventions can be more damaging than no intervention. Intention and commitment to working long term are very important. Equally, if a relationship or approach isn't working, it's important to find a better solution and/or seek support from others.

- **Flexibility** is important for developing and sustaining approaches and activities that work well with CYPCC. At the beginning of a relationship, mutual flexibility and finding common ground helps get things off to a good start. Being flexible throughout a working relationship is important for responding to lifestyle changes, to musical strengths and weaknesses, and to building trust. CYPCC often live chaotic lives, some have very particular physical or mental needs, some have been subject to abuse. Responding flexibly and appropriately in light of these will be essential to supporting progression.

- Working effectively with CYPCC invariably involves **collaborating with a range of partnerships** – partly because a full complement of skills, experiences and personalities is likely to come only from a range of different individuals and agencies, and partly because many CYPCC's lives are managed and supported by a wide range of different people. Looked after children, for example, may be supported by teachers, foster parents, birth parents, care home staff, GPs, social workers, psychologists, siblings, relatives, friends, lawyers, adoption agents etc. Running music programmes with CYPCC might involve a collaboration between music organization, music leaders, social workers, Young People's Services, youth centres, schools etc.

- There is a **lack of role models and pathways** for young musicians in challenging circumstances: established musicians who have come from similar circumstances to them, and established structures and pathways between opportunities for them to follow. This makes it hard to many young musicians to know what they might do with their musical abilities, and indeed how they might get there.

Find out more about MoreMusic at www.moremusic.org.uk.

Cath Reding, Sightlines Initiative: How do we listen to children's ideas?

We know that young children are full of ideas and questions, and that they can communicate their ideas in many ways. We explored the questions, "How can educators and musicians listen to and work with children's ideas?" And, "What can we do to draw out children's capacities to explore, create and communicate using music?" In order to find out about children's ideas, first we need to listen. We looked together at examples of adults' observations, which demonstrated how children interact musically not just in so-called musical activities, but in many aspects of their play. Through group reflection the adults decided on and offered opportunities to children to develop their thinking and exploring, not just using music but through a variety of different modes of expression.

After discussion the group produced three key points:

1. Think of children as producers of musical ideas and not (just) as consumers, as repeatedly asserted by educators in Reggio Emilia, northern Italy. Children can and do create their own music and their own culture. As adults we can give them opportunities to explore, create and share.
2. We wondered how educators and musicians working with primary aged children could learn from and build on early years practice. In a rich, enabling environment, children can continue to explore the fullness of their imaginations into Primary school and way beyond.
3. Society brings music education into children's lives. What values, purposes and meanings do we give to music education? Are these also shared by the children? How can we listen to and move forward with these different ideas?

To find out more about Sightlines' work developing children's ideas, including musical ideas, visit www.sightlines-initiative.com. You can learn about their Drama of Sound project at http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/resources/visualisations/spotlighting-sightlines-work-childrens-musicality or assess and develop your skills at www.good-questions.net/tools/drama-sound-creating-musical-environments-enquiry.

Paul Weston, The Garage: Where in supporting musical progression can technologies be most useful, and how?

Traditional music technology teaching and workshop structures run the risk of being repetitive and product-focussed: "I've got a product which does X. I'll learn how to do X then find the next product." A better approach tends to be "Here's my product. I've done X. What can I do with it now?"

There is now a wide range of music technology tools and platforms that are free, or very nearly free. For example:

- Reaper (www.reaper.fm) - a fully-fledged Digital Audio Workstation (DAW), like Logic, ProTools, Cubase or Garage Band. It's free in the first instance and then £6 to buy a licence to get the upgrades.
- Ohm Studio (www.ohmstudio.com) - another fully-fledged DAW but this time allowing people to compose, perform, record and produce music collaboratively over the internet via OhmStudio's cloud. It's free in the basic version with paid upgrades and subscriptions available for extended usage.
- Both of these free or nearly free packages have the advantage that students can carry on working on their music outside the classroom or workshop, because they can download and use the same software at home.
- Thumb Jam (£2 mobile app) which is good for exploring improvisation.

There is also a huge range of assistive music technologies that can be used with children and young people with particular needs. Used appropriately, these can have astonishing effects, uncovering musical minds that haven't otherwise been able to share their music with others. For example:

- Eye Harp (http://theeyeharp.blogspot.co.uk/) - a piece of music software that can be controlled with eye-tracking tools. Essentially, you can create music using your eyes as a mouse but looking and blinking. Eye Harp has had incredible results with young musicians who are severely physically disabled.

Find out more at www.thegarage.org.uk and
http://network.youthmusic.org.uk/category/free-tags/music-technology

Music and music education in 2050: where could we be?

Our collective vision for 2050 is of a fabric of musical communities, made up of many, many creative musical people (not just performers), developing individually and growing communally, where participatory musical democracy and meritocracy are the norm, achieved, we suspect, through self-belief, shared reflection, technology, a diverse abundance of opportunities to make and create music, and the unique contributions of real people.

Some steps along the road

Technology: Modern music technologies – for both creating and listening to music – have helped to blur the distinction between producers and consumers of music. (This is a distinction that some would argue was never really there in the first place but just one way of looking at musical 'transactions'). This blurring looks set to continue apace, as technology becomes wearable, internal, nano and increasingly intelligent about who's using it, and who and what and where those people are. This is something for us to work *with*.

Economics: We'll need to have open minds about the markets and finances for music. In the 20th century, live performance was overwhelmed by mass production of recorded music. This is to some extent now reversing but not in such a way as to fill the financial gap created by the ease with which music can be distributed digitally (with and without the consent of its creators). So perhaps the most sensible thing would be to pursue a non-musical job and do music on the side. But, ironically, something similar to what happened to music in the 20th century is now happening to a huge swathe of employment: technology has been taking over low-skilled manual labour for centuries but now it looks set, according to some, to be taking perhaps 50% of the jobs of accountants, lawyers, doctors, drivers, and operatives across the world. The outcomes look to be some combination of subsistence economies, a three-day working week, exponential innovation and war. We could do with some new macro-economics to roll out our vision!

Democratisation: Most of us feel very strongly about the music that we feel strongly about. And music is mostly a social activity. So it is no surprise that societies have developed divisions and thence hierarchies and cliques around music. (Many of today's music education challenges owe a lot to fundamental differences in musical taste.) Few people genuinely love all music, so making a more democratic and meritocratic musical culture is unlikely to be particularly easy for anyone who cares about music. But we need to work at it: recognising different musical creativities, supporting multiple kinds of musical progress, providing meaningful access to different musical opportunities, being open-minded but authentic, creating new fusions and celebrating old traditions.

Creative skills and tools: What skills, behaviours, tools and techniques would people need to be able to fulfill their musical selves, individually and collectively? For a long time there has been a strong focus on instrumental and vocal skills – the things that make the music – and repertoire – the

music that is made. These are important, but with new technologies they are important in different ways. And there are also the skills and tools required to exploit and develop musical creativity – are we developing those? For example, many people mention the importance of a good grasp of music theory: not just the ledger lines and the Italian terms but a broad and deep understanding of how music works. And there are the skills and tools required to fashion experiences from music: musical producers, musical distributors, musical architects, musical technologists, musical engineers, musical leaders etc. – are we developing this broader musical skills set for 2050?

Opportunities: What would everyone having rich, personally engaging opportunities to make, create, perform, hear, enjoy, learn, and participate in music for their whole lives look like? Presumably it would look like much more than a huge heap of music lessons. So if having all of those opportunities is an aspiration, then we'll need to be open-minded, intelligent, strategic and versatile in our approaches to musical opportunities. We'll need to plug music into existing activities and we'll need to lift up lids to see what musical activities are already happening. We'll need to get better at lighting people's musical fuses and helping them to become musical leaders in other people's lives.

Workforce: There is always a conundrum for an education workforce in a changing world. Children learn through perhaps 20 years of childhood, then spend perhaps 2-20 years becoming teachers, and then teach new children. Those new children need to be prepared for an adult life perhaps 20 years later – i.e. maybe 60 years away from when their teachers started learning. Even with the most accurate forecasting and the finest teacher development, at times of significant change, coping with this conundrum is tricky. Plus educational change carries very long-term risks. Isn't it easier just to stick with what we know works? We do need teachers who are true to themselves, but, crucially, who enable learners to be true to *themselves* too. Excellence comes from excellent individual journeys. Teachers need to help to make them that way.

Individual actions: Culture is about having things in common but arts are about doing or saying things differently. We are, all of us reading this, artists who like making things – but not so much taking on other people's things verbatim. So a big movement for any art form is unlikely to work if it tries to get everyone to do the same thing: they need to do their own things, but moving in the same direction. Thus, one group started to work up individual or organizational pledges, e.g.:

- I pledge to seek an opportunity for everyone to have individual lessons
- I pledge to make music genuinely available for anyone
- I pledge to see music play a more important role in schools
- I pledge to grow music opportunities for all
- I pledge to extend music making from schools to home and family
- I pledge to join up the offer in London
- I pledge to work with as many people and organisations as I can before I die!
- I pledge to reach out to people
- I pledge to keep communicating to the death!

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www.musical-progressions.org

for online tools, posters, blogs and write-ups and
presentations about musical progression.