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Book Section:
Pitts, S.E. (2017) “The Violin in the Attic”: Investigating the Long-Term Value of Lapsed Musical Participation. In: Mantie, R. and Smith, G.D., (eds.) The Oxford Handbook of Music Making and Leisure. Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780190244729.

https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190244705.013.4

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“The Violin in the Attic”: Investigating the Long-Term Value of Lapsed Musical Participation

Stephanie Pitts

The Oxford Handbook of Music Making and Leisure
Edited by Roger Mantie and Gareth Dylan Smith

Print Publication Date: Feb 2017 Subject: Music, Music Education
Online Publication Date: Jan 2017 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190244705.013.4

Abstract and Keywords

The motivations and experiences of adults who participate in music making have attracted increasing research attention in recent years, but less is known about the probably far greater number who have “given up” playing an instrument or lapsed in their participation: what are the factors that cause people to cease their involvement in instrumental learning, and how are these different from the views of participation expressed by continuing players? Life history interviews with current and lapsed members of amateur performing groups are used here to explore the long-term impact of music education. Even when the opportunity to make music has been set aside, benefits remain of open-mindedness to the arts, support for children’s musical education, and understanding of the value of leisure and creativity. These findings lead to conclusions about how foundations for musical leisure and lifelong learning could be laid in formative education, and the routes back into musical engagement made more accessible in adulthood.

Keywords: musical participation, lapsed participation, instrumental learning, lifelong learning

Introduction: Lessons from Lapsed Learners

THE motivations and experiences of adults who participate in music making have attracted increasing research attention in recent years (Pitts 2005), but less is known about the far greater number who have “given up” playing an instrument or lapsed in their participation (Lamont 2011). While it may seem perverse to look for evidence of the value of music education within the experiences of people who have ceased to learn, this proportion of the population has a lot to tell music educators about the lasting effects of

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their teaching. These lapsed or liminal participants also demonstrate some of the ways in which an understanding of music and music making pervades society, shaping citizens’ decisions about how and whether to support the arts, who the arts are for, and what they contribute to the world.

In *Touching Eternity* (Barone 2001), a thought-provoking account of the effects of one teacher’s career in arts education, the visual art teacher Donald Forrister is portrayed through interviews with his current and former students at a high school in North Carolina. The study was commissioned after Forrister had been awarded an “outstanding teacher” prize, and is full of appreciative tributes from students who had subsequently forged creative careers or maintained an active love of art into adulthood. They recall the skills and confidence that Forrister’s teaching gave them, and his willingness to spend hours outside lessons encouraging them in their artistic endeavors and talking with them as they faced the identity challenges of adolescence. But the most powerful narrative of the book is one of doubt—about the students whose potential Forrister missed or crushed, the dependence on his approval felt by some of those who were (p. 172) within his selective circle, and the disappointment for Forrister that, in adulthood, few of his students continued to engage in art: “the artistic publicizing of secret places was rarely practiced in busy adult lives” (141). Forrister’s story—and those of his students—illustrates how the lifelong impact of a teacher can be profound, but far from predictable. Moreover, these unpredictable but strong outcomes are very rarely acknowledged in research or policy, where the immediate, measurable effects of teaching hold prominence (Southgate and Roscigno 2009). Much is lost in this short-term view of how and why arts education can shape young people’s lives and attitudes, not least in an understanding of the contribution of lifelong music making to leisure and well-being.

While predicting the impact of learning in the arts is fraught with difficulties, much can be learned from taking a retrospective, life history approach to understand the place that music learning holds in people’s lives. This retrospection is itself full of complexities, communicating as much about the ways in which people construct their musical stories as about the facts of their musical education and experience (Holt 1978; Pitts 2012). However, these stories themselves, and the interpretations that individuals bring to the musical access and attitudes that they encountered in childhood, offer insights into the place of music in education and in society more widely. Learning an instrument, for example, can shape experiences of childhood and adolescence and lay foundations for the musical skills and cultural attitudes that a young player takes into adulthood. Parents, siblings, and wider family members can all present role models for musical encounters—and not only when they are active players, but just as much in their selection of repertoire to listen to (or not), and the place and priority of music in their daily routines.

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Past studies of musical life trajectories have tended to focus on exceptional achievement in instrumental learning, documenting the practice regimes of those students who achieve mastery or professional success, and noting the influence of their teachers (Howe and Sloboda 1991). First teachers, typically nurturing and encouraging, have been shown in these high-achieving cases to give way to the greater challenge and technical prowess of a performer role model—with the latter approach persisting into conservatoire training, where the “master-apprentice” teaching style remains the dominant model (Lebler, Burt-Perkins, and Carey 2009). Useful though this insight has been for demonstrating that musical accomplishment is a matter of sustained effort more than arbitrary “genius” (Sloboda, Davidson, and Howe 1994), the focus on expert instrumental skills defines the goals of musical success rather narrowly, and so the recent growth in studies of “ordinary” musical lives is a welcome contribution to music education research. This chapter will draw on some of these (e.g., McPherson, Davidson, and Faulkner 2012; Smilde 2009) in a discussion of formative musical experiences, as well as analyzing empirical evidence from my own life history research with musically active adults (Pitts 2012).

Another approach to understanding the long-term effects of musical learning is to consider the participation and consumption of music in adulthood and, in particular, how the motivations of those who currently engage in musical activities might differ from the recollected experiences of those who no longer participate. In other words, what does music contribute to adult life—and how might this contribution be better supported, during or beyond education? The benefits of musical participation are (p. 173) relatively well documented, and case studies have repeatedly shown how membership of a musical ensemble can provide well-being, social support, and a creative outlet for groups as diverse as homeless men in Canada (Bailey and Davidson 2002), elderly citizens in Australia (Southcott 2009) and England (Creech et al. 2014), professionals in mid-career and retirement (Pitts 2005), university students in England (Kokotsaki and Hallam 2011) and disaffected high school students in the United States (Mahoney 2000) and England (Finney et al. 2005). Much less is known about why people, including those who have experienced these benefits, cease participation in music, most notably on leaving school, when organized activities and resources for music come to an end (Mantie and Tucker 2008), but sometimes later in adulthood, when other work and life priorities become obstacles to participation. By examining motivations to cease or continue playing an instrument beyond school, this chapter explores how musical participation looks “from the outside” and how those who no longer actively engage with music articulate the benefits—and costs—of music learning. The empirical data for this discussion come from a recent study with current and former amateur musicians in England (Pitts 2014; Pitts, Robinson, and Goh 2015) that sheds new light on the relationship between social, musical, and personal goals in amateur musical participation.

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After considering the implications that the reported formative and lifelong experiences of musical engagement have for current music education aims and practices, the chapter concludes with the suggestion that the value of musical learning needs to be recognized in the broadest terms, as affecting the cultural responsiveness and responsibilities of future generations, whether or not they are active participants themselves.

Formative Experiences of Music Learning

If young children, when they were first given a musical instrument, were told about the thousands of hours of practice needed to achieve expert performance (Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer 1993), along with the potential injuries they might incur (Burkholder and Brandfonbrener 2004) and the risks to self-esteem and well-being in pursuing advanced study (Williamon and Thompson 2006) or a musical career (Kenny, Driscoll, and Ackermann 2014), it seems likely that the uptake for instrumental lessons would be even lower than the estimated 14 percent of students currently having extracurricular music tuition in English schools (Ofsted 2012). Instead, children’s instrument choice is motivated by the sound and appearance of the instrument—and, more pragmatically, its availability and fit to their family’s lifestyle—and by the opportunities the instrument brings to be in the school band, join with friends in rehearsals, and enjoy the excitement and applause of performing (McPherson, Davidson, and Faulkner 2012). After some months or years of more or less enthusiastic practice and participation, commitment to playing is put at risk by the transition to high school, increased demands of homework, (p. 174) and pressure to conform to peer-accepted teenage activities (Lamont et al. 2003). The young players who survive these challenges are likely to be those who have strong parental support (McPherson 2009), including encouragement or supervision of practice (Hallam and Creech 2010) and opportunities within or beyond school to make music with like-minded adolescents and supportive teachers (Pitts 2007), through which they can experience the satisfaction of musical belonging and develop a secure musical identity.

The development of skills and competence is the most obvious and measurable outcome of the first years of instrumental learning, but also of lasting impact is the formation of attitudes toward music making and self-identity as a musician. Expectations of instrumental learning can be self-fulfilling: parents who consider making music to be a “normal” thing to do—most often because they have learned an instrument themselves—are most likely to encourage their children in this activity (Pitts 2012). Similarly, children who have high ambitions for their own playing will tend to succeed above those who expect to cease playing after primary school (McPherson 2005). The sense of musical

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success is often fragile (O’Neill and Sloboda 1997), and young players are reliant to varying degrees on the reinforcement of their musical identity through encouragement from teachers, parents and peers, as well as from the affirmation of audiences, exam results, and a demonstrable increase in ability as a performer. Participants in my musical life history study (Pitts 2012) could often identify the individual, even the specific moment, that had helped them to realize that they had musical potential and ability—a musical “possible self” (MacIntyre, Schnare, and Doucette 2012). Others regretted that this moment had never come, or that their response to parental encouragement of practice had not been more diligent, so limiting their capacity for music making in adult life. Either way, the extent to which people identify themselves with music—and are willing to call themselves musicians—is strongly shaped by the opportunities and experiences of adolescence. This personal identification then has far-reaching social consequences for their own future support of the arts in their families and communities.

One group of young players more likely to avoid this motivational dependence on teachers and parents is emerging popular musicians, whose learning is often self-directed and peer-supported (Green 2002), encompassing the private musical lives of self-taught drummers, guitarists, bassists, other nonorchestral instrumentalists, and the collective learning of singers and band members who develop their skills through the process of writing and playing music together. Lucy Green, whose work in this area has been influential on understanding ways of teaching both classroom and instrumental music (Green 2008), offers the hypothesis that “young musicians who acquire their skills and knowledge more through informal learning practices than through formal education may be more likely to continue playing music, alone or with others, for enjoyment in later life” (56). Green’s proposal is that the higher level of self-motivation involved in learning without a teacher could be more readily sustainable into adulthood, and she suggests that longitudinal research is needed to test the hypothesis. There were relatively few popular musicians in my life history cohort to provide this longitudinal testing, but the few who did contribute had contrasting stories that leave the debate unresolved for the moment. Some individuals who strongly identified themselves as popular musicians (p. 175) had succeeded in building professional careers as performers and/or teachers (see also Robinson 2012), but others who had tried to bring their informally acquired skills to organized amateur music making, such as singing in a choir, were frustrated by gaps in their learning, related to technique or sight-reading (Pitts 2012, 169). An alternative hypothesis would be that it is the level of self-concept as a musician that differs in these examples—and that self-taught and formally taught musicians acquire that self-concept from different sources: the former through intrinsic motivation, peer approval, and success in performance, the latter through these routes also, but with teacher approval and external recognition (such as exam results) playing an additional and potentially dominant role. There are plenty of studies to show that lack of self-belief in musical skills

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is an inhibiting factor to making progress and forming a secure musical identity (e.g., McPherson and McCormick 2006), and indeed the group of Italian, self-taught musicians included in my life history study showed low recognition of their skills, dismissing their guitar playing and songwriting abilities as being inferior to the performing expertise of their conservatoire-educated peers (Pitts 2012, 78). Young people’s confidence in their own musical learning, and the extent to which this is validated by both peers and teachers, has a strong effect in placing music more or less prominently within their emerging adolescent identities.

From another perspective, the high dropout rate from the strongly teacher-directed American wind band system (Mantie and Dorfman 2014; Mantie and Tucker 2008) provides some evidence that music making that is heavily dependent on institutional structures and resources can be hard to replicate in adult life—either for practical reasons, or because of the psychological barriers of associating musical participation with a past phase of life. One of the “lapsed” musicians I interviewed in the U.K. explained how memories of school music had inhibited his adult participation in exactly this way: “for me, classical music is very tainted by childhood—by school and adolescence. [I’m] ambivalent because I don’t just unproblematically dislike it, but there is always a bit of that about it for me.” While this example is counteracted by many respondents recalling inspiring performances during their school years, the sense of musical attitudes being shaped in and by school is apparent, and illustrates the risk of school-leavers being ill equipped to find or invent opportunities for continuing their playing in adulthood. Musicians of all kinds can find themselves insufficiently adaptable or receptive to the amateur or community music scene beyond school, and without a secure foundation of musical skills and confidence, will easily become one of the many adults with “a violin in the attic.”

Motivations to Continue or Cease Participation in Adulthood

Another perspective on the long-term effects of musical participation in adolescence can be sought from those who remain actively involved in adulthood, and in (p. 176) the past few decades there have been a number of case studies depicting the musical lives of individuals, performing groups, and whole communities (e.g., Dabback 2008; Finnegan [1989] 2007; Pitts 2005). From this empirical evidence, the benefits of musical participation are often argued in relation to well-being, health, and social connection, and several recent reports have urged arts organizations to do more to promote these aspects

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of their work: “publicly-funded cultural organizations around the country are currently responsible for a very considerable quotient of public value in the realms of social capital and health and wellbeing [… but] much of this important aspect of cultural value is currently hidden” (Vella-Burrows et al. 2014, 50). These outcomes of arts engagement are certainly important, but they tend not to be the primary motivations of those people who belong to amateur orchestras, bands, and choirs, who join instead for the pleasures of rediscovering and developing skills, being among like-minded people, and making music together (Pitts 2014). There are dangers in portraying the side-effects of musical participation as its primary function, just as the “transferable skills” argument, while compelling (see Hallam 2015), can be damaging to music education by shifting emphasis away from musical activity toward its associated cognitive and emotional benefits.

A comparison of the motivations of those who are currently playing in amateur orchestras with those who have lapsed illustrates the fine line between continued musical engagement and ceasing to play. Players in our U.K.-based study reported the effects of significant life transitions on their inclination and ability to pursue musical activities, with leaving home, changing jobs, starting relationships, having children, and encountering ill-health, stress, or retirement all influencing the decision to join or leave ensembles (Pitts, Robinson, and Goh 2015). The main difference between continuing and lapsed players was not in these external circumstances, but in the extent to which musical participation was seen to enhance, rather than conflict with, other life demands. While one player would find rehearsals “physically demanding, a bit demoralizing,” another would see them as a necessary escape: “it’s fantastic, once a week, to switch [the work-related] part of my brain off [and] just focus on making music.” Often a practical reason for ceasing playing—time, energy, health—masked a more deep-seated crisis of confidence or identity, manifest in musical experience but strongly connected to other aspects of life. One player described how after a personal tragedy in her life she experienced a kind of musical breakdown: “I think with music, you know that whole saying of “losing your mojo,” where your confidence goes down, so your ability goes down, that kind of happened to me” (see Pitts 2014). The challenging aspects of musical participation—reported to include finding time to practice, feeling “judged” by other players, lacking confidence, and struggling to keep up in rehearsals—create a vulnerability in participants that accounts in part for the emotional effects, both positive and negative, of belonging to an ensemble. Where players feel supported and valued in their ensemble, their playing is a counterbalance to pressures of bereavement, ill-health, or anxiety; where these experiences are combined with a sense of insecurity as an ensemble member, withdrawing from musical participation can seem a necessary coping strategy.

(p. 177) Those players in our study who had joined an ensemble primarily for social reasons had sometimes been disappointed: “one of the reasons was to meet people, but I

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don’t know, maybe musicians are quite shy in general because they express themselves through their music. I never found it very easy in the social—like, in the breaks and things.” Breaking into a new musical scene had sometimes proved difficult too, either because established players already knew each other, or because standards in the ensemble provided too much or insufficient challenge. Nonetheless, the sense of friendship, like-mindedness, and pursuit of a common creative goal through collective music making was important to continuing players, and those who were most contented in their ensemble membership had thought carefully about their “fit” to the group, both musically and socially, and changed ensembles to find a better fit as needed. Friendship was described as an important aspect of musical participation by many continuing respondents, just as it was in the recollections of adults looking back at their adolescent music making (Pitts 2012). However, as in previous studies with audiences (Pitts and Burland 2013), these friendships appeared to be strongly embedded in the shared activity, operating within rehearsals but more rarely spreading into other areas of life. In a study of musical leisure activities in Milton Keynes, U.K., Ruth Finnegan ([1989] 2007) noted differences between musical genres in the extent to which musical friendships generated wider social support networks, finding that both country and western enthusiasts and brass banders were more likely than classical musicians to share other aspects of life beyond music, perhaps because of the strong family links that were also a part of those worlds (99).

A strong source of motivation for continuing players was the sense of recreating enjoyable musical experiences from adolescence, with those players who had experienced high levels of musical satisfaction, friendship, and belonging in their school ensembles feeling destined to seek out these activities later in life. One formerly professional player described how his gradual return to the amateur scene had brought some of the pleasure he had first experienced as a student: “I think I found what I missed as a young person again—as a student, maybe—you could take risks and it didn’t matter, to try different things.” Other positive memories of school music were linked to particularly memorable performances, unexpected or resounding successes, or inspirational teachers—but the converse was also true, when music in school had been compulsory or dull, and participation rather more unwilling. While my research has not so far been extensive enough to demonstrate a direct correlation between enriching school experiences and the tendency to continue playing into adulthood, there was certainly a trend in that direction, which is supported by previous work with adult singers (Turton and Durrant 2002), “non-musicians” (Gavin 2001), and American college students (Mantie and Dorfman 2014). Helen Gavin also urges caution against predicting musical futures from early experiences, quoting a professional flutist who says “ ‘[My parents] bought me a flute when I asked, so I suppose that set me off to where I am today, but they also bought me a bike, and I’m not in the Tour de France” (Gavin 2001, 57). Positive experiences of music

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in childhood are undoubtedly one ingredient in lifelong musical (p. 178) engagement, but need to be supported by lasting intrinsic motivation and a determination to find time for music among the competing demands of adult life.

Lasting Effects of Music Learning

The many obstacles to acquiring and maintaining a secure musical identity outlined in this chapter help to explain the low proportion of the adult population actively engaged in making music: the annual *Taking Part* survey run by Arts Council England estimates that under 10 percent of adults would rank playing a musical instrument as their main leisure activity, compared to the 79 percent who rank listening to music most highly (DCMS 2012, 31). The ubiquity of music as a soundtrack to daily life has been much commented upon in recent years (Bull 2005; Clarke, Dibben, and Pitts 2010; DeNora 2000), and yet few adults would see this lifelong informal engagement with music as a direct continuation of their school music education. However, understanding the full range of musical behaviors in adulthood as being at least in part a response to formative experiences can be enlightening for music educators and arts promoters alike. Even when the opportunity to make music has been set aside after school, adults’ levels of open-mindedness to the arts, their support for their own children’s musical education, and their understanding of the value of leisure and creativity, will have been affected to some degree by the musical contexts in which they grew up. The “hidden curriculum” of music education—those implicit messages sent through the status of music in a school, and the music teacher’s choice of repertoire and activities—can create a sense of whether music is readily accessible to all, throughout the lifespan, or is solely the preserve of privileged child prodigies (Wright and Froehlich 2012). This implicit knowledge will translate into attitudes to learning an instrument in adulthood, for example, affecting the extent to which the absence of past success in this area remains a lasting regret or something that can be remedied at any stage of life.

Some of the frequent classical music concert-goers in my life history studies have reflected on how their attempts at learning an instrument in childhood, while leading to limited technical prowess, had nonetheless shaped their future listening: “if the organist [who taught me] had found a way to make my eyes and hands work together at the piano, then I might have benefited from more player-side appreciation of my listening. … But I’m a very contented audience member and listener” (Pitts 2012, 150). Others endorsed this with reference to their longer engagement in instrumental lessons and school orchestras: “I think the experience you get playing music, as a musician, is quite different from if you tried to approach it just as someone who listens to it: I don’t know if it’s richer

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or something in some way, but it’s a lived experience.” The “player-side appreciation” referred to by these respondents is also evident in studies of adolescent musical role models, where playing an instrument has been shown to increase the range of available role models beyond the pop stars prominent in the media, and to (p. 179) raise awareness that building a musical career requires effort and ability as much as luck (Ivaldi 2013; Ivaldi and O’Neill 2008).

Sharing listening preferences with parents, siblings, and friends, or acquiring the concert-going habit as a family could also have lasting effects, even though these practices have changed across generations with the increase in portable listening technology and the decline in classical concert attendance (Kolb 2001). As adolescents form and display their own musical tastes, these contribute to friendships and wider social behaviors (Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves 2002) and have an impact in the home, either positively, through the exchanging of new musical knowledge with family members, or negatively, through disputes about the quantity and volume of music listening emanating from behind the closed bedroom doors of teenage offspring (Morgan, MacDonald, and Pitts 2014). These strong teenage preferences and recollections of family listening habits will be further developed through young adulthood and beyond (Lamont and Webb 2010), so building musical tastes and memories that will have lasting self-regulating and therapeutic effects for each individual (Batt-Rawden and DeNora 2005; Saarikallio 2011).

The shaping of musical expertise and attitudes in childhood has a further effect beyond the individual, through the numerous instances in which these experiences are eventually passed on to others through parenting, teaching, and other acts of sharing skills and understanding. Many of the respondents referred to in this chapter spoke of the connections between their own music making and that of their children, sometimes noting how their musical participation declined during early years of childcare, but was revived when their offspring started learning instruments themselves. One amateur oboist, now reluctantly retired from playing, described how his own practice regime —“half an hour in the morning and another twenty minutes at night, much to [the family’s] annoyance”—was intended as a model for his eldest son: “there’s two ways, you can bully [them] or you can demonstrate.” Similar examples are to be found in the *New Horizons* movement in the U.S.A., which has seen many older adults return to ensemble playing and articulate the benefits of these experiences for their health, well-being, and quality of life (Coffman and Levy 1997; Dabback 2008). Other adults in my study had forged careers as music teachers, often quite accidentally, as their confidence and enjoyment in music had drawn them into acquiring piano pupils or helping with music activities at their local schools, so “recycling the benefits” of their own musical education (Pitts 2012, 137). Since confidence for teaching music has been repeatedly observed to

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be lacking in generalist teachers (e.g., Hennessy 2000; Wiggins and Wiggins 2008), this lasting effect of musical learning should not be undervalued—and indeed, the role of past musical experience in the attitudes of those underconfident teachers deserves further exploration (see Biasutti 2010).

Beyond the readily visible effects of playing, teaching, or supporting music into adulthood, it is interesting to speculate on how public decisions are affected by the hidden musical backgrounds of cultural and educational policy makers. Politicians, in the U.K. at least, tend to be reticent in declaring their aesthetic interests, and indeed in recent times of financial recession have been outspoken about the alleged career advantages (p. 180) of encouraging children into sciences rather than arts subjects (Paton 2014). Wayne Bowman has observed that “where our most influential decision and policy makers have had no musical experience—or worse still, where experience in mediocre programmes has ‘turned them off’ rather than ‘on’ to musical experience—we can reasonably expect to reap only what we have permitted to be sown” (Bowman 2001, 14). Expecting all future politicians and policy makers to be musically proficient is clearly too bold an aim for music education, but we might hope that general education would make the majority of the population musically and culturally aware, sufficient to respect, if not actively engage in, the rich possibilities of musical leisure activities.

Looking Forward, Looking Back

In conclusion to this chapter, it is worth considering how the empirical evidence presented here can contribute to practice and debate in music education and music as leisure: namely, whether the foundations for lifelong valuing of musical participation could be laid more securely in formative education, and the routes back into musical engagement made more accessible in adulthood. The past century has seen an accumulation of claims made for music education (Pitts 2000), from its role as a civilizing force on adolescents (Cox 2002), to its capacity to improve school engagement and team work (Mahoney 2000), not to mention its benefits for brain function, disciplined learning, and other transferable skills (Hallam 2015). Such passionate advocacy for music education is understandable, since it is a subject that has always had to fight for curriculum time and resources, but there are dangers in claiming too much, and in attributing these benefits too widely. Not all school children have a positive or meaningful experience of music education, and while it is right to focus on how this might be improved through more widespread inspiring teaching, it is also valid to accept that full engagement in musical learning requires a commitment and motivation that will not be universal in the adolescent population (Lamont and Maton 2010). Schools should

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therefore be places of opportunity and possibility in the arts, but perhaps not of compulsion and obligation, since the life history evidence suggests that this can be counterproductive in obscuring the musical engagement that young people bring from their home and peer relationships.

One factor in securing a long-term positive impact for music education appears to lie in achieving coherence between school music and lifelong musical engagement, by equipping young people during their formative years with skills, open-mindedness, and enthusiasm that will be of lasting musical and personal value. This effect was most readily observed in older generations of life history respondents—those who sang in the school choir, listened to classical music on the newly acquired gramophone in the home, and grew up to attend concerts and sing with an amateur choral society (Pitts 2012, 40). Those specific connections depended on narrowly defined boundaries for musical engagement, and operated less reliably in the younger generations, as music (p. 181) education has become (rightly) more diverse in its genres and activities, and access to live and recorded music has become ever richer and more plentiful. Other educational disciplines—most notably information technology—are well acquainted with the notion of “future-proofing” their teaching, such that students acquire flexible learning skills that will be of lasting use, rather than focusing entirely on current information that will become obsolete. In music teaching, Julie Ballantyne and Don Lebler suggest that this can be achieved through “a multiplicity of music types and pedagogical approaches” (2013, 218), so as to offer young people a variety of routes into musical engagement and the resources and motivation to continue to seek out their own such routes in the years after school.

Further challenges lie outside music education, in the sustaining and developing of opportunities for meaningful musical participation in adulthood. Continuing with the choral singing example, the problem of an aging membership is well known to the directors of amateur choirs, with a survey carried out in U.K., Australia, and Germany showing that the traditional large choral society is in decline, with a largely middle-aged or retired membership, many of whom have been involved in singing for several decades (Clift et al. 2008). In the United States, Cindy Bell offers examples of “the gradual erosion of a once glistening choral society to a barely functioning non-select group of singers” (2008, 236), with difficulties arising not so much from the reduced personnel of the choir, but on their insistence on maintaining their “core” repertoire and failing to adjust the performance expectations of the choir: “a choral group of thirty non-auditioned singers cannot sustain a Mozart *Requiem*” (236). Bell argues that with changing membership should come changing purpose—not necessarily a decline in performance standards, but an adjustment to the skills that new generations bring to the choir, with the democratic hope of including and developing all who wish to participate. Some

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successful examples of this approach are reported both anecdotally, on the many community choir websites online, and in the research literature, which includes studies of intergenerational choirs (Conway and Hodgman 2008) and the growing numbers of “cambiata” choirs that aim to support boys in continuing to sing during and after puberty (Ashley 2013). Caroline Bithell describes the recent growth in community choirs as “one of the most intriguing and potentially momentous developments in the world of amateur, voluntary, participatory arts in the United Kingdom” (2014, 13) and offers many examples of how collective singing can mobilize communities and empower individuals.

The example of choral singing illustrates how collaborative music making can evolve to meet the needs and interests of younger participants—and perhaps we should therefore remain optimistic that the collective impulse to make music together will ensure that people (should they wish to) will always find ways to make music that are appropriate to them and the society in which they live. To take this for granted, however, would almost certainly be a mistake: opportunities can be taken only if they are readily available, and these new practices have grown up not by chance, but through the efforts of committed individuals who have identified social and expressive needs in their communities that can be fulfilled through music. Music education holds a large part of the responsibility both for training future musical leaders, (p. 182) and for enthusing future potential participants, listeners, and advocates for the arts. Politicians, meanwhile, could do much more to support and promote arts engagement in education and society, rather than viewing these as luxurious benefits to be funded only in prosperous times. Economizing on the arts is a sure route to an impoverished society, lacking in the fulfillment and community engagement that an aesthetically rich life can provide. Viewing the music curriculum and wider school arts provision through this lens of lifelong engagement—noting the benefits of lapsed involvement as well as ongoing participation—is one way to make music “part of the art world” (Becker 1982), and to ensure that the value of music in the lives of adult participants, whatever form this takes, is intentionally rooted in their formative experiences of musical learning. (p. 186)

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Stephanie Pitts

the University of Sheffield

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