

# ENSEMBLE

## MUSIC EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA'S SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Volume 1 Number 4, 5 December 2007

Having trouble reading this email? Read it on the web at <http://www.ensemble.org.au/news1071205.pdf>  
Do you know of an event or resource that schools should know about? Email us at [info@ensemble.org.au](mailto:info@ensemble.org.au)

=====

### THE STATE OF THE STATES

#### An Invitation

*Last issue Ensemble flagged a statement by national music groups and in anticipation invited grass roots points of view on the state of music education in Australia. Ms **Debbie Masling's** description of the situation in the ACT serves as a suitable snapshot, providing some context for the statement that follows it.*

In response to your invitation to report on the current situation of music education in the states and territories, I am writing to give an overview of music education in the ACT. I am the president of the ACT Music Educators' Network. This response is very brief, but I would be happy to expand on it at a later date if required.

The network is concerned about the need for more music teachers in the ACT, the tertiary music education programs being offered, the lack of provision for training primary school music specialists and the need for more varied and flexible pathways into tertiary music courses. As a collective we are currently examining where we are at and where we would like to be. Anita Collins, lecturer in music education at the University of Canberra will reply with more information about the developments in music teacher training in the ACT.

The network is also very concerned about teacher mobility in the ACT. At prescribed times in their career teachers are forced to move to another school. In our specialist area this affects the development and continuity of music programs within our schools.

#### The Primary Sector (K-6):

Very few schools in the ACT employ music specialist teachers. Those schools that are fortunate enough to have sourced a music specialist teacher report on the excellent outcomes that have been achieved for students. The ACT Instrumental Music Program (IMPACT) is a Departmental initiative that places itinerant band teachers into 54 primary schools to run Year 5 and Year 6 brass and woodwind band classes. The schools also provide a teacher from within the school who trains under the itinerant teacher. Additionally IMPACT runs 4 system concert bands, 2 primary, 1 junior secondary (Y7-9) and 1 senior secondary (Y10-12). Entry to these bands is by audition.

#### The Secondary Sector (7-10):

This is very much a mixed bag, ranging from schools with little music to schools such as Lyneham High School (LHS) at which 800 of the 1000 students participate in music classes and extra-curricular activities. LHS has recently been awarded Federal funding to build a performing arts centre on its

grounds. There is little consistency between schools and many are seeking ways in which to build music programs. Funding, resourcing, rooming and compulsory mobility of teachers appear to be major issues in most ACT high schools. Some teachers report timetabling concerns where music is not given the importance in the curriculum that it needs in order to grow. School-based curriculum provides the flexibility to cater to the needs of the school and its community.

### **The College Sector (Y11 & 12):**

There are a vast number of courses from which students may choose at college level. Colleges are offering tertiary, accredited and vocational courses. Many colleges offer VET certification for fields such as music industry. The Australian National University School of Music runs pre-tertiary courses for students wishing to specialise in either classical or jazz performance. These courses are accredited for inclusion in the students' UAI.

-----

## **NATIONAL MUSIC GROUPS RAISE CONCERNS**

### **States Missing the Beat on Music Education**

*Ian Harvey, Jenny Rosevear, Tina Broad & Richard Letts*

On Thursday the 30th of August, more than 250,000 students from around 900 schools took part in Australia's biggest ever simultaneous school music event – Music. Count Us In, a nationwide celebration of music's importance in a well-rounded education.

Yet the celebrations belied a disturbing trend in the provision of music in Aussie schools – a trend which music and community groups say is bad for kids, damaging for schools and attributable to puzzling inaction by the States.

The 2005 federally-funded National Review of School Music Education (NRSME) recapped long-known research - and highlighted compelling new studies - which show that learning music offers significant flow-on benefits to kids which go beyond the value of learning music for its own sake. These benefits include:

- helping develop the neural pathways in young children's brains, better equipping them for higher function tasks associated with things like maths and science;
- improving students' literacy and numeracy outcomes;
- helping to develop children's confidence, self-esteem and team skills,
- helping under-performing students improve,
- reducing truancy and
- helping kids make healthy life choices about things such as drugs and alcohol

Despite the proven benefits, as few as 23% of State schools provide their students a meaningful music education at school. This compares to an estimated 88% of schools in the independent system.

A coalition of six national music and community organisations is calling on State governments to:

1. Urgently commit to implementing the recommendations of the National Review of School Music Education, including commitments to multi-year funding pledges
2. Review and revise teacher training and registrations in each state to ensure appropriate music skills for new classroom teachers
3. Establish and fund a professional development strategy in music for new and existing primary classroom teachers

4. Commit to a five-year plan to train and employ sufficient specialist music teachers to offer weekly music instruction to all primary school children
5. Commit to working with each other and with the Federal Government to adopt national benchmarks for school music education, along the lines detailed in the National Review.

"It seems almost an act of educational vandalism that, in the face of all that we now know about the unique benefits to kids in learning music at school, the States are so behind the beat on all this," says Dr Richard Letts of the Music Council of Australia and a member of the steering committee for the NRSME.

"Either they are unaware of the research, or they're ignoring it. Whatever the reason, they've created a situation in which most Aussie kids miss out on the one subject at school which has – arguably over all others - such demonstrably far-reaching positive impacts: music."

"As far as we know, all the States agreed with the findings and recommendations of the National Review, which was handed down back in 2005," says Ian Harvey, Executive Officer of the Australian Music Association.

"But they seem content to let this excellent blueprint for change gather dust. It is unfathomable. Despite school education being the responsibility of the States, so far all the action on music education is happening at the Federal level."

"For example, we've seen the commissioning of the National Review of School Music Education, more than \$32 million go towards music equipment in schools under the Investing in Our Schools scheme; the formation of a national Music Education Advisory Group and national awards for excellence in music teaching, and of course Music.Count Us In. These are just some of areas in which the federal government has put its hand into its pocket for music in our schools. We applaud that and we need them to continue to take a leadership role. However, it remains a source of great frustration to us that the States are yet to come to the party on music in schools."

"Overall, there has been a degrading in the provision of music education in Australia for the past 40 or more years," said Dr Richard Letts, "How long must our kids wait? The independent schools know the value that parents attach to music programs and they go out of their way to give every child a good music education experience. Their music programs are without doubt one of the key attractors taking children out of the State systems," he said.

"The paucity of music in our schools makes no sense," agrees Jenny Rosevear, national President of the Australian Society for Music Education. "It is educationally counter productive, especially in an environment where Governments want to achieve higher literacy and numeracy standards. Music is the perfect companion subject to assist in those goals, yet it is not being given prominence in any of the curricula and it is virtually an afterthought in most primary teaching degree programs. Soon-to-be primary classroom teachers are lucky to get a couple of days' worth of music training over a three year undergraduate program. How can they be expected to give up to six years of music instruction on the basis of two days of training? Would we accept that for mathematics or science or reading?"

"No one suggests that revitalising music education in schools with appropriately-trained teachers and resources is a five minute task," says Dr. Letts. "It is not easy. But the States need to get with the beat and get on with it. Parents want it, principals want it and our kids deserve it."

For more information, call:

Australian Music Association Ian Harvey 03 9527 6658 or 0402 047 795

Australian Society for Music Education Jenny Rosevear (08) 8303 3679

Music. Play for Life Tina Broad 02 4454 3887 or 0439 022 257

Music Council of Australia Dr Richard Letts 02 9251 3816

=====

## **A LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

### **To the editor of "Ensemble"**

I would strongly contest the claim [Ensemble No. 3 of 8 November] that babies are born with perfect pitch. Who has made this claim, and on what empirical evidence?

The reasons for my scepticism are:

- 1) Babies do not need perfect pitch to recognise their mother's voice. We recognise voices by distinguishing the timbral elements of the sound, as well as becoming familiar with the pitch modulations of a person's common speech patterns. Neither of these skills require perfect pitch.
- 2) Likewise, we learn language through recognising and imitating vocal timbres and vocal cadences. Again, these skills do not require perfect pitch, however it is to be expected that an appreciation of relative pitch would aid the process of learning language. Perfect pitch and relative pitch are not the same thing.
- 3) If all babies are born with perfect pitch, one could expect them to retain this skill through their childhood and into their adult lives. Anyone who has worked with young children will know that this is not the case. Not only do very young children (kindergarten age, for example) rarely display perfect pitch, many of them display very little appreciation for relative pitch - often being unable to distinguish between high and low notes.
- 4) On what empirical evidence has this claim been made? I find it very difficult to imagine how one could ascertain whether a new born child has perfect pitch. What sort of test would you use on a child that has not yet developed any language skills or abstract cognitive ability to discover whether they have perfect pitch?

I would certainly be interested in reading any studies that have been done in this area - especially if there are researchers who claim to have proven that babies are born with perfect pitch. Unfortunately, since you have provided no references to support this claim, I must assume that your statement is false until more compelling evidence is provided.

Sincerely (Name & Address Supplied)

*A very good question! The claim was made in a Queensland education department magazine for parents: [http://education.qld.gov.au/publication/reporting/parents/2006/issue1\\_music.html](http://education.qld.gov.au/publication/reporting/parents/2006/issue1_music.html).*

*Ensemble has written to the relevant Queensland department. We look forward to publishing the response. Meanwhile – does any other reader have any information on this point?? We did find interesting - although unlikely to satisfy our correspondent - the research recounted at <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/science/ss/stories/s254556.htm>.*

=====

## **A COMMUNITY SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT TO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

## Dear Principal

### **BOUGHT SOME MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS ON LINE - TO FIND THEY'RE DUD?**

It's an increasing problem. Schools save hard to buy band instruments or violins. They search out the best price and decide to buy online. Then when the instruments arrive ... disappointment. They're unplayable. Worse: the seller won't replace them or reimburse the money. Often the seller is in India or China, so you can't even go and visit them to demand your rights.

ACSSO is partnering with the Australian Music Association to help schools to avoid this problem.

- But first we need to find a school that is prepared to talk publicly about how it all went so wrong ... a case study we can take to the media so we can warn everyone else to be sure of who they're buying from and the quality of what they're buying ... so everyone else can learn from your experience.

In return, the AMA is prepared to replace the dud instruments with good quality ones. As a thank you for being prepared to share your experience through the media.

A few conditions apply:

- Total value of this offer is \$10,000 RRP.
- We can't guarantee what brands we will replace your duds with, but we do promise they will be playable instruments suitable for your needs!
- One offer only
- The instruments must be truly unplayable - trumpets where the valves don't work, trombones where the slide doesn't operate, violins where the pegs won't hold in place and/or the bridge is unstable
- We're ideally looking for band instruments and violins, but if you've had problems with other instruments, including microphones, we may consider including them. If you thought you were buying a major brand and found they were fakes, please also let us know and we may consider including them too.
- You or a representative from your school must be prepared to talk to the media, which may include appearing on TV or radio.

To register interest, please contact the AMA urgently on [info@australianmusic.asn.au](mailto:info@australianmusic.asn.au).

Sara Hood  
Australian Music Association

=====

## **VIEW FROM THE UK**

### **Every Primary School to Become a Musical School**

*UK Department for Children, Schools & Families, 21 November 2007*

Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families Ed Balls today launched a national campaign to make our primary schools come alive with the sound of music, involving a £332 million (\$A800 million) investment in choirs, orchestras, new instruments, performance and free music lessons.

The Government has already gained backing from musical heavyweights Andrew Lloyd Webber and Julian Lloyd Webber and top pop star Jamelia in its bid to renew the country's musical traditions, creating a musical culture in schools for all to embrace, not just the few.

"Every child from all backgrounds should have the chance to perform, play an instrument or sing and I want every school to become a musical school." Ed Balls said:

"Everyone should get behind our efforts to make music a key part of the school day - for the educational and personal benefits for children and the cultural enrichment and enjoyment it brings people of all ages."

Read more at [http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2007\\_0216](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2007_0216)

=====  
=====

## **ONLINE RESOURCES**

### **The UK "Music Manifesto" Initiative**

Developed by UK government Departments concerned with education and families in collaboration with music and arts organisations and practitioners and the music industry, the Manifesto has five key aims:

- To provide every young person with first access to a range of music experiences
- To provide more opportunities for young people to deepen and broaden their musical interests and skills
- To identify and nurture talented young musicians
- To develop a world-class workforce in music education
- To improve the support structures for young people's music making.

"Music can be magic. It calls for and calls forth all human virtues: imagination, discipline, teamwork, determination. It enriches and inspires.

Read more at <http://www.musicmanifesto.co.uk/>

-----

### **New Zealand Action Research in Online Musical Mentoring**

#### ***Ministry of Education E-Mentoring in Online Real-time Music Tuition Project***

During June-August 2007, the National Centre for Research in Music Education and Sound Arts (MERC), in partnership with the Christchurch School of Music (CSM), carried out a Ministry-funded research project based on a video conferencing trial of instrumental and vocal tuition to outreach schools in the South Island.

The Ministry of Education Virtual Learning Network website has hosted materials and facilitated the video conferencing network between the South Learning Centre in Christchurch and four regional schools – Akaroa Area School, Amuri Area School, Reefton Area School, and Greymouth High School.

Four tutors from the CSM – teaching voice, violin, clarinet, and drums - were mentored by Mark Walton (CSM Musical Director and Programme Director of the video conferencing trial who has been involved in similar Outreach programmes in Australia).

Each school was matched with one tutor, receiving free face-to-face visits and six online, real-time video conferenced music tuition sessions. The website hosted blogs, video footage, lesson materials, news items and links for students and teachers to share learning between lessons.

Read more at <http://www.merc.canterbury.ac.nz/about.shtml>

---

## **MUSIC COMPETITIONS**

### **Australian National Eisteddfod**

An eisteddfod is a traditional festival of the performing arts from Wales based on the ancient bardic schools where lore and its presentation in various styles encouraged the development of cultural excellence by all.

The Australian National Eisteddfod covers 200 age based performance and composition competitions for 6 yrs to open in singing, drama and instrument(s) for solo and group performance.

This is a low cost opportunity to 'tell your story' in public performance and see and hear how others perform. Receive a confidential written assessment from a discipline accredited specialist with an award recognising your standing - including perhaps some cash.

Read more at <http://www.nationaleisteddfod.org.au/>

---

To unsubscribe from Ensemble click here: [mailto:webmaster@ensemble.org.au?subject=unsubscribe Ensemble](mailto:webmaster@ensemble.org.au?subject=unsubscribe%20Ensemble)