

# ENSEMBLE

## MUSIC EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA'S SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

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### RESPONSE TO LETTER TO THE EDITOR

#### Infants' Perfect Pitch

*In Issue 4, a correspondent questioned the research behind the article which asserted babies have perfect pitch. This is the response from the Queensland Education Department which published the article in their Parents' Newsletter:*

Thank you for your letter dated 14 November regarding 'Music Education Hits the Right Note' published in the 2006 *Schools + Parents* magazine.

The suggestion that babies are born with 'perfect' pitch emerged from peer-reviewed scientific research by University of Wisconsin-Madison Professor Jenny Saffran.

Her study 'Absolute Pitch in Infant Auditory Learning: Evidence for Developmental Reorganisation (Developmental Psychology 2001, Vol. 37, No. 1 p. 74 – 85) can be found at:  
<http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/infantlearning/publications/DevPsychAP.pdf>.

Since 2001 Professor Saffran has found additional evidence to support her initial research findings and also published studies regarding the developmental shift from 'absolute' to 'relative' pitch in infants. This information is available on the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Infant Learning Laboratory website:  
[http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/infantlearning/infant\\_research.html](http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/infantlearning/infant_research.html).

Her research has been widely covered in scientific and mainstream media in recent years including the Australian Music Associations' 2001 *Music makes the Difference* publication available at:  
<http://www.musicmakers.org.au/ClientImages/MMD-DL.pdf> (See page 2).

An interesting interview with Professor Saffran broadcast on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 2001 also discusses many of the queries raised by your reader. A full transcript of this interview can be found online at:  
<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/science/ss/stories/s254556.htm>.

Due to the nature of the research we believed the findings were likely to be of great interest to Queensland parents, given the large number of music students in our schools.

I have also listed below the original source of other information contained in the 'Did you know?' section of the article for your reference:

- **A Swiss study of 1200 children showed how playing music improved children's reading and verbal skills by improving concentration, memory and self-expression**

*E W Weber, M Spsychiger and J-L Patry, Music Makes the School; Biography and results from a school trial which had enhanced music teaching; Bd17. 1993 quoted in Come and Play Research*

Program Report at <http://www.kidsclubs.org.uk/uploads/information/ComePlayreportfinal2004.doc>

- **A Hong Kong study found that adults who had music training before the age of 12 years were better able to recall spoken words than adults who had little or no training in music**

*Agnes S Chan, Yim-Chi Ho, & Mei-Chun Cheung; Dept of Psychology; The Chinese University of Hong Kong; Music training improves verbal memory; Nature 396:128 available for purchase at*

<http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v396/n6707/abs/396128a0.html>

- **A US study discovered that children aged 5-7 years who had been lagging behind in their school performance had caught up with their peers in reading and were ahead of them in maths after just seven months of music lessons**

*M F Gardiner, A Fox, F Knowles & D Jeffrey; Learning improved by arts training; Nature 381:284; 1996 available for purchase at <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v381/n6580/pdf/381284a0.pdf>*

- **Listening to music at any age taps directly into our innate pleasure systems, activating euphoria-inducing brain regions**

*A J Blood, & R J Zatorre; Intensely pleasurable responses to music correlate with activity in brain regions implicated in reward and emotion; Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America; Vol.98 (20). 2001 available at <http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=58814>*

It all makes for fascinating research and is not only of great interest to the musical community but to anyone interested in child development and the development of language.

I thank you for your interest. Kind regards

John Algate, A/Assistant Director, Corporate Communication and Marketing Branch

Department of Education, Training and the Arts Ph: (07) 323 54183

E: [john.algate@deta.qld.gov.au](mailto:john.algate@deta.qld.gov.au)

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## **INTERNATIONAL ROUNDUP**

### **The Strategic Importance of Music Education**

*Washington Post, December 17 2007*

John H Mahlmann, executive director of the national Association for Music Education, says he is tired of having to defend the importance of music education. He often finds it necessary to rattle off statistics about how music improves the lives of people who study it. The sheer joy of playing and understanding music isn't enough, he said.

So he has an unorthodox response to educators: "Why is math so high on the priority list?" His answer: "Because we can test for it..."

The thing people forget, he said, is that musicians are assessed every time they play an instrument. "If you went to a concert and they only played 80% of the notes correctly, you wouldn't like it. Musicians strive for perfection. Lots of people don't mind 80% on a math quiz..."

Schools with music programs have graduation rates of 90.2% as compared with a 72.9% rate for schools without music education, according to a 2006 Harris Interactive poll of high school principals funded by the National Association for Music Education and International Music Products Association, known as NAMM.

The poll also found that schools with music programs have attendance rates of 93.3% compared with 84.9% for those that don't.

In 2006 SATest takers with course work or experience in music performance scored 57 points higher on the verbal portion of the college entrance exam and 43 points higher on the math portion than did students with no such experience in the arts.

Scores of those with course work in music appreciation were 62 points higher in the verbal and 41 points higher on the math, according to the College Board's 2006 Profile of College-Bound Seniors National Report.

A November 2007 Harris poll found that 86% of college graduates had some music education when they were in school, compared with 65% for those who had not completed or completed only high school.

The poll also found that 83% of people earning \$150,000 or more had a music education.

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## **Those with More Education and Higher Household Incomes are More Likely to Have Had Music Education**

### ***The Harris Poll® #112, November 12, 2007***

Whether it's chorus, band or just violin lessons, music impacts Americans' lives. While singing in a chorus or playing an instrument is fun, it can also provide important skills like creative problem solving that can help lead to higher education and incomes as well as personal fulfillment.

Three-quarters (75%) of American adults were involved in some type of music program while in school. Half (51%) were involved in chorus while 42 percent had some type of formal instrumental lessons. Just over one-third (35%) were in a school instrumental ensemble, such as an orchestra or band while 14 percent were part of an informal group, such as a garage band and 12 percent had formal vocal lessons.

Music education is associated with those who go on to higher education. In looking at what groups may have participated more in music, education shows the largest differences. Two-thirds (65%) of those with a high school education or less participated in music compared to four in five (81%) with some college education and 86 percent of those with a college education. The largest group to participate in music, however, are those with a post graduate education as almost nine in ten (88%) of this group participated while in school.

Music education is also associated with higher incomes. Three-quarters of people (74%) with household incomes of \$34,999 or less and 72 percent of those with incomes of \$35,000-\$49,999 participated in music, compared to 83 percent of those with incomes of \$150,000 or more.

These are some of the findings of a Harris Poll of 2,565 adults surveyed online between October 9 and 15, 2007 by Harris Interactive®. This survey was conceived and developed by Harris Interactive and was not commissioned by any organization. However, we sought and received valuable input from the National Association for Music Education on this subject.

Certain other groups are more likely than others to have participated in music in school. Women are more likely than men (80% versus 70%) and African Americans are more likely than Whites or Hispanics to have participated in music (80% versus 75% and 73%). Age wise, the younger one is, the more likely they participated in music as 83 percent of Echo Boomers (those aged 18-30) participated compared to 69 percent of Matures (those aged 62 and older). Also, the higher the household income, the more likely they participated in a music program.

### ***Music Education Provides Personal Fulfillment***

Seven in ten U.S. adults say that music education had at least some influence on their current level of personal fulfillment, with more than one-third (37%) saying that their music education has been extremely or very influential and one-third (33%) saying it was somewhat influential. Just one-quarter say music education had no influence at all. Those with a post-graduate degree are more likely to say music education was extremely or very important than those with a high school or less education or a college graduate (51% compared to 28% and 38%, respectively).

The type of music program one was involved in and how long that involvement lasted also matters when looking at personal fulfillment. Over half of those who had vocal lessons (52%) or were in a garage band (54%) say music education was extremely or very influential to their current level of personal fulfillment as do 46 percent of those who took instrument lessons. And, while it's probably not surprising that over three-quarters (78%) of those who are still involved in music say it was extremely or very influential, three in five (60%) of those with more than five years of involvement also say music education was extremely or very influential to their current level of music fulfillment.

### ***We Can Work It Out: The Skills Music Education Provides***

Besides just the music, participating in music programs can also provide people with certain skills that can be utilized in a job and career. Just under half (47%) of those who were in a music program say music education was extremely or very important in giving them the ability to strive for individual excellence in a group setting. A plurality (44%) say music education was extremely or very important in teaching how to work towards common goals and two in five (41%) say it was extremely or very important in providing them with a disciplined approach to solving problems. Just over one-third say music education gave them the skill of creative problem solving (37%) and how to be flexible in work situations (36%).

The more education one has, the more likely one thinks that music education was important in providing each of these five skills. In fact, almost six in ten (58%) post graduates say music education was extremely or very important as they strive for individual excellence in a group setting. Besides post-graduates, African Americans are also more likely to say that music education was important in providing them with each of these skills.

In looking at what the learnings and habits from music education provide, two-thirds of adults (66%), and 72 percent of those who were involved in music, say it equips people to be better team players in their career. Music education also helps one to solve problems – three in five adults (61%) and two-thirds (66%) of those involved in music say music education provides people with a disciplined approach to solving problems. Music also provides a sense of organization. Three in five adults (59%) and almost two-thirds (64%) of those who had music education say that it prepares someone to manage the tasks of their job more successfully.

### ***The Beat Goes On***

Even when the lessons could end, those who had music education continued with the program. Just one in six (14%) continued with their program for less than one year, while one-third (33%) continued for 1 to 3 years. Almost one-quarter (22%) participated for three to five years and 19 percent of those who had music participated for over 5 years. One in ten adults is still involved in a music program. Education also plays a role as those with post graduate degrees are more likely to be involved in music longer; three in ten participated for over 5 years and 14 percent are still involved.

Type of music program also impacts how long one participated. One-quarter of those who took instrumental lessons (24%) and orchestra (25%) continued with their programs for more than five years. Also, one in five of those who take vocal lessons (22%) and are in a garage band (20%) are still involved in a musical program. With these, as opposed to chorus, the knowledge of reading music is necessary and, with that skill, one may want to continue their involvement longer.

### ***So What?***

Whether it is singing with a group of other students, playing trumpet in the junior high orchestra or taking years of piano lessons, music education hopefully provides, on its face, an appreciation of music. But it also provides much more than that. Even after the lessons are long gone, the skill set that those years provided lives on for those who had music education. Whether it's learning to work in group settings or becoming more disciplined, music education provides certain fundamentals and those with this background now say it was influential in contributing to their current level of personal fulfillment. With all the benefits of music education, its continued importance in education is something that cannot be denied. In fact, in looking at how those with more education are more likely to have been in a music program, we can

probably say that music education is a tool to not only get students to stay in school, but to continue to further their education.

Read more at [http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris\\_poll/index.asp?PID=831](http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=831)

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### ***Twelve Benefits of Music Education***

1. Early musical training helps develop brain areas involved in language and reasoning. It is thought that brain development continues for many years after birth. Recent studies have clearly indicated that musical training physically develops the part of the left side of the brain known to be involved with processing language, and can actually wire the brain's circuits in specific ways. Linking familiar songs to new information can also help imprint information on young minds.
2. There is also a causal link between music and spatial intelligence (the ability to perceive the world accurately and to form mental pictures of things). This kind of intelligence, by which one can visualize various elements that should go together, is critical to the sort of thinking necessary for everything from solving advanced mathematics problems to being able to pack a book-bag with everything that will be needed for the day.
3. Students of the arts learn to think creatively and to solve problems by imagining various solutions, rejecting outdated rules and assumptions. Questions about the arts do not have only one right answer.
4. Recent studies show that students who study the arts are more successful on standardized tests such as the SAT. They also achieve higher grades in high school.
5. A study of the arts provides children with an internal glimpse of other cultures and teaches them to be empathetic towards the people of these cultures. This development of compassion and empathy, as opposed to development of greed and a "me first" attitude, provides a bridge across cultural chasms that leads to respect of other races at an early age.
6. Students of music learn craftsmanship as they study how details are put together painstakingly and what constitutes good, as opposed to mediocre, work. These standards, when applied to a student's own work, demand a new level of excellence and require students to stretch their inner resources.
7. In music, a mistake is a mistake; the instrument is in tune or not, the notes are well played or not, the entrance is made or not. It is only by much hard work that a successful performance is possible. Through music study, students learn the value of sustained effort to achieve excellence and the concrete rewards of hard work.
8. Music study enhances teamwork skills and discipline. In order for an orchestra to sound good, all players must work together harmoniously towards a single goal, the performance, and must commit to learning music, attending rehearsals, and practicing.
9. Music provides children with a means of self-expression. Now that there is relative security in the basics of existence, the challenge is to make life meaningful and to reach for a higher stage of development. Everyone needs to be in touch at some time in his life with his core, with what he is and what he feels. Self-esteem is a by-product of this self-expression.
10. Music study develops skills that are necessary in the workplace. It focuses on "doing," as opposed to observing, and teaches students how to perform, literally, anywhere in the world. Employers are looking for multi-dimensional workers with the sort of flexible and supple intellects that music education helps to create as described above. In the music classroom, students can also learn to better communicate and cooperate with one another.
11. Music performance teaches young people to conquer fear and to take risks. A little anxiety is a good thing, and something that will occur often in life. Dealing with it early and often makes it less of a problem later. Risk-taking is essential if a child is to fully develop his or her potential.
12. An arts education exposes children to the incomparable.

Read more at <http://www.childrensmusicworkshop.com/advocacy/12benefits.html>

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## **Principals' View of Music Education at Odds with National Research**

### ***Professor Margaret Seares***

There are serious concerns with a proposal from the Australian Primary Principals' Association that could encourage some schools to abandon a commitment to primary school music education, according to the Chair of the 2005 National Review of Music Education, Professor Margaret Seares.

Professor Seares said that while the Association's draft Charter on Primary Schooling, released yesterday gave music and physical education a privileged place over many other areas, they were still considered 'non-core' activities, perpetuating a false view that music and sport were simply 'diversionary' activities.

"The Charter states that 'core' subjects of English, mathematics, science and history enable children to embrace skills such as 'learning, thinking, communication, self management and technology', while music (and sport) are seen as 'enjoyable' areas that introduce students 'to many other important areas of life'.

"This completely ignores the findings of the research undertaken as part of our national review, which demonstrated the crucial role that participation in regular music making can have for learning, thinking, communication skills and the like, not to mention enhanced mathematical reasoning," Professor Seares said.

"The research also illustrated the importance of music as an avenue for these skills, for children for whom the standard approach to schooling does not work, and for children whose home environments lack the enrichment that other homes take for granted."

Professor Seares – who is Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor of The University of Western Australia – said she was concerned that such a charter would inadvertently lead to more Australian children, particularly children at risk of failing at school, being denied the musical environment that so many Australians had indicated to the national review that they wanted for their children.

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## **POLICY STATEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY MUSIC COMMISSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (ISME):**

Community Music is a vital and dynamic force that provides opportunities for participation and education in a wide range of musics and musical experiences.

Community Music activities are based on the premise that everyone has the right and ability to make and create musics. Accordingly, such programs can act as a counterbalance and/or complement to formal music institutions and commercial music concerns.

In addition to involving participants in the enjoyment of active music-making and creativity, Community Music provides opportunities to construct personal and communal expressions of artistic, social, political, and cultural concerns. Also Community Music encourages and empower participants to become agents for extending and developing music in the community

In the pursuit of musical excellence and innovation, Community Music activities also contribute to the development of economic regeneration, create job opportunities in the cultural sectors, and enhance the quality of life for communities. In all these ways Community Music activities can complement, interface with, and extend formal music education structures.

## ***The Nature of Community Music***

At the heart of excellent Community Music activities are the following characteristics:

- emphasis on a variety and diversity of musics that reflect and enrich the cultural life of the community and of the participants
- -active participation in music-making of all kinds (performing, improvising and creating)
- the development of active musical knowing ( including verbal musical knowledge where appropriate)
- multiple learner/teacher relationships and processes
- a commitment to life-long musical learning and access for all members of the community
- an awareness of the need to include disenfranchised and disadvantaged individuals or groups
- a recognition that participants' social and personal growth are as important as their musical growth
- a belief in the value and use of music to foster inter-cultural acceptance and understanding
- respect for the cultural property of a given community and acknowledgement of both individual and group ownership of musics
- an on-going commitment to accountability through regular and diverse assessment and evaluation procedures
- fosters a personal delight and confidence in individual creativity
- flexible teaching, learning and facilitation modes (oral, notational, holistic, experiential, analytic)
- excellence/quality in both the processes and products of music-making relative to individual goals of participants
- the honouring of origins and intents of specific musical practices

## ***Cultural Diversity in Community Music***

Musics of the world are relevant for musical practice and music education because of increased accessibility (through media and travel) and increased mobility (migration) and also because of the growing cultural diversity of many of our communities. This diversity creates the possibility for openness and innovation through many practical models for teaching and learning music at all levels.

Community Music programs and activities should encompass an appropriate range of musical practices, processes, materials, and philosophies from different cultures.

Read more at <http://www.mca.org.au/index.php?id=120>

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## **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/>

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