

September/October 2011

Music

“How the musical brain created human nature” is the subtitle of Daniel Levitin’s latest book “The World in Six Songs”. The book discusses six kinds of songs – those used to express friendship, joy, comfort, knowledge, religion and love. So music is our life-long companion and there are ever more varied ways in which we can make music, especially with others, as well as consume music as listeners, in ever more isolation from others, plugged in at the ear.

Current music education emphasises other areas of learning which can be fostered through music. This is nothing new to those of us working in special schools, where it is well appreciated that music reaches the parts that other areas of the curriculum don’t reach. Music and wellbeing is an area of great current interest, and the established profession of music therapy has much to offer.

So in this issue of Curriculum Bitesize we look at various ways of making music, showing that not only is it fun, but it’s beneficial for us all – putting the “hum” back in human!



● **Sally Zimmermann**
RNIB Music Adviser
Sally.zimmermann@rnib.org.uk



● **James Risdon**
RNIB Music Officer
James.risdon@rnib.org.uk

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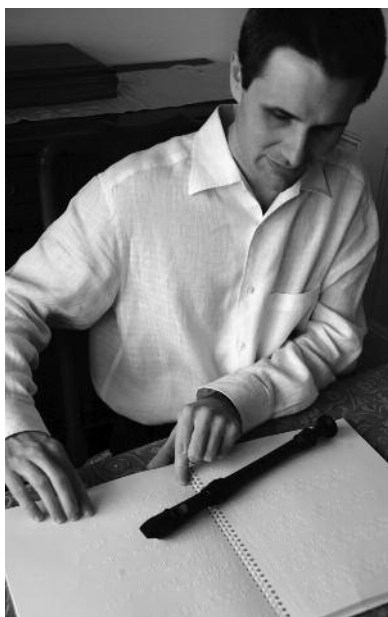
Please get in touch if you’d like to comment on this issue of Bitesize or share your ideas on classroom practice and activities.

Email insightmagazine@rnib.org.uk

Braille music – where could it take you?

Last December, I did something for the first time in my life: I used a music stand in a concert. I say this as a braille music reader and without a hint of irony.

I was playing the recorder in a Christmas mass as part of a Baroque orchestra and choir. The recorder



parts were occasionally tuneful, but mostly bitty and unmemorable and, although I was quite confident after a week of intensive cramming, I felt reassured by the knowledge that I could sneak a look at what was coming next during the long breaks in which I was not playing. As it happened, I only checked the music once, so paranoid was I of knocking over my stand, or worse still, that of my neighbour. The concert went very well and the braille provided a good talking point during the interval. I can't say that having a music stand and braille music took away any lingering nerves, but without braille music, the experience of making such joyous music as part of a band, the warm appreciation of the audience, oh, and the fee, would not have been possible.

The road to braille music literacy and fluency can seem, at the early stages in particular, a long and windy track through an indistinguishable forest, full of proverbial pot-holes. It is, however, a route to musical independence, opportunities, and even gainful employment. Here are a few recently-trodden clearings along the road you and your students might aim for to make the journey more pleasurable.

Celebrating your progress

RNIB's Music Advisory Service (MAS) administers annual tests of braille music literacy sponsored by Gardner's Trust for the Blind. Ok, having someone test your braille music skills might not seem instantly appealing, but having your progress measured and recognised by teachers and friends can give you encouragement, and if that isn't enough, there is a small financial prize for the winner(s) at each level. It is also handy for those times of transition stages to a new school or college, to reassure the new establishment that you can sort out music notation.

Making music with others

Most of us learn braille music on our own, one-to-one with a teacher, often while our friends are out playing. It can be a lonely road. But braille music gives us a fantastic way of being able to join in with others, perhaps singing in the school choir or playing in the school windband. This year, MAS supported a 10-year-old flautist as she auditioned and gained a place with the National Children's Orchestra. From quite basic braille music a year ago, she is now devouring flute parts to Beethoven's 5th Symphony and Riverdance.

Studying music

Taking music GCSE or even A-level can be a fun and rewarding experience with opportunities to develop your performing skills, work in ensembles, and bands with your friends, and also write and refine your own compositions. While braille music isn't absolutely essential for GCSE, it definitely is for A-level. Braille music scores are available for many of the current set works. MAS is currently working on producing Modified Braille Music for various specific purposes,

including the reading, interpreting and completing of scores for the listening examinations at GCSE and A-level. Piloting this work with a pianist and recorder player has been fascinating. Our popular Easter GCSE and A-level revision day gave braillists a chance to chat while we tackled past papers and discussed tactics for each exam.

Resources

MAS has developed a self-study course in braille music for sighted teachers and supporters which aims to give you the skills to support a braille music reader from first steps to about GCSE or grade 5 level. Also available is our 'Getting Started with Braille Music' pack. This contains sections for students and their teachers as well as a useful links section. Both are available to download from www.rnib.org.uk/braillemusic

And coming soon! A new course to get GCSE students up to speed reading braille music scores, aimed specifically at the listening paper.

Final thought

If you're worried that the road to braille music is never-ending, or that the light at the end of the tunnel is in fact a nasty man with a torch bringing you yet more work, I hope you'll take encouragement from our flautist as she takes her place for her summer concert in a National Orchestra, or the sixth former as she prepares for her exams and plans which academic music course to study at university.

- **James Risdon, Music Officer, RNIB**

Contact the RNIB Music Advisory Service on 020 7391 2273 or email mas@rnib.org.uk ■

Is it possible to take GCSE Music without reading music notation?

This is a question the RNIB Music Advisory Service is frequently asked by teachers on behalf of blind and partially sighted students selecting subjects to study at GCSE. The short answer is that it depends...

The examinations themselves

The main emphasis in GCSE is on composing and performing, neither of which demand the use of notation, though work in classical styles usually expects it. The listening component is assessed through a written examination. The exam paper includes a small amount of stave notation (the five lines with squiggles on).

If modified exam papers in braille or Modified Large Print are requested, the skeleton scores will be provided in braille music or Modified Stave Notation (MSN) respectively. However,

in the listening paper, candidates are not expected to write their answers in stave notation or in braille music, but can instead write their answers using literary names of notes. For some candidates (including fully sighted candidates) the amount of effort needed to be able to answer the one main melody dictation is disproportionate to the marks allocated.

Currently, EDEXCEL have scores to support listening preparation. These can be provided in MSN and braille, but also can be studied purely by ear – it is called a listening paper! →

The candidate

Most of the world's music is not notated. However, musicians need to use technical terms to communicate with each other. A prerequisite of successful reading of music is a working knowledge of the technical terms themselves.

Learning to read braille music or MSN is not a skill that can be acquired overnight. So, when deciding whether to introduce notation for a GCSE student, it is advisable to find out what their plans beyond year 11 are to allow plenty of time. If, for example, they are hoping to take grade examinations beyond grade 5, or take A level, or study most music degrees at university or college, they will need to be able to access music notation independently and efficiently. Fluency in reading stave notation usually arises from hours and hours of doing it. Does your student have ways of getting hold of written music?

The school

As a general rule, if the school would normally introduce stave music notation before or as part of the GCSE course, blind or partially sighted students should have braille music scores and materials in MSN, and be given support in how to understand and use them.

Increasingly, the business of writing music is managed by computer packages (notably, Sibelius), and students can read and write, and analyse music, through specialist software from spoken description. While this currently enables blind and partially sighted students to produce accurate stave notation for their peers, it does not solve the need to access hardcopy notation in the listening paper.

Information on music notation:

www.rnib.org.uk/braillemusic

www.rnib.org.uk/modifiedstavenotation

www.sibelius.com

Arrangements for exams:

www.jca.org.uk ■

Music products from RNIB

To order any of the following products call us on 0303 123 9999 or shop online at rnib.org.uk/shop. For further information email education@rnib.org.uk

Musical instrument memory tests

The Associated Board of the Royal School of Music (ABRSM) braille-memory tests cover a diverse range of musical instruments including flute, guitar, double bass, oboe, saxophone, trombone, tuba and violin. Candidates are given a short piece of braille music to learn in a set amount of time, which they then have to perform in exam. The tests are similar in challenge and level of demand to the Associated Board's standard sight reader tests, and candidates receive the same marks and are assessed in the same way.

Prices range from £3.95 up to £7.75. For a full list of titles available visit rnib.org.uk/shop and browse under 'educational resources' for music.

Music magazines

From RNIB Upbeat is packed full of information on rock, pop, jazz, folk and new music genres, plus in-depth reviews and interviews, and concert diary listings.



Available monthly on subscription in braille and email.

Musical instruments for little ones

The bright sea sounds drum (GM02) has a sea life design and contains colourful beads inside, that replicate the sound of the ocean. Children can gently tilt the drum to hear the beads cascade softly, or beat and tap with hands and fingers to make a unique sound. Age range: 3+ Priced: £9.



Rainbomaker (GM05) captivates children by creating a magic combination of sound and colour. It creates the gentle sound of rain as the colourful beads helter



skelter through the colourful discs inside. Age range: 3+ Priced: £9

Eddie the elephant tunes toy (GI62)

combines a cuddly toy with music. Eddie's trunk has eight different coloured shapes which play a different note when pushed and his left foot plays five popular childrens songs. Wonderfully bright and playful. Age range: From birth. Priced £20.41



Octotunes toy (GI65) a delightfully soft, vanilla scented musical octopus, that is bright orange in colour. Each of the octopus' tentacles plays a different musical note when squeezed. From birth. Priced £20.41 ■



What is music therapy?

Music therapy can bring particular benefits to children with special needs. Two Music Therapists highlight some of the values this specialist form of communication can offer

For David Wood, Music Therapist at RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning, music therapy is about creating a trusting relationship to nurture free expression

Most of the students that I work with love music; for some it is a very important part of their lives. In the music therapy sessions I run I encourage students to express themselves using different instruments and using their voice, but music therapy is not a music lesson and no prior knowledge of music is needed.

As a music therapist I try to meet the students where they are musically. I listen to what they

are expressing through their music, whether they are banging a drum, playing chimes, ringing bells, playing the piano or singing. I try to play music that is in keeping with, and sensitive to what they are communicating. In this way I can ensure that the students feel supported and listened to. It's about creating a calm non-judgemental environment, based on trust, which allows them to express themselves freely.

Students are encouraged to play music, to sing and to listen to what I am playing or singing. In this way, over time, the music making becomes a two-way process of communication. One of the aims of the session is to play music together. This can either be playing a well known song or improvising. At times the music we make



takes the form of a conversation, at other times we create a piece of music together. Sometimes we end up singing a song or playing a musical game. Music can communicate at a very deep level and has no need of words. At all times we try to have fun!

The students that I work with have a wide range of abilities, but almost all of them are able to relate and interact through music. As the sessions progress, I see students who were at first reluctant to contribute, becoming increasingly more involved. I see others improve their co-ordination, which helps with their playing. Some, who were reluctant to sing at the start, subsequently sing throughout the session. Over time their confidence seems to increase and they participate more. The student-therapist relationship is not a static one and it develops and evolves as the music therapy progresses.

Our sessions are always structured the same. We start with a 'Hello' song in which we all say hello to each other. We end with a 'Goodbye' song, which signals that we have finished but will meet again next week. Sessions last for half an hour and are held weekly. Apart from these factors, I never know what each session is going to bring. It is generally the students who direct what we do and what we play. I never cease to be amazed at what they are capable of.

● David Wood

For Andrew Darlison, Music Therapist at Linden Lodge School, music therapy can be about creating a bond to process powerful emotional states

Music therapy offers experiences of contact and linking to people for whom those experiences may be otherwise hard to access. Music is a medium which communicates emotional material – our feelings – such as fear, anxiety, joy and excitement. During a

music therapy session children can use music to explore, express and share their complex emotional world while in the company of the music therapist. They can also be playful or move towards an experience of playfulness. Sometimes the intense excitement and joy engendered by the free musical play and close musical interaction will evoke difficult feelings around having to leave the space and give up an enjoyable experience. All these emotions can be very powerful and potentially overwhelming and the therapist must handle them sensitively.

The highly flexible nature of music makes it an ideal medium for exploring emotions allowing the therapist to meet, match, reflect, accompany and offer containment of emotional material. This can leave children less emotionally isolated than may be possible in a classroom or other school setting. When, for example, a child's fearful rage may mean making physical contact with them is difficult, music can link, contain and hold emotional experiences without the need for physical touch. Children may not understand their own powerful emotions. They may experience them as frightening – destructive of relationships around them, incapable of being contained and confirming a self belief that they are in fact 'too much' to handle. Emotional material can be processed in music therapy during musical improvisation, transforming the more destructive elements into a more creative and generative expression.

The child's emotional world is just one element that can be explored successfully through music therapy. It's the immediate, dynamic and direct nature of the interpersonal contact offered through music that is so useful in offering visually impaired children a therapeutic experience.

● Andrew Darlison ■

Sing Up: Help kids find their voice

Are your children singing children? That is what matters most to Sing Up, a national singing programme set up in 2007. Howard Goodall, the Government's Singing Ambassador, wrote at the start of the programme that, "It is our goal that children and young people will say they can't remember a time when they did not sing." The voice is the instrument that we all carry with us, and it can be expressive and beautiful. To sing with others brings social unity, generates energy and is fun. Singing is good for you, and good for educational, social and emotional development of all young people. It helps with keeping healthy and develops confidence.

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Sing Up's work to date has centred on advocating the transformative power of singing. In addition to the proven benefits to health, happiness and wellbeing, the programme has analysed through work with children with SEN that singing can also develop language skills and raise aspirations. Indeed the effects of engaging in musical activities endure in the long term for children with special needs, their teachers, support workers and families.

Become a singing school

Sing Up, delivered in partnership by Faber Music, The Sage Gateshead and Youth Music, and supported by Government, offers high quality training and resources to support every



primary school, including schools supporting children with special educational needs, to become a singing school.

Among the wealth of resources available online (www.singup.org) you'll find a Song Bank, access to a termly magazine, downloadable lesson plans, curriculum links and practical packs eg Sign to Sing, Young Singing Leaders, and Vocal Health.

Included are resources particularly useful to children who are blind or partially sighted, including braille lyrics and braille music, →

provided by Prima Vista. Reading the words of an already known song, in contracted or uncontracted braille, can be really motivating for the beginner brailist and can be the first step to supporting a child's creativity with lyrics, words and song writing.

For children with limited physical movement and control, who are touch-screen and switch users, songs are included in the Song Bank with Clicker 5 tracks and tracks set up for VOCA participation.

Sing Up Awards

Many special schools use singing throughout the school day, cuing lunch time with a song, or celebrating success with a quick chorus. The Sing Up Awards recognise the singing that takes place in schools and provides the opportunity for progression from Silver, through Gold, to Platinum. So far 22 special schools have achieved a Silver Award, 11 have achieved Gold, and two are Ambassador Platinum schools; a real celebration of singing.

Singing with your pupils

So if you haven't yet had a go, how about starting with one of these suggestions, from a class of pupils with complex needs including sight and hearing loss

For that calm time in a lesson, play the song track for "I've got peace like a river" and watch the class still. Fade out the track and hum the tune, adding a bass line on F and C from large bass bars placed either side of the group. Listen as pupils join in the humming and get two pupils to play the bars – don't worry too much if the bars are played randomly, it adds to the atmosphere, but do encourage gentle playing. Fragment the tune and leave gaps. Pupils fill the gaps with their own vocalisations which can in turn be copied. The river flows along as improvisation and then gradually fades to silence and stillness.



"Song of the fish" requires more animation. Start with making any sounds that would suit an underwater scene. You start and choose sounds similar to sounds the pupils often make, walking around the group to keep the sound swimming around. As pupils and staff join in, add more layers of sounds. Merge in the recording of the song. Gradually replace the vocal sound effects with instrumental sounds – swishes on glockenspiels, shaking of shells, electronic sounds from a beam system. Keep a pulse going based on a rhythm from the song, maybe, "bub-ble bub-ble b b b". To end, get a pupil to count one, two, three, four and then all scream "Arrgghh." Record your underwater scene and play it back later in the day.

- Jenny Young, Sing Up
- Sally Zimmermann, RNIB

Registration with Sing Up is currently free of charge to all primary schools and gives full access to resources and training, visit www.singup.org and help your children find their voice. ■

Learning an instrument

Learning a musical instrument or having vocal tuition can be a fun and fulfilling activity, whether it leads to a glittering career or just a lifelong hobby. For children, the benefits of learning a musical instrument or singing are well documented (see references below) and include social participation, phonological development, communication and imagination, all skills which employers will value very highly.

The RNIB Music Advisory Service (MAS) receives enquiries every week from teachers and parents about encouraging musicianship in young children, and developing musical interest and skills in children of all ages. We offer the following ideas and suggestions:

Early signs of musicianship

You may be aware that your child is “wired for sound” from quite an early age. For example, he or she may be alert to unusual sounds such as car horns, may demand the same CD over and over again, may start picking out tunes on a keyboard, or even be calmed by music.

While not all blind or partially sighted children, including children with additional needs, will necessarily be interested or indeed talented at music, it stands to reason that if their primary means of understanding and ordering their world is through sound, music may play a more important role than for fully sighted children.

You might consider:

Joining a local music group for babies and toddlers. Look online or try your local music shop or library for details of groups in your area.

Finding an enthusiastic musician experienced in working with young children to come and make music together. Your child will enjoy exploring different sounds, singing songs, dancing and moving or simply listening to music.

Buying a keyboard (the simpler the better) and, perhaps, finding a teacher used to working with young children to give keyboard lessons. Keyboard lessons don't necessarily

mean hours of scales practice and learning to read music notation. A good teacher will encourage your child to make up his or her own songs, recognise the sounds of different instruments, develop listening skills and perhaps encourage a link between music and movement.

Finding a private teacher

There are many private music teachers, but few have experience of teaching blind and partially sighted students, though this need not be a deciding factor. It is important to undertake as much research as you can before making a choice. There are many ways of finding a music teacher, not least by word of mouth. Your library will probably have listings, and music shops may have details of local teachers.

More officially, we suggest you search the Incorporated Society of Musicians (www.ism.org), the largest professional body of music teachers. ISM maintain the largest professional directory which can be searched by area and instrument. All teachers listed on their directory are ISM members and have to maintain a professional and responsible approach to their work. Teachers are approved for inclusion after careful scrutiny of their qualifications, experience and achievements by their colleagues in the ISM.



Alternatively, The Music Teachers website (www.musicteachers.co.uk) is a free internet service for music teachers and accompanists with a searchable directory of music teachers. Unlike the ISM database, the service is open to anyone who wishes to register, so you may find more teachers fitting your search criteria, but they won't necessarily have the same level of professional qualifications and experience.

Many teachers will offer a consultancy lesson which is a good chance for your child to get to know the teacher and vice versa.

Opportunities in school

Every child in mainstream school at Key Stage 2 is entitled to instrumental or vocal lessons in school as part of the Government's Wider Opportunities pledge. This will usually take the form of class music lessons, possibly the recorder class we all knew and loved, but equally possibly singing or drumming, and will last for up to a year.

Secondary schools will have a Head of Music who will be able to provide details of any arrangements in place for instrumental music lessons, including instrument hire and fees. If the music provision in your child's school is run by your local borough or county music services, there may be additional out of hours musical activities on offer, for example weekend courses, bands and orchestras. Blind and partially sighted children are of course entitled to participate in these activities, though how to learn the music, follow a conductor or even simply knowing who is who and making friends can initially seem daunting. MAS would be delighted to hear from any parents with children playing in any music ensembles or bands, and is available to offer advice and suggestions to anyone wishing to experience this side of music-making. Making music with others is more fun than playing by yourself, and for blind and

partially sighted children in particular, can (or should) be a level playing field without barriers. It's a great opportunity for socialising and making new friends.

Working with your child's music teacher

If your child's music teacher does not have experience of working with blind or partially sighted children, it might be helpful to meet them beforehand to discuss your child's needs. Tell them as much as possible about your child's level of sight, for example, whether they like natural light or need a task light; how well they cope in strange surroundings; what, if any reading aids they use. Show them the kind of print your child will use for ordinary reading, where appropriate.

Most teachers will use a combination of tutor books and collections of music as well as their own materials. They may not know about Modified Stave Notation (MSN) or Braille Music, so if your child uses one of these, take an example along. If your child does not read music, explain how he or she likes to learn new pieces. Many people find it useful to take notes in the lesson, preferably on a dictaphone. If you learn the piano, your teacher could record your pieces one hand at a time while explaining some of the details such as fingering or dynamics, or if you play another instrument, they may be able to record the accompaniment for you to use as a practice tape. MAS is always happy to talk to teachers and if necessary visit to observe a lesson and offer ideas and suggestions.

Taking exams

Arrangements with all the main exam boards are in place for blind and partially sighted candidates, with unprepared tests being provided in braille and Modified Stave Notation. For further details visit

www.rnib.org.uk/music and the specific examination board's website.

Funding

Parents or carers experiencing financial hardship may be eligible for a remission or reduction in the fees for lessons and instruments, and there may be bursaries and scholarships available for children who show particular promise or talent.

The Music Year book is a good source of organisations and trusts who can help with funding, and most libraries should have a copy. Lists of funders are increasingly available online.

The Amber Trust specifically supports blind and partially sighted children, including those with additional needs. They can provide financial assistance for all aspects of music making. This might include instrument hire or purchase, the cost of music lessons or music

therapy sessions, the cost of travel to lessons or even attending live music events. Details of how to apply are available online at www.ambertrust.org.

Looking forward...

Finally, it's worth remembering that many blind and partially sighted adults make the successful transition from pupil to teacher and teaching music remains one of the more stable and guaranteed parts of the music business for regular employment. But in the meantime, enjoy the wide range of opportunities for learning and making music.

- **James Risdon, Music Officer, RNIB**

Reference:

Lonie D (2010) Early Years Evidence Review: assessing the outcomes of early years music making. Available at www.youthmusic.org.uk ■

Career opportunities in music

It is easy to think of Stevie Wonder and Andrea Bocelli, but there are so many different parts to the music industry where blind and partially sighted people can successfully work.

While your teenage students dream of being the next X Factor winner, more realistic careers are to be found in areas linked to performing but not totally dependent on impressing the viewing world in two minutes.

RNIB's Music Advisory Service runs a cradle to grave service supporting any blind or partially sighted person's musical activities and aspirations. When it comes to those wishing to be professional performers, we have two basic bits of advice:

1. Get a day job which leaves your evenings free to pursue your musical aims but pays

the rent or mortgage. While concert clothes, promotional photographs and recording demo tracks may be provided by your sponsors, getting to this illustrious point is your responsibility and needs money.

2. Self-employment in music is a "portfolio" career, a gig here, running a workshop there, a bit of teaching, recording for an advert. Very few people can survive on just one of these.

So, by way of a little inspiration and to broaden your students' outlook, here is a list →

of work currently being done by blind or partially sighted people in the music business.

Performing

- background music at formal functions (eg dinners, weddings)
- background music in restaurants
- recitals / lecture recitals / gigs
- opera soloist
- busking
- singing in backing groups
- electro-acoustic curating
- music director
- conductor
- playing/singing for fundraising events
- Church organist

Teaching

- private instrumental teaching
- whole class instrumental teaching
- class music teaching
- improvisation for adults with disabilities
- tutoring at summer schools

Composing

- own albums and downloads
- commercially sponsored CDs
- commissions for drama / festivals
- creating backing tracks

Recording

- live recording
- post production
- editing
- TV documentary work

Other

- piano tuning and piano maintenance
- journalism for music industry

VI specialist

- teaching braille music
- braille music transcription
- braille music proof reader
- training access to transcription software
- training access to sequencing and recording software
- writing scripts for speech access to mainstream software
- researching access to mainstream software
- promotion of own specialist software

And how do people get this work? Some study music after leaving school. (See www.accesstomusic.co.uk for practical courses.) There are also degree courses in every kind of music. The music world is one of connections, so getting to volunteer for a particular organisation in your chosen kind of music is a good way to start. More and more organisations are offering “internships” where expenses are paid for a short term contract, which gives you the work experience needed on your CV. For the various community and teaching areas there are accredited training routes and professional organisations to join. On the self-employment side, giving taster sessions for free, hiring the local village hall for an afternoon and running a free workshop, or advertising in your local music shop are all starting points.

Lastly, two thoughts:

1. What is your unique selling point? Can you describe what you do in 30 seconds to a stranger? You never know when this might land you an interview or bit of work.
 2. Doing a one off performance/workshop/lesson is easy. What is going to make your clients come back for the second one?
- Sally Zimmermann, Music Adviser, RNIB ■