

# Music for the Majority

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It was over a pint in 2018, somewhere near Kings Cross, that I pointed out to Gary and Chris that 2020 marked 50 years since the publication of Paynter and Aston's seminal text *Sound and Silence*, and that would it be good to do something – perhaps a book.

All three of us, and perhaps, just perhaps some here today, are in a sense 'children' of *Sound and Silence*. It was part of a movement that marked unprecedented developments in the philosophy and pedagogy of music education and crucially, it established a focus on the child as artist and composer, that all children can compose, and that this was possible in the general music classroom. This represented an upheaval in thinking about classroom music.

Anyway, after the to and fro, the stops and starts, that are typical during the genesis of a book, the publishers Routledge agreed to our proposal. The challenge was to get it out in 2020 and having not left ourselves much time, we made it with just two months to spare!

In working out a structure for the book our first port of call was to pay homage to the original by commissioning practitioners to write new projects for the classroom which acknowledge the legacy of Paynter and Aston, and at the same time offer a contemporary take on musical creativity.

The book's sixteen projects became the third and final section of our book. These are structured in the same way as the original. An introductory justification for the project, followed by creative tasks to explore, then examples of how such task have been worked and worked out and finally follow up possibilities.

We also wanted to set the ideas of *Sound and Silence* in context and the introductory section aims to do this. Particularly important here are the ‘voices’ of those who lived through the impact of Sound and Silence and also worked to move these ideas on. However, we also wanted to include scholarly chapters that critically engaged with the concept of musical creativity in the classroom and where possible to propose themes that might contribute to a new agenda. These chapters make up the central section of the book. When read together all there are four broad themes that the book aims to address:

- Firstly, it is a celebration of *Sound and Silence* and to a certain extent the subsequent work of John Paynter;
- Second, it is also a critique of the same *Sound and Silence*. *Sound and Silence doesn't get an easy time*;
- Third, it offers a critical account of subsequent work on the creative music classroom over the last 50 years;
- Finally, it sets out proposals for fresh thought that aim to inform the ongoing debate on the creative music classroom.

In the introduction to *Sound and Silence* Paynter and Aston ask: what is creative music? The answer given:

First of all, it is a way of saying things which are personal to the individual. It also implies the freedom to explore chosen materials. As far as possible this work should not be controlled by a teacher. *His* role is to set off trains of thought and help the pupil develop his own critical powers and perceptions. The processes of composition in any art are selection and rejection, evaluating and confirming the material at each stage. It is essentially an experimental situation.

Thinking of the classroom as a place of open-ended experiment where the teacher's role was one of facilitation rather than instruction represented a break with long-held assumptions about the nature of music as a subject of

the school curriculum. Placing their work within 1960s progressive thinking Paynter and Aston write:

If any one aspect of education is characteristic of the whole, it is the change of emphasis from children being instructed to children being placed in situations where they can learn for themselves.

Paynter and Aston had in mind the failure of music education to commit fully to the majority of pupils as part of a general education. Music as a subject of the curriculum had taken on a form that progressively excluded the majority of pupils, based as it was on the acquisition of skills associated with instrumental performance underpinned by and frequently dominated by information about music.

Paynter and Aston noted how Art, dance and drama were at ease with placing children's creative work centre stage and in finding inspiration from the work of contemporary artists, from modernist movements of the twentieth century, for example.

Paynter and Aston maintained that music was a language of expression giving those creating music a means to say things in and through music. And the way to do this was through making up music - musical composition.

It was these lines of justification that provided the structuring principles of *Sound and Silence* and that were able to give a sense of coherence to the 36 projects. Paynter and Aston write:

[The projects] represent ways of thinking about creative music-making, and we see them as only gateways. From any one of these, teachers may devise for themselves courses of work through which a great deal of music could be taught. In this sense, the projects we offer are not complete in themselves: we hope teachers will evolve others like them.

This was not the way text books were meant to work. Instead of a teaching manual here was an invitation to re-imagine the classroom that would invigorate the professional lives of music teachers.

Robert Bunting is the first to write in chapter 3 of our book where we hear the voices of those teachers who lived out Sound and Silence in their classrooms. Robert writes:

Two years into my teaching career, in 1970 Sound and Silence struck me like lightning from a clear sky. Rather than a tame, tidy teaching manual, it was a buzzing, glittering bundle of radical ideas. Here was a complete rejection of academic music education with its complacent conservatism; instead, our pupils found themselves venturing into often unfamiliar sound-worlds, as if breathing the air of another planet. This was tremendously exciting. So too was the astonishing idea that young people could think musically for themselves, that teaching could be a dialogue between their ideas and ours.

The publication of Sound and Silence was followed by the Paynter-led Schools Council Project - Music in the Secondary School Curriculum with its slogan - Music for the Majority - establishing the music teacher as an agent of change. By the 1980s musical composition was finding a place in examination syllabi and notably in the new GCSE examination while establishing a place in the National Curriculum for music.

However, reaction to the progressive trends of the 1960s have been strong and politically co-ordinated. In the case of music attention has been drawn to the disregard for long-established ideas about progression in learning, centred around the acquisition of foundational skills logically ordered. Progressive trends have been seen as defacing tradition, lowering standards and undermining discipline. This voice of conservation has in the past fifty years gained in political traction bringing the very notion of creativity under the

spotlight and in effect progressively diluting the manifesto of Sound and Silence.

Quite unlike the time of Paynter and Aston much of music educational discourse of the present time is overwhelmed by the shrill voice of public policy, the rampant instrumentalisation of schooling and the scourge classroom performativity. This leaves restricted space in which to ask questions about the nature and function of music in society and in education in the way that Sound and Silence was able to do.

The introduction to Sound and Silence concludes:

We hope teachers will try to release the natural creativity in those they teach, whatever the age and ability of the pupils. Creative experiment is only one small part of music in education: but we believe it is a very important part and one that should not be neglected.

That one small part was the cat out of the bag. A fire had been lit. And the flame still flickers.

Above all else our publication seeks to view Sound and Silence in a critical light while keeping in mind the questions posed by Paynter and Aston: Why do we teach music anyway? How do we fit into the pattern of education today?

These questions relate to the place of classroom music within a general education, one that is neither specialist nor vocational, one where growth in musical understanding in lockstep with the growth of the musical capabilities of the child.

Our book considers music education as a distinctive classroom entity with the potential to open minds freed from the calls for heavily prescribed outcomes and narrow forms of assessment. It considers how such an education can work with the musical imaginations of children and young people by working

with the their impulses to make music. It is a music education receptive to children and young people's nascent creativity and boundless search for meaning.