

I Want To Break Free: challenging the hegemony of traditional composition through improvisation, performance, collaboration and sound installation.

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According to research conducted since 2012/2013, (Whittaker et al., 2019; Savage 2018, 2020) the provision of public examinations such as GCSE and A-level Music is under serious threat. These qualifications require students to perform, compose and critically analyse musical works selected by the examination board. Whilst the performing element of these qualifications seems to be adequately supported by schools, Music Hubs and private tuition, students are increasingly turning towards technology-based approaches to music creation and production, not necessarily in school, as articulated by Folkestad in a keynote at the 2022 SEMPRES conference in London. Furthermore, whilst traditional approaches to music composition used to be firmly situated in the Western Classical Art tradition, it could be argued that some music teachers may be clinging to these traditions, despite their students' preference for music technology and digitally based genres. How, therefore, can music educators adapt their pedagogy to encourage wider participation in musical composition and performance in secondary schools?

This paper critically analyses the response of music teachers, musicians, music students and young people to a fully immersive ninety-minute sound installation project. We examine the extent to which participants break free from traditional composition, performance and improvisation techniques in order to understand approaches to sound art. Through thematic analysis of video recordings and workshop written feedback, different responses to creating sound, storytelling and performance are identified. Whilst findings point towards mixed levels of confidence in working in new ways from all five groups, as such installations are equitable and open to all, consideration should also be given to the potential benefits of this approach for participants who are neurodiverse or have specific learning needs which make traditional approaches to notation-based composition challenging. Furthermore, exposure to sound art in primary and secondary education might also initiate an interest in music that would not otherwise be realised because of the restrictions of the current traditional approach. We conclude that developing approaches to sound installation may have positive benefits for a wide range of student musicians in school settings and we call for further training for music educators to gain awareness and embrace such pedagogical approaches to widen participation in music in HE, as well as offering enriching musical experiences in the wider community.

Keywords: Installation, creative composition, performance, secondary education, community

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Biographies

Dr Monica Esslin-Peard is an Honorary Fellow in the Department of Music, University of Liverpool and divides her time between academic research and teaching in secondary education in London. Her research interests include reflective practice and musical learning of classical and popular musicians, reflective practice with inter-cultural groups and reflective practice and pedagogy. She has published seven peer-reviewed papers/chapters, including a paper in the first volume of the *Journal of Popular Music Education* (2017) and is in demand as a reviewer for academic publications in the fields of classical and popular music, jazz and reflective practice. Monica is a frequent presenter at UK and international conferences and has more recently reported on the effects of COVID-19 upon music education and is working closely with Music Hubs and HE institutions to develop pathways into music higher education for student musicians lacking formal music qualifications.

Samuel D. Loveless is an award-winning composer, performance artist and music educator. His compositions span a range of genres challenging traditional approaches, exploring the relationship between performer, space and audience. As someone who is neurodivergent, accessibility and inclusivity are central to his work. Samuel has recently completed a Masters in Composition with Distinction at the Royal College of Music where he was a South Square Trust Award Holder and a Vaughan Williams Bursary recipient. During his Masters, he studied at the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague as part of the Erasmus+ programme. Samuel composes for world-renowned ensembles such as Explore Ensemble, Apartment House and the Ligeti Quartet, with commissions from the Sigmum Quartet and the Residentie Orkest. He is an Associate Member of The Montrose Composer's Club. As a composer, he receives regular commissions and enjoys collaborating with leading practitioners across a myriad of disciplines throughout the UK and Europe.