

I Want To Break Free

Challenging the hegemony of traditional composition through improvisation, performance, collaboration and sound installation



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Agenda

Context

Why this study?

Findings from our five sound
installation workshops

Discussion and implications for
music education in schools and HE
and making music in the
community

Can we break free?



Context

Decline in Music in secondary schools – 50% have no music

Decline in uptake of GCSE and A Level music

So we consider Sound Installation:

‘a performative act which may encompass physical movement, creating sounds with objects, singing and creating sounds with musical instruments and objects focussing on the active involvement of participants, irrespective of their musical backgrounds or abilities’.



Why this study?

Research Questions

- How do musicians participate in four different scenarios in a sound installation?
- What implications does an approach based on sound installation have for pedagogy?
- How does an inclusive, participatory workshop foster skills development in composition, improvisation and performance?

5 groups in the UK and Sweden
n=77, 33 adults, 44 young people



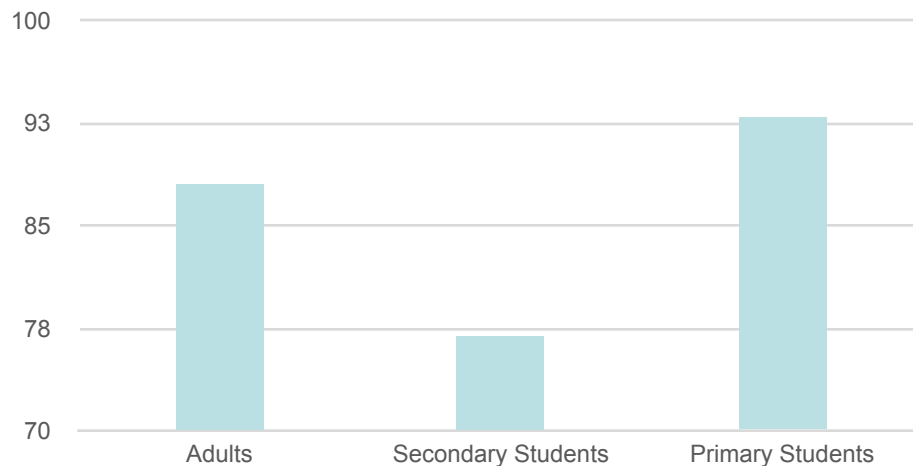
Findings 1 – joy in experimentation

Questionnaire Q1/Q3:

All participants were positive about their experiences.



Experimenting with sound/Freedom to create sounds n=77



Findings 2 – an understanding/enjoyment away from definitions of ‘making music’



‘Sound is just a part of everyday life. It is there. It doesn’t require a musical structure’
(Strachan, 2017, p. 88)

There was a clear shift in the understanding of what the group could achieve, seeing an increase in enjoyment and engagement as a result, regardless of participants’ prior conceptions of making Music, (Participant)

Findings 3 – musical experience is not essential

The participants got out of the workshop what they put into it.

Musical experience was helpful, but not essential.

Swedish UG and PG music students added dance elements to 'Bloom'.



Amateur singers were most comfortable singing 'Somewhere', and decided they would not move around like other groups.

Findings 4 – In what way is this composing?

Participants explored sound and improvisation freely, learning how to create musical sounds and rhythms with balloons.

All groups responded positively to 'Letting go'.



Findings 5 – each group thought the workshop was relevant to them

‘Very useful in a choir to get everyone to listen to each other. The group today was cooperative and open. What would happen to those who found it silly? Would they open up and listen?’ (Choir member)

‘I would like this in music lessons because theory is boring. I really enjoyed it.’ (Primary school student)

‘This workshop gave me the opportunity to create different sounds through a group setting without any judgement.’ (Swedish music student)

‘Unusual but liberating’ (Music teacher)

‘Thinking outside the box - unusual ways to play an instrument.’ (Secondary school student)

Discussion

1. Do you need to be a trained musician?
2. To what extent can you overcome your prejudices if any?
3. What are the pedagogical benefits?
(Listening in a new way, exploration, creativity...)



Making sound without the judgement of others enables participants to compose, improvise and perform with a purpose, i.e. to create music.

Implications or why we should break free

In school music programs today, students may need, desire, and/or benefit from a music education beyond a formal, euro-centric, and/or monocultural experience. Indeed, many likely come to learning with diverse (musical) backgrounds and preferences. Further, music students may find relatable content and processes inviting and enjoyable. (Bennett & Sena Moore, 2023)

Our profession requires a cataclysmic shift from dictating curricula and curriculum content from the 1950s— meaningless to the majority of youth for at least the past 40 years. Our teaching institutions isolate themselves from the realities of 21st century music that are founded upon numerous forms of popular music that have been the core of youth music making and music listening for at least the past 80 years. The ongoing endemic apotheosis of Western classical music and “traditional school music” must cease immediately if music educators are to remain relevant. (Gouzouasis and Bakan, 2011)

Questions: Can we break free?

Next steps:

More workshops –

- a) With neuro-diverse students in secondary school
- b) In conservatoires and university music departments

Create and sustain a debate

Contact us to get involved.

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Questions?

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