

Music Teacher

August 2006

OPINION

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Changing tunes

The following text by *Christina Coker*, chief executive of Youth Music, was a keynote speech at the Music Education Council/Music Manifesto Changing Tunes Conference held in Birmingham on 11 July as part of the National Festival of Music for Youth

“ The question you may all be asking is ‘why are we here?’ This conference has been the starting point for what, and how are we going to do it?

It matters that we all help to change the tunes, for two reasons: Firstly, because we need to move music and culture to centre stage and ensure that they are given a much higher value in society, both for their intrinsic value and for their wider impact. They should not be at all peripheral. To do that we need to recruit credible, influential people from outside the profession to be our advocates.

Secondly, because children and young people from *all* backgrounds must have an active stake in the musical and social life of our country. To move forward on any premise less than that would be morally indefensible, damaging, dangerous and irresponsible.

Taking responsibility is one of the main things about leadership. It is so important for us to acknowledge, respect and support the voice and choice of young people, and help broaden their horizons.

How can one leader possibly do all that?

The best thing to do is to play to your strengths, but be prepared to embrace change. Work with others with whom, together, you can provide the kind of diverse, inclusive experiences our youngsters find so meaningful.

I've just met a child who described her school music education so far as ‘seriously wobbly’. I think that, despite the waves of good practice, there is quite a lot of ‘seriously wobbly’ stuff out there. We cannot hope for an overnight revolution or the whole system would collapse, but the status quo will not do.

The engine of change will be partnership and collaboration. Our leadership challenge needs commitment and belief in a longer journey. It needs open-mindedness, a willingness to be ready to embrace change, and to let go of the tried and tested if it is no longer fit for purpose. It needs the courage to step forward – to take that one step that may seem too far.

There is a role for government and policymakers to support the long game, and I would like to see them making financial commitments across election spends and government spending reviews. Partnerships and networks, whether formally or informally constituted, should be encouraged and supported. Current good examples from key catalysts offering such support are not enough.

ANDY HOWES



However, aside from collective responsibility for action, I don't underestimate the power of individuals to inspire and to bring about change. I would therefore like to issue two personal challenges to all the delegates here today:

A year from now I would like everyone to be able to talk about a new or developing partnership through which young people who would be out of the loop have got involved in music-making on their own terms and have a route to carry on if they want.

And I would like everyone to be able to name at least five people from outside music education whom you personally have turned into an advocate for our cause.

Despite the amazing technological advances of recent years, as human beings we are struggling to communicate. But music has a special ability to cut across so many barriers. We should aim to create, within communities, hubs of activity where music and culture are created, recreated and developed – where people will naturally converge, connect and communicate; find common ground for fostering respect and understanding; and celebrate that which unites as well as that which makes us different from each other.

Making music is the place where learning meets hard work meets fun.

Whatever stage you are at, please don't let the bigger picture slip from view. Don't shirk the responsibility we all share to help shape lives and build the kind of society we want and need – the ultimate legacy. ”

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