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# Land of hype, not glory

Richard Clegg, aka DJ Filthy Dirty Rich, squats in front of his Pyrotechnic Radio crew

CHRIS MANDREW

Our fickle Government has broken its Music Manifesto promises, says **RICHARD MORRISON**

**A**s you may have noticed, ours is a Government besotted by quick-fix initiatives – announced with hyperbolic fanfare and just as swiftly supplanted by the next fad-of-the-week. Nowhere has this institutional attention-span deficit been more disruptive than in music education.

In 2004, for instance, it launched a "Music Manifesto" with a noisy ta-ra-ra and a promise that "over time every primary-school child should have opportunities for sustained and progressive instrumental tuition, offered free of charge or at a reduced rate". Today? My inbox is choked with distressed e-mails from parents and teachers telling me of recent cuts to their local authority's music services. And all, it seems, the result of the Government's decision to divert money intended for music services directly to individual schools – where it doesn't even have to be spent on music!

At least the people fighting these cuts can count on a chorus of middle-class rage. Another brilliant music-education project dear to my heart has, by the very nature of its work, far fewer influential supporters. Exactly two years ago on these pages I wrote about CM (or "Community Music", as it was originally called), an idealistic but also highly effective Southwark-based charity working with disaffected youths in some of the grottiest areas of South London.

Its premise was simple. Music often means a lot to children who are otherwise indifferent or hostile to benign social activities. These are teenagers who have dropped out of the educational system and are at risk of falling into the culture of knives, drugs and gangs so prevalent on the estates.

CM offered them not traditional music lessons but active involvement in cutting-edge music technology, DJ-ing, songwriting and music production, using professional musicians with a certain amount of "street cred" as tutors. But what it really offered was a lifeline. Kids with zero self-esteem found, to their surprise, that they were "good for something". In many cases that discovery led them back into formal education with a new resolve. In 20 years more than 10,000 teenagers have passed through its doors.

Richard Clegg (or "Filthy Dirty Rich" as he is known when wearing his hip-hop DJ hat) is a shining exemplar of its strategy. Now 28, he grew up in an Irish family in Cricklewood, North London, got into drugs as a 14-year-old and had a brush with the law. But he was nuts about music. "It was my only passion," he recalls. "School bored me, and smoking weed demotivates you from doing anything else."

So his youth-worker took him to CM. It



transformed his life. After doing a succession of its music courses, he was placed by the charity as an apprentice with Asian Dub Foundation – a band that has long supported its work. "That gave my life such a strong focus," Clegg says. "In certain inner-city areas there's a 'can't be bothered' mentality that is hard to escape. CM helped me to break free from all that peer-pressure

**Grants are drying up and lottery money is running out or being diverted to pet government projects**

stuff." He even toured with ADF as support DJ and all-purpose roadie. "My mum couldn't believe it. I was actually doing something with my life."

Then, again supported by CM, he set up an internet radio station, Pyrotechnic Radio ([www.pyroradio.com](http://www.pyroradio.com)), specialising in the hip-hop and urban sounds that the big pop stations tended to sideline. It was, and is, spectacularly successful, getting a million hits a month from around the world and now branching out into live gigs and

broadcasts. But Clegg also started putting back into CM a little of what he had gained from it. He became a mentor for kids very much like he once was, and helped to set up a music project in Grahame Park, an appallingly designed Sixties sink estate in North London. "So many young people you come across are from backgrounds where there are no positive ideas floating round," he says. "CM is the sort of organisation that puts positive ideas into their heads."

Well, you can guess what is coming next. Like most music-education projects round Britain – especially those doing vital work outside the formal system – CM's work is precariously funded by short-term project grants. For lots of reasons, those grants are drying up. Lottery money is running out or being diverted to pet government projects. The Arts Council says that it's the job of the Department for Education and Skills to fund educational projects, but the DfES, for whatever dark reason, looks askance at edgy, nonconformist charities such as CM. In any case, what this work needs is permanent, guaranteed funding. But with the Olympics coming, the current overriding fad at the DfES is getting children to do more sport, not music.

CM won't disappear, and it is still doing some educational work with disaffected

kids, in conjunction with a pupil referral unit in Greenwich. But it has to work where it can get funding. So the main thrust of its activity now is advising aspiring young musicians about how to establish a viable career or a sustainable music-related business. Clegg, with the experience of Pyrotechnic Radio behind him, has been recruited to search out exciting new talents with the hunger to succeed.

That's an important task. But it's not quite the same thing as pulling desperately nihilistic youngsters in from the streets and giving them a reason to live and be happy. What's wrong with this country? Why do we fritter so much money on expensive political gimmicks, yet deny long-term support to organisations with a proven record of improving the quality of life in the most needy parts of Britain? Everyone involved in music education at present has the same story, even if some are too frightened of offending their political masters to speak openly: excellent work is being jeopardised by the piecemeal, whimsical nature of state support.

Didn't the Music Manifesto promise to "build pathways for progression in music"? So far, it has delivered only wrong turnings and dead ends.

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