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Richard Stilgoe was one of the lucky ones, he says. As a child he got music early on. "It opens up so many opportunities in your life. It's been very exciting, every now and then somebody claps - and for young people particularly the need to be clapped and approved of as opposed to being told to shut up all the time is really really necessary."

So that's what he has been doing, giving kids the chance to hear that applause. For 20 years he's been doing it as the presenter of the annual School Proms at the Royal Albert Hall, and there have been his own family concerts at the Royal Festival Hall. Ten years ago he founded the Orpheus Centre, giving young disabled people the chance find fulfillment through music.

Now, as the new chairman of Youth Music, he is spreading the word even wider.

Stilgoe's own career, of course, has been as a performer and writer, with the lyrics of *Cats*, *Starlight Express* and *The Phantom of the Opera* to his credit. He gave away his royalties on *Starlight Express* to a village in India,

and for some time it has been earning that community £500 a day.

He was a choirboy at home in Liverpool, having piano lessons from the age of seven, but though he had a teacher that saw his talent, it wasn't plain sailing for him. One day he took in the overture of the musical *Oklahoma* and asked to be allowed to play it.

"He said 'No, it's rubbish'. What a dangerous thing to say to an 11-year-old! - 'I've got a pupil here who really likes music and has got something he really wants to play, so I'm going to try and put him off'. It wouldn't happen today, the ecology has changed, thank God."

His great good fortune was to be a teenager at the time of skiffle - he had a band, Tony Snow and the Blizzards, which played Liverpool's Cavern Club twice, "because they didn't believe we could be that bad a second time, and we were". It was an easy music to learn, three chords, and when young people have got the hang of three they want to be able to do four and drive, so a generation of decent guitar players was born, in spite of woeful school music provision then.

He gives credit to the present gov-

The importance
making a



ernment for raising the level of music teaching in schools, even though there are still local authorities not funding it as they should.

As a new TV celebrity he was asked to open many things, including special schools, where there was a plangent absence of music. He became involved with Dr Michael Swallow's Share Music project to allow disabled people access to music performance, and in 1998 developed the idea by setting up Orpheus, a residential centre in Surrey which now has 24 disabled residents who get the chance to learn performance and independence over a three year stay. They have performed at the Glastonbury Festival, the Notting Hill Carnival, the Royal Opera House and even for the Queen at Windsor Castle on her 80th birthday.

Stilgoe's guru has been Richard McNicol, the animateur at London Symphony Orchestra's St Luke's Education Centre, and who has been a tutor at Orpheus centre. "There's a whole generation of music teachers now who aren't music teachers, they're music leaders who draw children along into doing music with them, and it's a much more democratic system in >>

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nice noise

>> which you ask the children what music they want to do for a start" Stilgoe says. "We call them music makers instead of amateurs, because it's in English."

And that is Youth Music's task, to draw young people into music, and through music into a more confident, more sociable, life.

"Our first job is still to give people their first experience of music" he explains. "Our second job is to give them second experience, which may provide but we need to tell them where to go.

"So I think need better links with music services and music teaching in its traditional form so that we can pass people on."

Our young musicians, as exemplified in the Schools Proms have always been world leaders. "Whenever they have a European youth orchestra they have to have a quota to stop it being entirely British.

"But the top of pyramid has always been fine, what we're interested in is how wide the base of the pyramid is. In a way, the Schools Prom can be quite dangerous because a minister can come along and see that everything's fine, because there will always be the peaks on display. It's not what's happening on the top of the Empire State Building that matters, though, it's



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what's happening down in the street."

He pays fulsome tributes to his predecessor, Gavin Henderson, but as the new chairman he wants to see Youth Music having a higher profile, standing alongside the young people as they perform rather than standing in the wings. "Most of them won't become full time performers, of course, but it will make them a real-

ly good audience for whatever music they choose to listen to" Stilgoe says, "and it's just as important to train consumers as it is to train performers - perhaps we train too many performers and then disappoint them."

But Youth Music's mission is about what he calls "OOSH music" - out of school hours - and he has been on the board of trustees since it was set up in 1999.

"It's a difficult time when kids leave primary school and suddenly exam pressure gets going, and lot of them give up music just at the time when socially they need that feeling of doing things with people" he says.

Some, aged 15 or 16, who have even disengage from school altogether. "Music can get them back in, and we have examples of that - of youngsters who have been excluded from school and decided never to go to school again, who have come into one of our music workshops in one of our actions zones, done some stuff with us and asked to do more, and we tell them 'Back at school is where you do more of it'.

"It's very thrilling, because we only set out to make a nice noise but if you change a life while you're making a nice noise, it's really something." ●

Curriculum vitae

1943	Born, Camberley, Surrey, March 28
1954-61	Liverpool College; Monkton Combe School, Somerset
1961-64	Clare College, Cambridge, choral scholar; member of Footlights Revue
1964	Marries Elizabeth Gross (dissolved), two children
1960s-70s	Appearances on BBC current affairs programme Nationwide, then on That's Life
1975	Marries Annabel Hunt (dissolved), three children
1970s-80s	Tours one man show
1981	Libretto for <i>Cats</i>
1984	Libretto for <i>Starlight Express</i>
1984-2002	Two man show with Peter Skellern
1985	Libretto for <i>Phantom of the Opera</i>
1987	Presents Schools Prom for the first time
1988	Joins Michael Swallow in Share Music project
1998	Opens Orpheus Centre
1999	Trustee of Youth Music
2007	Chairman, Youth Music