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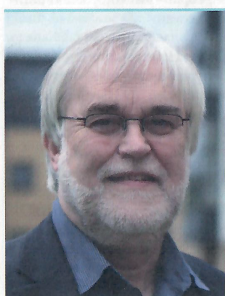
- ✓ Professor of Music, Adam Ockelford shares an insight into his latest book, *Comparing Notes: How We Make Sense of Music*
- ✓ One academic year on since the start of our choral programme with seven Creative Education Trust secondary academies, we hear from singing ambassadors Ella Bishop and Scott Ribbons
- ✓ Christopher Hopton reflects on five years as Chairman of Voices Foundation
- ✓ Kim Duff (Head Teacher of Kings Heath Primary Academy) and Simon Toyne (David Ross Education Trust Director of Music) talk about the first year of Voices Foundation's Singing School programme at Kings Heath Primary Academy

INSIDE VOICES

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MUSICAL BY DESIGN



ADAM OCKELFORD

Adam Ockelford is Professor of Music and Director of the Applied Music Research Centre at the University of Roehampton in London. His latest book, *Comparing Notes: How We Make Sense of Music*, which explains how music works, and tackles a range of key issues in music education, was published by Profile Books in June, 2017.

Despite the publicity surrounding talent shows and the often ephemeral celebrities they spawn, human beings don't fall neatly into two groups: a tiny elite of 'musicians' and 'everybody else' i.e. the 'non-musicians'. If this division really did exist, then the aspiring stars would have no one who was capable of appreciating their performances. In fact, almost everyone has the ability to grasp the meaning of music at an intuitive level – and in this sense, everyone is a musician.

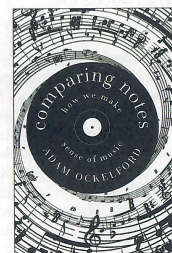
This assertion begs a number of questions. For example, when does musicality emerge in children's development? Is it when, aged one and a half, toddler Tom can't resist clapping along to the theme tune of his favourite television programme? Or when Avni, aged 3 years, can sing *Twinkle, Twinkle* more-or-less in tune from beginning to end? Questions like these miss a crucial element of what it is to be 'musical' though. For while an important component of musicality is the ability to reproduce patterns in sound, that is far from being the whole story. To understand why, consider what being competent in using language means, and how it is acquired.

Long before children can speak, they learn to process much of the language that is directed at them. This imbalance is never eradicated: as adults, our receptive vocabulary (words that we can recognise) is far more extensive than our expressive lexicon. Music offers a more extreme case of the same phenomenon. We can all recognise many musical works: hundreds if not thousands of songs and instrumental pieces, ranging from advertising jingles to pop songs, from national anthems to soccer chants. So we each have large repositories of musical information in our brains.

But what about expressing ourselves musically? When we are alone (in the bath) and in some public situations (such as karaoke nights – usually fortified by alcohol), we can access our database of melodies, acquired just by listening, and metamorphose into performers. However, such situations are the exception. In the West, the division of roles into those who produce and those who consume music means that most of us tend to be chronically inhibited from performing for other people: the 'curse of The X-Factor' as I call it, which publicly reinforces the prejudice that there are a tiny minority of us who are musical.

This is merely a social construct, however, that has no place in communities where music is more generally participatory and is often built into the rituals of daily life. Examples range from the Scottish 'iorram' or rowing songs of the Isle of Mull to the rhythms that Northern Ewe children in Eastern Ghana create as they pound dried cassava in mortars. It is not the case that the oarsmen of Mull or the Ghanaian girls are innately more musical than typical urban Westerners; it's just that the former feel comfortable expressing themselves through music in the presence of others. There is no evidence either that Western audiences enjoy music any less than the performers to whom they are listening. What, then, is the difference between performing musicians and others?

The short answer is the thousands of hours of practice that performers have spent in developing their technical proficiency. Inevitably there are neurological and physical changes that occur as part of this daunting journey to accomplishment. But if performing musicians 'turn off' the intellectual strand in their response to music – the part of their



Adam's latest book, *Comparing Notes: How We Make Sense of Music*. Published by Profile Books (Hardback: £20, E-Book £12.99)

brain that consciously attends to what they are hearing – it seems that their intuitive reactions to music are the same as everyone else's. A Western classical musician may happily lose herself dancing to pop music, for example. Conversely, we can enjoy a great performance of classical music without necessarily being able to emulate it ourselves.

The amazing thing is that, on the whole, this intuitive understanding of music is already in place by the time children begin their formal education at the age of four or five, provided that they have been offered plenty of rich, interactive musical experiences. And, invariably at the heart of those experiences will be singing. That is why in an era when music in the early years is almost entirely overlooked by the UK Government in terms of national educational priorities, organisations such as The Voices Foundation are so important. With their input, young children have the capacity to acquire all the elements of musicality that they need to understand, enjoy and participate in music-making for the rest of their lives.