



**Culture 2000**

## **Holly Marland – Royal Northern College of Music**

### **Training musicians for work in healthcare settings**

At the end of the first phase of the European Exchange Programme, conservatoires are faced with a number of challenging questions;

- What is the role of live music in an a multi-cultural, neo-technological age?
- Where is the audience for live classical music?
- What are we preparing our musicians for?

Conservatoires seem to realise that they are sometimes perceived as hothouses for the production of a classically trained elite. They seem to realise that the training they offer doesn't always lay a gilded path to the concert hall and that their graduates can struggle to earn a living or indeed to find fulfilment through performance on the concert platform.

Conservatoires seem to realise that the audience for live music could be dwindling. They seem to realise that in order to make live music relevant to everyone, they need to respond to people's needs and to embrace cultural diversity. In the UK over the last few years, programmes of musical outreach have been set up to meet new audiences beyond the concert platform. Orchestras play in supermarkets, Opera Companies surprise commuters at railway stations, String Quartets work in prisons to reach out and educate new audiences.

Acknowledging the importance of music in education and the community, the UK government has pledged to give every child access to instrumental lessons and musical activities both in and out of the classroom. Associated funding has given rise to a number of excellent outreach pilots across the UK.<sup>1</sup>

Growing out of this is an acknowledgement that live music has a place beyond performance skills and education. There is more to music than the transfer of knowledge from teacher to pupil and from musician to audience. There is something magical about music that people

---

<sup>1</sup> Competitive funding structures did lead to an initial lack of joined up thinking between practitioners and a lack of consistency in the evaluative methods used to underpin practical activity. It could be vital to learn from these mistakes as we take Music for Health work forward in the UK.

down the ages have struggled to quantify. Music affects the way we feel - mentally, physically and spiritually.

Centuries ago, music was regarded by philosophers as indispensable to the health of the soul. Today, a variety of UK organisations including *Nordoff – Robbins Music Therapy*, *Live Music Now!* and *Music in Hospitals* are providing practical opportunities for musicians to engage in healthcare settings and to bring joy to people's lives through live music. Music's role as a healing agent is also being increasingly tried and tested in both music and medical research<sup>2</sup>.

The European Exchange Programme has given musicians and medics an opportunity to explore music's capacity to humanise the hospital environment and to transform the experience of patients, staff and visitors. The programme's intentions have been very distinct from education outreach and performance as entertainment. The selected professionals from the UK were highly adept at both, yet had to embrace new training methods, new approaches in musical communication and new philosophies, whilst still maintaining their identity as performers.

Working closely with patients, visitors and staff in hospitals, the musicians needed to find new ways of

- opening themselves up to every aspect of the context in which they play
- balancing their own musical personality with the needs of the person for whom and with whom they play
- understanding and responding to the constantly changing climate of hospital environments
- understanding the contexts in which music is welcome or unwelcome
- treating older and younger patients with equality
- respecting people's personal space whilst finding a "touching place" to meet people through music
- understanding body language and developing a heightened sense of spatial awareness
- rethinking the physicality boundaries of their instruments
- understanding the physical signification of rhythmic, harmonic and melodic narrative
- understanding when to explore a patient's musical memory and when to improvise new material
- stripping music back to its basics and re-learning how to play with music, especially through the use of the voice
- working with the person and not the illness

Much of the above requires a deconstruction of what is traditionally perceived to be the status quo within conservatoire training. Work in hospitals demands an empathetic, spontaneous approach to music making which the traditional performer/audience relationship within classical music can sometimes preclude.

---

<sup>2</sup> Including research by Sydney de Haan Centre, Peninsula Medical School, Edinburgh Institute for Music in Human and Social Development, Royal College of Music, Stockholm (supported by European Parliament).

The musicians on the exchange programme have drawn together a new set of possibilities for their music making, developing an ability to express themselves musically beyond their instrument. It could be argued that use of the voice and body language are as important in this work as the ability to play excellently on one's instrument. For classically trained musicians, there is a real need to find an appropriate balance between the pursuit of excellence in performance and the intention to form a relevant connection with people.

The European Seminar calls for the development of practice and research to cement the relationship between the worlds of music and medicine. The Programme itself has flagged up the need for informed project leadership and comprehensive training pathways for both musicians and medics. There is a need to translate the perceived power of music into hard evidence, to engage in meaningful dialogue with other arts and health practitioners and to work in an integrated way in order to build a lasting relationship with the health sector. For conservatoires, the challenge lies in providing sustained opportunities for practical engagement underpinned by research at the highest level.

For the RNCM, it has been a real privilege to have been so closely involved in the work of the European Programme. We have been able to host open seminars during each of the two UK residencies, profiling the musicians' work and opening up debate around practical and ethical issues. These seminars were attended by over 70 students, staff and graduates of the College as well as members of the ever – expanding network of contacts around the residencies.<sup>3</sup>

We also created 5 placements for RNCM students and graduates to shadow the preparation and de-briefing sessions during each of the UK residencies. This gave them the opportunity to network and exchange ideas as well as giving them a valuable insight into music's place in the hospital environment.

As the only UK Conservatoire to have been awarded status as a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, the RNCM has a duty to share good practice and to transfer knowledge to the wider arts community. Prior to the residency programme, RNCM students and graduates had the opportunity to perform in a variety of healthcare contexts through collaborations with LIME and Live Music Now! The European Programme has shown new methods of working beyond interactive performance and has demonstrated the need to develop specialist training pathways for musicians centred on programmes of practical activity.

The RNCM is keen to support the UK professional musicians as they continue their learning journey and to give student musicians the opportunity to get out there and put new ideas into practice.

Working together on the European Exchange Programme, RNCM and *Arts for Health* have been acting as pioneers for future music for health activity in the UK through ongoing

---

<sup>3</sup> Including representatives from Local Government (Blackburn), LIME, MIRIAD, Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy, LMN!

dialogue with a number of key organisations.<sup>4</sup> Collaborative advocacy has resulted in an increase in requests for project activity and the RNCM has already been approached by a number of regional healthcare settings to look at developing sustained project work. RNCM and Arts for Health are now in the process of identifying resources to support the continuation and development of this work within a framework of informed project management, specialist leadership and research.

For student musicians at the RNCM, music for health work could potentially become an accredited part of their course, mentored by experienced professionals. For professional musicians, there is a real need to secure appropriate funding to pay them for the time they spend preparing for project work, delivering the work and de-briefing afterwards. It is vital that their work is valued and properly remunerated. For researchers, it is essential that they can set up well defined comparative studies and that they have the full support of musicians and medics in carrying out their work.

Developments in practice and research in this area could do much to address the questions posed at the start;

- If we can prove that live music promotes well being and can be used as a preventative and curative treatment, then live music has a fundamental role to play in a multi-cultural, neo-technological age.
- If we can prove that live classical music can have positive effects on the body and the brain, then the audience for live classical music is potentially boundless.
- If Music for Health opportunities continue to grow and we can help musicians to re-evaluate the currency of their art, then we could be preparing our musicians for more than “Music for Music’s Sake” – we could be preparing them for Music for Health’s sake.

---

<sup>4</sup> Including *LIME*, *Arts Council NW*, *Manchester Culture and Health Strategy Team*, *Musique et Santé (Paris)*, *Waterford Healing Arts Trust (Ireland)*, *Live Music Now!*, *Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy*<sup>4</sup>, *Music in Hospitals*, *Music Mind Spirit*, *Education departments at Hallé, RLPO, BBC Phil, Camerata, Artis, AdLib, Royal Schools for the Deaf, Music Unlimited, Melody.*