

Ms Kerryn Riseley, Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House
East Melbourne
By email: etc@parliament.vic.gov.au
February 15, 2013

Dear Ms Riseley,

RE: An Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools

I want to thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this committee investigating Music Education in the Victorian education system.

I have been the music director for the Victorian Youth Symphony Orchestra since the beginning of 2012, along with being music director with the Monash University Choral Society and the Ipswich City Orchestra in Queensland.

The bulk of my experience in regards to music education was in the Queensland Education system in the years after graduating from my Bachelors degree in Brisbane (2005 – 2009). Whilst my experience and knowledge is limited in direct regards to the practices and structures in the Victorian Education system, I would still like to offer these observations for your consideration.

Benefits of music education

The term "well balanced" is a catch phrase that seems to be constantly thrust upon many facets of our lives. We are being constantly reminded that a well balanced diet is essential to increasing longevity and life quality along with avoiding countless number of diseases and ailments. Likewise a well balanced lifestyle should see us dividing our time evenly between work, recreation and family. It is also my belief that an education should be well balanced between the physical, mental and creative. It is without question that the pillars of reading, writing and arithmetic should be staples of any education; however what is the point of being able to read and write without the creative spark and imagination to have something to read or write about?

Across so many industries in today's society, employers are looking for their employees to constantly think "outside of the box", to be creative and to provide different insights into new ways to solve problems, to help companies move forward, to reach new markets and to think "creatively". The idea of creativity being this divine gift that has been bestowed upon a select few or a split second when all the stars align to form that "light bulb" moment" is a common misconception. Creativity comes from the development of creative thinking habits and the freedom of imagination along with self confidence to express these ideas. This is knowledge and skill that can be developed, just as in maths, science and sport.

There has been significant research into the fields of creativity and whether it can be a learned skill in recent years (not to mention the enormous number of self-help "unlock your creativity" books and programs). Tina Seelig, the executive director of the Stanford Technology Ventures Program, which is the entrepreneurship centre at Stanford University School of Engineering, states:

"The biggest myth about creativity is that it isn't important and that it can't be learned. In fact, it is one of the most important skills we can master. With enhanced creativity, instead of problems

we see potential, instead of obstacles we see opportunities, and instead of challenges we see a chance to create solutions. Creativity is critically important in everything we do, including designing products, growing businesses, and building alliances between nations. We are literally inventing the future every moment. And these skills can be learned."¹

Sir Ken Robinson states that:

Creativity is now as important as literacy and we should treat it with the same status.... We have to go from what is essentially an industrial model of education, a manufacturing model, which is based on linearity and conformity and batching people. We have to move to a model that is based more on principles of agriculture. We have to recognize that human flourishing is not a mechanical process; it's an organic process and you cannot predict the outcome of human development. All you can do, like a farmer, is create the conditions under which they will begin to flourish.²

It is through a music education that we can create the conditions where creativity can be nurtured and grow.

Student and teachers already have a vast amount of subjects to cover in their education curriculum. It would then seem wise and efficient to use subjects that could target and develop multiple skills sets at the same time to help the student grow efficiently. An active participation in the creation and performance of music helps with the growth of a number of different facets in a child's education. Aside from offering children an avenue for creative and expressive output, a person fully engaged in the act of music making is simultaneously using and developing an array of different skills. In the draft Australian Curriculum for the Arts it named the following skills that a person fully engaged in music-making is simultaneously using:

- Emotional skills
- Creative skills
- Listening skills
- Expressive/communicative skills
- Cognitive/analytical skills
- Emotional skills
- Right and Left Brain capacities
- Skills involving an understanding of cultural context and history
- Kinesthetic, fine motor skills and coordination
- Social skills in collaborating with other players, communicating with audiences³

With all these skills being used, this is not just an example of creative education but efficient education. As a subject in itself there is not another example where this many skills are being simultaneously engaged.

To quote from the above mentioned draft curriculum:

¹ Taken from an interview for Business News Daily: <http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/2471-creativity-innovation-learned.html>

² Taken from a TED Talk given by Sir Ken Robinson, 'Do Schools Kill creativity?', delivered in February 2006. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG9CE55wbtY>

³ These skills were named in the draft curriculum for the arts. http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/DRAFT_Australian_Curriculum_The_Arts_Foundation_to_Year_10_July_2012.pdf

Music is exploring, performing, creating, listening and responding to sound and silence. In music, students engage with music from diverse cultures and places. Through this practice they construct and communicate ideas, meanings and values about their personal, social and cultural worlds. Like all art forms music has the capacity to engage, inspire and enrich all students, exciting the imagination and encouraging students to reach their creative and expressive potential.

Music enables students to listen with intent, which underpins all music activities. Students individually and collaboratively engage with the elements and concepts of music, through composing, performing and responding to create, communicate and evaluate music ideas. Students learn the language, skills, techniques and knowledge of music in increasing depth and complexity with ongoing and disciplined practice. Students work with the elements and materials of music to develop musicianship, critical thinking and aesthetic understanding. Students' active participation in music fosters learning for life-long well-being, developing understanding of other times, places, cultures and contexts.⁴

A meaningful involvement with music education offers so many wonderful opportunities for young students to develop creative thinking patterns whilst also gaining in confidence to express their ideas and thoughts whilst also working with other members of their class. Learning to listen with extent not only underpins musical activities but underpins other learning activities such as languages, literacy comprehension and information retention.

There have been a number of examples of where music education and activity has been used and implemented to effect social change in very difficult conditions. One leading example is the El Sistema program in Venezuela. **El Sistema** is a publicly financed voluntary sector music education program in Venezuela, founded in 1975 by economist and musician José Antonio Abreu under the name of **Social Action for Music**. This government funded program in Venezuela currently has over 300,000 students involved across 125 youth orchestras with over 70% of the students coming from poor socio-economic backgrounds.

It was Abreu's vision that:

"Music has to be recognized as an agent of social development, in the highest sense because it transmits the highest values - solidarity, harmony, mutual compassion. And it has the ability to unite an entire community, and to express sublime feelings"⁵

The program is known for protecting and working with children to prevent them from being drawn into lives of crime and drug abuse. The program has now spread across Venezuela and they have begun implementing the program into all primary schools across the country. Likewise there have been other programs internationally that have been modeled on this program in Great Britain, Scotland, Portugal and the United States. They have also started to experiment with similar programs in Venezuela's prison system to help reform the prisoners as documented in an article in translation from *El Nacional*.⁶

A second example was highlighted in the 2007 documentary film directed by Michael Davie "The Choir". Shot over four years it follows the stories of a selection of inmates in South Africa's largest prison, the Leeukwop Prison. The inmates are recruited into the prison choir and through the brotherhood of the choristers along with their leader's guidance they are able to learn skills to help them survive prison life along with preparing for life for when they are released. Through this choir, the inmates have to learn to

⁴ibid

⁵ Tricia Tunstall: Changing Lives: Gustavo Dudamel, El Sistema, and the Transformative Power of Music, 2012 p.273

⁶ José Bergher (trans.), "El Sistema in penitentiaries", *The Power of Music* - tipom.wordpress.com, 2008.

<http://tipom.wordpress.com/>

dedicate time to rehearsals whilst also reforming their violent ways. They learn about making a commitment to the choir and fulfilling this commitment. It is also very moving in this documentary to see the group develop and the individual chorister's personal feelings at the joy of getting to perform music. It is programs like these that has served as inspiration for a number of prisons across the world to start implementing art and music based programs to help rehabilitate prisons.

From my own personal experiences, I have been involved with a number of youth music organizations on a senior level including the Victorian and Queensland Youth Symphony Orchestras. It is always significant to see in these ensembles the diverse range of students who form the orchestra and how the groups don't solely consist of students looking to have a professional music career.

In the Victorian Youth Symphony Orchestra, 95% of the members are aged between 18 and 30. They also represent a diverse range of areas of study and professions including medicine, engineering, accounting, law, physiotherapy, along with members of the public service and staff from major universities. In fact there is only a small minority of members who are seeking a professional music career. Most attribute their continued membership to positive experiences they received through a continued education in music throughout their primary and high school years. It is from this education that these members now look to community music making to help enrich their lives creatively but also to make meaningful contributions to society and art in general. Many of the members of the VYSO also play for a number of other community based ensembles which along with the VYSO are involved in helping to nurture and promote young professional musicians and composers along with raising money and performing for various charity based activities.

A developed school music program can also be a great source of pride and promotion for the school community itself. Having a thriving music program can be used become involved in presenting school events such as musicals, dance shows, music exhibitions. It can also be used for school ceremonies and open days to promote the School itself or to promote school fervor at sporting events and rouse team onwards.

The Delivery of Music education

Like any important facet of education, to achieve maximum results for the student, the experience must be meaningful and sustained. In teaching children reading, writing and arithmetic, we start at the elementary stages and slowly and incrementally develop their skills and abilities in these areas. I believe that by adding a sustained and meaningful music course along with these skills would also help to develop a child's creative abilities whilst also reinforcing the other skill sets they are already learning.

Recent research by Ian Harvey has found that 63% of Australian Primary Schools offer no classroom music. If we take into consideration that nearly all of state primary schools in Tasmania and Queensland employ music specialist teachers, then the reality is the percentage of schools across of Australia is considerably higher than this 63%.⁷

If the government were to only address one point out of this enquiry then I believe this to be the most important point. If the government wishes to implement a music program throughout the education system then the delivery of this program would be crucial to its chance of success.

For any education program to have truly long lasting results then the student must have a meaningful experience across a sustained period. Likewise the experience had by the student will determine their

⁷ Ian Harvey: *Percentage of Students Receiving a Sequential, Continuous, Developmental Music Education in School*. Music Council of Australia.

<http://www.mca.org.au/images/pdf/MCAresearch/mcaRESEARCH%20competent%20music%20ed.pdf>

attitudes to subject. If they are exposed to an enjoyable and engaging experience in regards to music at an early stage of their schooling life then they are likely to continue to have an appreciation for music throughout their life.

It is my belief that music should be taught by trained specialists in all primary schools across all schools in Victoria similar to the system implemented in Queensland and Tasmania. The reason for trained specialists is twofold: Firstly, current primary school teachers already have a large enough workload as it is without having to take on extra training. Secondly implementing a system using music specialist would help to capitalize on the large number of musically trained people graduating from undergraduate degrees around Australia.

To be a proficient musician takes considerable years of dedicated study, especially when it comes to being proficient to play a musical instrument. In the current system for training primary teachers there isn't the time to sufficiently train a teacher to be musically proficient along with the rest of their studies. The national average of music education in an undergraduate teaching degree is 17 hours.⁸ Considering a student seeking a professional career in music would dedicate at least this much training in a week, 17 hours hardly seems enough for a teacher to offer a meaningful curriculum.

If the government were to introduce a program of specialist music teachers across all primary schools then it would help grow another avenue of employment for the number of university students graduating from Music degrees who already have limited opportunities for employment.

A career path for a professional musician is difficult just from the sheer lack of opportunities to perform. At the end of 2010 there were 5,175 students registered in full time study for music, with the majority majoring in performance. In the 2006 census around 7,800 people reported primary musician occupations such as instrumental musicians, singers, composers or music directors. Relative to the 12,500 thought to be currently practicing professionally, or the 60,000 of those registered with APRA | AMCOS, it is clear that considerable numbers of musicians are not working in musical occupations as their main job.⁹

Already a large number of those who don't follow performance careers have a teaching career but there are still a large number who, dismayed by the now limited number of teaching positions and relatively low income prospects, will look to other careers. Creating more opportunities for employment would take advantage of the number of highly trained people with music degrees and help to develop the education for our future generations. Furthermore, having highly trained musician's helps to guarantee a more meaningful connection with music education.

Finally in regards to the presentation of a program, along with student involvement, getting to see live performance is crucial. Music is a "living" art. Whilst we have been blessed to have the recording industry that is able to capture and records performances of many great artists, they are really only capturing one moment in time. Music is best experienced not through a recorded medium but through a live performance. Australia has a number of very proficient professional music ensembles across a diverse range of genres and mediums. I believe it is vital for all students to experience live music of different genres and likewise for our professional music companies to have government support to help present them. Done at an early age and with a meaningful experience, this will help to generate support for the Arts in Australia for future generations.

⁸ Dr Rachel Hocking: *National Audit of Music Discipline and Music Education Mandatory Content within Pre-Service Generalist Primary Teachers: a report.* Music Council of Australia, Music Education Advisory Group, for the Australian Govt Dept of Education, Employment and Training. 2009

⁹ Statistics taken from the Australian Government's Artfacts website:
<http://artfacts.australiacouncil.gov.au/creation>

Conclusion

If the point of this enquiry is to discover if the government can do things better or can dedicate more resources to music education in Victoria then the simple answer is yes. Music education is not just about how we can train musicians better but how we can contribute to give a more full and well balanced education to all students. An education which not only helps to cement the pillars of reading, writing and arithmetic but helps to celebrate the importance of creativity and help it to grow.

In an idea adapted from Sir Ken Robinson's TED talk on creativity, the students finishing school today won't retire from the workforce until 2073 and it is our job as educators to help prepare and train them for this future.¹⁰

In education we should not sit around waiting for someone to have that light bulb moment. Remember that all lights generally come with a switch and that it is up to us to flick the switch on. A meaningful music education can lay the framework for us to learn how.

Yours Sincerely,

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Victorian Youth Symphony Orchestra

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¹⁰Adapted from Sir Ken Robinson's Ted Talk "Are Schools Killing Creativity"