

Passion meets the muses at the three flying fish cafe

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When we think of the elements of music, we tend to list its components, such as rhythm, melody, tone colour and so on. But let's look at music another way. Let's start at the very beginning as Julie Andrews would sing!

What is music? Why is there music? Why does it exist? It's a bit like the God question and the 'has there ever been life on Mars?' question.

Just as life forms need light, air and water in order to survive, so too, sound needs air. It is its life source. There is no sound in space. Indeed just as we need to breathe oxygen more than other gases, so the whole structure of sound would be altered if, for example the major gas around the earth were helium. So sound is only as it is because of the unique physical properties of planet earth. More on these unique physical properties later.

There's a relatively new definition of music around which has opened up musical vistas to incorporate the use of sound in any way conceivable. It goes like this. *Music is organised sound.* But there's a problem with this definition. Language is organised sound. Muzak is organised sound. A telephone ring is organised sound. The beep of a life-support system is organised sound and if the machine happens to be attached to someone you love, it's the worst 'music' you're ever likely to hear — unless of course it stops! Where's the passion in these organised sounds? What? Yeah! Passion. (see Appendix 1)

Here are some other components which could help us realise the concept we know as 'music'.

- passion
- imagination
- free mind
- the Muses
- harmony

What do these words mean to you? Write down your responses inside your fish place mats and when you have finished, make an origami fish following the directions next to you. Use your table

companions as helpers. These tasks shall be accompanied by a fragment of music. It is the Adagio from Joaquin Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez*.

All these words belong to *all* the arts. In the appendix you will find definitions and explanations of these terms. They are all components of the music experience and one of them lies at the very core of the 'what is' and 'why' music questions.

This word is *not* passion, but it's a great word so let's have a look at it first. Passion is a quality not found in all music, but it is found in all the best music. The production of music over the centuries has at times been dictated by need; the needs of kings, of churches, of recording companies, advertising agencies and others. The produce of these commissions is not always filled with passion and commitment by the composer. And this does not matter. What does matter is that students are aware of the functions of music and the different purposes of music. The need to make money, the need for some composers to write just in order to feed a family, gives the music a context. And the way that music is used, perhaps to inspire football club allegiance or to get you consuming more muesli bars is also a context.

The Rodrigo piece has a context too. It is filled with passion and there's a reason for the passion. Rodrigo was blind, so he relied enormously on the help of his wife to just get from one day to the next. Their first child was miscarried and Rodrigo's wife spent two months in hospital recuperating from this ordeal. Rodrigo was to a large degree left to his own grieving and his own living devices. That is when the Adagio for this concerto was written. It is regarded as his best work. It is definitely his most popular.

The CSF has incorporated 'Past and present context' as a major area of learning in music because it is important that students hear and

perform music written just for them, such as the wondrous music of Franciscus Henri and the great selections of the ABC song books. It is also important that they hear and respond to intensely personal music, and to functional music. What is most important is that they become increasingly aware of the differences of purpose and of function! Music which is chosen because of its relevance to students at a particular time takes on another context and another function. This too, is important.

Listen to the Concerto again. What about this music makes it sound passionate? What makes it sound Spanish? What does the music do for the composer and the listener that words, pictures or movements could not? What is unique about the music experience?

Let's put some of these words into practice to create some passion. This will be a tricky task, because your instruments consist solely of paper and plastic products. So, here's the plot, the context.

You have spent five years establishing a successful music program in a small country school. You have run imaginative and relevant classes within the school and in your own time have established a choir and an ensemble group. You have also put on a couple of productions to raise funds to purchase instruments for the program. On December the 16th, the Principal announces at the last assembly of the year that the school is to merge with one 20kms away. This effectively means that your school is to close and the other school is to swipe all the resources and your students. As there is a music teacher at the other school, you will be placed in charge of the PE program.

Your composition starts with you hearing this news and expresses your ultimate reaction. Think:

- passion
- the blending and balance of tone colours

- contrasts in dynamics
- the use of changes in tempo
- whether you need a rhythmic structure for any of the piece
- the form of the piece
- whether you need to work with changes in pitch and how you will achieve this.

First, plot your reactions to the situation, that is, develop a story board. This may be pictorial, or you may just have frames with words or feelings or expressions or both. Then develop a musical response, so that development works in tandem with the story board you have created.

Here's another piece of music which works across several art forms. It too is passionate, imaginative and uses plenty of free mindedness. How does it work? What words would you use to describe what is happening in this piece? What makes it passionate? (The piece is from the video, *Tap Dogs*. It is a piece where the interaction between the visuals, the set, the dance and the music all work together to create passion.) And by the way, why is it that men have to look hot and sweaty and exhausted when they dance, where women have to look like angels who have not exerted themselves at all?

The music that you created before using paper and plastic did not contain any tones. Tones are notes with a definite pitch. Whenever a note is played or sung which has a specific tone, we hear a fixed series of notes above it called the natural harmonic series (Unless it is a pure tone. Tuning forks and recorders produce a tone where it is often hard to hear harmonics. It approaches purity. A bell has very distinctive harmonics to the point where it can be hard to know which is the fundamental note.) The natural harmonic series is a natural physical property, a bit like the colour spectrum.

One of the muses, Urania, was called the Muse of Heavenly Harmony, long before any kind of

sophisticated musical harmony ever existed. But there were basic chords produced on instruments such as the lyre, also abundant in Greek mythology, but actually developed in Sumeria, long before the Greek classical age. It is interesting to note that the development of harmony, from sustained octaves, to drones using an octave and a fifth to triads which add the third note, mirror the partials of the natural harmonic system. It's almost as though the potential has always existed, but it just took humans a while to cotton on to it. A bit like electricity. Even Pythagoras knew this. He knew when he divided a string into several sections and saw the mathematical relationships of octaves and fifths and so on, that humans had been working with these intervals in their music for centuries. So that, as Ian Johnson explains:

What the Pythagoreans found so wonderful was that their elegant, abstract train of thought should have produced something that people everywhere already knew to be aesthetically pleasing. They had discovered a connection between arithmetic and aesthetics, between the natural world and the human soul. 1

And this is really interesting stuff, because it would seem that tones and the natural harmonic series are the sole province of music, which begs the question, 'why are they there?' Is music something we need? What need does it fulfil that nothing else fulfils?

The definition of music *used* to be to do with the production of tones. Though I am not in any way suggesting that we return to this definition and do away with the wonderful sounds at our disposal for all manner of music making, it is important not to lose sight of music's uniqueness, because it's really special stuff. The potential for the manipulation of tones and harmonies is awesome. Even dear old Schoenberg, father of the twelve tone row, who steered music away from tonality, eased his opinions as he grew older. His dying words were '*harmony, harmony*'.²

Here's some more music with a context. What is the purpose of this music as an accompaniment to the animation? What is its function within the script? (*In the Bag*. From the video 'Donald and Company'. It is a jazz piece which makes one want to get up and dance. It is used in the animation to encourage some bears to pick up the rubbish in a park. It is a work song.)

So let's make some functional music, that is create music to illustrate given stimuli, rather than personal output music. This time we shall use contrasting photos as the stimulus. (See Appendix III for photos and specific composition criteria.) Compositions are then performed.

What's the gist of all this? What have we explored?

1. Music is a unique form of expression and communication, often the most appropriate and most powerful form of expression and communication available to us.
2. Music fulfils human needs not just human wants.
3. Music is functional as well as personal.
4. We can make music from absolutely anything which is capable of producing sound.
5. Passion, imagination and free mind, or free thinking are as much essential components of music making as melody, rhythm and form.
6. The CSF directs students of all ages to not only explore the natural elements of art forms such as colour, harmony and form and make use of these elements in their arts making (skill development), but just as importantly to see and understand the purpose, the context, inherent in the arts, so that their arts experiences are *relevant* experiences as well as *learning* experiences.

Appendix I

'No one can deny that the century has has been one of the most violent in human history, or that this violence has sometimes been reflected in its music. But everyone has to admit that this century has produced more variety, more choice for the listener than any in the past. One reason why twentieth century music has not always been well received is that most composers have refused to pamper their listeners. They have hoped for audiences who can listen attentively to their works and be open to new perspectives. In a century when music has so often been treated as palliative or a means of escape, such listeners have tended not to be numerous.' *from Leaving Home*, by Michael Hall.

Appendix II

passion — strong emotion; outburst of anger; sexual love; strong enthusiasm. (Oxford)

imagination — the faculty or action of producing mental images of what is not present or in one's experience. Creative mental ability. (Collins)

free mind (mind) — the part of a person responsible for thought, feeling and intention. (Collins) (free) at liberty, unrestricted, not confined (Oxford)

harmony — a state of peaceful agreement and cooperation. 2. Music. A pleasant combination of two or more notes sounded at the same time. 3. the way parts combine well together or into a whole. (Collins)

the Muses — (Greek mythology) the nine sister goddesses, each of whom was the protector of a different art or science. **Music** comes from the Greek, *mousike* in protection of the Muses.

Museum is also a Greek word which means 'home of the Muses'. (Collins and The Greek Myths).



Place photo #1

Photograph 1. Meerkat in waiting



Place photo #2

Photograph 2. Garden Setting

Appendix III



Place photo #3

Photograph 3. Ardent supporter



Place photo #4

Photograph 4. Moving Train

Appendix III

Photograph 1. Meerkat in waiting

Use the Dorian mode (from D to D) as the basis of a melody. Use some form of harmony (for example a drone using D and G and/or D and A). Develop a sense of space in the piece. Think about changes in tempo, dynamics, the use of silence, rhythm and a form and appropriate tone colours for the piece.

Discuss, rehearse, assess, refine, perform.

Photograph 2. Garden Setting

Use the penatonic mode to create a melody. Use the pentatonic mode to create a counter-melody. Think about changes in tempo, dynamics, the use of silence, rhythm and a form and appropriate tone colours for the piece. Discuss, rehearse, assess, refine, perform.

Photograph 3. Ardent supporter

Place an emphasis on rhythm, with at least some use of syncopation. Think about changes in tempo, dynamics, the use of silence and a form and appropriate tone colours for the piece. Discuss whether you want a melody or harmony.

Discuss, rehearse, assess, refine, perform.

Photograph 4. Moving Train

The piece should start slowly and speed up at some point. Think about changes in tempo, dynamics, the use of silence, rhythm and appropriate tone colours for the piece. Discuss whether you want a melody or harmony. Discuss, rehearse, assess, refine, perform.

Appendix IV

Assessment

This session has been for teachers, rather than a grab bag for students. So although we have not been working to a specific CSF level, we have been working with the CSF music sub strands. We have also been working across several KLAs and Arts strands. Write down those activities which you feel

were addressing particular sub strands and those links which have been made to other KLAs or Arts strands.

Resources

Books

- Johnston, Ian, *Measured Tones. The Interplay of Physics and Music* Institute of Physics Publishing, London 1994
- Hall, Michael, *Leaving Home* Faber and Faber, London 1996.
- Ainsley, Robert, (ed) *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Classical Music* Carlton Books London, 1995
- Origami from, *Unicef Creative Crafts*, Creativity For Kids, Cleveland, Ohio USA
- Krebs, W.A., (ed) *Collins Compact Dictionary*, HarperCollins, Sydney 1995
- Sykes, J.B. (ed) *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* Oxford Uni. Press, Oxford 1978
- Graves, Robert, *The Greek Myths* (Vols 1&2) Penguin, Middlesex 1984
- Liavas, Lambros, *Music in the Aegean* Ministry of Culture, Ministry of the Aegean, Athens 1987.
- Rigden, John S., *Physics and the Sound of Music* John Wiley and Sons, New York 1977
- Verma, S. (ed) *Curriculum & Standards Framework*, Board of Studies, Carlton, 1995
- Parnall, R. *The Arts Course Advice* (Unit 1, Level 3, Music and Media, by M. Stefanakis) Community Info. Service, DoE, Victoria 1996

Videos

- Perry, D., *Tap Dogs Back Row* and Sydney Theatre Co. Pro. Warner Vision 1996
- In the Bag*, from *Donald and Company* Walt Disney 04100

Recorded Music

- Rodrigo, J., *Concerto de Aranjuez, Adagio* from *The Swoon Collection* ABC Classics 446 631-2