

Music teaching is so different from other branches of education, and it is important to generate with greatest care the extremely powerful means of communication through music, and to equip young people with a lifelong source of satisfaction. Perhaps it would be wise to remember at this point that education nowadays is not entirely limited to the young - we have our evening classes and other similar adult teaching sessions. Whilst the approach may in these circumstances differ, the end product is the same.

Training and discipline are most certainly needed for the performer and composer, and it may be said that there is no specific need for preparation for the listener to music. The latter may be true, as humans instinctively respond to music and rhythm, as is seen in reaction to the heavy beat of pop music, the frequency of which is not very different from the human pulse - a step further from the unborn child's early percussion lessons from his mother's heartbeat.

I feel though, that, whilst people can and will respond to this and other sorts of music, some training is necessary to appreciate music at greater depth. Even an animal can respond to musical sounds and we deserve to respect the greater capacity of human emotional and thinking powers.

How often does one hear the remark, "I wish I had been given the chance to learn music as a child!", or "Would that I had persevered with my music lessons!". A parent speaking thus might give his children more encouragement and chance than perhaps he experienced. I think that no adult in our supposedly educationally-orientated world should need to make these remarks. Parents do not need to pay vast sums of money for the privilege of private instrumental lessons for their offspring. All children could benefit if music at all levels of education were not treated as a poor relation to other subjects. By all levels, I mean-even in the earliest years of life. Parents and playgroup leaders should be more aware of adding musical knowledge and skills, both visual and aural, to the upbringing of even the youngest children. They are encouraged in the fields of numeracy, writing and artistic skills, but all too often not in music.

Children learn by absorbing naturally what is surrounding them. Music can so successfully be used in games, colourful books and other suitable material. The aural side is even more important - most people can sing - and there is some good music on tape and record specifically designed for the very young. Children need to be taught an awareness of music.

Not all children attend playgroups, and the latter are not in business to educate their charges, but I have not experienced one that includes music in its morning activities. With so much parental involvement in these organisations, hopefully some could assist the leaders in a musical sphere.

Unfortunately even primary schools all too often let down the children musically. Whilst some are first class, others are variable or useless. Primary education comes at such a wonderful stage of eagerness in the mental development of children. They respond with joy to what is presented imaginatively by properly trained teachers, who can be assisted by much well- designed material. Development of concentration, rhythmic awareness and awareness of variation of time can be fostered by means of experimentation and example.

By the time a child reaches secondary education, they should have acquired some sound basic skills of notation and appreciation on a limited level, upon which high standards and a growing critical ability may be built. Not all children will like classical music - why should they? - but whatever they play or listen to can be appreciated with knowledge. These children are informed and critical and will at least be able to decide what music is good and what is of poor quality.

I have experienced schools where music appears in the first year as a class subject, with no proper syllabus. Thereafter it is 'dropped' until after Ordinary Level examinations, to reappear as a means of occupying, occasionally, those children who are unlikely to be bright enough to attempt Advanced Levels. Even in schools where music is taught after the first year, it is unlikely that any real form of syllabus is in evidence. What a limited view of education - and how many schools are guilty of this limited view? Are we not educating children by means of information? If part of this education is withheld, then they are not fully educated.

The young specialise so early nowadays in the subjects they think will help them in their future careers. My own children are, at the ages of 13 and 14, having to decide which subjects they wish to 'drop' from their curriculum. They hardly know anything at this age, let alone whether they wish to cease learning any more! We are told to expect more leisure time in the future. We should therefore think of musical education as part of equipping children to live fuller lives in these forthcoming days. They have to learn to avoid becoming idle cabbages. Perhaps one day my hopes will become reality!

In all teaching of music, we must do more than convey just the mechanics of musical education.

Particularly with individual tuition, one must literally strike the chord of understanding with pupils. One cannot convey the soul of music to someone with whom one is not in 'tune', or encourage them to develop the required discipline to raise their performance to the highest level of which they are capable. To carry this further, having established a good relationship with a pupil, through music, one has a great chance of assisting the pupil in some other aspects of life.

Music has the means of stabilising the otherwise disorderly mental processes of some humans, and one can see the benefits of the work of a musically-trained teacher of the mentally handicapped.

As a teacher I experience great satisfaction in training a gifted pupil. I am also rewarded seeing the love and appreciation of music as experienced by the less gifted mortals, in whom I have had the privilege of sowing the seeds of this love.