

The sound of music

Access and engagement with music – at any age – has been scientifically proven to bring a host of cognitive and physical benefits. Clea Friend discusses her mission to introduce classical music to infants and young people across Scotland



...wake up, breakfast at home, out to a café with mum to meet her NCT friends, shopping in town, snooze in the buggy, trip in the car to pick up big sister from school, tea-time at home, CBeebies on the TV then bed-time with mobile hanging over me until I drift off to sleep...

Does any of this sound familiar? Some of the above will be included in an average day for baby and most of it will have a soundtrack of background music, be it the radio, canned music in a shop, café or elevator or even the sound of singing. The barrage of sounds and noise is relentless.

As a musician I am acutely aware of it. People often ask me what I like to listen to – but to be honest I relish silence when I can find it as it is so hard to come by in my city life. However, I couldn't imagine my life without music in it. When it is controlled, live, refined and I can give it my attention there is nothing I like more.

Recitals for Wrigglers aims to give children an introduction to music through an experience of the highest quality so that they realise what it can be. It is important that young people know that music is created by human beings and the best of it takes skill and practice – and is fun to make!

Increasingly science is proving what many of us have instinctively known – that music can improve and enhance physical and mental health. From cognitive development, physical rehabilitation, extended mobility to memory recall, music can play a part. Being exposed to music, or any enjoyable activity also increases the production of Oxytocin, the so-called 'love' hormone which has been said to contribute to "pro-social behaviours" and positive expressions of relation, trust and bonding.

For children it has been proven to facilitate learning across the curriculum and for those with challenges such as dyslexia, ADHD and autism, musical activities can have a powerful therapeutic and often transformative effect. Interactive music making helps to develop communication skills, encourages an awareness of ones' own sense of self within a group and can help with integration and inclusion.

It is a privilege for us to witness and share a child's first live musical experience. At every *Recitals for Wrigglers* performance the magical power of acoustic music is evident. Parents and carers who might be concerned about their child's behaviour or attention span are instantly reassured as soon as the first sounds emerge from our instruments and they see their charges are mesmerised. One parent told us after a concert: "that was the stillest they have ever been".

And this is only the tip of the iceberg.

The environments we create at our concerts, which we have carefully considered, is one where adults and children of all ages can listen, respond, move around and engage with each other non-verbally through the shared experience of music. It is a safe place to acknowledge feelings such as joy, sadness, anger and confusion which can be difficult to express through language – even when one has learned to speak!

One of the most touching things to witness is the bond shared between a baby and their older sibling through listening to our performance. Some babies who attend our performances are too young to play games and too young even to move independently, but sharing this sound

world with older siblings is something they can engage in simultaneously and on a level without the need for parental input.

There are a number of musical initiatives for babies and toddlers but what we believe makes *Recitals for Wrigglers* unique is that we are professional classical musicians delivering live acoustic music in person and up close. We perform 'real' pieces, not simplified or dumbed-down versions of classical repertoire for carers with fidgety children in tow.

Our programmes are carefully constructed to keep the attention and focus of our audience. Lasting no more than 40 minutes, each concert begins with a short (15 minute) classical repertoire. Then we tell a short story – something well known and again in keeping with the overall theme – which we illustrate with extracts of music. For the final ten minutes we hand out percussive toys and instruments, playing or singing songs and nursery rhymes, allowing our young audience to really get involved. This format has proved very effective and with a wide variety of musical styles the children are kept fully engaged.

Our concerts are designed to be enjoyed by adults and children alike, choosing music that has universal appeal. A huge incentive for us is to demonstrate that classical music isn't for an elite clientele – this is a sad misconception that has done damage to the image of classical music. It is our hope that by reaching children at such a young age they will grow up enjoying all kinds of music, including classical.

One parent said to us recently that when you have a baby you are excluded from cultural activities and don't feel welcome. This is an unfortunate reality. Even without a young child one can feel excluded from classical concerts, galleries and other situations where the expectation is that you should be quiet and still. *Recitals for Wrigglers* is happy to break those traditions and hopes to help shift the them into a more inclusive and welcoming direction.

Looking forward, we hope to develop our programmes for primary school-aged pupils. Funding permitting, we would like to work in partnership with primary schools, especially those with no music provision, focusing particularly on more deprived areas and on children facing social and academic challenges. We know the research which identifies the benefits of access to music of all kinds. Yet opportunities for such are becoming few and far between as the arts continually face budget cuts and pressures on education budgets means music provision is no longer the norm at school. Through our programme we hope to make classical music more accessible and inclusive from a young age and give those with more complex needs an expressive outlet and a link to their peers.

We believe having music in your life isn't a luxury – but a necessity.

Clea Friend MMus MSc PGCE is co-founder of *Recitals for Wrigglers* and a classically trained musician

Recitals for Wrigglers

Upcoming performances, with the theme of Wriggle Around the World:

- Stockbridge Library, Edinburgh
Tuesday 25th April (10:30am)
- Queensferry Church, South Queensferry
Wednesday 26th April (10:30am)
- Morningside Parish Church, Edinburgh
Friday 28th April (10:30am)
- Fire Station Creative, Dunfermline
Saturday 29th April (10:30am)
- Linlithgow Bowling Club, Linlithgow
Sunday 30th April (10:30am)



© Ben Newman

Recitals for Wrigglers will also be performing a special Spring Collection at the Palace of Holyroodhouse on Tuesday 30th May at 10:30am.

For more information, or to book tickets, visit www.recitalsforwrigglers.co.uk

Arts Round-up

By Lynn Gilmour

Search for youth advisors

Young Scot and Creative Scotland are searching for talented volunteers to join a new advisory panel.

The National Youth Arts Advisory Group, for young people aged 14-23, will play a key role in setting out an artistic vision and recommendations to help Scotland's young people to flourish and achieve their goals using arts and culture.

Find out more at young.scot/things-to-do/events/aberdeen/join-the-national-youth-arts-advisory-group/

Closing date: Monday 17 April

Get Write In!

CELCIS have launched a new creative writing competition for all school-aged children who are looked after or have care experience.

With the theme of 'Random moments', budding writers are invited to talk about a moment that was a turning point in their life, a fork in the road or an unexpected surprise.

For more information, visit www.celcis.org

Closing date: Thursday 15 June

What's in a name?

Imagine has a new name for its flagship festival. Formerly known as the Imagine Festival, it is now called the Edinburgh International Children's Festival.

The event, the first led by new Director, Noel Jordan, will begin with a free launch weekend held at the National Museums of Scotland and will run from 24 May-4 June 2017.

www.imagine.org.uk/festival/

Teenage kicks

The Scottish Book Trust has announced the winner of the inaugural Scottish Teenage Book Prize.

Borders-based author Claire McFall was announced as the winner in March for her third novel *Black Cairn Point*, garnering the most amount of votes from young readers aged 12-16.

Find out more at scottishbooktrust.com