

## Book Reviews

**The GCSE Composition Course** by Barry Russell & Tony Harris. London: Edition Peters, 2004. 4 project books, c. 62 pp, £6.95 each, and teacher's book, 94 pp, £12.95.

*The GCSE Composition Course* consists of a teacher's book and four themed project books for students. The student books are based around topics selected to accommodate the areas of study prescribed by the General Certificate in Secondary Education music specifications. Thus book 1 is entitled *Music for Special Events* and *Music for Film*, book 2 *Minimalism, Serialism, Experimental and Electronic Music*, book 3 *World Sounds and Writing for Instruments* and book 4 *Song and Dance*. I was very impressed by the teacher's book which, as a composition resource file, should be on every music teacher's bookshelf. I have reservations, however, about the project books and their suggested use with pupils.

My first reservations began to form as I read the introduction to the teacher's book. Here the suggestion is made that the course could enable students to 'complete ten substantial composition projects, five in each of two broad areas of study as required by all the examination boards' (p. 8). This raised two concerns: firstly this might be misread by inexperienced teachers as suggesting that pupils should only compose within two of the areas of study prescribed by their GCSE music specification, whereas the holistic philosophy of the new specifications makes it quite clear that while pupils (in the majority of instances) submit only two compositions for final assessment, they are to explore all areas of study through performing, composing and listening. If teachers look at the concordance or cross-referencing at the end of the teacher's book, however, they will see that the authors

recommend the exploration of at least three of the project books for each specification. It is important that teachers make this observation. The second reservation was that the expressed aim of completing ten composition projects during the GCSE course might be quite ambitious given my own and colleagues' experiences of mixed ability GCSE music teaching.

The teacher's book is very clearly laid out with an introductory section on the nature and process of composition and the role of the teacher within this process. I found this invaluable reading and shall recommend it to my teacher training students. There follows an overview of the project books and activities with clear advice concerning the role of the music teacher within the project and the major challenges presented for the teacher by each project. There is an overarching emphasis throughout the book on the creation of 'real' musical products rather than 'school' musical outcomes. This approach permeates the entire philosophy of the course and is exemplified by the importance attached by the authors to the provision of performance opportunities for pupils' composition work.

Overall there is an intensely musical approach to the whole composing process at GCSE. The central portion of the book (around 50 pages) consists of 'kick-start' ideas and activities which form a superb resource bank for teachers and could be used or adapted throughout the entire secondary school age range. They explore, through short, fast-paced and motivating activities, the areas of rhythm, pitch, melody, harmony and timbre/texture. This is intended to lead to the production of a multitude of short compositional 'sketches' providing seed corn for future composing work. Exploration encompasses topics such as free rhythm, quartal harmony, melodic

improvisation and world music styles within short simple activities designed to build confidence and motivate pupils. Relevant 'kick start' activities are clearly linked to projects within the student books. The final section of the teacher's book is a guide to the process of setting a composition brief and student logging and appraisal of their work. The conclusion offers good advice on creating an appropriate learning environment for quality composing work to take place. These sections would prove invaluable to new teachers and those reflective practitioners constantly seeking to improve their own practice in the area of composition. I have two suggestions to make should the package be revised in the future. Firstly, the introduction would benefit from the citing of some composers as examples who are not male, white European, based within the Western art music tradition and dead! And secondly, a CD providing audio recordings of the exemplar composing material contained within the teacher's book would be useful for the increasing number of music teachers who are not pianists.

The pupils' books contain a series of activities of increasing difficulty grouped around the theme(s) of the project book. Each project is designed to last for half a term and to build on work undertaken in preceding projects. There is a variety of style and type of approach so that the composing process does not become formulaic. The activities are, in the main, well-pitched for the age group and present creative, innovative ideas that made me itch to try them out. I think, however, that the suggested use of these books as 'recipe books' for all but the most advanced pupils to work from presents a number of problems. Firstly, the communication of musical ideas throughout the books relies on notated examples as there is no audio CD. Although graphic notation and rhythm tabs are used in some projects there is a heavy reliance on staff notation (how else can one

communicate these ideas without a recording?) which would preclude many pupils from accessing the ideas. The layout of the books is also very text heavy with densely typed pages and the use of some demanding vocabulary. As far as I could see, there is no direction to pupils as to how they might differentiate activities according to their ability or experience. There also seems to be some confusion at times as to whether the writer is speaking to the student or the teacher. I think that these books would work best as additional teacher's material which could be relayed to students verbally or through interactive whiteboard and audio examples. The danger is that teachers might distribute these books directly to pupils and expect them to 'get on with it'. In fact page 9 of the introduction to the teacher's book states that this would be a possible though not preferred approach. For the majority of pupils this could be a recipe for disaster and would undermine the excellent ideas and very musical ethos of the series.

This material requires teaching, with the recontextualising and differentiating expertise of a teacher who knows their individual pupils and can refocus it to best suit their individual needs and abilities. Used in this way it could produce exciting musical and convincing compositional products. My overall summary would be: teacher's book – you must have this; pupils' books – handle with care!

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**Praxial Music Education: Reflections and Dialogues** edited by David J. Elliott.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, xv + 336 pp, £27.50, hardback.

This is a collection of critically reflective essays on the praxial concept of music and music education which David Elliott originally put forward in *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education* (1995).

For those of us not entirely sure what 'praxial music education' is, Elliott provides a succinct overview.

It appears that a praxial approach develops musicianship and listenership through engaging students in performing-and-listening, composing-and-listening, arranging-and-listening, conducting-and-listening, and listening to recordings and live performances. Musicianship and creativity should be developed simultaneously and moreover should relate to musical style communities. As for the word itself:

'Praxial' is meant to convey the idea that music pivots on specific kinds of human doing and making . . . that are purposeful, contextual and socially embedded' (p. 14)

McCarthy and Goble shed light on the matter by presenting a helpful historical perspective of the praxial philosophy which does serve to orientate newcomers to the field. They point out that the praxial concept is a successor to the utilitarian and the aesthetic. The latter climaxed with Reimer's *Philosophy of Music Education* (1970), and music education as aesthetic education became the new official doctrine both in the USA and the UK. According to McCarthy and Goble this gave professional unity, security and respectability in the 1950s and 1960s. Unfortunately the idea remained somewhat obscure and nebulous (a fate we hope does not overcome praxial music education). *Music Matters* challenged all this, and put forward an alternative view. In particular it criticised the narrow focus upon the musical work, the lack of context, neglect of sociological, political and cultural meanings, as well as the inappropriate employment of common musical elements. Elliott's views prompted considerable debate within the music education community, and some of it was very heated. It would have strengthened this chapter if greater attention had been

paid to Swanwick's critical concerns about what he called Elliott's 'caricature of the views of Reimer' (Swanwick, 1999: 130). In fact, Swanwick insisted that any replacement model for 'music education as aesthetic education' would not be built on 'any monolithic performance tradition' (Swanwick, 1999: 140).

Margaret Barrett helpfully compares John Paynter's views and practice with those of David Elliott. For Paynter, music composition is a primary means of constructing musical understanding, underpinning the whole curriculum. Elliott on the other hand disagrees about music composition being the 'primary' or the 'surest way' to develop musical understanding: 'unless or until students come to know the essential nature of musical works as performances, composing should not be the primary way of developing musicianship' (p. 178). This leads Barrett to see a possible schism in the ways in which music educators view compositional and creative experience in the classroom, maybe arising out of the conflation of the terms 'creativity' and 'composition' within music education writing.

Barrett also discusses Elliott's desire to induct students into a reasonable range of musical practices in the world beyond school. Interestingly, she argues that this talk of cultures is generally related to adults, and consequently we may lose the opportunity to learn more about the communities of practice of the child's musical world. However, Lori-Anne Doloff outlines how Elliott's praxialism can be combined with traditional approaches in the classroom, and that improvising should always be in relation to some specific musical practice-style context, rather than being judged in purely subjective terms. She reminds us that even an aleatoric style has a particular history attached, with specific examples for listening and specific ways of doing the improvising.

A central plank of Elliott's view is that listening is inferior to performing. This is contested by Koopman, who puts forward the notion that it is the aim of music education to teach pupils to be critical listeners: after all this is what most of today's pupils in fact do. Koopman argues that such listening is far from the passive activity that Elliott believes it to be. Similarly, Cutietta and Stauffer in 'Listening Reconsidered' conclude that praxial philosophy has a few gaps, and among them is the nurturing of listening skills. Wayne Bowman carefully explores the pros and cons of performing and listening in a philosophical sense. He argues sensibly that as music educators we are professionally obliged to strive and maintain an appropriate balance between performing and listening, and to resist the kind of thinking that suggests that highly desirable options must mutually exclude each other.

In this review I have focused on specific chapters that have been helpful in clarifying straightforwardly the nub of what is distinctive about praxialism. Other chapters illuminate particular viewpoints stimulated by Elliott's work including 'understanding musical understanding' (Gruhn), music and knowledge in bodily experience (Westerlund and Juntunen), composing and improvising (Martin), multicultural music education (Szego), curriculum implications (Regelski), early childhood music education (Woodward), general music (Burnard), 'why I don't feel included' (O'Toole). The final chapter by Kari Veblen on Community Music and praxialism chimes with some current thinking in the UK about the need to break down the barriers between music in and out of school.

What relevance does all this have for music educators in the UK? We need to consider whether or not 'music education as aesthetic education', with its emphasis upon common musical elements has had its day, although its legacy has indeed been rich.

Recent developments evident in the work of Youth Music and the Wider Opportunities initiative do indeed seem to resonate with Elliott's own illustration of how the curriculum-as-practicum might look in practice:

When small and large performing ensembles . . . are developed . . . and students engage in performing, improvising, composing, arranging, conducting, and music-listening projects, then the school music classroom, or the community music situation becomes a reflective musical practicum: an approximation of real music-practice situations, or music cultures (p.13)

In this book, Elliott wanted to present a series of probing, reflective essays by invited contributors, on the ideas promulgated in *Music Matters*. The resulting anthology produces many different interpretations, some of them contradictory. Elliott appeals to post-modernism to remind us that texts cannot and do not have one true and universally understood meaning. It is hoped that the publication of *Praxial Music Education* will presage vigorous debates within music education of ideas, philosophies, methods and institutions, and thus contribute to the growing maturity of our field of study. This is a challenging book, difficult in parts, but well worth the effort if it results in an interrogation of our current practice, and of our taken-for-granted beliefs about music education.

#### Reference

- SWANWICK, K. (1999) 'Music education: closed or open?' *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, **33**, 127–141.

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**Exploring the Musical Mind**, by John Sloboda. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 437 pp, £24.95, paperback.

It is rare to find an academic book that is emotionally and morally compelling as well as intellectually engaging. John Sloboda achieves this remarkable feat by rooting this summary of his career as a music psychologist within his ethical concerns about the current state of the world, so implicitly inviting readers to question the 'demonstrable social benefit' of their own academic work (p. 397). Sloboda is clear-headed and persuasive in expressing his distaste for contemporary global politics, and in describing the personal decisions which have led him increasingly to prioritise his 'other life' as a peace and disarmament activist. He acknowledges that his discussion of such matters is 'more personal than is customary in academic discourse', but by facing political questions so directly, Sloboda points to the fact that ethical and moral choices are present in all research: 'attitudes towards values and priorities are so intimately connected to a person's social context and background that removing them from the discourse can hide key assumptions that motivate the argument, and thus obscure the basis of the argument as rooted in the realities of lived experience' (p. 395).

Sloboda presents his political perspectives at the end of the book, in a chapter entitled 'Assessing music psychology research: values, priorities, and outcomes'. The Preface makes a brief mention of how those very concerns were a motivation to produce this volume, but avoids the risk that they will skew the book as a whole; indeed, those readers reluctant to engage with the ethical dilemmas that Sloboda presents need only miss out the final chapter, and the book will remain a stimulating account of an impressive and influential career. The hope is, however, that music psychologists – and

those working in other academic disciplines, including music education – might take up with enthusiasm Sloboda's arguments about social relevance in research, and so 'embrace better and more far-reaching questions' (p. viii).

And so on to the content of the book which consists, with the exception of the chapter already mentioned, of previously published material in the broad areas of cognitive processes, emotion and motivation, talent and skill development, and 'music in the real world'. These four sections are helpfully cross-referenced in a table at the start of the book, in which the key topics of each chapter are outlined, and links between chapters sharing similar concerns identified. For music educators, the second half of the book is the most obviously relevant, containing as it does some of Sloboda's significant work on instrumental learning, everyday listening practices, and the tricky questions of 'talent' and 'giftedness'. Despite the familiarity of some of these chapters, I found them fresh and challenging, perhaps because their placement alongside work on emotion, timing and cognition invites new connections between ideas that can sometimes seem unrelated.

Throughout the book, Sloboda's writing is clear and approachable; no mean achievement across three decades and such a wide variety of topics. It is a shame that his work was not fully supported by the editing process: there are frequent typographical errors, inconsistent use of visual and described musical notation, and at one point a pseudonym used in several chapters is revealed in another. Perhaps this is an inevitable result of bringing together work that has previously been addressed to many different audiences, and although a list of reprinting permissions is given at the outset, some of the chapters suffer from a lack of context. Chapter 3, for example, on space in musical notation, seems to give an

inordinate amount of attention to questions that are everyday concerns for performers but must have been novel ideas to readers of *Visible Language*, where the paper first appeared. A few sentences of explanation at the start of the chapter would have helped to highlight this unusual focus. Similarly, when Chapter 9 begins 'I guess that all of us are here because, in one way or another, we love music', an accessible start to a conference paper becomes a slightly bizarre statement on the meaning of life. The book works well at the level of content and structure, but would have benefited from closer attention to matters of continuity and presentation.

This collection of papers will help to take music educators beyond their comfort zone of existing engagement with music psychology, as it tackles not just the social and developmental topics that are relatively familiar in educational circles, but also makes accessible more cognitive and perceptual research questions. It is quite remarkable that this wide-ranging and consistently excellent body of research is the work of one person. Any sense of self-obituary is alleviated by Sloboda's modest introduction, in which he credits the large numbers of researchers with whom he has been associated, and highlights the strengthening of the music psychology community during the course of his career. Sloboda's book is a valuable resource for those seeking an accessible and concise guide to central areas of music psychology, and has far-reaching implications in challenging researchers to recognise the ethical and social dimensions of their work as they make their choices about priorities and approaches. These are questions that are equally urgent in music education, and offer much to think about.

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**Becoming an Orchestral Musician: A Guide for Aspiring Professionals** by Richard Davis. London: Giles de la Mare Publishers Ltd., 2004. 236 pp, £14.99, paperback.

This book has been written by a professional flautist of high standing and long experience, and is expressly intended for young players interested in pursuing a career as orchestral musicians. As such it is a practical guide which yields considerable insight into the culture and craft of orchestral playing. It has no particular bias towards flute or even woodwind playing, but is generic in its scope, combining the author's own perspective with the voices of 17 diverse instrumentalists, and three other musicians closely involved with orchestras in different capacities, who were interviewed for the book. The volume has little basis in formal research, but the multiple dimensions of being an instrumentalist in a large ensemble come from an insider's perspective, and the many tips and pointers which suffuse the book are undoubtedly straight from the horse's mouth. The author suggests that the book may also be useful for parents of aspiring musicians and for non-musicians with a general interest in orchestras, although the latter group might find biographies in this area provide a more satisfying read.

The volume is clearly written and structured, divided into 12 chapters. Three introductory chapters cover motivation, and the early years of a musician's development. The core of the book is then devoted to the nuts and bolts of orchestral playing, and includes chapters on appropriate topics such as intonation, conductors, counting and auditions. The final chapters of the book deal with aspects such as survival in the professional world, and place orchestral playing within a context of alternative musical careers.

Each chapter is laid out logically and includes many subheadings, which make this a useful reference book or volume to dip into. As such it may be an excellent ongoing resource for students. Throughout, Davis has articulated his approaches to playing, which are thought-provoking and may well be used to support the long processes of development all professional instrumentalists must go through. Anyone, for example, finding themselves in a rut with their practice, or preparing for a string of auditions will find something here to inspire them. The enthusiasm of the author, and his pleasure in and commitment to orchestral playing, are evident throughout the book. They are also qualities which emerge from the interview extracts with the other orchestral musicians, which are used effectively to support and illustrate the material. The foibles and quirks of musicians also shine through the anecdotal snippets of stories, and these sit well alongside the solid professional advice which is on offer here. Consequently the fallibility of musicians is clearly demonstrated alongside their dedicated professionalism.

Davis' style is reminiscent, perhaps, of a masterclass, and focuses on a range of directives; for example that every student should learn to conduct in order both to instil a fundamental physical feeling for pulse and rhythm, and to learn to interpret pieces of music as a whole rather than as a series of disparate fragments or movements. At a more detailed level, particular generic aspects of playing are discussed, such as getting away from the tyranny of the bar line. Here the analogies which Davis uses to clarify his points are refreshingly lateral and apt:

In performance, the notes frequently appear to be incarcerated behind bars. Playing without bar-lines would in fact be visually confusing: your part would

have an endless stream of notes, and offer no trace of phrasing or direction. [...] You wouldn't dream of drawing grid-lines all over the Mona Lisa, and yet you hear the musical equivalent of this day after day. Bar-lines are musical packages that you must unwrap. (p. 48–49)

Tips on listening out for the speed, width and intensity of vibrato in an orchestral section, and on the precision of note endings in a high-class ensemble offer a real opportunity for students to polish their orchestral craft. Davis shares his own strategies for getting the best results, and presents them lucidly:

With note-endings, I always try to picture the sound visually. Depending on the musical context, I may imagine it as the arc of a projectile falling from a cliff – or perhaps being thrown into the air and then plummeting down again. I can then visualize placing my taper on top of everyone else's. If mine has a different curve from the others, then I am wrong. A note ending should be an exact fit, in the same way that many transparencies of the same picture placed on top of one another should look as one. (p. 93)

The musical examples used to illustrate the principles of rubato and rhythm make the ideas immediately accessible, and it is surprising perhaps that more of these are not used elsewhere in the text. They would appeal to the practical mindset of many instrumentalists. In addition, further practical exercises might also be useful for music students, keen to develop their skills, and whilst many of the topics covered in the book are themselves the subject of specialist studies, little indication is given here about useful further reading. This is a serious shortcoming, particularly in a book designed

to foster students' enthusiasm, curiosity and skill development.

The final chapters of the book are perhaps the most disappointing. Full-time orchestral playing is becoming less and less of a realistic possibility for musicians, whilst the range not simply of alternatives but also of portfolio careers is rapidly increasing. The working patterns of the twenty-first century require several different sets of skills – including career management and adaptability, familiarity and facility with an ever-increasingly wide range of musical languages, ability to compose, arrange, teach and lead – all of which may need to be assimilated and developed. These final chapters seem to echo the culture of the twentieth century more than the current reality, which often tends towards a more eclectic and exciting mix of work for many professional musicians. In this respect the book has some limitations, but it will nevertheless prove to be an extremely useful volume for its target audience.

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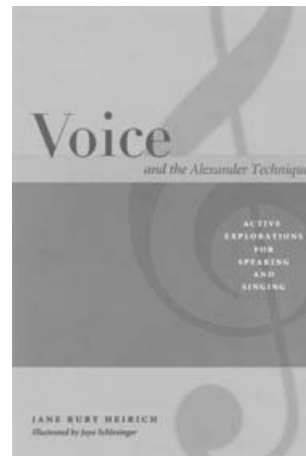
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**Voice and the Alexander Technique: Active Explorations for Speaking and Singing**

by Jane Ruby Heirich. Berkeley: Mornum Time Press, 2005. 150 pp, \$40.00 hardback.

This book, which has been written for singing teachers, singers, and actors, is in oversized format and accompanied by a CD that allows those without access to a keyboard to sing along with the vocal exercises given in the book. It also has very clear illustrations of anatomical details and examples of posture. The glossary and bibliography are comprehensive and the whole book is designed for easy use. The chapters are laid out with explanations, exercises and suggestions for further explorations and case

study examples in the margins give extra insight into the topic being discussed.



The book begins with an explanation of the author's experience, and guidelines for using the book and CD. There is a comprehensive explanation of the development of Alexander Technique and a chapter on the nature of vocal sound. Some of the terminology is American and the tone is quite colloquial but it has a certain charm and the explanations are so clear that there is little confusion. Heirich goes on to discuss postural problems in particular and the common vocal difficulties that arise as a result. Halfway through the book she reiterates the difficulties of 'learning to sing and speak' by reading a book and she suggests that the activities are done with the help of an Alexander teacher. However there is much to be gained even without a qualified Alexander practitioner, and her whole approach stresses the need for careful thought, preparation and self-monitoring. Certainly her advice to work through the 'TO DOs' with a sympathetic friend/partner is essential, as so much of Alexander work involves observing and changing bad postural habits. She also stresses the need to use our ears when judging the benefit of the various vocal exercises.



There are 'TO DO' activities throughout the book which integrate movement, posture and sound in a way that allows the singer/speaker to monitor progress; the emphasis is always on inviting the reader to experience the changes that take place in the voice. The second half of the book deals with the re-education of the breathing system, 'thinking up' games, 'monkeying around with the voice' and supporting the voice. Each of the games is supported by comprehensive explanations as to their purpose and illustrations where necessary of the anatomical and physical processes involved. Sometimes she suggests new perspectives on basic fundamental technique and I found these refreshing and helpful.

Jane Ruby Heirich's approach is primarily educational: she wants to pass on her knowledge and experience gained from working both in the field of singing and Alexander Technique. However she is not content to write a factual explanation, but wants instead to encourage singers/actors/voice users to try and discover, for themselves, the value of the work she is promoting. For her, the process is more important than the final result and she emphasises the length of time this journey of vocal discovery can take. She puts considerable emphasis on the practical application of Alexander Technique with the voice, hence the CD and the large-scale format, which both work extremely well. I was impressed with the illustrations by Jaye Schlesinger, which were some of the clearest I have come across in many books on vocal technique.

The references to current teaching practices and vocal terminology are very useful and Heirich attempts to explain the various different approaches to talking about

voice in a non-judgemental way. However she is not afraid to challenge false ideas about vocal practice and she presents clear arguments to defend her beliefs. She does not mind the use of images and metaphors to help understand the workings and sensations of the voice – even when these may be anatomically incorrect – as long as the student also understands the true anatomical functions. There is an excellent discussion on 'belting' and some useful guidelines on the common postural problems. Many of her case study examples struck a chord with experiences in my own teaching and faults like 'arched back', 'knee-locking' and 'rib-cage corseting' and were easily recognisable from students I have taught.

Heirich's teaching experience of 50 years comes through constantly in the book and I highly recommend it to anyone working with voices, whether singers or speakers. For many years singing teachers have been aware of the value of the work of Alexander Technique but this book puts it at the heart of good speaking and singing and enables non Alexander specialists to gain insight into the importance of good posture, breath and balance in vocal sound production. There was just one little slip; 'the late Janet Baker' is still very much alive, if no longer performing, I believe. Despite that, I will be recommending this book to my colleagues in singing teaching and also to classroom teachers suffering prolonged vocal strain. Bearing in mind that reading a book does not make a great singer, this publication at least makes the whole process of singing very clear to non-specialists and specialists alike and encourages a dynamic approach to understanding the voice.

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