

## Book Reviews

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**Music in our Lives: Rethinking Musical Ability, Development and Identity** by Gary E.

McPherson, Jane W. Davidson, & Robert Faulkner. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 249 pp., paperback. £ 39.99. ISBN: 978-0-19-957929-7.

The authors' aim for *Music in our Lives* is to investigate the range of achievements of Western musical learners, particularly the gap between the ways in which learners engage with performance skills and the role of music in their everyday lives. The authors explore different ways of thinking about musical engagement, development, ability and identity. This text is based on data collected during a 14-year longitudinal study, which took place in two phases. The first involved 157 students aged seven to nine, who were about to embark upon learning an instrument in Sydney, Australia. A wide range of data were gathered at intervals from students and parents to provide information on their beliefs, attitudes and motivations for the child's instrumental learning as well as measures to assess the ways in which the children progressed and developed musically. The second phase of this research followed up many of the original participants as they entered adulthood.

*Music in our Lives* provides an overview of these research projects and uses the findings to develop a theory around musical ability, development and identity. The volume is divided into 12 chapters which address very different aspects of the projects. Chapter 1 provides frames of reference for, and details of, the studies upon which the book is based. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 review some of the findings from the first phase of

the study looking at aspects such as practice, progress, and gradual fall out of participation in formal musical learning. Chapter 5 presents data from the second phase of the study and provides a descriptive profile of participants' musical lives as young adults. Chapters 6 to 10 use case studies of participants to reconsider preconceptions of musical development and experience and develop theory in these areas. Chapters 11 and 12 provide frameworks and interim theory for further investigation and discussion.

One of the main strengths of *Music in our Lives* is the scale of the work undertaken and the breadth and depth of the data collected. A wide range of research methods were used, such as regular interviews with parents and students, practice diaries, videotaping of practice sessions, and students' musical aptitude scores. The results from across these measures, combined with a large sample size accessed over a long period of time, provide significant opportunities for the authors to triangulate their data and provide a sound basis for the development of theory that runs throughout this volume. The writing style of the text is accessible and the book is a pleasure to read. The authors bring alive their participants' stories through the use of directly relevant quotations from qualitative data and perspicuous analysis of their contributors' meanings. Quantitative data are described clearly and the use of graphs and tables to illustrate these data helps the reader to gain a broad understanding of trends in participants' behaviour.

One of the challenges for this book, which the authors themselves touch upon (p. 12), is achieving a balance between providing a holistic view of the studies on

which this volume is based, and a discussion of theoretical interpretation and implications. On the whole the authors achieve this balance well. In chapters towards the beginning of the book, which detail early practice and progress by students and the gradual decline in engagement with formal music learning, descriptive statistics are used extensively to give an insightful picture of trends in behaviour and attitudes. However, case study sections appear in these chapters to illustrate these trends in behaviour and animate what could otherwise become rather dry reading.

More extensive use of case studies is made later in the volume and over the course of the book there is a move from a broad view of participants' musical lives to a more nuanced understanding of particularly interesting aspects of several individuals' lives. These case studies highlight interesting challenges to received understanding about musical ability and identity. Case studies used in Chapters 6 and 7 are particularly effective and here individual stories with a common thread are drawn together to explore a particular theme. Chapter 6 documents the experiences of two high-achieving students to examine traditional notions of musical development and Chapter 7 uses the stories of two students who stopped their formal learning as a way to explore the range of factors that can impact upon musical journeys. The commonalities and contrasts between individual experiences both within and between these chapters, combined with discussions of relevant theory, are enlightening.

There are a limited number of occasions where the level of analysis sells short the data, notably the two chapters that are given over to participants telling their musical life stories in their own words (Chapters 9 and

10). These largely descriptive narratives are the result of a conscious methodological choice by the authors and while interesting, a more analytical approach may have provided readers with a deeper and more useful understanding of participants' experiences.

The authors are clear that discussion of the full range of detailed findings of these longitudinal studies is not their aim for *Music in our Lives*; however they do suggest that further detail can be found in other publications arising from the project. Unfortunately there doesn't appear to be a comprehensive list of these outputs and this is perhaps a missed opportunity to direct readers whose interest has been sparked by this book to further detailed work arising from the project.

*Music in our Lives* is a volume based on an ambitious longitudinal project, which examines critically notions of musical ability, development and identity. The inviting style in which this book is written provides easy access to a number of facets of this complex project and the combination of descriptive data and case study material makes this book a rich resource.

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**Hear, Listen, Play! How to Free Your Students' Aural, Improvisation, and Performance Skills** by Lucy Green. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 124 pp., paperback. £19.99. ISBN: 978-0-19-999576-9.

Lucy Green is well known for her theory and research in the field of informal music learning. Many of us associate this with the increasingly popular *Musical Futures* method and have ourselves enjoyed training days