A study of teacher confidence in teaching music within the context of the introduction of the Foundation Phase (3–7 years) statutory Education Programme in Wales

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This paper examines teacher confidence in teaching music within the context of the introduction of a Foundation Phase 'curriculum' in Wales for pupils aged 3–7 years. This involved a move away from music as a single subject to being part of creative development. The findings are based on a small-scale study of 12 teachers from four primary schools in south Wales. The findings illustrate that teacher confidence has improved since the Foundation Phase was introduced. The language used in the new documentation was a contributory factor as teachers found it more straightforward to understand what they were expected to do, and being able to combine music with other topics made it easier and more enjoyable to teach music. As a result, music (both indoors and outdoors) is a more regular occurrence and has become liberated from its perceived single subject status with the associated confidence issues.

The lack of teacher confidence in teaching music in the primary school has been the subject of much research both in the UK (for example, Wragg *et al.*, 1989, 1992; Rogers *et al.*, 2008) and around the world (for example, Fahnoe, 1987; Jeanneret, 1997; Russell-Bowie, 2009; Kiliç, 2009). This research has identified lack of confidence in both serving teachers (Mills, 1989, Beauchamp, 1997; Holden & Button, 2006; Stunell, 2010) and those training to be teachers (Mills, 1996; Hennessy, 2000; Seddon & Biasutti, 2008; Hallam *et al.*, 2009; Beauchamp, 2010; Munday & Smith, 2010; Russell-Bowie, 2010). It is suggested that any fundamental change in a curriculum, particularly in a national curriculum that is a statutory requirement throughout a country, has the potential to affect confidence levels in teachers, either positively or negatively. In Wales, the change from a subject-based National Curriculum for Key Stage 1 for pupils aged from 5 to 7 years, to a new Foundation Phase (FP) for pupils aged from 3 to 7 years of age, represented just such an event.

The phased introduction of this new programme began in 2008, reaching full implementation in 2011. Prior to this new policy, Young (2007, p. 19) suggests that there were only 'slight variations of policy and practice across the four countries of the United Kingdom' in early childhood education, but this is certainly not the case now. The new FP 'curriculum' was facilitated by the devolution to Wales of selected government powers,

including education, and was underpinned by the belief that 'children learn through first-hand experiential activities with the serious business of 'play' providing the vehicle' and that 'a greater emphasis on using the outdoor environment as a resource for children's learning' was required. (DCELLS, 2008, p. 4)

To put these developments in perspective it is necessary to examine briefly the recent history of the curriculum in Wales, and the place of music within it, which led to the FP in its current form.

Historical context

The 20th century proved to be an era where major changes in educational development took place across the UK. In the latter half of the 20th century, not only were there changes in the structure of schools, but also a transformation of subjects being taught which revolutionised the British education system (Paynter, 2002). During most of this period the education system in Wales was closely tied to that in England and

Between the establishment of a separate Government Department for Wales, the Welsh Office, in 1964 and the arrival of 'democratic devolution' with the election of a National Assembly for Wales in 1999, decisions affecting education in Wales were increasingly devolved to the Secretary of State for Wales, advised by Welsh Office civil servants. But it was clear to all concerned that politicians and officials were expected to work closely with their counterparts in the relevant functional department (education in this case) in London. (Daugherty & Elfed-Owens, 2003, p. 234)

Throughout this time, however, 'the strong consensus of both official and community perspectives ensured that, whatever its intrinsic merit in a national or even international context, the musical culture of Wales was assured' (Beauchamp, 2003, p. 134).

Perhaps arguably the biggest threat to the standing of music came in 1988 in the form of the Education Reform Act, which introduced a National Curriculum stipulating what should be taught, including in music, in all state-funded schools in England and Wales. As a result, teachers' opinions on what pupils should be taught were felt to be redundant and they had to adhere to the 'inflexible' guidelines of the National Curriculum (Halliday, 1999). Before the 1988 Education Act, it was common for extra-curricular activities such as choirs and instrumental groups to 'represent the only music in a school, with some children receiving no teaching at all' (Glover & Ward, 1998, p. 12). Therefore the advent of a National Curriculum had some potential benefits for music in that it became a statutory subject, with 'progressive' curriculum content facilitating access to music for pupils of all abilities and backgrounds. Another result was that music was transformed from a 'subject taught mainly by music specialists to one which is taught by class teachers' (Ward, 1998, p. 18). In Wales, where music had long been regarded as the 'Third Language' (Beauchamp, 1995), it is important to note that devolved educational power meant 'it could take independent decisions regarding the curriculum. ... [and] ... The Welsh National Curriculum in Music (1992) further ensured that Welsh musical culture was reflected in the document' (Rainbow with Cox, 2006, p. 366).

By 2004 the National Curriculum was well established but, again taking advantage of devolved powers, the Welsh Assembly Government introduced a new Foundation Phase (FP) for pupils age 3–7 years, which would be piloted in schools across the country to replace the previous Key Stage 1 [KS1] (5–7 years of age) with its National Curriculum content. After a successful run of pilot schemes across Wales, the FP was introduced into all mainstream schools in Wales in 2008, with the aim of all pupils between the ages of 3–7 being active participants by July 2010 (DCELLS, 2006) – which was later extended to September 2011.

The FP marked a move away from the historically rooted concept of the 'subject' as the 'dominant way of defining the curriculum' (Crawford, 1998, p. 274). Previous guidance to KS1 teachers was given in the form of these single subjects, but the FP is based on seven complementary areas of learning which 'work together to provide a cross-curricular approach to form a practical relevant curriculum' and 'should not be approached in isolation' (DCELLS, 2008, p. 14). From the seven areas of learning, practitioners are expected to produce well-planned play activities that gives children the opportunity to 'have a flying start in life' (DCELLS, 2008, p. 3). Within the FP Framework, practitioners are given generic guidance on the learning outcomes of each area. 'Language, literacy and communication' and 'mathematical development' are two areas of development staying relatively close to the subjects in the old National Curriculum, but subjects such as music, drama and art merge together under the banner of 'creative development' (DCELLS, 2008). In view of the questions the teachers were asked below, it is important to note that the need to compose, perform and appraise remain, but without calling them this as these words were no longer in the documentation.

Such a move supports Paynter's (2002, p. 224) assertion that music would benefit from 'closer association' with other art forms such as art, drama and dance allowing pupils the opportunity to indulge in productive activities that 'involve everyone' (p. 224). In addition, Barnes (2001, p. 92) highlights that 'music is essentially a creative discipline in all aspects'. There is the potential, however, that music may become a less important subject as an element of 'creativity' instead of being a single subject. In addition, for teachers who previously taught music within a structured subject-based curriculum, the introduction of the FP in Wales imposed new demands to adapt their methods of teaching to ensure new strategies and expectations could be met.

Factors influencing teacher confidence

In addition to the more generic factors which can affect teacher confidence across the curriculum, there are other factors specific to music. Despite it playing 'a role in almost everyone's daily life' (Glover & Ward, 1998, p. 1), music can be a subject regarded as less accessible than others due to a lack of understanding and knowledge (Holden & Button, 2006). Over the years many researchers have attempted to seek an understanding of why teachers in the primary school have difficulty in their confidence of teaching music. Beauchamp (1997, p. 69) suggests that some teachers have issues teaching music as 'their training did not equip them with the relevant theoretical and pedagogical background', with the result that some teachers often 'feel inadequate' (Young, 2001, p. 209). This can lead to what Gifford (1993) labels a full circle of inadequacy, meaning that if teachers

do not have the confidence to teach and participate in music, this could have a negative effect on their pupil's own interest in music. Some researchers argue that if teachers are going to even begin to overcome confidence issues in teaching music, they need to start by becoming involved in the lessons themselves instead of reading documents and guidance 'religiously without proper interpretation' (Holden & Button, 2006, p. 34). The impact of this type of approach will be explored below.

Research questions

In spite of the large amount of research on teacher confidence in teaching music in the primary school, such research was carried out prior to the FP and looked at music as a single subject within a National Curriculum. The study reported here aimed to explore the impact of the implementation of the FP on the levels of confidence of primary school teachers and what, if any, factors affect this. As a result, the following questions are explored:

- What is the impact of the introduction of the FP on teachers' confidence in teaching music in the early years and the amount of music they do?
- What is the impact on teachers' confidence of a move from music as a single subject to part of 'creativity' in the FP?
- What is the position of music in FP classrooms?

Methods

In this small-scale study, a mixed methods approach was adopted involving the use of written questionnaires and individual interviews. The questionnaires gathered basic information on teaching and musical experience of the teachers in the study and also explored perceived levels of confidence. In this context it was appropriate to use Likert scales which 'build in a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response while still generating numbers' (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p. 325). As a result, the questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale in the majority of the 26 questions (Likert items), whilst the remaining questions only required a dichotomous yes or no response. Using scales gave the opportunity to analyse each Likert item easily to gain an understanding of a range of opinions and experiences of teachers.

The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) was used to explore the Likert items in order to analyse the data and make comparisons, predominantly using the mode (the most common) response as 'Methodological and statistical texts are clear that for ordinal data one should employ the median or mode' (Jamieson, 2004, p. 1217) – although the use of Likert scales as ordinal data has been a contentious issue for at least 50 years (Carifio & Perla, 2008). To supplement this, and to contextualise the responses, the range of responses (indicating levels of agreement from 1–5, see more below) was also analysed. Results are reported for all teachers in the sample as no significant differences were found between individual schools.

The questionnaires were administered personally and included a covering letter and consent form stating the aims and objectives of the research. A time and date for collection

was arranged, which gave teachers the opportunity to discuss any queries and encouraged a higher response rate.

Although questionnaires are valuable to researchers as they are relatively straightforward, there can also be a lack of flexibility in response and it is difficult for in-depth information to be gathered (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007). In addition, Cohen & Manion (1994, p. 238) highlight that, 'using a single method approach yields limited and sometimes misleading data'. Therefore in order to gather more detailed information, questionnaires were 'complemented by the collection of qualitative data' (Basit, 2010, p. 17) through means of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews also allow a researcher to ask questions as a result of the answers provided by the interviewee (Swetnam, 1997), ensuring that areas important to the teachers are explored, even if not part of the original questions.

When deciding upon the method to record interviews it was noted that an interviewer 'writing furiously throughout the interview' (Bell, 2010, p. 167) could be a distraction and full attention cannot be paid to the interviewee. Hence opportunities to probe 'on issues that seem analytically relevant' (Gibson, 2010, p. 62) may be missed. Interviews were therefore recorded to ensure that data were not lost. Informed consent was gained in accordance with ethical guidance from the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2004 – at the time of the interviews).

The sample

Four schools were chosen over a 20-mile radius covering two counties in south Wales. The schools were chosen from a purposive random sample of all English-speaking schools within each county. All teachers participating in this study were currently teaching the FP, but had also previously taught Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum. This allowed them to make the necessary comparisons between the two frameworks. In each school, all FP teachers (between three and five) were requested to complete questionnaires. The total response of questionnaires was 12 teachers, three from each primary school. Out of the 12 respondents, three teachers from three separate schools consented to participate in follow-up interviews. Although not a criterion for selection, these teachers had a range of teaching experience as shown in Table 1 below:

A comparison with the teaching profession in Wales as a whole (GTCW, 2009) shows that the sample is similar to the population of primary teachers in Wales.

To gain baseline data on the musical background of the respondents, as well as basic demographic data, the questionnaire used the categorisation of 'musical experience a and b' based upon an existing paper by Beauchamp (2010) (Table 2).

Table 1 Number of years teachers have been teaching

Years teaching	0–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	20+	Total
No. of teachers	3	3	1	2	3	12

Table 2 Musical experience

Musical experience a	No.	Musical experience b	No.
Do not play instruments	8	No qualifications	9
Play instrument/s – no grade	1	Grade 5 theory or above	0
Instrumental/vocal grades 1-5	2	O level/GCSE music (or equivalent)	2
Instrumental/vocal grades 6–8 or above	1	A Level music (or equivalent)	0
Total	12	Music diploma	0
		Music degree	1
		Total	12

It was apparent that the majority of teachers in the sample did not have any background in playing musical instruments and most had no musical qualifications – although two teachers had O level/GCSE music (or equivalent) and one had a music degree. This information is intended only to contextualise the study and does not assume or imply that music qualifications will make a teacher any better or more confident in teaching music.

Results

As outlined above, the analysis is based upon 12 questionnaires from teachers in four south Wales primary schools. The quantitative results for the whole sample will be supplemented as appropriate by reference to interviews carried out with three teachers from three of the schools above in order to provide more nuanced information.

Confidence in teaching music before and after the introduction of the Foundation Phase

As all the teachers had taught both the National Curriculum and the FP, the impact of the introduction of the FP was first addressed in the questionnaires with two Likert scales indicating their level of agreement with two separate statements: 'I was confident teaching music before the introduction of the Foundation Phase'; followed by 'I am confident teaching music in the Foundation Phase'. It should be noted that all statements deliberately adopted a positive tone as a matter of principle, but also to ensure scores remained consistent. Teachers were able to show negative responses by their level of disagreement. In the analysis of this and later statements below, it should be noted that a score of 1.0 is the highest level of agreement with the statement, with 3.0 representing the most neutral response and 5.0 being the highest level of disagreement. It should be noted that the small sample size does not allow any measure of statistical significance and results are reported below acknowledging this limitation. Nevertheless, the mode (the most frequent occurring) response of the whole sample group provides a useful measure of their level of agreement and hence perceived confidence.

What was immediately obvious from Table 3 below, however, is that although the mode response is similar, the range of responses is different. It is important to note that in the 'before' the Foundation Phase (FP) responses, two modes were identified, 2 (agree) and

Table 3 Confident teaching music 'before' Foundation Phase and confidence 'Now'

	Before	Now
Mode response	2/3	2
Most positive response	1	1
Most negative response	4	2

3 (not sure), with responses ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (disagree). Reassuringly, the responses after the FP suggest that things have improved for the teachers in the study and a range of response only from 1 (strongly agree) to 2 (agree) – i.e. no neutrality or disagreement in the sample. Therefore all participants, although varying in levels of confidence, felt more confident in teaching music since the introduction of the Foundation Phase.

This was exemplified in one of the interviews where Teacher 3 stated that before the FP

I had to timetable in a lot of subjects and to do music lessons we had to book the music room ... music is much easier to teach now I think. You don't have to do set work, it is much more about letting the children explore and I think for teachers who are less confident it makes things a lot easier in terms of teaching and confidence. So yes, I'd say I'm more confident now.

This extract also introduces a theme which is apparent in all of the interviews with teachers regarding music as a 'separate subject', rather than an integrated part of everyday life in the classroom. Teacher 3 explained this by saying

Music can be brought into different topics and is so much better for teachers and children as they can explore sounds more often than before and not think of music as a separate subject ... (Teacher 3)

This is echoed by Teacher 1 who reported

The FP has made it [music] become more natural I suppose, rather than a separate subject ... It is now more integrated into the creativity side of things.

The impact of the move away from music as a timetabled subject under the NC was explained by Teacher 2 who stated

The children have the opportunity in their free play to use instruments to use in different areas and enhance their experiences, it's whenever they want to really ... we've brought instruments into the role play corner for different topics that we've done. We've got vehicles at the moment so they are experiencing different sounds at

Table 4	Children	perform/compose/appraise more	since	the
introduc	ction of the	e Foundation Phase		

	Perform	Compose	Appraise
Mode	1	1/2	3
Most positive response	1	1	1
Most negative response	4	4	4

the airport, fire station and hospital, so it's easier for me to be able to use music in that way rather than doing it as a single subject.

This perceived new freedom in the FP curriculum will be returned to below, but as the subject label of 'music' seems to have restricted the teachers' confidence in teaching it, the next questions explored the impact of removing the explicit 'labels' of composing, performing and appraising (used in the previous NC) in the FP guidance. This is not to say such activities did not appear, but they were implicit, rather than explicit. For example, they appear as elements of creative development, such as 'experiment with different ways of making and organising sounds', 'play simple rhythmic and melodic patterns on a variety of instruments' and 'reflect on their own and others' music' (DCELLS, 2008, p. 40). Despite the labels disappearing, teachers were familiar with the concepts through many years of use in the NC and were hence able to make informed judgements. Adopting the deliberately positive tone of previous Likert statements, teachers were asked to indicate levels of agreement with three separate statements: 'Children perform/compose/appraise music more since the introduction of the Foundation Phase'.

The teachers gave a mode response on 1 (strongly agree) and 2 (agree) in terms of performing and composing (see Table 4), thus showing a strong level of agreement that children participate more in these activities within the FP than previously.

The mode response for appraisal, however, indicated a neutral response to the suggestion that children appraise more since the introduction of the FP. One possible explanation emerged in an interview where a teacher stated that appraising was a difficult area because they did not know what it meant and often 'would leave it out' of the planning. This will be returned to in the discussion below.

Given the situation above where pupils regularly undertake all musical activities, but only composing and performing were perceived to have increased, it is necessary to explore the potential impact of teacher confidence on their practice in these three areas. To this end, teachers were asked to respond to three separate statements: 'I feel confident in performing/composing/appraising music'. Teacher responses in Table 5 indicate a somewhat conflicting picture, with the only neutral and negative modes of 3 and 4 in the whole survey in their confidence in composing.

Having explored levels of individual confidence in each area, teachers were then asked about their confidence in *teaching* each area with separate statements relating to 'I feel confident in *teaching* performing/composing/ appraising'. These results in Table 6 supported the more negative response to composing with a mode response of 3 (neutral),

Table 5 I feel confident performing/composing/appraising

	Performing	Composing	Appraising
Mode	2	3/4	2
Most positive response	1	1	1
Most negative response	4	4	4

Table 6 I feel confident teaching performing/composing/appraising

	Performing	Composing	Appraising
Mode	2	3	2
Range	2	3	4
Most positive response	1	1	1
Most negative response	3	4	5

Table 7 The language used in Foundation Phase documents is easier to understand than National Curriculum

Mode	2
Most positive response	2
Most negative response	4

compared to 2 (agree) in performing and appraising. What is reassuring, however, is that the previous responses suggest that this does not stop them undertaking all the musical processes with pupils.

Language used in official documents

If teachers did not always understand the components in the old NC, it was important to assess their understanding of music in the new FP. They were therefore asked to indicate their agreement with the assertion that 'The language used to explain musical activities in the new FP documents is clearer to understand than the previous National Curriculum guidance/documents'.

Table 7 shows a potentially positive impact of the new FP as the mode score was 2 (agree) in agreeing with this statement, which indicates that these teachers believed that the language used in Foundation Phase guidance is easier to understand. When this was explored further in the interviews it became apparent that the perceived formality in statutory documentation can have a negative impact on teacher confidence. Some teachers felt the musical language used in the old single subject of music in the NC was not as helpful as the guidance provided in the more integrated FP requirements. When asked to explain this, teachers outlined that before the Foundation Phase they did not

understand what they were being asked to do, or how to interpret guidance and musical vocabulary. This resembles Stakelum's (2008, p. 281) assertion that 'music education has become synonymous with implementation of the contents of a curriculum where, from the outset, the promotion of atomistic skills of music literacy was fostered at an official policy level'. The negative impact of this and the potential benefits of a more integrated creative approach are summed up by Teacher 2 who suggested that

Before they were using musical terms and for people like me who don't know musical vocabulary it was quite hard to understand what they actually wanted us to do. Now it's easier because the guidance isn't as formal and we're letting the children experience different aspects of music ...

This was supported by Teacher 1 who asserted that

I think it's now maybe easier to follow, because you're allowed freedom to do what you want. They've used easier language and not musical vocabulary where before we had to stick to the guidance.

This suggests that the move away from a subject-based curriculum to a more integrated 'creative development' context does seem to have liberated the teachers in this study to embed music into other areas of learning and into a variety of topics, which has had a positive effect on their confidence of teaching music.

The move to the FP was, however, not without problems and Teacher 3 claimed that

I think the language is easier [in the FP], but what I find more frustrating is that what they want you to do isn't set out as clearly as before. In the [National] Curriculum they set out exactly what to do with performing, composing and appraising, but now because it's in with creativity it's not as clear as before.

This concern, however, has to be balanced against the problems posed by the use of the labels performing, composing and appraising. In all interviews, one of these caused a problem and the outcome is explained below:

I was always a bit unsure about appraising, but I would do my best to try and follow the guidance. (Teacher 3)

Appraising before the Foundation Phase. I didn't really understand what that was so I found that difficult and probably would leave that out if anything. (Teacher 2)

Well, the composing part I was a bit unsure of so that would be left out ... (Teacher 1)

The results above should not, however, imply that teachers did not appreciate some elements of structure in their teaching. In two of the interviews the teachers mentioned the use of a music 'scheme' was a positive source of support:

The scheme is there and the scheme itself is very good ... (Teacher 1)

Before the FP I was literally just following the scheme on my own and kind of just doing as the scheme explained ... (Teacher 2)

Nevertheless, the perceived freedom to move beyond the scheme the teachers felt with the new FP guidance was important in developing their confidence. The interviews suggested that teachers found the FP made it easier to plan music in everyday lessons, but also, and perhaps more importantly, the teachers reported that music was seen as an integrated part of everyday activity and not a separate activity to be done at specific times with specific content. The positive impact on teacher confidence provided by the FP approach appeared in all three teacher interviews. It is perhaps explained best in their own words:

Whereas before I had to work rigidly through the scheme despite what was going on around, now you can choose something from the scheme that fits with what you're doing and that's really good. ... Before [the FP] I think that things had to be right the notes and songs made had to be right, whereas now it doesn't matter so much. Not that it doesn't matter at all, but it's different, the children are experimenting and exploring rather than having to do it a set way so it does seem easier for me. (Teacher 1)

I'm much more confident now I think, because we're using music with our topics it's more relevant to everyday lives and easier for me to understand and use in lessons rather than always having to use musical words I don't understand. (Teacher 2)

It makes it easier for me to plan and decide on activities because I can bring in music into a topic rather than think oh, I've got to do a music lesson and start from scratch. It's easier to bring music into subjects that I am more confident in. ... Now I can bring instruments into anything and it works, and the children love dancing to music and making a noise. (Teacher 3)

The above seems to suggest a move from seeing music as a separate entity managed by the teacher to a natural part of everyday activity managed by the pupils. As such, the FP seems to provide teachers with a 'flexible framework', not a 'prison' (Bourdieu, 1999 cited in Stavrou, 2006) as they seemed to perceive the previous music schemes and national curriculum.

The impact of play

This would support the success of the move to a play-based approach to learning in the FP, with the freedom for pupils to make their own choices. Now that music is part of 'creativity', it is expected that by participating in play activities that involve music, pupils will have a chance see that music is not a single, isolated subject with 'inert' information, but 'should engage in creative, imaginative and expressive activities in art, craft, design, music, dance and movement.' (DCELLS, 2008, p. 39) This may go some way to addressing Paynter's (2002, p. 217) concern that for so long pupils have been 'absorbing inert information about music'.

Overall this study suggests that the result of this greater play-based approach to learning, led by pupils, is that music plays a far *more* important and central role in the everyday classroom. In this study, when asked specifically, it is reassuring to note that 60% of the sample believed that music had become *more* important since the introduction of the FP.

As previously stated, teachers felt that under the old NC they had been expected to plan individual music lessons that focused upon performing, composing and appraising. Although implicitly teachers are still required to teach these areas within the FP, the greater freedom perceived by the interviewees, and the benefits for both teacher *and* pupils, are summarised by teacher 1 who stated

The children enjoy it more now that they have a choice in what they can do and the freedom that both they have, and I have as a teacher, shows in the enjoyment of the subject now it is combined with other areas.

Summary

As stated earlier, the research reported here was a small-scale study, but is the first to explore the impact on music teaching in the early years since the introduction of the FP across the whole of Wales. Before the FP, these teachers stated that their confidence in teaching music was a lot lower than it is now. As a result, music (or elements of it) would often be left out of the curriculum as teachers were confused, or even 'imprisoned', by official guidance and often did not understand what they were expected to do. The majority of teachers in the study indicated that FP documentation made it straightforward for them to understand what they were expected to do, and being able to combine music with other topics made it easier and more enjoyable to teach music.

As a result, music (both indoors and outdoors) is a more regular occurrence and has become liberated from its perceived single subject status with the associated confidence issues. The teachers in this study asserted that they were more confident in planning and carrying out musical activities and, as a result, music appears to play a far more central role within the FP classroom than it did with the National Curriculum. As Teacher 2 stated, 'I don't have a set time to do everything each week and it's more free. I think I end up doing it [music] more or less all of the time!'

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