Journal of the Royal Musical Association, 149.1, 23–49
doi:10.1017/rma.2024.13

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Challenging Classical Music's Genre Conventions: Findings from a Project on Youth Voice in Instrumental Education

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Abstract This article explores classical music education through analysing findings from a project on embedding 'youth voice' within instrumental teaching and learning. Drawing on theorizations of classical music as a genre, I describe how the young people in this project saw classical music's genre conventions as working against a youth voice approach. The article also outlines the ways in which youth voice was shaped through social relations in this space as well as the 'institutional ecology' of music education. I argue that embedding youth voice approaches in instrumental education will only be effective if the genre itself is open to transformation.

Introduction

Despite a burgeoning critical literature on instrumental teaching and learning, there is evidence that the 'traditional model' of pedagogy[1] remains the default in many contexts. This model, as Pozo and others describe, is characterized by 'authoritarian and one-directional social interactions'[2] in which pupils' views are not typically sought or listened to. The persistence of such a model is perhaps surprising given that it contravenes the United Nations Convention on Children's Rights. Countries that are signatories to this convention – that is, every country in the world except the United States – are required to give children the 'right to express […] views' and for these views to be given 'due weight'.[3] These rights have, to date, remained underexplored in relation to instrumental teaching and learning. In order to open up such a discussion, this article

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I am grateful to music education charity Agrigento for funding The Music Lab, as well as to Lewisham Music and Sound Connections for supporting this project, and to the two anonymous reviewers for very helpful comments on an earlier version.

[1] Juan Ignacio Pozo, José Antonio Torrado, and Lucas Baño, 'Teaching Music: Old Traditions and New Approaches', in *Learning and Teaching in the Music Studio: A Student-Centred Approach*, ed. by Juan Ignacio Pozo and others (Springer Nature Singapore, 2022), pp. 21–46 (p. 42).
[2] Ibid., p. 22.
[3] The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child> (accessed 22 December 2022).

situates this 'traditional model' of instrumental teaching and learning in relation to policy and theoretical approaches on 'youth voice' as well as theorizations of classical music as a genre. Building on this framing, the article explores how embedding youth voice in instrumental music education has the potential to change not only the pedagogy, but also the genre of classical music in ways that enable it to become more inclusive. In short, it asks how classical music might change if young people's voices were listened to.

As such, the article draws on and contributes to international policy, practice, and academic debates on diversity in classical music[4] as well as youth voice in music education.[5] It draws on qualitative data from a study carried out with partner organizations Sound Connections and Lewisham Music. Sound Connections is a music education sector support organization which focuses on youth voice. The project built on findings from my monograph *Class, Control, and Classical Music*,[6] which asks why classical music in the UK is predominantly played by people who are white and middle-class. It argues that in the UK, classical music's classed history shapes its conventions and practices today. These conventions and practices are reproduced through its institutions, and the book focused on music education institutions, highlighting the role of exam boards and conservatoires established in the late nineteenth century in shaping the musical lives of the young classical musicians today. In short, the book argues that the aesthetic conventions of classical music do some of the work of boundary-drawing to retain it as an elite social space. These aesthetic conventions include the canonic repertoire, the instruments, and the technical requirements to be able to create the ideals of beauty that are valued within the genre. All these conventions require a long-term, intensive investment of money, time, and effort that is more possible and makes more sense for middle- and upper-class families. Classical music's exclusionary practices are, therefore, to some degree embedded in the aesthetic itself. But this boundary-drawing is usually conceived of as musical rather than social; inclusions and exclusions occur on apparently purely musical grounds around 'talent' or ability rather than on the basis of membership of a social group. In this way these classed, racialized, and ableist exclusions are camouflaged by concepts such as 'talent' or 'the music itself'. The inequalities that have been documented across classical music education and the profession[7] are therefore not a coincidence but are built into the genre's conventions and institutions.

[4] See, for example, Paul Boghossian and Michael Beckerman (eds.), *Classical Music: Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges* (Open Book, 2021); Tamsin Cox and Hannah Kilshaw, *Creating a More Inclusive Classical Music: Executive Summary* (DHA and ICM, 2021), <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Executive_Summary.pdf>; Anna Bull, Laudan Nooshin, and Christina Scharff (eds.), *Voices for Change in the Classical Music Profession: New Ideas for Tackling Inequalities and Exclusions* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

[5] See, for example, Jean-Philippe Després and Francis Dubé, 'The Music Learner Voice: A Systematic Literature Review and Framework', *Frontiers in Education*, 5 (2020), doi:10.3389/feduc.2020.00119; Gary Spruce, 'Music Education, Social Justice, and the "Student Voice"', in *The Oxford Handbook of Social Justice in Music Education*, ed. by Cathy Benedict and others (Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 287–301.

[6] Anna Bull, *Class, Control and Classical Music* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

[7] Anna Bull and others, *Slow Train Coming? Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in UK Music Higher Education*, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies Network (2022), <https://edims.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This means that in order to diversify classical music not only do its institutions, its selection and progression mechanisms, and its culture need to change, but its aesthetic conventions should also be open to scrutiny. This point also follows a basic premise of diversity work: the space that 'diverse' others are being invited into has to be open to being changed by those who are joining it.[8] There are multiple angles from which we could approach this 'diversity' work. Some of these are being explored by musicians who are experimenting with ways in which diversity might support the aesthetic renewal of classical music[9] as well as by music educators who are exploring how genre diversity can lead to social diversity in music programmes.[10] However, one route suggested in *Class, Control, and Classical Music* is embedding 'youth voice' in classical music education. To explore this, in the following discussion I ask how youth voice in the form of musical and creative decision-making can be embedded within instrumental classical music education. The article also explores classical music as a genre, asking to what extent the conventions of classical music shape young people's voices.

The article first explores theorizations of youth voice outside and within music education and then outlines the notion of classical music as a genre. It then introduces 'The Music Lab', the project which this article discusses, before outlining findings across four themes: first, how young people experienced the project and how it contrasted with their existing instrumental teaching; second, how young people understood classical music as a genre; third, how the 'institutional ecology' of classical music education limited the extent of transformations that were possible in the space of The Music Lab; and fourth, how the social relations of the space shaped participants' musical voices. Finally, it discusses these findings in relation to the questions of diversity in classical music raised above.

Introducing Youth Voice

Concepts and theories associated with youth voice have been influential within international human rights policy for more than thirty years. The most widely used policy formation in this area, the UN Convention on Children's Rights (UNCRC), states that:

> States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.[11]

network/report/slowtraincoming/>; Cox and Wilshaw, *Creating a More Inclusive Classical Music*; Bull and others, *Voices for Change in the Classical Music Profession*.

[8] Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Duke University Press, 2012); Anamik Saha, *Race and the Cultural Industries* (Polity Press, 2017).

[9] Kristina Kolbe, '(Un)Settling Institutional Hegemony: Challenges of Diversity Strategies in the Western Classical Music Sector', in *Voices for Change in the Classical Music Profession*, pp. 69–80; Jon Silpayamanant, '[Re-]Training Classical Musicians towards Polymusicality and Hybridisation: An Interview with Jon Silpayamanant', in *Voices for Change in the Classical Music Profession*, pp. 185–94.

[10] Matthew Clauhs and Radio Cremata, 'Student Voice and Choice in Modern Band Curriculum Development', *Journal of Popular Music Education*, 4.1 (2020), pp. 101–16.

[11] The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Convention on the Rights of the Child.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Since it was adopted by the United Nations in November 1989, 196 countries have signed up to the UNCRC, with only the United States having failed to ratify it. However, instrumental teaching and learning – perhaps due to its fragmented and largely unregulated status in the UK – has only minimally engaged with this concept, as outlined in the following discussion.

There exist various models for theorizing how children's views should be heard. Perhaps the most commonly used one is Roger Hart's 'ladder of participation',[12] developed in the 1980s out of Sherry Arnstein's earlier model of (adult) citizen participation.[13] This model conceptualizes children's and young people's levels of participation in decision-making in any activities they are involved with. The bottom three rungs of the ladder denote manipulative, decorative, or tokenistic involvement of young people. For example, orchestral education programme El Sistema Venezuela sits at this level of the ladder as it involves children and young people in tokenistic or even manipulative ways to accrue prestige for the project rather than allowing children a meaningful say.[14] The middle rungs of the ladder involve adult-led projects that children and young people understand and contribute to. At the top of the ladder sit child or youth-led projects that may not involve adults at all. Despite the popularity of this model, it has been substantially critiqued, including by Roger Hart himself, for its cultural bias in favouring North American and British cultures. Hart has also argued that it is time to move beyond the ladder towards alternative metaphors and theories for children's participation.[15]

One of the moves beyond the 'ladder' is to conceive of children as 'social change agents'.[16] This approach draws on a critique that Karen Malone and Catherine Hartung make of children's participation models, and of projects that draw on these models. They argue that such models aim to maintain the current status quo rather than enabling social transformation.[17] This critique draws attention to an interesting tension in projects embedding 'youth voice' in instrumental classical music education: to what extent is classical music – its pedagogy, repertoire, conventions, instruments, and other genre norms – able to be transformed through youth voice interventions?

However, despite the decades-long engagement with youth voice in education research, practice, and policy, in the field of instrumental education discussion of

[12] Roger A. Hart, *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship* (UNICEF, 1992) <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/100-childrens-participation-from-tokenism-to-citizenship.html> (accessed 1 September 2021).

[13] Sherry R. Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 35.4 (1969), pp. 216–24.

[14] Geoffrey Baker, 'Citizens or Subjects? El Sistema in Critical Perspective', in *Artistic Citizenship: Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Praxis*, ed. by David Elliott, Marissa Silverman, and Wayne Bowman (Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 313–38.

[15] Karen Malone and Catherine Hartung, 'Challenges of Participatory Practice with Children', in *A Handbook of Children and Young People's Participation: Conversations for Transformational Change*, ed. by B. Percy-Smith and others (Taylor & Francis, 2009), pp. 24–38, (p. 28).

[16] Ibid., p. 29.

[17] Ibid., p. 33.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

youth voice remains in the early stages.[18] There currently exist competing definitions, terminology, and theorizations, including 'learner voice' (Després and Dubé), 'a musical say' (Davis), or 'dialogic' musical voice (Spruce). Jean-Philippe Després and Francis Dubé focus on decision-making in their definition of 'learner voice' in music education as:

> the process by which learners are listened to, consulted, included, take part, or take charge of the decision-making process or take action about their learning or their education in diverse contexts.[19]

Després and Dubé go on to outline the characteristics of 'authentic learner voice initiatives', which should 'allow for two-way exchanges between teachers and students, are participatory and inclusive, challenge established power relations and allow for effective changes'.[20] This definition does, therefore, include the possibility for learners to act as 'social change agents'. However, I will suggest in the following discussion that conceptualizations of youth voice in music education need to include a dual focus: as well as 'learner voice' as outlined earlier, they also need to include *musical* voice. By this I mean the ways in which musical learners might discover an expressive, creative voice through their music education. This conceptualization is centred in Sharon G. Davis's definition of 'voice':

> a musical say includes opportunities to contribute in ensemble settings and the development of musical voice through ownership, agency, relevance, and personal expression – and the investment of these dynamic and fluid meanings in the ensemble process.[21]

Here, Davis combines decision-making or 'a musical say' with ideas of musical voice as 'personal expression'. She situates this discussion within a framing of identity formation, drawing on Etienne Wenger to argue 'that understanding who we are is a result of 'incorporat[ing] the past and the future in the very process of negotiating the present'.[22] In other words, rather than assuming that 'voice' is something that is already there to be uncovered, it is instead formed through the experiences in the music

[18] See Després and Dubé, 'The Music Learner Voice', p. 11. There does, however, exist an extensive literature on informal learning and in-class curricular music, such as the 'Musical Futures' programme, and the gap between pupils' musical identities inside and outside school, See, for example, Alexandra Lamont and others, 'Young People's Music in and Out of School', *British Journal of Music Education*, 20.03 (2003), pp. 229–41; Anna Mariguddi, 'Tensions, Issues and Strengths of Professor Lucy Green's Model of Informal Learning', *Music Education Research*, 24.4 (2022), pp. 442–454; Ruth Wright, 'Kicking the Habitus: Power, Culture and Pedagogy in the Secondary School Music Curriculum', *Music Education Research*, 10.3 (2008), pp. 389–402. See also Helen Dromey, 'A Pedagogy for Continuation: Rethinking Instrumental Teaching after Whole Class Ensemble Tuition' (PhD dissertation, University of York, 2024).

[19] Després and Dubé, 'The Music Learner Voice'; Spruce, 'Music Education, Social Justice, and the "Student Voice"', p. 3.

[20] Després and Dubé, 'The Music Learner Voice', p. 4.

[21] Sharon D. Davis, 'Fostering a "Musical Say": Identity, Expression, and Decision Making in a US School Ensemble', in *Learning, Teaching, and Musical Identity: Voices across Cultures*, ed. by Lucy Green (Indiana University Press, 2011), p. 267.

[22] Etienne Wenger, *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 155.

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classroom (as well as outside it), within the formation of a wider (musical) identity. Davis's definition makes clear why definitions of youth voice in music education cannot be taken directly from other education settings but need to include this dual focus of learner voice as well as expressive voice. In this vein, Helen Dromey has drawn on John Dewey's work to devise a pupil-led pedagogy for small-group instrumental teaching, entitled 'Be a musician' (BeAM).[23]

The third definition of 'voice' that I draw on comes from Gary Spruce, who argues that the development of musical voice is dialogic or relational rather than individual; musical voice is developed through interactions within the pedagogic space as well as in relation to musics from other times and spaces. This approach means that we need to draw on 'a musical pedagogy that seeks to engage the voice of the learner – both musically and verbally – not as an individualized, "personalized self", but as existing always in relation to an "other"'.[24] Spruce further suggests that it is necessary 'to interrogate the pedagogical values and ideologies that construct the voice and which privilege certain voices and messages while rendering others unheard'.[25]

Spruce's approach fits well with – and indeed draws on – Madeleine Arnot and Diane Reay's theorization of 'pupil voice',[26] the final theorization that I will introduce. Arnot and Reay's approach is not specific to music education but rather takes a critical sociological approach towards education systems more widely. Arnot and Reay argue that 'voice' is far from a straightforward concept, and in educational projects that centre voice, it is crucial to distinguish which types of voice we are eliciting. Most notably, they argue for 'the development of what we called a sociology of pedagogic voice which engages with the power relations which create voices',[27] suggesting that 'key to this analysis is not that voice cannot change power relations, but that shifts in power relations can change "voices"'.[28] Similar to Spruce's and Davis's approach, this theorization counters the assumption that individual voices already exist and simply have to be elicited. Instead, all these authors foreground the ways in which 'voice' is produced within social relations, dialogically, over time. Arnot and Reay's approach is particularly important for understanding how marginalized pupils may experience pedagogic spaces. Janet Batsleer, in her study of an informal education project using arts-based methodologies with marginalized young men in Manchester, argues that 'the analysis of "youth voice" needs to recognize how the discourses or codes of youth are shaping participation practice and delineating what can and cannot be spoken', noting that 'paradoxically, inviting young people to speak, especially those who have been marginalized by school, can in some ways intensify that marginality'.[29] Such a reminder is particularly important

[23] Dromey, 'A Pedagogy for Continuation'.
[24] Spruce, 'Music Education, Social Justice, and the "Student Voice"', p. 299.
[25] Ibid., p. 288.
[26] Madeleine Arnot and Diane Reay, 'A Sociology of Pedagogic Voice: Power, Inequality and Pupil Consultation', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28.3 (2007), pp. 311–25.
[27] Ibid., p. 312.
[28] Ibid., pp. 315–16.
[29] Janet Batsleer, 'Voices from an Edge. Unsettling the Practices of Youth Voice and Participation: Arts-Based Practice in The Blue Room, Manchester', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 19.3 (2011), pp. 419–34 (p. 423).

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in projects where young people from social identities that are marginalized in classical music education are expected to negotiate complicated power relations in order to speak. This complexity is also present in relation to young people's creative, expressive voice. In summary, Arnot and Reay's and Spruce's sociologically grounded readings of voice are generative in that they recognize and foreground the complex social dynamics that shape the possibilities for youth voice in classical music education.

In the discussion the follows I draw on these theorizations to formulate two distinct versions of 'youth voice'. The first version I will call 'learner voice', drawing on Després and Dubé. This refers to the extent to which learners have a say in their own teaching and learning. The second version I will call 'musical voice', referring to the development of young people's musical, expressive capacities. This version draws on Spruce's and Davis's work. Both of these types of voice are formed dialogically, as part of a wider identity-formation process, within the power relations of pedagogic spaces. In order to operationalize these ideas and explore them empirically, in the research questions (as outlined in the following section) I focus on decision-making[30] which captures both of these versions of voice: being able to make decisions about how learning takes place, as well as musical or expressive decisions about what sounds good.[31] Before introducing the research questions, I first outline the socio-aesthetic context in which this musical decision-making is taking place by exploring theorizations of classical music as a genre.

Classical Music as a Genre and a Pedagogic Model

In using the term 'classical music', I am drawing on a theoretical approach from popular music studies where the concept of genre is used 'to understand the relationship between the social and the aesthetic by studying the circulation of common "orientations, expectations and conventions"'[32] between producers, audiences, industry, and texts. This theoretical lens allows for social and aesthetic conventions to be studied together rather than assuming that 'the music' exists separately from the social practices through which it is created. As a result, identifying and analysing genre conventions can reveal how social norms are legitimized by aesthetic ideals, and/or vice versa, and how systems of musical meaning are reproduced through these conventions.

The ways in which musical meaning and value are constructed within classical music have been theorized by Lydia Goehr, Lucy Green, Georgina Born, Christopher Small, as well as myself. A full discussion of these is beyond the scope of this article but can be

[30] The use of this term was influenced by discussions with Helen Dromey.

[31] This approach is complementary to, but distinct from, Pozo and others' focus on 'student-centred learning'. The latter examines instrumental teaching and learning through a primarily psychological lens, while a 'youth voice' approach situates such discussions within a wider human rights framing that focuses on the social rather than the individual level. See Guadalupe López-Íñiguez and others, 'Student-Centred Music Education: Principles to Improve Learning and Teaching', in Pozo and others, *Learning and Teaching in the Music Studio*, pp. 369–84.

[32] Anna Bull and Christina Scharff, 'Classical Music as Genre: Hierarchies of Value within Freelance Classical Musicians' Discourses', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24.3 (2021), p. 675; Bull and Scharff, 'Introduction', in *Voices for Change in the Classical Music Profession*, pp. 1–16; Stephen Neale, *Genre* (British Film Institute, 1980), p. 19.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

found in *Class, Control, and Classical Music.* To summarize, Lydia Goehr traces how classical music's autonomy from social concerns can be traced to the turn of the nineteenth century and was crystallized in the notion of the 'musical work' wherein meaning lay within the work itself, rather than its social function.[33] In the present day, Lucy Green has identified classical music's ideological values as universality, autonomy from social concerns, complexity, and originality.[34] Similarly, Georgina Born, in a wider theorization of music and genre, describes 'the mutual mediation of music and social processes in Western art music', against discourses of universalism that assert classical music as existing outside of social concerns.[35] The hierarchy of composer–performer–audience is described by Christopher Small as fundamental to classical music's ontology, as well as the prioritization of harmonic over rhythmic complexity, among other points.[36] Finally, I have identified aspects of classical music's culture among young people in the south of England that form a 'contingent connection' with white middle-class values and identities: prioritizing long-term investment; valuing 'emotional depth' and 'serious' music over 'fun' music; and formal, gendered modes of social organization of music-making. Within these wider social systems of meaning-making, specific social and aesthetic conventions can be identified. For example, the convention whereby audiences refrain from clapping between movements at concerts makes sense if one understands the meaning of a musical work as a coherent whole that should not be interrupted.

Classical music's pedagogic conventions can also be understood in relation to these systems of musical meaning. Indeed, the 'traditional' or 'master–apprentice' model of instrumental teaching and learning gains its power in a large part due to its relationship with classical music's genre-specific ontologies (which are in turn upheld through its institutions). For example, Pozo and others describe how the 'traditional model' of instrumental teaching and learning assumes objective 'positivist' knowledge and involves 'direct or transmissive teaching methods based on strictly prescribed, regulatory, authoritarian and one-directional social interactions, in a teacher-student method dyad', which is 'centred mostly on musical score decoding and technical control of the instrument'.[37] In a similar vein, Harald Jørgensen describes the 'master–apprentice' style teaching in instrumental education 'where the master usually is looked at as a role model and a source of identification for the student, and where the dominating mode of student learning is imitation'.[38] Finally, I have outlined classical music's 'pedagogy

[33] Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Clarendon Press, 1992).

[34] Lucy Green, 'Why "Ideology" Is Still Relevant for Critical Thinking in Music Education', *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 2.2 (2003), pp. 1–24 (p. 16). See also Georgina Born, 'The Social and the Aesthetic: For a Post-Bourdieuian Theory of Cultural Production', *Cultural Sociology*, 4.2 (2010), pp. 171–208; Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music.*

[35] Georgina Born, 'For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 135.2 (2010), pp. 205–43 (p. 215).

[36] Christopher Small, *Music, Society, Education*, 2nd edn (Wesleyan, 1996).

[37] Pozo and others, 'Teaching Music: Old Traditions and New Approaches', p. 22.

[38] Harald Jørgensen, 'Student Learning in Higher Instrumental Education: Who Is Responsible?', *British Journal of Music Education*, 17.1 (2000), pp. 67–77 (p. 67).

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of correction' as 'a teaching practice where the majority of the pedagogic input consists of correction' or 'getting it right'.[39] These pedagogic practices contribute to upholding the wider systems of musical meaning described earlier, such as the hierarchy of composer over performer, or the assumption that musical meaning exists in the composer's intentions as represented in the score, transmitted via the authority of the teacher.

Other than in work by Lucy Green, Christopher Small and I, critical discussions of classical music instrumental pedagogy have not tended to be situated within social analyses of classical music as a genre. Nevertheless, such a framing is important because pedagogic conventions – similar to other genre conventions – reproduce systems of musical meaning, and in order to make changes to instrumental teaching and learning, it is helpful to understand the systems of meaning that are upholding current practices. The framing of genre therefore allows the 'traditional' model of instrumental teaching and learning to be understood in relation to the wider ideological systems of musical meaning and value identified by Goehr, Born, Green, Small, and myself. Furthermore, from a youth voice perspective, theorizing classical music as a genre enables a focus on how the genre is understood by those who are playing or listening to it in a particular context (in this case the young people in this study) rather than attempting to find a definition that remains consistent over different times and places (which as other authors have argued, is not possible[40]). Finally, such a perspective allows an understanding of genre as fluid, occurring through the mutual mediation of the social and the aesthetic.[41]

Indeed, as Live Ellefsen has argued in relation to classroom music, despite music teachers' mobilization of genre categories as 'neutral and natural',[42] they actively (re) produce these categories through everyday classification processes. She describes these processes as 'genring'. This term 'refers to productive acts of temporary interpretation and signification, in which existing classification systems and genre categories in the social are operationalized and (re)negotiated'.[43] The concept of 'genring' reminds us that genre conventions do not reproduce themselves but must be actively reproduced by teachers and students. It draws attention to the pedagogic and socio-cultural work that goes into upholding these conventions. This approach is particularly important for classical music due to the ways in which social, economic, and cultural value are stored within its institutions and spaces.[44]

[39] Anna Bull, 'Getting It Right: Why Classical Music's "Pedagogy of Correction" Is a Barrier to Equity', *Music Educators Journal*, 108.3 (2022), pp. 65–66 (p. 66).
[40] Boghossian and Beckerman, *Classical Music: Contemporary Perspectives and Challenges*.
[41] Georgina Born, 'Music and the Materialization of Identities', *Journal of Material Culture*, 16.4 (2011), pp. 376–88.
[42] Live Wieder Ellefsen, 'Genre and "Genring" in Music Education', *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, 21.1 (2022), pp. 56–79 (p. 65).
[43] Ibid., p. 57.
[44] Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

How Do Young Classical Musicians Experience 'Youth Voice' Approaches?

Després and Dubé, in their literature review of research into 'learner voice' in music education, found only seven peer-reviewed articles in English published since 2007 that also included qualitative data from young people on this topic. They outlined the following findings from this literature:

> most music learners (a) don't like to be lectured and tested, they prefer to be active in a collaborative and non-stressful environment; (b) don't like to be directed in a top-down approach, they want to take part in the decision-making process, and (c) prefer not to specialize too quickly: they value learning various instruments and songs.[45]

This analysis draws on studies from across a range of genres. However, when comparing these findings with studies carried out specifically within classical music, it appears that they may not hold up. In classical music education, both Geoff Baker and I have found evidence that directly challenges Després and Dubé's finding that learners 'don't like to be directed in a top-down approach'. These findings lead to challenges around incorporating a youth voice approach in classical music. In *Rethinking Social Action through Music*, Geoff Baker analyses a classical music programme in Colombia (the 'Red'). His study documents attempts to move away from a Sistema-style programme – which relies on strict authority, rote learning, and prioritizing musical over social learning – towards a more pupil-centred model of teaching and learning where the 'social action' side of 'social action through music' is taken seriously.[46] Baker documents resistance from both teachers and students within the programme to these changes, finding that older students were the most likely to resist the inclusion of a more 'social' dimension:

> Members of the student committee of the youth orchestra, having spent years climbing the institutional hierarchy, were keener on performing European masterworks than playing Colombian repertoire or composing their own music, and they *wanted* the orchestra to be exclusive […] The Red's management was pushing for a more participatory ethos, but the most advanced students wanted a more presentational emphasis.[47]

In this instance, youth voice is conservative, defending hierarchy, exclusion, and 'top-down approaches'. Similarly, in my study of youth music groups in England, attempts to challenge hierarchies in two youth orchestras – which would potentially have given more of a say to the young musicians – were unpopular; existing hierarchies whereby adults held positions of power were defended.[48] There existed a deep trust in adult leaders running these groups, and a disavowal of power relations between conductor and musicians, despite the fact that all the musical decisions were made unilaterally by conductors. Many of the young people stated that they enjoyed this top-down approach.[49]

[45] Després and Dubé, 'The Music Learner Voice', p. 11.
[46] Geoffrey Baker, *Rethinking Social Action through Music: The Medellín Half-Miracle* (Open Book, 2021).
[47] Ibid., p. 123.
[48] Anna Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, chapter 3.
[49] Anna Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, chapter 3.

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It is important to note that both Baker and I found these attitudes among older 'young' classical musicians who had been investing in their music education and in the culture and hierarchies of classical music for a significant period of time. Presumably these young musicians wanted to reap the benefits of their investment and hard work. Drawing on Reay and Arnot, the defence of the status quo that Baker and I found shows how young people's voices were shaped by power relations in the form of the conventional pedagogies and genre norms of classical music.

These findings demonstrate that the project of embedding youth voice in classical music education – whether 'learner voice' or 'musical voice' – brings with it significant challenges. If young people defend the status quo whereby they do not have a voice in their learning or their musical expression, then 'youth voice' in classical music is doomed to fail. However, if the genre conventions of classical music are contributing towards these hierarchies of value and authority, then identifying and critically discussing these genre conventions with young people could open up space for transformation. As a result, building on the preceding theoretical framings, the research questions that this article addresses are as follows:

1. To what extent do the conventions of classical music shape young people's musical voices?
2. How can youth voice in the form of musical and creative decision-making be embedded within instrumental classical music education?

Introducing The Music Lab

This project came about through conversations I had with Jenn Raven, deputy director of Sound Connections, a London-based music education charity that supports other music education organizations to embed a youth voice approach. We were awarded a small grant from music education and social justice charity Agrigento to run a project on youth voice in instrumental teaching within music education 'hubs' in the UK.[50] Following a competitive process, Lewisham Music was chosen as our hub partner to run The Music Lab. We also recruited music facilitator Isabella Mayne and youth worker Jacob Sakil to run the sessions and were supported by project coordinator Liz Coomb from Sound Connections. The decision to include a youth worker as well as a music facilitator was an explicit one that recognized the expertise of youth workers in facilitating critical dialogue with and between young people and 'tipping balances of power in young people's favour'.[51] Following multiple delays due to the Covid-19

[50] 'Hubs' were established in 2012 following the National Plan for Music Education, replacing local authority music services. As Ally Daubney and colleagues describe: 'Hubs comprise groups of organisations – such as local authority music services, schools, other Hubs, Arts organisations, community or voluntary organisations. The Hubs were designed to augment and support music teaching in schools […] so that more children could experience a combination of classroom teaching, instrumental and vocal tuition and input from professional musicians.' Ally Daubney, Gary Spruce, and Deborah Annetts, *Music Education: State of the Nation* (All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education, Incorporated Society of Musicians, University of Sussex, London, 2019), p. 8.

[51] Tania de St Croix, *Grassroots Youth Work: Policy, Passion and Resistance in Practice* (Policy Press, 2016), p. 6.

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pandemic, the project was eventually run over two days in 2021 during the October half-term school holidays.

The project was free for young people to participate in, and an invitation to participate was sent to all young people enrolled in Lewisham Music's instrumental teaching programme who played orchestral instruments or piano, at grade 3 or above 'in a classical style'. This recruitment approach was designed to focus on classical music as a genre, as discussed below. Nineteen young people (nine girls and ten boys) between the ages of 11 and 16 participated in the project and had all started learning their instrument between the ages of 6 and 10. Importantly for considering social diversity in classical music education, the majority of young people described themselves as having racialized identities which are minoritized in the UK (although not necessarily in London).[52] The sample was also more privileged in relation to class than the wider population of Lewisham with eleven out of nineteen being clearly middle-class.[53]

It is important to contextualize the findings within Lewisham as an area, and within Lewisham Music as an organization. Keith Sykes, the community music lead at Lewisham Music, who was our liaison for the project, described Lewisham as a fertile and exciting place musically and socially, where young people seemed to have a particularly wide variety of musical interests and tastes. It is important, therefore, in assessing the success of the project to point out that Lewisham is not a typical hub or a typical area. A further factor affecting the dynamic of the project was that it was a one-off workshop rather than an ongoing project. This is important in thinking about the power relations and possibilities for youth voice within the space: it was a new space for the young people, and while some of the young people knew each other from their Saturday music school, many of them did not know any of the other participants. It was also short-term: we were creating a 'temporary autonomous zone'[54] where the rules

[52] Seven self-identified as white, three as mixed race, two as British Chinese, one 'Asian', and five who were of Black African or Caribbean descent. One participant described themselves simply as 'British'.

[53] In order to understand class position, participants were asked about their parents' occupations and their eligibility for free school meals, a measure of income: 11 (58%) had parents who were in jobs that clearly placed the young people as upper-middle- or middle-class, in NS-SEC 1 or 2, against 45% of the adult population in Lewisham. See Local Government Association, 'Explore Data', <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/dataAndReports/explorer?category=200006> (accessed 28 June 2022). Four participants described semi-skilled or unskilled jobs, and three answered that they were 'unsure' when asked if their parents did paid work. A further marker of class in the UK is whether pupils are eligible for free school meals (measured on income) and out of the nineteen pupils, three were on free school meals and one was unsure. This means that 16% (or possibly 21%) of pupils were on free school meals, as opposed to 28% of secondary school pupils in Lewisham (against a national average of 22.2%). See Local Government Association, 'Percentage of Secondary School Pupils Known to Be Eligible for Free School Meals in Lewisham', <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=2174&mod-area=E09000023&mod-group=AllBoroughInRegion_London&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup> (accessed 28 June 2022).

[54] Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, 2nd rev. edn (Autonomedia, 2004).

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could be discarded and experiments could be tried out. The invitation to participate called pupils to

> explore, together, ways of teaching and learning classical instruments differently. You'll be our co-researchers, bringing your ideas about what you want from your music education and experimenting with how to do things differently.

Owing to this framing of the project being advertised as being something different to their usual music-making, there was likely to be a degree of self-selection in who signed up.

During the two-day session, decision-making was shared between the facilitator, Isabella, and the participants, drawing on principles of community art.[55] The main activity across the two days was devising music based on musical material either learnt by ear or from a piece of music they had brought in themselves. They spent much of the time working in small groups of four or five, with Liz, Jacob, Isabella, and I providing help if needed. Their devised pieces were then combined into a longer piece for the whole group at the end of each day.

Clearly it is not possible to disrupt participants' many years of socialization into classical music's genre conventions within a two-day period. Instead, the project was designed to explore how young people whose instrumental learning had taken place within a 'traditional model' of classical music's genre conventions responded to a workshop-style setting where youth voice was foregrounded, and to explore how this contrasted with their existing instrumental music education. We saw this approach as the first step in a longer process towards embedding youth voice in instrumental classical music education, which would necessarily involve building up young people's capacity for decision-making and voice over time.[56]

The project was granted a favourable ethical review by the University of York's Department of Education ethics committee. The decision was made not to anonymize the organizations or music facilitators involved in the project[57] in order to acknowledge their contributions to the project publicly as well as to appropriately attribute authorship to Isabella Mayne and Jenn Raven for the youth voice toolkit that has been published coming out of this research.[58] The names of young people given below are pseudonyms.

The following findings draw on four main sources of data: participant observation including observation and participation in music-making and informal conversations with participants during breaks; three focus groups on the second afternoon in which all of the participants were involved and a fourth focus group at the end of the project with the facilitators and organizers; written comments elicited from participants onto a padlet in the introductory session held on zoom; and a short questionnaire asking for

[55] Francois Matarasso, *A Restless Art: How Participation Won, and Why It Matters* (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 2019).

[56] A pedagogy that supports this approach is being developed by Helen Dromey in her PhD research looking at string teaching for pupils progressing after experiencing Whole Class Ensemble Teaching (a statutory requirement in music education 'hubs' in England).

[57] This is in line with the British Educational Research Association's guidelines: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2018-online>, page 27, paragraph 40.

[58] Isabella Mayne, Anna Bull, and Jenn Raven, 'Embedding Youth Voice in Classical Music Pedagogy', *Sound Connections* (2022), <https://issuu.com/soundconnections/docs/the_music_lab_-_toolkit>.

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demographic data and music education background. The youth worker, Jacob, and project coordinator, Liz, also contributed to participant observation, sharing their notes from observations of the small group work. Reflexive thematic analysis[59] of all the data except the questionnaire (which was used solely to describe the demographic characteristics of participants, as outlined earlier) was carried out. This involved repeatedly reading over the data (focus group transcripts, online comments, and ethnographic fieldnotes) in an iterative process, drawing out initial codes that were then shaped into the themes that are outlined in the following sections. The theoretical lenses that were drawn on to identify codes in the data were youth voice (in particular 'learner voice' and 'musical voice' as noted above), classical music's conventions, and 'diversity' whether of genre or demographic group. The interpretations reached, while grounded in the findings, are therefore specific to the theoretical lenses that were applied; different theoretical lenses would have resulted in different findings from the same data.

The article structure follows the four themes that were identified in the data analysis. The first three themes focus on the first research question, exploring how the conventions of classical music shape young people's voices, while the final theme and the conclusion explore routes towards, and challenges in, embedding youth voice in instrumental classical music education.

Theme One: Comparing Musical Decision-Making in The Music Lab to Participants' Existing Instrumental Education

Similarly to Davis, I found that young people had 'strong ideas about expressive musical decisions'.[60] Participants got involved in musical decision-making quickly and easily. In the small groups, while they spent some of their time chatting or 'messing around' with their instruments rather than working on the task they had been assigned, there was also a substantial amount of musical decision-making occurring, with comments such as 'it sounds nice when …', 'what are we doing *here*?', 'how do we make it flow between groups? [when putting several parts together]', or one group member saying to the others, 'if you have ideas for the bass line just add it in'. One of the older participants (age 16) described his group's process as follows:

> It was like this journey of different ideas and some ideas went to a dead end because it sounded horrible sometimes, and sometimes it worked really well.

The group dynamics varied across the four groups (as explored later), but all of the groups were able to come up with musical material to share in the plenary sessions at the end of each day. During sharing sessions, young people appeared to have a strong sense of ownership over the musical material they had co-created.[61]

[59] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (Sage, 2021).
[60] Davis, 'Fostering a "Musical Say"', p. 279.
[61] This finding is similar to other studies exploring small group informal learning in school music education. See, for example, S. E. Evans, G. Beauchamp, and V. John, 'Learners' Experience and Perceptions of Informal Learning in Key Stage 3 Music: A Collective Case Study, Exploring the

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In focus groups and informal discussions with participants during the breaks, it became clear that the mode of music-making that they were experiencing in The Music Lab formed a strong contrast with their instrumental education more generally. In the online session that was held before the workshops started, participants were asked to write down a time when they had, or had not, had a say in their instrumental lessons. They gave examples of both 'musical voice' and 'learner voice': choosing the instrument they wanted to learn, choosing repertoire, and control over interpretation or composition. Examples of a time when they 'had a say' included 'when I choose the grade pieces I do', or:

> My violin teacher normally chooses the pieces and if I'm going to skip a grade. The time I had a decision was deciding to play the violin for the first time.

As exemplified in this quote, repertoire choice was an area where many participants felt they did not get a say. This finding is in line with Nielsen and others' survey of 151 music teachers in Norway, which found that particularly when teaching classical music (as opposed to popular music or other genres), teachers' preferences and tastes were more influential than pupils' preferences on choice of repertoire.[62] Similarly, in David Barton's survey of 486 private instrumental teachers in England, teachers stated that they did offer repertoire choice to pupils, but in reality these choices tended to be tightly circumscribed; for example 'allowing pupils to choose from a selection of pieces pre-chosen by the teacher'.[63]

Other than choosing repertoire or choosing what instrument to learn, most examples related to musical voice, and participants gave more examples of times when they had not had a say than when they had. One example was an attempt at interpretive decision-making:

> Once with a teacher, I put in my own phrase and breath marks but my teacher told me it was incorrect and changed them all – but I didn't think it sounded good!

While this intervention by the teacher might have been intended to help the student improve their technical mastery, the student experienced it as a correction which failed to support her own musical voice.

Another description of a student's musical voice being 'corrected' was as follows:

> I wanted to add other aspects to the piece I was playing, but when I tried it out, [my teacher] listened and said it wasn't how to play.

These examples show that some of the young people in The Music Lab were experiencing instrumental learning as correction or being told that their musical voice

Implementation of *Musical Futures* in Three Secondary Schools in Wales", *Music Education Research*, 17.1 (2015), pp. 1–16.

62 Siw Graabræk Nielsen, Anne Jordhus-Lier, and Sidsel Karlsen, 'Selecting Repertoire for Music Teaching: Findings from Norwegian Schools of Music and Arts', *Research Studies in Music Education*, 45.1 (2022), doi:10.1177/1321103X221099436.

63 David Barton, 'The Autonomy of Private Instrumental Teachers: Its Effect on Valid Knowledge Construction, Curriculum Design, and Quality of Teaching and Learning' (PhD dissertation, Royal College of Music, 2020), <http://researchonline.rcm.ac.uk/id/eprint/1715/>, p. 150.

was not acceptable. Despite ongoing work to shift the 'traditional model' of instrumental teaching towards a more dialogic one,[64] these experiences suggest that there is still a long way to go with this work. Indeed, creative music-making workshops along the lines of The Music Lab were not the norm for participants; only five out of the nineteen said that they had ever been involved in *any* creative music-making sessions or workshops; some described doing Musical Futures-style learning in secondary schools[65] but this did not involve their own creative input. For most participants, being engaged in creative music-making that gave space for their own musical voice was a new experience.

Theme Two: Exploring How Participants Understood Classical Music as a Genre

From the findings presented so far, it was clear that most of the young people participating in The Music Lab had experienced a relatively conservative model of instrumental education. This is not surprising since, in the UK, the majority of instrumental teachers have not had any training and therefore are likely to be relying on teaching the way they were taught.[66] However, rather than holding individual teachers solely responsible, it is important to understand the wider structures and institutions that are shaping teachers' practices. These include the genre conventions, and associated pedagogic practices, of classical music. Some of these have already become clear in the previous section, in which participants described teachers choosing their repertoire for them, upholding the genre convention of fidelity to the score,[67] and engaging in the 'pedagogy of correction'.[68]

Indeed, when we explored participants' understandings of 'classical music', the young people's descriptions included many of the genre conventions of classical music that are familiar from critical literature in this area.[69] Fidelity to the score was

[64] Helena Gaunt and Heidi Westerlund (eds.), *Collaborative Learning in Higher Music Education* (Ashgate, 2013).

[65] The 'Musical Futures' mode of informal learning, devised by Lucy Green, relies on small group, self-directed learning within the school music curriculum whereby pupils learn music by ear from recordings. However, unlike Musical Futures, The Music Lab did not involve copying recordings but rather devised their own music based on an existing piece, including classical pieces.

[66] Norton and colleagues in a survey of 496 instrumental music teachers in the UK during 2013–14 found that over two-thirds did not hold any teaching qualifications, and only a third had done any continuing professional development training in teaching. Similarly Boyle's (2020) survey of 388 instrumental teachers in the UK found that the majority of respondents started teaching without any training at all, nor had they done any formal CPD during their careers. Naomi Norton, Jane Ginsborg, and Alinka Greasley, 'Instrumental and Vocal Teachers in the United Kingdom: Demographic Characteristics, Educational Pathways, and Beliefs about Qualification Requirements', *Music Education Research*, 21.5 (2019), pp. 560–81 (pp. 74–75); Kerry Boyle, *The Instrumental Music Teacher: Autonomy, Identity and the Portfolio Career in Music* (Routledge, 2020).

[67] Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*; Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works.*

[68] Bull, 'Getting It Right'.

[69] See, for example, Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*; Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*; Green, 'Why "Ideology" Is Still Relevant for Critical Thinking in Music Education'; Small, *Music, Society, Education*.

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seen as being important to classical music as a genre. For example, as one participant described:

> So if you're playing a piece of classical music and I don't know, there's a tremolo in there and you don't want to play the tremolo 'cos it sounds bad, but you have to play it 'cos that's part of the music, otherwise it won't be classical music.

Other points of agreement outlined the association between aesthetic and social conventions. When discussing the question of what classical music is, one participant gave this answer:

> Really old stuff. Like just […] really old songs that everyone knows for some reason, that are normally played on orchestras, a piano or a violin or something and you can't really change it unless you're really brave and you've got to do it in front of the teacher

Here, this participant gives a comprehensive overview theorizing the genre through the instruments and repertoire, as well as outlining how the genre convention of fidelity to the score and the composer's intentions are produced through hierarchical relations of teaching and learning. The aesthetic convention of fidelity to the score ('you can't really change it') is directly associated with the social relations of classical music pedagogy via the master–apprentice model ('you've got to do it in front of the teacher').

Most importantly for this discussion, in some cases participants perceived the principles of youth voice to be directly opposed to classical music's genre conventions. One participant described how:

> I think it's just very structured, you don't get to interpret a piece how you want, it's like, this is a sad song so you have to play it sad, and if you think something sounds better in forte, it's 'no it's mezzo piano, you're doing it wrong'.

This participant explicitly states that 'you don't get to interpret a piece how you want'. Their musical voice is positioned as unimportant compared to the genre convention of fidelity to the composer's intentions.

On the whole, there was broad agreement about what 'classical music' as a term referred to, and many of the young people were critical of its genre conventions, in some cases passionately so. But despite these critical perspectives, it was clear that classical music's conventions were shaping their musical decision-making even in The Music Lab where their 'musical voices' were explicitly supported. The most obvious way in which this occurred was through a reliance on notation. In the process of devising musical material, most of the groups used flipchart paper to note down the structure of their pieces of music. This was to help them remember their piece, or to make sure they agreed on the structure.[70] Another example of use of notation occurred in a group that was devising a piece based on a recording brought in by one of the

[70] In Marín and Echeverría's typology of the function of musical scores as 'pragmatic' and/or 'epistemic', the young musicians in The Music Lab were clearly using scores for a pragmatic function, that is, to reduce cognitive effort. See Christina Marín and María Puy Pérez Echeverría, 'Reading Music: The Use of Scores in Music Learning and Teaching', in *Learning and Teaching in the Music Studio*, p. 199.

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group. Rather than learning the piece by ear, as we had done on the first day, two members of the group (the two violinists) searched online to find the sheet music for the piece and then read the music on their phones. This seemed to be their default way of operating and was carried out without much discussion. These two examples of relying on notation in different ways suggested a habitual dependence on a written text, as is the norm in classical music, rather than trusting to their musical memories or improvisatory ability. Therefore, while participants were critical of some of classical music's genre conventions, others were accepted uncritically.

Theme Three: The Power Relations Created by the 'Institutional Ecology' of Instrumental Education

Perhaps the most compelling finding from this project around the role of classical music's genre conventions related to the wider 'institutional ecology'[71] that these young people were operating in, and how this 'ecology' shaped their musical voices. My argument here builds on ideas introduced earlier about the power relations that create voices. As Arnot and Reay suggest, 'voice cannot change power relations, but shifts in power relations can change "voices"'.[72] While we went some way towards shifting classical music's genre conventions in The Music Lab, there still remained wider institutional power relations that could not be altered by any actions taken in this space.

This discussion also reveals how the wider institutional ecology of classical music shaped young people's musical voices. By 'institutional ecology' I am referring to the description from *Class, Control, and Classical Music* of the 'framework of organizations that make up the classical music world' analysed by mapping all the musical ensembles and institutions that young people in the study participated in.[73] This analysis revealed that the classical music education institutions set up in the late nineteenth century – grade exam boards and conservatoires – were heavily influential in the lives of the young classical musicians today. Any discussion of classical music as a genre within the context of music education therefore needs to take into account this institutional framing in shaping the circulation of common 'orientations, expectations and conventions'[74] that form and reproduce the genre.

The importance of this institutional ecology was also apparent in The Music Lab. To illustrate this, I have reproduced the following transcript from one of the focus groups in which we were talking about playing interpretations that are different from what the composer intended. Nate, the main discussant, was a 13-year-old Black boy from a working-class background who had been relatively quiet in the discussion until this point. There were four other participants in the focus group, three who were white middle-class and one from a white immigrant family whose class position was unclear;

[71] Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, ch. 2.
[72] Arnot and Reay, 'A Sociology of Pedagogic Voice', p. 316.
[73] Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, ch. 2.
[74] Neale, *Genre*, p. 19.

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their comments are not individually attributed as the speakers were not fully clear from the focus group transcript.

Anna: Why don't you think people usually do that? [i.e. do things differently to what the composer wrote]
Nate: In grade exams if you do something different to how the piece is written, the examiner will mark you wrong.
Anna: So that's why you wouldn't do it differently?
Nate: If I was practising for an exam.
Anna: What about if you weren't practising for exams? Would you do it the same or differently?
Nate: I mean, different, because you're not really being tested for anything, you're not really being watched so you can do anything you want with it, because you're not going to go and show it to some people who are marking it, you're just doing it for fun.
Anna: So do you guys agree with Nate, if you're not doing it for an exam you should mess around with it?
[several people] Yeah.
Anna: And do you guys do that?
Sometimes [one person], yeah [two people]
Anna: Are your teachers ok with that?
[several voices]: No; Not really; No – Sometimes, I don't know.
I do it at home.
Yeah.
Sometimes, once I've practised.
Anna: So you do your own thing at home?
Yeah, Sometimes, if I've practised it properly then after.
Anna: You also said no, your teacher doesn't let you, Nate, can you say more about that? Why's that?
Nate: Because she's very strict on what I do, like she really wants me to pass exams.

From this discussion, first of all it is clear that the genre convention of fidelity to the score is reproduced through the disciplining mechanisms of grade exams, as Nate explains. The wider power relations of instrumental education in the UK context are clearly created in a large part by institutions including grade exam boards. Indeed, in Nate's account, grade exams and the correcting gaze of the examiner – as channelled through his teacher, who wants him to do well in exams – are *the* reason why the genre conventions of instrumental teaching and learning cannot be changed. Voice cannot change these power relations; this example shows the limit to what a focus on youth voice can do in the context of this wider institutional ecology that upholds the genre conventions of classical music education.

A further genre convention is revealed in this discussion: the discourse of classical music being 'serious' and other genres of music being 'fun'.[75] The young people in this

[75] Anna Bull and Christina Scharff. '"McDonalds' Music" Versus "Serious Music": How Production and Consumption Practices Help to Reproduce Class Inequality in the Classical Music Profession', *Cultural Sociology*, 11.3 (2017), pp. 283–301.

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study – similar to my previous research with young classical musicians – saw 'hard work' as part of learning 'proper' classical music, while the creative 'messing around' that The Music Lab involved was not valued or validated by the institutional ecology and the genre conventions of classical music. 'Doing your own thing' and 'doing it for fun' were described as something to do *after* participants had 'practised properly', rather than being an integral part of their music education. This focus on classical music as 'work' is, I have argued, one of the genre conventions that maintains classical music's status as 'serious' and as more valuable than other genres, which by comparison are seen as 'fun'. Similarly, here, we can see that from these participants' perspectives, this hierarchy of value is upheld – in their minds – primarily by the dominance of grade exams.

Despite this hierarchy of 'proper practice' being valued over 'doing your own thing', it became evident through discussions with The Music Lab participants across the two days of the workshop that many of them were engaged in creative music-making on their own at home. This appeared to be taking place independently from their formal lessons, without institutional support or the support of teachers. One example was described by two friends, Grace and Sienna. They were both learning with the same teacher, who they described as 'very very strict', explaining that she 'mostly just will work on grades'. Alongside this formal instrumental education, both of them engaged privately in creative music-making on their violins at home. Sienna told me how she plays along to songs she likes, playing long notes as harmonies or drones. Grace described how:

> I'd go online and search for tunes I like, like the Avengers theme tune and play it just because I like it. But I didn't always feel like I could play it that well because my teacher didn't help me [with it]. But if I'm doing something like that on the side it makes me want to play the violin more because I enjoy it.

For both girls, this way of music-making was a tactic they used to sustain their enjoyment in playing, or as Sienna put it, 'I try to train my brain to think "violin – that's not a chore".' The other advantage of creative musical exploration outside of formal lessons was that 'You do [your own thing] much more when you're alone. You don't have everyone saying, "hold the bow properly".' Similarly, as Grace described:

> It feels like I'm not being judged while I'm playing [on my own at home]. Obviously my mum can hear but I'll be like, I'm not going to practise, I'm just going to play something random, she's like, ok, and it doesn't put pressure with people watching, if I mess up it doesn't feel bad.

This discussion reveals the distance between young people's self-directed, private music-making, and their formal music education. However, this exploration of their musical voices was occurring outside of, and separate to, their formal instrumental education, even while they used it as a strategy to maintain their interest and commitment to learning their instruments.

Drawing on a genre studies approach, institutions – such as grade exam boards – are part of the framework that forms and reproduces genre. The influence of institutions, and how genre conventions circulate through institutions, is, in this way, connected

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with the social and aesthetic conventions of classical music. In this way the genre conventions of classical music affect possibilities for youth voice in teaching and learning. To relate this to the dual focus on voice that I introduced earlier, it shows that while the young people are not necessarily enabled to have a 'learner voice' whereby they are have a say in how they learn, they are still developing their 'musical voice' independently, even if this has to take place in secret and remains unsupported by formal music education.

Theme Four: The Role of Peer Interactions in Shaping Voices

The final theme considers the ways in which peer interactions were shaping participants' voices in order to allow a discussion of youth voice as dialogic.[76] This contributes towards addressing the second research question of how young people's voices can be embedded in classical music education. In discussing the development of 'learner voice' in instrumental teaching and learning, Després and Dubé's recommendations include 'explor[ing] avenues to build and realize the full potential of social connections with peers'.[77] Similarly, as discussed earlier, Gary Spruce argues that pupil voices always exist in relation to an 'other' in a dialogic model. These 'others' can include wider musical influences, but also peer influences. In The Music Lab, these peer influences included the voices of others in their small groups. Nevertheless, it is important, as Catharina Christophersen describes, to challenge a 'stereotypical and problematic perception of collaborative learning environments as purely consensual and dialogical communities'; instead, 'acknowledging the presence of power and conflict is necessary if a nuanced concept of collaborative learning in […] music education is to be developed'.[78]

Social relations between peers became much more important in The Music Lab than is usual in classical music education due to participants spending much of their time working in small groups, often without an adult or tutor present. Perhaps surprisingly, however, in my ethnographic observations, the musical decision-making taking place in The Music Lab appeared to be relatively inclusive. While participants who were more articulate and confident contributed more, these contributions did not clearly map onto age, class, race, or gender. For example, in one group, two working-class Black boys were both giving their input confidently and clearly, and in other groups many of the girls – including younger girls – were also taking leadership roles. In fact, the musical activities seemed to be more inclusive than the socializing that took place during breaks, whereby the groupings that young people self-organized into were more obviously patterned by gender, age, and, to some degree, race and class.[79] However, it is important to note that the ways in which social identities were shaping interactions

[76] Spruce, 'Music Education, Social Justice, and the "Student Voice"'.
[77] Després and Dubé, 'The Music Learner Voice', p. 12.
[78] Catharina Christophersen, 'Perspectives on the Dynamics of Power within Collaborative Learning in Higher Education', in Gaunt and Westerlund, *Collaborative Learning in Higher Music Education*, p. 78.
[79] This finding is similar to Hollingworth's findings around the social groupings of secondary school pupils occurring along classed and racialized lines; see Sumi Hollingworth, 'Social Mixing in Urban

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were not necessarily fully apparent to an observer, not least given the weight of evidence that inequalities shape participation; as Howe and Abedin found in their review of four decades of studies of classroom discussion, 'student participation is not equally distributed around the classroom, but heavily dependent on such factors as gender, ethnicity and history of attainment'.[80]

Despite these observations, small group working still proved to be challenging. Indeed, one group had entirely disintegrated by late morning on the second day. Two members of the group – both 11-year-old girls – split off to work together on their own piece, while the other two members of the group drifted off on their own or joined another group. This indicates the difficulties of working across age, ability, gender, race, and class differences. Indeed, in my previous research with young classical musicians, I found that young people were unwilling to work with those with a perceived lower level of ability to themselves and only wanted to work with those at a similar or higher level of ability.[81] While in The Music Lab, this attitude was much less present – perhaps supported by the devised nature of the music-making whereby participants could come up with parts that suited their abilities – other difficulties arose which affected participants' musical voices.

One of the biggest challenges appeared to be the lack of skills in deliberative discussion to enable participants to make collaborative musical decisions. Across all of the four groups, to different extents, creative decision-making appeared to be ad hoc, even chaotic. Furthermore, when one member of the group disagreed with an interpretive decision, the young people were not, for the most part, able to effectively deal with this situation. An example of this occurred in a group I participated in on the morning of the second day. I noticed that one member of the group, Ryan, was not contributing as much as the others. During a hiatus in the session, he turned to me and asked 'which one sounds better?', playing a short passage from the piece they had devised the previous day. He played two versions: one with a dissonance and one without. His group had chosen to play the dissonance, overriding his preference for the version without the dissonance. He was clearly still mulling it over and was appealing to me as an adult with authority over what was correct or incorrect; he argued that the piece was supposed to be in D minor, so including an F♯ – the dissonance – was wrong. This disagreement exemplifies the decision-making process in this group, where suggestions for new ideas were either adopted immediately, or ignored, without any discussion of why they were being accepted or rejected. In this case, such an approach had led to Ryan feeling that his expressive voice had not been listened to. As a result he withdrew from making further suggestions to his group.

Research on young people's deliberative discussion shows that this is a skill that is lacking in education settings in general, not just in music education. This is at least in part due to the dominance of modes of pedagogy that are 'teacher centred and

Schools: Class, Race and Exchange-Value Friendships', *The Sociological Review*, 68.3 (2020), pp. 557–73.

[80] Christine Howe and Manzoorul Abedin, 'Classroom Dialogue: A Systematic Review across Four Decades of Research', *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 43.3 (2013), pp. 325–56 (p. 344).

[81] Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, ch. 3.

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hierarchically controlled, so that talk largely flows through the teacher and adheres closely to their concerns'.[82] Therefore, in their study of deliberative dialogue within secondary school citizenship classrooms in the UK, Lee Jerome, Anna Liddle, and Helen Young argued that 'educators need to value the process of deliberative discussions and avoid a push for conclusive answers'.[83] In keeping with this wider educational context in which deliberative discussion is not taught or learnt, within the normal genre conventions of classical music education, skills in group decision-making appear not to be foregrounded. In my previous research, I found that while young people in youth music groups emphasized their agency within youth choir or youth orchestra rehearsals, in reality, very few asked questions or made contributions.[84] These findings suggest that music teachers could draw on Jerome and others' resource for helping teachers to support deliberative classrooms.[85]

For the purposes of this article, it is clear that the development of 'dialogic' voice in music education, as described by Spruce, requires attention to deliberative discussion in ways that go beyond – and sometimes may go against – classical music's genre norms of 'getting it right'. Similarly to Jerome and others' findings in secondary school classrooms in the UK that 'task completion' was seen as valuable in a way that inhibited deliberative discussion,[86] 'getting it right' seems to contribute towards a closing down rather than an opening up of possibilities, and relies on teacher-directed 'correction' which does not develop skills in consensus or discussion. This meant that in The Music Lab, participants were not (for the most part) able to draw on developed levels of deliberative skills in peer group creativity to overcome differences of opinion or deal with conflict. As a result, lack of deliberative discussion in some cases inhibited the development of participants' musical voices. This is therefore an important area to address in embedding youth voice in instrumental classical music education.

Concluding Discussion: Can Youth Voice Contribute to Diversifying Classical Music?

The first research question for this study asked to what extent classical music's genre conventions shaped young people's musical voices. Young people in The Music Lab had a clear perception of classical music's genre conventions. The first convention that they identified as shaping musical voice was 'getting it right' or the 'pedagogy of correction', in which the overwhelming focus on correction – whether technical or

[82] Howe and Abedin, 'Classroom Dialogue'; Lee Jerome, Anna Liddle, and Helen Young, *The Deliberative Classroom and the Development of Secondary Students' Conceptual Understanding of Democracy* (Middlesex University, 29 January 2020), p. 16, <https://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/sites/teachingcitizenship.org.uk/files/Deliberative%20Classroom%20General%20Guidance%20JUNE%2017%20pdf.pdf> (accessed 30 June 2022),

[83] Jerome, Liddle, and Young, *The Deliberative Classroom*, p. 9.

[84] Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, ch. 6.

[85] Jerome, Liddle, and Young, *The Deliberative Classroom*.

[86] Lee Jerome, Anna Liddle, and Helen Young, 'Talking about Rights without Talking about Rights: On the Absence of Knowledge in Classroom Discussions', *Human Rights Education Review*, 4.1 (2021), pp. 8–26.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

'musical' – meant that in cases where pupils did not want to prioritize getting it right, this was not able to be voiced. The second convention identified was around the dominance of grade exams. This led to – or justified – a lack of choice over repertoire as well as modes of teaching and learning where pupils were primarily working on exam preparation, within a model of musical progression that foregrounded technical progress. Third, and related to this, was the genre convention of 'hard work' that was prioritized over creative messing around. This was also described as 'practising properly' versus 'doing your own thing'. I have argued that this upholds classical music's status as 'serious' versus other types of music-making as 'fun'. Indeed, outside of their instrumental lessons, young people were finding ways of exploring their musical voice and playing the types of music they chose, but this 'undercover' music-making was seen by participants as a way to keep up their motivation for learning their instrument rather than as part of the 'work' of learning an instrument. Fourth, the genre norm of fidelity to the score and/or the composer's intentions was still very present in young people's understandings of classical music and the teaching that they were experiencing. This echoes Small's description of the hierarchy of composer–performer–audience as one of the genre conventions of classical music.[87] Fifth, as has been explored at length in existing literature, the 'traditional' or 'master–apprentice' model – whereby teaching and learning classical music involves a hierarchical relationship between teacher and pupil – disallowed or discouraged young people's musical decision-making. And finally, while young people did not explicitly identify it, a further genre convention that was visible in The Music Lab was a reliance on written notation.

Out of these genre conventions, the first five – 'getting it right', the dominance of grade exams, 'practising properly' rather than 'doing your own thing,' fidelity to the score and the composer's intentions, and the 'master–apprentice' model – were all identified by young people as ways in which their musical voices were inhibited. Despite having a clear sense of the ways in which they *wanted* to draw on their 'musical voices' in their instrumental education, these were seen as untenable within the 'traditional model' of classical music education as they directly opposed classical music's genre conventions. Young people were highly aware of the wider conditions that shaped their voices, in particular the 'institutional ecology' of music education. In this way, while young people wanted to act as 'social change agents'[88] within classical music by challenging its genre conventions, the power relations that shaped their voices inhibited this possibility. Overall, the findings demonstrate that it is not possible to bring a youth voice approach into classical music education without disrupting its genre conventions and aesthetic norms.

Nevertheless, to answer the second research question – how can youth voice be embedded within instrumental classical music education – this study has identified concrete ways forward in which instrumental teachers can incorporate youth voice. First, a 'youth voice' approach in instrumental classical music education has to make

[87] Small, *Music, Society, Education.*
[88] Malone and Hartung, 'Challenges of Participatory Practice with Children'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

space for *both* learner voice and musical voice. There is a risk that only 'learner voices' are elicited, whereby young people are asked about how they want to learn, but are not given the chance to explore their *musical* voices and decide for themselves what sounds good. Second, exploring 'musical voice' may involve challenging the genre conventions of classical music. In particular, the convention of fidelity to the score and to the composer's intentions should be loosened or abandoned. Instead, pupils can be encouraged towards freedom of interpretation; for example, changing the tempo or dynamics, or adding in elements that they have devised themselves. Fundamentally, this is about allowing pupils to make decisions about what sounds good, even if their preferences go against aesthetic conventions of good taste. Third, young people can be given meaningful choices of repertoire. This means moving beyond tokenistic modes of repertoire choice where pupils are allowed to 'choose' between a handful of pieces pre-selected by teachers or exam boards. Instead, teachers need to find ways of supporting young people to play the music that excites them. As this study showed, young people were already finding ways to play the music they wanted to play but this was taking place in secret without any support from their teachers.

Fourth, teachers need to engage learner voice in order to allow learners to choose the mode of correction that they prefer. This means giving pupils a say in when/how they want to be corrected. Some pupils may want high levels of correction while others may want none, and these preferences may change over time. As I have previously argued, 'a wider discussion of the purpose and impacts of correction' is needed.[89] Fifth, drawing on Spruce's discussion of voice as dialogic, I have outlined ways in which peer-to-peer interactions affected musical voice, describing how lack of skill in deliberative discussion inhibited participants' abilities to make musical decisions as a group, therefore leading to some feeling that their voices were not being heard. Resources are needed to help teachers to build pupils' skills in deliberative discussion so that young people are better able to negotiate creative differences in group work with peers.

Finally, teachers can make space to discuss with pupils the social and institutional structures and power relations that shape young people's musical voices. As Live Ellefsen has suggested:

> In addressing the 'genring' that creates 'genres' and sustaining the idea that music is 'genred' rather than 'belongs to genres,' music teachers may enable discussions about and understandings of the various social functions of music. They could bring to students' attention the procedures that naturalize, canonize, and historicize music and musicians and thereby the procedures that may trivialize and exclude musical acts.[90]

I would add, not only can the social functions of music be discussed, but the aesthetic itself should not be separated from the social in these discussions. The genre conventions of classical music – such as the hierarchy of composer over performer, the musical work as an integrated whole, or valuing harmonic complexity over other musical

[89] Bull, 'Getting It Right', p. 66.
[90] Ellefsen, 'Genre and "Genring" in Music Education', p. 74.

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

qualities – can also be made visible as acts of 'genring' which should be open to discussion and challenge.

Some of these changes – most notably the changes to aesthetic conventions that would result from abandoning fidelity to the score – will open up possibilities for classical music as a genre to change. This kind of openness to variation would be in keeping with the ways in which other genres (whether in music or in other cultural forms such as television, film, or fiction) evolve over time in a complex interplay of repetition and difference.[91] Such an evolution can, therefore, open up exciting possibilities for the creative and social renewal of classical music.

There are some limitations to this study. First, it was a short-term, small-scale project. Questions remain, therefore, about what would happen when these kinds of practices are carried out in a longer-term way. In addition, this article has not discussed parental involvement, which was an important theme in young people's discussions and was clearly an influence on young people's participation in The Music Lab; in fact, one participant described how his mother had signed him up to the project without asking him, ironically for a project on youth voice. Furthermore, while this study focused on young people learning within a classical style, it is important to acknowledge that youth voice may also be inhibited in other genres. However, genre-specific approaches to addressing youth voice are needed, and it is particularly important to study the genre conventions of classical music education because classical music forms the basis for much wider music education pedagogy.[92] Finally, this cohort of young people might have been distinctive, due to being located in Lewisham – a musically highly fertile area – and having signed up for an experimental workshop. Nevertheless, the findings from this study suggest that for some young people at least, there is an appetite for doing things differently. This finding goes against Geoff Baker's and my previous studies among older teenagers, where we found resistance to changing classical music pedagogies.[93]

Returning to the discussion of diversity that this article opened with, I finish by asking whether challenging classical music's conventions can contribute to greater social diversity within those learning and playing it. To what extent does this kind of work have the potential to change the aesthetic of classical music in order to allow it to become more inclusive? It is important not to assume that changing the aesthetic will automatically lead to social diversity; indeed, a danger in projects such as The Music Lab is that opportunities are improved for confident middle-class children who already have a plethora of options, without any changes for less privileged young people. Furthermore, as Anne Shreffler's discussion of the new music scene in the United States

[91] Neale, *Genre*; Georgina Born, 'Against Negation, for a Politics of Cultural Production: Adorno, Aesthetics, the Social', *Screen*, 34.3 (1993), pp. 223–42.

[92] Green, 'Why "Ideology" Is Still Relevant for Critical Thinking in Music Education'; Pozo and others, *Learning and Teaching in the Music Studio*; Gary Spruce, 'Participation, Inclusion, Diversity, and the Policy of English Music Education', in *Reaching Out: Music Education with 'Hard to Reach' Children and Young People*, ed. by Chris Harrison (Association for Music Education, 2013), pp. 23–31.

[93] Geoffrey Baker, *El Sistema: Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music.*

https://doi.org/10.1017/rma.2024.13 Published online by Cambridge University Press

explains, changing aesthetic norms can in fact create even more boundaries around race and gender, rather than opening up access to under-represented groups.[94] As noted in theme three earlier, embedding a youth voice approach does not necessarily change anything about the structures that have created these patterns of exclusions in the first place.

Having said that, however, the creative music-making activities that were carried out in The Music Lab did have the potential to lead to musical and social diversification of classical music. For example, young people were, for the most part, willing to work across different levels of ability, in contrast with my previous research on young classical musicians.[95] Furthermore, by exploring music-making activities that were outside the normal conventions of instrumental teaching and learning, young people were also opening up possibilities for collaborations across different social groups. This means that rather than classical music working as a space for social closure by segregating young people from middle- and upper-class families into an extracurricular social space (as I found in *Class, Control, and Classical Music*[96]), workshops such as The Music Lab can facilitate music-making across genres and technologies of music-making. This means that social closure among classed groups – while still possible – is less inevitable.

To conclude, incorporating youth voice into classical music education *can* contribute to diversifying it, but does not necessarily do so. There are various factors that need to be in place in order to support greater diversity. Wider institutional change – including changing the power relations that shape voices – is also necessary. Most notably, as I have highlighted in this article, embedding youth voice approaches in classical music means opening up the possibility of challenging its genre conventions. In contrast with my previous research, young people in this study were heavily critical of the ways in which the genre conventions of classical music instrumental education did not allow space for youth voice – whether 'learner voice' or 'musical voice'. These findings show that young people will act as 'social change agents' in classical music, if they are given the space to do so.[97]

[94] Anne C. Shreffler, 'Afterword', in 'Boundaries of the New: American Classical Music at the Turn of the Millennium' [Forum], *Twentieth-Century Music*, 16.3 (2019), pp. 373–455.

[95] Bull, *Class, Control, and Classical Music*, ch. 3.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Resources for music teachers were devised from this project to support the development of youth voice in instrumental teaching. For an introductory guide see: Isabella Mayne, Anna Bull and Jenn Raven. Embedding Youth Voice in Classical Music Pedagogy. Sound Connections (2022) <https://issuu.com/soundconnections/docs/the_music_lab_-_toolkit>.

For a brief guide for instrumental teachers to the ideas in this article, with discussion questions, see Anna Bull, *The Music Lab: 'Musical Voice' and 'Learner Voice' in Instrumental Classical Music Education* (Sound Connections, 2024), <https://www.sound-connections.org.uk/resources/the-music-lab-musical-voice-and-learner-voice-in-instrumental-classical-music-education/>.

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