

***“How can we make the case for music that shows how it has the power to both mirror and change society?”***

My argument is that if one cannot make the case for music as mirroring society then fundamentally one cannot make the case for music education. For it is in the uses to which people put music that it gains its meaning. A conception of music purely in terms of its sonic elements is impoverished and misguided. Music forms an essential backdrop to community and national events and occupies a central place at many of the transition points in life: birth, Music is one of the key means by which individuals, groups and societies create and project their sense of identity. Embedded within different musical practices are different pedagogies, musical values and priorities about what makes a performance, composition or improvisation of value with critically informed listening playing a key part in this critical engagement. These all provide a rich resource for teachers. Unfortunately, official curriculum documents, Ofsted reports and examination specifications continue to promote what Nicholas Cook refers to as ‘... the extraordinary illusion—for that is what it is—that there is such a thing as music, rather than simply acts of making and receiving it’ (Cook, 2003, p. 208). This leads us then to teach music as purely or exclusively about how its sonic elements fit together. Young people recognise this as an illusion and the reason why many of them disengage from formal music education.

I’m sceptical about claims that music or music education can change society in any significant way. The claims of El Sistema and In Harmony to have a social impact are highly questionable for, as Anna Bull (2014) has pointed out, the likelihood is that they simply sustain the particular cultural and social hegemonies embedded in classical music practices.

Where I do think music education can have an impact for social change is in supporting young people to become critical, questioning musicians as the basis for becoming critical, questioning citizens who realise that they can act upon their world and change it.

### **References:**

Bull, A. (2014) *Reproducing? Classical Music and Inequality*

<http://www.discoversociety.org/2014/11/04/reproducing-class-classical-music-education-and-inequality/>. Accessed March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

Cook, N. (2003). 'Music as Performance'. In Clayton, M. Herbert, T. and Middleton, R. (Eds.), *The Cultural Study of Music* (pp. 204-214). London: Routledge

### **Points from Break Out Discussion**

- The importance of the voice of the young person as the advocate for music education.
- Tension between exam and curriculum specs. And how teachers want to teach.
- All musics are equal *but* all musics are different.
- Role of subject associations in giving classroom teachers a voice in music education.