

**LEYMN at the  
MERYC conference  
17-20 July 2013**

A few notes and thoughts from my brief visit to the sixth conference of the European Network for Music Educators and Researchers of Young Children at the Hague University of Applied Sciences.



The focus of MERYC2013 is interdisciplinary discussion and dissemination of new, unpublished research relating to the field of music and early childhood (0-8 years) in education (school and extracurricular contexts) and everyday life, both in theoretical research and innovative approaches to practice. The main aim of MERYC is to improve European research and practice with young children and music.

There was a very warm welcome for me when I finally found the right building on the university campus at the Hague on Wednesday afternoon. 17 European countries were represented at the conference this year, all of whom submitted abstracts for review. A copy of the conference proceedings, including all submitted research papers, can be bought [here](#).

The conference opened with a fantastic percussion performance from local children and was followed by an introduction from MERYC chair Michel Hogenes. He gave us an overview of the development of early years music in the Netherlands, founded by a prominent musician Gehrels, with pedagogy based on singing, and influenced by Kodaly and Orff. He stated concern over the lack of research currently being carried

out in the field, despite the plethora of great ensembles and institutions in the Netherlands.

Michel acknowledged the work that Dr Susan Young had done in developing MERYC in her role as chair, and thanked her with a small gift.

Before the evening's presentations there was time to explore some of the stands over a cup of tea. I was completely hooked on playing with Omni – an interactive sampling machine from Amsterdam's Sound Playground. With the right facilitator it strikes me as a great tool for unlocking creative potential in early years and special needs children. And, as you can see, it was fun! (See attached OMNI video clip). More details on the ONMI can be found [here](#).

Time for three presentations after the break, including our own 'What's That Noise?' with Linda Bance.

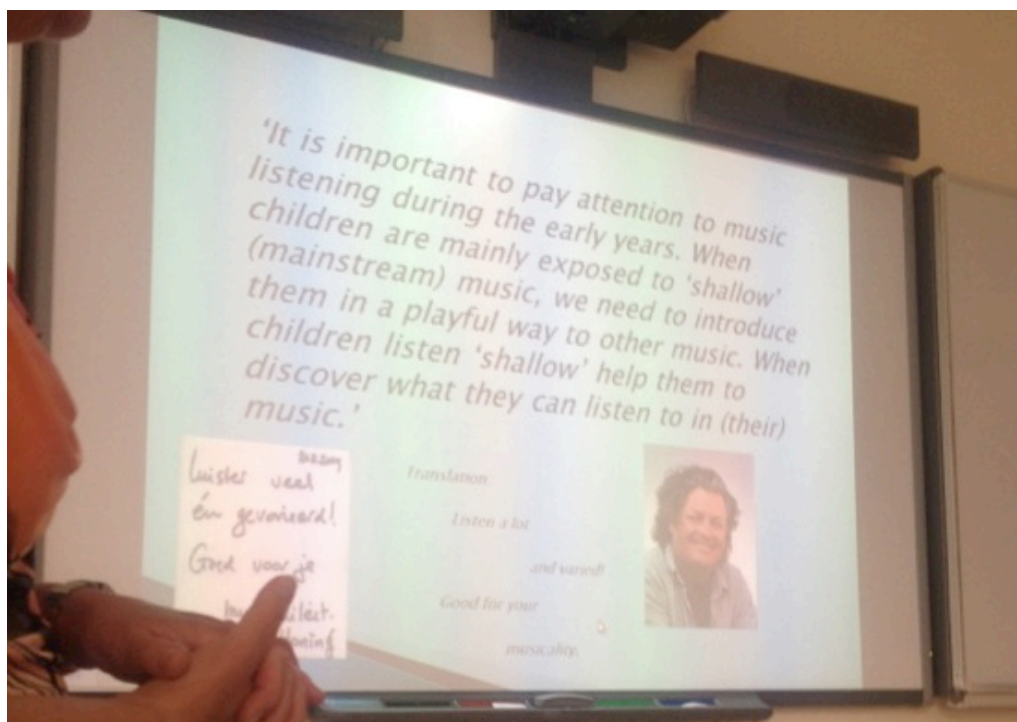
The first was entitled *Two Ears One Mouth*.

What do children listen and respond to most to in music? Is it the sound (pitch, timbre, dynamics), the form (structure, repetition, variation) or its meaning (purpose, emotion)?

Is it one area or a combination? Does this change dependent on the child or the situation? We can direct children by placing certain musical influences into a situation. We can use movement to emphasise the rhythm and structure.

Some tips for effective practice: Offer musical play; create opportunities to focus on musical aspects; to understand the elements music better; "Listen a lot and varied! Good for your musicality. "

Do you agree with the quote below about 'shallow, mainstream music'?



Next up was Linda Bance, representing LEYMN, with our film project “What’s That Noise?”. There was a good crowd of about 30 delegates, more than half of those present. Linda gave a background to the project and spoke about how we decided what footage we should include. It was comforting to see a familiar face (aka Florence Swann, my youngest!) as we showed the film.



The film was really well received, with the following questions and observations from the room:

What are the biggest challenges for early years music making?

*Heads and leaders not making room for music and not understanding the power of music making.*

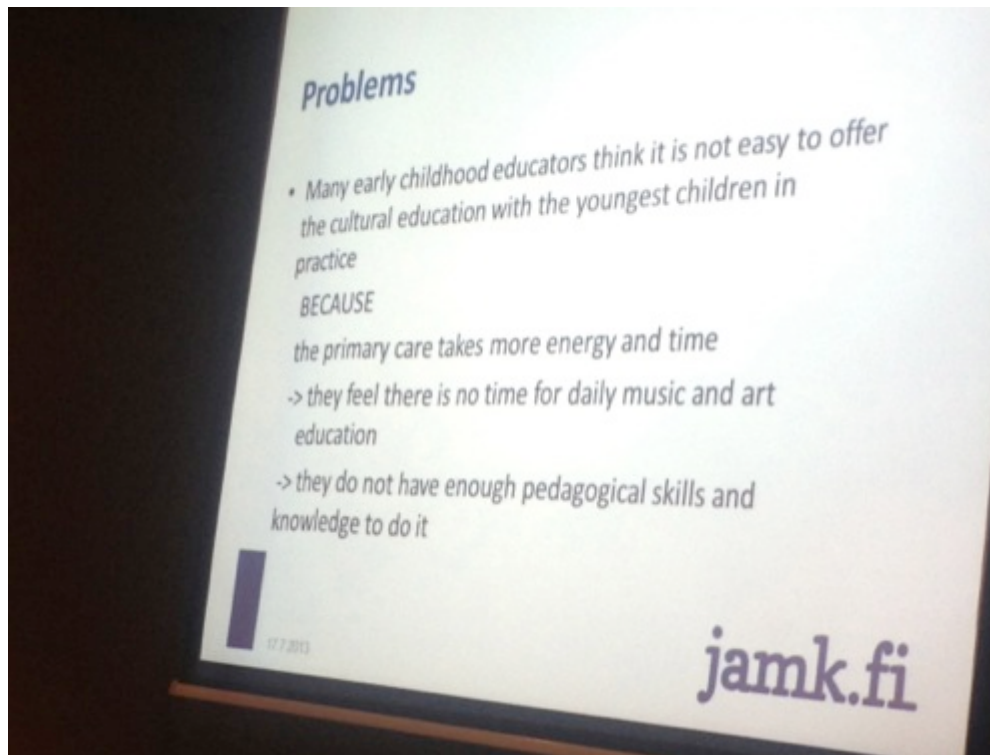
How can we involve parents?

*Confidence of practitioner to invite parents to share in it. Sending home samples of singing, giving the parents ownership of the work*

How do you get practitioners to understand the importance of free play music making and it's role in musical development?

*EY training in the first instance, PGCE etc and more training.*

Following Linda was a presentation by Leena Pantsu from Finland – Music and other arts in the everyday life of very young children. She outlined projects led by her students from the four-year early childhood music course. What struck me was the similarity in pedagogies between UK and Finland, and also the challenges we face in engaging staff – does this sound familiar?



Feedback from the room after both presentations:

Both papers show how important it is to have a real clear theoretical underpinning at the heart of the project, that's based in practice (Jessica Pitt)

In comparing the two projects it's clear that a combination of free play and gentle adult interaction, the package with both aspects, is the most successful model for music making in settings. (Margareta Burrell)

So, a brief but fascinating time at MERYC, here below follow a few conclusions from me.

We face very similar challenges across the countries in underlining the important role that music and the arts play in a child's holistic early education

That our projects have very similar aims, ie to improve confidence and skills of EY practitioners, to support parents and families in cultural pursuits and music making together, to further children's musical development.

We all believe in the rights of children to access to excellent music making opportunities so they develop an entitlement to this that lasts through their lives.

Nina Swann August 2013