

Music and Dyslexia

A Positive Approach

Edited by

**TIM MILES
JOHN WESTCOMBE
DIANA DITCHFIELD**



John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

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Foreword

Tim Miles and his colleagues have edited and contributed to a most useful book of essays. It will be useful not only to specialist teachers of children with dyslexia but also to many class teachers who have children with a variety of different difficulties among their pupils, for the emphasis throughout is on neurological differences between one child and another, whether these children are identified as having special needs or not. The term 'neurodiversity' is a helpful one, because it suggests that there are ways of teaching which, in the early years, will appeal to all children, whatever their developmental differences, and which they can all enjoy. The rhythm games described in Chapter 4 are especially enlightening. All children can join in and practise their 'performance', and everyone will benefit. Moreover, they can be taught by teachers without specialist music training, a huge advantage in most schools. The book is thus of great practical value.

It is also optimistic and cheerful. It is impossible not to sympathize with the horrors for a dyslexic student of Grade V theory (a horror well enough known to those who are not dyslexic). And the strategies for teaching and learning musical notation for those who are dyslexic will be eagerly read by music teachers. In many different ways, this is an excellent addition to the growing literature of dyslexia and music, and it is to be warmly welcomed.

Mary Warnock
House of Lords



List of contributors

An asterisk () marks a cameo writer.*

Adam Apostoli is a 20-year-old undergraduate student at the University of Edinburgh, currently in his third year of a degree in Music Technology. A keen singer, Adam hopes to pursue further study in Historical Musicology and Performance following his degree.

Paula Bishop-Liebler, a doctoral student at the Institute of Education, London, is researching links between music and dyslexia. She assesses and supports dyslexics at the Dyslexia Teaching Centre, Kensington, and in a variety of conservatoires including the Royal Academy of Music, the Royal College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

Nigel Clarke studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Paul Patterson and won the Queen's Commendation for Excellence. He has been Composer in Residence or similar to Black Dyke Mills Band and the Alabama Wind Ensemble. Nigel has written soundtracks to a number of feature films and was nominated recently at the World Soundtrack Awards.

Diana Ditchfield studied piano performance at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, before taking degrees in Education and teaching in secondary school in the United Kingdom. Her interest in dyslexia started in the 1980s. She teaches piano at the Municipal School of Music in Limerick and is a Learning Support Tutor in Disability Services at University level.

***Margaret Howlett-Jones** trained at the Froebel Institute, Roehampton, with music as her special study, and worked for seven years as a primary school teacher. Following maternity leave, she took on a number of piano

pupils and became increasingly interested in dyslexia in the music-learning context, taking the RSA Diploma. She is Secretary to the British Dyslexia Association Music Committee.

Carolyn King read Biochemistry at Oxford and secured her PhD at UCL Hospital Medical School. Ten years of research were undertaken on the mechanism of action of cholera toxin. She then established an oboe-orientated second career. Happily, both of these have relevance in sight-reading. She recently completed an MA in Musical Teaching in Professional Practice at Reading University.

Michael Lea is a double bass player who graduated from the BBC Training Orchestra to CBSO and the BBC Concert Orchestra. Since moving into the freelance world, he has played in over 250 films and many famous recordings. He taught for many years at the Guildhall School of Music, and latterly has devoted time to composition.

Jenny Macmillan has an MA in Psychology for Musicians from Sheffield University. She is a Suzuki piano teacher and ESA teacher trainer in Cambridge. She gives lectures and demonstrations throughout the United Kingdom on the Suzuki approach and has contributed to several music education journals.

Olivia McCarthy graduated in Music from University College, Cork, specialising in piano performance. Since obtaining her Higher Diploma of Education, she has taught piano, state examination music and the common diploma syllabus for many years at the Municipal School of Music, Limerick City, where she is presently Head of the Piano Department.

Christine McRitchie Pratt has always been involved in teaching and music-making both in schools and privately. She writes musicals as well as playing the harp and hurdy-gurdy. Her commitment to the arts includes involvement in the ADC Theatre, Cambridge, and being a founder member of Cambridge Youth Music.

Tim Miles, OBE, MA, PhD, CPsychol., FBPS, was the first Professor of Psychology at the University of Wales, Bangor, serving from 1963 to 1987, and is now Professor Emeritus. He has published widely both on dyslexia and other topics. He is an amateur cellist.

Sheila Oglethorpe graduated from the Royal Academy of Music having studied piano, cello and singing. She taught music at primary and secondary level and now teaches privately. She does dyslexia/music consultancy at Salisbury Cathedral School. The second edition of her book

Instrumental Music for Dyslexics: A Teaching Handbook was published in 2002. She lectures for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

Katie Overy is a Lecturer in Music at the University of Edinburgh and Co-Director of the Institute for Music in Human and Social Development. She has a long-standing interest in the role of music in human learning, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary research and the integration of research and practice.

***Pauline Poole** trained as a Primary School Teacher and taught across the phase, and now lectures in a College of Further Education. She is currently finishing the OCR SpLD Diploma Units. She delights in sharing her love of singing with children, and, as a committed Christian, Pauline spends her spare time involved in children's and youth work for churches in North Hertfordshire and Albania.

Annemarie Sand trained at the Royal Academy of Music and has performed extensively with major orchestras and opera companies both here and abroad. Her repertoire covers demanding roles from Sieglinde in Wagner's *Ring Cycle* and Maria in Berg's opera *Wozzeck* to contemporary opera. She now combines her solo career with teaching.

Lauren Stewart originally studied Physiological Sciences at Oxford, but transferred from bodies to brains via neuroscience training and doctorates at UCL and Harvard. Her interest in the neuropsychology of music stems from the belief that music provides a unique window onto the human mind and brain. Her current research includes amusia (inability to make sense of musical sound) and the perceptual, cognitive and motor skills in trained musicians.

John Westcombe taught music in Inner London before taking advisory and music direction posts in three large LEAs. More recently, consultancy work has been done for Trinity College of Music and Youth Music. Current interests include concert reviewing and Chairing the British Dyslexia Association Music Committee. Heinemann published his *Careers in Music* (1997).

***Siw Wood** was considered 'too hopeless at spelling' to go to secretarial college, but in fact trained at art college. She reports that dyslexia has had a huge influence on her life. Her jobs have included dental nurse, ward orderly, farm worker, PR official in a theatre, mobility assistant and chauffeur. Her main hobby is singing.



Preface

This book is a sequel to *Music and Dyslexia: Opening New Doors* (Miles and Westcombe (eds), Whurr, London, 2001). It comprises both chapters from some of the contributors to the earlier book and from other musicians as well. Those who contributed to both books are Tim Miles, John Westcombe and Diana Ditchfield (who are jointly the editors of the present book), Sheila Oglethorpe, Nigel Clarke, Michael Lea, Paula Bishop-Liebler, Annemarie Sand and Siw Wood. The new contributors are Adam Apostoli, Margaret Howlett-Jones, Carolyn King, Christine McRitchie Pratt, Katie Overy, Olivia McCarthy and Lauren Stewart. Sadly, Professor Margaret (Peggy) Hubicki, a contributor to the earlier book and a leading member of the British Dyslexia Association Music Committee, died early in 2006. Her sympathetic understanding of the difficulties experienced by many dyslexic musicians has made a lasting contribution to the field. Chapter 14 in the present book, written largely by Annemarie, pays a warm tribute to Peggy.

We have divided the book into four sections. These are entitled 'Tackling Problems', 'In and Around the Classroom', 'Strategies and Successes' and 'Science Takes Us Forward'.

In the first chapter, Tim Miles outlines the main characteristics of dyslexia and briefly mentions other developmental differences which have come to the fore in recent decades. He emphasises that the word 'difference' is more satisfactory than such words as 'anomaly', 'deficit', 'disability' and the like: one of the important messages of the book as a whole is to encourage teachers of dyslexic children and adults always to think positively. In Chapter 2, Tim calls attention to some of the things which can go wrong in the lives of dyslexics. They can happen to any of us, whether dyslexic or not, but experience suggests that dyslexics are

particularly vulnerable to such things, and it is therefore important that teachers should know what to expect.

In Chapter 3, Christine McRitchie Pratt gives a comprehensive list of the visiting and school-based staff requirement regarding accessories and materials as well as good advice about direct help for dyslexics in the classroom; in Chapter 4, Katie Overy provides a selection of musical activities and games suitable in both the music and language classroom for both dyslexics and others. In Chapter 5, Olivia McCarthy and Diana Ditchfield recall a very disruptive pupil who had severe difficulties with her short-term memory whom they gradually won over to competence in piano playing through appropriate tuition in her early years; some of the writing team have then pooled their thoughts, in Chapter 6, on what might lie behind pupils' reluctance to involve themselves or seemingly miss out on the pleasures of musical participation. In Chapter 7, Sheila Oglethorpe calls attention to some of the many different ways in which music can contribute richly, and unexpectedly, to the lives of those who are dyslexic, and provides valuable case studies. In Chapter 8, Tim Miles calls attention to parallels between the teaching of musical notation and mathematical notation. Because symbols are involved, these notations may take dyslexics longer to learn, but that need not prevent them from becoming highly successful musicians or mathematicians. Diana Ditchfield, in Chapter 9, acknowledges that some young musicians have found it frustrating that, at least to find a way through the examination system, theory has to be learned and written questions answered, and welcomes the role of technology in these matters.

Next come two contributions on sight-reading, written from somewhat different angles. The chapter by Sheila Oglethorpe (Chapter 10) contains a wealth of practical advice; that by Michael Lea (Chapter 11) reports that he found memorisation when playing the guitar easier and sight-reading easier when playing the cello or double bass. He offers an ingenious neurological explanation for this based on a diagram: the cortical homunculus devised by the neurologist Wilder Penfield.

For Chapter 12, there is a straightforward setting-out of good advice from Nigel Clarke, who has needed to be very resourceful and press on against difficulties, and, in Chapter 13, there is an even-handed view, from Adam Apostoli, about how far music has been embraced by the technological age (and vice versa).

Chapter 14 relates a remarkable sequence that has a strong triangular feel about it in terms of the personalities involved, the transference of teaching expertise and the reversal of fortune. In Chapter 15, Paula Bishop-Liebler's illustrates by means of case studies the variety of skills which dyslexic singers need to accumulate according to the type of music

which they wish to perform, whether, for instance, it be jazz, baroque or music for the theatre.

In Chapter 16, we hope to catch the eye in our movement between groups of musicians with 'Thirty-seven oboists'. Here, Carolyn King describes her experiences in teaching and assessing a large cohort of oboists, some but not all of whom were dyslexic. Then Jenny Macmillan, in Chapter 17, draws attention to ways in which the Suzuki influence is analogous to styles of teaching of dyslexics, not least in the matter of notation not being an essential part of that method's initial engagements, and the words 'structured', 'sequential' and 'cumulative' are shared vocabulary. In Chapter 18, Nigel Clarke's successes in both leadership of a conservatoire department and as a distinguished composer in the world of film-making demonstrate that success can be achieved and problems overcome.

In Chapter 19, Katie Overy briefly describes some of the latest brain-imaging techniques; she then outlines some research findings on the aural basis of music processing, the brain differences associated with musical training and the brain differences associated with dyslexia. In Chapter 20, Lauren Stewart provides an analysis of the various skills required for successful sight-reading; then, as a sequel to Katie's chapter, she reports on some of the studies by herself and colleagues on what has been discovered about music skills from the use of brain-imaging techniques.

Amongst the main chapters, three cameos will be found, two by individuals and the third by various hands. They serve to demonstrate the individual nature of responses to dyslexia for both young people and adults, and what teachers need to look out for.

We express our gratitude to the British Dyslexia Association for support of the Music Committee in past years. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank Joanna Westcombe for her help with the early drafts of this book.

Tim Miles, John Westcombe and Diana Ditchfield

Tackling problems
