

Q&A

Abigail D'Amore has a background in non-western music and was involved in Musical Futures from the outset, becoming project leader last year

Musical Futures is an approach to secondary music which brings non-formal teaching and informal learning styles into the more formal context of schools. It is an initiative of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation



CAREER PATH

- » Took A levels in music, theatre studies and English literature at a comprehensive school in the Midlands, going on to study music at Cardiff University
- » Taught English and music to 16-24-year-olds in southern India before completing an ethnomusicology MMus at London's School of Oriental and African Studies
- » Worked as assistant editor of Music Teacher
- » Worked as a project manager for Hertfordshire Music Service while collaborating on the pathfinder pilots of Musical Futures with London's Institute of Education
- » Took over as MF's national coordinator in 2008 and then as project leader in 2010

MT What is your musical passion?

The part music plays in other people's lives. I love hearing people talk about how a particular song reminds them of a family holiday or a gig that moved them to tears.

MT Did an inspiring teacher start you off on a musical career?

Yes! Mrs Lane, my school music teacher, was running Musical Futures (MF) style music lessons before it existed. She recognised we all had individual needs and aspirations with music and built on them. While I was doing classical music in my own time, I much preferred jamming with the various grunge bands that used to hang out in the practice rooms in school and she encouraged me with both. I went on to study music at university, so her approach clearly worked.

MT Have you done much teaching yourself?

Apart from a small amount of instrumental teaching while studying, and a brief stint teaching music in India, I am not a teacher – and I'm always upfront and honest about that. My role in MF is as the organiser behind the scenes. What I don't ever do is tell teachers how they should teach, or even that they should be doing MF at all!

MT Tell us more about Musical Futures.

Contrary to popular belief, it is NOT a scheme of work. It is an approach to teaching and learning music in secondary schools, particularly at Key Stage 3. It spreads 'virally' from practitioner to practitioner with relatively little central input, and is estimated to be operating in one third of secondary schools in England.

“ MY ROLE IS AS THE ORGANISER BEHIND THE SCENES. WHAT I DON'T EVER DO IS TELL TEACHERS HOW TO TEACH ”

The starting point for MF was the huge disparity between the enthusiasm and motivation young people have for music in their leisure time and the reluctance they often display towards school music. MF aims to rectify this by offering two fundamental sets of teaching and learning strategies: **non-formal teaching** (an inclusive approach to whole-class music-making) and **informal learning** (a model that involves students working independently and 'teaching themselves', as they would outside the classroom). Additionally, NUMU (numu.org.uk) was developed through MF as a safe online space for young people to publish and receive feedback on their music.

MT Why should teachers consider using it?

We consistently get reports from teachers – and we've had an independent study carried out by the Institute of Education which verifies this – saying how MF has revolutionised their music departments. On average, schools see a 42% increase in the number of students wishing to continue with music at Key Stage 4, and 98% of students prefer MF to other types of music lessons. Students also demonstrate better behaviour, more focus, high levels of self-esteem and confidence, enhanced group skills, leadership skills, and of course musical skills.

MT How can teachers get involved?

The first step is to go through our free teacher resource materials (available from musicalfutures.org.uk/resources). Secondly, we run a free training and CPD programme that is devised and delivered by classroom teachers running MF themselves (from our network of 'Champion Schools'). This is an opportunity to meet others running MF and to see how different teachers have adapted it within their own settings.

MT What else keeps you busy other than music?

My 11-month-old daughter Maddalena plays a fairly big part!

MT Why do you think music education matters?

One young person told me recently that 'If someone were to take music away from me it would be like someone ripped part of me away'. That's why music education is important.

musicalfutures.org.uk

* NEXT MONTH
Viviane Ronchetti, director,
National Youth Strings Academy