

A 50-year overview of instrumental music programs in Victorian Government secondary schools: The more things change, the more they stay the same

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Abstract

The paper investigates the history of instrumental music programs in Victorian Government secondary schools over a 50-year period. These programs were researched using archival materials, State government documents and curriculum changes. Factors which impacted the transformation were government policy, societal trends, developments in the curriculum and policy reform. The study found that there was a demand for these programs despite the issues of costs, access and quality. It wasn't until the government review into the status of music in Australian schools in 2005 that music programs could be discussed more holistically at a national level. This prompted a review into music education at the State level after the subsequent formation of the School Music Action Group. From this, there has been more awareness of the issues and the need for more support for instrumental music programs.

Keywords: curriculum; government secondary schools; instrumental music; music education; Victoria

Introduction

In Victoria instrumental music programs have been formally offered as a free provision in government schools since 1965. Instrumental music programs refer to the delivery of practical music lessons and instrumental music ensembles. The classes were usually extra-curricular in contrast to compulsory classroom music lessons, and occurred during the school day in which students received one lesson a week in lieu of an academic school class. Ensembles were timetabled in designated breaks in the school day such as lunchtime or after school. Instrumental music teachers worked either on a permanent, contract or itinerant basis and often travelled between schools. The research builds on the author's doctoral study which investigated instrumental music in Victorian government secondary schools from 1965 to 2000 (Lierse, 2005). This has been

extended to a 50-year history comparing and contrasting each State and Territory. The paper will focus on Victoria.

School education is a State provision in Australia and how the program commenced and progressed was independent to other States and Territories. It was not until the *National Review of School Music Education* in 2005 that together with classroom music, instrumental music tuition in government schools around Australia was examined and critiqued. The 'Review' found that systems in other States and Territories faced similar issues to Victoria, and through a more united voice, music educators could then advocate back within the State of Victoria for the growth and continuation for these programs amidst budget and resources cuts. The following sections up to the year 2000 is a revisit and summary of the pertinent themes from my doctoral research completed in 2005. This has been provided to set

the scene for the developments in the twenty-first century. Following these, current issues will be discussed.

Instrumental tuition prior to 1965

In the twentieth century, instrumental music tuition has been available as a free provision for students at select Victorian government secondary schools. Prior to the 1960s, lessons were available on a fee-paying basis and varied between each individual school. In the 1960s government funded instrumental music programs began to emerge in some government schools in Australia. This was an organized scheme focusing on instrumental music tuition. Bartle (1974) discussed:

Of late, however, Education Departments in all States have been employing teachers of instruments to give lessons, generally in school time and free of charge, to interested pupils in government schools. In larger schools such teachers may be employed full time; others cover two or three schools on an itinerant basis. They usually form orchestras, bands and small ensemble groups as well as providing individual tuition. Teachers of instruments in most States seem, however, to be in very short supply, and so not all government schools are at present included in the scheme (p. 22).

The provision was a positive move but there were issues with the lack of funding, paucity of qualified teachers and inadequate facilities. However, this has not deterred the demand or the interest for instrumental music programs.

1960s

In March 1965 Mac. Robertson Girls' High School hosted a seminar attended by 120 music teachers. It was led by Mr J. Collins, who was the Inspector of Victorian High Schools, to discuss the issue of introducing government funded instrumental music tuition (Education Department, 1967). The issues outlined were a lack of funds, qualified teachers and facilities (Ruskin, 1965, p.18). Coincidentally, a similar

meeting would be held forty-two years later at Melbourne High School, the brother school to Mac. Robertson Girls' High School to discuss similar issues. As a result of the initial meeting in 1965, instrumental music teachers were hired in both the High and Technical School Divisions. Instrumental music staff were employed by a region but were designated a base individual school. Student recruitment, programs and instrument loans occurred at the school level and there were opportunities for combined events with other schools (Ray, 1990). The types of ensembles formed at schools were orchestras, concert bands, choirs, string orchestras as well as recorder and brass bands. In 1966, Alexandra E. Cameron (1910-2017) was appointed as the first Music Inspector for Secondary Schools (RMIT University, 2017).

1970s

It was the 1970s that Victoria was becoming a centre for the performing arts. Back then, Melbourne boasted two full-time orchestras, an opera company, a theatre company and was home to the Australian Ballet Company. Since then, these organisations, to a point have remained the status quo with variations overtime to the local opera companies and associated orchestras.

The growth and development of instrumental music programs aligned with the value placed on the performing arts, most notably in the establishment of the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) in 1973, the only kind of institution at that time in the country.

In 1974, schools known as Regional Music Placement Schools were established, one in each of the four metropolitan regions of Melbourne. They were Macleod High School, Blackburn High School, McKinnon High School and University High School (Education Department, 1979, p. 24). Melbourne High School and Mac. Robertson Girls' High School are special academic entry high schools from years nine to twelve in which they also received additional instrumental music staff. Hamilton High School situated in the country was also a Regional Music Placement School. Later, Balwyn High School began

to accept instrumental music students who were out of the zone. The concept of the Regional Music Placement School was stopped in the early 1990s as it was considered politically incorrect, but it was now up to the discretion of each of these schools to admit music students if they were out of the zone.

The 1977 report *Education and the Arts* discussed the status of music education in schools around Australia. This provided information on the current status of different arts forms in each State and Territory. This was the first time that arts education had been viewed from a national level in which national objectives could be defined. These were access, participation, confidence, commitment and excellence (Commonwealth of Australia, 1977a, p. 3). At that point it was found that “the Arts, Education, and Youth, Sport and Recreation Ministries operate separately, and with minimal evidence of shared policy-making in the arts and education fields” (Commonwealth of Australia, 1977b, p. 68). In Victoria, it was found there was a general lack of qualified music specialists (p. 14). Even though there were approximately 100 specialist instrumental music teachers at that time, out of the 288 secondary schools, 177 did not have an instrumental music program (Commonwealth of Australia, 1977b, p. 14).

In 1978, the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School was opened which offered intensive training for students gifted in either music or ballet. Students from Years 7 to 12 from around Australia are eligible to audition for a place (Pascoe, 2000, p. 169).

Other specific developments to instrumental music was the establishment of the Saturday Morning Music School in 1970 by Alexandra E. Cameron which is now known as Melbourne Youth Music. This was created for students who otherwise would not have opportunities to play in an ensemble.

1980s

The 1980s was a time of curriculum developments in the State of Victoria. The most significant change was the recognition of instrumental music performance as a standalone subject in its own right. The Higher School Certificate, more commonly known as

‘HSC’ was a one-year course for students in their final year of Secondary School. There were two music subjects offered: ‘Music A’ which was Music Performance and ‘Music B’ which was Music History, and Styles (Comte, 1983, p. 262). It was not only significant that instrumental music was a subject, but it was classified as a Group One subject which had the same weighting and status of numerical marks awarded in other academic subjects. In contrast, Drama and Dance were classified as Group Two subjects in which an overall letter grade was awarded. This meant that Music A could directly contribute to a university entrance score.

In 1989, the Report of Music Education Committee of Review was the first landmark investigation into music in Victorian Schools. It was known as the *Ray Report*, named after the Chairperson Margaret Ray, who was the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Box Hill. The *Ray Report* gave a clear overview for the first time of instrumental staffing in each region, the instrumental teacher to student ratio, and percentage of schools with instrumental music teachers (Ray, 1990, p. 38). It was found that only two-thirds of Victorian government secondary schools had access to an instrumental music teacher. Fifty-five per cent of these were fully qualified teachers and received the same wages as classroom teachers. However, the remaining forty-five per cent were classified as category or provisionally registered teachers placing them at a lower pay rate (p. 39). There were 62 recommendations as a result of the report with numbers 22 to 32 specifically for instrumental music. The issues raised highlighted a lack of; operating guidelines for instrumental music programs, staffing, equity of resources between schools, unequal workloads, poor morale and career structure for instrumental music teachers.

1990s

The 1990s was a time of economic rationalism and neo-liberalism in education in which there was a focus on budgets and documenting and reporting by administrators. By the early 1990s, the Technical and High Schools had amalgamated resulting in

Secondary Colleges which in some schools, the population exceeded 1,200 students. This resulted in a readjustment of instrumental music staff and ensembles at some schools, especially for those who had only worked in one division. There were also multi-campus schools which impacted timetabling and ensembles.

The Coalition Government came into power in 1992 in which the Honourable Jeff Kennett became the Premier of Victoria. As part of economic reform, 270 schools were closed or amalgamated by 1996, and many staff were placed on short term contracts (Lierse, 1997, p. 2). Moreover, the Participation and Equity Program (1985) which lent resources to schools, the Music Resource Centre, Statewide Music Education Committee and Camberwell Music Library were also closed by 1996. These changes created uncertainty and had a negative impact on job security and morale.

In 1992, the Higher School Certificate changed to the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). The VCE was designed as a two-year course with a unit completed each semester. Music was expanded into three subjects. Music A became Music Craft and subsequently Music Performance, Music B became Music History and Styles, and Group Music was added as a third subject. This was another instrumental music subject. The Curriculum and Standards Framework (CSF) was introduced in 1995 in which The Arts was recognized as one of the Key Learning Areas. There were arts focused government reports including the Arts Education: Report by the Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts Reference Committee in 1995.

The Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals (1997) report documented the staffing of instrumental music teachers in 1995 which compared data from 1989. It was found that in 1989, there was one instrumental music teacher to 885 students to 780 students in 1995. Instrumental music was only available to a minority of students. In 1999, the Bracks Labor Government came into power to replace the Kennett Coalition Government in 1992. After a decade of cutbacks, it was hoped there would be some future changes for the positive.

The twenty-first century

The twenty-first century witnessed reviews into music education in government schools and subsequent advocacy groups. In 2005, there was the *National Review of School Music Education: Augmenting the diminished* which examined the status of music in Australian schools. The findings gave a more holistic view of what was occurring in instrumental music programs in government schools around Australia, and provided the opportunity for music educators, administrators, parents, politicians and the education and music community to have more open conversations about associated issues.

The *National Review of School Music Education: Augmenting the diminished* in 2005 spurred a decade of advocacy for music education in Victorian government schools. The national document was used as a basis for State and Federal university lobbying to ensure that the recommendations from the National Review of School Music Education were adopted and implemented in Victoria. There were just under 5,000 submissions as well as an investigation of classroom and instrumental music programs in sample schools around the country (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2005). The review found that there were pockets of excellence in some schools, but there was a large variation in the quality and variety of programs and there were issues of access and equity. Unfortunately, the research found that 9.4 per cent of sample schools did not have a music program at all (p. 64). This 'crisis' in music education and the solution to "increase the attention placed on the quality of music programmes and the place of music in the curriculum" (Lierse, 2007). The attention on music education did highlight issues of access in different geographic locations across the country and helped to unify music educators in the challenges they faced. Unfortunately, the issue of access, equity and quality of music education in Australian schools has not drastically improved since the *National Review of School Music Education: Augmenting the diminished* in 2005. This included the quantity and preparedness of pre-service teachers (Garvis & Lemon, 2013, p. 101).

Formation of sMAG

In April 2007, a workshop entitled School Music Education for every child- Promoting a world-class music education was held at Melbourne High School, a special entry Years 9 to 12 boys school with a large instrumental music program. The workshop was hosted by the Principal Mr Jeremy Ludowyke, Mr Richard Gill gave the Keynote address and other key speakers were Senator the Honourable Rod Kemp and the Honourable Mr Phil Davis Member of Parliament. More than 100 delegates attended. As a result of the workshop, a School Music Action Group called 'sMAG' was created as a Victorian response to the concerns of the present state of music education, and the need to implement the recommendations in a Victorian context. The findings from the workshop were written up in a document entitled the Victorian Music Workshop Report.

Members of sMAG included teachers, principals, representatives from the education sectors, independent music and arts bodies, and the music industry. The Mission of sMAG was "to work cooperatively with the State and Federal governments to ensure that the recommendations of the National Review of School Music Education (NRSME) are adopted and implemented throughout the State of Victoria" (School Music Action Group, 2007).

The Victorian Music Workshop Report stated 15 actions from the *National Review of School Music Education* with a focus on the Victorian context. Action number 4 was specific to instrumental music education: "Access to Instrumental and Voice-Based Programs and Activities: Provide all necessary resources so that every Victorian school student has the opportunity to participate in continuous, sequential and developmental instrumental and voice-based music programs". (School Music Action Group, 2007, p. 9) The *National Review of School Music Education* discussed how access to music programs were haphazard which resulted in "Instrumental and vocal programs being limited to a relatively small percentage of State secondary school students" (p. 16). Some of the activities of sMAG have been;

the development of partnerships with the music community, hosting forums, developing advocacy statements, and developing a strategic plan and initiating meetings key stakeholders. One of the most significant outcomes was the Parliamentary Inquiry into the *Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools* published in November 2013 (Parliamentary Paper, 2013).

Parliamentary Inquiry

The *Parliamentary Inquiry into the Extent, Benefits and Potential of Music Education in Victorian Schools* took place from 2010 to 2013. There were 244 submissions and 120 witnesses. In the Chair's Jan Konberg MLC forward the Key recommendations were; "a state-wide music education policy, a promotion plan to increase awareness about the benefits of music education amongst school leaders and teachers and increased training and support for teachers, particularly music teaching at the primary school level" (p. xiv). It was found that:

Schools can also choose to provide co-curricular music activities such as instrumental music lessons, ensembles and choirs. These activities operate outside of the core curriculum and are optional for students... However, instrumental music lessons are often only provided to students on a user-pays basis... Most government secondary schools in Victoria offer optional instrumental music programs to students on a subsidised basis (p. xvii).

Chapter six and recommendations 37 to 45 focused on instrumental music programs. Recommendation 39 discussed how there were issues with funding with many schools needing to supplement the program themselves. Secondary schools who did not have an instrumental music program found it challenging to grow a program without additional support which was recommendation 41. Again, there were issues with the status and quality of instrumental music teachers with a percentage of teachers still not being fully qualified according to recommendation 43. Many were also dissatisfied with how their positions were categorized according

to the Victorian Institute of Teaching. An overarching issue was that the level of government funding had remained static while the demand for instrumental programs had grown (p. 119).

Masson's (2013) response reiterated the issues associated with instrumental music programs. There were two points which were repeatedly made "1) that there is evidence of many benefits to music education in schools, and 2) that the provision of music education is still inconsistent and inadequate; as the report says, not all students have equitable access to music education (p. xvii).

2018 Update

An outcome of the inquiry was for Victorian government to commit \$1.4 million to establish quality music programs in all government primary schools in partnership with a private provider Musical Futures Australia. There was also \$400,000 for government, Catholic and independent primary schools for students from low socio-economic backgrounds to purchase musical instruments for instrumental music programs. (School Music Action Group, 2018) In May 2018, the Victorian government released a statement in which they are dedicating one million to music education in Victoria in which:

- \$600,000 will be provided to government schools to purchase music-related resources such as musical instruments.
- \$400,000 will continue the delivery of teacher training and professional learning in music education, so that schools can develop quality music programs for their students (School Music Action Group, 2018).

These initiatives will assist in providing resources for instrumental music programs, however the amount is not adequate to cater for all government secondary schools in Australia, especially for those in need.

Summary

Instrumental music programs formally commenced in Victorian Government secondary schools in 1965. The way these programs have developed has been unique to each school and region. The factors which have impacted their development have been their rationale, geographic location, culture, budget and personnel. Differences between such programs have included the scope of the provision offered at schools, performance opportunities, special programs for musically gifted, specialist music schools and the resources to offer the subject up to the final year of schooling.

Despite the demand for the programs, there have been issues of equity, quality and resource allocation due to the high costs of running such programs and the need for specially trained teachers. These reports have provided relevant information to understand current issues and to form strategies to further improve the situation. This mode of reporting has continued into the twenty-first century and has shed light of issues of equity, not only in Victoria, but for the first time at the Federal level.

Over the past 50 years, instrumental music has been introduced and recognized as a subject in Victorian Government secondary schools. There has been an increasing demand for the resource but there have been issues of qualified instrumental music teachers, equity between schools, and adequate resource allocation. Many of these issues are due to inadequate funding. A series of government reports have pinpointed the issues with a list of recommendations. However, the amount of funding allocated has not been adequate to meet the demand. It is only through a commitment to music education by governments, policy makers, schools, principals, universities teachers and students that instrumental music has a chance of surviving let alone thriving during a time of economic rationalism. We hope that the next 50 years will have a more positive outlook.

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