



# The benefits of a classical music education

Synergy between classical music teaching and world music traditions means that now everyone can benefit from high quality ensemble playing

Many private preparatory, junior and pre-prep schools are justifiably proud of the quality of the music education that they provide and the large numbers of pupils who learn to play musical instruments. Schools tend to follow the classical model of providing specialist tuition on strings, woodwind, brass, piano/keyboard, vocal, percussion and guitar and most

will also offer a number of classical orchestral, band/wind ensembles and vocal/choral opportunities. This classical model produces competent performers with a good overview of classical traditions and repertoire and it also teaches important life skills – listening, empathy, patience, persistence, teamwork and self-discipline.

But what about those pupils who don't have an interest or aptitude for classical music and who don't currently participate – are they missing out on vital life skills training and if so, how can we include them?

Fortunately there is now an additional way to teach and deliver music and these all-important life skill benefits in tandem with the classical model.

## The world music approach can work for all pupils, regardless of attitude, ability or socioeconomic background

World music genres - African Drumming, Brazilian Samba, Indonesian Gamelan, Caribbean Steel Pans and World Percussion - enable a school's music department to deliver a high speed, low cost alternative to the classical approach. It's a 'learning by playing' approach\* which has been tried and tested in many schools, loved by children and it's an approach which can be accessed quickly by any classically trained music educator (or indeed by enthusiastic and skilled generalist class teachers).

But the real strength of the approach is that it engages and involves ALL pupils and allows a school to offer every pupil the opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument and develop those vital life skills. See Table 1: The Benefits.

This needs further explanation:

- The world music approach can work for all pupils, regardless of attitude, ability or socio-economic background, because the instruments and the music are inherently accessible. The basic playing techniques of most instruments can be picked up in a relatively short period of teaching time and many simple ensemble pieces can be achieved by complete beginners. Therefore, the instrument is not a barrier to progress. Similarly, the music is easily approachable (even if it sounds unfamiliar to the ear initially) and whole classes of children can be playing simple pieces successfully from the first lesson.

- The accessibility of the instruments and the music also contributes to rapid progress. Children are immediately engaged and encouraged to focus, not only because the instruments are different, colourful and create a wonderfully different sound world, but because the class can quickly make a satisfying sound corporately. Nothing succeeds like success and under the guidance of a skilled and enthusiastic teacher it is entirely possible for a class to be performing together in front of the whole school after a few class music lessons.
- Rapid musical progress can of course reduce costs significantly. World music traditions can be picked up immediately by classically trained music teachers but they can also be taught by generalist teachers, enabling schools to make use of 'in-house' skills and extend current capability.
- Further budget considerations are the relatively low cost, durability and ease of maintenance of world music instruments as well as the additional benefit that one set of instruments can be utilized by the whole school. Once the school has procured a set of samba drums, or an Indonesian Gamelan, or a set of African drums then the instruments are there for future year groups to benefit from.

For all these reasons the cost of implementing a successful world music class ensemble-based approach

is astonishingly low and could literally cost your school as little £1 per pupil per year. See Table 2: The Costs

World music is a fabulously cost-effective way to involve all pupils in real music-making and to teach vitally important life skills to those who may currently be missing out. It makes a superb complement to established classical offerings and will give your music department an international string to its bow that is cost-effective and very quick to implement.

\*NOTE: the *Drums for Schools* "learning by playing" approach and Class Packs have been developed, tested and refined over twenty years of actual class teaching, initially in primary schools in the Bristol region of the UK and later extended to Foundation Stage and Secondary levels in schools all over the UK and internationally. It is currently being applied successfully in hundreds of state-funded and independent schools in the UK, the Gulf, South East Asia and the USA.

Mary Edwards is a Music Education Consultant and former Director of Music at King Edward's Junior School, Bath. For more information about *Drums for Schools*, visit [www.drumsforschools.com](http://www.drumsforschools.com)

**Table 1: The Benefits**

The following table scores Classical and World Music ensemble-based learning for the scope they give in developing each skill or area of knowledge.

Scope: 1= very limited, 2= limited, 3= fair, 4= good, 5= excellent

You may be surprised just how high world music-based learning scores, but the fact is that most of the major world music styles are ancient and sophisticated traditions with extensive repertoires and considerable scope for developing all the same skills that are needed for and developed by classical ensemble playing.

		Classical	World music
<b>Life skills</b>	Listening/empathy	5	5
	Initiative/leadership	5	5
	Teamwork/collaboration	5	5
	Patience/persistence	5	5
	Self-discipline	5	3
<b>Musicianship</b>	Instrumental skills	5	4
	Improvisation skills	3	5
	Performance skills	5	5
	Aural memory	5	5
<b>Academic learning</b>	In depth knowledge of the style/tradition	5	3
	Notation skills	5	4
	Compositional skills	5	4

**Table 2: The Costs**

The following table shows the approximate cost per pupil per year of teaching each world music tradition. There's a blank row for you to fill in and compare your school's classical music costs and coverage.

Assumptions: School of 300 pupils in 12 classes of 25 pupils each Cost of musical instruments written off over 1 year (percussion) or 3 years (other instruments) Based on Drums for Schools Class Packs

Style	Number of pupils	Instruments	Specialist teaching staff	Costs	
				Total costs per year	Total costs per pupil
<b>World Percussion</b>	300	£200		£200	£1
<b>African Drumming</b>	300	£300		£300	£1
<b>Indonesian Gamelan</b>	300	£400		£400	£1
<b>Brazilian Samba</b>	300	£400		£400	£1
<b>Caribbean Steel Pans</b>	300	£500		£500	£2
<b>Classical</b>					