ARTICLE

Joining alone: factors that influence the musical participation of young adults after leaving school

Emma White and Stephanie E. Pitts

Department of Music, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
Corresponding author: Emma White; Email: emma.white68@hotmail.com

Abstract

When young people leave the musical world of their school environment, a lack of clear routes into adult musical engagement brings a risk of wasted ability, motivation and enjoyment, which arguably undermines the value of music education. This study explored the factors that influence continued musical participation among young British adults who had been actively engaged in school music. Musical participation is defined in this research as group music-making in either a formal or informal setting. Participants ($n = 102$) completed an online questionnaire or were interviewed ($n = 6$) about their past and present musical experiences along with future expectations for music-making. The stark headline finding was that while 87% of participants had intended to continue with music-making beyond school, only 48% had found groups to join. Nonetheless, 78% expected to continue with music-making in the future. Our research therefore suggests that any break from musical participation need not be permanent for individuals who have established strong musical identities through their early experiences. To conclude, we present a model of lifelong musical participation that illustrates the influences, motivations and choices that contribute to sustained musical engagement.

Keywords: Musical participation; post-school music; motivation; young adults; musical independence

Introduction: music education for lifelong participation

Music educators implicitly hope that they are starting the young people they teach on a path that will lead to lifelong engagement with music and that these students will come to value the place of music in their adult lives (Myers, 2008). But such a hope is overly optimistic if students are not adequately prepared for the realities of venturing out independently into the adult world of music-making.

A strong sense of musical identity is required for successful musical independence, and this begins during the formative years through an interplay of various factors both at home and in education settings (Lamont, 2011; Sichivitsa, 2007). Parental support is important in both initial musical engagement (Young, 2008) and continuation of musical activity during the school years (Ilari, 2018; McPherson, 2009). In studies of accomplished musicians, parental involvement had great value regardless of the parents' own level of formal musical knowledge (Sloboda & Howe, 1991). Developing musicians benefited if parents gave them freedom to experiment musically (Davidson & Burland, 2006), encouraged practice, communicated with teachers and acted as an interested audience (Creech, 2010).

Teachers give further support to the establishment of musical identity. Initially, teachers with engaging personalities and pedagogical expertise can ignite musical interest and progress (Davidson, Sloboda & Howe, 1996). However, to sustain this progress, students need to assume greater control of their musical development. Teachers who understand the complexities of adolescent motivation can help their older students discover what motivates both their learning and their decision to engage in musical activities (Cogdill, 2015). Sustained commitment is more

likely if students are provided with sufficient challenge and autonomy and given responsibility for their learning (Evans & McPherson, 2017). Commitment can also be reinforced by peers, who provide a context of like-minded friendship in which a positive musical identity can develop (Lamont & Hargreaves, 2019).

After leaving school, the decision to continue participating in musical pursuits is in a young person's own hands. As they start university or paid employment, there are many competing options for young adults' choices of activities, and without a clear route into musical participation, there is a risk of previously enjoyed group music-making becoming a thing of the past. With more choice as to how to spend their leisure time, young adults select which activities to pursue based on how much enjoyment the activity provides, the values associated with the activity (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) or the importance it might have for a future career (Evans & Liu, 2019).

Prior experiences are an important factor in the decision to continue group music-making, and many young adults search for activities that resemble the ensembles they experienced at school (Pitts & Robinson, 2016). Research with high school orchestra students found that positive prior musical experience increased the likelihood they would continue with musical participation (Evans & Liu, 2019). However, Mantie and Talbot (2020) found that the reality for many individuals was that having spent many years actively making music, this participation ended abruptly upon leaving school. This supports previous research which established that many students see school music-making as a finite activity with no link to musical life beyond school (Mantie & Tucker, 2008; Rohwer & Rohwer, 2009).

Without the external influences of parents and teachers, if an individual is to continue, they must make a personal commitment to music-making and have a sense that their needs are being met. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) suggests that individuals seek out activities that satisfy the three basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy and will thrive if their behaviour is self-driven rather than affected by external factors. There is substantial evidence that musical participation can fulfil the psychological needs of young adults, including the satisfaction of becoming more confident players and developing a broader range of musical interests and skills (Bowles, Dobbs & Jensen, 2014), the use of music-making for stress relief or as a distraction from academic studies (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007) and the value of social interaction with other players (Hewitt & Allan, 2013).

However, young adults need to have access to relevant musical activities and must feel equipped to flourish in such groups. Krause et al. (2020) suggest that teachers should encourage students to join groups outside school in order to aid the transition from school-based to community-based activities. However, doubts remain about whether music education provides students with appropriate skills for continued musical participation (Pitts & Robinson, 2016) or enough 'musical independence' to feel confident in amateur music groups beyond school (Mantie & Talbot, 2020, p. 101).

To address these challenges, this study identified the following research questions for empirical investigation:

1. What are the factors that affect the decisions of young adults to continue with music-making?
2. What are the effects of past musical experiences on continued musical participation?
3. What changes in practice might better support future music-making?

Research methods and participants

This study considered the impact of new-found independence on motivation for continued participation in young adults and was positioned to investigate those who had previously

displayed a significant degree of commitment and motivation prior to leaving school. The three criteria for inclusion were:

- Having been at school in the UK, which allowed for a certain homogeneity of musical experience.
- Having participated in one or more musical ensembles during school years (ages 11–18).
- Being in the age range 19–25 years.[1]

Method

A survey approach was adopted that encompassed those respondents who might only be prepared to answer quick, multiple-choice questions as well as those who would offer more detailed responses to open-ended questions. Participants were recruited via social media, personal contacts and mailing lists from the authors' university, followed by a degree of snowball sampling which resulted in responses from across the UK and from a range of musical backgrounds. The online survey was designed in four sections:

- General demographics including current musical and educational situation.
- Early musical education and questions about participation in groups prior to leaving school.
- Musical experience since leaving school.
- Expectations for music-making in the future.

There were 117 responses, and 102 met the required criteria for inclusion. The majority (68%; $n = 69$) were currently at university or college, 27% ($n = 28$) had left or graduated from university or college, and 5% ($n = 5$) had not attended any education establishment beyond school.

To supplement the data acquired through the open-ended answers in the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were carried out with respondents who had agreed to further contact. Participants who displayed a range of early and current musical experiences were contacted, and from 12 email enquiries, 6 respondents replied, which, although fewer than hoped, still gave additional insight into individual musical stories in ways that enriched the survey findings. The profiles were suitably varied: four respondents were currently at university, and two had left university, which matched the balance of the population from the questionnaire responses. All the interviewees were female, which meant that gender could not be a focus for analysis as there was no point of comparison.

All respondents to the questionnaires were given a participant number and coded for their current situation: *AU* (at university); *LU* (left university) and *NU* (no university experience). 'University' was the term used to encompass all education beyond school and included those who may have been at further education colleges or conservatoires.

The interviewees were also given pseudonyms. General information about the current education situation and current musical activity of the interviewees is displayed in Table 1, with the current situation and musical status informing the assigned code.

A mixed methods approach to data analysis was taken, with descriptive statistics and measures of frequency used to provide an overview of the population and the question responses. The qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which generated themes focusing on past musical experiences and the establishment of a musical identity, the transition from school to university and the challenges to continued musical participation and future musical hopes and intentions.

Table 1. Background Information of Interviewees

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Current situation	Current musical status	Assigned code
Phoebe	19	At university (AU)	Only prevented by COVID-19 restrictions (COV)	AU-COV
Hannah	19	At university (AU)	Not currently active (N)	AU-N
Becky	22	At university (AU)	Yes, currently active (Y)	AU-Y
Rachel	21	At university (AU)	Yes, currently active (Y)	AU-Y
Gemma	23	Left university (LU)	Not currently active (N)	LU-N
Grace	22	Left university (LU)	Yes, currently active (Y)	LU-Y

Table 2. Extent of Choice for Learning an Instrument

	(1 = not my choice, 5 = completely my choice)				
	1	2	3	4	5
Extent of choice to learn a 1st instrument ($n = 102$)	2% (2)	7% (7)	13% (13)	33% (34)	45% (46)
Extent of choice to learn a 2nd instrument ($n = 84$)	5% (4)	7% (6)	12% (10)	19% (16)	57% (48)

Findings and discussion

Establishment of the musical identity

The participants in this study were included because of their musical commitment prior to leaving school. For most of the respondents, instrumental learning had begun at a young age with 82% ($n = 84$) starting to learn an instrument before the age of 11. Many played multiple instruments, with 82% ($n = 84$) playing two instruments and 38% ($n = 39$) playing more than two instruments. Table 2 shows the levels of choice respondents felt they had over the decision to play an instrument.

Although these ratings demonstrated high levels of individual choice in the decision to play an instrument, the qualitative data showed that family members were often nonetheless important influences in initial musical engagement. At the start of the interviews, all participants referred to family influence, providing examples of relatives as role models, decision-makers and musical experts: these included a mother who had '*always kind of played piano*' (Gemma, LU-N) and a drumming brother who inspired the choice of playing '*trumpet, because it was also quite loud*' (Becky, AU-Y). Having other instrumentalists in the family made the musical decision not about whether to learn an instrument but which one to choose:

> *So my grandad … was a professional musician … and my parents went to my grandad and were like –'What do you think she should learn?' and I started off on Alto Sax*. Rachel, (AU-Y)

The inclusion of family when discussing their own musical background shows how the interviewees considered the formation of their musical identity to be affected by family musical history and experience.

Musical engagement while at school

As expected of these musically engaged individuals, membership of music groups while at school was high with 94% ($n = 96$) belonging to school ensembles, 64% ($n = 65$) being members of

Table 3. Number of Groups Attended While at School

	School groups (*n* = 96)	Out-of-school groups (*n* = 65)
1 group	18% (17)	51% (33)
2 groups	24% (23)	31% (20)
3 groups	19% (20)	7% (11)
4 groups	10% (10)	0% (0)
More than 4 groups	28% (27)	8% (5)

out-of-school ensembles and many associated with several groups (see Table 3). Most respondents were happy with their level of involvement, with 68% of them feeling the level of involvement was about right, 27% wanting to have done more and 5% wishing they had done less.

Although school music groups were a fundamental part of many respondents' lives, feelings about the levels of commitment varied. For some, the choice to participate came from the sheer love of music: '*I loved any musical activities while I was at school and participated in as much as possible . . . If I didn't have to do lessons for other subjects at school, I would've quite happily spent every day in the music department*' (AU51). Others found that the musical aspect was enhanced by the social benefits: '*Looking back I really enjoyed being involved in lots of musical activities, . . . and I liked going to many ensembles as my friends were there, so I wasn't "missing out" on socialising at lunchtime*' (LU52). For these students, the quantity of opportunities was an important part of feeling immersed in musical activity, and there is a strong sense of intrinsic motivation in doing 'as much as possible'.

However, some respondents felt the volume of activities as a pressure, with the expectations of others affecting their decisions to participate: '*Hard to balance not doing too much and was the only social life you had time for. Lots of pressure from teachers and peers about what you should be involved in*' (NU12). The resulting sense of duty led in some cases to musical experiences that were less satisfying or enjoyable than the participants were hoping for:

> I would've liked to have some more groups that were for higher level students as I often found myself leading sections or helping younger pupils and the music often wasn't that challenging. (AU49)

Further evidence of the conflict between intrinsic motivation and external pressures to join and continue with music group membership was seen in the quantitative data, with decisions to join and decisions to continue (as summarised in Table 4) showing a high level of self-motivation.

In keeping with previous research (Hewitt & Allan, 2013; Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007), the musical aspect and the social fit were the main reasons for attending both types of groups. Unlike Hewitt and Allan (2013), this study found that most respondents rated the musical aspect of these groups more highly than the social aspect. However, the qualitative responses showed that the two aspects were closely connected, as for the member of a musical theatre group, who '*loved the social aspect and performing around with like-minded people*' (LU116).

Among the interviewees, Phoebe found the social aspect to be the motivation for her attendance at a Saturday morning music group:

> I only started going to the Saturday morning orchestras when I was about 16 or 17. Definitely because of my friends. My friends went and they would come back to school and tell stories and be laughing at things that happened on Saturday morning and I wasn't there, and I've got terrible fear of missing out. (Phoebe AU-COV)

Table 4. Motivations for Attending School and Out-of-School Groups

	School groups ($n = 96$)	Out-of-school groups ($n = 65$)
Love of/enjoyment of music	62% (60)	58% (38)
My teacher expected me to	18% (17)	5% (3)
The social aspect	15% (14)	23% (15)
My parents expected me to	2% (2)	11% (7)
Other	3% (3)	3% (2)

Note. The 'Other' responses all fell into a combination of the 'musical-social' fit.

In addition to these peer-group interactions, some respondents commented on '*the interaction with the conductor as well as other friends in the orchestra*' (AU115), demonstrating how youth-oriented ensembles could lay the foundation for intergenerational participation in the future, provided those relationships were positive and encouraging.

Expectations versus reality

Respondents' reflections on their musical life beyond school revealed a discrepancy between expectations for musical participation and the reality. The questionnaire asked respondents to look back at their school years and recall whether they expected to join musical groups when at university.

As shown in Table 5, of all university students, past and present (AU and LU), only 13% did not intend to join musical groups during their university years. In reality, however, 48% failed to find musical activities to join. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) restrictions on rehearsal and performance were a factor from March 2020 onwards, and 69% of respondents felt that the pandemic had negatively impacted their musical life. However, regardless of the effects of the pandemic, figures in Table 6 show that without access to structured and easily available groups, those outside the institutions of university and college were not participating in great numbers.

When asked to reflect on their motivations for joining musical groups after leaving school, of those that had found groups, 100% rated their choice to participate at 4 or 5 (5 = totally my choice). This compares to the 82% and 77% rating their choice to join school or out-of-school groups at 4 or 5 (cf. Table 2). In addition, the level of influence held by 'others' over these young adults had fallen in comparison to the school years. Table 7 shows the motivations for joining and the influence of significant others.

The data demonstrate that the influence of others is less strong at this stage, whereas issues directly influencing the self, such as the musical and social aspect and relationship with the ensemble director, were important. Although the musical aspect (*I really wanted to carry on playing/singing*) rated as a higher motivation than the social aspect, the gap between the two factors was narrower at this stage than during the school years (cf. Table 4), indicating the shift in motivations at different stages of life.

For these respondents, successful engagement depended on the extent to which the available activities satisfied their musical and social needs. While at school, Grace (LU-Y) had questioned her competence: '*I'd sort of lost my way a bit with the brass world. I just felt a bit – I'm rubbish at it – I lost confidence which was really sad*'. However, at university, she noticed a change: '*I got put on the flugelhorn, it kind of brought me out of my shell a bit and boosted my confidence . . . I was really grateful they recognised that and just gave me a chance and it was really good fun*'. For others, the effect a positive musical-social fit had on the enjoyment and satisfaction of the musical experience could be quite profound:

Table 5. Expectations Versus Reality of Joining Music Groups

Responses	AU respondents (n = 69)	LU respondents (n = 28)	Total (n = 97)
When at school, expectations of joining university musical groups			
Yes, definitely	64% (44)	36% (10)	56% (54)
I thought it was possible	26% (18)	43% (12)	31% (30)
No	10% (7)	21% (6)	13% (13)
Experience of finding musical groups at university			
Yes	56% (38)	43% (12)	52% (50)
No	30% (21)	57% (16)	38% (37)
No, because of COVID-19	14% (10)	–	10% (10)

Table 6. Experience of Finding a Music Group (LU and NU respondents)

Responses	Left university (n = 28)	Did not attend university (n = 5)
Not found a group	61% (17)	60% (3)
Yes, found a group	18% (5)	40% (2)
COVID-19 prevented me	21% (6)	0% (0)

Table 7. Extent of Motivations to Continue with Music-Making at or After University

Responses	(1 = not a lot 5 = a lot)				
	1	2	3	4	5
I really wanted to carry on playing/singing	2% (1)	2% (1)	6% (3)	16% (8)	74% (37)
I hoped the social aspect would be good	0% (0)	4%(2)	10% (5)	20% (10)	66% (33)
The ensemble leader was an influence	22% (11)	22% (11)	22% (11)	10% (5)	24% (12)
It was a distraction from other academic work	18% (9)	22% (11)	14% (7)	26% (13)	20% (10)
My parents expected me to carry on	36% (18)	20% (10)	20% (10)	14% (7)	10% (5)
I didn't want to let down my former instrumental teacher	54% (27)	24% (12)	6% (3)	14% (7)	2% (1)

Note. Figures include responses from AU and LU respondents, n = 50.

> *I've really enjoyed it and it has pushed me really hard as a musician. I have really improved, met some fantastic people and performed to a very high and professional standard. I've surprised myself by the quality of music I've made!* (AU64)

Not all respondents found groups that met their musical needs, with 29% of those responding to this question citing this as the main reason for not being part of musical groups. Some respondents could not find a group that fitted with the instrument they played: '*Initially at freshers fair I didn't find any orchestras or wind bands that I could join – all the musical societies were either for strings or jazz*' (AU95). Others found the level of the group did not match their needs: '*I couldn't find*

exactly what I was looking for – it was either too informal or too rigorous' (AU106), or missed the familiarity of the groups they had belonged to in the past: '*I would most likely have carried on if it was with the same group of friends/teachers who I had grown to love playing music with for so many years*' (NU21). Becky (AU-Y) found the standard of university groups was disappointing in comparison to her youth orchestra:

> *The youth orchestra I had been in had been really good. There were lots of people there in the National Youth Orchestra and had gone off to music college, so it was a pretty high standard, [. . .] And then when it came to Uni it just wasn't as good. I'd go and rehearsals were a bit tedious, because people wouldn't have done any practice. Through no fault of their own, they didn't have the same skills, which is fine, [but] it wasn't so good to be a part of.*

Finding an appropriate group could be quite a challenge for some. Respondent AU62 explained: '*As I play such an unusual, non-orchestral instrument . . . very few opportunities have been available*'. On discovering a group that met both their social and musical needs, almost against the odds, the positive effects were immense, with a real sense of satisfaction and of finding their place in the musical world:

> *However, now I have found a group solely for my instrument that plays to a very high standard and had people close to my age that understand my instrument (and not all sea-shanty playing OAPs!) [. . .] I feel as if I fit into the music world because of what I play, instead of despite what I play.* (AU62)

The purely social aspect of being part of a group was important to many respondents. It was particularly relevant to those who had left university and wished to become established in a new location: '*Also going to the pub after evensong, it helped me get to know people after moving to London*' (LU7). However, the type of musical group could have an impact on whether the social side was likely to be satisfactory: '*Choral groups tend to skew much older in membership; I was the only young person in the choir I joined*' (LU118).

For some young adults, a lack of social support affected their decision whether to join a group at all. Nineteen percent of respondents cited this as the main barrier to participation: '*I didn't [join] in first year because I was nervous about doing it by myself, and then I never got round to it in second year*' (AU41); '*Too busy at beginning of degree and not wishing to sort of "join alone", so being unwilling to start after this*' (AU39). This demonstrates the challenges faced when individuals lacked the level of social support they had been accustomed to in past musical experiences. These respondents felt that the prospect of having no social support affected their motivation in the initial stages, and then having missed the moment, they were discouraged from searching for future musical opportunities.

The impact of musical-social fit on musical identity

The interviewees demonstrated the complex relationship between the musical-social fit of the groups, their musical identity and their impact on continued participation. Hannah (AU-N) had not found a group that met her musical-social needs, which weakened her sense of musical identity and in turn decreased her sense of drive and motivation to seek out further activities: '*I don't play a lot, I don't even take my clarinet to Uni anymore which is so bad. [. . .] I should be more enthusiastic and go along and try more things*'. Gemma (LU-N), too, showed how the musical-social fit could affect her musical identity. She found the groups at university '*kind of cliquey, kind of pre-established*' and did not engage in musical activity until she took part in an open mic night with a friend from home. This met her musical-social needs and helped her

rediscover a musical identity outside a pre-existing group: '*I'd definitely like to do more kind of casual open mic night kind of stuff, particularly with close friends I can sing in harmony with*'. This example illustrates that although joining a group was the clearest indicator of continued musical participation after school, other modes of musical engagement were possible and, in this case, more effective.

These stories reveal the fragility of musical identity after a change in circumstances. While Hannah had some degree of acceptance of her lack of musical participation and weakened musical identity, Becky (AU-N) displayed disappointment and loss. Having been very active at school, her expectations of continued musical participation in high-quality groups at university were not met, and she struggled to find groups that achieved the musical fit she desired. Rachel (AU-Y), by contrast, had been similarly fortunate in her university experience: gigs and tours with the jazz band met her musical and social needs until she felt '*like I spent more time doing music outside of my degree than I did actually doing my degree*'. Her musical identity seems firmly established now as she contemplates leaving university: '*I can't see it changing. I'd like to think it won't. My whole personality is being a musician. If I were to stop, what would I be doing with my life?*'

Expectations and hopes for the future

Whether or not they were currently musically active, most respondents felt that it was likely they would participate in music-making at some point in the future. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of responses by category of the current situation and whether or not they are currently musically active. The only respondents who did not expect to carry on in the future were not currently active.

These results are notably more positive than the findings from Mantie (2018) and other US scholars predicting high dropout rates after school (Bowles, Dobbs & Jensen, 2014): in contrast, 38% of our respondents reported that they expected to join musical groups in the future, and 54% felt it was a possibility with 6% thinking it unlikely. Only 2% ($n = 2$) expressed no desire to recommence music-making. The respondents had clear expectations about what they would like from these future groups. Many individuals mentioned the desire to find future music groups that were similar to the out-of-school ensembles they had previously experienced. One respondent explained:

> *I haven't found an ensemble that I liked as much as the county youth groups yet. My university orchestra wasn't very big and didn't play very challenging music and I found it difficult, as a young person, to fit in at local groups.* (AU124)

Phoebe (AU-COV) had similar feelings: '*honestly I think the best option might be like a continuation of Saturday morning orchestra*'. The need to be with those of a similar age was highlighted by Hannah (AU-N): '*if there was something targeted towards 20- to 30-year-olds I would definitely be up for trying it out*'. These sentiments demonstrate the challenges surrounding musical provision for young adults. The membership of amateur music groups is ageing, and Pitts (2020) reports the ongoing struggle faced by the members of such groups in recruiting younger musicians. This is unlikely to be resolved if young adults are reluctant to join and poses the question of whether specific groups could be set up for this demographic to encourage participation beyond school and university. Another possibility is the reframing of intergenerational groups, which are usually viewed as being mainly of benefit to the older people involved (Creech et al., 2013) but have the potential to give new skills and confidence to student-aged participants too (Yang, Li & Zhao, 2017). Relieved of the pressure to 'fit in' with their older counterparts, students and young adults might then find a distinctive role between school and later adult musical participation.
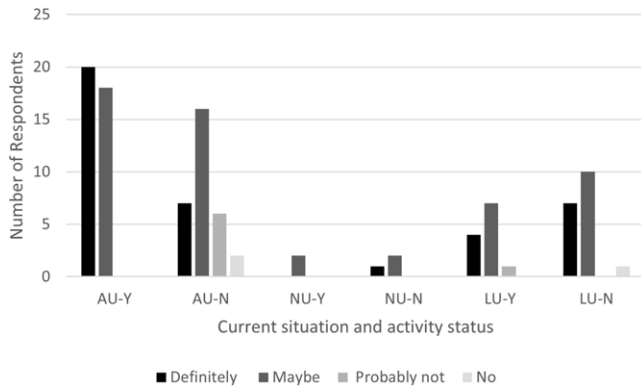
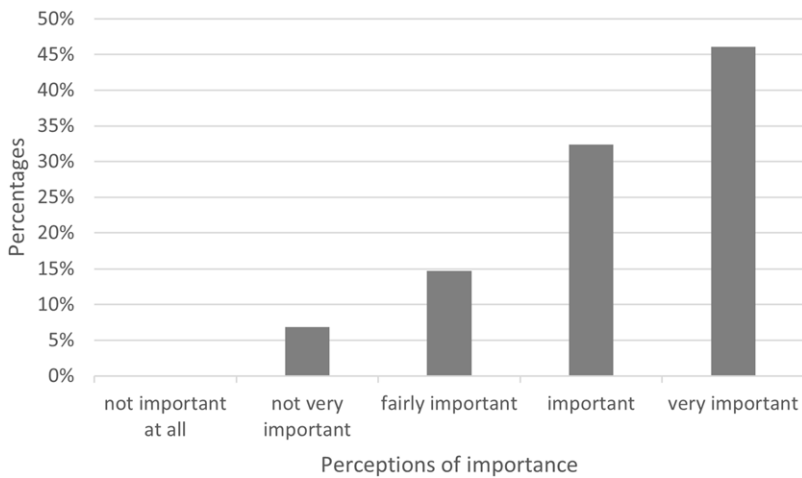**Figure 1.** Expectations of continuing with music-making in the future.

Figure 2. How important is it for music to be part of your life in the future?

An interrupted journey

Although many respondents were not currently musically active, they remained hopeful that their break in music-making may be a temporary hiatus. Music was felt to be a significantly important part of the life of most respondents whatever their current situation, with Figure 2 displaying the positive response to the question posed about the importance of music in their futures. This suggests that the foundations of their music identity set during their early experiences had endured, despite any negative experiences or breaks they had encountered in the journey so far.

The challenge for music educators and those running ensembles is to support and promote the concept of lifelong music-making and to make students aware of future possibilities. All interviewees commented on the lack of advice they received for future music-making, with Hannah (AU-N) feeling unprepared for possible gaps in the musical journey: '*It would have been comforting to hear if you stop for a few years you don't have to stop forever*'. Inevitably, there might be a degree of positive self-presentation in respondents' eagerness to say to a researcher (particularly one who they might know to be an instrumental teacher herself) that they would have liked to continue with music, even when this had not occurred in reality. However, the open-mindedness to future participation seemed genuine, and Hannah had comforting words for herself and any others facing a temporary break in their musical journey: '*you'll pick it up again. And, you know you won't lose it, it's like riding a bicycle … It won't be gone forever*'.

Conclusions and implications

This study considered the factors that affected young adults in their journey towards independent music-making, from early musical experiences and influences to their perceptions of the musical and social aspects of music-making. For those respondents who had successfully navigated the transition from school to post-school musical participation, their ensembles played a valuable role in establishing social bonds in a new community. However, the strongest deterrent to continued music-making post-school was a perceived lack of fit between the young adults' needs and expectations and the available musical opportunities.

Beyond the structured institutional settings of school-related music groups, access and opportunity had proved to be more difficult for many respondents. There were mixed experiences of accessing university music groups, and although orchestras and other formal groups were often well-advertised and run from within music departments, less formal opportunities were harder to find. If balancing the musical-social fit for young adults is an important issue, as this study suggests, universities may need to consider offering a greater range of auditioned and non-auditioned groups and promote and support informal music-making opportunities. Students who had been unsuccessful at the audition could be given advice about alternative musical opportunities on offer. Particular attention should also be given to the issue that numerous students miss what they perceive to be the key moment for joining musical groups in the 'Fresher's Fair' at the start of their university career. Many felt a lack of social support at that time, so focusing on welcoming those attending alone, as well as extending 'Re-Fresher' invitations beyond the frantic first few weeks of university life, may encourage more to participate.

The participants in this study had all been actively engaged in music-making while at school, and those involved with their music education might have expected that these musicians would be likely to continue beyond school. The data show that support for ways into future music-making for these previously committed players was scant; no interviewees felt they had been given guidance about musical participation as a lifelong pursuit during their time at school. Mantie's (2021) portrayal of the undervaluing of 'leisure education' in schools is pertinent here: these young adults had made decisions, probably guided by parents and teachers, about whether to pursue music as a degree subject or career option, but their continued engagement with the extracurricular pursuit that had been an important part of their school years was less directly addressed and therefore harder to navigate. If schools empower students with more independence and give them opportunities for organising and marketing concerts and forging links with community groups for joint concerts, they may feel more equipped for music-making in the future.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group *State of the Nation Report* into music education in the UK (Daubney, Spruce & Annetts, 2019) paints a gloomy picture of music education in schools and shows the limited availability of resources to facilitate links with community ensembles. Over a decade ago, Christopher Small (2010) proposed a solution that now seems more urgent than ever: 'a network of music centres throughout the country, where people of all ages can engage in musicking and dancing as and when it suits them . . . where older can help younger, and perhaps vice versa, and where instruction is offered as the need is felt for it' (p. 288).

Though still perhaps an aspirational dream, such a design would arguably meet the needs of musicians of all backgrounds with a range of musical and social fits, allowing the potential for more opportunity for lifelong musical engagement.

Limitations and future research questions

This exploratory study has highlighted factors including parental influence and school musical opportunities that affect post-school musical participation. From these findings, a larger-scale study could be designed to test relationships between the factors and to investigate the experiences of a wider range of young adults including those who were less highly engaged in school. The
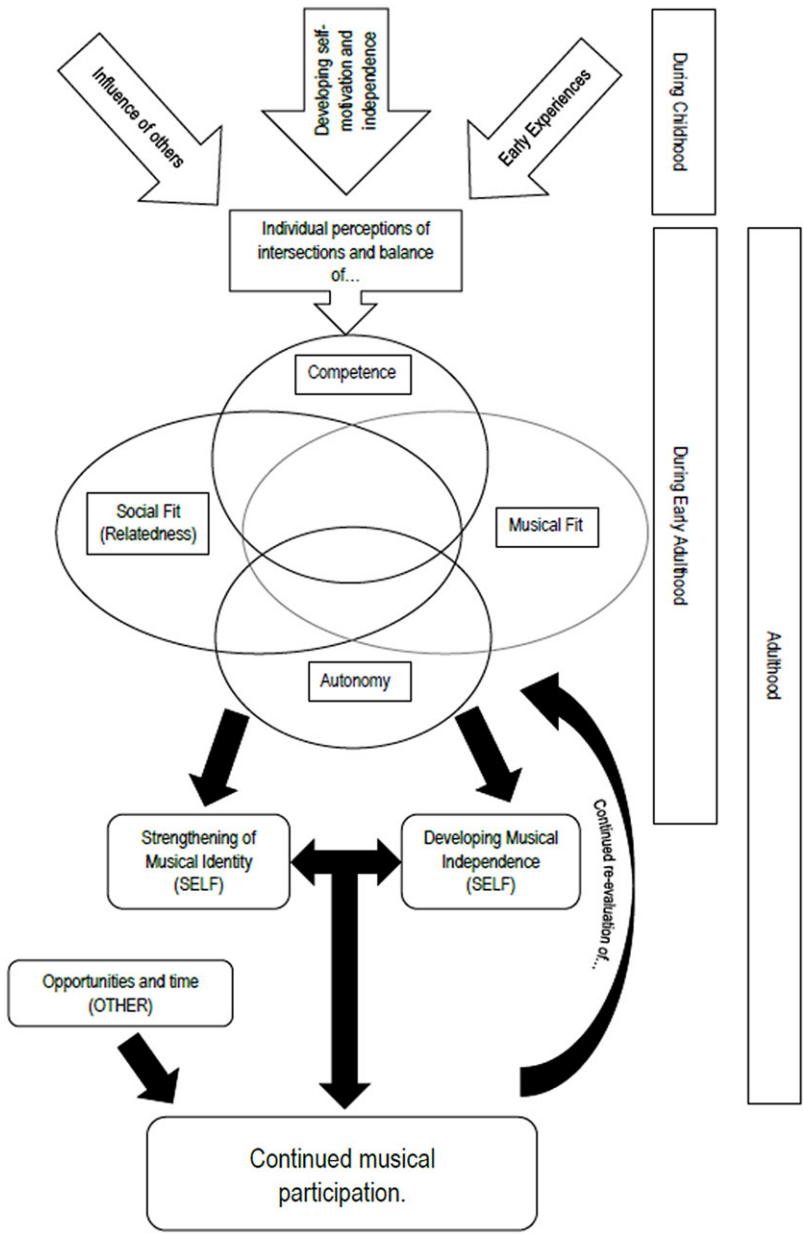
Figure 3. Proposed model for lifelong musical participation.

capacity for developing musical independence in young adulthood has been shown to be key, and future studies in this field could draw on sociological research that has investigated the changing relationship between parent and child as they reach young adulthood (King, 2013).

The snowball sampling of this study meant that most respondents came from a more formal music education background; future research might target individuals from informal music backgrounds and consider the factors that affected their continued musical journey. The limited sample also meant that comparisons could not be made by gender, race or social class, but wider research points to these being substantial factors in access to musical participation (Bull, 2019;

Scharff, 2017), and a further longitudinal or retrospective study with a broader participant pool could investigate the effects of these factors at this critical point in musical transitions.

Finally, the timing of this study, with data collected between February and April 2021, meant that the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions had affected the experiences of the participants, so carrying out a similar study when musical activities are re-established might yield additional insights.

Proposed model for lifelong musical participation

In summary, findings from this study show that a balance of influences, motivations and choices from both self and others is needed to sustain musical participation. The proposed model (Figure 3) illustrates this relationship.

As the model shows, early experiences help form the musical identity, but during early adulthood, the individual's perceptions of the intersections and relationships between competence, autonomy and the social-musical fit (from Self-Determination Theory, Ryan & Deci, 2000) play a vital part in the decision to continue with music-making. Participation beyond these years is informed by continued re-evaluation of these aspects, as well as the availability of playing opportunities and the effects of competing time commitments. The weighting of each factor and the balance between them will be different for each person, according to their experiences, influences and motivations.

The individual makes the decision to continue to participate in musical activities, but all those involved in the early stages of the musical journeys of young musicians, including parents, instrumental teachers, staff in school music departments and extracurricular music leaders, need to understand the lasting effects of the role they each play. While the musical identities of young musicians are strengthened through the opportunities and support offered in the school years, music educators at all levels need to give greater thought to laying the foundations for a transition to independent music-making in adulthood. By creating appropriate environments and providing a variety of opportunities, they will help young people sustain their musical life into adulthood and experience and enjoy lifelong musical participation where the balance of musical and social needs is met.

Note

1 Although this criterion excluded responses from those who had just left school and were still 18, it was felt that the music education of these individuals was likely to have been more adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and might skew findings as the aim was to explore musical participation in more 'normal' situations.

References

BOWLES, C., DOBBS, T. & JENSEN, J. (2014). Self-perceived influences on musically active nonmusic majors related to continued engagement. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, **33**(1), 11–20. https://doi.org/10.1177/8755123314540657.

BRAUN, V. & CLARKE, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, **3**(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

BULL, A. (2019). *Class, Control, and Classical Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

CLARKE, E., DIBBEN, N. & PITTS, S. (2010). *Music and Mind in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

COGDILL, S. H. (2015). Applying research in motivation and learning to music education. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, **33**(2), 49–57. https://doi.org/10.1177/8755123314547909.

CREECH, A. (2010). Learning a musical instrument: The case for parental support. *Music Education Research*, **12**(1), 13–32. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613800903569237.

CREECH, A., HALLAM, S., McQUEEN, H. & VARVARIGOU, M. (2013). The power of music in the lives of older adults. *Research Studies in Music Education*, **35**(1), 87–102. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103x13478862.

DAUBNEY, A., SPRUCE, G. & ANNETTS, D. (2019). Music education: State of the Nation. Report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education, the Incorporated Society of Musicians and the University of Sussex. https://www.ism.org/images/images/FINAL-State-of-the-Nation-Music-Education-for-email-or-web-2.pdf.

DAVIDSON, J. & BURLAND, K. (2006). Musician identity formation. In G. E. McPherson (ed.), *The Child as Musician: A Handbook of Musical Development* (pp. 475–490). Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198530329.003.0024.

DAVIDSON, J. W., SLOBODA, J. A. & HOWE, M. J. A. (1996). The role of parents and teachers in the success and failure of instrumental learners. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, **127**, 40–44.

EVANS, P. & LIU, M. Y. (2019). Psychological needs and motivational outcomes in a high school orchestra program. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, **67**(1), 83–105. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022429418812769.

EVANS, P. & MCPHERSON, G. E. (2017). Processes of musical identity consolidation during adolescence. In R. MacDonald, D. J. Hargreaves & D. Miell (eds.), *Handbook of Musical Identities* (pp. 213–231). Oxford Scholarship online. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199679485.003.0012.

HEWITT, A. & ALLAN, A. (2013). Advanced youth music ensembles: Experiences of, and reasons for, participation. *International Journal of Music Education*, **31**(3), 257–275. https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761411434494.

ILARI, B. (2018). Musical parenting and music education: Integrating research and practice. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, **36**(2), 45–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/8755123317717053.

KING, A. (2013). Recognising adulthood? Young adults' accomplishment of their age identities. *Sociology*, **47**(1), 109–125. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512448559.

KOKOTSAKI, D. & HALLAM, S. (2007). Higher education music students' perceptions of the benefits of participative music making. *Music Education Research*, **9**(1), 93–109. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613800601127577.

KRAUSE, A., KIRBY, M., DIECKMANN, S. & DAVIDSON, J. (2020). From dropping out to dropping in: Exploring why individuals cease participation in musical activities and the support needed to reengage them. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, **14**(4), 401–414. https://doi.org/10.1037/aca0000268.

LAMONT, A. (2011). The beat goes on: Music education, identity and lifelong learning. *Music Education Research*, **13**(4), 369–388. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2011.638505.

LAMONT, A. & HARGREAVES, D. (2019). Musical preference and social identity in adolescence. In K. McFerran, P. Derrington & S. Saarikallio (eds.), *Handbook of Music, Adolescents, and Wellbeing* (pp. 109–118). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MANTIE, R. (2018). Continuing to play: Music participation in the university years. *International Journal of Community Music*, **11**(3), 311–324. https://doi.org/10.1386/IJCM.11.3.311_1.

MANTIE, R. (2021). *Music, Leisure, Education: Historical and Philosophical Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MANTIE, R. & TALBOT, B. C. (2020). *Education, Music, and the Lives of Undergraduates: Collegiate a Cappella and the Pursuit of Happiness*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350169258.

MANTIE, R. & TUCKER, L. (2008). Closing the gap: Does music-making have to stop upon graduation? *International Journal of Community Music*, **1**(2), 217–227. https://doi.org/10.1386/ijcm.1.2.217_1.

MCPHERSON, G. E. (2009). The role of parents in children's musical development. *Psychology of Music*, **37**(1), 91–110. https://doi.org/10.1177/030573560708604.

MYERS, D. (2008). Lifespan engagement and the question of relevance: Challenges for music education research in the twenty-first century. *Music Education Research*, **10**(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/14613800701871330.

PITTS, S. E. (2020). Leisure-time music groups and their localities: Exploring the commercial, educational, and reciprocal relationships of amateur music-making. *Music and Letters*, **101**(1), 120–134. https://doi.org/10.1093/ml/gcz044.

PITTS, S. E. & PRICE, S. M. (2020). *Understanding Audience Engagement in the Contemporary Arts*. London: Routledge.

PITTS, S. & ROBINSON, K. (2016). Dropping in and dropping out: Experiences of sustaining and ceasing amateur participation in classical music. *British Journal of Music Education*, **33**(3), 327–346. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051716000152.

ROHWER, D. & ROHWER, M. (2009). A content analysis of choral students' participation perceptions: Implications for lifelong learning. *International Journal of Community Music*, **2**(2), 255–262. https://doi.org/10.1386/ijcm.2.2-3.255_1.

RYAN, R. M. & DECI, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, **55**(1), 68–78. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68.

SCHARFF, C. (2017). *Gender, Subjectivity, and Cultural Work: The Classical Music Profession*. Abingdon: Routledge.

SICHIVITSA, V. O. (2007). The influences of parents, teachers, peers and other factors on students' motivation in music. *Research Studies in Music Education*, **29**(1), 55–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X07087568.

SLOBODA, J. A. & HOWE, M. J. A. (1991). Biographical precursors of musical excellence: An interview study. *Psychology of Music*, **19**(1), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735691191001.

SMALL, C. (2010). Afterword. In R. Wright (ed.), *Sociology and Music Education* (pp. 283–290). Abingdon: Routledge.

WIGFIELD, A. & ECCLES, J. S. (2000). Expectancy–value theory of achievement motivation. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, **25**(1), 68–81. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1015.

YANG, A., LI, E. & ZHAO, M. (2017). Harvard crooners: Building intergenerational relationships through participatory music making. *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships*, **15**(4), 419–422. https://doi.org/10.1080/15350770.2017.1368359.

YOUNG, S. (2008). Lullaby light shows: everyday musical experience among under-two-year-olds. *International Journal of Music Education*, **26**(1), 33–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761407085648.

Emma White is a graduate of the MA course in Music Psychology in Education, Performance and Wellbeing from the University of Sheffield. She is a music teacher with Hertfordshire Music Service and a committed amateur musician, the combination of which has led to her research interest in musical participation.

Stephanie E. Pitts is a professor of music education at the University of Sheffield, with research interests in musical participation, arts audiences and lifelong learning. Her books include *Chances and Choices: Exploring the Impact of Music Education* (2012) and *Music and Mind in Everyday Life* (Clarke, Dibben & Pitts, 2010). She is the director of the Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre (sparc.dept.shef.ac.uk), and her recent research with arts sector partners across four UK cities led to the book *Understanding Audience Engagement in the Contemporary Arts* (Pitts & Price, 2020). She is currently leading an Arts and Humanities Research Council Network on Classical Music Cities and is an associate director of the Centre for Cultural Value.