

Why Music? An Evaluation of a Music Programme for Older People in the Community

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Abstract

Background: A programme of regular ‘concerts and teas’ for older people was established in 2009 in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London. This evaluation examines their impact.

Method: Following the music performance on two separate occasions, audience members were invited to participate in brief interviews. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect qualitative data relating to the participants’ experience of both the music and the overall event.

Results: The findings suggest that the music was effective in evoking positive emotions including happiness, relaxation, inspiration, awe and gratitude, whilst negative emotions, such as anxiety and worry, were lessened. The affective response was enhanced by the interaction between performers and audience, the high standard of performance and suitable repertoire. The opportunity for social contact and interaction relieved loneliness and contributed to the participants’ enjoyment of the events.

Conclusion: It was concluded that the combined experience of live music and social contact is of benefit to the wellbeing of older people.

Keywords: live music, older people, positive emotions, anxiety, depression.

1. Introduction

Later life is, for many people, a period marked by increasing challenges. Some of these are due to the transitions of life, such as retirement and bereavement; some are due to increasing frailty and susceptibility to illness and disability (Austad, 2009; Buchner & Wagner, 1992).

Retirement is not always an easy adjustment. The loss of a work identity and its accompanying status (both financial and social) can be difficult. A recent report by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Centre for Ageing Better (2017) found that only 56% of UK workers planning to retire in the next five years are looking forward to it. Their anxiety is fuelled by a number of issues. For example, 41% worry about their finances, 32% fear missing social connections from work, 24% fear losing a sense of purpose and 33% fear being bored (<https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/news/retirement-transitions-later-life>). At the same time, the achievement of a particular chronological, defined by society as ‘old’ can invite ageism (Edlund, 2016).

Bereavement is one of life’s most stressful events; when experienced in old age, the likelihood of physiological and psychological decline is greater (Spahni, Morselli, Perrig-Chiello & Bennett, 2015). For example, there can be decreases in cognitive and immune function (Ling, 2016; Vitlic, Khanfer, Lord, Carroll & Phillips, 2014) which can engender a growing sense of vulnerability and mortality (Plawecki & Plawecki, 2016).

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There is also the challenge of ill health. Medical advances have led to improvements in the treatment of conditions that in earlier generations would have been life-threatening. However, the resulting increase in life expectancy has not been accompanied by any comparable reduction in morbidity; people are spending more years in poor health. According to a recent report, 40% of the over 65s in the UK have a limiting long-standing illness and 59% of the over 80s have a disability (Age UK, 2017). As well as physical disorders, there are growing numbers of older people suffering from dementia. Currently, 850,000 people are estimated to have dementia in the UK. These numbers are predicted to rise by up to 35% by 2025 (Alzheimer's Research UK).

These challenges of retirement, bereavement and ill health apply to all older people at some stage. They are each a catalyst for social isolation and loneliness, conditions that are themselves harmful to physiological and psychological health. For example, the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, stroke and high blood pressure is increased (Hawkley, Thisted, Masi & Cacioppo, 2010; Holwerda et al. 2012; Valterra, Kanaan, Gilbody, Ronzi & Hanratty, 2016) whilst the probability of premature death is raised by up to a quarter, a comparable effect to that of smoking and obesity (Holt-Lunstad & Layton, 2010; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Baker, Harris & Stephenson, 2015); depression is also a risk (Adams, Sanders & Auth, 2004). This is not a new problem. In 1947, loneliness was described as 'the most common, if at the same time the most imponderable, of the ills from which the aged suffer' (Rowntree, 1947).

Although there is no avoiding the challenges that this stage of life brings, the intensity and timing of their impact can vary widely. Each person's experience will be different and may be dependent on their individual resources, both financial and social. They may also be influenced by geographical location.

The area of interest for this report is the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London, UK. Of particular significance to the wellbeing of older people in the borough is the high proportion of those living on their own. At 62%, this is the highest of any borough in London and the numbers are predicted to rise. Within their numbers are a rising number from black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, many of whom have no family nearby, thus making them particularly vulnerable to social isolation (Kensington and Chelsea, 2007). Strategies are therefore needed to alleviate social isolation and improve older peoples' quality of life.

2. The use of music

Music's benefits pertain to people of all ages. However, its efficacy in enhancing and maintaining the wellbeing of older people is well-known (Creech, Hallam, McQueen & Varvarigou, 2013; Hays & Minichiello, 2005; Laukka, 2007). There are several reasons for this. Firstly, it can be enjoyed regardless of cognitive capacity (Cohen, Bailey and Nilsson, 2002) and requires no physical effort; both the fit and the frail can enjoy its benefits. Secondly, when experienced in a group, it can contribute to the maintenance of self-esteem and the avoidance of isolation or loneliness (Hays & Minichiello, 2005). Thirdly, it can be a powerful trigger of emotions (Rickard, 2004) such as joy and elation. In the short term, this can lead to a reduction in negative affect (Miranda & Claes, 2009) and the regulation of mood (Västfjäll, 2002); in the longer term, the cultivation of positive emotions 'transforms people for the better and sets them on paths toward flourishing and healthy longevity' (Fredrickson, 2004).

Music can be experienced in various ways: as a listener or as a participant; alone or in a group; recorded or live. There are benefits to each. For listeners, live performances to a group have been found to elicit more significant benefits (Staricoff, 2004); the performers' facial expressions and body language enhance the listener's affective response (Finnäs, 2001).

For many older people, access to live music is limited. Despite the plethora of concerts in London, financial considerations, transport issues, immobility or a reluctance to go out in the evening make attendance difficult. These same issues also limit opportunities for social contact. To address this in a local setting, a series of concerts and teas, specifically for older people, was established in 2009. Holy Trinity Brompton, a parish church in South Kensington, London, agreed to host the events as part of its outreach to the local community and a committee of dedicated volunteers was formed to oversee them. Their aim was to give older people in the community regular opportunities to access live music and to enjoy social interaction in a warm and welcoming environment.

In 2017, this evaluation was carried out to investigate the effectiveness of the events in reducing loneliness and in regulating mood.

3. Background to the Events

The series comprises six free concerts a year and draws an audience of between 250 and 500. They are advertised via local organisations for older people, other local churches and through word of mouth. The music is provided by professional musicians, the tea is made and served by volunteers; each person involved gives their services free. Like any gathering of older people, the audience is diverse. According to the organisers, ages range from the mid-60s to the late 90s with the occasional centenarian. There is a corresponding range of health status. As well as those able to live independently, there are a number who either live in sheltered housing, attend day care clinics or live in residential care. Some are members of organisations such as Age UK or other local charities that provide activities for older people.

4. Methodology

To investigate the impact of the events and gain an understanding of the audience's experience, members of the audience were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews comprising four simple questions immediately following the music programme at two of the year's events. This approach ensured as large a number of participants as possible and minimised any feelings of intrusion into their enjoyment of the event. In May, the performer was the pianist, Derek Paravicini. Despite being blind and severely autistic, Derek can play any music that he has previously heard. He was accompanied on the stage by his mentor, Professor Adam Ockelford. After performing some classical and jazz pieces, Derek invited the audience to make their own requests. In October, the performer was violinist Michael Bochmann. A well-known figure in British musical life, Michael performs regularly as a soloist, chamber musician and director. The programme included some well-known classical pieces as well as his own arrangement of *Amazing Grace*³. At both events, the performers introduced their programmes and gave the audience opportunities to participate.

4.1 Interviews

Fifteen interviewees (14 females, one male) were recruited. None had any association with the organisation of the concerts. A training session provided instructions relating to the interviewing of older people, the obtaining of consent⁴ and the recording of the interviews. There were two interview schedules: one for those attending independently and one for carers accompanying older people unable to respond themselves.⁵ Immediately after each performance, an announcement informed the audience that they would be invited to answer some questions about the event. The interviewees then approached individual members of the audience. If informed consent was provided, the interviews proceeded, generally lasting between two and three minutes. All the recordings (using a mobile phone app) were emailed to the researchers.

No problems were reported, or complaints received. Eight refused to participate, giving no reason; three refused due to an insufficient command of English. It was apparent from the recordings that for many respondents, English was not their first language. This reflects the demographics of the borough: only 61% of its residents hold a UK passport (the lowest proportion of any local authority in England and Wales) and only 48% were born in the UK.

4.2 Participants

The numbers of attendees, interviewees and participants at each event are shown in Table 1.

Concerts	Number of interviewees	Number of attendees (approximate)	Number of interviews conducted	Gender of those interviewed	
				Females	Males
May	15	290	150 (51.7% of the total)	133 (88.6%)	17 (11.3%)
October	11 (four cancellations)	375	89 (23% of the total)	68 (76.4%)	21 (23.5%)

Table 1: Numbers of attendees, interviewees, participants

³See Appendix 3 for concert programmes

⁴See Appendix 1 for consent protocol

⁵See Appendix 2 for interview schedules

The total numbers attending each concert was an approximate calculation made by the organisers. The percentage of those interviewed at the October concert was lower due to the larger attendance figures and the smaller number of interviewees. It is not known whether the disparity between the number of male and female interviews accurately reflected the gender balance of those attending.

A preliminary question, ‘*Did you come on your own today or did you come with someone?*’ was asked to establish whether the participants were attending in an independent capacity or with a carer, and therefore which interview schedule should be used. This elicited additional information as to whether they had come with a friend or a group (care home, day care centre or local organisation) and whether they were attending for the first time or were regular attendees. Data are shown in Table 2.

<i>Attendance</i>	<i>May</i>		<i>October</i>	
	<i>(n)</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>(n)</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Alone	40	26.6	15	16.8
With another/others	108	72	70	78.6
With a friend	63	42	39	43.8
With family member/carer	8	5.3	7	7.8
With a group	26	17.3	13	14.6
First time	34	22.6	11	12.3
Regular	53	35.3	35	39.3

Table 2: Numbers of participants attending alone or with friends; for the first time or regularly

4.3 Analysis

The researchers conducted the analysis using the qualitative analysis software NVivo 10. The interviews were first transcribed. Familiarity with the data was achieved by listening to the audio recordings and by repeated reading of the transcriptions. After an initial coding of the data, potential themes were then identified and named. This process followed the guidelines set out by Braun and Clark for thematic analysis (2006). Both sets of data (from the two concerts) were analysed concurrently.

5. Results

The overarching theme was an increase in wellbeing which resulted both from the music and from the other aspects of the event. These were treated as two separate themes. These, together with the sub-themes are presented in Table 3.

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Sub-theme</i>	<i>Description</i>
An increase in wellbeing derived from the musical performance	Positive emotions	Happiness, relaxation, inspiration, gratitude, awe, interest, enjoyment.
An increase in wellbeing derived from the other aspects of the event	Positive emotion	Gratitude, enjoyment.
	Social contact	A forum to make new friends and to meet existing friends. The interest of the volunteers.
	The atmosphere	The welcome and friendliness of the volunteers
	The tea	The high standard
	Organisation	The attention to detail

Table 3: The Themes, Sub-Themes and Descriptions

5.1 The increase in wellbeing derived from the music

The first two questions of the interview related to the music. The first question, ‘*Could you tell me what you thought about the music today?*’ was designed to elicit the participants’ cognitive appraisal of the music, whilst the second, ‘*How did the music make you feel?*’ was designed to elicit their affective response. As the number of carers interviewed was small (six in May; three in October), their responses have been incorporated with those of the independent respondents.

Answers to the first question elicited two principal responses: enjoyment and awe. Comments ranged from simple one-word answers or phrases such as, 'I loved it, I really did' or 'mind-boggling' to more expansive reflections. Some made comparisons between the performers and others that they had heard. For example, 'Brilliant. All the pianists I've seen, I've heard and seen, I mean he was better than a few of them'. Others simply expressed their amazement, 'Absolutely no words can describe, no words can describe. It's genius, he's one in a million I imagine. Fantastic'; 'He's a virtuoso, it was wonderful'; 'This was really the crème de la crème'.

Particular elements of each performance drew their attention. Comments were made about Derek's ability to play despite being blind, 'How he can sit there, and, you know, he can't see and whatever you ask him for, he can play', about his memory, 'I think it's really, really remarkable, you know, that he could play all those things. To remember it all, I was really, really surprised' and about his autism, 'For someone that was born premature and then to be autistic, the way he can do that, it's just like a miracle, isn't it? It is a miracle'. The role of Professor Ockelford also drew their attention, 'I can't imagine how his friend could have taught him'. They realised they were fortunate to hear him play, 'You know, you're not going to see or hear someone like that every day of the week'.

There were comments about Michael's stage presence, his ability to communicate and his appearance: 'The guy had a beautiful presence, he really made you feel the music'; 'He's so nimble, so professional, he's so nice, his personality is nice, very warm'; 'I thought he was utterly charming. I'd love to hear him again another time. That's the best recommendation I can give'; 'I really enjoyed it today, the man, he was very handsome'.

These remarks support the findings of several studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of the visual element on the experience and evaluation of music (Platz and Kopiez, 2011). Visual cues, such as facial expressions can convey emotional content and enable the performers to interact with the audience, thus engaging their attention. The comments also suggest that the talent of the performers was the primary catalyst for the feelings of awe experienced on both occasions.

The interaction between performers and audience was different on each occasion. When Derek performed, the audience demonstrated their engagement and enthusiasm by making requests for particular pieces, sometimes shouting out in their effort to be heard. By contrast, Michael enjoyed a rapport with the audience when they were 'completely silent'. As he said, 'When you are really listening, you become silent'. This was endorsed by a carer looking after a group. She said, 'I think they loved it, they were quiet, engrossed, that means they are listening and enjoying it'.

The second question, '*How did the music make you feel?*' elicited three principal responses: the music aroused feelings of happiness, relaxation and inspiration. The number of participants reporting each emotion is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Numbers reporting each emotion

	<i>Happy</i>	<i>Relaxation</i>	<i>Inspiration</i>
May concert	49 (32%)	36 (24%)	37 (24.6%)
October concert	36 (40.4%)	30 (33.7%)	15 (16.9%)

The emotion most commonly experienced at both concerts was happiness. This was expressed in a number of ways. Whilst some gave one-word answers, others conveyed the strength of their emotion. For example, 'How it made me feel, ummm, just joy really, just complete joy to sit and listen to it' and, 'The best thing of all, happy'. One participant, who spoke little English, had no difficulty in communicating her response, 'Happy, happy, I enjoyed, really happy', whilst another talked about the effect the music had on everyone there, 'It really picks everyone up, it makes everyone happy'. This was something observed by one of the carers. She commented, 'Every time I come with a group of residents, even though they may not have felt like coming, afterwards they always feel very, very happy. They always feel it was worth it'.

The second emotion that participants reported was feeling relaxed. For some, this was simply a pleasant experience. For example, the comments included, 'Really relaxed, really nice. It was indescribable, it was really lovely' and 'It made me feel relaxed, happy, calm, all those things'. For others, the music was able to distract them from their worries and concerns. This could be about health, 'Very relaxed, very relaxed. I'm due to have surgery soon on a knee, so I needed something like this', or about general stress, 'What I like about the concerts is that it takes your mind away from every other thing, every stress or everything that you have been wondering about. It takes your mind off, so you, it's relaxing'. As one participant said, '... especially for anyone that's very anxious, anxiety, or with a background of any problem, I think it's very good'.

The third emotion that the participants reported was inspiration. Some used alternative words, such as being ‘uplifted’ or ‘exhilarated’, or of being taken to a different world. For example, ‘I think it just simply transports me from the world’, and, ‘Well, good music, it sort of lifts you up into another level, doesn’t it? It was like I’m in the heavens’. Like those who spoke of the music distracting them from their worries, some referred to the music making them feel better. Comments included, ‘Just different. I need something that changes my mind and lifts me up. And I feel it’; ‘It gave me an uplift in my spirits, it made me feel good and that’s really important, isn’t it?’

As these comments suggest, many of the participants experienced strong emotional responses to the music. Not only were they distracted from negative emotions such as anxiety, stress, sadness and fear, but they felt happy, relaxed and inspired.

Some participants reported feeling nostalgia. Music’s capacity to arouse past memories is well known; it may, for example, evoke memories of an event which itself evokes strong emotions (Sloboda, 2003). As one participant commented, ‘Berkeley Square is where I worked so it evoked lovely memories of Louis Armstrong who I adore, and so it all kind of made me go into memories, recall memories of happy times as well’. For some, the music evoked childhood memories: ‘My grandad played the violin, my uncle played the piano at home, everybody sang, so there was always music in our house and it made me feel so at home having this music once again and it was such a pleasure, such a delight’. For a small number of participants, this experience was another pathway to improved wellbeing.

The questions, ‘*Could you tell me why you came today?*’ and ‘*What is it that you like about the concerts?*’ gave participants an opportunity to give their opinion about all aspects of the event.

There were four points relating to the music that participants particularly appreciated. Firstly, the variety of music offered: ‘Well, it’s the different people that perform. It gives you a different memory to live with and to go away with’; ‘Because of the unexpected you know. I love the variety’; ‘I loved the variety of pieces, touching all emotions’.

Secondly, the familiarity of the music. The programmes usually include some well-known pieces that will be familiar to many. Listening to familiar music is always enjoyable, but, more than that, ‘the most beneficial responses of listening to music are elicited when older adults listen to music that is familiar, pleasant and meaningful to them’ (Sung, Chan & Lee, 2010). The responses suggest that this is so. For example, ‘The music was very interesting, because nearly all of us could be familiar with it’; ‘I enjoyed that very much. I knew most of the pieces as well’. Some mentioned particular pieces that they had enjoyed. For example, ‘I liked the Brahms which we had today. I’m very fond of Brahms, and I also liked the Handel’ and, ‘I particularly liked Swan Lake. Because I used to go and watch Swan Lake, it was my favourite ballet. So, anything to do with Swan Lake is a delight for me’.

Thirdly, the length of the concert. In order to cater for shorter attention spans and physical discomfort, the concerts last no longer than 45 minutes. Their comments endorse this approach: ‘Sometimes you go to a concert and it’s very uncomfortable and it goes on for too long. This is completely different’ and, ‘Normally I find it too long, but I thought it was just the right length’. As one participant said, ‘The reason we like it is because it’s exactly the right length of time. And I’ve been a teacher and I know that people’s attention span is 45 minutes and then they need to change So if I go to a concert, usually, by half time, I’ve had enough. And I come. I like it because it’s absolutely gauged to the right length. And that’s been very cleverly done because ... I’m not saying that people this age, because we are all of the older generation, but it’s exactly pitched perfectly’.

Lastly, the standard of the performers. As well as the comments made about the two events, as previously discussed, regular attendees also referred to the concerts more generally. Comments included, ‘Every single one they do is wonderful’; ‘They’re unique. You get the most wonderful stars’. This was another reason for their regular attendance: ‘They’re all a high standard. That’s why I like to come’ and ‘The fact, having a programme and I know I’m coming to hear some, you know, lovely people, talented people which are playing’.

These different features of the performances, the variety, the choice and length of programme and the high standard of music all make an important contribution to the participants’ overall experience and enjoyment. One participant summed it up succinctly: ‘The variety over the year, very high quality, about the right length, everything really and superb playing today’. The music performance is the principal focus of the afternoon, and the responses to the questions indicated that this was, in most cases, the foremost reason for the participants’ attendance. However, other aspects of the event contributed to their enjoyment. Those most frequently cited were the opportunity for social contact, the quality of the tea, the atmosphere and the good organisation.

5.2 Social Contact

Given the demographics of the area and the age of the audience, it can be assumed that several of the audience live alone. Sixteen percent of respondents in May and 29% in October cited the opportunity for social contact as a reason for attending the concerts. For some of them, life is lonely: 'I have my pension and I have nothing else to do. I'm on my own a lot of the time'. Many of them enjoyed the opportunity to be with other people of a similar age and stage in life: 'It's so nice to be with other people, like yourself. It's nice to get out the house, and to have an alternative entertainment to the television'; 'Instead of sitting at home, you know, just by yourself and watching TV, here you meet friends, you enjoy the tea, the refreshment and there's good music to listen to'. There were some for whom life was particularly hard. One participant admitted, 'I lost my husband four years ago, he had twelve years of Parkinson's disease. It's just nice to not be on my own'.

As well as meeting new people, some regular attendees enjoy an opportunity to meet friends. As one participant commented, 'Well, it gives us an opportunity to meet up with one another. My friend moved further out, so we tend to meet up and this is such a lovely venue to come to'. Another said, 'We've been before with friends, and friends were coming. It's a good meeting place and we hear the music'. Others described the events as 'nice to introduce friends to'. Many participants appreciate the warm, friendly atmosphere. One participant described how she felt 'warmness about me' and another observed, 'Well, it's very friendly. I think the welcome we get at the door, for one thing, is just wonderful'. This was one reason given for regular attendance: 'I always come for the concerts because I can meet people and I like the atmosphere and the ambience. That's what I come back for. And that puts a smile on my face'.

For many of them, the tea is a treat. Great care is taken in its preparation and the standard of presentation is high. This was reflected in comments such as, 'The tea is like the Ritz'; 'It's a very classy tea, isn't it?'; 'You couldn't fault anything, it was excellent service'. Some participants highlighted their favourite foods: 'The eclairs, they're beautiful'; 'And, of course, the meringues'; 'The sandwiches are delicious; I'm not a cucumber fan, but I do like smoked salmon, and the smoked salmon here is just the McCoy'.

These responses illustrate the profound enjoyment that many of the participants experienced. The afternoon was described by one as a 'life enhancer', whilst another talked of her 'feelings of wellbeing, absolute wellbeing. Each time I come, it just brightens my day'. Many were quick to express their gratitude: gratitude for not having to pay, 'And to be able to come here, every two months, free of charge I think it's one of the best things ever'; gratitude for the hard work of the volunteers, 'People go to a lot of trouble, it's a lot of work' and gratitude for the musicians, 'I think all the musicians who come are so generous'.

When the experience of past events is positive, the expectation for future events is raised. For regular attendees, confidence in the quality of the event gives them something to look forward to, in itself a positive experience. One participant commented, 'I love it, I look forward to it you know. It's in my calendar in big letters'. Even before the event, the concert can be a topic of conversation: 'It's a regular date in your diary. We talk about it beforehand, don't we?' This is a further illustration of the social contact that the concerts facilitate. Important as these individual aspects of the event are, many participants drew attention to the 'winning combination' of music, tea and social contact: 'It's the music and being indulgent with the tea, it's seeing people regularly'; 'It's a beautiful atmosphere, they do a great job with the tea, lovely music, absolutely lovely everything'.

Remarkably, none of the participants expressed any negative comments. Whilst it is unrealistic to suppose that none of the attendees had anything but positive comments to make, those who agreed to be interviewed expressed themselves with great enthusiasm, as the following comments illustrate: 'Beautiful, absolutely gorgeous, gorgeous, gorgeous fantastic'; 'It was absolutely incredible. Incredible, amazing, yeah. I completely got transported'; 'I thought it was fantastic, absolutely brilliant. Brilliant, brilliant, lovely'. Although the positive nature of the comments reflects the appreciation of the audience, it should also be noted that those interviewed may have hoped that their responses would help towards the continued provision of the events.

6. Discussion

As discussed in the introduction, old age, for many people, can be a time of loss, grief, loneliness, fear and anxiety. These conditions, and the negative emotions that they arouse, can have a deleterious effect on physical and mental health.

Music, with its ability to alter the emotional state of the listener (Chan, Wong &Thayala, 2011) through the arousal of positive emotions, can assist in the prevention and treatment of the negative emotions that trigger these conditions and, at the same time, serve to enhance psychological and social wellbeing (Emmons and Mishra, 2010). As the performer, Michael, commented, ‘... Music is a communication at a deeper level. It brings things out in people, which words can’t do’.

The responses to the first two questions in this study suggest that several positive emotions were evoked through the music: happiness,relaxation, inspiration, enjoyment, awe, gratitude and nostalgia.All the respondents felt one or more of these in some measure. Similar findings were shown in a survey carried out by Laukka (2007). Participants were asked, ‘How common is it that you feel each of the following emotions in response to music?’. From a list of 45 emotions (both positive and negative), the most common responses were happiness, enjoyment, nostalgia, relaxation, calmness and feeling moved.This supports the notion that music is a powerful trigger of emotions(Rickard, 2004) and suggests that happiness and relaxation are amongst the most common of emotional responses to music.

These results therefore support previous findings; some of the emotions aroused might reasonably have been expected. At least for the duration of the concert, listening to the music inspired participants, helped them to relax and made them feel happy. At the same time, negative affect was reduced.

Other emotional responses, however, cannot be presumed. For example, the arousal of awe was dependent on the ability of the two performers; music played by someone of less talent and experience would not have elicited the same response. The same is true of gratitude. Defined as a sense of wonder, thankfulness and appreciation (Emmons & Shelton, 2002), it is only aroused if the person feels that they have been given something of significant value; it is an emotional response to a gift (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000).

Both live and recorded music can trigger an emotional response. However, the participants’ comments support previous findings demonstrating that when music is performed live, attention is enhanced (Skoda, Adachi & Umeda, 2016) and the response is heightened (Vuoskoski, 2016). In addition, the performers’ spoken words, body language and facial expressions enhanced the interaction between the performers and members of the audience and served to intensify the emotions that they experienced.

Many of those who attend regularly ‘go away and live with’ the memories of the previous concert. Past experiences build up anticipation for the next event. Previous research has shown that both the anticipation prior to an event and the recalling of positive memories afterwards can increase the arousal of positive emotions (Quoidbach, Mikolajczak& Gross, 2015) and act as a regular of sad moods (Joorman, Siemer&Gotlib, 2007). This not only prolongs the effects of the individual events, but also acts as an incentive to return on future occasions, thereby accumulating the potential benefits.

The social psychologist, Barbara Fredrickson (2002) states, ‘A social activity can be construed as feeling connected to others and cared about’. The responses of the participants show that this was part of their experience at the events; being cared about, either by friends or attentive volunteers, was a vital part of the event’s appeal. Fredrickson goes on to say that this sort of experience is ‘likely to produce experiences of love, contentment, interest, or other positive emotions’. These too were seen in the participants’ responses and illustrate the powerful impact that simple socialising can have. Some researchers have suggested further benefits. For example, Meltzer (2013) writes of friendship networks acting as a ‘behavioural vaccine’, an inoculation against illness. This is beyond the scope of this study to determine. However, it suggests that the effects of these events may be more far-reaching than those presented here. The evaluation was carried out in such a way as to minimise any unwanted intrusion into the participants’ lives. It was therefore not possible to obtain data such as the age, ethnic origin and education of the participants. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to interview the volunteers. Their insight would have made a valuable contribution to the findings.

Although there are countless opportunities for listening to live music in London, many older people struggle to access them. By catering for their specific needs, these occasions allow older people to experience live music and social contact, both so beneficial to their momentary and ongoing wellbeing. These findings suggest that similar events, whether on a large or small scale, would make a considerable difference to the lives of older people. Future evaluations of this or other similar events, could determine their longitudinal effects.

Ethical approval

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration and approved under the reference EDU 17/129 and approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 03.05.2017.

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Appendix 1

The protocol used for obtaining consent to take part in the interviews.

For those attending independently, interviewers asked the following questions:

Would you mind if I ask you a few questions about the concert today?

Would you mind if I record your answers?

For those accompanied by a carer (either alone or in a group) or family member, interviewers first approached the carers to ask whether the individual was able to provide informed consent. If not, the carer or family member was asked to provide consent on their behalf.

I would like to ask your companion a few questions about the concert today. Is he/she able to agree to this?

If not:

Would you provide consent on his/her behalf? I would like to record the answers.

Appendix 2

The interview schedule for those attending the concerts:

Are you here on your own or did you come with someone?

For those who arrived independently (without a carer), the following questions were asked:

Could you tell me what you thought about the music today?

How did it make you feel?

Could you tell me why you came today?

If you have been before, what is it that you like about the concerts?

For those attending in a caring role, either in a professional capacity or as a family member, the following questions were asked:

Could you tell me what you thought about the music today?

How did it make you feel?

How do you think that the person that you are looking after responded?

How do you know – did they tell you or did they react physically in some way, such as smiling, singing, tapping their hands or feet?

Appendix 3

Music Programmes

25 May 2017

Derek Parvavicini (piano) with Adam Ockelford

Arabesque no. 1, Andantino con moto – Debussy

Clair de Lune – Debussy

Le Petit Nègre – Debussy

Black and White Rag – Scott Joplin

L-O-V-E - Nat King Cole.

Call me irresponsible – Jimmy Van Heusen

A nightingale sang in Berkeley Square – Eric Maschwitz and Manning Sherwin

Tiger Rag – Art Tatum

Requests:

Rhapsody in Blue – Gershwin

All the things you are – Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern

Carousel Waltz – Richard Rodgers

Waltz in D flat major, Op. 64, 'Minute' Waltz – Chopin

Swan Lake - Tchaikovsky

You'll never walk alone – from Carousel by Rodgers and Hammerstein

Piano concerto no. 2 – Rachmaninoff

Final piece:

Flight of the Bumble Bee – Rimsky-Korsakov

5 October 2017

Michael Bochmann (violin) and accompanist (piano).

Sonata in D, Opus 1, 13. Fourth movement. Allegro con brio – Handel

Duo, Opus 162. First movement. Allegro moderato – Schubert

Hungarian Dance no. 1 in G minor. Allegro Molto - Brahms

Amazing Grace, arranged Bochmann for solo violin

Passing Fancy, Solitaire Melody for solo piano – Howard Skempton

Hebrew Melody, Opus 33 – Achron

Waltz, Rather Fast and Nervous – Benjamin Britten

Caprice no. 13 in B flat major, The Devil's Laugh - Paganini

Dance of the Goblins, Scherzo Fantastique, Opus 25 - Bazzini