

## Uniting Voices

*Report by Janice Purdie, recipient of the ASME Music Educating for Life Award in South Australia*

It was a privilege to attend the biennial ASME National Conference, held this year at RMIT University in Melbourne. The conference offered a plethora of opportunities to further professional knowledge, share ideas, learn about current research, and to network with educators from around the country and the world. The program included a number of keynote lectures, a range of paper presentations and hands-on workshops, several panel discussions, and a performance by Faye Dumont's Women's Choir.

Deborah Cheetham, Yorta Yorta woman, soprano, composer and educator, was the opening keynote speaker and began the conference with a lecture entitled, "A Song is not just a Song." She cast a vision for every educator to understand the true value of the longest continuing culture in the world – a culture where a song is a map to your identity. She challenged us to think about how many Australians live with a great deficit of knowledge about our history, and how as educators we have a responsibility do something about this shortfall amongst the next generation. Deborah highlighted the fact that many music educators avoid teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music because of their own lack of familiarity, but challenged us to consider the idea that the educational process should always mean that we as educators stand to learn as much as those whom we teach.

The second keynote address was given by Professor Martin Fautley, the director of social work at Birmingham City University. He gave a highly engaging presentation about curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in music education, highlighting both challenges and possibilities. One of the memorable sayings he employed was, "We set out to measure what we value, but end up valuing what we measure." He challenged every educator to consider the links between assessment and curriculum, asking many probing questions, such as, "Do we plan curriculum and then assess? Or do we work out what the assessment is and then plan curriculum?"

Other highlights for me included a helpful panel discussion chaired by Brad Merrick on facilitating shared practice, resulting in range of fruitful small group discussions about possible opportunities for meaningful collaboration and advocacy. Another panel discussion addressed the area of music and well-being, highlighting some of the current research findings in regards to performance anxiety and citing some of the current strategies and approaches that are being successfully employed to achieve both early intervention and prevention.

Dr Anita Collins presented an update on her research in music education and the brain, fueling listeners with incredible advocacy data supporting why every child should be musically educated. Danielle Burns gave a presentation on ways her school is working to foster a growth mindset amongst their students. Practical workshops such as those on game composing and looping by Katie Wardrobe equipped teachers with helpful skills using current technology to teach core musical concepts and skills.

The conference concluded with David Forrest, Professor of Music Education at RMIT University, giving the Jacinth Oliver Memorial Address. He creatively used the 24 Preludes of Dimitri Kabalevsky to share thoughts, reflections, and considerations in regards to the current state of music education in Australia.

The National Conference was an amazing way to refresh my passion for music education, reflect on and refine my own teaching practice, and connect with other music educators. I would strongly encourage any teacher who has the opportunity to attend.

Janice Purdie  
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