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# The Art of Listening: Listening Skill Development, Classical Music Appreciation, and Personal Response through Visual Art in a Middle School Program

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## Abstract

Although many programs aim to develop students' listening skills and promote the appreciation of Western classical music, relatively few such programs incorporate visual art. This study examined the perceived effectiveness of the Edinburgh International Festival's (EIF) *Art of Listening* program in reaching its stated goals to: develop skills for listening, encourage the enjoyment of listening to Western classical music, break down preconceptions held about Western classical music, cultivate a deeper relationship with the imagination through music and art, and encourage students' personal responses to music. Focusing primarily on the first three goals, this study gathered data from 78 students from six upper primary classes (generally students ages 11 or 12) from four schools located in the Edinburgh, Scotland metropolitan area. Findings from student and teacher surveys before and after the program as well as program observations indicate that participants perceive that the *Art of Listening* program achieves the specific objectives examined, at least in the short-term. Both students and teachers responded positively to the program's unique combination of listening skill development, classical music appreciation, and responses to music through visual art. The article discusses considerations for implementing similar programs in other contexts and makes suggestions for future research.

## Introduction

Considering students' interests and needs related to music education is important for high interest, engagement, and a thorough music education (Kaschub & Smith, 2014) as well as to create personal connections between students and subject matter. One program that tackles this issue by providing supplemental music education as a field trip opportunity is the Edinburgh

International Festival's (EIF) *Art of Listening* program. Even though the focus of the EIF's work is their annual festival of the same name, the Scottish organization also offers year-round classical music programming for a variety of audiences, including school groups. The program moves beyond simply offering music appreciation or music history by facilitating interactive student explorations of what it means to listen, live professional musical performances, and personal responses to music through visual art creation, in addition to covering the history, elements, and popular contemporary uses of Western classical music.

There is an abundance of research on how to develop students' listening skills (see Arcavi & Isoda, 2007; Jalongo, 1996; Norkunas, 2011; Sims, 2005; Smialek & Boburka, 2006; Thompson, Leintz, Nevers, & Witkowski, 2004; and Wilson, 2003). Thompson et al. (2004) offered a four-stage model for effective listening that included preparation, listening process model application, evaluation, and future goal setting. More recently, Kerchner (2014) discussed best practices and expanding listening skills to strengthen theoretical understandings and concrete ways of applying musical listening, which eventually lead to musical enjoyment. The purpose of listening skill development can range from understanding the historical context of music and discovering new genres or traditions of music to learning specific elements of music (Kaschub & Smith, 2014). Besides being a key element of music education, listening is also important for students in general social interactions—in the classroom and beyond. However, we have found no studies of programs that combine the development of student listening skills with imaginative personal responses to listening through visual art.

Studies exploring visual art's impact on cultivating imagination and providing opportunities of expression are plentiful (see Alerby, 2000; Özsoy, 2012; and Villarroel & Infante, 2014). Often, students' responses through art are analyzed to understand their cognitive

abilities (Lambert, 2005), communication skills (Watts & Garza, 2008), knowledge of serious subjects such as death (Marsal & Dobashi, 2011) or the environment (Alerby, 2000), cultural values (Andersson, 1995), or general intellectual acuity (Brooks, 2009). However, almost no research has been done on programs that use visual art to capture responses to music. Kerchner (2014) discussed the use of listening maps, in which students translate what they hear into personal, non-standard musical notation and also create visual images illustrating personal connections to music, but examples are otherwise lacking.

Although much has been written on how to promote interest in Western classical music (see DePascale, 2003; Green & Hale, 2011; Kolb, 2000; Levin, Pargas, & Austin, 2005; Shuler, 2011; and Woody & Burns, 2001), less is known about how to break down preconceptions about the genre. Kolb (2000) lamented the dearth of research on the attitudes and preferences of university students about music. She explored university students' preconceptions about classical music and found beliefs that classical music concerts were expensive and that concertgoers were well-to-do economically, older, and possessed some requisite "special knowledge" (p. 17) about classical music. Although responses after attending a classical concert were mixed—depending on the particular concert students had taken part in—the students generally enjoyed the classical music (Kolb, 2000). Building on Kolb's study, Dobson (2010) collected data from nine culture consumers who did not attend classical music events and found that their experiences were affected by their lack of knowledge and preconceptions about classical music. For instance, some thought that "classical performances are, by their very nature, perfect" (p. 116) and so did not know how to judge the performances, while others so revered the music that they felt a "moral obligation" (p. 118) to like it.

Given the relative dearth of literature on how to break down conceptions about classical music, particularly in students, and on how the visual arts can be used as a vehicle for students to express their responses to music, thereby improving their listening skills, the intent of the current study was to begin addressing those gaps by examining the Edinburgh International Festival's *Art of Listening* program and its combination of these different elements into a single two-hour session. The stated goals of the *Art of Listening* program are actually many:

- Nourish the individual by cultivating a deeper relationship with the imagination through the use of music and art.
- Cultivate a meaningful relationship with performance.
- Explore an experiential and participative approach to listening.
- Introduce Western classical music by developing creative skills for listening.
- Encourage the enjoyment of listening to Western classical music.
- Explore and encourage the listener's personal response to music.
- Break down the preconceptions sometimes held about Western classical music.
- Increase accessibility to EIF's musical repertoire across age ranges.
- Explore the dynamic between the musician and the individual / audience (Edinburgh International Festival, 2007).

Exploring all of these goals was beyond the scope of this project; this exploratory study focuses on examining whether there is evidence that the program promotes the development of creative skills for listening, encourages the enjoyment of listening to Western classical music, and breaks down preconceptions sometimes held about Western classical music. This research sought to improve our understanding of whether and how a multi-dimensional program may facilitate these beneficial outcomes, with the hope that the *Art of Listening* program may be useful as a model

for future program development, both in other out-of-school music education contexts as well as potentially in school music curricula.

## Program

### Site

The *Art of Listening* program is presented on-site at the EIF's headquarters at The Hub, an architectural landmark in the city of Edinburgh—a neo-Gothic building completed in 1845 to house the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Church's governing body (Edinburgh International Festival, 2014). The building was renovated in 1999 to become the EIF headquarters, and modern additions include a colorful entryway and a red stairwell fitted with hundreds of sculpted figures. The Hub sits on the Royal Mile near Edinburgh Castle, with a tall spire visible from many locations (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* The Hub, the Edinburgh International Festival's headquarters

The program takes place in the main hall, which is two stories tall with a vaulted ceiling, stained glass windows, elaborate wooden carvings, and large chandeliers. Before students arrive, the staff set up the room with chairs arranged in rows facing a piano and monitor as well as an open space with mats, pillows, and a clipboard with drawing materials (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Main hall in The Hub, set up for the *Art of Listening* program

## Staff

There are three primary and two secondary staff members associated with the *Art of Listening* program. The primary facilitators are the EIF's Head of Programme Development, a professional pianist, and a professional vocalist. The Head of Programme Development oversees the program, offering an introduction and facilitating focused listening response activities at the end of the program. The two professional musicians jointly facilitate the middle parts of the program. In addition, the EIF's Creative Learning Officer and a teaching artist who assists with various EIF programs both support the program as well. The Creative Learning Officer assists

with booking and fielding correspondence with interested schools, and both assist with setup and breakdown of program materials.

### Program Structure

The program is offered approximately 16 days per year for schools in the Edinburgh metropolitan area. Year 7 students come as an entire class, and up to about 40 students can participate at each session. (Year 7 is the last year of primary school and approximately corresponds with fifth grade in the United States.) Numbers are maximized within sessions to try to include as many classes as possible, although there is so much interest in the program currently that 30 – 40% of interested classes cannot be accommodated. Those who have not participated in the program in the past year are given priority for registering. Free buses are provided by EIF between schools and the program site.

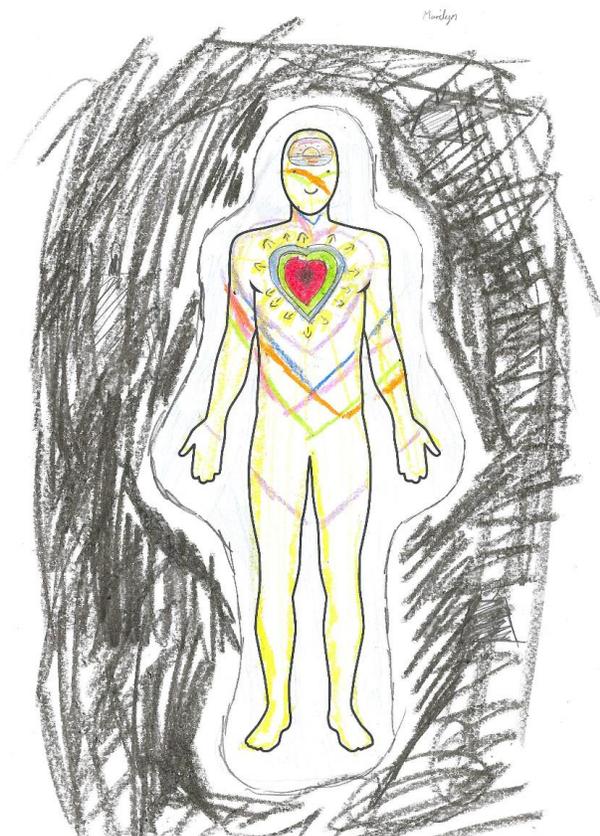
The program lasts for two hours and is offered up to twice per day, in the morning and afternoon. As students enter, they are given name tags, which facilitators use to call on students by name during the program. The program begins with a 20-minute introduction to the EIF and discussion of listening. The Head of Programme Development (Programme Head) starts by asking the students if they know what the EIF does, and she shows a brief video to orient the audience to the work of the organization and introduce the facilitators. She then asks the students to talk about what kind of music they listen to and like; if no students bring up classical music, she asks what they think of it. The Programme Head states that the session is “about classical music and about listening.” Students are asked if they think they are good listeners, if they ever struggle with listening, and what happens when they do not listen. The Programme Head discusses different brain waves and their relationship to energy levels, mentioning that the

students have internal resources to keep themselves attentive, if they want to be. This introduction grounds the program within the organization and also gets the students immediately thinking about the topic of listening and its personal connections to their lives.

After the introduction, the pianist and vocalist perform a duet, which is used to discuss norms around listening such as the common practice of clapping at the end of a performance as well as student expectations of understanding what they hear. Following the duet, the pianist asks if any students play the piano and what they know about the piano and its history, which is usually little. He discusses the history and capabilities of the piano, illustrating different techniques and styles of music including popular contemporary music with which the students are familiar. The musicians also discuss sound waves, explaining what produces sound on the piano, how that sound production is different on other instruments, and how listening physically occurs. This part of the program lasts approximately half an hour and is sometimes followed by a 5- to 10-minute break; some classes bring snacks for the break.

The next part of the program centers on a focused listening activity. Lights are lowered; students and any interested teachers lay on their backs on mats with pillows on the floor. The Programme Head asks that students not sit on a mat next to their friends, to prevent distraction, and that they close their eyes. A facilitator leads a breathing exercise, asking the participants to pay attention to their breathing in different parts of their body, relax their muscles, and clear their minds. There is sometimes a bit of fidgeting, whispering, or giggling at the beginning of the focused relaxation, but students are always silent and motionless by the end. The group then listens to a classical piece on the piano for a few minutes after which they are invited to sit up and open their eyes, and the room lights are raised. The students (and again, any interested teachers) are prompted to draw their response to the music using colored crayons and an A3-size

sheet of copy paper prepared with the outline of a person, on a clipboard (see Figure 3 for a finished example). Students tend to work quietly and individually on their mats, and all program facilitators walk around to check in with students on their progress, asking what they saw or felt while listening and, where needed, prompting students to reflect on how they might visually represent those feelings or ideas. The listening and drawing activities take approximately 45 minutes and are followed by optional sharing of drawings. Students are invited to show their drawing to their classmates and explain what they drew. Generally, two or three students opt to share their work. The program concludes with one or more duets in languages other than English, during which the musicians ask students what they think is going on in the song and what musical elements give them clues about the underlying story, despite not being able to understand the words. At the end of the program, the students take their work with them.



*Figure 3.* Finished student drawing illustrating his/her personal response to classical music

## Methodology

### Participants

Six classes, representing four schools from the Edinburgh metropolitan area, participated in five programs at the EIF's headquarters at The Hub as part of this study. The schools had already decided to participate in the program, separate from the study, and were selected because they were representative of the diversity of schools in the area. Six teachers plus one teaching aide provided feedback on the program, and half of the teachers had participated in the program before. In addition, 78 students in year 7 (generally ages 11 or 12) participated in the research. A few additional students participated in the programs studied, but only those who provided signed consent forms from a guardian and signed an assent form themselves were included in the study. In addition to the students and teachers, five EIF staff members also participated in the research.

### Data Collection

Quantitative and qualitative data about the program were collected through surveys, observation, and interviews. Staff members and students' guardians signed consent forms, and students signed assent forms before engaging in the study, which was approved by the [university institutional review board name removed for blind review]. Pre-program and post-program surveys were administered to both students and teachers. Pre-program surveys were completed approximately one week before program attendance, and post-program surveys were completed immediately after the program while participants were still on site. In addition to the

survey immediately following the program, teachers also completed a follow-up survey a few days after participation. Student surveys before and after the program required students to rate their listening skills (on a five-point scale from Poor to Excellent) and their enjoyment of classical music (on a seven-point scale from Completely Unenjoyable to Completely Enjoyable); student surveys also contained open-ended questions about listening skills as well as enjoyment and ideas about classical music. Teacher surveys asked about anticipated and observed student impacts as well as strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Each of the five program sessions was audio-recorded, and the first author took field notes during and after observations of each session. In addition to the surveys and observations, all EIF staff members involved were interviewed at the program site by the first author to explore their ideas about the program. The Head of Programme Development and the Creative Learning Officer were interviewed both before and after program observations, and the two musicians and assisting teaching artist were interviewed after the programs. Interviews were audio-recorded and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. The interview protocol was semi-structured, gathering information about the program, such as its structure, goals, and challenges, as well as staff perceptions of the outcomes under consideration and reflections on the observed sessions. The researcher also audio-recorded and took field notes during the team meetings that EIF staff members held to check-in and reflect at the end of each day. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim.

## Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis involved repeated measures t-tests to examine potential differences between student pre- and post-program self-reported ratings of listening skills and enjoyment of

classical music. Comparing pre- and post-program student responses, McNemar tests (Adedokun & Burgess, 2012) were used to examine potential differences in mentions of certain concepts, and repeated measures t-tests were used to examine possible differences in ratings of listening skills and classical music enjoyment. Effect sizes, Cohen's *d*, were computed using the original standard deviations to prevent overestimation of effect size (Dunlap, Cortina, Vaslow, & Burke, 1996). Descriptive statistics were employed to further explore various student and teacher responses. An alpha-level of 0.05 (two-tailed) was used to determine statistical significance, and quantitative data were analyzed in Stata 13. The qualitative data were examined with thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), using an inductive approach to uncover emergent themes in the data (Thomas, 2006). A mixed method approach was used; the qualitative and quantitative findings were analyzed across method, with each used to support and extend the other.

## Results

The investigation focused primarily on three of the program's stated goals: developing creative skills for listening, encouraging the enjoyment of listening to Western classical music, and breaking down preconceptions sometimes held about Western classical music. Results were also found related to how the program cultivates a deeper relationship with the imagination through the use of music and art and how it encourages listeners' personal responses to music.

### Encouraging the Enjoyment of Listening to Western Classical Music

There was a statistically significant increase in the students' ratings of their enjoyment of classical music after the program, compared with their pre-program enjoyment ( $t(54) = 4.18, p =$

.0001). The effect size was found to be .38, which indicates a small to medium effect (Cohen, 1988). Although the study design was not a randomized, controlled experiment and thus does not allow for causal inference, this finding indicates that the *Art of Listening* program may contribute to students' enjoyment of classical music, at least in the short term. This quantitative difference was supported by qualitative student response data. When asked what, if anything, changed about their ideas of classical music after the program, 73% of students reported enhanced enjoyment or appreciation. Comments on this included many direct statements such as "I used to find it boring but now I enjoy it," "I didn't like classical music but now I do," and "I thought it was boring but now its [sic] exciting." Students also mentioned that they found classical music more enjoyable because they knew what to listen for and had a better sense of the variety within the genre. For example, students wrote the following about classical music: "I find it easier to understand and so I find it more enjoyable," the program "broadened my ideas of what it is," and "I know now there is an enjoyable wide variety within classical music." This is corroborated by student responses to questions asking them about their associations with classical music, discussed below.

#### Breaking Down Preconceptions Held about Western Classical Music

To explore possible shifts in pre-conceived notions about classical music, students were asked before and after the program what classical music made them think of. There was a general shift in attitude from students' initial thinking that classical music was old-fashioned or boring to classical music being relaxing or interesting.

When responding to a question about what classical music makes them think of before the program, nearly a third (31%) of the students felt classical music was old-fashioned or had connotations with older people (e.g. "my Grandad," "my grandma," and "people dancing in

gowns on the Titanic”) or objects (e.g. “ancient vases” and “old people and antiques”).

However, their concept of “old” was generally fairly recent; one student said classical music made him think of “1950s old,” another “1970,” and multiple students referenced the 1980s; the earliest time period referenced was from the comment about the Titanic. Although no students mentioned time periods or events before 1900, they clearly felt that classical music was old-fashioned before participating in the program. As one student noted, classical music is “slightly dated as most famous composers are dead.” This idea persisted after the program, but only about half as many students as before (17% vs. 31%) mentioned an old-fashioned connotation after participation, although this was not a statistically significant difference (*McNemar*  $\chi^2(1) = 2.33, p = .13$ ). Some students specifically mentioned that they no longer felt it had an old connotation after the program; students noted, “Classical music inst [sic] just old old songs, it's also new songs,” “I used to think it was for old people but now I don’t,” and “I used to think classical music was really old and weird but its [sic] different and really fun to listen to.”

In addition to possibly having a pre-conception that classical music is old-fashioned, about 20% of the students thought of it as being boring before participating in the program. In contrast, only 7% of students felt it was boring after participating in the program, although this was not a statistically significant difference (*McNemar*  $\chi^2(1) = 2.57, p = .11$ ). A few students directly commented on this when asked what changed about their idea of classical music; one noted, “I thought it was boring but its [sic] not,” and another said, “Before I thought it was boring but now its [sic] like each song has a story.”

Some students (22%) did have positive associations with classical music before participating in the program, however. These were almost exclusively mentions that classical music was “relaxing” or “soothing,” and these were sometimes part of mixed feelings about

classical music. For example, one student noted, “I am not that keen on classical music. But I sometimes find it soothing.” After the program, significantly more students discussed positive associations with classical music ( $McNemar \chi^2(1) = 7.20, p = .007$ ). A number of students indicated it was “relaxing” or “peaceful,” as noted in pre-program responses, but there were a wider range of positive responses after participation including ideas that classical music is “meaningful,” “fun,” “powerful,” “exciting,” and even “cool” that were not present initially. Some students also spoke generally about an emotional connection; one student mentioned, “It was actually really cool how it can make you feel things.”

In addition, students tended to discuss specific instruments or composers much more when writing about classical music after experiencing the program. A few students (11%) mentioned specific instruments and none mentioned composers before participating, but three times as many (33%) mentioned specific instruments or composers (such as Beethoven, Mozart, and Bach) when writing about their associations with classical music after the program, and this difference was statistically significant ( $McNemar \chi^2(1) = 12.57, p = .0004$ ). Most of the students who mentioned an instrument after participation wrote about the piano, which is likely directly tied to the extensive discussion of the piano in the workshop.

Overall, most students’ responses (75%) indicated a positive change in their conception of classical music, and even more (82%) indicated a change in their thinking about classical music, whether related to enjoyment, conceptions, or both. An additional 10% of students showed no improvement in their enjoyment of or ideas about classical music but indicated that they already had a high regard for classical music before participating in the program.

## Developing Creative Skills for Listening

Students were also asked before and after the program to rate their listening skills. Approximately three-quarters (74%) of the students rated their listening skills higher after the program. Although there was no statistically significant difference in ratings before and after the program overall ( $t(54) = 1.86, p = .068$ ), there was a significant increase in self-reported listening skills in five of the six classes ( $t(33) = 4.18, p = .0002$ ). The students in the one class removed from this analysis had extremely low abilities to focus and pay attention, and their program differed greatly from the other five classes based on observations. The effect size of listening skill improvement in the remaining five classes was .30, which indicates a small to medium effect (Cohen, 1988).

The teacher of the outlier class did note that the students were typically very poorly behaved in the classroom. No other information was available on the specific background of the class or its teacher, although how, if at all, the teacher prepared the class for the visit would be useful to know. That the outlier class did not show the significant increase in perceived listening skills demonstrated by the other participants may indicate that the program is effective at enhancing listening skills in students already predisposed to pay attention in class, but further research would be warranted to explore this idea. It is also possible that the program was a useful preliminary step in helping the students think about the importance of listening, without offering a direct change in their perceptions of their listening skills. The teacher noted that the class was unusually well behaved in the second part of the program, and the students were observed quietly focused on the drawing activity. This indicates the program was able to successfully focus students' attention, at least during that part of the workshop.

The quantitative differences found regarding listening skills are also supported by qualitative student responses. Students responded that they:

- gained an appreciation for the importance of listening (e.g. “It is important to listen,” My listening skills “improved because I realized there were more good things to listen to,” and “I learnt that if I listen I might learn something interesting”),
- increased the duration of their focus and listening (e.g. “I got more focus,” I am “able to be quiet for longer,” “It has made me concentrate [sic] more,” and “I can listen longer”),
- realized what elements are important for them to be able to listen well (e.g. “I improved [my listening] because I was engaged,” “Now I pay attention to the lyrics,” and “[I can listen better] by concontraiting [sic] on one thing”), and
- gained an enhanced awareness while listening (e.g. “It made me more aware of sounds” and “Now I realise that music can kind of be like a story if you listen well enough”).

The quantitative and qualitative findings taken together indicate that students felt their listening skills were improved in a variety of ways through their participation in the program.

### Other Goals

In addition to the three focus outcomes discussed above, the project also provided some data on how the program cultivates a deeper relationship with the imagination through the use of music and art, and how the program explores and encourages the listener’s personal response to music. Students were not directly asked about these elements because they were not primary goals of the study, and thus we collected no related quantitative data. However, some students discussed their imagination and personal responses to music without prompting in their post-program survey responses to questions on other topics. For example, when asked what classical

music made them think of after the program, students answered, “rainbows,” “all galaxy is in me. I feel like flying in the water,” “world, stars, meadows [sic],” and “I think of ideas for my books.” Some students identified the drawing response activity as their favorite part of the program; favorites were mentioned as being, “drawing my response to the music because it was so tranquil,” “drawing the pictures because it gave us a chance to do our own thing,” and “lying down and listening to the music, [it] made me have a lot of thoughts.” When asked if there was anything they wanted to share, one student said, “I liked drawing what I felt.”

Observations of the program provided data that support the idea that the program cultivates a deeper relationship with the imagination through the use of music and art and that it encourages the listeners’ personal responses to music. The program’s inclusion of a drawing activity based on student’s responses to the piano music explicitly requires students to engage with their personal response to the music and draw from their personal imagination. All students in the study participated in this activity and thus demonstrated these attributes during the program itself. Beyond simply participating, the students seemed quite engaged in the activity: nearly every student in all classes was silent as they worked, their heads were bent down looking at their paper, and their hands were busy drawing. A teacher observing her class while drawing noted how nice this was for them, said, “They’re never at peace or at rest [like this].”

Many students drew complex and often abstract images of their response to the music. When facilitators came around as students were drawing to discuss an individual student’s work, students generally explained their drawings as being illustrations of their emotions during or as a result of listening to the music. One student described his drawing, “There’s a person, and the music is coming into the person’s head, and then the music is turning into happy stuff, happy and good stuff.” Others said they drew the music as being “a door to the world” and “the good side

of my life and the bad side of my life.” Some students drew themselves with family members; one student noted that she included her grandfather, and another drew an image from when “I was on holiday with my mum.” A few students across the classes drew themselves in their favorite football team’s uniform and did not give a clear rationale for doing so in the context of the listening experience, but otherwise the depictions seemed to be intimately aligned with each student’s individual response to the music, drawing on their feelings and personal connections. The students overall clearly demonstrated a relationship with their imagination through music and art as well as their personal response to music through this activity. The study did not, however, examine whether students felt they had generally enhanced skills or awareness of these areas that might extend beyond the workshop.

#### Teacher Feedback

Teacher surveys after the program revealed that every teacher felt that the goals of the program under consideration—cultivation of students’ imaginations, encouragement of students’ personal responses, improved listening skills, increased enjoyment of classical music, and the breakdown of pre-conceived ideas about classical music—were all actual outcomes of the program, based on observation of their students during the program. Of the goals, all teachers felt that cultivating students’ imaginations and encouraging students’ personal responses to music were important outcomes. Improving listening skills, increasing enjoyment of classical music, and breaking down preconceptions of classical music were seen as important outcomes for all but one teacher each.

It is unsurprising that most teachers felt all of the program’s goals were important, since teachers self-select to participate in the program. More important is the finding that all

participating teachers, both returning and new, felt that all of the program's goals were achieved in the one session. Previous survey data from EIF as well as increasing teacher interest in the program support this finding; the *Art of Listening* is regularly 30 – 40% over-subscribed, and teachers appear to be very satisfied with the program based on their feedback. One teacher noted, “all staff attending thought it was an exceptionally good workshop—well organised, superb leaders, well-structured and clear aims. The way the morning developed was brilliant and we all thought that it gave the children a way in not only to listening to classical music but that the skill could apply to anything.” Other participating teachers echoed this sentiment based on their observations of their students.

## Conclusion

In summary, the *Art of Listening* program appears to be effective at its stated goals of developing listening skills, encouraging the enjoyment of listening to Western classical music, and breaking down preconceptions sometimes held about Western classical music. There is also evidence that the program cultivates a deeper relationship with the imagination through the use of music and art and that it encourages listeners' personal responses to music, at least during the program itself. Overall, both students and teachers felt positively about the program generally and in relation to the outcomes discussed.

## Discussion

### Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This study's limitations should be taken into account when considering the results. The program is only implemented in one city with a particular grade level, so the results are not generalizable to all students or even necessarily to all students of equivalent grade level in all

locations. Future studies might consider expanding the field of subjects to include students from different grade levels and different socio-economic, geographical, and musical backgrounds, if the program is expanded or offered elsewhere. Relatedly, the program is offered by a music education non-profit and with facilitators who are different from the students' teachers, so the findings may differ if the program is offered in a regular music classroom.

Furthermore, because an experimental design was not possible, the relationships found are not necessarily causal, although qualitative data show that at least some participants explicitly identified the program as having shifted their perceptions or enjoyment of classical music and improved their listening skills. Therefore, in the future it would be useful to include an experimental design, if possible, to gain more clarity and certainty about results. Relatedly, this study was only able to examine participant perceptions of the outcomes of interest, such as listening skills and music enjoyment, and participant definitions of these concepts may have varied. A full program evaluation with a priori operational definitions of these concepts would be useful to ensure standardization and confirm the results.

Moreover, the post-program surveys only examined outcomes at one time point, so the findings cannot provide information about long-term impact beyond the workshop; longitudinal research would be needed to determine if changes in attitudes or skills persist. Although the results of this single-visit program are quite promising, it is possible that the workshop's substantial goals could be even more effectively achieved through more sustained contact. Although expanding the program may not be practical for music education non-profits, teachers could offer follow-up lessons that continue exploring the less traditional aspects of general listening and of incorporating other art forms within the music classroom. In addition, teachers

could consider incorporating these elements and the program's approaches into their regular curriculum, if no external opportunity was available.

There has been and continues to be discussion of the controversies for selecting music repertoires for music appreciation and listening programming. Although some consider classical music as foundational (Thompson, 2002) and necessary in understanding the current musical landscape (Hess, 2015), others say that a non-classical music listening program promotes culturally relevant and/or new and diverse musical experiences (Abril, 2013; Seidel, Tishman, Winner, Hetland, & Palmer, 2009). Although this program specifically focuses on classical music, the goals and structure of the program could potentially be adapted for use with other kinds of music.

## Implications

Despite its limitations, this study offers a promising initial exploration of the EIF's *Art of Listening* program that can be used as a springboard for both future research and program development. These results corroborate the findings in existing research: young peoples' lack of knowledge about Western classical music keeps them disconnected from it (Dobson, 2010; Kolb, 2000). When given foundational information about Western classical music and an opportunity to listen to it under the right conditions, the results from this study support the idea that young people develop an appreciation for at least some aspects of this kind of music. This finding also validates the notion that introducing young people to Western classical music at an early age prepares them to be more receptive and approving of the genre (Davis, 2014; O'Brien, 1986).

In thinking about using the *Art of Listening* program as a model for the development of other similar programs, two key features to consider, beyond the content discussed, are the staff

and site. All three facilitators were highly skilled at reading and reacting to the needs and interests of each student group, seamlessly tailoring each session to the particular set of participants. Each of the six observed sessions contained slightly different content in response to the student groups. Teachers noted this flexibility; one mentioned that the strongest part of the program was the staff “really responding to what the children said,” and another said that the program’s biggest strength was the “fantastic staff who engaged with the pupils and gave inspiration to them.” Students also commented on the staff without prompting. When asked for any additional comments, one girl noted, “I like how they interact with you!” Many students cited the piano playing or singing as their favorite part, and some of them even mentioned the staff by name. Thus, careful staff selection seems like an important consideration for the development of similar programs, and staff may be an element to consider in future research.

Another key feature seems to be the physical location where the program is held. Both students and teachers were observed in awe of the site when they entered the space, standing with wide eyes and open mouths. One teacher noted that her students “loved the space right from the start, which really helped them get into the session.” Both teachers and EIF staff members felt that holding the program in a more neutral space away from the school was important. Offering the program at the Hub in Edinburgh provides two affordances: the space is aesthetically striking and it is not a school space. It gets the students out of their typical routine physically and psychologically. To run such a program for students elsewhere, finding an appealing yet neutral space seems ideal, and researchers may wish to take location and environmental aesthetics into account in future studies.

## Conclusion

As a one-time, two-hour program, the *Art of Listening* seems to potentially have a powerful positive impact, at least in the short term, on the student participants. Teachers have observed this and continue to participate while spreading interest to colleagues, causing the program to be successful from a subscription as well as programmatic standpoint. The unique space, talented staff, and thoughtful structure all appear to contribute to the perceived development of student listening skills, enjoyment of classical music, and changed perceptions of classical music. It may be feasible to implement a similar program or multi-program series in other non-profit or even classroom contexts with some adaptation, although incorporation of the identified key elements would need to be considered. Future research into this and other similar programs would ideally be expanded to include an experimental design, longitudinal tracking, and other locations, audiences, and types of music to better understand the impacts of combining a focus on listening, music, and visual art.

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