



# Making Music, Making Communities

Findings from an online survey of Making Music member organisations, investigating connections between leisure-time musical groups and their local communities

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## Foreword

Making Music is the UK wide membership organisation for leisure time music groups, supporting them with practical and artistic resources, celebrating their achievements and advocating for their needs.

Much research has been completed in recent years highlighting the significant and varied benefits of participation in leisure-time music groups for individuals, ranging from measurable health impacts (e.g. COPD), evident mental health improvement, and including better social links for isolated and lonely people.

This is useful evidence when we are making the case for leisure-time musical activity, but we realised there was no research from the UK which examined the impacts of the groups' existence on their local community, and how significant they may be.

Some of those benefits – taking as our starting point anecdotal reports – could be economical; others could be societal, impacting on cohesion and empowerment of communities, and place-making, attracting potential residents and businesses.

But the problem is that at the moment we simply don't know enough about what exactly those benefits are, and how they could be quantified. So we approached Professor Stephanie Pitts of the University of Sheffield, as we had come across some of her previous work in the field of voluntary music organisations.

This report is the result of a substantial pilot study Stephanie has undertaken as a consequence which begins to give us a clearly evidenced picture of what we think is the very significant social and economic impact of music groups on their communities. We very much hope this will lead to a more extensive piece of research as we continue to pursue these important questions together.

*Barbara Eifler*  
*Chief Executive*  
*Making Music*



# 1. Executive Summary

## - Context

The benefits of participating in a musical group are well understood from previous research (e.g. Clift & Hancox, 2010; Creech *et al.*, 2014; Pitts, 2005; Pitts & Robinson, 2016): studies carried out with instrumental and vocal groups have repeatedly shown how music-making enhances wellbeing and sense of community, as well as developing musical skills and enjoyment. Much less explored, however, is how the presence of those musical groups impacts upon the people in that locality: put simply, does the variety of musical opportunities available in a town, city or rural area help to define the character of a place and to shape the lives of the people who live there? Making Music, as an organisation who support such activity across the UK, approached the Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre (SPARC) at the University of Sheffield, who have an established interest in investigating such questions – and so the joint project reported here began.<sup>1</sup>

## - Methods: a national online survey

A survey of Making Music's UK-wide member organisations was undertaken in December 2016, generating 559 complete responses from a wide range of organisations (see section 3 for details of participants; Appendix A for the survey). Making Music assisted in the promotion of the survey on their website and social media platforms, resulting in a response rate of around 17% of their member organisations.

- The leisure-time musical groups (LMGs) who responded to this survey were mainly vocal ensembles (62%), including choral societies and community choirs, alongside orchestras (13%) and a range of smaller or more specialist ensembles, including brass, wind and concert bands.
- The LMGs were mainly non-auditioned (70%), rehearsing weekly (85%), and giving between three and five performances a year (58%). Outside this traditional model, however, there was a great diversity of musical practice, including groups who did not give formal performances.

## - Headline findings

- LMG members principally join their groups in order to enjoy making music together (92%), to challenge themselves and develop musical skills (87%), and for the opportunity to perform to an audience (85%). They place varying value on the social elements of membership, though a majority enjoy the chance to spend time with like-minded people (69%) and to give something back to the community (61%). *(See Section 3)*
- The finances of LMGs are a source of concern for some groups: most groups charge their members annual subscriptions of over £50 (76%), and many report facing increasing costs while feeling constrained from putting up ticket prices. *(See Section 4)*
- LMGs mainly rehearse weekly in church buildings including parish halls (47%), education buildings (29%) or community buildings (20%): these locations sometimes lead to reciprocal links including outreach and fundraising activities. *(See Sections 4 & 7)*
- The majority of the audience members for LMG performances are friends, relatives and other local supporters of the group (family/friends formed the largest category for 60% of LMGs). Members selling tickets was one of the highest influences on audience recruitment (42%), after distribution of posters and flyers (69%). *(See Section 5)*

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.sparc.dept.shef.ac.uk](http://www.sparc.dept.shef.ac.uk) and [www.makingmusic.org.uk](http://www.makingmusic.org.uk) for further details of both organisations.

- LMGs reported a decline in support from local media, including local newspaper reviews, but made extensive use of shared and reciprocal publicity with other LMGs. *(See Sections 5 & 8)*
- LMGs' connections with their local communities fell broadly into three categories:
  - **Commercial connections:** working with local businesses and sponsors was important to a small number of groups, but arguably under-represented in the survey, as few groups showed awareness of the increased footfall and expenditure in a local town that might be generated around an LMG concert by performers and audience members alike. *(See Section 6)*
  - **Educational connections:** here LMGs were more highly motivated, seeing an opportunity for their own growth and a responsibility to encourage the next generation of music-makers. However, some had been discouraged by lack of response from schools and other youth music groups, and had perhaps underestimated the effort involved in building and sustaining mutually beneficial educational relationships. *(See Section 7)*
  - **Reciprocal connections:** LMGs were most responsive when talking about relationships with local charities, and had clearer measures of success including funds raised and evident benefits to locally disadvantaged groups. Activities were generally location-specific, including performing in care homes, hospices and refuges, though were acknowledged to take a high level of resource and commitment, such that some LMGs felt they were working at capacity in these activities. *(See Section 8)*

### - Key messages

- The findings presented in this report (summarised in Section 9) highlight the cultural, social and financial effects of leisure-time musical groups on their local settings, and the ways in which these could be enhanced through more effective communication between musical groups, educational settings and media organisations in any given locality.
- They show how musical groups can have a strong community presence, bringing people together over shared musical experiences, charitable acts and causes, and local identity and social cohesion.
- However, they also show that achieving these effects can be a demanding task for volunteer organisations, and that more explicit articulation of these goals could help with amassing support to achieve them and so increase the benefits of local musical activity.