

UCL iMerc Newsletter — Vol. 25, April 2026

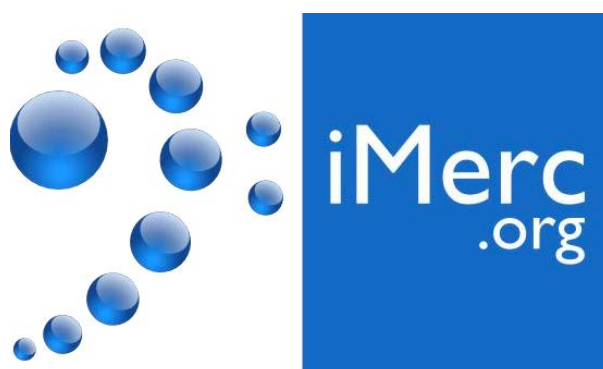
About us

Over the past 20 years, we have been developing the International Music Education Research Centre (iMerc) at the UCL Institute of Education to celebrate and disseminate our extensive research in the field of music education, broadly conceived, and to hear about new research from colleagues elsewhere in the world. In the beginning, we often held our research seminars over several days, such as in different European cities to allow our doctoral students to have more intensive support as a community, to listen to local researchers, and to share their ongoing research journeys. These 'Travelling Research Seminars' visited Ireland (Limerick), Spain (Barcelona), Italy (Bologna) and Sweden (Malmö) and helped us to establish our international profile and sense of community. With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, we have been meeting more regularly, both online and in person, to continue to share new research and insights related to diverse topics in music education. We are a group of researchers at doctoral and post-doctoral levels, as well as senior researchers, with a shared curiosity and interest in advancing basic and applied research. In line with our mission, the monthly seminars continue to foster a sense of shared endeavour amongst colleagues who are based in the UK, across mainland Europe (such as Portugal, Germany, Greece, Skandinavia), Asia (China, including Hong Kong), Latin America, USA and Australia. Opportunity is taken each month to be informed of research

news and various current research projects, including opportunities to listen to the latest research from our invited speakers. If you would like to know more or to join us, please contact us.

Our upcoming UCL iMerc Research Seminar will take place on **Wednesday, 22 April 2026**, 11am-1pm BST via Zoom and in room 938 at the IOE. We are pleased to invite you to join us online [HERE](#) or in person. Everyone is welcome!

In This Issue



1 - Credit: iMerc

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1. *Previous UCL iMerc Research Seminar, 25 March 2026*
 2. *Upcoming SEMPRES Conferences*
 3. *Newly published: Research Studies in Music Education Vol. 48(1)*
 4. *Newly published: The potential impact of singing on young children's health and well-being: a longitudinal perspective*
 5. *Newly published: Making space for singing in the 21st century classroom – A focus group interview study with primary school music teachers in Sweden*
 6. *Newly published: Comparative Musicology: Evolution, Universals, and the Science of the World's Music*
 7. *Call for proposals: RMA Study Day, 'Children's Music-Making in the Institution: Historical Perspectives on Music Education in the Long Nineteenth-Century'*
 8. *Invitation: Let's Play! Hybrid Seminar*

9. Invitation: World Voice Day 2026!

10. Invitation: Music Impact Survey

11. UCL iMerc Research Seminar, 22 April 2026

12. Congratulations!

13. Upcoming Seminar

14. Contact us

Previous UCL iMerc Research Seminar, 25 March 2026



2 - Credit: Bridget Whyte, iMerc



3 - Credit: Bridget Whyte, Professor Graham Welch, iMerc



4 - Credit: Bridget Whyte, Zhengyi Du, Professor Graham Welch, Sandra Oberoi, Ronald Wan, Dr Eunice Tang, iMerc



5 - Credit: Zhengyi Du, iMerc



6 - Credit: Bridget Whyte, Professor Graham Welch, iMerc



7 - Credit: Bridget Whyte

Bridget Whyte: The Music Education Ecology across the UK – an update

Bridget's (bridget.whyte@musicmark.org.uk) presentation explored how music education varies across the UK due to the devolution of education and cultural policy. She outlined key political, policy and societal developments shaping provision both in and out of the classroom, with a particular focus on England. Reflecting on the past 30 years, she highlighted how provision had evolved and examined the significant changes underway following the 2024 change of government.

She also drew attention to developments across the other nations, noting that Scotland had increased funding to improve equitable access to instrumental learning, while Wales had introduced a National Plan alongside a new National Curriculum to transform musical

learning. The session concluded with insights into what could be expected in the coming months and years across all four nations.



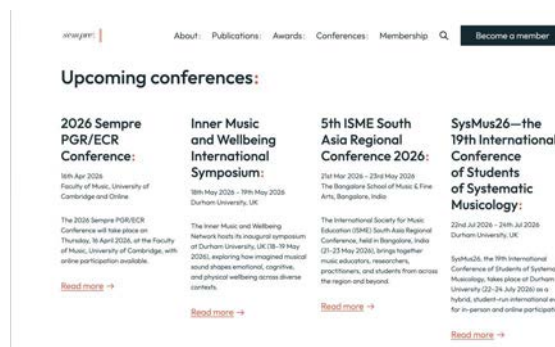
8 - Credit: Zhengyi Du

Zhengyi Du: Investigating the Impact of Digital Technologies on Higher Education Students' Creativity and Musical Creativity: Focus on Project-based Learning and Chinese Cultural Heritage

Zhengyi's (zhengyi.du.20@ucl.ac.uk) presentation examined how digital cultural heritage technologies had been integrated into a Chinese folk music course in higher education through a project-based learning approach. Drawing on a mixed-methods study involving 99 university students, the research found improvements in several dimensions of creativity, including fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration, as well as aspects of musical creativity. While gains in subject learning outcomes were more moderate, students demonstrated clear adaptation to the approach.

Qualitative findings highlighted changes in learning processes, with the integration of digital technologies supporting a deeper understanding of Chinese folk music and enhancing students' interest and motivation. The study also offered theoretical insights, revisiting Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity by introducing a culturally informed dimension, and framing digital cultural heritage technologies as interconnected resources that support creative learning across different stages.

Upcoming SEMPRE Conferences



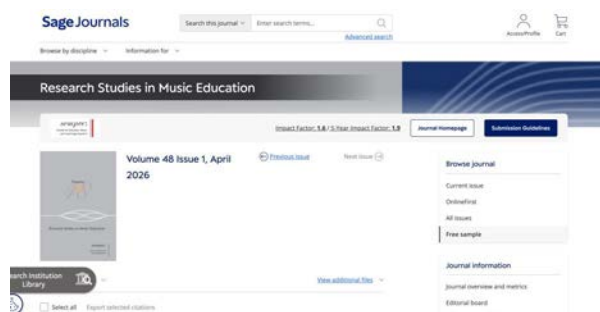
9 - Credit: SEMPRE

SEMPRE hosts a range of conferences each year, bringing together researchers, educators, and practitioners working across music education and music psychology. These events provide a platform for sharing research, networking, and exploring current issues in the field.

- *Inner Music and Wellbeing International Symposium* 18–19 May 2026, Durham University <https://musicinmyhead.org/net>
- *5th ISME South Asia Regional Conference 2026: Music Education and Sustainability* 21–23 May 2026, The Bangalore School of Music & Fine Arts, Bangalore <https://regionalconferences.isme.org/sarc/>
- *SysMus26 – the 19th International Conference of Students of Systematic Musicology* 22–24 July 2026, Durham University <https://musicscience.net/events/sysmus26/>
- *Eighth Performance Studies Network International Conference* 15–18 July 2027, School of Music, University of Leeds

These events provide a range of opportunities to engage with current research, build networks, and explore developments across music-related disciplines. To explore upcoming conferences and find out how to get involved, visit: <https://sempre.org.uk/conferences/>

Newly published: Research Studies in Music Education Vol. 48(1)



10 - Credit: Research Studies in Music Education

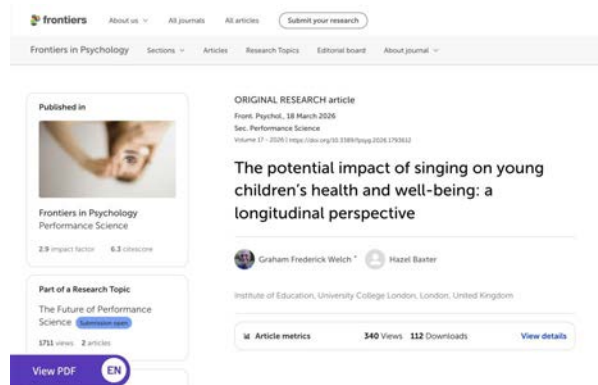
A new issue of the *British Journal of Music Education* (Volume 48, Issue 1) has been published by Cambridge University Press, featuring a collection of research exploring current developments and challenges in music education.

The issue brings together international perspectives on teaching, learning, and musical practice, highlighting themes such as classroom pedagogy, creativity, and the role of music in educational contexts. As a leading peer-reviewed journal in the field, it continues to showcase research that informs both policy and practice in music education.

To explore the full issue, visit:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/toc/rsma/48/1?volume=48&vol=48&issue=1&publicationCode=rsma>

Newly published: The potential impact of singing on young children's health and well-being: a longitudinal perspective



11 - Credit: Frontiers in Psychology, Professor Graham Welch and Hazel Baxter

The article reports data from an ongoing research evaluation of the impact of a special singing programme with young children in a London Primary school. A particular focus is on the extent to which any wider benefits of singing are evidenced in terms of participant children's health and well-being. The research data were collected from children aged six to eight across two school academic years. The programme is being led by professional singers from a charitable singing foundation who make regular visits to the school to work with children, their teachers and teaching assistants. Children's singing behaviour and development was assessed by combining data from the Singing Voice Development Measure (SVDM) and a revised model of vocal pitch-matching development (VPDM). Children's perception of their health and wellbeing was assessed through the Very Short Wellbeing Questionnaire for Children (VSWQ-C) and the PANAS-C measure of emotional wellbeing (modified for younger children). Longitudinal data analyses from four separate data collections over 18 months suggest that children's singing competency continued to improve over time, with younger children showing greater progress due to their less developed skills initially. Participants outperformed national averages in singing competency for children of equivalent ages. Children consistently self-reported high well-being ratings, with a reduced variability in negative responses, particularly among younger children. The data analyses suggest that the programme supported children's singing development. Although there is no direct statistical evidence linking singing with health and well-being, the findings align with global research highlighting the mental, physical, and social benefits of singing. We speculate that the programme continues to contribute positively to the school's culture and, by implication, potentially serving as a protective measure for their health and well-being. Ongoing research needs to explore this possibility.

Welch GF and Baxter H (2026) The potential impact of singing on young children's health and well-being: a longitudinal perspective. *Front. Psychol.* 17:1793612. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1793612

Newly published: Making space for singing in the 21st century classroom – A focus group interview study with primary school music teachers in Sweden



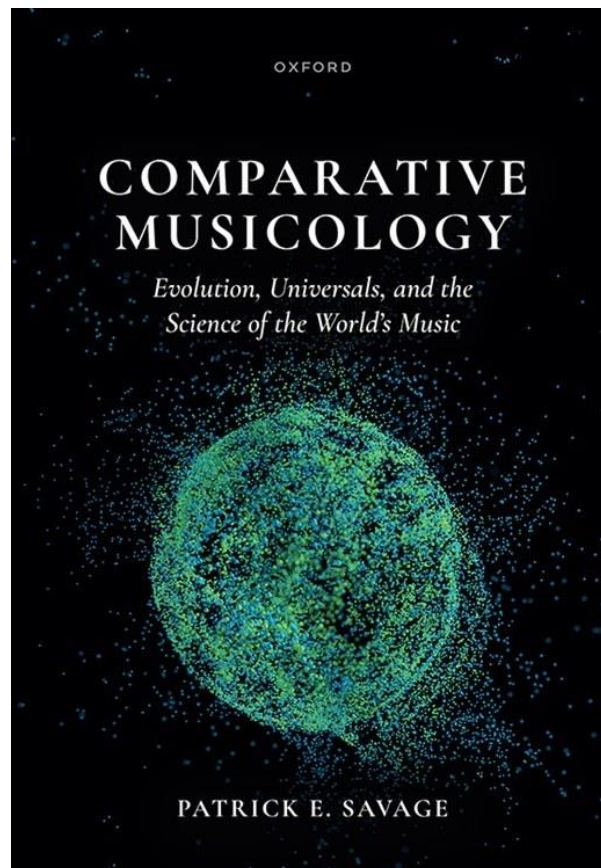
12 - Credit: *British Journal of Music Education*

A recent article in the *British Journal of Music Education* explores how singing is positioned within contemporary primary school classrooms. Based on focus group interviews with Swedish music teachers, the study highlights both the value of singing for children’s musical, social, and emotional development, and the challenges teachers face in making space for it in everyday practice.

The findings point to tensions between curriculum demands, time constraints, and teachers’ confidence in leading singing activities. While singing is widely recognised as an accessible and inclusive form of music-making, it is not always prioritised within classroom settings.

Björner Horwitz, E., Thorarinn Johnson, D., Lyberg-Åhlander, V., Sahlén, P., Laukka, P., & Bygdéus, P. (2024). Making space for singing in the 21st century classroom – A focus group interview study with primary school music teachers in Sweden. *British Journal of Music Education*, 41(2), 209–223. doi:10.1017/S0265051723000360

Newly published: Comparative Musicology: Evolution, Universals, and the Science of the World's Music



13 - Credit: Oxford University Press, Patrick Savage


A new open-access book, *Comparative Musicology: Evolution, Universals, and the Science of the World's Music* by Patrick Savage has been published by Oxford University Press. The book explores global patterns in music, examining its evolutionary origins and the extent to which musical features are shared across cultures. The publication includes forewords by Psyche Loui and Svanibor Pettan, and is freely available to download as an open-access resource, making it particularly valuable for research and teaching. Read book here:

<https://academic.oup.com/book/62353>

An accessible companion article, “*Music is not a universal language – But it can bring us together when words fail,*” has also been published in *Nature*, featuring multimedia content to support wider engagement with the research. Read article:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-026-00565-1>

Call for proposals: RMA Study Day, 'Children's Music-Making in the Institution: Historical Perspectives on Music Education in the Long Nineteenth-Century'



Children's Music-Making in the Institution:
Historical Perspectives on Music Education
in the Long Nineteenth-Century

CALL FOR PAPERS

CONFERENCE THEMES

I. Institutions as Ideals: The Impact of Institutions in Shaping Childhood Musically

II. Institutions as Mirrors: The Function of Musical Childhood in Mirroring and Making Nineteenth-century Society

III. Institutions as Legacies: The long-lasting impact of the nineteenth-century/Victorian Institutions on children's musical culture

Oxford Faculty of Music,
Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities,
University of Oxford

17th October 2026

To submit a proposal, please send an email attachment containing the following information to cmloxford2026@gmail.com by May 31st 2026:

- Title of Paper
- Abstract (max. 250 words)
- Full name (as you would like it to appear in the programme)
- Institutional affiliation
- Short biography (max. 150 words)

All proposals will receive a decision by mid-July. Further information regarding the programme and registration will be circulated in due course.

Programme Committee:
Emma Arthur (University of Oxford)
Vinzent Wesselmann (University of Oxford)

FACULTY OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
RMA
ROYAL MUSICAL ASSOCIATION

14 - Credit: Royal Musical Association

A call for papers is now open for the RMA Study Day *Children's Music-Making in the Institution: Historical Perspectives on Music Education in the Long Nineteenth Century*, hosted at the University of Oxford Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities on 17 October 2026.

This study day aims to bring together researchers working across the areas of historical musicology, music education and childhood studies to investigate the relationship between children's music-making and the Institution in the long nineteenth century. The term 'Institution' in this case is broadly defined to include educational, commercial, and charitable organisations as well as large-scale systems of transmission, including examination boards, pedagogical networks and publishers. In addition to highlighting how these various institutions sounded (and thereby defined) the lifestage of childhood, this study day will also aim to examine how these hierarchical structures paralleled larger political, social, and cultural systems of power during the long nineteenth century. Furthermore, discussions will also extend to investigating the long-standing influence which these institutions continue to exert upon the landscape of music education today.

In addition to papers, the study day will also include a workshop engaging with primary sources, and a panel featuring guest speakers offering both academic and institutional insights into the development of children's music education. The committee wishes to emphasise the friendly nature of the study day. It intends to foster a welcoming space for early-career researchers with opportunities to connect and socialise interwoven throughout the day. The committee invites proposals from postgraduate and early career research students for 20-minute conference papers. Key areas of interest include:

I. Institutions as Ideals: The Impact of Institutions in Shaping Childhood Musically

- How did nineteenth-century institutions create the “sound” of childhood?
- How did institutions contribute to the creation of a genre of children's music?
- How and why was music implemented by institutions, and what was the intended outcome?

II. Institutions as Mirrors: The Function of Musical Childhood in Mirroring and Making Nineteenth-century Society

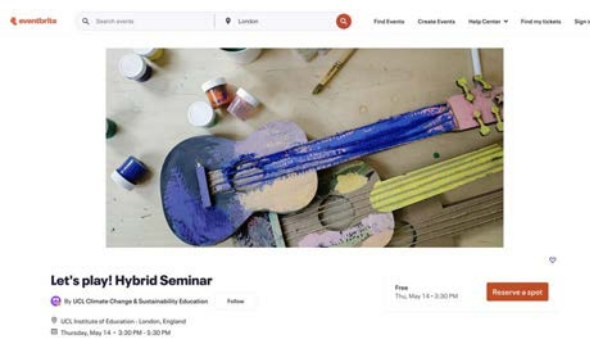
- How did institutions' implementation of children's music reflect ideals surrounding childhood itself?
- How, through its presence in institutions, did music communicate, instruct and reflect moral teaching and social expectations of the period?
- What role did pedagogical practices and syllabi have in shaping notions of “taste” in the next generation?
- In what ways was music a vehicle for class mobility and individual, social, national, and imperial improvement?

III. Institutions as Legacies: The long-lasting impact of the nineteenth-century/Victorian Institution on children's musical culture

- How are the ideals of childhood, as sounded by the Institution, echoed or ‘heard’ in post- nineteenth-century contexts (particularly by and because of long-standing institutional tradition)?
- What has been the continuity and change regarding children's music in the Institution over time?
- How has children's music changed over time?
- What vestiges of the Victorian institution remain in today's music education landscape? Are they still relevant to today's society?

The deadline for submissions is 31 May 2026. To apply, please send an abstract (max. 250 words) and supporting information to cmioxford2026@gmail.com

Invitation: Let's Play! Hybrid Seminar



You are invited to attend the *Let's Play* Hybrid Seminar, an engaging event exploring creative approaches to play, learning, and participation. Bringing together practitioners, researchers, and educators, this seminar offers an opportunity to share ideas and insights across both in-person and online formats. As a hybrid event, participants can join either face-to-face or virtually, making it accessible to a wider audience and encouraging inclusive discussion and collaboration. To find out more and register your place, visit:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/lets-play-hybrid-seminar-tickets-1986312314603>

Invitation: World Voice Day



15 - Credit: World Voice Day

You are warmly invited to take part in World Voice Day, a global celebration dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of the voice in communication, education, and wellbeing. This annual event brings together educators, clinicians, researchers, and performers to explore how we use and care for our voices, with a wide range of activities, talks, and workshops taking place around the world. To learn more and register your interest, visit: <https://worldvoiceday.org/welcome-to-world-voice-day/event-registration/>

Invitation: Music Impact Survey

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Do you have 10-15 mins to tell us about musical impact in your school?

Share your thoughts for a chance to WIN A MUGO FOR YOUR SCHOOL!

About the study
This study aims to understand how teachers and schools think about inclusive music education; what it looks like in everyday practice and how widely the Sounds of Intent framework is being used to support pupils' musical development.

Who can take part?
Headteachers, music specialists, music leads, music services, general teachers, music therapists and classroom assistants from special school settings.

What will taking part involve?
You will be asked to fill in a short 10-15 minute online questionnaire about music education in your setting.

For more information please contact
Natalie Cairns-Ratter, Research Assistant at the University of Roehampton
Email: cairnsrn@roehampton.ac.uk
Tel: 07496058751

University of Roehampton

16 - Credit: Natalie Cairns-Ratter and Ben Sellers

Natalie Cairns-Ratter (cairnsrn@roehampton.ac.uk) and Ben Sellers (ben.sellers.25@ucl.ac.uk) are exploring how music education is delivered in UK special schools, and how effectively current approaches support the needs of all learners. This study seeks to understand how teachers and schools approach inclusive music education, what it looks like in everyday practice, and how widely the Sounds of Intent framework is used to support pupils' musical development. By taking part, you will help provide valuable insight into what is working well and where improvements can be made to ensure music education is accessible, engaging, and meaningful for all students. As a thank you, every completed survey will be entered into a free prize draw to win a Mugo for your school, a portable musical instrument designed to enable children with disabilities to create music. You can access the survey here:

https://qualtricsxmlc5sgb694.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8qyKiwFHrBUhWtg



17 - Credit: Jiayi Wang

Speaker: Jiayi Wang

Topic: An exploratory study of the lived experiences of performance-related health and wellbeing among flautists

Jiayi's abstract:

Limited research has investigated the performance-related experiences of flautists. While music performance science research has grown, much of it focuses broadly on musicians in general or specific instruments (such as piano or strings), with flautists receiving much less attention. The thesis investigates the lived experiences of flautists, focusing on their perceptions of performance-related physical discomfort, injury and related mental health and their coping strategies when faced with such challenges in practice and performance. The rationale for the research is underpinned by the unique demands of the flute as a musical instrument. The aims of the research have been to provide flautists with an opportunity to reflect on any physical or psychological performance issues in their own words, how these have been managed (where possible), and to understand the subjective meaning of these experiences. All the fieldwork was undertaken during or immediately after

the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, the participating flautists were deliberately selected using professional networks on the basis of their answers to a pre-interview initial questionnaire. This related to the characteristics of their personal backgrounds and their experiences, as well as being able to participate remotely. There have been two data collection phases. Phase 1 was a specially designed pre-interview questionnaire drawing on themes from appropriate literature. Phase 2 was built on the pre-interview questionnaire responses and was designed as semi-structured interviews, undertaken on Zoom. These included a personal 'River of Flute-playing Experience' activity during the interview. The 'River of Experience' method is an autobiographical research tool in which participants were asked to annotate key biographical experiences and challenges at various points in their lives by the drawing of a meandering river. The combined data analyses of the questionnaire and interviews drew on thematic analyses. Amongst the key findings, the participants reported a personal history of performance-related health and wellbeing challenges that they had faced at some point in their lives. These are associated with both their practice and performances. The data analyses suggest that music and wellbeing education needs to recognise likely performance-related health challenges and to provide supportive resources to assist flautists in managing these challenges. The participants' diverse experiences highlight the importance of managing health and the value of supportive social connections. The participants cope with health challenges by integrating passion, resilience, and adaptability into their lives, finding ways to grow and continue to thrive in their flute-playing journey, despite disruptions. The study underscores the need for comprehensive health education and support resources for flautists, emphasising the significance of resilience and adaptability in fostering health, wellbeing, and success.

Jiayi Wang (jiayi-wang@ucl.ac.uk) is a PhD candidate at the IOE, UCL's Faculty of Education and Society, under the supervision of Professor Graham F. Welch and Dr Regina Saltari. Her research focuses on exploring the lived experiences of performance-related health and wellbeing among flautists, with broader passions in performance science and music education. She holds a BMus degree in Music from the University of Sheffield and an MA in music education from the IOE, UCL. She also works as a Postgraduate Teaching Assistant for the MA Music Education programme at the IOE.



18 - Credit: Sandra Oberoi

Speaker: Sandra Oberoi

Topic: The Ecology of a Musical Life: Understanding Youth Musical Identity Formation in Post-liberalisation Bangalore

Sandra's abstract:

Drawing on semi-structured interviews conducted with an 18-year-old Tamil Brahmin musician from Bangalore, now studying Popular Vocals at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, this study applies Bronfenbrenner's ecological model as its primary analytical framework to clarify how musical identity is formed, negotiated, and transformed across the ecological systems of a young person's life in a rapidly globalising Indian city. By tracing interactions across the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem, the analysis reveals how musical identity emerges not as a linear trajectory but as an adaptive, multi-layered negotiation between inherited cultural capital and emergent global ideologies and possibilities. This case study is not an exceptional story; it provides a lens to examine other young musicians in a diverse, post-liberalisation urban context where traditional caste, class, and gender expectations intersect with new forms of cultural mobility, digital access, and transnational aspirations.

Singer, music educator and voice teacher, **Sandra Oberoi** (sandra@harmonybangalore.com), founded Harmony The Music School in Bangalore, India in 2008. Director of Harmony

International, UK, and choral conductor of the award-winning youth choir, The Harmony Chorus, she is presently engaged in research studies at UCL, Institute of Education. Advisor for the International Society for Music Education's (ISME) South Asia Regional activities, has served as ISME board member-at-large from 2022-24 and continues to co-chair the ISME Advocacy Standing Committee. International Region Governor for the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), Sandra actively facilitates purposeful music programs for young people across India and internationally, besides creating professional development opportunities for music teachers globally.

Speaker: Shike Guo

Topic: The Relationship Between Music-Related Characteristics and Stress Among Chinese Adolescents: An Integrated Model of Musical Sensitivity, Musical Identity, and Music Engagement



19 - Credit: Shike Guo

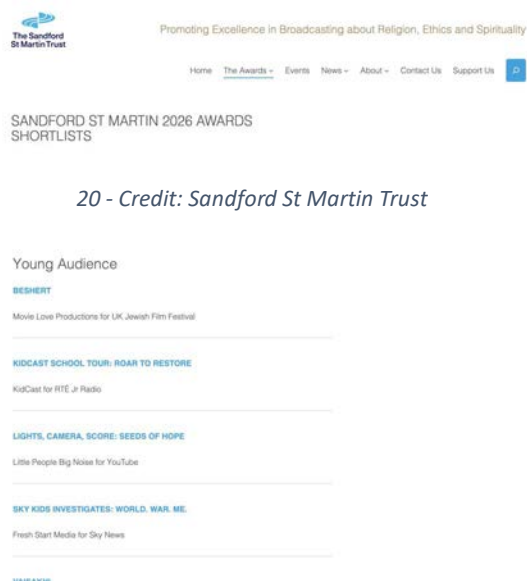
Shike's abstract:

Adolescence is a critical period of heightened stress vulnerability, yet music often serves as a key resource in young people's emotional lives and everyday coping. This study investigated how music-related characteristics, specifically musical sensitivity, musical identity, and music engagement, related to stress among Chinese adolescents. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research integrated questionnaire data from 219 junior secondary students with semi-structured interviews with 12 selected participants. The study examined whether music engagement mediated the relationships between musical sensitivity, musical identity, and stress, and how musical background shaped these patterns. Findings revealed that musical identity functioned as the strongest protective factor against stress, while musical sensitivity exhibited a more complex dual role, encompassing both supportive and vulnerability-related effects. The study contributes a more nuanced

understanding of music's role in adolescent stress regulation, foregrounding individual differences in how young people relate to and engage with music.

Shike Guo (shike.guo.23@ucl.ac.uk) is a PhD candidate in the Department of Culture, Communication and Media at the UCL Institute of Education. She holds an MSc in Psychological Studies from the University of Glasgow, a Graduate Diploma in Psychology from the University of Melbourne, and dual bachelor's degrees in Musicology and English in China, where she also received systematic training in music therapy. Her research interests lie at the intersection of music, psychology, education, and mental health, with a particular focus on the role of music in stress regulation, emotional well-being, therapeutic support, and learning. She has participated in music therapy practice in hospitals and child care settings, supporting activities for different groups in areas such as attention training, emotional soothing, and psychological stress relief, and has also gained experience in music teaching. These practical experiences in both clinical and educational contexts continue to shape her research interest in the relationship between music and mental health.

Congratulations!



The screenshot shows the website for The Sandford St Martin Trust, which promotes excellence in broadcasting about religion, ethics, and spirituality. The page is titled "SANDFORD ST MARTIN 2026 AWARDS SHORTLISTS" and lists several categories under "Young Audience":

- BESHERT**: Movie Love Productions for UK Jewish Film Festival
- KIDCAST SCHOOL TOUR: ROAR TO RESTORE**: KidCast for RTE, a Radio
- LIGHTS, CAMERA, SCORE: SEEDS OF HOPE**: Little People Big Noise for YouTube
- SKY KIDS INVESTIGATES: WORLD, WAR, ME**: Fresh Start Media for Sky News

21 - Credit: Sandford St Martin Trust



22 - Credit: Dr Gregory Boardman



23 - Credit: Dr Gregory Boardman

Following its success in winning the inaugural UNESCO *Seeds of Hope* Award last summer, our doctoral colleague Dr Gregory Boardman (greg@coolriddims.co.uk)'s *Lights Camera Score* initiative, delivered in association with the English Chamber Orchestra, has received further recognition with a nomination from the Sandford St Martin Trust.

The Trust, which promotes excellence in broadcasting on religion, ethics, and morality, will host its awards ceremony on 16 June 2026. The nominated *Lights Camera Score* film was created by students from Castledon School (Wickford, Essex), with an original score composed by [Year 9 pupils at The King John School](#) (Benfleet).

The *Lights Camera Score* team continues to deliver projects across West Yorkshire, Essex, and East London, showcasing pupil and student work throughout 2026. For details, see <https://sandfordawards.org.uk/sandford-st-martin-2026-awards-shortlists/>

Upcoming Seminar

Please note that our next UCL iMerc research seminar will be on Wednesday, 20 May 2026, 11.00am BST. Please mark this date on your diary. If you're interested in sharing your work, we'd love to hear from you. Please feel free to get in touch. Thank you for all your continued engagement!

Contact Us

Visit us on the website at <https://www.imerc.org/>

Professor Graham Welch: graham.welch@ucl.ac.uk

Professor Evangelos Himonides: e.himonides@ucl.ac.uk

Dr Eunice S Y Tang: eunice.tang@ucl.ac.uk