

# Music and Well-being

by Paul Herrington

## Personal experience...

I cannot think of a time when I wasn't playing music. From junior school recorder, playing through brass-band and youth orchestras via punk, blues, jazz and folk groups to ambient electronica, a major part of my identity is being a musician, even if it has never managed to be a financially viable career path! I have always gravitated towards other musicians and working in psychiatry has been no exception. There is something about playing music with others that flattens hierarchies and redefines roles. The stereotype 'us' and 'them' that can be reinforced by staff and service users alike, gives way to a different level of musical interaction and respect. Everybody gains.

## Research says...

There is a growing body of research on the effect of music on the person. One study looks at whether music training can make individuals smarter. Scientists found more grey matter in the auditory cortex of the right hemisphere in musicians compared to non-musicians. They feel these differences are probably not genetic, but, instead, due to use and practice.

Listening to classical music has been thought to enhance



performance on cognitive tests. In addition, the use of music to enhance memory has been explored, and research suggests that musical recitation enhances the coding of information by activating neural networks in a more united and thus more optimal fashion.

Other studies have looked at the positive effects of music on health

weekly workshops that use Syd's songs, both from the early Pink Floyd days and his later solo work, as inspiration for our own treatment of them. We plan to use a wide range of arts media, including video, dance, and puppetry to put on a week's performance at a mainstream theatre in Cambridge in a year's time. Following this we plan to take the show down to London to perform.



and immunity. How music is processed in the brain, the interplay between language and music, and the relationship between our emotions and music.

## For example...

There is an exciting project currently underway called *'The City Wakes, a tribute to Syd Barrett'*, a collaboration between Escape Artists, an arts and education charity, Cambridge Regional College, our local college of further education, and the Cambridge Mental Health Resource Centre, where I currently work. We are fortunate that the project is being endorsed by, and has received some financial support from, Syd's sister, Rosemary.

Together we have set up a series of

Within the workshops, we have set up opportunities for participants to study a range of modules leading to a full level two/level three qualification from the Open College Network. These modules include song-writing, sampling, sequencing, music

software and setting up PA sound system and stage for live performance. We are also writing a module that covers Peer Mentorship, the provision of support, enthusiasm and motivation to newer participants.

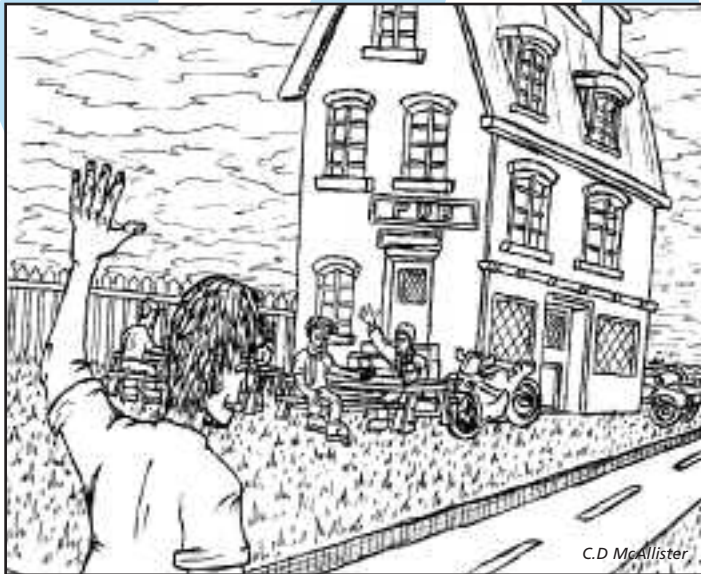
There is no predefined structure to the sessions apart from the overall brief of covering Syd's songs.

Participants collectively create the musical content, with the academic

work sitting as neutrally behind this as possible.

It is important to say that all this high-level activity hasn't come together out of nowhere. A significant number of service users have been involved in earlier projects, both with Escape Artists

together with Pink Floyd's 'Grantchester Meadows', and performed by service users and professional musicians including the world famous Kings College Chapel choir. There was a sell-out audience of 650 people to witness this amazing event. Escape Artist's musical director,



and Cambridge Regional College.

In July 2007, Escape Artists invited a group of service users to deliver a music workshop for BBC Blast, a national touring set-up offering arts workshops to young adults. Despite a short time scale and the newness of delivering rather than receiving workshop provision, the BBC Blast team thought our session over two days was the most successful of all.

In September 2005 we performed 'Adoreus - A Cambridge Cantata' at Kings College Chapel with Escape Artists. An eighteen month series of music workshops



created content from people's perceptions of their own city, including the river, pubs, Big Issue salesmen and animal experimentation!

These themes were woven

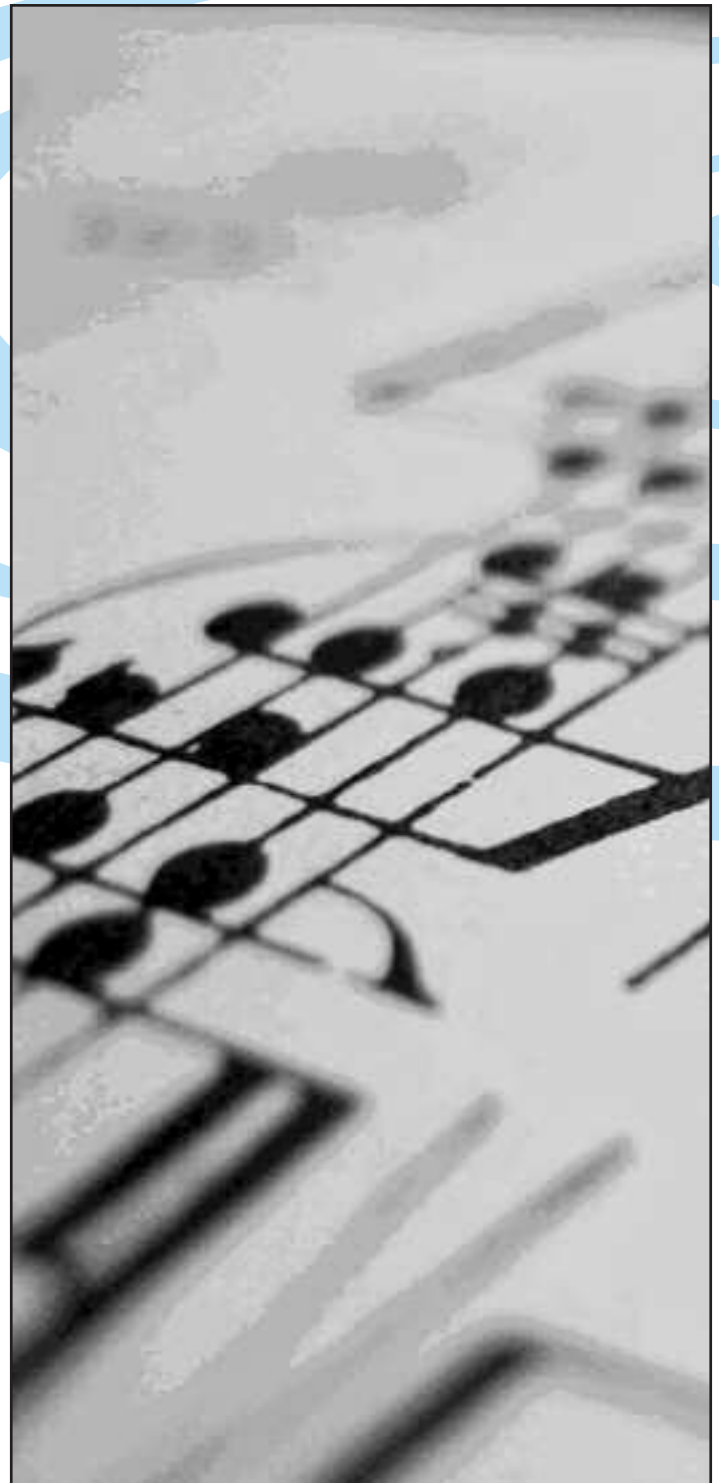
Simon Gunton, deserves a special mention for his incredible energy and his ability to instil in all of us the belief that we can achieve beyond our wildest dreams. It is thrilling to see the progression of building block on building block of self-confidence, assertiveness and self-esteem in all of us!

Over the past few years we had developed out of traditional day centre-based music groups a series of courses at Cambridge Regional College, in response to service users requests. The first of these, 'Making Music', ran termly, and opened its doors to any adult returner to learning in its second year. The second, 'Performance Skills', ran part-time over one academic year and was again opened to any adult returner to learning.

This course was accredited with NCFE, a national awarding body. The opening out of these courses served as affirmation that the students were first and foremost musicians above their individual disabilities. Work is now underway to completely embed these courses within the music department at CRC, taught by the college's existing teaching staff with increased capacity to support students psychological needs.

#### Personal gains...

I have witnessed a number of amazing personal journeys through all this music. There are a few that stand out from the others



that I would like to mention:

Two particular men took part in the Cambridge Cantata concert in Kings College Chapel. One had an alcohol and heroin problem that meant he was rarely clear-headed or consistent. He avoided contact with most mental health professionals and had no other structure to his week apart from drink and drugs.

The second man also had a drink problem, extreme restlessness and a very short attention span. People who knew him disbelieved him when he first tried to recount his story of his involvement. They didn't think he was capable of such sustained commitment!

Another musician has an obsessive-compulsive disorder, coupled with a psychotic illness. Shy to extremes and always late for appointments because of his checking behaviours, he becomes a confident, fluent and skilled musician when he straps his bass guitar on.

Finally, a singer with a lengthy history of wildly fluctuating moods who has struggled to keep relationships with peers and professionals alike, but has consistently been part of all of these projects over the past four years. She still has to go into hospital from time to time but nowhere like the frequency of before.