

**Bannan, Nicholas. 2019. *Every Child a Composer: Music Education in an Evolutionary Perspective*. Oxford: Peter Lang. 636 pages. Paperback \$81.44; eBook \$81.44.**

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At first glance, the title “every child a composer” may seem to the average reader like wishful thinking or at least an overly optimistic statement. After all, musical creativity, and even musicality, is still believed to be an exceptionally rare gift rather than a common trait of all human beings. But because this book has been written by an incredibly experienced and successful music teacher who is also a composer and a respected scientist, such a thought-provoking title should act as an incentive to delve into it. Readers will not be disappointed. Bannan’s book is extremely well researched and scientifically grounded, challenging the conviction that music is “an ability possessed by only a few” (4) – a conviction that is still widespread, not just within the general population, but also among musicians, music teachers and musicologists. Bannan does not content himself with convincing us that music is a part of our nature, he also delivers a recipe to help awaken the “bottled-up musicality” in us all. In order to achieve this ambitious task, he proposes a new model of music education aimed at stimulating the instinctive, interactional, and innovative musical behavior that is usually suppressed and neglected within our society.

The first part of Bannan’s book begins with a comprehensive summary of the current scientific knowledge that serves as a foundation for his claim to revolutionize music education. This claim is supported by recent discoveries about the origins of music in the fields of anthropology, archeology, biology, neuroscience, and the psychology of music. Although the appearance of music in our ancestral history may seem distantly related to contemporary music education, Bannan convincingly argues that this is not true. He suggests that there is a direct link between the adaptive functions of music and the effectiveness of music pedagogy: teaching can be improved if it does not inhibit our instinctive musical behavior that has been shaped by evolution. Bannan employs the latest scientific findings to show the tight connection between our biological legacy and our urge to express ourselves through music, adding his own multi-faceted explanation of the role of music in human evolution. He employs a bio-musicological perspective with the central idea that human musicality is a set of abilities that allow us to produce and perceive music (Fitch 2015). The advantage of applying this view to explain human music abilities is that it broadens the traditional anthropocentric point of view. The best way to understand human uniqueness in the domain of music is by using interspecies comparison.

According to Bannan, there are eight “principal attributes of human musicality,” all of which may result from different evolutionary pressures: “rhythmic entrainment, aural discrimination, response to the acoustic environment, parent-infant bonding, social cohesion, communication to share, memetic parasitism, and communication to affect” (7-8). It is worth mentioning that from this perspective our musicality has been selected for

different purposes, not only by an inanimate environment but also by social and cultural factors. Although the current picture of music origin is multidirectional and far from conclusive, one element of this process seems to be unquestionable – namely the important role of vocalization in the evolution of human musicality. Bannan pays special attention to this by emphasizing that humans are the only living vocal learners among primates. But what is of especial significance for our music abilities is the two-dimensional use of pitch, which allows the creation of a horizontal/ vertical relationship. The awareness of this natural two-dimensionality of pitch plays a critical role in the model of music education proposed in the next two parts of the book.

The second and most essential part of the book is devoted to presenting Bannan's original method for teaching music. It is worth mentioning that the proposed method is the result of not only the application of scientific evidence regarding human musicality, but also of the author's vast experience as a practicing music teacher. My first impression after reading this part of the book is that its main aims are to replace the traditional descriptive learning of musical skills with learning based on spontaneous but controlled performance and the awakening of musical creativity among all students. Since the evolutionary roots of our musicality are closely connected to changes in our vocal abilities, it is not surprising that Bannan has chosen singing as a basic music activity for pedagogical practices in order to achieve these goals.

Another important characteristic of the proposed pedagogical approach is its collective nature. The reason for choosing this pedagogical strategy again lies in the evolutionary roots of music and its possible adaptive function related to social bonding (cf. e.g. Savage et al. 2021). From this perspective, a collective music activity can lead to positive emotional states: a motivational mechanism that has been selected for sustaining and increasing social cohesion. However, the potential benefits of collective singing are not only social and emotional. The generation of positive emotional states through collective singing can also reinforce the memory of performed musical patterns, making the process of learning effortless. This proposed collectivism in music education has significant value, especially in our society where music is still mainly understood as an individual rather than a collective activity. The ethnomusicological perspective shows that this musical individualism is rather an exception to the rule. Bannan often indicates the bond between the deep social roots of music and his promising musical pedagogy which should convince all sceptics about the need of collectivism in music education. A vital part of Bannan's pedagogical approach is an original form of communication between students through simple gestures, which he has dubbed "Harmony Signing." This does not just fulfil a communicative function but can be a powerful tool to generate and establish cognitive connections between auditory and visual sensations. In some sense "Harmony Signing" is a revival and extension of the old idea of a musical gestural mnemonic system, the most famous example of which was the "Guidonian hand" introduced in medieval Europe by Guido d'Arezzo (Miller 1973). I found this approach particularly important because it creates a cognitive bridge between preconceptual sensations of musical sounds and conceptual categories of visual signs without necessarily referring to musical notation.

Another ambition of Bannan's pedagogical approach is to deprive music pedagogy of Eurocentrism and gender prejudice. While the latter aim seems quite easy to achieve by applying an egalitarian way of participation in music making, the former is definitely a challenge in a musical environment dominated by the Western musical tradition. In order to broaden the scope of students' musical competence beyond Western musical structures, Bannan introduces many non-Western musical examples, such as Southern African rhythms, Xhosa harmonic patterns, and Latin style schemes. He frequently indicates the influence of non-Western traditions on Western music, as in the case of the presence of oriental techniques in Western modal music. Although these examples will unquestionably enrich a student's musical imagination with new forms and skills, the vast majority of musical tasks in Bannan's model are based on Western musical achievements such as triads of major scale, modulation, and enharmonic relationships. This does not mean that Bannan's aim has not been achieved. Introducing non-Western music schemes into music education as an integral part of teaching material counteracts the still widespread "tendency to see Western Art Music as a pure and unsullied achievement" (54). However, we have to be aware that every musical culture, apart from being a result of our shared musicality, possesses its own unique features that are transmitted by the tacit rules of enculturation. Therefore, all the existing musical traditions make up our cultural diversity and their preservation is as important as the preservation of dying languages.

The third part of the book is an extension of the second part and adds the perspective of teaching in secondary schools, but can also be treated as an invitation to lifelong music learning. Bannan sees the collective and creative learning of music in childhood as the point of departure for a lifelong adventure with music. He emphasizes the openness to novel experiences and new musical ideas that every student can bring to the classroom. The main job of a teacher at this level of education is to encourage creativity, listen to students' musical expression, and facilitate interaction. Both the second and the third parts of this book can be viewed as a handbook of music pedagogy or as a guide for music teachers. These parts are of special interest for music educators at all levels. However, in order to really appreciate the value of the proposed model of music education, the first part of this book is indispensable. It delivers a set of convincing justifications for the teaching methods proposed in parts two and three, which distinguishes Bannan's model of music pedagogy from the variety of proposals present in contemporary music education. But the scope of potential readers of this book extends far beyond music educators. Thanks to the inclusion of the most up-to-date scientific information about the origin of music, this book will be of great interest for all readers looking for a scientific explanation of human musicality.

Possibly the most important message of this book is the appeal for the re-appreciation of music education in our own lives. The fact that human musicality is a part of our nature does not mean that we do not need musical education. Quite the opposite. Bannan shows that in order to release all the potential benefits of our musicality we need good guidance to develop our own musical skills. Bannan's connections between our biological inheritance and cultural information can be interpreted as a caveat against the "nature-nurture" debate, though he does not express that caveat directly. After all, our musical behavior is a product of both our unique inherited musicality and a process of learning

that is shaped by our social environment. These factors are dependent upon one another. Bannan's model of music education uses this interdependence between our musical nature and nurture to show how to optimize the development of our musical skills and improve human existence. In this respect, Bannan's book is a successful attempt to combine evolutionary musicology with music education. His proposed approach is a good example of the idea of consilience (Wilson 1998), which postulates the unification of science with the humanities and arts, and can be seen as an important step towards filling the gap between Charles Percy Snow's two cultures (Snow 1961). Whether or not one supports the unity of knowledge, it is clear that Bannan's model of music education—if widely applied—will improve the musical condition of our society.

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99

Piotr Podlipniak

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