

***Musique concrète* at secondary school: Asking the ‘right’ questions**

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Musique concrète poses challenges for secondary school music teachers because it does not appear in abstract notation format, it is compiled from found sounds and it eschews many of the features that music students expect to hear in a piece of music, such as melody, rhythm, harmony and recognisable timbres. In recent years, attempts have already been made to help fourth year secondary school students from different schools in Ireland to engage with and learn about *musique concrète*. These included exposure to many works, focus on one composer, sound manipulation, free composition, consensual assessment and the sharing of responses. Despite their experience, however, participants in these studies reported that they did not really understand the music. This paper emerges from another small-scale study in which a teacher-researcher explored exam-type questioning as a scaffold for time-constrained listening and learning. Three groups of 16-year music students, with no previous school experience of *musique concrète*, participated in this project. They listened to two programmatic and two abstract pieces while viewing the associated waveforms on an audio editor and on a printout. This would compensate for the absence of notated extracts. Written questions for Group 1 were ‘open’, for Group 2 were ‘closed’ and for Group 3 were a mixture of formats. In three post-test group interviews the students explained what they had learnt. An analysis of these discussions and of the written answers demonstrates three distinct levels of understanding about the music, according to the questions posed. It was concluded that (a) students could be guided in their listening, (b) musical features could be detected by a teacher, even without input from a composer and (c) the ‘right’ questioning could have positive learning outcomes. It is suggested that with Continuing Professional Development, music teachers could be enabled to act on these conclusions.