

Hallelujah, it's school concert season: Music researcher explains why these performances are so important

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Credit: cottonbro studio from Pexels

Who could have imagined how quickly we would return to pre-COVID routines?

Here we are again, juggling year-end stressors, wondering how we can squeeze everything in. If you have [young children](#), you will likely also have several school concerts to mark the end of the year.

While we want to support our loved ones' [extracurricular activities](#), perhaps you secretly curse sitting through yet another performance or carols sing-along.

I am a researcher in [music education](#) and a conductor of community ensembles. Are these events important? Do they matter at all?

Why music matters

The first thing to remember is [music](#) really matters. Apart from the joy of making music and gaining a skill, there are many advantages for kids learning music.

Australian music educator and researcher Anita Collins [has studied](#) how learning music helps children's cognitive development.

As she [explains](#), neuroscientists have found the brains of people who studied music look different from those who did not have [music lessons](#): "music education works three areas of the brain at once: the motor, visual and auditory cortices. If we think about it, it's like a full-brain workout; it's like our legs, our arms and our torso doing an exercise at the same time. Music education is exercise for the brain."

The long-term impact on the brain is also startling. Research [suggests](#) children who undergo music training have better verbal memory, second language pronunciation accuracy, reading ability, reasoning skills, auditory, motor and [sensorimotor integration](#), and [executive function](#).

Other [research](#), surveying more than 112,000 students, revealed those

who learn music were more successful than non-musicians across math, English and science.

Showcasing and building skills

But these concerts also have a broader purpose.

At school concerts, students showcase their learning as individuals and in ensembles. This can motivate a child to practice and learn their instrument. The performance itself can build a student's confidence and skills in other areas such as public speaking, presentation and managing nerves.

When they play in groups, students can often perform better than expected. As a music director of many school (and community) productions, I can attest that something magical happens in the couple of weeks leading to a performance.

A sense of belonging

We know people who play in music ensembles [identify a feeling of belonging](#) as a benefit of playing with others.

This feeling can be amplified in year-end concerts where a school community and families gather together. Research shows feeling connected to others or a sense of belonging [can reduce](#) feelings of loneliness, alienation or hopelessness.

Connection beyond schools

In my broader work, I have also seen how end-of-year concerts can provide important connection and build community at a time of year

many find really difficult.

For those who have lost or are separated from loved ones, the festive season can be [very stressful and lonely](#).

But community music can provide a broader social purpose and support network. While conducting the [San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus](#), I noticed some singers, who were estranged from their families, struggled each December. To help, we filled our schedule with appearances. Being together and connected lifted everyone's spirits.

In the post-pandemic era, en masse community music-making has exploded with the [Pub Choir](#) and [Spooky Men's Chorale](#) attracting thousands of participants. People of all ages buy tickets or volunteer to meet up and learn songs in low-pressure settings such as pubs, sports arenas or outdoors. Here, social and well-being factors are emphasized, rather than the quality or expertise of the performance.

More than just a concert

So yes, year-end concerts are another thing to do at an already busy time of year. But they are so important. They can enhance students' learning and well-being and unite communities.

They are also hopefully fun and rewarding.

So let's vote with our bums-on-seats. Knowing the essential benefits of music to children and society, let's show up and clap and cheer. Better yet, participate! Your life will be the richer for it.

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