

# STAR ATTRACTION



*This year's Music Education Expo, the last at the Barbican before moving to a larger venue for 2016, once again mixed the practical, political and thought-provoking. Joanna Wyld finds that the attendees were often the stars of the show*

Now in its third year, the Music Education Expo – as regular MT readers will well know by now – is the UK's largest conference and exhibition for music teachers. For the uninitiated, the event offers two days of free CPD sessions and a huge variety of exhibition stands: from publishers to practice rooms and gadgets to gamelan. It has quickly become a fixture in the music education calendar, and provides an excellent networking opportunity for classroom, peripatetic, private instrumental and head teachers, hub leaders, workshop leaders, and administrators across the sector.

Visitors to the Expo arrived at the Barbican's exhibition centre to be greeted with the 2015 Expo Guide, which suggested seven different

'routes' through the day's seminars and workshops, tailored to one's focus as a music educator. Routes were offered for private and classroom teachers, those in primary or early years education, and for those whose focus is technology, collaboration, international perspectives, or funding and policy. Of course, many



Plastic fantastic: trying out instruments at the Expo

visitors opted to devise their own routes. In addition to keynote speeches and organised discussions, there were numerous opportunities to network among the many exhibitor stands, or at the Expo cafés.

Both days were framed by live performances given from the balcony overlooking the Expo stands. At the start of day one, any bleary-eyed attendees were soon wide awake and enjoying the exhilarating rhythms of an ensemble from the Barbican's creative learning programme Drum Works, a project which has been running since 2007. The following day began in similarly rousing fashion, with Gianni Brass entertaining the crowds before returning at lunchtime to play Tromba's plastic instruments in two brand-new fanfares written by the winners of the Expo Composition Competition, Garrett Norton and Daniel Hall. Elsewhere in the programme another celebrated brass player, trumpeter Alison Balsom, drew large numbers to her discussion of the new BBC Ten Pieces project.

Vocal group VOCES8, which entertained exhibitors with a singalong session during the lunchtime performance on day one, went on to give an inspiring workshop in the Rhinegold Theatre. The group outlined its 'VOCES8 Method', a way of solving three of the main problems facing music teachers today: time, money, and fear. Paul Smith led the session, inviting the audience to copy him, at first saying a few words, and then removing the syllables from those words to create a basic beatbox rhythm, accompanied by simple physical actions. At this stage, no musical pitch was involved, so that everyone felt confident to join in. While one group continued the beatbox rhythm, two other groups were taught different clapping rhythms. Before long, participants were producing a three-part texture. Only then, with inhibitions lowered, was pitch introduced, with a