# Could music mask dyslexia? by Alicia Johnson

## Abstract

There are well-established links between music and dyslexia in terms of speech and language, cognition, literacy attainment, and academic achievement. It has also been hypothesised that engaging with music on a regular basis from an early age enhances working memory (WM), phonological awareness (PA) and word reading efficiency (WRE); cognitive correlates that inform the diagnosis of dyslexia. It can therefore be assumed that a child with dyslexia can benefit from music at the cognitive level and musical training might equip musicians with skills that mask dyslexia traits. This, in combination with the emphasis placed on auditory-related tests in dyslexia identification processes, can make the identification of dyslexia in musicians problematic. For example, PA and WM are commonly found to be challenged in dyslexic profiles. Conversely, PA and WM have been shown to improve with musical training. The present study addresses the above issues by looking at cognitive and behavioural profiles of dyslexic musicians to examine whether music masks traits of dyslexia and whether current methods of identifying dyslexia can be said to be adequately serviceable for musicians. Participants were recruited as musicians who were diagnosed with dyslexia later in their educational journeys, some as late of post-graduate level. Participants shared their learning histories and their musical backgrounds, alongside cognitive testing looking at their WM, PA and WRE. Findings confirm our original assumptions as they suggest that music training from a young age can provide unconscious strategies that mask traits of dyslexia at the cognitive and behavioural levels. Therefore, if not properly understood, music could potentially mask a dyslexic individual from the support they need. Future studies might further investigate cognitive correlates in dyslexic musicians in order to better inform diagnostic tools.

**Key words: Music, dyslexia, dyslexic musicians, cognition, dyslexia assessment.**

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