

My life as an editor - Roderick Hunt



Roderick Hunt is an Emeritus Professor at the University of Exeter, UK. Alongside his devoted scientific and teaching work in the field of plant science, Professor Hunt is also known as an accomplished bass soloist and passionate opera performer. He was formerly Chief Editor of *Annals of Botany*, and long

time Council Member of the European Association of Science Editors, where he was also a Vice-President (2000-2003) and for a number of years he has held the Treasurer position at this organization. He is also a member of the Council of Science Editors. The following short but interesting interview with Professor Hunt, reveals his thoughts, experiences, interests and some of his future plans.

What attracted you to science editing and how did you become involved in EASE?

I had been a major contributor to my journal earlier in my career and was honoured when they asked me to become a decision editor. I eventually became Chief Editor and then a member of the private company which owns our current three titles, where I am now CEO.

In your opinion, what is a fundamental premise for good editing practice?

Excellent service to the reader. Authors must just tag along.

You have been treasurer of the European Association of Science Editors for several years. What is the role of a treasurer in such an association?

Basically, handling all the money. And stuff such as maintaining a Registered Office, including archiving, financial policy, payments policy, audit, banking, security, payments, receipts, budgeting conferences, paid and honorary staffing, statutory compliances.

Have you encountered any problems related to the recent decision for the UK to leave the European Union?

The likely damage to British science funding is considerable. The EU has been a major contributor there and government promises to make up the difference after Brexit are disingenuous. Already, there are signs that British labs are less welcome than before as members of European science consortia.

What are your current research interests?

Physiological and biometrical plant ecology.

It is known that you are a big fan and performer of music, especially opera. How did your passion for music arise?

I have always been attracted to the power of music. I started out as an instrumentalist (trombone, tuba, double bass) but when I realised that singing involved less portage, I was hooked.

Are you preparing for a theater piece in the near future?

Next month I am performing in Rachmaninoff's *Aleko* in Bristol. Then there is a *Traviata* next year, plus several concerts.

What would you like to perform in front of an audience, but you have not yet?

I have a secret plan to appear in *Rheingold* in 2019. There, it's not a secret any more. Just search Tarnhelm Opera.

What is common to music and science?

Author = composer. Editor = performer. Reader = audience.

What is your opinion about the famous Mozart effect? Is it based on sufficient and good quality evidence?

Because Mozart was evidently a pipe through which music flowed into the world without touching the sides, some have been tempted to infer that his music has special supernatural, spiritual or subtle qualities. However, though spatio-temporal reasoning has been shown to be promoted by listening to his music, to my knowledge no-one has done any experiments that are also controlled for level of mindfulness. My hypothesis is that mindfulness is the more likely factor influencing the results that have been obtained and that multivariate work is needed to disentangle this process fully. I predict that similar effects could also arise in the presence of other forms of music.

Do plants really respond to music?

Plants certainly respond to brushing and disturbance by wind. But the physical onslaught of music is mild in comparison to these and is unlikely to produce measurable effects, unless applied at an outrageous level. Because plants have no physical or cognitive ability to access the detailed information that is embedded within what we call music, that form of stimulus is closed to them. Plants do not 'understand', they are simply reactive. Natural selection does their planning and decision-making for them. They 'see' only the energy and materials which impact them most proximally. Although everything of human importance, past, present and future, is ultimately tied to the life of plants, they have got us to where we are without the ability to appreciate music.

In addition to science, editing and music, what are your other interests?

These are very numerous, and very minor.

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