

Editorial

It's time for Premier Denis Napthine to face the music

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Professor Brian Cox was once part of the band D. Ream. *Source: News Limited*

OVER the weekend, I was thinking about putting together another band. I haven't played in one for years. As always, I'd surround myself with superior musicians in the hope my shortcomings on drums would be less obvious.

But this band would be different. Not only would they be excellent musicians, I'd set out to recruit only fair dinkum geniuses.

What about an internationally famous physicist on keyboards? Let's see. Okay, Professor Brian Cox. He's an Advanced Fellow at the University of Manchester, a

member of the High Energy Physics group and is working on research using the Large Hadron Collider, the highest-energy particle collider ever made.

Scientists working on it this year confirmed the Higgs Boson - the so-called God particle - that had been predicted to exist in 1964.

You'll have seen Prof Cox on our TV screens this year. But we first encountered him as part of the band D. Ream which had a hit with *Things Can Only Get Better*.

On lead guitar, we'd recruit a prominent astrophysicist. What about Brian May, the distinctive and inventive lead guitarist with Queen, who last year was ranked the second greatest guitarist of all time by *Guitar World* magazine?

May's PhD thesis was a survey of "Radial Velocities in the Zodiacal Dust Cloud", which sounds like a prog rock album title from 1969. Perfect.

There can't be much doubt about who we'd want on violin. Not just a virtuoso, but perhaps the world's outstanding intellect of the past 2000 years. The great theoretical physicist Albert Einstein can fill those shoes.

Einstein's mother was an accomplished pianist and she had little Albert learning the violin from 1885. Until then, he'd been happy to build houses of cards. But his mother saw something others did not and perhaps understood innately that music might winkle it out of the underachiever. Einstein went on not only to develop the General Theory of Relativity, he won a Nobel Prize and was *Time* magazine's Man of the Century. He'd pull a crowd.

The fact is that without Einstein's love for music, and his ability to play it, he would not have developed his theories which are now seen as the cornerstones of physics. He said: "It occurred to me by intuition and music was the driving force behind that intuition. My discovery was the result of musical perception."



Brian May of Queen, here performing with Jessie J during the closing ceremony of the London 2012 Olympic Games, is also an astrophysicist.

It's not a coincidence that music played such a large part in the lives of the scientists named in this column. It's likely they are smart and tended toward their scientific disciplines *because* of music.

International studies conducted at some of the most esteemed universities in the world have concluded that music, particularly with small children, has a range of sometimes quite unexpected benefits - not least of which it boosts IQ. At birth, the human brain is a work in progress and in the first years of life, it makes billions of neural connections through synapses and assisted by what are known as glial cells.

In the brains of children who learn to play an instrument, or sing - and particularly, if they do so reading music notation - those connections multiply and vital parts of the brain grow.

Music almost uniquely involves both hemispheres of the brain and children whose brains have been exposed to music tuition perform markedly better in other areas where both hemispheres are engaged, such as languages and higher mathematics.

That is why the findings and recommendations of the Napthine Government's inquiry into the benefits of music education are so important. The Government's Education and Training inquiry found that music was "uniquely important" and accepted it benefited children beyond the music itself. There was a "compelling case in favour of ensuring every student had access to a meaningful music education".

That's not the case now; indeed, there is no requirement that music be taught in our schools and while some schools offered specialist classes, in others there were only "token musical experiences".

When Premier Denis Napthine was in Opposition, he was acutely aware of the nexus between music education and improved intellectual and physical development. He thundered: "When elected to government, the Liberal Party will require every primary student to be taught at least one lesson of music each week. The Liberal Party will also address the growing shortage of music teachers in Victoria."

That's handy because the report notes that shortage and suggests ways in which more teachers can be channelled into music.

But a key finding also states: "There have been few substantive improvements to the quality and provision of school music education in Victoria over the past two decades."

What that really says, Premier, is that it's time to face the music.

Alan Howe is *Herald Sun* executive editor