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Music in Three Dimensions: An integrative perspective on the aesthetic, praxial and social dimensions of music

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Abstract

This paper outlines a perspective on music and music education arising from the experience of Sage Gateshead, a large cultural institution in the north of the UK. More specifically, it is a perspective which has emerged from the process of situating undergraduate music learning within Sage Gateshead's artistic programme. A process of action research undertaken by the author between 2011-2015 helped to develop a critical understanding of the organisation's practices which in turn has helped to underpin the undergraduate curriculum.

This particular situation has given rise to a conception of music which might be broadly described as *integrative*, emphasising the integration of three musical dimensions which have often been considered as separate or contesting – if closely related – fields of musical practice, namely; the 'aesthetic' and 'praxial' models of music which have long been the subject of much debate; and the idea that there are specific and measurable 'social' – as well as physiological, psychological, and other – benefits associated with music, which has informed much cultural policy since the late 1990s in the UK. The perspective of Sage Gateshead – and the model described herein – suggests that music is at its most potent when all three of these dimensions – the aesthetic, the praxial and the social – are engaged, not to the exclusion of the other two, but held in a kind of 'creative tension' with them.

The idea that music operates on a number of levels simultaneously is certainly by no means radical or new. However, what I hope can be gleaned from a better understanding of the situation of Sage Gateshead is the kind of *creative tension* which exists when these three dimensions of music's power are engaged in practice. In particular, an *integrative* model of music has implications for the training of musicians, as it infers that musicians need more than just the traditional skills of musicianship if they are to form and sustain long-term careers in music. Rather than the common perception of becoming a music educator as the 'negation' of a professional identity in music, the *integrative* model of music sees musicians as more holistic agents, with the knowledge and skills to be able to operate competently and effectively across music's different dimensions.
Keywords: Sage Gateshead, aesthetic, praxial, social, praxis

Introduction

Sage Gateshead is a relatively young music organisation, which celebrated its tenth birthday in 2015, and whose mission is 'enriching lives through music' (Sage Gateshead, n.d.). The organisation operates from an iconic Norman Foster designed glass building on the Gateshead bank of the River Tyne in the Newcastle-Gateshead conurbation in the north of the UK, although its programme extends into the rest of the NE region, and its influence is felt nationally and worldwide.

Since its inception, the artistic programme of Sage Gateshead has been conceived as consisting equally of music performance on the one hand, and music learning and participation (L&P) on the other. The organisation's vision is reflected not just in the equal weighting in its artistic programme between performance and L&P, but also in the fabric of the building itself. The Sage Gateshead building contains three concert venues of different sizes, with a suite of twenty-six music education rooms contained in the ground floor. Music

education is, quite literally, the foundation around which the rest of the organisation's practices are constructed. Perhaps the simple fact of this physical co-existence between the worlds of music performance and music education is responsible for some of the development of the integrative model of music described herein.

Since 2009, Sage Gateshead has been delivering undergraduate music education in a joint collaboration franchise model with University of Sunderland. The BA (Hons) Community Music course was established in 2009, and the existing BMus (Hons) Jazz Popular and Commercial Music transferred from Newcastle College to Sage Gateshead in 2011. The central idea of establishing these programmes within Sage Gateshead was to provide an alternative route for HE Music study which was grounded in the practices of the music and music education sectors, giving students the opportunity to learn 'inside' industry practices, rather than just learn 'about' them.

Method

The knowledge that has developed as result of this situation has emerged through an iterative process as a form of *praxis* (Bowman, 2009; Freire, 1970; Nelson, 2013), with the more productive knowledge of the organisation's practices informing the undergraduate curriculum, and the more theoretical knowledge used to critically underpin the undergraduate curriculum articulating the complexities of the organisation's situation; a *virtuous circle* of knowledge development, so to speak. Delivering undergraduate music programmes within a music organisation in this way might be seen as a form of 'action research' (McNiff, 2013; Reason & Bradbury, 2013), with new knowledge about the organisation emerging in a 'dialogic' way (Bakhtin, 1981; Wegerif, 2012) through the development of the academic perspective required to underpin undergraduate learning. Students learn about 'real world' (Bennett, 2012) music industry practices, while the organisation learns how to articulate those practices in academic terms.

Findings

Perhaps the most significant concept to have emerged so far from this situation is the model which I refer to as 'music in three dimensions' (Camlin, 2015a, 2015b), emphasising the pluralistic, emergent and integrative model of music which describes Sage Gateshead's artistic programme, shown below:
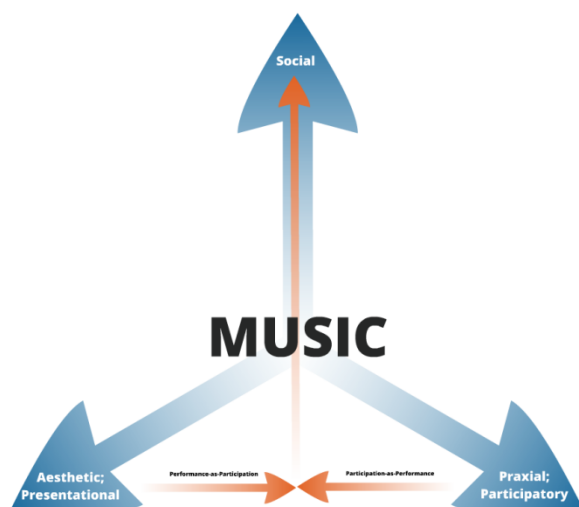

Fig. 1: Music in Three Dimensions

The model expresses a dialogic and inter-dependent relationship between three musical dimensions, namely: the 'aesthetic' or Presentational model of music (Adams, McQueen, & Hallam, 2010; Elliott & Silverman, 2013; Turino, 2008), concerned with "the beauty or 'meaning' of its sonorous forms" (Elliott & Silverman, 2013); the 'praxial' or Participatory view (Elliott, 1995, 2009; Swanwick, 1999) which holds that music is, "a human practice that is procedural in essence" (Elliott, 1995, pp. 247-249); and the 'social' view in which "active engagement with music impacts beyond the development of musical skills" (Hallam, 2015, p. 1). In the model, the first two dimensions are inherently musical ones, held in a kind of "creative tension" (Adorno, 1973, p. 153; Wegerif, 2012, p. 158) with each other, rather than being seen as completely discreet fields of practice, with the red arrows between them describing the tensile force which unites them. Some writers (Turino, 2008) *do* see the aesthetic / presentational and praxial / participatory dimensions as "different form[s] of art and activity entirely – and that they should be conceptualised and valued as such" (p. 25). However, in practice, there is perhaps more commonly an integrative tension between them: musical participation often leads to presentations of musical performance (Camlin, 2015a), and even highly presentational forms need to widen participation, increase access and broaden inclusion, in order to resist becoming what Daniel Barenboim describes as an, "ivory-tower community [which has] lost a great part of the connection between music and everything else" (Rusbridger, 2013, p. 210).

While these first two dimensions describe the dialogic relationship between presentational and participatory forms of music, the third dimension – the 'social', represented by the red vertical arrow - accounts for the extra-musical benefits that can arise from 'musicking' (Small, 1998), including benefits to psychological well-being, confidence, empathy, physical health, as well as increases in social cohesion and social capital (Arts Council England, 2014; Hallam, 2015; Matarasso, 1997; Neelands, University of Warwick, & Heywood, 2015).

I refer to the model as an 'integrative' model of music, although it might be more appropriate to call it a 're-integrative' one, acknowledging that musicality is something which has been present in all human cultures for the 60,000 year history of our species (Dunbar, 2012; Mithen, 2007) and only relatively recently separated in Western cultures with the evolution of 'aesthetic' forms (Elliott & Silverman, 2013; Ranciere, 2003). Or, as David Byrne puts it, "before recorded music became ubiquitous, music was, for most people, something we did" (Byrne, 2012).

The way in which this model has evolved is worth noting. In terms of establishing a discourse about 'quality' between students on a more performance-based course like the BMus, and the BA Community Music, it became apparent that there was no easy way to do this. There is a tendency – perhaps not surprisingly – to judge the quality of participatory forms of music by the standards of its presentational counterpart, without recognising that the intentions and concerns of participatory music might be different, and require different quality measures. However, recognising these differences also highlights the fact that the quality standards of presentational music – for example, "organised beginnings and endings, individual virtuosity, contrasts, transparent textures" (Turino, 2008, p. 45) – often *do* apply to participatory settings as well, leading to a complex web of inter-related meaning.

The conclusion reached – as an organisational community including its students – is that quality is contingent upon its situation. In other words, in order to understand issues of quality in music, they have to be understood first in the context within which they occur (Camlin, 2015a). This realisation has led quite naturally to more sophisticated dialogic conceptions of musical quality – as outlined in the diagram above – which support students on both courses to understand what 'quality' might look like in practice, and how it is not fixed, but subject to change as the situation changes.

In this sense, the transformative 'social' dimension of music helps to unify what might otherwise be more separate concerns. Whether listening to, or participating in, music, surely all musicians hope that the instances of music they create or facilitate will have a deep emotional connection with the hearts and minds of listeners and / or participants, ultimately leading to life-affirming – or even life-changing – 'strong' experiences (Gabrielsson, 2011); perhaps the pursuit of such transformational, 'strong' experiences is something which unites *all* musicians.

Accepting this 'integrative' model of music as a valid and useful paradigm does, however, require some conceptual shifts, and changes in understanding of what it means to be a musician. Traditionally, models of music education set up the professional identity of Music Educator as the *negation* of a professional identity as a performing musician. We have probably all heard – or even given – the advice to aspiring musicians that you can train as a *musician,* and if that doesn't work out, you can always become a music teacher, thereby suggesting that music educators are in some sense 'failed' or non-musicians. However, because of the way the music industry has changed (Anderson, 2009), most musicians will need to be adept at teaching music as well as performing it, if they are to sustain a career in music in the longer-term. And yet, the negative perception of Music Educator as a professional identity mitigates against musicians being able to develop the necessary skills and knowledge to function successfully *as* music educators, especially within a very different musical landscape to previous generations of musicians. The integrative model described herein helps to break down some of these distinctions between 'musician' and 'music educator' which have become less relevant in a music industry which has changed beyond all recognition, but it is only a small part of the bigger paradigmatic shift occurring within the sector.

Indeed, the 'virtuous circle' of knowledge development suggested in this paper is already underway within the organisation. The 'music in three dimensions' model described herein and arising from within the degree courses, has already found its way back into the organisational culture of Sage Gateshead which informed its development, translated into perhaps more accessible – i.e. non-academic – language within the organisation's current business plan 2015-18 as three inter-related 'spheres' of:

Artistic innovation and excellence (aesthetic / presentational);
Music education (paraxial, participatory)
Social impact (social)
(Sage Gateshead, 2015)

The knowledge emerging from these particular circumstances – situating undergraduate learning within the organisation's practices – has therefore become knowledge that the organisation can put to service in the clearer articulation of its mission and purpose. More broadly, this approach of situating HE study inside 'real world' practices suggests a useful methodology for unearthing the tacit knowledge contained in those practices and helping to articulate them more clearly. If developed, it is in this iterative kind of epistemological development that the "productive knowledge" (Bowman, 2005, p. 52) of broader cultural sector practices might be made more explicit.

Implications

A key implication of this integrative model of music is in recognising the full complexity of musical situations – especially music teaching-learning situations – and what this means for the training of musicians. In an industry where the traditional boundaries between the fields of music performance and music education have become much more porous, musicians require an understanding of music that goes well beyond just being able to play their instrument well, encompassing a range of pedagogical knowledge and skills for working with a wide range of

individuals and groups in a multitude of different, changing situations, including those where music may be used as a vehicle for bringing about social change, or increased levels of individual self-expression and actualisation.

The integrative model of 'music in three dimensions' also helps to resolve some of the philosophical challenges contained in the long-standing 'aesthetic vs. praxial' debate, by recognising that both of these dimensions of music are valid, and the interplay – or "dialogic space" (Wegerif, 2012, p. 158) – between them helps to create a richer context of musical meaning, especially when understood in relation to the 'social' aspects of music, which helps embed that meaning deeply within people's lived experience of music.

A further implication relating to the way this model has evolved, is in recognising that this concept might be regarded as simply one outcome of situating HE provision inside 'real world' cultural sector practices which, almost by definition, have evolved in more practical ways without necessarily being grounded in academic knowledge. When we are required to articulate 'real world' practices in academic terms, it is perhaps inevitable that new knowledge will result, as we discover new ways of articulating those practices. It would be reasonable to expect that applying a similar principle of using 'real world' situations to host undergraduate learning would result in similar epistemological developments, which might in turn support the Arts sector to develop stronger arguments about the value of the Arts in Society.

Conclusion

To conclude, the 'music in three dimensions' model provides a dialogic way of conceiving of musical practices, recognising the importance and inter-play between three complementary, integrated dimensions of music: the aesthetic / presentational; the praxial / participatory; and the social. It enables a more sophisticated discussion of what constitutes 'quality' in musical practices, by recognising that any such discussion needs to be grounded in a clear contextual understanding of musical situations, which are subject to change.

It also provides a useful insight into what happens when undergraduate music learning is situated inside the 'real world' practices of a large music organisation. There are clear benefits to students as they not only learn about the musical practices which drive the organisation, but also contribute to an ongoing process of articulating those practices, introducing them 'first hand' to the kind of epistemological developments which can occur within an action research context. The model itself has proved useful – at least to the organisation – as a way of refining and articulating Sage Gateshead's artistic purpose, and has also fed into broader discourses about the quality of Participatory Arts practices (Camlin, 2015a).

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