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Whose quality is it anyway? Inhabiting the creative tension between presentational and participatory music

ABSTRACT

The complexity of identifying what constitutes quality in the field of Participatory Music is increased by contrasting it with its counterpart Presentational Music. Resorting to dichotomous positions – e.g. process vs product; access vs excellence; technical vs ethical – only helps to partially understand this complexity. In this article, I argue that applying a dialogic perspective of 'creative tension' to the continuums of practice between Presentational Music, Participatory Music and more socially or ethically engaged practices enables us to talk about issues of musical quality in participatory settings in a more meaningful and consistent way. This dialogic approach may also help to resolve similar dichotomies in broader Participatory Arts practice.

KEYWORDS

participatory music
presentational music
dialogue
creative tension
quality
participatory arts

1. The Paul Hamlyn Foundation-funded UK national special initiative to develop the theory and practice of Arts in participatory settings. The short courses in ArtWorks NE were established to introduce artists aspiring to work in participatory settings to some of the key issues of practice and thought surrounding this field.

INTRODUCTION

One of the areas essential to developing a practice in Participatory Arts is in understanding what constitutes ‘quality’. How do we measure it? What do we look for? How do we support it? Plan for it? Does it correspond with ‘aesthetic’ notions of artistic quality, and if so, how? Discussing such matters opens up a complex and contested field with many dissenting views. At its conclusion, the ArtWorks project itself acknowledged that it had ‘struggled with how to address [the] problems’ associated with the thorny question of ‘quality’, and even ‘whether there needs to be a coherent “answer” to this problem’ (Burns 2015: 45). Quality clearly matters, to all involved – artists, participants, employers / commissioners / managers – but the ‘lack of a shared sense of what constitutes quality contributes to the widespread ‘second class’ image of arts in participatory settings’ (2015: 45).

It is not my intention in this article to further stoke the fires of those already lively debates; instead, I wish to set out an alternative way of considering the issues, using a dialogic perspective to resolve some of the apparent contradictions and conflicting views. Although my ideas may have emerged in a particular situation – including being part of a small group of artists, academics and organizations developing a series of short courses within the ArtWorks NE pathfinder project (ArtWorks NE 2013)¹ – I hope they have some relevance beyond this point of origin. Also, because I am a musician who works in participatory settings themselves, the specific examples I will draw on to illustrate this perspective are largely musical, although again, I hope that some of what I have to say will resonate with colleagues working in or with other disciplines and art-forms. Participation may mean quite different things to different art-forms, but there are also inevitable similarities and correspondences.

The fundamental question we are seeking to answer when it comes to understanding quality in any artistic practice, including art in participatory settings, is how do we know whether something is any good? Moreover, to ask the question, ‘is it any good?’ contains within it the assumption that we already know what it is good *for*. Since the social value of the arts was made explicit in the late 1990s (Matarasso 1997), we have known that there is more to art than just its aesthetic qualities, yet ‘aesthetic’ measures of quality are often still our preferred benchmark, even when the explicit premise of a participatory arts experience may be about social cohesion, ‘health musicking’ (Trondalen and Ole Bonde 2013; Ruud 2013) or a host of other social outcomes. It is not that ‘aesthetic’ quality is not important in participatory arts practice. Far from it – aesthetic quality *is* important, not least to the participants involved, and the artists for that matter. However, the question of ‘quality’ is simply more complicated than having a single aesthetic quality measure – in music, ‘the beauty or “meaning” of its sonorous forms’ (Elliott and Silverman 2013) – to be applied across all instances of musicking as the primary measure of quality.

Part of the problem with the word ‘quality’ is that it can be used to mean very different things. We may naturally use it to refer to the ‘aesthetic’ qualities of a given instance of art, but we may also use the term to refer to the process of its creation, or the means of its access and inclusion. It is easy for these different meanings of the word ‘quality’ to be conflated, and become confused. At worst, we can end up with situations where aesthetic quality may be considered to be high but the quality of access and inclusion is low, or

vice versa. From these dichotomized positions, we can become embroiled in fierce disagreements about quality, which ultimately waste energy that could be put to better use in the development of practice.

Despite nearly twenty years of arts policy geared around the social benefits of arts participation, it is clear that more sophisticated conceptions of quality, which can be applied across a wider range of artistic experience, are still under development. We say we want ‘Great Art for Everyone’ (Arts Council England 2010) or ‘Inspiring Music for All’ (Zeserson 2014), but the fact that we have to still say it merely emphasizes the fact that we are not there yet, as the recent Warwick Commission report testifies:

The [UK] government and the Cultural and Creative Industries need to take a united and coherent approach that guarantees equal access for everyone to a rich cultural education and the opportunity to live a creative life. There are barriers and inequalities in Britain today that prevent this from being a universal human right. This is bad for business and bad for society.

(Neelands et al. 2015: 8)

The central tension here is how to achieve both artistic excellence (Great Art) and universal access (Everyone), and the complexity of this relationship is further compounded by the rapid and massive changes to the music industry itself. The question ‘is it any good?’ has become more complex since the advent of the Internet, as increasingly digital methods of distribution of music have brought about the collapse of the ‘hit’ economy and a burgeoning of ‘niche’ markets in music (Anderson 2009). In the Internet age, artistic quality has become mediated less by the traditional institutions of quality – concert halls, radio stations, record stores – and much more by individual taste.

Armed with such individualized notions of quality, there is much less consensus about what is ‘any good’ any more, as the decline in sales of music singles demonstrates. Competition for audiences across these ‘niche’ markets is therefore fierce, which further drives up presentational standards. Into this competitive context, participatory arts practice may least resemble the kinds of artistic practice of its ‘aesthetic’ counterpart, and without a more holistic understanding of arts practice, there is a danger that participatory arts practice will simply be considered ‘not as good’ as more presentational art forms. To combat this, if we accept that the value of art is different in different situations, then we need a way of understanding quality in arts practice that is not fixed and immutable, but rather contingent upon its particular situation.

Addressing these issues of quality is important not just for those working in participatory arts settings, but for everyone working in the arts and in arts education. Because of the way that the Internet has democratized notions of musical quality in its brief history, we should expect that the future will bring more of the same, with increasingly individualized standards of quality. Unless we are able to develop a more holistic understanding of quality across presentational and participatory art forms, we run the risk of becoming factionalized and fragmented as a sector, at precisely the time we need to be at our most unified if the vision of ‘Great Art for Everyone’ is to be achieved.

2. I use the verb 'to musick' throughout this article in line with Christopher Small's definition of the term, meaning to, 'take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing' (Small 1998: 9).

EXAMPLES

Discussing issues of quality within music is therefore not straightforward, especially when the lines between performance and participation become blurred. Within this article, I will refer to a number of different kinds of musicking² situations to illustrate some of these distinctions. Rather than presenting these distinctions in purely conceptual terms, I think it is easier to understand them when we can ground them in concrete experience. To that end, let me start with a few examples from my own experiences of musical situations, and let me invite you to substitute examples of your own:

Example 1: 1987, and I am in the audience at Cropredy Festival in the United Kingdom when John Martyn and Danny Thompson play the ambient track 'Small Hours'. The echoes and reverberation of John Martyn's open-tuned echoplexed guitar fill the air around us, and the sun slowly sets. I imagine deep rich colours of orange and purple, but that might be a fantasy of memory. The overall effect is mesmerizing and transcendent, and I listen in awed and reverential silence to the subtle craft of the two performers, feeling transported through the music as it dissolves around me.

Example 2: Summer 2013, and I'm on an outdoor stage in the sun leading Solfest's annual 'community musical'. The core house band of professional musicians is joined onstage by a 30 strong community choir including some Community Music students from Sage Gateshead, as well as festivalgoers who have learned the material at workshops over the weekend. Song sheets are distributed throughout the audience and more people join in. Onstage, three actors weave a dramatic narrative between the songs, of how nearby town Aspatria got its name, while just offstage, a phalanx of ukulele players are joined by the mighty Boom Dang percussion ensemble for a rousing finale involving the whole audience learning a simple celebratory traditional English folk dance. By the end, the festival field is a sea of singing and dancing bodies.

Example 3: c.2002, and a CoMusica (Youth Music Action Zone) showcase in Stockton-on-Tees features the debut performance of a rock band of primary school children barely taller than their guitars. Despite their nascent technical skill and occasional hesitancy, they play a convincing short set of covers and also a song they have written. They have the trope of rock musician down to a tee, with all the necessary postures and gestures to delight their audience, who are clearly amazed and surprised at their considerable achievement.

Example 4: July 2014, and a delegation of partners from a pan-European 'Erasmus' exchange programme gather in the evening in a local pub in west Cumbria for an informal singaround. Groups of singers from the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, Slovakia and Turkey share songs from their own localities, but when the repertoire shifts into Beatles territory, everyone joins in. There is no real leader – someone starts singing and the room joins in. The language barriers that have been carefully navigated during the day's workshop disappear, and the party is transformed into a cohesive, united choir. Gradually, more of the hostelry's 'locals' are drawn in, and soon the whole pub is singing together, our unity confirmed with much smiling, laughter and eye contact.

DIFFERENT QUALITIES

In each of the examples above, one might say that there is an underpinning quality, but to look for comparison between the transcendent experience of John Martyn's technical guitar wizardry with a pub singalong is to miss the

point. Whilst both might be considered instances of ‘quality’ musicking in their own way, there are clearly different kinds of quality in play. The first three examples all involve stage performances, but they are different kinds of performance. The last three examples all involve participation of some kind, but again, they are different kinds of participation. So, given these significant differences in form, what criteria do we use to judge?

I will look at each of these examples in a little more detail, but it is worth explaining how I see the connections between them. Example 1 is what I would consider to be an instance of an ‘aesthetic’ musicking, the kind of ‘strong experience’ (Gabrielsson 2011) that many of us may bring to mind when asked to recall a piece of music that has moved us and left an impression. I am not participating in the music any more than as a listener, but my senses are fully engaged. Example 4 is a kind of musicking at the opposite end of the spectrum I’m about to describe, where again it is a ‘strong experience’, but one where everyone is actively involved as participants in the music. The other two examples are ones that don’t seem to fit neatly into one kind of experience or the other, and I shall come on to those shortly.

The need to understand musicking from a perspective that goes beyond purely ‘aesthetic’ criteria is not new. David Elliott’s seminal work, *Music Matters* (Elliott 1995) is perhaps the earliest explicit articulation of the view that, ‘music is a human practice, and all musical practices depend on a form of knowledge called musicianship that is procedural in essence’ (Elliott 1995: 247), giving rise to what he terms a ‘praxial’ approach to musicking, where, ‘music can only be understood and experienced in relation to contexts of socio-musical practice’ (Elliott and Silverman 2013: 30). Away from the sphere of formal musical performance, ‘people concerned with music and health, music and education, and so forth, are ill-served by adopting – or assuming – the aesthetic concept, or what others often call the work-centred or “fine art” concept of music’ (Elliott and Silverman 2013).³ As Elliott and Silverman conclude, on its own, the traditional aesthetic concept of music simply isn’t able to qualify all instances of musicking.

3. Notwithstanding the valuable challenges to this traditional notion of aesthetics that recent writers have made (Bourriaud 2002; Kester 2005), within this article I am restricting my usage of the term to the more traditional view of it expressed by Elliot and Silverman.

PRESENTATIONAL AND PARTICIPATORY MUSIC

In *Music as Social Life* (2008), Thomas Turino goes so far as to separate instances of music-making into what he sees as quite different ‘fields’ of practice. *Presentational Music* ‘is a field involving one group of people (the artists) providing music for another (the audience) in which there is pronounced artist-audience separation within face-to-face situations’ (Turino 2008: 51). This position corresponds with Example 1 in my outline. He also introduces the idea of *Participatory Performance* as, ‘a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role’ (Turino 2008: 26). Within the traditional ‘aesthetic’ model of music, performance may be considered as, ‘a complex network of relations connecting musical agents, works, sound, and listeners’ (Godlovitch 1998: 4). However, Turino’s definition of participatory *performance* describes instances of musicking that may well include some or all of these features, but equally that may not, where those involved are neither performers nor audience, but all participants, ‘actively contributing to the sound and motion of a musical event through dancing, singing, clapping, and playing musical instruments when each of

these activities is considered integral to the performance' (Turino 2008: 27). This corresponds to Example 4.

This distinction is a really useful one, as it makes clear that,

situations of participatory music-making are not just informal or amateur, that is, lesser versions of the "real music" made by the pros but that, in fact, they are something else – a different form of art and activity entirely – and they should be conceptualised and valued as such.

(Turino 2008: 25)

He goes on:

It is not that one type of music making is better or more valuable than the other; it is simply that they are different, with different social functions, responsibilities, and other sound features that make them work. It is for these reasons that participatory musical styles do not transfer well to presentational stage situations, in spite of Nationalists', folklorists', and academics' attempts to bring them into presentational settings. It is also for these reasons that it is a mistake to judge music-making in one field on the terms of the other.

(Turino 2008: 44)

Accordingly, how quality is measured in each instance of musical performance is substantially different. Turino identifies many characteristics of presentational music which determine its quality, including, 'planned contrasts of all types – rhythmic, metric, melodic, harmonic, dynamic, a shifting emphasis on different instrumental timbres' (2008: 58), as well as 'individual virtuosity, variability of rhythms, transparent textures and timbres' (2008: 60). Many other writers have written extensively on the subject of what constitutes quality in – what Turino would term 'presentational' – musical performance, where the emphasis is on, for example, 'defined, technical standards expected by audiences' (Rink 2002) or the technical (and ethical) skills of musical production (O'Dea 2000) or the clearly defined criteria by which a musical performance might even be considered as such (Godlovitch 1998).

The musical characteristics of participatory music are, Turino argues, very different. 'Densely overlapping textures, wide tunings, consistently loud volume, and buzzy timbres are extremely common sound features of participatory music throughout the world. Taken together, these aspects provide a crucial *cloaking function* that helps inspire musical participation' (Turino 2008: 46). Music that is less exposing for those participating, which makes it easier to join in with.

Moreover, apart from these significant differences in musical characteristics, the overall purpose of participatory performance is substantially different to that of its counterpart: 'participatory values are distinctive in that the success of a performance is more importantly judged by the degree and intensity of participation than by some abstracted assessment of the musical sound quality' (Turino 2008: 33). Hence it is the social aspects of the musicking that are emphasized rather than the musical. 'Put another way, participating in music and dance is more about the social relations being realised through the performance than about producing art that can somehow be abstracted from those social relations' (Turino 2008: 36).

A simple answer then, to the question of this article might be to suggest that for any instance of musical performance, we need first to identify what the performance is *for*. Different quality standards apply for presentational

and participatory music, and we need to judge each instance by the appropriate quality measures. If the purpose is to realize an instance of presentational music, traditional ‘aesthetic’ standards apply. If participation – in its purest sense – is the purpose, then,

the quality of the performance is ultimately judged on the level of participation achieved. Quality is also gauged by how participants feel during the activity, with little thought to how the music and dance might sound or look apart from the act of doing and those involved.

(Turino 2008: 28)

IS THAT ENOUGH?

However, separating out musicking into two discrete sets of practices with their own standards of quality might help to resolve some of the more philosophical contradictions inherent in musicking as a totality, but is it enough? While this kind of classification may be helpful when judging the quality of a given instance of music that falls neatly into either field, a lot of musical activities don’t submit easily to this classification. Sometimes it might feel like both, as my earlier examples illustrate. Indeed, ‘the dynamics of preparation [for presentational performance] typically mirror participatory performance itself’ (Turino 2008: 53), while some inspirational and virtuosic presentational performers – Bobby McFerrin springs to mind – tirelessly seek to break down the conventional boundaries of the performer–audience relationship through their art, transforming enthusiastic audiences into co-participants engaged in a collaborative performance.

Although he identifies some of the creative considerations manifest in his own Zydeco band creating music that people can both listen and/or dance to (Turino 2008: 55–56), Turino’s conception only touches briefly on the practical challenges and implications of creating work intended for either field of presentational or participatory music, and the inevitable influence of the other field on such acts of creation. It is clear enough that work created exclusively for presentational contexts, when it is understood as such by all involved – e.g. composer, musician/s and audience – may be judged by the quality standards relating exclusively to presentational music. Similarly, instances of exclusively participatory performance, when it is understood as such by all those participating, may be judged by the quality measures relating exclusively to participatory music, as outlined above. However, what about instances of musicking that start off as participatory opportunities, but that become presentational? Or vice versa? How do we judge the quality of a Bobby McFerrin gig? On his solo performance alone, or on the extent to which everyone in the auditorium becomes an active musical participant? Or, to paraphrase Brian Eno, ‘when faced with a choice’, do we judge ‘both’ (Eno 1979)?

Without a more sophisticated way of understanding and describing this complex relationship between the quality of presentational and participatory music, we inevitably run the risk of judging one field of musicking by the quality standards of its counterpart. And, because the ‘aesthetic’ model of presentational music represents the dominant cultural perspective, it tends to be the quality standards of presentational music that are used to measure the quality of all music, both presentational and participatory, often to the detriment of the participatory (ArtWorks 2015: 5).

However, it is not enough to say that we *shouldn't* judge the quality of participatory music by the quality standards of presentational music. For many participants, that is what they are aspiring to, and for their performance to be judged solely by how much fun they appear to be having, rather than more presentational quality measures, can quickly become patronizing. So how do we resolve this apparent contradiction?

DIALOGICS

Regardless of how far we might agree with Turino's assertion that, 'the values and goals of presentational performance lead to different criteria for creating and judging good music' (Turino 2008: 52), rather than thinking of his definitions of presentational and participatory music as binary opposites, it may be helpful to consider them as complementary states, held in a kind of creative tension. Or as different ends of a continuum of musical practice that exert a tensile force on each other from opposing directions. In many – if not most – instances of musicking, both fields of musical practices and their attendant measures of quality are invoked, albeit to greater or lesser extents. Presentational and participatory influences are present in all instances of musicking which don't sit exclusively in one camp or the other. To my mind, that's most music.

Once we start talking in terms of 'creative tension' between perspectives, we are already in the linguistic realm of dialogics, where, 'meaning always assumes at least two perspectives held together in creative tension' (Wegerif 2012: 158). The term 'dialogic' is,

a word coined by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin to name a discussion which does not resolve itself by finding common ground. Though no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another.

(Sennett 2012: 18)

Therefore, from a dialogic perspective, we don't *have* to classify music into either camp. Neither do we need to resort to just using a set of traditional 'aesthetic' measures to assess its quality. Rather, we recognize the creative 'pull' of either field on the other, and start to see how this might help to assess the quality of music which doesn't fall squarely into either classification. In fact, through the application of a dialogical 'frame', Turino's fields of musicking become points along a continuum, with presentational music at one end, and participatory music at the other, in a state of creative tension within which the diverse panoply of music is realized (see Figure 1). It is precisely this creative tension that gives rise to exciting new forms: 'new ideas simply keep popping into existence stimulated by what Bakhtin refers to as the 'inter-animation' of different perspectives' (Wegerif 2012).

Understanding these key differential aspects of music, and the interplay between them, is essential for those wishing to work in musical fields, and yet it is something that until recently has largely evaded discussion for want of a conceptual 'frame' through which to view it. Turino's work in particular makes this possible, because his setting out of an independent quality standard for participatory music creates a new perspective. When we view these fields within a dialogic 'frame' we see them as complementary forces, whose arising 'creative



Figure 1: Presentational-participatory continuum.

tension' creates the 'dialogic space', or 'dialogic gap – the gap between perspectives in a dialogue' (Wegerif 2012) where their interplay can be examined.

While Turino argues that 'there is a different "head" or mindset among musicians who habitually operate in one or the other of these two fields' (Turino 2008: 54), I think this is only partially true. The creative tension between presentational and participatory kinds of musicking is something that some musicians – and perhaps especially, 'musicians who think of themselves also as teachers' (Swanwick 1999: i) – have to navigate on a regular – perhaps daily basis. If we lead participatory music activity, we are often leading participants across the 'dialogic gap' from participation into the realms of presentational performance, and it is important that we – if not our participants as well – understand how the land shifts under us as we make that transition.

In western cultures, we are surrounded – some would say bombarded – by instances of presentational music, often in recorded formats, on the TV and radio, in advertising, at social events, while we drive, exercise, or in the background as we work. Therefore, our expectations of participatory music are mediated, at least in part, by our cultural immersion in the presentational. Outside of the purely participatory musical cultures, which Turino describes – e.g. Conima communities in Peru and Shona communities in Zimbabwe – it is hard to think of situations where participatory musical traditions are *not* mediated by their relation to presentational standards. If the young rock band in Example 3 (above) couldn't really play their instruments at all, merely applauding their participation would feel inauthentic, for all concerned. Despite their emergent technical skills, the fact that their playing is recognizably aspiring to high presentational standards is important, not least to them. Which isn't to say that their performance should be judged *solely* on presentational standards either. As beginners, it is entirely appropriate for them to receive positive recognition of their participatory achievement; the attendant increase in their confidence and self-esteem will spur them on to greater achievement in the future.

Similarly, outside of exclusively presentational contexts like a classical music performance, it is hard to think of music that is developed within high presentational standards of realization, which is *not* considered stronger the more people are able to join in with it. As well as examples like the 'Solfest Community Musical' (Example 2), visiting many pubs in the United Kingdom at the weekend one is likely to encounter groups or individuals singing along and/or dancing to highly presentational live or recorded music, and concerts of presentational music in our music stadiums and music festivals would be

unnaturally sombre events without high levels of committed participation by the audience. An audience's committed participation, by joining in with the singing or by dancing, can often be the fuel that drives the presentational musician to increasingly more virtuosic displays of musicianship. 'You've been a great audience!' is more than just a way of saying thank you; it is also an acknowledgment of the complex interplay between musical presentation and participation.

Even communities of the most presentational forms like classical music recognize the need for music to *mean* something beyond its intrinsic aesthetic quality, even if that wouldn't extend to audience participation in performance. Daniel Barenboim points out how even the classical music community can easily become, 'a community made up of artists and audience that is an ivory-tower community, because both have lost a great part of the connection between music and everything else' (Rusbridger 2013: 210). Whilst remaining strongly within presentational traditions, there is still an ethical 'pull' on classical music to be a voice in the dialogue of participation, as evidenced by the many and diverse educational initiatives like 'In Harmony' (Arts Council 2008) projects in the United Kingdom.

If most music might be considered to sit somewhere along this presentation-participatory continuum, and if we accept that through a dialogic perspective, these fields are held in 'creative tension' with one another, it also makes sense that most – although probably not all – music will manifest as being more closely aligned with the practices of one or the other field, whilst being simultaneously drawn – to a greater or lesser degree – towards its counterpart at the other end of the continuum. Rather than a third 'field' – neither *a* nor *b* – which sits somewhere in between the two which Turino outlines, a dialogic perspective gives us a more dynamic and blended model of 'push and pull' between the complementary fields of presentational and participatory (see Figure 2).

To return to my earlier examples, if we accept that John Matryn at Cropredy 1987 (Example 1) might be what Turino would describe as a more obviously presentational performance, and the pub singalong (Example 4) a participatory one, the other two examples might be described as more 'blended' instances of performance, although with subtly different qualities. To make comparisons between these similar positions, suppose we refer to instances of musicking such as the Solfest Community Musical (Example 2) or a Bobby McFerrin gig as a kind of performance-as-participation, where the intention is to create a performance whose quality can be measured in presentational terms, but which also seeks to recruit audience members as co-participants. And suppose we refer to instances of musicking such as the young rock bands showcase (Example 3) as a kind of participation-as-performance, where

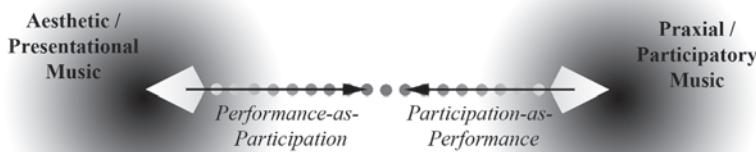


Figure 2: Simultaneously pulled in both directions.

musical activity that started as a participatory activity is making the transition to a presentational context. Their quality can be examined in terms of both presentational and participatory standards of quality, but to different degrees.

I don't suggest these categories as some kind of rigid taxonomy, rather the difference in emphasis is to recognize different positions along the presentational-participatory continuum where subtly different qualities are invoked. If they are of any use as terms, it is merely to highlight the difference between an instance of musicking that is presentational being drawn towards participation, and one that is participatory being drawn towards presentation. The important point here is the dialogic notion of 'creative tension', which – in this model – every instance of musicking that is neither exclusively presentational nor participatory is subject to. Furthermore, because 'musicking is situated; it is always linked to a site and a situation' (Stige 2013), and because every instance of musicking is situated differently, the implication is that we also have to judge each instance of music differently, with reference to its wider specific context.

PARTICIPATION-AS-PERFORMANCE

Because of the ubiquity of presentational forms in western culture, through the mass media and our increasingly digital relationships with music via radio, television and the Internet, participants may well be drawn into musical participation through being inspired by the presentational performances of their favourite musical artists. It is therefore not surprising that groups that start life as participatory opportunities can quickly aspire to presentational performance to a public audience. The community choir, for example, who might have formed out of purely social intent, may very quickly find themselves performing in public, in effect swapping a participatory set of musical practices for a presentational one. And when they do perform, it is often to audiences composed largely of friends and family, so the artist-audience dynamic is subtly different to that of a purely presentational performance. While the erstwhile participants now feel like performers, their audience may well be still applauding their participation, not the musical quality of their performance.

Navigating the 'dialogic gap' between the two fields can provoke high levels of anxiety and unease, as group members sense that they are now engaged in a subtly different set of practices, but can't quite say what the difference is. The songs, as it were, remain the same, but the context of their realization as music is very different. Whereas before, with more emphasis on participation, singing in the group was fun and social, now there is more focus on presentational 'quality': singing the parts correctly, in time, in tune and often from memory. In other words, in the community centre without an audience, it matters more whether people are joining in, whereas when performing to an audience it matters if the right words and notes are sung, or whether there is agreement about vowel sound, intonation or articulation within the group. The more focus there is on presentational performance, the more it matters.

The increasing levels of arousal within individuals in the group as they move towards performance can be experienced as excitement. Critically, this increased arousal can also be experienced as unpleasant and bring about a good deal of anxiety (Apter 2007). As levels of arousal increase, more of the group find themselves switching emotionally between excitement and anxiety. This mixture of excitement and anxiety now permeates the group dynamic, with individuals often switching between the two states with an intensity that

some find exhilarating, but that others find so uncomfortable that they cease their membership of the group. While psychological models of arousal like Reversal Theory (Apter 2007) can explain this phenomenon, the lived experience of those involved can be contradictory, confusing and uncomfortable. Participants may get excited as the day of the performance approaches, but on the day itself, this excitement ‘flips’ into fear and panic, which only ‘flips’ back into excitement again once they are on stage. Some participatory ensembles resist the opportunity to perform in public for precisely the reason that it changes how they approach their musicking, and introduces discomfort and anxiety which is counter to the group’s *raison d’être*.

The responsibilities of leadership within such a context can be equally challenging. Knowing how to support individual group members with the appropriate blend of encouragement, reassurance, praise, attention to detail and corrective technique requires patience and considerable skill. Needless to say, in order to facilitate participation towards presentation, it is important that musicians leading participatory work have high levels of presentational performative skill and experience themselves, so that they are able to understand how to influence the group production of musical qualities – good tone, accurate intonation and phrasing and so on – which will be used to judge the quality of the group’s presentational performance. And of course, those performative skills need to be understood explicitly rather than tacitly, so that they can be communicated and taught effectively. They also need to be coupled with an effective pedagogical approach, so that learning is maximized.

There is also a responsibility to make sure that any resulting work is ‘ready’ for presentation to a public audience, in terms of its correspondence with presentational standards. This responsibility is due mainly to the participants, so that their experience of public performance is not marred by feelings of discomfort, or by a less than enthusiastic audience response. It is also a responsibility due to the field of participatory music itself; its undeserved reputation as a somehow ‘lesser’ version of the ‘real music’ (Turino 2008: 25) is no doubt reinforced when it is brought into the public arena before it is ready i.e. before enough attention has been given to the shaping of its musical features so that they fall recognizably within presentational standards.

More broadly, there are other interesting tensions surrounding the movement of participatory musical traditions into the presentational arena: ‘stylistic transformations have occurred in various parts of the world where participatory traditions are adapted for presentational performance’ (Turino 2008: 60). This ‘professionalization’ of traditionally participatory music is of ongoing musical and ethical interest, as performers and audiences navigate the ambiguous territory where cultures of performance and participation elide. The widespread adoption of presentational standards like silent audience appreciation of performances, for example, may have helped to elevate some traditionally participatory music to the same stages and venues as more established presentational forms, but raises ethical tensions about maintaining an authentic connection to participatory roots. The ‘professionalization’ of the UK folk industry (Winter and Keegan-Phipps 2013) is a good example of this phenomenon.

PERFORMANCE-AS-PARTICIPATION

Turino’s assertion that ‘presentational performers do not feel the responsibility to make music that will provide a comfortable basis for others to join in’ (Turino 2008: 56), is also only partially true. Many modern presentational

performances are explicitly courting participation, sometimes on a mass level. The proliferation of so-called ‘reality’ TV music shows that rely on audience participation, or recent forays by well-known artists into the commercial world of musical theatre bear testimony to this. Stadium rock as a genre relies heavily on the interplay between presentation and participation, and in other contexts – jazz and blues, for example – virtuosic displays of musicianship are routinely met with active audience appreciation – applause, cheers – while the music continues, something culturally unacceptable in other, more highly presentational musical forms where it would be considered a distraction, or disrespectful to the performers. Misreading or misunderstanding this dynamic can be awkward for both artist and audience. I remember seeing Ravi Shankar chastise a spontaneously cheering WOMAD audience in the 1990s with the disparaging rebuke, ‘this is not *pop* music’, and wondering at the time about the very different expectations of a world music festival audience looking for a good time, and an iconic musician performing at the highest standards of presentational excellence.

OTHER DICHOTOMIES

Elsewhere (Camlin 2015), I refer to the way that a dialogic perspective also helps to resolve some of the other apparent dichotomies that influence the development of Participatory Arts. When we value all perspectives, rather than just settling on one and defending it to the death, the age-old arguments about ‘access vs excellence’, ‘ethical vs technical’, ‘process vs product/goal’ become irrelevant. Dialogics can transform these dichotomous positions from oppositional and binary states into forces that have the potential to strengthen the work. Access, excellence, ethics, technique, process and product/goal are all to be desired, and their active pursuit introduces creative tension within the work which in turn, helps to raise it to a higher level.

I have heard colleagues refer to these dichotomies as ‘tightropes’ that must be walked, but when we view these tensions in dialogic terms, they become oppositional forces that, when pulled taut, create strength. Viewed from a monologic perspective, each dichotomy might present a precarious pair of poles which appear to be exclusive and binary – you are either balancing on one or the other, and often defending it *against* the other. However, viewed dialogically,



Figure 3: Creative tension resolves dichotomies.

and especially when a number of these apparent dichotomies are brought into play, their opposition creates an even wider ‘dialogic space’ that benefits from the positive tensile force of all of its constituents, rather like the way the oppositional springs in a trampoline pull together to create a secure platform that will support a number of bodies (see Figure 3). The phrase, ‘access to excellence’ is a good way of demonstrating this dialogic interrelationship.

BEYOND THE CONTINUUM – MUSIC IN THREE DIMENSIONS

I think there is one further step that we can take in understanding the implications of using a dialogic perspective to understand issues of quality in participatory music, and music in general. The continuum I have described so far, from presentational to participatory music, is really only a partial description of a bigger picture. If we think of Turino’s fields of music as ‘dimensions’, I believe there is a third dimension that must also be accounted in assessing music’s quality, and this is its actual impact, on listeners and/or participants. In short, its capacity to create ‘strong experiences’ (Gabrielsson 2011) or social impact.

Taking Turino’s social model of participatory music as an example, we can see that the goals of musical participation – collective participation and enjoyment – are broadly humanistic, to do with individual ‘self-actualization’ through social connection. Or, as Freire would have it, to do with ‘the individual’s ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human’ (Freire 1970: 37), achieved through collective participation because, ‘self-actualisation is possible only as a side effect of self-transcendence’ (Frankl 1946: 2).

These goals could be realized through any number of activities; they are not exclusive to music, as they represent a kind of humanistic concern with self-actualization, which is non-art-form specific, or not even specifically to do with the arts. After all, Socially Engaged Art (SEA) (Helguera 2011) is only one manifestation of a socially engaged practice; participation in the arts might be a valuable factor in human health and well-being, but it is not an exclusive relationship. Music might be the vehicle by which some people strive for self-actualization, but for others it might be sport, or employment, or parenthood, or any one of an almost infinite host of activities, practices or identities.

Neither is this aspiration to social impact exclusive to music participation. Presentational forms of music aspire to the same kind of transformative impact on listeners, as participatory forms hope to have on participants. They simply seek to achieve it in different ways. More aesthetic forms of music look to ‘the beauty or “meaning” of its sonorous forms’ (Elliott and Silverman 2013) to transform the lives of listeners, while participatory forms look to accomplish similar transformational social ends through acts of collective expression and creativity. In fact, the greatest social impact of music may come from the more mundane ‘everyday’ ways in which we use it to alter our mood or levels or levels of arousal, either through playing music, or simply through listening to it (Bernatzky et al. 2013; Trondalen and Ole Bonde 2013; Schellenberg 2013):

Insofar as music listening can influence health, it offers a number of advantages. Aside from people with impaired hearing, it is readily available to all parts of society (unlike, for instance, theatre and opera), and it can be tailored to personal taste. Therefore, it may reach those that do not normally ‘consume’ other kinds of culture. Moreover, music can be consumed in many different contexts; it is not tied to a particular time or location. From an intervention point of view, additional advantages

include that music is inexpensive, easy to administer, and arguably has few if any negative secondary effects, in contrast to, for instance, prescription drugs and other approaches to addressing stress-related ill-health.

(Västfjäll et al. 2013: 406)

When we consider these different dimensions of music as being in ‘creative tension’ with each other, it becomes clear that music’s affect is complex and far-reaching. Any given instance of music might therefore be seen to have three forces acting upon it simultaneously: towards the aesthetic, the praxial and the third dimension of social impact.

The further along the path of social impact, the more we are moving out of an exclusively musical dimension, into a dimension of more socially engaged practices. A social pedagogue, youth worker, or indeed a clinician, might approach music – or art more generally – from the perspective of one of a possible range of interventions that might support a client’s development, health or well-being. From this perspective, art is just one means of bringing about social change, health and well-being or personal development and self-actualization; there are many others.

On the other hand, artists may tend to be reaching out from their artform practice – presentational, participatory or an integration of both – to achieve social impact. The more socially engaged the practice, the more the particular artistic skills sets involved become increasingly less critical, in favour of a socially engaged attitude to practice that sees past the particularities of individual art forms to the diverse needs of individual people. From the point of view of participatory music, because music-making has benefits outside of just getting better *at* music-making, the goal of music-making isn’t – and shouldn’t be – exclusively about achieving one’s potential as a performer, but also about achieving one’s potential as a human being.

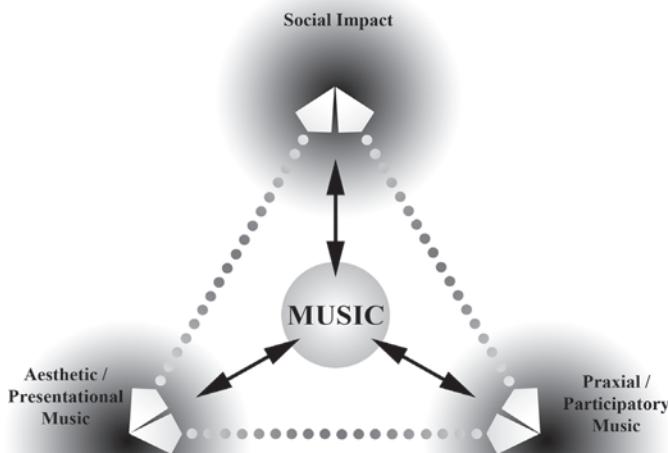


Figure 4: Music in three dimensions.

Of course, ‘nothing worth having about artistic experiences can be delivered. It can only be enabled’ (Matarasso 2014), so our aspirations for the transformational power of music – or art more generally – can only be realized when they are matched by a corresponding connection with an individual’s aspiration for their own development or self-actualization. We can plan for social impact, but we cannot guarantee it (Matarasso 1997: ix). However, activation of the dimension of social impact is facilitated when either or both of the other dimensions – aesthetic/presentational and/or paraxial/participatory – are strong. Although social impact may be realized in slightly different ways through either presentational or participatory means, it is this dimension that unites the other two, and gives the act of ‘musicking’ a deeper meaning and purpose.

TEACHING SKILLS OR TEACHING PEOPLE?

Therefore, while the end result of an artistic intervention transforming the lives of learners/participants may be the same, the starting points for such an undertaking might be quite different. Hence, part of the challenge for artists working in participatory settings is in understanding whereabouts within this complex interrelationship between aesthetics, praxialism and social impact one’s practice currently inhabits, and what forces are pulling it in which direction.

In the presentational/aesthetic dimension of music education, the emphasis is on developing students'/learners' technical skills, so that they might become better performers, and manipulate sound more skilfully. At the more socially engaged dimension of this interrelationship, the emphasis is on more of an ethical position of supporting learners to realize their potential as *human beings*, so that they can more closely achieve self-actualization, through increased confidence, health, self-esteem and positive, meaningful social relations (Camlin 2015). Again, viewed dialogically, these aspirations for learners/participants are not mutually exclusive; rather, they support each other in creating a ‘dialogic space’ where the achievement of both is possible. Ideally, we want music to be the vehicle through which learners/participants can further their actualization as both performers and as people, by being part of excellent instances of accessible collective musicking. In other words, maintaining the ‘creative tension’ between these three complementary dimensions has the effect of widening the ‘dialogic space’ within which transformational work can occur.

Within music, the social aspects of Turino’s participatory music is just one example. The burgeoning music and health/well-being movement (Creech 2014; MacDonald et al. 2013), music therapy in all its forms (Pavlicevic and Ans dell 2004; Trondalen and Ole Bonde 2013; Tsiris 2014), music education itself, Community Music (CM) (Higgins 2012; Veblen et al. 2013), as well as Social Pedagogy initiatives involving music (Youth Music Network n.d.; Chambers and Petrie 2009), all point to different instances of music’s social impact in diverse contexts. Initiatives like Daniel Barenboim’s East-West Divan Orchestra (Barenboim 2009: 181) take musicking very clearly into the realms of the sociopolitical, whilst maintaining a very strong connection with the quality standards of presentational performance, while musical approaches informed by Critical Pedagogy (Abrahams n.d.) emphasizes kinds of human musical agency for social change.

Other artforms represent still more dimensions, whose presentational and participatory practices are held in a similar creative tension with their social impact, which increases the dialogic space still further. The further towards

the presentational dimension of any given artform, the more the ‘aesthetic’ quality of that artform is emphasized, and the greater value placed on the technical aspects of its realization. The further towards the socially engaged dimension, the more the practices have in common with other participatory artforms, and more ethically and socially engaged practices.

Therefore, knowing how to assess the quality of a particular instance of art participation requires us to understand first where that instance features within the ‘dialogic space’ that exists between these three dimensions. Second, we have to understand in which direction the practice is aspiring or moving, towards a more presentational, participatory or socially engaged dimension. Once we understand that, we can more easily make potentially appropriate judgements of its quality, and its direction of travel. Such judgements are not absolute; rather, they are ‘fluid, porous, negotiated affairs’ (Bowman 2009: 109), rather like the communities that give rise to them. Consensus over such judgements, reached through dialogue, can aid mutual understanding, while dissensus, or ‘agreeing to differ’ can help to widen the dialogic space still further. Participatory arts lies, then, in a ‘creative tension’ with more traditionally ‘aesthetic’ practices and more socially or ethically engaged ones. Each dimension acts as an additional voice in the dialogue between these different perspectives, enabling a richer dialogue to emerge.

CONCLUSION

The quality of participatory music – or participatory art more broadly for that matter – cannot be assessed solely by the traditional ‘aesthetic’ standards of its presentational counterpart; the context of the musicking must always be accounted. In participatory music, there is always a musical purpose, and there is also usually an extra-musical purpose. Musical participation is often a means to achieving some non-musical goal, such as the pursuit of social, educational or health benefits, as much as it is about achieving a purely musical goal. However, this is not to ‘swap’ one set of quality standards for another. We are not ‘let off the hook’ of presentational standards simply by playing the ‘participation’ card, or by referring solely to the quality of its social engagement, or health and well-being outcomes. Because of the dialogic relation of creative tension between these fields, the presentational quality of the music made in any instance of participatory music is always going to matter.

A stronger measure of quality comes from recognizing the complex inter-relationship between the different dimensions of the aesthetic, the praxial and the social, and the extent to which any given instance of art-making achieves its purpose, in relation to the creative tension that exists between them. When it comes to music, in order to understand how to assess the quality of any specified instance of musicking, we have to understand what it is *for*, in terms of the degree to which it aspires towards realization of presentational/aesthetic qualities, praxial/participatory qualities and its transformative social impact on listeners and/or participants. Therefore the quality of any given instance of musicking – including participatory music – needs to be measured by reference to an integrated and dialogic measure of quality across aesthetic, praxial and social dimensions. This same dialogic approach might also be pertinent to other artforms.

These conclusions are broadly in keeping with other findings that have emerged from the ArtWorks initiative. Just like the practices themselves, quality in participatory settings is fluid, emergent and negotiated. Above all, arts in

participatory settings are both situational *and* ‘situated’ i.e. ‘always linked to a site and a situation’ (Stige 2013), and therefore, ‘good planning must be based on a shared understanding of what quality means within the particular context of a project’ (ArtWorks 2015: 7) Adopting a dialogic frame in our discussions helps us to account for these situational factors, and thereby develop a more sophisticated understanding of how we can assess ‘quality’ in participatory arts practices.

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