

Forthcoming entry in *The Science and Psychology of Music: From Beethoven at the Office to Beyoncé at the Gym* (Edited by William Forde Thompson and Kirk N. Olsen) ABC-CLIO/Greenwood.

This chapter introduces the field of community music for the non-specialist reader.

### **15c. Music in the Community**

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Modern society offers a range of possibilities for people to engage in musical practice. These include music education programs in primary and secondary schools; specialized training in performance, theory, musicology, and composition at universities and conservatoires; as well as professional ensembles such as symphony orchestras. But people also create opportunities for music making outside of these formal institutional environments. In such contexts, musical activities are guided less by predetermined curricular requirements – or the demands of professional training and repertoire – and more by the interests of the participants and the characteristics of the local communities they share. This chapter introduces a variety of forms such community-based music making can take. In the process, you will learn about some areas of research in community music, what community music means for the people who participate in it, and what it offers for broader issues related to cultural identity, social justice, and sustainability.

#### **Community Music: What is it?**

There is a sense in which all music can be thought of as community music. Music is, after all, a highly social activity requiring cooperation and a range of shared social and cultural understandings. And indeed, music making of all kinds, in configurations large and small – such as orchestra, rock bands, taiko drumming groups, and formal music education programs – all involve people working together. Those people all live in neighborhoods, towns, and cities that support and benefit from such activities. Researchers who study community music want to know more about the various forms it takes and what it means for the lives of the people who participate in it. Because of this, they have developed various ways of looking at the subject that can help us obtain a more detailed sense of what’s involved.

For example, Lee Higgins (2012) suggests three main areas for research in community music. These involve: (i) exploring the types of musical activity that characterize a particular community more generally; (ii) examining how music is created communally between specific members of a given group; and (iii) studying the ways community music programs are designed to foster positive forms of social engagement. The first of these areas is referred to by Higgins as the “music of a community.” Here, one might think of the different musical environments created at an electronic dance music (EDM) event in Montreal, an outdoor performance of traditional folk music in Prague, or at a church service in Alabama,

and the kinds of shared experiences and collective meanings such events have for the people who participate in them as performers and listeners. In line with this, “music of a community” explores the significance of collective music making for a given culture or group of people. It involves the roles of both formal and informal types of learning and practice, and it examines the various functions music serves for the community as a whole. Put simply, “music of a community” refers to the kinds of musical practices, styles, and genres that are associated with a given group, and how the tapestry of musical activity contributes to the broader social and cultural identity.

Consider, for instance, the many ways in which drumming groups in Kopeyia, Ghana contribute to a shared understanding of the peoples, places, beliefs, and histories of the society in which that music making happens. Consider, too, how this “music of a community” helps to strengthen social and cultural belonging among the people who participate in it, both as performers and listeners. To take some other examples, one might think of the musical communities associated with rap, metal, country, blues, punk, house, and jazz. In each case, the music making is deeply connected with a shared sense of identity, which can also be reflected in the ways people speak and dress, and how they see themselves in relation to other social groups.

The second area of community music research mentioned above involves studying the activity of “communal music making.” Here, the level of inquiry shifts from the broader cultural concerns associated with “music of a community” to the more intimate level of musicians interacting in specific contexts. Consider again the example of Ghanaian drumming. The relationships between master drummer, supporting drummers, dancers, and various others involve bodily, sonic, emotional, spiritual, and other forms of social and musical communication. The ways these aspects play out may differ in performances, from group to group, and from person to person. The unique character of specific groups and events within broader musical communities can also be examined in other contexts. Think, for example, about the variety of approaches to rap that emerged in Los Angeles in the 80’s and 90’s, or the house music of Chicago that emerged in the same period, or the many current instantiations of metal music around the world. Each of these communities are established by individuals and groups that share common experiences and ideals, but who also express many differences in how they create and think about their music. Moreover, it is these differences within musical communities that keep them creatively vital. Accordingly, the theme of “communal music making” asks the researcher to examine the various ways specific members of a community go about making the music they do, how they interact with each other and collaborate, and what this means for their lives.

The third area of research involves exploring the ways communal music making programs are designed to serve as forms of active social intervention. It is these types of musical environments that many researchers refer to when they use the term “community music.” One of the main features that distinguishes this kind of community music is that it involves forms of musical learning and community

building that are intentionally situated outside of music schools and conservatories. This is because it is thought that the kinds of musical practice and learning that occur in these institutional environments often reflect too strongly the musical ideals and practices of the dominant culture. As such, they tend to ignore cultural diversity and the needs of marginalized groups. In response to these concerns, community music organizations, programs, and facilitators offer opportunities for collective music making built on principles of hospitality, inclusivity, and respect for difference, where people of various backgrounds and abilities can come together and participate in the creation of a musical community.

Community music programs are guided by highly skilled facilitators who aim to foster creativity and collaboration among participants, where personal and social growth is as important as musical development. Ideally, the musical activities of these groups are not meant to adhere to some pre-given model, but rather reflect the goals and backgrounds of the people who constitute them. As such, community music remains open to a range of musical and cultural perspectives – the “music of communities” and forms of “communal music making” mentioned above. However, as these programs often comprise people of various ages and cultural backgrounds, participants are encouraged to collectively develop their own approaches to music making. As a result, improvisation, exploration, experimentation, collaboration, and shared self-assessments play important roles in community music programs.

### **History and Uses of Community Music Programs**

Precursors to the kinds of community music programs just mentioned can be traced back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, community music as a critical form of social intervention really only began in the 1960s and early 1970s in the United Kingdom, North America, and Australia as part of the broader “community arts” movement. This movement reflected the growing counterculture environment of the time, which developed alternatives to polarizing distinctions between “high/serious” and “low/vernacular” art. In doing so, it encouraged creative learning and social engagement through the arts that took the experiences, needs, and goals of participants seriously as guiding elements of practice. Today, community music programs can be found across the globe, with organizations such as the International Society for Music Education (ISME) offering important international forums (journals and conferences) where facilitators and participants can share experiences, ideas, and research. This has revealed a range of important applications for community music.

For example, programs have emerged that support intergenerational activities, where participants of various ages collaborate and learn from each other. This upsets the traditional adult-as-teacher/child-as-learner dynamic, affording environments where participants can act as both teachers and learners who engage in reciprocal acts of giving and receiving. Good examples of this can be found in the work of Canadian researchers and facilitators Carol Benyon and Chris Alfano. Benyon and Alfano have developed programs where youth and senior citizens come together to sing and learn to play instruments.

Documentation of these programs has shown that, in addition to musical learning, a deeper appreciation and understanding emerged across generational groups who participated. This helped to breakdown stereotypes and foster mutual forms of respect and support between participants. Similarly, across Canada and the United States, the New Horizons Bands—whose motto is “Music for life!”—offer similar types of intergenerational music making opportunities.

Community music also serves an important role for socially marginalized groups and individuals. For instance, the Meet4Music program (M4M) in Graz, Austria, provides a safe environment where participants engage in weekly sessions involving musical and dance improvisation. The sessions are open to everyone in the community. However, a special effort is made to include recent immigrants and refugees. Research has shown that the open ended and improvisational nature of this program provides a way for established participants and newcomers to interact, develop physical forms of communicating, and thereby build trust and friendships even when spoken language is difficult or impossible. These observations demonstrate the important role community music can play in fostering an openness to difference and for initiating new shared cultural understandings.

Similarly, community music programs have emerged in the context of music therapy (sometimes called “community music therapy”), where the healing effects of music are being developed in conjunction with the social benefits offered by communal music making. As with M4M, these programs encourage participants to express their own cultural experience and to do music creatively and collaboratively. This fosters a greater sense of identity, personal agency, and belonging whereby people can think of themselves as more than just patients. Promising outcomes for physical, mental, and social well-being are being shown in a range of clinical contexts.

Important projects have also been initiated to serve at risk children and youth offenders, such as Youth Music in the United Kingdom and Musical Connections in New York City. These projects offer opportunities for participants to engage in activities that provide healthy diversions from harmful activities, promoting self-worth and social integration. Related projects involve work with prison inmates, such as Mary Cohen’s work with the Oakdale Prison Community Choir in Iowa. Likewise, the Dallas Street Choir (Dallas, Texas), facilitated by Jonathan Palant, invites homeless people to participate. These programs aim to promote personal transformations and positive social exchanges.

Additionally, because community music often involves the activities of specific groups of people in specific locations, it can also play a role in preserving indigenous forms of music making. Accordingly, a range of programs now exist that aim to both protect and extend traditional practices by sharing them with the broader community. For example, students at Queensland Conservatorium at Griffith University in Australia partner with Indigenous musicians to develop collaborative performance opportunities. Such events are intended to foster positive forms of discussion and cross-cultural understanding. Similarly, an international research project called *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures* investigated and compared

conditions in nine musical cultures. In doing so, it explored the relationship between music and other aspects of these communities with the aim of developing strategies for ensuring the long-term preservation of cultural heritage.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced some important aspects of what community music can entail. We have touched on its implications for positive social and personal transformation, social justice and sustainability, and human well-being more generally. There is, of course, much more to explore and many new possibilities for community music are appearing on the horizon. The emergence of digital technology and the internet means that musical communities can now be located online, with participants collaborating across the globe. Additionally, community music is emerging as a field of study in academia where a range of research projects have been initiated. Likewise, courses of study are becoming available, where aspiring researchers and practitioners can gain valuable practical experience and theoretical knowledge. For example, the Masters in Arts in Community Music at the Irish World Academy at the University of Limerick (Limerick, Ireland) is both a theoretical and practical degree program. Here, students learn about various kinds of community music. They also participate in projects that engage members of the surrounding communities. These projects involve leading orchestras, as well as initiating musical activities in hospitals, community centers, and more. Lastly, it is possible that the introduction of community music into the academic sphere might help open a wider range of possibilities for formal music education programs, leading to a greater appreciation of the meaning of improvisation, creativity, collaboration, and other cultural perspectives for musical learning.

## **References and Further Readings**

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