Liber plurium vocum

voor Rokus de Groot
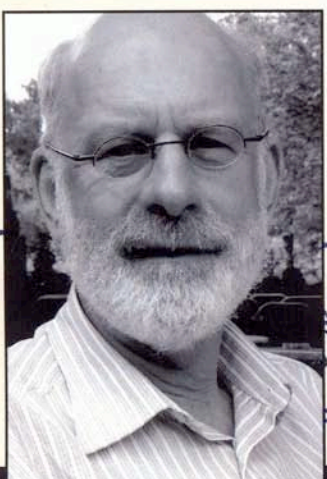
Onder redactie van Sander van Maas, Carolien Hulshof en Paulien Oldenhave

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Expanding communities through music education
A practice of 'conversation of multiple voices'

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The recent popularity of 'community' as a topic in music scholarship and practice goes hand in hand with the paradigm shifts taking place in how community is re-imagined and experienced due to political and economic changes and globalized relationship structures in musical and non-musical contexts. Along these lines, music scholarship and practice have been increasingly orienting themselves to questions such as: 'Do communities create new closeness and possibilities for musically working together?' and 'Do communities validate or extend hierarchical power structures in deceptive ways?'

This paper explores how ideology, education, and community serve as key socio-cultural enablers of creativity in music education. First, I review notions of higher music education as practice of political action and communal creativity. This is embedded in the assumption that when we begin to explore music education that arises in the multiplicity and mutuality of 'conversations of voices' things begin to change.[1] Building on this framework, the music department and the school classroom, when musically working together, become a 'polyphonic' community of socially and culturally heterogenic groups of music learners who have the opportunity to develop a sense of collectivity and mutual responsibility for the difference of voices.[2]

The paper concludes with an overview of CALM (*Community Action in Learning Music*), an interdisciplinary communal music educational project in which Rokus de Groot took great interest. As an invited scholar and composer he gave a lecture on globalized intercultural music practices entitled *From Sufi Tomb to World Music Stage: Pakistani-Indian Qawwali* to Greek music students and student composers participating in the project (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, April 29, 2009).

CALM's practice is taken as a process of socio-musical transformation and as a newly emerging form of engagement and participation in the public sphere. In order to enhance the curriculum of an academic course, CALM fosters music in 'polyphonic' learning environments that bridge the musical worlds of the music department and 'high risk schools with predominately multicultural students who do not have access to music education due to geographical, economic, cultural and political factors.'[3]

Music education as enabler of political action

Contrary to the view that music education is an academic field that concerns, for the

most part, instructional methods which are utilized by music teachers or which are proclaimed in music curricula, I argue for the use of music education as a paradigm of reflection and theoretical construction of political action that can help us expand and thus better capture variegated facets of musical expression and creativity.

If we agree that the nature and value of music education are primarily determined by the nature and value of music experience for all, then music education - like music experience- involves a communicative practice, in which the meaning of community becomes an issue.[4] Therefore, a lack of communal contexts amounts to something like a lack of the public sphere, which is to say that music education - especially in music departments- would somehow have to exist without a relationship to the people next to them, or without 'the "oral" being-together of proximity and immediacy'.[5]

In an interview with the French magazine *L'Express,* the philosopher and professor of comparative literature George Steiner expressed his disquiet that the teaching of arts and humanities had become a means by which the public sphere is kept at a distance:

> In my life I met five or six students who were more gifted than me, more creative. One day, in Cambridge, one of my students, first in academic standing, told me: "I am horrified about everything you taught us. I despise everything you represent. I do not want to hear anything about culture any more. I am leaving to work as a shoeless doctor in China." A few years later, I was invited to Beijing and the British ambassador gave me news about this woman. She was a doctor at a Chinese village with no water and electricity... Well, I think that she was perhaps my only success.[6]

Along these lines, academic teaching of music in general and music education in particular, needs to fight the feeling of social ineffectiveness, apathy and detachment from real world problems shared by many music students and scholars. Then students would not need to reject the teaching of music and start off to become doctors serving the poor far away from their respective departments, as Steiner's anecdote so poignantly asserts.

When I consider music education as an enabler of political action, I mostly draw from my own research on and experience of teaching undergraduate music students music education through practice in 'high risk' schools. In this context, practice does not belong to an individual but to a collective of dissident or marginalized groups: undergraduate music students who are not yet members of the institutionalized group of music teachers, and school children at 'high risk' schools who are excluded from the public music education system (e.g. Roma children). Practice is thus grounded on the notion of politics as the empowerment of 'the collective capacity of those who have no specific capacity', or as 'the power of anybody'.[7]

Rokus de Groot takes political action to contribute to 'humanistic emancipation',[8] in which dissident voices play an important part. In his exploration of

compositional, performance, and listening processes of musical polyphony - inspired by Edward Said's writings - he writes:

> Musical polyphony indeed serves as a humanistic model here, since there is no tyranny of the majority or a minority, and there are always dissident voices, as well as alternative manners to listen to the ever-alternative ways the voices are musically interrelated.[9]

In this view of practice, music participation and, in turn, music education become a transformative possibility of political action with democratic consequences and effects beyond themselves even when participating musicians, music learners, and listeners do not classify their actions as political engagement.[10] As De Groot claims: 'Even if we are not experiencing what the music offers as a potential experience, it may help us to sympathise with those who do. In that sense, listening, even when alone, is an act of social engagement.'[11]

Music education as politically defined and thus empowering action can boost undergraduate students' confidence by providing them with musical experiences that form both their personal and the school children's participation and communication in an ongoing process to transgress individual and collective practices of music creativity.[12] This makes them rethink theoretical ideas and values in order to respond to new social realities. Taking a practice perspective that forms social and musical connections beyond the university classroom, music education in the academia can become a paradigm capable to mingle the ramifying dichotomies of theory and action, 'academic authority and experiential learning',[13] knowledge of 'tools of practice' and knowledge of 'practice itself'.[14]

Conceptions of music education practice as 'conversation of multiple voices'

How can we create music educational practices more conducive towards creative risk-taking, divergent thinking, personal expression, and innovation? The recent emergence of what is referred to as 'practice theory' in sociological literature calls for a special type of explanation of music education. According to Wacquant, when speaking about his transformative learning experience as an apprentice boxer in a boxing gym in Chicago's South Side, learning is 'not a dialogue between the sole teacher and his pupil but rather a conversation of multiple voices open to all the regular participants in the workout'.[15] In other words, practice theory claims that a subject matter comes to be learned, transmitted, and produced as a predominately collective or communal activity in which members of this collectivity learn through a peer-to-peer approach by 'watching, listening to, and feeling the energy of' the other members.[16]

This claim points toward music polyphony in which the conversation of multiple voices is used both in counterpoint and harmony. According to De Groot, polyphony implies 'the simultaneous unfolding of two or more different voices, each

with its own identity, and at the same time each with a "responsibility" to the other and for the *ensemble* of voices.'[17]

> Polyphony as a social model entails the welcoming of difference - without which counterpoint is not possible - as well as the eagerness to involve oneself in the endless richness of ever-changing mutual response between voices. Though one voice may seem temporarily more prominent - but not dominant-than others, this role changes between the participants, and is not lasting.[18]

With regard to music education, one could conclude that emancipation of otherwise rigid traditional teacher-student relationships or hierarchical power structures through conversation of multiple voices can result into a freedom of music creativity. 'Everybody should provide a source for transformation and transgression and must be given the space to be this impetus for others and receive expression from others, in order to achieve creative freedom.'[19] Thus, the communal context in which music learners learn from and teach each other can create new forms of musical interactions and ways to musically relating to others as inseparable from music expression.

One such communal context can be found in De Groot's intercultural compositional projects, such as *Seyir*[20] for Turkish ud and ensemble, *Layla and Majnun*[21] for Syrian tenor, qanun, cellist and Iraqi break dance, and *ShivaShakti*[22] for sarangi and English horn. These compositions have been developed with professional musicians from different musical backgrounds who had to simultaneously become mutual learners and teachers because of the polyphonic practices used. According to De Groot, 'polyphony is very different from multiculturalism. Polyphony is not voices standing beside each other but completely interacting and reforming, changing (mutual attuning) each other in order to make the music move forward.'[23]

If we opt to open educational spaces in which we enhance the student experience of peer-to-peer learning in a community, a more explicit view of what kind of spaces these might be is proposed in the work of Delamont, Atkinson and Pugsley on educational ethnography.[24] They observe that educational spaces need to be 'uncommon' or unfamiliar in order to facilitate the development of learning models that do not occupy traditionally organized educational sites. Delamont *et al.* argue that uncommon settings can help all participants take 'the viewpoint of actors other than the commonest types of "teachers" and "students" in ordinary state schools.'[25]

Furthermore, uncommon educational spaces can challenge music students' idealism, speculation, uncertainty, and control of reality by giving them the possibility of risk-taking, experimenting, and not knowing the outcome of their musical and educational explorations. One such example of an uncommon communal learning setting, which bridges the musical worlds of the music department and 'high risk' schools, is proposed by CALM. In order to capture more elusive aspects of collective music creativity CALM utilizes the learning model of 'students teach students'.

CALM

The concept of CALM (Community Action in Learning Music) is multi-faceted: as the name suggests, the project involves music education that hopefully engenders socially meaningful action; that builds and develops music learning communities through a 'students teach students' approach. It is also the forum for undergraduate music students to participate and show their music and educational judgment, competence, and responsibility not in 'fictive problems and lessons'[26] or 'through playing to teach music',[27] but in response to multiple political, socio-cultural, and socio-economic issues influencing public music education.[28]

CALM's uniqueness lies in that it is a sustainable project (since 1999), soundly integrated into ethnically and culturally diverse K-12 classrooms. Each semester the 20 to 25 fourth- or fifth-year students who enroll in the course 'Introduction to Music Education' create groups of two to four students. For a whole semester these groups of students teach schoolchildren and explore musical and pedagogical pathways that engage all participants (university students and schoolchildren) in innovative music making (composing and improvising).

The undergraduate music students who become music teachers are in the higher semesters of their university studies that are mostly musicological and music theoretical in nature. In addition, they have obtained a solid practical base in music performance and musical craftsmanship in music conservatories and they have never taught music in a school classroom before.

The Greek and Cypriot schools that music students choose to teach at have limited or no access to public music education, expression and creativity. These schools are mostly located in economically disadvantaged areas, and their student body is predominately comprised of students of minority ethnic groups who are, by and large, children of economic immigrants and/or Roma children.

CALM is a widening participation project: until today more than a hundred urban and provincial schools have participated in the project. These neglected schools are by no means associated with the university under any official educational partnership or framework. Music students have to search for such schools by themselves and go through many difficult bureaucratic challenges in order to gain permission to teach. Thus, students are confronted early on with issues related to the political contexts of the schooling enterprise.

In order to accomplish this first teaching experience in an actual school setting music students have to develop and experiment with original and imaginative approaches to music learning and teaching through collective music making. The students bring a large variety of physically and aurally appealing instruments to the classroom, as well as digital interactive music devices from CALM's increasing collection.[29]

Not only do the students use journals and portfolios as learning tools, the teaching experiences of each group are videotaped and shown, discussed, and

evaluated by their peers during three-hour weekly sessions. By sharing and critically reflecting on their experiences of music teaching and music making, students are given the opportunity to compare their own experiences with music education theories and research assigned during the semester, on the one hand, and preconceptions that mostly stem from 'idealized realities of their musical past', on the other.[30]

Conclusion

If we expand learning communities, we can enhance the students' experience of learning. But to give students the possibility of learning experiences is not enough if these experiences do not allow for empowerment of marginalized or dissident groups of learners, mutual responsibility for difference through polyphonic socio-musical practices, creation of uncommon learning environments beyond old teacher-student power structures, and self-reliant action of learners.

Finally, one might add that the placement of social links that aim toward service to others - especially children - in academic music courses, as in the case of CALM, may instill a greater sense of purpose to music students' learning because their learning really matters and, in turn, gives them the opportunity for a very special sense of musical interactions that afford for different sorts of feelings, expressions, and ways of being. As Rokus de Groot so rightly expressed his desire:

It is my wish that our mutual discoveries, our polyphonies, and our common ground in love and music become accessible to all children.[31]

Notes

[1] Loïc Wacquant, *Body and Soul: Notes of an Apprentice Boxer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
[2] Rokus de Groot, 'Perspectives of Polyphony in Edward Said's Writings', in Ferial J. Ghazoul (ed.), *Edward Said and Critical Decolonization*, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007, 219-240. Rokus de Groot, 'Eduard Said and Polyphony', in Adel Iskander and Hakem Rustom (eds.), *Edward Said: A Legacy of Emancipation and Representation*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2010, 204-226. Rokus de Groot, 'Polyphony as a Model for Globalizing Societies', Invited lecture presented at *The Language of Art and Music Symposium*, The Institute of Cultural Diplomacy, Berlin, February 17-20, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l9vdprmnSxg) (accessed 10 February 2012).
[3] Eleni Lapidaki, Rokus de Groot and Petros Stagkos, 'Music Creativity as Socio-musical Practice', in Gary McPherson and Graham Welch (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Music Education*, Vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming June 2012.
[4] Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education: Advancing the Vision*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003.
[5] Luis Jacob, 'Communities Between Culture-by-mouth and Culture-by-media', in *Public*, 39 (2006), 86-95, 90, http://pi.library.yorku.ca/ojs/index.php/public/article/viewFile/30388/2791 (accessed 5 February 2012).

[6] Dominique Simonnet, 'George Steiner, La Culture ne Rend pas Plus Humain', in *L'Express Livres*, 28 December 2000, http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/la-culture-ne-rend-pas-plus-humain_817466.html (accessed 25 May 2010).

[7] Christian Höller and Jacques Rancière, 'The Abandonment of Democracy. Interview with Jacques Rancière', in *Documenta Magazine (Education)*, 3, 2007, 13-29: 21.

[8] De Groot, 'Perspectives', 231.

[9] Ibid., 232.

[10] Jean Burgess, Marcus Foth and Helen Klaebe, 'Everyday Creativity as Civic Engagement: A Cultural Citizenship View of New Media', Paper presented at the Communications Policy & Research Forum (CPRF), 2006, Sydney, http://eprints.qut.edu.au/5056/ (accessed 12 December 2011).

[11] Rokus de Groot, 'Polyphonies of Love', Invited lecture presented at the Eranos Meeting on *Love and the Musical Arts*, 2011, Eranos Foundation and Fetzer Institute, Ascona, August 14.

[12] See Eleni Lapidaki, 'Transgressing 'Accustomed' Creative Experiences in Music Education', in Conference Proceedings of the First Interactive Music Conference Bergen, Bergen, 2007, 25-27 April.

[13] Elana Michelson, 'Beyond Galileo's telescope: Situated knowledge and the assessment of experiential learning,' in *Adult Education Quarterly*, 46/4 (1996), 185-196: 185.

[14] Magdalene Lampert, 'Learning Teaching in, from, and for Practice: What Do We Mean?' in *Journal of Teacher Education*, 6/1-2 (2010), 21-34: 23.

[15] Wacquant, *Body and Soul*, 113.

[16] Neil Stephens and Sara Delamont, 'Roda Boa, Roda Boa: Legitimate Peripheral Participation', in Diasporic Capoeira, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26/1 (2010), 113-118: 113.

[17] De Groot, 'Perspectives', 221.

[18] Ibid., 232.

[19] Lapidaki, Learning from Masters, 110.

[20] First performance in Amsterdam, 2001.

[21] First performance at *The Poetry International Festival* in Rotterdam, 2010.

[22] First performance in Chennai, India, 2009. Rokus de Groot, *ShivaShakti. Play of god and godess*, Quintone Q11002 CD, 2012, compact disc.

[23] De Groot, 'Polyphony as a Model for Globalizing Societies'.

[24] Sara Delamont, Paul Atkinson and Lesley Pugsley, 'The Concept Smacks of Magic: Fighting Familiarity Today', in *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26/1 (2010), 3-10.

[25] Ibid., 5.

[26] Cecilia Ferm, 'Playing to teach music – embodiment and identity making in musikdidaktik', in *Music Education Research*, 10/3 (2008), 361 – 372: 368.

[27] Ibid., 370.

[28] See Lapidaki *et al.*, for a more elaborate discussion of CALM's socio-musical practices.

[29] See http://calm.web.auth.gr/StudentsPage/students_Intro.html for examples of CALM's collective music creativity).

[30] Marsha Kindall-Smith, Constance L. McKoy and Susan W. Mills, 'Challenging Exclusionary Paradigms in the Traditional Musical Canon: Implications for Music Education Practice', in *International Journal of Music Education*, 29/4 (2011), 374-386: 382.

[31] De Groot, 'Polyphonies of Love'.