



Come One, Come All

The Benefits of Music-Making within the Community

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Since prehistoric times, music has played an important role in the community. We know that 50,000 years ago humans first started creating art in the form of cave paintings and jewellery and that it was around this time that they also began to ceremonially bury their dead. The emergence of these types of intentional activities imply that music must also have emerged at the same time and indeed findings from paleolithic archaeological sites¹ reveal that prehistoric people used a variety of tools to create musical instruments, suggesting that music was indeed significant to early communities.

Originally it would have been sounds rather than our more modern conception of 'music' that was produced within these prehistoric communities. Animal bones would have been banged together and horns blown to create sounds that fulfilled a range of functions; to warn of danger, to call individuals together and to mark key events in the life of the community. These primitive sounds would have evolved into more recognisable patterns of music as human cognition developed and instruments became more refined.

The history of music and community

Because music is pre-lingual it, along with prehistoric art, was one of the earliest forms of communication and this is why music was not just inseparable from early communities, but was absolutely integral to positive community relations. In fact anthropologists have now proven that early cultures with a strong musical tradition thrived whereas other cultures without a musical tradition struggled to survive².

One reason for this is because music evokes strong emotions and heightened states of awareness. We associate strong emotions with evolution³ (reproduction and survival) and this is why traditionally societies with a musical culture have been better able to flourish, because the music coordinates their emotions, helps important messages to be communicated and motivates individuals to identify with and to support other members within their community⁴.

The importance of music for human social development

In addition to its important role in the development of community, music also plays an important part in individual human social development, specifically in the early years. Indeed as David Francis of The Performing Rights Society states, music '*stimulates foetuses and infants in such a way as to promote their well-being*'⁵. This is because modern music is thought to have originated from early interactions between mother and child known as 'motherese'. Motherese is observed when adults with child caring responsibilities, specifically mothers, communicate intention and meaning to their babies using vocal-gestural communication.

The function of motherese is to strengthen the bond between adult and baby and to help the infant to acquire language. Remarkably, motherese is similar across cultures despite differences in language, and these early interactions between mother and child have been found to have '*an essentially musical quality*'⁶. Playing musical instruments, singing or listening to music therefore invokes strong feelings of wellbeing in the individual, even if only at a subconscious level, because it reminds us of our infancy and our connection to others. This is why even as adults, music is vitally important to our continuing personal and social development.

¹ See for example the 2008 findings at the sites of Hohle Fels and Vogelherd in South West Germany.

² David Francis 'The Powerful Role of Music in Society' (2008)

³ Duke University Soundscapes website 'The Power and Emotion of Music'

⁴ Susan Hallam 'The Power of Music' (2010)

⁵ David Francis 'The Powerful Role of Music in Society' (2008)

⁶ *ibid*

Playing musical instruments (as opposed to simply listening to music) is particularly important for human social development because music making is fun and uses different skills to the ones that most people usually employ on a day to day basis. This means that making music is relaxing and can relieve feelings of stress and anxiety. In fact there is now a growing body of research which demonstrates that playing musical instruments is really good for you in terms of both improved physical and mental health.⁷

Research from 2001 has shown that improved mental and physical health in the individual increases their capacity for social integration⁸. This is because when an individual feels positive, relaxed and confident they are much more able to integrate with other members of their community. This in turn strengthens the community as a whole because when all the members of a community are fully integrated each individual is able to contribute a diverse and unique set of skills and talents to that community.

It can therefore be seen that the benefits of music in this instance are two fold- it firstly improves the social development of the individual by increasing their feelings of well being and connectedness, but it also has the secondary benefit of increasing that individual's ability to then integrate within their community which results in a stronger community for all of its members.

What is a modern community?

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, community is defined as 'a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common'⁹. From this we can infer that although community is a broad term it emphasises the coming together of a diverse group, perhaps because they are linked by social ties, share common perspectives or simply because they live in the same geographical location or setting. A modern community therefore would comprise individuals from a large range of ages, abilities, languages, cultures, tastes and preferences and catering to such a diverse group can often be problematic.

The benefits of music for the modern community

Music does not suffer the frustrations of catering to the diverse group of people that we are likely to see in a modern community because music is non-verbal and does not differentiate or discriminate between age, culture or ability. Outdoor musical instruments such as those produced by Percussion Play can therefore be absolutely integral to the promotion of cross cultural engagement and the fostering of positive community integration.

The benefits of community engagement with music are multifaceted and wide ranging. This is because music is a very powerful medium, evidenced by the fact that in some societies there have been attempts to suppress or control its use. Music reflects and creates social conditions and is powerful within a social group because it can facilitate or impede social change. For these reasons community music therapy has recently emerged as a 'context driven and ethical practice'¹⁰ and it has become necessary to develop theories that explain how we 'can use music intentionally to enhance connectedness'¹¹. Indeed, as Professor Gary Andsell¹² (2014) states;

"The practice of community music therapy is one approach that has been developed to facilitate the many benefits that community membership promotes."

⁷ Sarah Glynn 'Music Benefits Both Mental and Physical Health' (2013)

⁸ Ichiro Kawachi and Lisa F. Berkman 'Social Ties and Mental Health' (2001)

⁹ Oxford English Dictionary online

¹⁰ Megan Ellen Steele 'How Can Music Build Community? Insight from Theories and Practice of Community Music Therapy' (2016)

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Andsell, G. (2014). Revisiting 'Community music therapy and the winds of change' (2002)

As Krivo¹³ and others have noted, we now live in a new global era where social isolation and anxiety is becoming increasingly common for people of all ages and backgrounds. For this reason practices that encourage participation have become more widespread and music therapy has been consistently proven to be one of the best ways to promote inclusion and to lessen feelings of anxiety within the individual.

We have all experienced the power of community music and the feeling of participation that it creates, whether it be by singing Happy Birthday at a child's party or by dancing with others in a night club. Music goes beyond words and enables meanings to be shared without language. Music also promotes the development and maintenance of individual, group, cultural and national identities. In fact in today's global community we can even create new online communities and share music across international borders via the internet.

The benefits of outdoor musical instruments for the community

Everyone and anyone can make music and playing musical instruments can help bring communities together across generations, social classes, income brackets, and ability in a way that no other medium can. For this reason outdoor musical instruments and musical parks such as those produced by Percussion Play can have a huge positive impact on the community for a relatively low cost. Musical parks are great for all ages as well as for individuals with disabilities because no musical training or skill is necessary to play the instruments or to enjoy the outdoor space. In fact, many of Percussion Play's instruments have been designed specifically so that they can be used by people in wheelchairs or by individuals living with a range of conditions such as autism for example.

For this reason outdoor musical instruments in communal areas address a real community need because music groups can *'help generate pride in a place and community, helping to transform an area into somewhere people want to live and feel safe and connected in'*¹⁴.

There are also additional benefits for the community itself when music participation is made available. For example there is an economic impact. Outdoor musical parks like those created by Percussion Play can attract more visitors to the community and thereby contribute to regeneration. In many cases there is no longer any funding for music and the arts from local authorities because they do not fit within their more mainstream policies. For this reason outdoor musical instrument parks can provide opportunities for people to access music who may not otherwise be able to. There is also the obvious benefit that being with or around others reduces loneliness and social exclusion which are a very real cost to local services.

How does music bring people together?

Listening to music and singing together has been shown to create a sense of group identity¹⁵ and may be particularly potent in bringing about social integration because it directly impacts on the neuro-chemicals in the brain which facilitate feelings of closeness and connection¹⁶.

One 2017 study¹⁷ found that playing musical instruments, singing and dancing also resulted in greater positive emotions which suggests that people feel closer to one another when playing music. This is due to the release of endorphins which these types of activity facilitate. This, plus the fact that music has been linked to the release of dopamine (the chemical that causes us to feel

¹³ Krivo et al., 'Social isolation of disadvantage and advantage: The reproduction of inequality in urban space' p197 (2013)

¹⁴ Making Music 'Why Leisure Time Music Matters' (2015)

¹⁵ Jill Suttie 'How Music Bonds Us Together' (2016)

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ Grau-Sanchez et al 'Exploring Musical Activities and Their Relationship to Emotional Well-Being in Elderly People across Europe: A Study Protocol' (2017)

pleasure) means that music makes us feel good and connected with others, particularly when we are making music ourselves¹⁸. Or in the words of Jill Suttie, music can help us '*connect, cooperate and care for each other*'¹⁹.

There is so much evidence now that confirms that music helps to promote individual confidence, reduce anxiety and improve social relationships which is why when you want people to bond, music is a natural resource for making that happen.

Music is able to bring a diverse group of people together in the community because it transcends language limitations- instead providing its own language of rhythm and melody to enable its players and users to communicate with each other non-verbally. Providing opportunities for members of a community to be around each other in this way promotes familiarity and the formation of healthy relationships and helps to engender a sense of belonging for those who participate. It is apparent then that music can help us to develop a more harmonious society if access to it is provided and engagement promoted.

In the modern world where we often live in very close proximity to our neighbours, it is easy to forget the original purpose of music as a tool for communication- indeed, nowadays we need only lean over the garden fence on a Sunday morning in order to connect at some level with those around us. What music does goes further than this though- music does not just nod towards inclusivity and connection- it actively demands it because in order to engage with music you need to engage your whole mind and body as those around you engage theirs. It therefore provides a powerful stimuli for positive community relations.

Researchers have proven that music enhances group identity and that playing musical instruments in a group helps us to '*synch up our brains and co-ordinate our body movements with others*'²⁰. It is suggested therefore that coordinating movement through music may increase our sense of community and make us more social.

How does music bring people together? A case study from Percussion Play²¹

The ability of music to bring people together and foster positive community relationships is evidenced by what happened when Percussion Play Denmark was asked to create an interactive musical garden for elderly residents, visitors and local children to enjoy together.

The main purpose of the outdoor musical instruments was to prevent loneliness. However, it's become clear since that the instruments can be used in many other contexts including physical exercise and therapy. The instruments are strategically placed so that they can be clearly seen from the public path that leads up to the garden, with the intention of attracting neighbours and curious passers-by to the care centre's garden. "*When an outsider comes and starts playing music, the residents also come out and look because they find it interesting and it's a great opportunity to meet people*" says Care Centre Manager Agnete Bille.

The care centre's nearest neighbour is Poppellunden nursery and these young neighbours regularly pop in to play on the new outdoor musical instruments. Children from other nurseries in the area do the same. "*Something magical happens when the children and older people meet*", she says.

The older people are very keen to help the children. It's a completely instinctive reaction for them. Because of this, it often mobilises them in ways that they probably don't realise. It's only been a couple of months since Trollemose Care Centre received

¹⁸ Jill Suttie '*How Music Bonds Us Together*' (2016)

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ *ibid*

²¹ <https://www.percussionplay.com/elderley-care-centre-invite-music-children-into-their-garden/>

the outdoor musical instruments, but they've already become a part of the centre's everyday life and they are frequently used by both outsiders and care centre residents. Care assistants accompany residents into the garden and use the instruments in rehabilitation work at the care centre.

Lars Hansen of Percussion Play Denmark says "We hope that by sharing the musical instruments with family, friends and visitors, a sense of community pride and ownership will occur amongst the residents. Playing music is a multi-generational and fun experience, and playing music together with family members, other residents or helpers, creates social interactions that can only have a positive impact on mental function, mood and overall well-being."

The future for community music

Despite growing research into the positive role of music in the lives of individuals there is now a real need for 'systematic investigation of the ways that music can impact on groups of people in social settings'²². David Francis of The Traditional Music Forum²³ feels that past research has focussed on commercial and work environments and that as a result research into music in public places has been neglected. For example Francis feels that there is a whole field of worthwhile study in exploring whether music may increase tolerance when people have to queue for long periods of time and whether music and musical instruments could be utilised to engender feelings of well being and safety in public places²⁴.

Recently psychologists like Giorgis Tsiris (2014), Gary Andsell (2014) and Ornette Clennon (2013) have called for more collaboration between the fields of community music therapy and music and health²⁵. Tsiris points out that there is a need for the interdisciplinary study of music and health in everyday contexts²⁶ and how we need to further our understanding of how contemporary societal changes impact upon the delivery and practice of community music therapy. Clennon calls for further discussion into the relationship between community music and community music therapy and points to the importance of community music therapy for clients within the mental health system²⁷.

It is therefore apparent that despite the vital part that music has played in the community since prehistoric times, there is still much to investigate about the impact that it can have on modern communities. It is however clear from the research that we do have that making musical instruments accessible to all the members within a community can have a huge positive impact, not just on the individuals within the community but for the community as a whole.

The Power of Percussion Play

The outdoor musical instruments created by Percussion Play are diverse and accessible to everyone within the community and make perfect additions to any setting. Percussion Play's musical instruments are suited to gardens and social spaces in schools, care homes, nursing homes, hospices and hospitals, where they can be used and enjoyed by all who encounter them. Anyone and everyone can experience the pleasure that playing these wonderful instruments provides and Percussion Play instruments are currently being installed in a variety of settings all over the world.

²² David Francis 'The Powerful Role of Music in Society' (2008)

²³ The Traditional Music Forum is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SC042867)

²⁴ David Francis 'The Powerful Role of Music in Society' (2008)

²⁵ Megan Ellen Steele 'How Can Music Build Community? Insight from Theories and Practice of Community Music Therapy' (2016)

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ *ibid*

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