Chapter 13

Community Music Therapy Partnering With Community Musicians: Orchestral Dialogues – Accepting Self, Accepting Others

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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the collaboration of community musicians and community music therapists working to create a community orchestral dialogues experience for youth patterned after a Middle Eastern model. The author explores the definitions of community musicians, music therapy and community music therapy, and how these definitions diverge and converge. The author explains and discusses Orchestral Dialogues: Accepting Self, Accepting Others and the learning that took place for the youth involved, as well as for the staff, both community musicians and community music therapists. The final section of the chapter provides lessons learned and implications for future collaborations for community musicians and community music therapists.

BACKGROUND: PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP TO COMMUNITY MUSIC AND MUSIC THERAPY

Music is not designed for privacy or containment – it naturally reverberates, permeates, goes through boundaries and walls. And in doing so it calls to others, attracts, gathers, connects people together. It creates community. (Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004, p. 16)

A 7-year old girl sits in the church pew and hears the flute played for the very first time. The sound wraps itself around her, in her and she knows, just knows, that this instrument, this sound must be made by her. Instinctively, she knows that with this instrument she can express herself in ways that words fail.

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This child was me. There was no explanation, just an innate knowledge that I was meant to play the flute. At age 9, my flute and I began a journey that began with lessons. By age 12, I was performing in public and by age 15, I had performed in front of an audience of 300 people; I was also a member of a chamber orchestra. Throughout my childhood and youth, I always preferred to be part of a group rather than the soloist. I knew that music was my medium, and I knew I wanted to study it, but I did not want to teach or to be a performer despite being groomed for performance. I approached my band director about my relationship with music and performance when I was 16. My teacher told me about this area called “music therapy” and encouraged me to investigate this as a career. In 2001, I completed my education in music therapy and became a board-certified music therapist.

Being both a clinical music therapist and a community musician (CM) was wonderful, but something was missing: how to connect these two passions. Then, in the fall of 2012, the answer presented itself in the form of an article describing Community Music Therapy (CoMT). Community Music Therapy was appealing as it seemed to connect the two worlds of music therapy and community musician (CM). The two main ideas of the article that resonated most with me were 1) being invited to contribute expertise to a community and 2) that the community had what it needed for its own healing. Approaching clients and community engagement through a strengths-based lens combined the clinical elements of music therapist and the training of a community musician.

Integration of self as musician, music therapist, and as someone who is knowledgeable in how those skills can interact within a community, may seem to be incongruous. There are, however, intersections of theory and practice in these two areas creating space to complement and collaborate. Finding these intersections served as an inspiration to continue to bridge the space between community musicians and music therapists. To begin to forge these connections of how exactly to complement, collaborate, and creatively work together, a shared understanding of terms is necessary.

A Shared Language

Defining Community Musician (CM)

What is a community musician? This question is not easily answered as there are several understandings of a CM, expressed through varying worldviews. The literature suggests that there are multiple ways to define a CM that include how to educate students, where to educate students, how to measure that success, and how to be present in the community. (Everett, 1997; Veblen, 2008; Walters & Shuman, 2008). Understanding the definition of CM begins with the context of the musical experience. Veblen (2008) of the Community Music Activity Commission (CMAC), under the International Society of Music Education (ISME), suggests that defining CM’s includes five domains 1) Kinds of music and music making; 2) Intentions; 3) Participants; 4) Teaching, learning and interacting; and 5) Interplays between formal and informal contexts. Community musicians not only teach, but they learn and are sensitive and responsive to the contexts of the students.

Students and teachers bring their social, emotional, physical, and political contexts to their lessons. For instance, Veblen (2008) acknowledges that a student’s context may be in a formal education institution, a community center, or even a lesson received on the street. Community musicians need to be aware of their own contexts, their students’ contexts, and the contexts of the communities in which they work. Examples of contextualized learning include the work of Musicians Without Borders, the World Peace Orchestra, or learning that occurs in The Philadelphia School, a private school in South Philadelphia.
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