



**COMMUNITY MUSIC AND THE “MUSICAL COMMUNITY”:
BEYOND CONVENTIONAL SYNERGIES**

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Schools can be sponsors, partners, or beneficiaries of community music activities. The same pattern holds for community music activities and universities. However, and while fluidity between communities and schools seems ideal for both constituencies, this does not always occur. The author examines the complexities of these relationships.

In order to provide a framework for a discussion of “Compelling Connections: Community and Music Making in Canada” (Veblen, 2003), Kari Veblen utilizes the typology she and Bengt Olsson adopted in an earlier study entitled “Community Music: Toward an International Overview” (2002). The typology, based on the American model of Leglar and Smith (1996), identifies seven groups engaged in community music activities. These are:

- (1) community music schools
- (2) community performance organizations
- (3) ethnic/preservation groups
- (4) religious groups
- (5) associative organizations within schools
- (6) outreach initiatives of universities and colleges [and]
- (7) informal, affinity groups (see Veblen & Olsson, 2002; Veblen, 2003).

Considering each group in turn, Veblen is able to identify ways “in which C[ommunity] M[usic] activities and school music programs connect, intersect, or bypass each other” (Veblen, 2003, p. 25). Her conclusion is that “there is a rich and complex mosaic of community music groups, activities, and networks in Canada that relates to music in schools in important ways” (p. 27).

Closer examination reveals that schools can be primarily sponsors, partners, or beneficiaries of community music activities. Sponsors support activities developed for communities, either by communities or by sponsors themselves. Partners work with communities to develop activities, and beneficiaries reap the rewards of activities developed, sponsored, and perhaps partnered by others. Other relationships are, of course, possible, but these can usually be analyzed as variants or amalgams of sponsorship and partnership. Note, too, that the line between ad hoc activities and formal programs must be constantly redrawn since the border between them is porous and ill defined. Non-curricular activities fertilize school music programs and curricular programs yield non-curricular activities. Whatever the structural paradigm might be, successful activities and programs accrue

reciprocal benefits to communities and schools.

Although fluidity between communities and schools seems ideal for both constituencies, this does not always occur. A school may function autonomously so that it and the community in which it is located, to use Veblen's word, "bypass" one another. Conversely, it may be the community that rejects the school's efforts at outreach. Either way, it is the school that suffers most. The community may remain unscathed by a school's insularity but the reverse is rarely true.

For the most part, schools do not function alone. Community music schools "often merge or meld with public school music programs" (Veblen, 2003, p. 25; see Abeles et al., 2002) and "orchestras, opera companies and other professional organizations partner with school systems, as well as with other branches of the community" (Veblen, 2003, p. 26). Veblen further notes that individuals who recall "positive [musical] experiences in high school" are likely to support musical organizations later in life. Professional and community performance organizations, alike, benefit from a tradition of quality musical instruction in schools.

As much as community music involves partnership with schools, it also involves sponsorship by them. "Associative organizations, "ethnic/preservation groups" and "informal, affinity groups" function and sometimes flourish in schools. The school's initial commitment may be minimal, as when a newly formed radio club is provided with meeting space. At this early stage, the club itself may lack structure and purpose. Over time, the loosely constituted group becomes a more formal entity. It elects a board

of directors that holds regular meetings apart from the membership. In effect, the membership becomes the informal club. A teacher-advisor is appointed to oversee the club and the school may commit financial and other resources to it. Passive sponsorship has evolved into active partnership.

In most cases, sponsorship and partnership go hand-in-hand. Organizations that sponsor outreach programs usually partner with schools, daycares, seniors' homes and so forth. Many educators reject sponsorship without partnership, but this is not always the case. Outreach programs of professional arts organizations frequently aim to convert children and (less often) adults to a cause, be it ballet, theatre or symphonic music. This kind of outreach without engagement has lost much of its credibility, since it has proven less effective than means involving true partnership of propagating interest in the arts.

Without “buy-in,” sponsorship imposes values on communities they may neither need or welcome. Veblen’s examples of schools and their affiliations with religious groups are illustrative. Clearly, a “school [that] has a mandate to remain secularly tolerant of all faiths and beliefs” (Veblen, 2003, p. 26) will have a different rapport with the religious community than a “religiously affiliated school [in which] students perform and sing as part of daily religious training” (Veblen, 2003, p. 26). In the first example, the school accepts and respects the religious community, but is arms’ length from it. In the second example, the school fuels and nurtures religious beliefs, and is closely allied with the religious community. Relations between religious schools and secular communities can be problematic. Imagine a school seeking to inform and educate the community using music

as a tool of religious conversion. The line between partnership and incursion has been violated, so the motive for community involvement and means of achieving it are suspect.

Connections between community music activities and schools are a template for connections between community music activities and universities. In North America, universities house schools of music that are integral to “the musical community.” The definition of the latter has expanded in the past forty years beyond its once seemingly inviolable boundaries. It is now recognized that community musicians are crucial to a healthy musical community. They work alongside professionals paid to create and re-create music, professionals paid to train others to create and re-create music, and bureaucrats and administrators who create and manage infrastructures so that composers can compose, performers can perform and teachers can teach. In Canada, colleges and universities are central to this model, since they employ established composers, performers and teachers to train new ones. Other participants in the musical community, from venue managers, to music therapists, to recording engineers, may receive college or university training along the way.

At best, school music programs flow seamlessly into community music programs. Can the same be said of university music programs? Many universities have service learning components to their degrees that reflect a new commitment to community outreach. Joe Deal, provost of the Rhode Island School of Design cautions that “we should not forget . . . in our enthusiasm to embrace a more public role for higher education in the arts that our first obligation is to the students enrolled in our programs” (Deal,

2003, p. 16). Where does this leave university music programs with respect to communities? To begin to answer these questions, it is necessary to consider how, and how effectively, university-based musicians act as sponsors, partners and/or beneficiaries of community music activities.

Community performance organizations are not typically sponsored by universities, but frequently enter into partnerships with them. In Brandon (Manitoba, Canada), the university provides rehearsal space for the community orchestra. The relationship – to this point passive – is more layered than this. Conducting students are given opportunities to direct the orchestra. Rehearsals are videotaped and their professor critiques students. Student and community musicians are beneficiaries of this active partnership, which has the added benefit of being cost-neutral to both parties since services are exchanged in kind.

The positive outcomes of partnership of this sort can be far-reaching. In Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, a community jazz orchestra created to instill community spirit and civic pride in a demoralized citizenry spawned a jazz program at Algoma University College. The College, in turn, provides players to the community jazz orchestra. This partnership, too, is cost-neutral, since students receive academic credit, not financial remuneration for participating in the ensemble. It is not unusual, particularly at universities away from large urban centers, for students to receive credit for participating in community ensembles (Suriano, 2003, p. 9). Sometimes these ventures are fully co-operative – the Brandon Choral Society and Brandon University Chorus is a single ensemble. Community members participate as volunteers while students register to receive academic credit.

Ethnic/preservation groups and universities frequently co-operate with one another. Ethnomusicologists, anthropologists and folklorists work with communities to record, preserve and study music from oral traditions. Universities also form ties with affinity groups and, in a particularly interesting twist, affinity groups themselves become the focus of scholarly investigation. A sociologist at Brandon University, for example, is studying folk musicians as members of a singer/songwriter/listener community that is differentiated from other subcultures by its practices, perspectives and relations (Grills, 2004).

The extent of reciprocity between religious groups and university music schools depends on the university. If the university has denominational ties, the relationship can be a close one. For example, Canadian Mennonite University, which is located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, has a fine music program and is affiliated with the Mennonite community in the city and region. Sometimes, universities have sacred music programs that require practica and service learning placements in community churches.

Most Canadian universities, including those once affiliated with religions, are now publicly funded secular institutions committed to religious pluralism as a matter of policy. Since all religions, from this institutional perspective, are equally valid, affiliation with one religious group or another is impracticable. At Brandon University we are currently grappling with this issue. The Christian Heritage School, which is privately owned and operated, recently approached the University for assistance in developing a music program. The School's mission, according to its website, is to provide

an education “in which the Lordship of Jesus Christ and Biblical principles permeate all instruction and activity. . . .” (Christian Heritage School, 2004). If it transpires that music must be taught from a Christian perspective, as would seem to be the case, the university can have little or no role to play at the school.

Associative organizations with schools, and associative organizations with universities, provide an interface between institutional learning and the community. Apprenticeship programs bring students together with professional arts organizations. Student musicians play beside their professional counterparts in symphony orchestras or sing supporting roles in operatic productions. In Canada, which is a unionized environment, an agreement must be negotiated between the university and appropriate unions because students will be doing the work of union members. With goodwill on both sides, potential complications can be circumvented easily.

It is evident from the foregoing examples, that when universities participate in community music activities they do so following much the same models as schools.

Returning to Veblen’s typology, we have yet to consider “outreach initiatives of universities and colleges.” This category is different from the others that denote groups of people sharing common aims, attributes, beliefs or practices. The other categories do not specify, “outreach initiatives” but only name the groups of people involved. Why not call the present category simply “universities and colleges”? After all, they are collectives of like-minded people similar to preservation, religious or affinity groups. Or, are

they somehow different from this?

The simple answer is that universities thrive on intellectual diversity, not uniformity of opinion and outlook. From this perspective, universities are not community based. Since outreach is not at the core of their mission, they could, at least until recently, gaze chiefly inwards and still be seen to flourish. Since the 1960s, however, universities have become increasingly accountable to granting agencies, especially to governments, and to students, parents and community partners. It is no coincidence that universities now maintain community outreach and that community engagement is essential, even pivotal, to their functioning.

Universities do respond more and more frequently to needs identified by communities. It is not universities that elect to partner with communities, but often communities elect to partner with universities in much the same way they do with schools. Nor do universities today have the final say concerning outcomes of joint ventures. Communities use their own criteria to determine the success or failure of cooperative projects. That universities engage in outreach at the community's discretion, and are subject to assessment and evaluation by the community, is difficult for universities to accept. They are accustomed to assuming, or presuming to assume, a leadership role with respect to community partners.

Nevertheless, there are three sorts of outreach initiatives in which universities routinely engage. These are: (1) initiatives originating in the academy in response to its needs; (2) those originating in the community in response to its needs; and (3) those originating in the academy in response to

the community's needs. Initiatives originating in the community in response to the academy's needs are scarce and do not form part of the present discussion.

In the academy/academy scenario, a conductor-researcher may wish to work with an intergenerational choir. Given demographics at most universities, it is only natural to solicit membership from the community in addition to the university.

In the community/community scenario, citizens may wish to have a local theatre restored. A university professor is called upon to provide advice and guidance. The community is the main beneficiary of this arrangement, although the professor may derive supplementary income from contract work.

The academy/community scenario is most usual. The university may identify need for an enrichment activity, such as one-to-one instrumental instruction to supplement band programs at schools. The university, perhaps through its conservatory, develops an after-school program to which schoolteachers refer students. The university's goal seems altruistic, but student recruitment probably factors into its participation. The motivation, then, may be part academy/community and part academy/academy.

Many universities in Canada operate conservatories that are community music schools in all but name. Group and individual instruction is offered at all levels and can include Suzuki, Kindermusik, Kodály, Orff, Dalcroze and other teaching methodologies. While students are the closest link between

schools and conservatories, since they often receive instruction at both places (e.g. group lessons at school and private lessons after school), teachers are the closest link between university music schools and conservatories. University professors teach at conservatories as independent contractors or in conjunction with university contracts. Senior undergraduate or graduate students may teach as independent contractors, to fulfill teaching assistantships, or to satisfy requirements of a teaching methods or pedagogy class. Work-placement or service learning modules involving community teaching may also be part of a university music program.

In each of these examples – academy/academy, community/community, and academy/community (including the conservatory model just described) – the university provides instruction and leadership to the community. This is as it should be, but only to a point. Although real benefits accrue to the community in each example, the relationship between academy and community is consistently hierarchical. The academy teaches the community. The community learns from the academy. Universities comprise experts. Communities comprise lay people. Professionals work at the university. Amateurs live in the community. Such stereotypes misrepresent resources in the community. This skews the university/community balance, so outreach motives and methods, and methods and outcomes, may no longer accord with one another.

Susan Knight, reflecting on her role as a choral conductor, addresses this kind of disjuncture between aims and achievements:

If I conduct a pedagogical practice in which I autocratically direct, diagnose, prescribe, treat, and redirect the music-making, then how can my students acquire those qualities which I most want for them: independence, self-directed skill acquisition . . . self-confidence, creativity, awareness and consideration of others . . .? I, as their teacher-conductor, must find effective ways to distribute the power amongst [choir members and] . . . share the decision-making with them. (Knight, 2004, p. 11)

The same principles apply when university experts contribute to community activities. The goal, surely, is for the community to realize self-sufficiency. This is not achieved by sustaining the separateness of academy and community, but by bringing them closer together. “An alliance of academy and community so reciprocal that distinguishing one from the other has nothing to do with purpose or meaning, but solely with administrative and physical structure” (Carruthers, 2003, p. 12) would be ideal.

Until this is achieved, any distribution of responsibility or power that favours the university can threaten the community. For this reason, when faced with the prospect of cooperation with universities, community recalcitrance is neither uncommon nor unfounded. A quarter-century ago, Minzey and LaTarte (1979) noted this phenomenon with respect to schools. “Groups dealing with community education . . . perceive that schools are going to expand their activities into the specialties of other agencies and will infringe on, disrupt, interfere with and even eliminate other organizations. It is a typical case of ‘turfdom’ of which we are all sometimes guilty . . .” (p. 51).

Léo Charbonneau (2004) elaborated on this enmity with respect to universities in a recent article on community service learning and civic engagement in Canada. “Community organizations often have limited resources and may even feel reluctant to participate [in community service learning] for fear of being subsumed by the university” (p. 16). Charbonneau advises independent management of co-operative endeavours. He gives, as an example, Trent University, in Peterborough, Ontario, where community service learning is “managed through an independent non-profit organization called the Trent Centre for Community-based Education. The centre’s board, made up of representatives from both Trent University and local community agencies, strives to have neither side dominate” (p. 16). In this way, the university embraces its new role as leader in the community, but abandons its historical role as leader of the community.

Stereotypes within the musical community must also be challenged if synergies between academy and community are to occur. In a paper on arts management I presented in Paris last year (Carruthers, 2003) I recounted John Blacking’s summary of Percy Grainger’s appraisal of who does what in the world of music.

Role distinctions between creator, performer and listener, variations in musical styles and contrasts in the apparent musical ability of composers and performers, are consequences not of different genetic endowment, but of the division of labour in society, of the functional interrelationship of groups and of the commitment of individuals to music-making as a social activity. Distinctions between music as ‘folk’,

‘art’, or ‘popular’ reflect a concern with musical products, rather than with the dynamic processes of music making. (Blacking, 1987, p. 21)

Grainger was ahead of his time in rejecting the idea that amateur and professional musicians could only gaze at one another across an unbridgeable gulf. His view of eastern and western, concert and popular, concert and folk music, and so forth, is also quite modern. Arbitrary distinctions between types of musicians and styles of music have long been impediments to university involvement in community music. Furthermore, the emphasis on product at the expense of process, on talent at the expense of training, is at odds with what community music seeks to achieve.

The belief that individuals assessed as “talented” should have greater opportunity for study than others in the population is anathema to community music education. Finland has long been enlightened in this regard. The large number of world-class musicians emanating from this comparatively small country does not speak necessarily of superior talent. It speaks of an education system built on the premise that music study is everyone’s right. As Riita Poutanen, principal of the West Helsinki Music School states, “if you only educate those with a special talent for an art, the culture loses” (Tillotson, 2004).

Concepts of a musical elite and an elite music are bound up with one another. Universities, as custodians of elite music, have had little to do with community music. Herein lies a contradiction that belies musical foresight. As Estelle Jorgensen observes in her most recent book, *Transforming Music*

Education (2003),

Throughout history, common music has constituted the bedrock for elite music. . . . This is the case, for example, with jazz, in which the tradition that began as informal music making was transformed into a classical tradition in its own right appealing to an elite group of practitioners and listeners. (p. 33)

It is only when once “common music” becomes elite music that universities take note. Prior to that, they evince little interest in repertoire outside a strict canon for undergraduate teaching, as distinct from graduate research purposes. Courses on rock music, for example, became standard fare at North American universities only when the 1960s and 70s were safely over and done with.

What makes music “important” enough to be studied at university is, for the first time in a long time, in a state of flux.

The notions of centre and periphery, mainstream and margin, and universal and local have long been important criteria for the scholarly study of Western art music. Indeed they are often taken for granted. During the nineteenth-century these relationships were complementary and underwrote the corollary assumptions that, whereas great music serves to mediate the local and the universal . . . lesser music remains perforce contained in its local sphere. (Sallis, 2004, p. 1)

Assumptions about what constitutes greater and lesser music, and how

music's relevance to the community that produced it is assessed, are undergoing review. The result is that non-elite musics are gaining a stronger and stronger curricular foothold, which augers well for academy/community liaison.

To complete this transformation, universities must accept that amateur non-elite music may lack the polish of professional elite music. The public, too, must accept that this is so. Jorgensen blames the chasm in public perception of community and professional music on advertising that “undermines and devalues amateur participation in music making by subjecting it to comparison with exacting professional and commercial standards” (Jorgensen, 2003, p. 2). The university is a bastion of professional standards. It has interest in maintaining the status quo and takes a Janus-faced view of community music. Everyone should be encouraged to make music and has ability to do so in some degree. On the other hand, community music is not the same standard as professional music and so lies outside the purview of university music programs. Although other practitioners, in health-care and community development, for example, may play a role in community music activities, university musicians, the reasoning goes, belong to a professional elite whose talent and training sets them apart from the community at large (Small, 1977, p. 208; Small, 1998, pp. 64-74).

So the question remains – are meaningful synergies possible between communities and universities when it comes to music? The answer, of course, is yes, but only once certain assumptions on both sides are abandoned. This process is already well underway. The realization that non-classical and non-western musics can have widespread significance beyond

the local sphere, and that complexity and sophistication are not the same thing, are changing the way universities approach music education. They are embracing a more comprehensive view of music, musicians and the musical community than ever before. The result is that collaborative relationships that restore balance to community/university interaction are possible.

There are impediments to a rapid, wholesale transformation of the relational paradigm. Community relations with universities have been too hierarchical, too mired in stereotypes of experts and novices, which means leaders and followers, to admit radical change easily. It is now recognized, however, (1) that institutional outreach that fails to foster community engagement is self-serving and apt to lead nowhere, and (2) that approaches to educating musically that equate talent with privilege, and that polarize those who have and those who have not, received formal training in music (for whatever reason) must be relinquished before new synergies can occur. It is only by moving beyond conventional synergies that community music can flourish within the university musical community.

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