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Towards Musical Individuation

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In Jungian theory, heavily influenced by Zen Buddhism (Lee, 1998; Spiegelman & Miyuki, 1987), the developmental stages of human life are symbolized as a circle that represents the wholeness, and the open ended process towards the wholeness is called Individuation. Within the circle there are two stages; the Morning and the Afternoon of Life, and the latter begins at the age of 35, an age at which individuation begins and one that I have reached and passed. Thus, it seemed to be a perfect time for me to begin my own journey towards individuation, especially musical individuation since music had always been such a central part of my life.



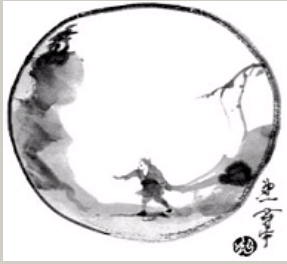
Musical individuation is a term that I created to refer "individuation as a musical being." In the belief that every human being has his or her own "Music Child" [1] that represents one of the creative, genuine, healthy cores of the self, we are all musical beings, and each individual has his or her own relationship to music. Musical individuation therefore means an open-ended process towards the wholeness in music.

My relationship with music dates back to my years in kindergarten, and I remember singing and dancing as daily rituals during those times. Nevertheless, I have and continue to make a great deal of effort to regain my relationship to music in my life, because I lost it for a long time. Hence, I would like to share my ongoing journey towards musical individuation that will allow me to become more whole and genuine in music.

Being a Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapist, who values the therapeutic essence of innate creativity and uses improvisational music to maximize it, helped me realize that not only the client but also the therapist has to reach his or her own "Music Child" in order to facilitate any change or growth through music. This realization led me to reach out to my Music Child, my Ox.

The Jungian idea of individuation is often explained with the symbolization of "Ox Herding" from Zen Buddhism since the process of ox herding [2] symbolizes that of finding the true self (Spiegelman & Miyuki, 1987). The Ox here symbolizes unconsciousness that is to be searched for, aware of, encountered and integrated with consciousness to achieve the wholeness, the ultimate terminus of individuation.

The first step of individuation is to be aware of one's individual, social, cultural unconscious forces that affect conscious thoughts and behavior. Thus, my musical individuation began with my attempts to be aware of the unconscious forces beneath my conscious thoughts and behaviors.



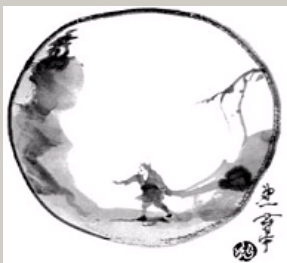
Searching for the Ox^[3]

The Morning of My Life

As a Korean woman raised in a Confucian culture that has required women to be silent, submissive, passive, dependent, obedient and inexpressive, I often had a hard time figuring out how to be true to myself. I have been told not to be different, not to be expressive, not to be excessive, not to be passionate, not to have a voice and even not to be aware of my own feelings, needs, thoughts or beliefs. I was always worried about how much I could express my feelings or reveal my thoughts and needs, because I was criticized whenever I had my own voice. Thus, it was not really possible to be true to myself or to others during the morning of my life.

However, it was through music (and perhaps only through music) that I was able to feel myself, my enthusiasm and my energy. Music was my refuge where I could be myself as fully as I wanted. Hence, it was rather natural for me to have the dream of becoming a musician. In college, I majored in voice, minored in piano and continued developing myself as a classical musician.

One day, I heard about people who used music and their musicianship in working with children with special needs. I became so curious and fascinated that musicians could help people feel better and learn more. I subsequently volunteered to film sessions in the Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy at NYU. There, I witnessed the power of music as well as the power of people. There were fabulous musicians singing and playing not for big audiences but for little handicapped children. I was so moved by the talented musicians devoted to helping special children grow. The children discovered new abilities in music and were able to get in touch with and express difficult feelings by singing or playing instruments. Shortly thereafter, I decided to become a music therapist and began to study music therapy at NYU.



Seeing the Traces

An Initial Step

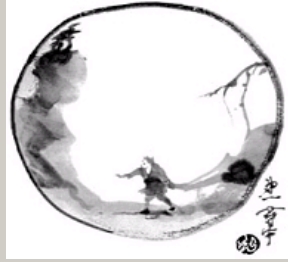
– Being Aware of My Musical Persona and Shadow

In the music therapy program at NYU, I was encouraged for the first time in my life to be as expressive, communicative and creative as I could be in music. I remember how frustrated I was when I was asked to improvise on the spot during the first improvisation class. Since I had long been trained as a classical musician, I had been banned from improvisation and encouraged only to recreate music as it was. I did not know how to make music without a set of instructions or structure. I had never been encouraged in my classical training to express, create, and communicate freely through music. Although it had always been a central part of my life, music, at some point, had become something to achieve rather than just something to enjoy and appreciate. It was such a reawakening moment for me to realize that I needed to find my musical self not only to become a better music therapist but also to become fully human.

During the last five semesters in the PhD program in Expressive Therapies at Lesley University, I was often encouraged and motivated to focus on my own musical, artistic and expressive needs, and it led to my self-awareness, the key factor of individuation. Through being aware of and taking care of my own needs, I believed that I could create more potential to become freer,

more creative, more expressive and more communicative, not only as a therapist but also as an individual.

Upon my reawakening, I had to go back to the fundamental questions about my authentic relationship with music, and my initial step to search for the musical ox finally began.



Seeing the Ox

The Afternoon of My Life

Meeting My Musical Shadow

My musical persona was formed during the morning of my life. It aims for artistic, aesthetic perfection; no mistakes, no awkward sounds and no imbalances. Every sound was supposed to result from super-conscious, rational, pre-calculated and prepared structures or organisms. It does not allow for any unconscious, unplanned, unprepared or unexplained sounds. Should any imperfect sound escape, my musical persona would become frustrated and upset since these sounds must be the result of incompetence. A recurring dream of mine concerns washing all of the dirt off of my body. In real life, especially when I was in college, I obsessively washed my hands so as not to be exposed to any kind of harmful germs. All of these represented my perfectionist persona.

What my musical persona hated and feared was my musical shadow – imperfect, unplanned, unprepared musical sounds. During music therapy training, I participated in a music therapy group where the members were encouraged to improvise music to explore active imagination, a way of discovering the unconscious. In two years, I could not (perhaps I refused to) participate in the group improvisation because I could not accept the unplanned sounds of improvisation as music. I just could not bear all of the unprepared sounds as well as the members who seemed to be enjoying making unpleasant noises.

It was only later that I discovered that I was just projecting to the improvisation members and to their music all of the fears of my musical shadow. Outside the classroom, my relationship with the class members was not problematic. I was recognizing my strong uncomfortable feelings towards the shadow. I also started contemplating other possible unconscious elements triggering my anxiety and frustration in music

Getting in Touch with My Musical Anima and Animus

I might have many different anima and animus figures in my musical self. Some of them empower me as a musician; others activate my inner critics. My father, an amateur classical music critic who loves classical music and greatly admires highly gifted classical musicians, would be an important animus. He is likely the one who passed on his love of music and musicality to me. My father used to ask me to sit with him and listen to "perfect" musicians. However, when I said to him that I wanted to be a musician, he gave me a doubtful look and said to me, "Do you understand music should be made only by genius people? Otherwise, that is not music. It's not more than a good deal of noise." In college, I always tried to get his approval and recognition as a musician. But, whenever I practiced before him, he asked me to shut the door so that I could not be heard. Clearly, my musicality was not perfect enough to be music to him.

Another important animus is my music therapy supervisor. He is such a talented musician who never had any kind of formal musical training. Just as easily as walking, he one day picked up the piano. Whenever he is making music, it seems so effortless and free. His talent makes me feel even more incompetent and incapable despite his warm encouragement and compliments on my musicality.

My primary musical anima is the music teacher I had at college. She was energetic, enthusiastic, but at the same time, critical, capricious, short-tempered and narcissistic. She did not allow for any mistakes or imperfections in making music and used to yell at her young

student, "You are a pathetic creature! How dare you want to be a musician! You better stop musical training right away and learn another skill to survive in this world! I feel so sorry for you because you certainly do not have enough talent to be a good musician." Her presence was just enough to make me feel inefficient, incapable and incompetent. Even though she one time said that all she had been doing was to stimulate her students' desires to devote themselves more to musical training, most of them gave up their careers as musicians shortly after they graduated from the college. I did not give up my career right away, but whenever I was making music, I could hear her criticizing voice saying, "No, no, no! You are not good enough to make music!"

Beyond my conscious levels, these anima and animus have influenced my musical personality and behaviors. Whenever I make music, their presence and voices become my own, saying, "not good enough!"

Looking into Musical Archetypes

Now, what is music? This question occupied me for hours before I fell asleep last night. Music is a strange thing. I would almost say it is a miracle. For it stands halfway between thought and phenomenon, between spirit and matter; a sort of nebulous mediator, like and unlike the thing it mediates -- spirit that requires manifestation in time, and matter that can do without space. We do not know what music is (Heine quoted by Ansdell, 1995 p.7).

As I embarked on a journey to find my musical self and became cognizant of my musical shadow, anima and animus, a fundamental question was raised; what is music as it is? Although this Zen-like question helped me unify my musical persona and shadow, it is not an easy question to answer.

According to Ansdell (1995), music is the actualization of the possibility of any sound, experienced with the body, to present meaning to a human being. Some people argue that all sounds cannot be considered music, for sound and music are different, and other people insist that all sounds should be regarded as music, for music should not be limited to the view of human beings. Bruscia (1998) notes that:

Does music always involve sound? Does music include the organization of silence, noise, and vibrations? Is music strictly auditory? Does it always have to be experienced through the ear? Is music strictly human, that is, do all sounds in music have to be humanly made, or does music also include environmental or natural sources of sound? Are bird calls and whale songs music? (p.8)

As Bruscia's question indicates, music can be conceived and perceived differently in various situations and environments. The sound of a bird singing, considered as disturbing noise in the early morning, can be perceived as serenading music in the evening. The ticking sound of a clock regarded as motivating in the afternoon can be unbearable at night. In other words, how I define music depends on how I am feeling and what I am thinking.

Consequently, music can also tell something about myself as Ansdell (1995) remarked that what we do, what we make is how we are (p.125). Aigen (1999, 2003) also declared that music reveals who we are, what we feel, and what we need. Furthermore, one's music can be a symbolic projection of the unconscious aspects of the self (Turry, 1998). That is, the musical elements are symbolic representations of unconscious elements of the self and the process through which these elements unfold and interact within the personality. Thus, each musical element symbolically represents a particular aspect of personality, and each musical process corresponds to a psychological process (Bruscia, 1987). It is the reason that I was able to learn more about myself by uncovering my musical unconsciousness.

According to Nordoff and Robbins (1977) and Lee (2003), there are some archetypal musical elements despite geographical, historical, ethnic, and cultural uniqueness and differences throughout the world. For example, that the two most common tempi of musical beat are those of our heartbeat and of walking. Also, the most common musical form is "A (a+a') B (b+b')," consisting of symmetrical phrases; this might reflect music within our body, mind, and spirit, which seem organized rather than random, and symmetrical rather than unbalanced. Hence, the music we make can be related to the music we have. In other words, the music from us relates to the music within us.

As musical expression can tell us about the physical, psychological, social and spiritual

condition of those who participate in its realization and creation (Aigen, 1999), the music we make and experience can reveal who we are, what we feel, what we think, and what we need. Therefore, the freer the music is, the freer the life is; the richer the music is, the richer the life is.

Remaining Journey

"Are you a god?" they asked.

"No."

"An angel?"

"No."

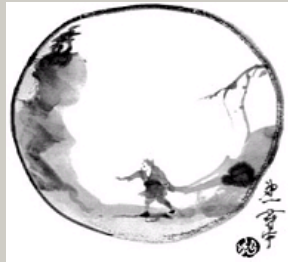
"A saint?"

"No."

"Then what are you?"

Buddha answered, "I am awake." (Smith, 1995, p.82)

There are more important stages left towards individuation; herding the Ox, coming back home on the ox's back, forgetting the ox, and then the "kong (空)" or mu (無)". Even though I can now identify some of the unconscious forces that I have, I am still struggling to harmonize the conscious and unconscious parts of myself. My discomfort, anxiety, fear and frustration are still there. The only difference is that I am now aware of other parts of myself. Individuation is a life-long journey, and I just hope to be awake during my journey, believing I will become more genuine in music along the way.



Catching the Ox

Notes

[1] An inborn musicality residing in every human being that can be activated in the service of personal growth and development. Once activated, the Music Child in each individual stimulates self-discovery, self-expression, and self-actualization (Nordoff & Robbins, 1977, 1980; Robbins, 2005; Robbins & Robbins, 1991, 1998).

[2] That is searching for the ox, seeing the traces, seeing the ox, catching the ox, herding the Ox, coming back home on the ox's back, forgetting the ox, and then achieving the "kong (空)" or mu (無)", the state of wholeness. In Zen philosophy, wholeness is emptiness, and emptiness is wholeness.

[3] The pictures are works by Yokoo Tatsuhiko, a members of the Sanbō-Kyōdan Society.

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