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Vol 5(3), November 1, 2005  
mi40005000192

## Being Who You Aren't; Doing What You Can't

### Community Music Therapy & the Paradoxes of Performance<sup>[1]</sup>

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If Man is a sapient animal, a tool-making animal, a self-making animal, a symbol-using animal, he is no less a performing animal, Homo Performans [...] His performances are reflexive - in performing he reveals himself to himself.

*Victor Turner*

[In Vygotsky's zone of proximal development] children perform "a head taller than they are". Human development is an 'unnatural act'; we become who we "are" by continuously "being who we are not"

*Fred Newman*

Performing arts like music reveal the collaborative elements in the expressive practice of mutual respect.

*Richard Sennett*

All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify.

*Erving Goffmann*

### Summary

This article gives some introductory thoughts on the 'paradoxes of performance' in contemporary music therapy, through the perspective of the evolving practice and discourse of Community Music Therapy—where aspects of the practice, theory and ethics of performance in music therapy are currently being debated. The article looks at these aspects in two ways: firstly, through a case study of a Community Music Therapy project in East London which is being tracked as part of a larger research study; secondly, from various interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives on music, performance, and personal and social development. It suggests that the new discourse of Community Music Therapy is usefully opening up professional and theoretical discussion within music therapy to the potentials and problems of working with clients across the full continuum of private to public music therapy, and to the rich potentials of music as a performance art within reflexive practice.

### 1. Introduction—'David's Epilogue'

In my book *Music for Life* (1995) the case study of 'David'<sup>[2]</sup> gives a mostly conventional narrative of therapeutic process. I end it, however, by briefly describing how David and I performed together at the Christmas party at the St Thomas Centre (which housed, within the

crypt of a church, a music therapy unit, primary care NHS clinic and a counseling center, with occasional joint events). At the time of writing I think I saw this performance event as illustrating the successful outcome of the individual music therapy process.

After we'd finished doing music therapy together David and I kept in touch. Twelve years later I interviewed him as part of a project I'm doing on people's relationship to music, and how it helps them through their lives. David talked in this interview about the good feelings he's always got from playing music:

**David:** It feels as though I'm actually enjoying what I'm actually doing. It feels sometimes that I'm completely someone else, and playing to a whole audience...

**Gary:** You can imagine yourself standing up there on the stage?

**David:** Oh yes, I *can* do! It takes me back to the time I was in the *St Thomas Centre* with you, and we had that concert for the patients and the staff at the Centre. That was really *marvelous* to me. Because I was actually in front of me. We had some rehearsal, I went home and had my tea, came back and done the whole thing. And I *really* enjoyed doing that in front of the complete audience. I played *Amazing Grace*, and I even composed a bit of it myself! People clapped at the end, and everyone came up to me, and I was talking to them...there was no difficulties...

These comments made me think. What David remembered twelve years later was this public aspect of our work. He cites as central what I marginalized at the end of the case study. The strange phrase he uses—"I was actually in front of me"—refers I think to his earlier statement ("It feels that I'm completely someone else"), perhaps to the sensation of being different 'out there', in public, instead of his usual feeling of being trapped inside himself, socially excluded. But this leads to a paradox, because when David continues to talk about how music helps him he also says "In music...it's like me being me. I can be *me*—I can show my true self".

This vignette of David focuses nicely what I'm thinking of as the 'paradoxes of performance'—which Community Music Therapy is currently engaging with. The sense of paradox is expressed in the title of this article, inspired by the ideas of the 'social therapist' Fred Newman (who in turn is inspired by Vygotsky): how performance can allow you to be yourself through 'being someone else'; can enable you to do what you 'can't do'; can be naturally 'unnatural'; can allow you to reflect on the real through the unreal; can be personal yet public; can be shared yet different for everyone.

In order to explore these paradoxes I look at several areas in this article:

1. Music therapy's traditional relationship with, and attitude towards, performance
2. Community Music Therapy's development, and the debate around performance
3. The 'normative model' of performance in musical culture and its gradual challenge (in both practice and theory)
4. Uses of a notion of performance in other (socio-cultural, health and political) discourses

I also describe a current Community Music Therapy project in some detail and suggest how the 'paradoxes of performance' could perhaps be a resource rather than a problem for the further development of music therapy.

## 2. Music Therapy & Performance: An Ambivalent Relationship?

Each era in the development of 'modern music therapy', as well as each national tradition, seems to have had a different attitude towards performance<sup>[3]</sup>. The pattern, however, seems to be broadly as follows:

*Stage One: 'pre-professional':* musicians perform to patients in hospitals—sometimes legitimated by a 'recreational model' that saw music as a therapeutic form of entertainment, implicitly addressing the social and psychological aspects of illness.

*Stage Two: 'early professional':* with the beginnings of modern professional practice 'musician therapists' played to, but increasingly also *with* patients. In the initially broad work of many of the music therapy pioneers<sup>[4]</sup> there was a fluid movement between private and public musical events, psychological and social aims, entertainment and therapy. Musical performance is certainly one element of what was understood as 'music therapy' at this time.

*Stage Three: 'institutional consensus':* the institutionalization of music therapy practice has

been legitimated by a theoretical consensus constructing music therapy as a paramedical/psychological intervention, along with its normative conventions (what I called the 'consensus model' in Ansdell 2002). This led to an increasing 'privatisation' of its occasions. Individual or closed-group sessions have become the norm, and several pioneers who were involved in Stage 2 have expressed their relief that the professional expectation is no longer that they manage the musical life of a hospital or school as well as their individual therapy case-load[5].

Interestingly, specific reference to musical performance in music therapy literature is scant in both Stages 2 and 3 (shown by the following brief informal survey of indexed references to 'performance' in selected music therapy literature[6] (Fig.1):

**Fig 1: 'Performance' in selected music therapy literature**

BOOK	No. of indexed references
GASTON (1968) <i>Music in Therapy</i>	0
PRIESTLEY (1975) <i>Music Therapy in Action</i>	0
NORDOFF & ROBBINS (1977) <i>Creative Music Therapy</i>	0
DAVIS, GFELLER & THAUT (1992) <i>An Introduction to Music Therapy Theory &amp; Practice</i>	0
HEAL & WIGRAM (1993) <i>Music Therapy in Health &amp; Education</i>	0
BUNT (1994) <i>Music Therapy: An Art Beyond Words</i>	0
ANSDELL (1995) <i>Music for Life</i>	1
LEE (1996) <i>Music at the Edge</i>	1
PAVLICEVIC (1997) <i>Music Therapy in Context</i>	0
BUNT & HOSKYNS (2003) <i>Handbook of Music Therapy</i>	1
DAVIES & RICHARDS (2003) <i>Music Therapy &amp; Groupwork</i>	0
DARNLEY-SMITH & PATEY (2003) <i>Music Therapy</i>	0
ALDRIDGE (2004) <i>Health, the Individual &amp; Integrated Medicine</i>	2
WIGRAM (2004) <i>Improvisation</i>	2
.....	
RUUD (1998) <i>Improvisation, Communication &amp; Culture</i>	12
PAVLICEVIC & ANSDELL (2004) <i>Community Music Therapy</i>	43

Although I characterized Stage 2 as incorporating performance in music therapy practice, it is actually seldom discussed (this is strangely true even of the Priestley and Nordoff-Robbins texts). In both of these latter cases there was clearly explicit performance work going on, though when it comes to their written texts it is the individual or 'private group' work that is theorized as 'music therapy' (almost as if perhaps the public performance aspects were self-evident—or else difficult to integrate into developing theory).

It is clear we cannot say that performance in music therapy has suddenly arrived on the scene after Stage 3. Perhaps, however, for some music therapists in Stage 2 and 3 there was (for disciplinary and professional reasons) a discomfort in integrating performance theoretically into music therapy discourse alongside dyadic and group formats. For others the 'consensus model' clearly provided a welcome exit route from having to work at this level[7].

To sum up (and perhaps to caricature - but only a bit!), the 'consensus model' of music therapy considers:

- Therapy and performance as antithetical
- "Putting on a performance" ("acting-out", being "inauthentic", hiding behind a "persona") is what therapy is trying to *treat*, not encourage!
- Performance for ill, vulnerable, troubled people is counterproductive, coercive, ethically dubious, professionally confusing and possibly dangerous
- Therapy is about *process*, not product
- Therapy needs: privacy, confidentiality, concentration on individual authenticity and care with theoretically-conceived boundaries of time, space and person

### 3. Community Music Therapy & Performance: A New Attitude?

At the base of Fig.1 are two exceptions to the pattern: Even Ruud's (1998) *Improvisation, Communication & Culture*, and Pavlicevic & Ansdell's edited book *Community Music Therapy*

(2004). The remainder of this article is partly an attempt to suggest some areas of explanation for these exceptions (which are becoming rapidly less exceptional in recent music therapy discourse). In contrast to the bullet list above, Community Music Therapy is suggesting that:

- Performance occasions *can* be an appropriate therapeutic means for individuals and communities
- 'Giving a performance' can have positive, healthy connotations that relate to a fundamental and natural mode of musicing, and to a fundamental psychological and social reality—that 'performing' ourselves in the world is natural and necessary.
- Performance work in music therapy can keep a focus on *process* whilst also working for outcomes; can balance individual and communal needs
- Performances create and sustain networks of relationships between and amongst people, institutions and communities

Whilst Community Music Therapy (Stige 2003; Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004) is in its early days of theoretical formulation, it is clear that the broader practices that it champions have been 'marginally widespread' for much of Stage 3 (the contradictory phrase being telling here!). In fact it has been a prime motivation of CoMT to help organize a theoretical and professional discourse for such broader practice in order to better legitimate, theorise, research, and teach it. Performance aspects have been a key (perhaps core) characteristic of CoMT practice, as shown in the first collection of international chapters on the area (Pavlicevic & Ansdell, 2004). The 43 indexed references to 'performance' in this volume illustrate the function the various authors accord to performance and its occasions in their music therapy practice. These suggest how it is possible to twin performance and music therapy not as the 'ambivalent pairing' we saw in Stage 2 and Stage 3 of music therapy's development, but rather as:

- A natural and necessary part of standard musical practice that can often also be appropriate for music therapy
- A focus, site, tool or occasion for music therapy to work with personal, social and cultural dimensions of human need
- A concept in tune with contemporary interdisciplinary theory on personal and social health and wellbeing

Some of the rapidly developing discourse on Community Music Therapy has been centering on this relationship between performance and music therapy practice, leading to an interesting recent web-debate on the subject that raised some of the paradoxes of the subject. Even Ruud (2004) published a short discussion paper entitled 'Defining Community Music Therapy' in which he tried to do just this, using the notion of performance:

Community Music Therapy, then, may be defined as the reflexive use of performance based music therapy within a systemic perspective. (Ruud 2004, emphasis in original)

This suggestion was followed by a lively debate by further discussants Stige (2004), Ruud (2004), Ansdell (2005), Ruud (2005), Pavlicevic (2005) and Garred (2005). The gist of this discussion is a resistance to *defining* CoMT by exclusive reference to performance, whilst acknowledging that the potential value of performance is indeed one vital characteristic of most CoMT work—and that reflexive thinking on this is relatively new. Performance can be key (at some times, in some places), but is also not central. It is one possibility, richly connected to other possibilities. Ruud, however, holds to his view that what is definitional of CoMT is that it uses performance to 'negotiate the space between the private and the public, the client and the institution/other staff, or the client and the community' (2004).

Various useful themes and distinctions emerged from this discussion. Stige, for example, refers to the new discussion on the 'narrow and broad' notions of performance: on '[a] concept of performance as presentation of art for an audience and performance as presentation of the self in everyday contexts' (2004, p. 3).

Apart from this latest discussion there has been increased attention recently within the music therapy literature to the relationship between music therapy and performance (Stige, 2004; Turry<sup>[8]</sup>, 2005). Much of this argument was of course prefigured in Even Ruud's<sup>[9]</sup> pioneering reorientation of music therapy towards aspects of culture, society and the relationships between musical performances and the way we 'perform' our identity and health. The last of these aspects has also been key to David Aldridge's conception of music therapy's value (I shall look further at these ideas in Section 6).

A parallel 'turn to performance' has been happening within musicology, sociology and cultural

#### 4. Rethinking Performance: From Reproduction to Relationship

Although mainstream thinking about music within musicology grudgingly conceded that music was a performance art, it traditionally considered performance (and the performer) as 'supplementary' to the musical work and its composer. 'Performing *what?*' was instead its starting question. Both Cook (2003) and Godlovitch (1998) give accounts of this text-based idea of music, which has denigrated performance as mere reproduction of 'musical objects', leading at best to a concept of 'music and performance'.

A significant shift has taken place recently, however. Trends such as the 'new musicology' and what Cook calls a 'culturally-oriented musicology' (developed out of interdisciplinary contact between musicologists, ethnomusicologists, sociologists of music, pop and jazz studies)<sup>[10]</sup>, have increasingly moved towards a performance-based understanding of music ('music as performance'). Attention now is being given to the creative act of performing itself as a social event; to the 'improvised' dialogue with a text or a tradition in real social time; to rehearsal and inter-performer collaboration. This is a major shift of emphasis:

Instead of seeing musical works as texts within which social structures are encoded, we see them as scripts, in response to which social relationships are enacted. [...] To call music a performing art, then, is not just to say that we are performing it, it is to say that through it we perform social meaning (Cook, 2003, p. 206).

Working from a similar premise, both Benson (2003) and Godlovitch (1998) elaborate a much more personal and social account of musical performance than has previously been the case in musicological writing. Benson's is based on a Gadamer-inspired dialogical theory, where the whole musical process—composing, performing, 'audiencing'—is seen as one unbroken and improvised interpersonal and intercultural dialogue which happens through musicking. Performance for Benson is elaborative, improvisatory, transformative—it brings music quite literally to life again. 'All performance is resuscitation' he writes (p. 179). This in turn lends performing an interesting social and ethical dimension:

The challenge facing the performer is that of speaking both in the name of others—the composer, performers of the past, and the whole tradition in which one lives—and in one's own name, as well as to those who listen. (Benson, 2003, p. 188)

Godlovitch's analysis of musical performance takes him to what he calls a 'personalist' conclusion. 'Why do we attend a musical performance?' he asks. Not just to hear a text being 'reproduced' but to hear *people* performing, to witness something being at stake for these people, and of this situation being something humanly vital:

Personalism reminds us that performance is a way of communicating, not especially a work or a composer's notions, but a person, the performer, through music. Personalism intimates that a proper understanding of performance must...appreciate ritual, forms of communication, action and its significance, human benefit and reciprocity, and a good many other concerns belonging naturally to social conduct. (Godlovitch, 1998, p. 145)

This new attitude towards performance is perhaps most famously conveyed by Christopher Small's (1998) concept of *musicking* (and his book of this name), which is achieving a reorientation of thinking about music - towards activity and relationship. Performance is central to Small's ecological model of musical activity- indeed performing is unashamedly simply what music is all about:

To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing' (Small, 1998, p. 9)

Musicking is about the creation and performance of relationships [...] It is the relationships that it brings into existence in which the meaning of a musical performance lies' (Small, 1998, p. 193)

In some degree Small's social discourse of performance was already there in earlier writing about music by non-musicologists. The pioneer sociologist Alfred Schutz wrote about the social intersubjective relationships between performers in his famous essay 'Making Music

Together: A Study in Social Relationship'(1964). Equally, the cultural theorist Edward Said (1991) has written about performance as an 'extreme occasion' that reveals the paradox of being utterly socially situated whilst also being removed and protected from everyday life within the self-sufficiency of a 'musical world' (Barenboim & Said, 2002, p. 37).

One more perspective needs attention here: the writing on musical performance within popular music and jazz studies (Frith, 1996; Fischlin & Heble, 2004). Here the traditional 'art music' problem of musical works is less apparent, and the approach to the issue more pragmatic. Jason Toynbee (2000) writes the following in a chapter called 'Making up & Showing off: what musicians do':

So far... I have not made a distinction between authorship and performance. For in an important sense it is the elision of these moments which distinguishes popular music's mode of production...In short, performance refers to creation-in-progress...to carrying on production' (Toynbee, 2000, p. 53)

In pop performance there is then the whole theatrical side of 'showing-off' (as arguably there is in *any* performative genre). What gets usefully emphasized in much analysis of pop, rock and jazz performance is just how key this aspect of communicating to the audience is. This sensitizes us also to the various modes of communication itself (musical and non-musical) within this heightened context—turning the spotlight particularly on how the body and its gestures mediate form, content and context (as we will see in Section 6 from Jane Davidson's research).

Arguably many of these different perspectives sketched in this section could be accommodated within the interdisciplinary area of 'performance theory' and performance studies (a field too wide to fully characterize here (but see Schechner (2002)). Nicholas Cook helpfully summarises the 'performance studies paradigm':

The contemporary performance studies paradigm stresses the extent to which signification is constructed through the act of performance, and generally through acts of negotiation either between performers, or between them and the audience. In other words, performative meaning is understood as subsisting in process, and hence by definition is irreducible to product. (Cook, 2003, p. 205)

The case study that follows could be understood in this sense.

## 5. A Case Study of Performance: Musical Minds' Summer Concert

*Musical Minds* is a group which meets in the East End of London, in a church hall next to the main psychiatric hospital in the area. The group is hosted by a non-medical agency that gives support and advocacy to adults living with chronic mental illness. The area is one of the most socially-deprived in London, with high social immigration and migration. It still has, however, some of the vestiges of the old East-end community culture (which includes a musical culture of communal pub singing and performance).

*Musical Minds* comprises of a core of about 10 very diverse members, some of whom have experienced music therapy when in the hospital next door. Many are informally linked to a 'mental health community' within the area. They have existed as a group for many years, and set themselves up to sing together. It is not a music therapy group as such, though they do employ a music therapist, Sarah, as a 'group facilitator'<sup>[11]</sup>. The organization the group belongs to has a philosophy of self-advocacy and empowerment for members, which is an approach Sarah shares. She uses her music therapy skills, but also her mental health advocacy skills with the group. *Musical Minds* meets weekly, with members taking turns to sing solo songs, but increasingly to sing together as an ensemble. For the last three years they have arranged their own public concerts (usually twice a year), and are also invited to do 'guest spots' at events like World Mental Health Day. The group considers these public events the highlight and their *raison d'être*.

The following narrative describes aspects of a concert the group mounted in April 2004. Material comes from my contact with Sarah and the group before, during and after the concert, and from interviews with participants (both of the group and also with audience members). I've arranged the material into the themes this material fell into, but also to those most relevant to this article. The musical excerpts were chosen as representative of these themes.

### Preparing for the Concert

The group use their weekly time (from 4-6pm every Thursday) to prepare for the concert. They start rehearsing after Christmas for the April concert, with the urgency increasing in the final 6

weeks. I join them for a rehearsal three weeks before the concert. At first there's talk of whether there will be enough people in the audience; whether the staff of *Beside* will manage to do the food and drink; how to clear the stage area of junk. But then the group moves on to the musical aspects. They try out songs they will perform: some solo items, a few duets and trios, and several chorus numbers. Wayne rehearses his song, but he can't help rushing ahead with the music. Sarah tries to pull him back through her piano accompaniment, and after he's finished Colin gives him quite tactful feedback about singing it a bit slower. The next try he's a little better. Some of the communal numbers are ragged at first, but there's discussion about listening to each other, trying to get it together. They try again, listen a bit more to each other, and the music begins to cohere.

**(i) Individual & group** - Sarah talked about the development of the group over the last few years: from a rather individualistic 'doing their own thing' style to, more recently, building both musical and organizational collaboration. Sarah has encouraged the group to listen more to each others' songs, and to join in and work on group numbers. Social collaboration seems to have followed musical collaboration:

**Sarah:** For example... we worked out a vague dress-code and there was one guy—who's an 'unwashed rocker' and this is who he is and he's not going to change his image for anyone! And to the last it was I'm not going to change, so he said I won't sit on the stage, and we said OK... but he turned up to the performance in different trousers, a concession. We didn't say anything... but he'd thought about what he wanted to do...

**(ii) Preparation & spontaneity** - the group had been preparing for 4 months for the concert, and there's an important relationship between the ongoing week-by-week musical and social process of the group and this 'concert highlight'. The group is keen to put on the best show they can, both musically and in the presentation aspects. Sarah works hard to help keep members collaborating during rehearsals, but says that when it comes to the performance "all I do is play the piano—I don't go on stage at all. Someone compères, I just stay below the stage at the piano—as far as the audience is concerned I'm the piano-player!" Because there's a level of organization and preparation (of music, seating arrangements etc), there's also room for spontaneity and a sense of possibility on the night. For many people in the group this is the absolute highlight of their social life, and a real challenge on many levels:

**Sarah:** This concert is a big event for us... it's something that we aimed for and worked for and achieved—it gives a momentum, something to aim for, a reason for coming that will give you a musical experience today...It's not about rehearsing to do it over and over again in order to get it perfect, but working on it now, to get something out of the musical experience *right now*, in the concert.

**Audience member:** There was a real sense of occasion and preparation—they'd obviously thought about how they were sitting, what they were wearing... and at the same time there was an obvious enjoyment of having the audience *part of* it—so there was lots of acknowledgement of people in the audience.

**(iii) Support & autonomy** - On the stage there is a big banner with *Musical Minds* on it, brightening up the scruffy church hall, and communicating a sense of the identity and pride of the group. But there's also the very careful and skilled behind-the-scenes support that Sarah gives, which seems crucial to the performance event being a success. This support is at the same time musical, organizational and 'moral'. The 'musical support' becomes evidence both in rehearsal and performance times: Sarah needs to be an amazingly flexible accompanist to keep with some of the members, and to cope with their sometimes wayward renditions of songs:

**Sarah:** In terms of the music I'm finding a way for a song or chorus to actually work...given that many of the members *don't* actually sing what's written! So working out how to make suggestions about tempo, pitch, but also how much to let it go. I don't spend much time note-bashing... but there is a limit: you heard a few people chop notes, bars, leave sections out! [laughs]

Some people always make the same mistake of course, but others it just comes out differently every time... I might say things like 'slow down' ... and then in the group stuff I'll sometimes be very directive, and wave a hand around, but then they'll get up on the stage and it'll all gone haywire! So its getting balance between letting things happen and saying something. I think it's not right to say 'Everything's great!' when it's

not... because many of the members are musically sensitive, and they can tell the difference...

So Sarah sees her role in this preparatory stage as helping the members to get their performance as right as they can, or want it to be. It's not a case of musical perfection for perfection's sake, but of being sensitive to what the members themselves want to do with their music. Sarah manages this (as do the group) without comparing people too much—given there are marked difference of ability, talent and awareness in the group. During the concert Sarah steps more into her 'piano-player' role (though I was aware of her still using her 'directional skills' throughout the performance from the piano). Anxiety is often very high before the performance, and the atmosphere often socially fractious—I don't know why they put themselves through it' says Sarah. But the group seem indeed prepared to put themselves through this process for the sake of the performance and what they take out of this—both as individuals and as a group.

**Sarah:** Suddenly they're on the stage and they do everything then—you heard them shout to me: "Come on Sarah, let's start"—it's funny! I'm trying to find where *they* are, what's happening!

**Audience member:** I was struck by what it looked like when I walked in... tables and chairs with crisps and drink... not rows of chairs in lines. So from the beginning a sense of people coming to be part of an occasion, rather than to sit there and just watch. Also I recognised a lot of the people there, that are part of this loose mental health community in this area... so that was quite nice: the sense of the audience being part of a community too, overlaps between performers and audience...

### The Concert

The following three excerpts and comments give a flavour of aspects of the performance event itself:

**(i) *West Side Story Medley*** - the concert begins with all the group on stage, singing an ensemble number. Nerves are bad, and the beginning is musically ragged. Sarah works hard (on the piano, along with gestures to the group) to motivate musical collaboration. After the first shaky number of the medley they begin to gel:

**Sarah:** This *West Side Story* medley we did once before... sometimes it just goes chaotic, people speed up... But we then talked a lot about listening to each other to make it work... and after the show this time the person who'd usually trip it all up came up to me and said that it'd gone well and thank you, you teach us to listen... and I thought: wow, it doesn't actually matter whether it has the desired professional musical effect, but the fact that he's thinking about listening to others, that he can actually collaborate with others without it going off the rails... And that's a *huge* thing for them to be able to listen to each other... because their ongoing constant complaint in life is that they're not listened to... but the truth is that most people in the Group do find it very difficult to tolerate others: their behaviour, their stuff, their music... they haven't want to hear it in the past. So this is another paradox: their whole thing is "nobody listens to me" but then they don't listen to anybody else either!

**Audience member:** What happened is clearly supported by Sarah—both musically, in the way she has to be so flexible in her accompanying, sometimes having to jump from one part of a song to another, switch keys in the middle... but also how the Group has found a kind of autonomy... which Sarah facilitates... this is almost contradictory I know! The balance of how she does it... Musically you could say it was a bit scrappy... in contrast to the varying degrees of polish of the solo turns... but when they all came together you had this rather ragged mixture... in terms of timing and pitching.. but nevertheless there was a sense of them having *worked* together for this, and this being the culmination...

**(ii) *My Way*** - Vick takes the microphone for one of the solo spots. *My Way* is a song he identifies with, and others think of this as 'Vick's song'. Vick is part of the East End pub-singing culture and regularly sings this karaoke-style in the local area. He has a good strong voice and gives the song all he's got, though Sarah has to work hard to get Vick's performance more communicative (rather than a monologic karaoke singing-it-out style). But it changes during the song, and ends on an exciting climax, leading to rich applause. Vick is somehow both totally himself in his spot, whilst also being a Sinatra tribute, both giving an individual performance, but also really engaging with the social situation. This is characteristic of many of the solo 'spots'



in the concert:

**Sarah:** The group is incredibly various: their likes, dislikes, abilities, issues, age, background, difficulties... everything. The variety of songs is extreme! As professionals you'd never programme such variety, so you've got individuality at the same time!

It's interesting that what they're often anxious about is maintaining their own identity... but of course that's exactly what it's most difficult to do with a mental health difficulty—they're labelled, and there in this East London community which is a traumatic place to be... so it's an irony really that as I'm pushing them together musically they're becoming better at being individual... So the programme represents this idea of each person really being themselves through their choice of song and style, but also what's been achieved is a *togetherness*...

**Audience member:** When people stood up to do their solos, they're saying 'Here's *my* music, here's *my* history... There's a strong sense of individuality too—the individual 'turns'—people coming up to the mike and doing their song. But this wasn't at the expense of the group, because they took it in turns to introduce each other... with a bit of patter, which was very nice: it felt there was a place for them to be soloists, and to be the Group at the same time. They were very supportive of each other, with positive feedback to each other as it was going on... but it's at the same time *shared* with people... that's very nice.

**(iii) We'll Meet Again** - For the last song the whole group sing this wartime classic. They encourage the audience to join in (which they do!):

**Audience member:** At the end of the concert they did one of those classic East London songs—and it was really fun just to join in, the whole audience joined in. I was sitting at a table with someone who'd only recently come out of the hospital... and he really enjoyed joining in. So there's this sense that the group promotes other people's ability to participate as well... In a way it's part of the old East London tradition of community singing—you go to the pub and sing-along... and it's still going on. I know several people in that group do karaoke stuff around... so the concert was part of that tradition. So though they come together within this project for people with a mental health history, what they were actually doing was primarily part of that musical tradition, rather than being ill...

**Sarah:** This was the first time afterwards that they said they felt good about singing together as a group. Why? Because I think it's when they really feel they *belong*—they're part of it: they have that experience I think of being part of something that feels good, that they are contributing, that's different if they're not there... and something that's fun as well! They got on well! And they're not people that necessarily 'get on well' other places...

#### **After the Concert**

The week after the concert the group get together, have a party and talk about the concert. A video was made, and all of the group want a copy—it's very important for them to show others, to have a record that they really did do it!

**Sarah:** Yes, it went better than I'd hoped: and it was a great atmosphere! They really enjoyed it I think ... and also I think they saw that there was something so good to be had about getting involved (in the long-term and immediate preparation for the event) ... and something so good to be had from good music, from listening to each other, being listened to by others...

## **6. Why is Performance "So Good"? Six Perspectives**

Why did *Musical Minds* get so much from this performance situation? The following discussion brings together the suggestions of six theorists of performance from a variety of disciplinary perspectives<sup>[12]</sup> (which complement the more 'musicological' ones in Section 4 above).

### **(i) Performance as Identity: 'I Perform Therefore I Am' (Aldridge)**

David Aldridge (1996, 2004) has introduced into music therapy a synthesis of sociological, medical and aesthetic thinking in his ontological concept of the 'performed self'. 'Rather than

the Cartesian "cogito ergo sum"—I think therefore I am—I propose *argo ergo sum*, I perform therefore I am" writes Aldridge (1999, p. 27). Importantly, he considers this not just a psychological or sociological concept, but a physiological one too. At a basic level our 'performance' is fundamentally physical (our immune system for example or our motor coordination)—something we see clearly when such performance 'fails' when acute or chronic illness restricts performance. Aldridge suggests that from this physiological level through to the social, we are continually improvising the performance which is our self. He calls it "living as jazz". Both our identity and health are therefore also a performance, and when patients play in music therapy they 'perform their lives before us' (p. 27)—their health and illness; who they are and who they *can* be. Within, for example, the dyadic situation of music therapy with a patient with a severe neurological illness, the creative dialogue between client and therapist can be seen as a 'health performance':

What we see in the process of the neuro-rehabilitation is a restriction in performance of movement, of communication, of thinking, and for some, being a whole person. My contention is that music therapy promotes performance and retains residual performance as long as possible (Aldridge, 2001, para 6)

Aldridge talks of being able to 'repair performance' in this way, with the music therapist's job being to provide 'sites for performance' such that the 'performance of the self' can continue.

Much of Aldridge's theory seems directly relevant to *Musical Minds*. Most members of this group have experienced how acute and chronic mental illness disrupts their 'self performance'—their identity, social relationships and work lives. And yet they also seem to be able to mobilize (with Sarah's help) a form of 'self-repair' *through* musical performance. They are very much saying in the concert (individually and collectively) "*Argo ergo sum!*" They perform themselves and their lives how they are—with their illness and health mixed together. But they also creatively perform how they can be; their hopes and aspirations, the achievement of personal and social connection. Perhaps this is why the experience feels so good to them.

#### **(ii) Performance as Embodiment (Davidson)**

That performance both begins (and ends) with our bodies is something the music psychologist Jane Davidson also emphasizes in her pioneering synthesis of research on musical performance (2001, 2002, 2005; Williamon & Davidson, 2002; Faulkner & Davidson, 2004). Earlier empirical research on performance tended to study the production of sound from a somewhat disembodied stance. Davidson has instead developed a broader bio-psycho-socio-cultural perspective. Her various studies of individual and group performance show an evolving wholistic sequence of embodied performance. Firstly, the individual free-moving body works within its biomechanical constraints to produce a complex task. In music this is, at the same time, an expressive performance produced via a bodily 'centre of movement' (eg a pianist's swaying from the hips). In addition to this performers also produce a whole repertoire of non-verbal movements which serve to coordinate their expressive musical actions with co-performers and audience (these being embedded in a socio-cultural framework). Lastly, performers convey something about themselves in the music through their bodily conduct, which is accessible to (and desired by) audiences. In 'optimal performance' Davidson suggests 'the expression of the musical sounds and the social intentions of the performer in context are integrated in the bodily production' (2005, p. 232).

We have seen how the need to retain and enhance the performance of the self within illness is crucial. Davidson's perspective suggests in more detail how an integrated psycho-physical and socio-cultural process naturally occurs within musical performances, and how such experience might be especially important for people such as the members of *Musical Minds*. The performance examples in Section 5 show this group's search for 'optimal performance' and how momentary and fragile is its achievement. Davidson's work demonstrates how, despite this difficulty, there is value and potential in such moments of 'optimal performance'. Her research provides, moreover, useful tools for examining performance processes within circumstances where optimal performance is a difficult challenge rather than an everyday achievement.

#### **(iii) Performance as 'Completion' (Turner)**

It is understandable to assume that the etymology of 'performance' indicates 'through the form'. The anthropologist Victor Turner (who made an extensive study of performance cross-culturally) gives, however, another interesting possibility:

*Performance...* is derived from the Middle English *parfournen*, later *parfourmen*, which is itself from the Old French, *parfourmir*—*par* ('thoroughly'), + *fournir* ('to furnish')—hence performance does not necessarily have the structuralist

implications of manifesting form, but rather the processual sense of 'bringing to completion', or 'accomplishing'. To perform is thus to complete a more of less involved process rather than to do a single deed or act (Turner, 1982, p. 91)

This sense of performance as *completion* assumes then that something *needs* completing, both in the cultural form which is the performance vehicle, but perhaps also in personal and social life. It suggests that in the creative 'carrying out' of performance something is transformed, personally and socially. In this sense performance events are close to ritual events in being both experiential (going with the liminal flow of musical *communitas*), but also potentially reflexive—showing people back something about themselves and their society. Turner became especially interested in the rehearsal or preparation process for performance. He commented on how an actor moves from taking up a role (= 'not me') to assimilating this in performance as 'not not me'. The aim, says Turner, is *poiesis*, rather than *mimesis*: making, not faking'. He sums up his concept of performance: 'A performance, then, is the proper finale of an experience' (1982, p. 13).

This concept of performance matches well to my perceptions of *Musical Minds*. The members (individually, collectively) did not merely communicate the 'form' of the songs, they somehow *completed* both the songs and themselves in the course of performance. It often felt (for both audience and performers) as exactly the 'proper finale of an experience', a carrying-out of something both personal, communal and cultural at the same time. In this process something was transformed. It also had the sense of *reflexivity* mentioned by Turner: the whole performance itself being a comment to society about what these people *could* do (marginalized as they are). But also on a more personal level, the choice of songs and their ways of performing them gave subtle messages on, as Turner writes, 'the nature, texture, style and given meanings of their own lives as members of a sociocultural community' (1987, p. 22). Somewhere here a magic mirror was at work.

#### **(iv) Performance as "Being Who You Aren't, Doing What You Can't..." (Newman)**

This strange counterintuitive statement (which I took as the title for this article) comes from the radical New York 'social therapist' Fred Newman. A main inspiration for his method and theory (which is a thorough critique of traditional therapy) is the early Russian developmental psychologist Vygotsky. The latter's theory of child language development caught Newman's interest; how Vygotsky suggested that children perform 'a head taller than they are' when surrounded and inducted into a cultural 'zone of proximal development' (for example, a conversation or playing music together). Adults literally talk (or play) above the child's developmental level, but whilst in that cultural performance space the child performs 'beyond himself'. Thus, these 'performance spaces' (zpbs) are both the tool for development but also the experienced result (a 'tool-and-result' phenomenon in Newman's theory):

In this way, human development is an "unnatural act"; we become who we "are" by continuously "being who we are not", as the tool-and-result of our activity (Newman in Holzman, 1999, p. 100)

Newman wants to get away from therapy as people finding out who they 'really' are, from expressing inner content 'outwards'. Again Newman takes inspiration from Vygotsky who famously wrote:

The relationship between thinking and speaking is not the relationship of one being the expression of the other [...] When you speak you are not expressing what it was that you were thinking, you're *completing it* (Vygotsky in Holzman, 1999, p. 127)

This notion (which links with Turner's definition of performance as completion) leads Newman to take a performative stance on therapy itself—where for him people learn to perform themselves differently in ensemble with others. The aim is to transform the whole 'zone' of relational experience such that people experience themselves differently together. "I'm not concerned to help people to discover self. I'm concerned to help people discover life" says Newman:

What we were creating in therapy...was *performance*...and that performance was of wonderful, developmental, therapeutic value. People were learning how to perform—going back to Vygotsky's language—people were learning to perform *beyond themselves*. They were breaking out of the habit of simply being themselves to discovering not who they were but *who they were not*. (Newman in Holzman, 1999, p. 129)

In these terms *Musical Minds*' performance was certainly a form of 'social therapy'. Instinctively

the members of this group literally 'staged' for themselves a 'zone of proximal development', an environment in which to perform 'a head taller' than they usually can in everyday life. Performing is both a natural 'tool-and-result' of musicing, but also one for social communication and collaboration (again at levels greater than in 'everyday life'). And certainly the fundamental paradox of 'becoming who we "are" by continuously "being who we are not"' was readily apparent for many of the members. The conventional therapy model of 'expressing yourself' was hardly adequate to what happened. The Vygotsky/Newman model, however - of performance being both the 'therapeutic' tool, *and* the 'therapeutic' result within the socio-cultural space of the song/event - gives a compelling picture.

#### **(v) Performance as Social Authorship (Toynbee)**

Jason Toynbee (2000) continues this critique of naive expressionism within his theory of popular music. Instead of thinking of musical creators (along lines popularized by Romantic pictures of classical composers expressing their souls through unique musical expressions), Toynbee suggests that most musicians create *in* performing—that 'making up' and 'showing off' are one fluid continuum. And they do this by selecting 'possible voices' from the already-available cultural stock, and then 'speak through' these musical voices with personal agency. He calls this 'social authorship'. Here again is the paradox of performance: being your own musical voice through being someone else's:

It represents another nail banged in the coffin of expressionism. For not only are voice-ingredients located in the social world, so too is the creative act. Never a pure enactment of subjective intention, it must, as a condition of its possibility, have an awareness of itself as a performed act in a social milieu, at a particular time and place [...] Effective social authorship produces thick texts which speak of the social lives of people, particularly oppressed people, but which also promise the possibility of change (Toynbee, 2000, p. 58/66).

Vick's rendition of *My Way* comes to mind here. Toynbee's view explains how performing is seldom so simple as the traditional model of 'expressing yourself' or 'communicating the song'. Vick instead took part exactly in a process of 'social authorship'—taking a cultural voice (a style, a song, a performer) and transforming it in the course of performance, so that the performance event was both characteristically Vick *and* Frank. It was both of the moment, and woven within a cultural and social tradition. Vick was 'being who you aren't; doing what you can't'.

#### **(vi) Performance as the Generation of Mutual Respect (Sennett)**

Where inequality (of health, money, opportunity) is unavoidable, how can people retain their self-respect? When well-meaning social and health workers give aid, therapy and advice, is mutual respect ever possible? The sociologist and amateur musician Richard Sennett (2004) suggests that practicing and performing music may be a paradigm for thinking about mutual respect in these situations. Respect, Sennett suggests, cannot just be intended, it must be *performed*: 'Respect is an expressive performance. That is, treating others with respect doesn't just happen, even with the best will in the world' (p. 207). What people want, suggests Sennett, is usually something more collaborative and less personal. Musicing is exemplary here of collaborative 'respect-in-action', of 'taking the other seriously' (p. 52).

His examples of the fruits of musical participation seem directly applicable to *Musical Minds*. Firstly, as Sennett suggests, the skill and craft element of learning something like music, of rehearsing and performing it, illuminates how self-respect develops. The members of *Musical Minds* engage with their music primarily for its own sake: to get it as right as possible, to make their shared performance a quality event. This palpably cultivates what Sennett calls 'secure self-respect'. Their investment of participation, rehearsal and mastery reaps dividends in dignity and self-respect. Secondly, *mutual respect* flows from such musical collaboration. Sennett uses the example of chamber music to illustrate this:

...ensemble work requires collaboration. Unless the musicians are playing in unison, they have to sort out differences and inequalities, loud against soft parts, or soloists and accompanists working together [...] This is mutual respect as musicians perform it, a matter of recognizing someone else who is doing something different. (Sennett, 2004, p. 6)

This performative enactment of mutual respect describes well the narrative of the rehearsal and performance aspects of *Musical Minds* sketched in Section 5: the balancing of autonomy with community; of how Sarah's role naturally shifts as the situation changes; of how self-respect and mutual respect is generated through musicing and performing. At several levels this

performance event is a fine example of how, in Sennett's words, 'performing arts like music reveal the collaborative elements in the expressive practice of mutual respect' (p. 263).

Taken together, these six theories of performance suggest how and why the members *Musical Minds* find their performances so satisfying and necessary. They also suggest how the varying performative aspects of Community Music Therapy projects can be in alignment both with contemporary psychosocial theory, and with a broadened therapeutic agenda—to provide transformative experiences at individual, social and political levels.

## 7. Conclusion: Returning to the Paradoxes

This article has attempted to sketch some of the paradoxes of performance, as may be relevant to a Community Music Therapy practice incorporating the possibility of performance situations. These paradoxes of performance are at times puzzling, and it is perhaps no surprise that music therapy has been traditionally wary of entering into the performance zone—and rightly so. I do not want to give the impression that performance is a ubiquitous good for all music therapy, or even for CoMT in particular. It is rather a possible resource—which can promote powerful experiences for individuals, groups and places.

It is necessary to keep looking both at the powers and the problems of performance for music therapy. The cultural theorist Edward Said has called performance 'an extreme occasion [...] the central and most socially stressed musical experience in modern Western society' (1991, p. 12). Here is the paradox again—performance as stress, performance as epiphany. We could think perhaps of the two faces of performance:

- *Performance as pressure*: the discourse of socio-economic performance (with its performance 'targets' and 'indicators') has burdened the modern notion of performance with negative/stress-laden connotations. This is also part of the reality of much musical life now—of competitions and performance situations loaded with expectation, pressure and judgement. All of this could become unwittingly part of music therapy situations if we are not mindful.
- *Performance as epiphany*: this is the other face—performance as peak experience, 'natural high', as 'completion', not competition; as site for identity work, *musical communitas* and social hope.

Perhaps the job of Community Music Therapy is to negotiate between these two potential modes.

Sometimes I'm asked whether this new attention to performance is simply a reversion to the early professional days of music therapy, when performance was often 'required' from music therapists, but not necessarily of their choosing (or necessarily in clients' interests). I think not. Instead, as the recent dialogues in *Voices* showed, the new attitude is one of 'reflexive performance' (Ruud) where the affordances of performance are carefully considered—and where the potential (and real) pitfalls of entering the performance space with ill and vulnerable people is carefully considered (Alan Turry's recent (2005) article being exemplary of this trend). One of the intentions of constructing a new discourse of CoMT is precisely to open up professional discussion of the potentials and pitfalls of crossing with clients the full continuum of private to public music therapy, so that we can share experiences and concerns and can encourage rich but safe practice.

What I hope this article has conveyed is the sense that music is indeed rightly defined as a performance art through and through—'music as performance'. And if we follow where music and people lead, then both often lead up the steps, onto the stage and towards the lights and the microphone!

## 8. Epilogue: 'the Chipped Mug Philosophy'

In May 2005 *Musical Minds* mounted another concert, an equally powerful demonstration of musicing creating community. Talking about this concert Sarah produced the 'chipped mug philosophy'. Some weeks earlier, Sarah had bought new mugs for the group, as all the ones in the church hall kitchen were chipped. One of the members had said "Why shouldn't we have a bit of class?". Sarah reflected how these new mugs could stand for many layers of her experience of *Musical Minds* and the concerts. In a sense many aspects surrounding *Musical Minds* were a bit chipped: the deprived area; the members and their struggle with their illness and society; their performances of the music at times...But for the concerts everyone made efforts to do something about these factors: to clear up and decorate the venue; to work on the music, "attempting to repair chips and cracks, even though it may not be possible to make a fine bone china job of it"—says Sarah, who concludes:

...the point being that we don't have to settle for the chipped mugs, [but also] of it mattering to make the effort to repair and give regard to what's already there. I guess the overall theme is that it must be right to try to make 'it' (the music, and therefore everything else that goes with it) special, otherwise the situation is hopeless.

'Making special'...I remembered that this was no less than Ellen Dissanayake's definition of art - why we have it and why we need it: 'Doing something and making special characterize our humanity' (1995, p. 79).

## Acknowledgements

I want to thank *Musical Minds* (and their host organization, *Beside*) for welcoming me so warmly, for including me in their group from time to time, and for allowing me to research them and their performances for the ongoing research project of which this essay forms a part. I have enormous admiration for the group and for their facilitator Sarah Wilson, who has generously shared with me her many thoughts about the challenges and rewards of performing with *Musical Minds*. Thanks also to Brynjulf Stige for a useful critique of an earlier draft of this article and to Carolyn Kenny for a later one. Also to Simon Procter for last-minute technical help.

## Notes

[1] This article forms part of the international collaborative research project inaugurated by Brynjulf Stige: *Music & Health in Late Modernity* (Research Council of Norway project no: 158700/530).

[2] David has been visually impaired from birth - but it is his 'secondary handicap' that has resulted in him being socially excluded for much of his life. At the time of writing David is having music therapy again with another therapist.

[3] As I don't intend this article as an extensive literature study of this area I have limited this characterisation to European tradition, which I've compiled this with the help of the following sources: Stige (2002, 2003), Tyler (2000); Everitt (1997); Ruud (1980); Priestley (1975). I hope others will subsequently fill in the picture for the North American, Canadian, Asian and Australasian traditions - whether and how it differs from my characterisation here. I am aware of several ongoing studies reviewing aspects of performance within these traditions. I hope these will soon enrich the growing map of this territory.

[4] For example, Juliette Alvin, Nordoff and Robbins, Mary Priestley, Florence Tyson (see Stige, 2003 for more detail).

[5] I realise that I perhaps over-simplify here - often in 'Stage 2/3' music therapy practice and theory became so heterogeneous that general statements risk inaccuracy. For a more nuanced account of these historical foundations see Stige (2003), Chap 3.

[6] Brynjulf Stige (personal communication) rightly pointed out to me that a flaw in this argument is that this omits the references to performance *not* indexed, or in non-indexed texts. I am happy for my thesis to be disproved by a helpful researcher scanning every page of every music therapy text!

[7] Two key theorists in music therapy not fitting this pattern are David Aldridge and Even Ruud (for references see later), who throughout Stage 3 have developed notions of performance in music therapy in different ways. I'll look at these in Sections 3 & 6 below. Equally there have been many music therapists during Stage 3 who have cultivated music therapy approaches relevant to their particular contexts (often involving performance elements) and have presented this work at conferences rather than in the literature.

[8] Turry's earlier paper, *Performance and Product* (2001) is a notable precursor to the current debate.

[9] Ruud's extensive work in this area is well summarised for the English-language reader in his book *Music Therapy: Improvisation, Communication, and Culture* (1998)

[10] For more on the origins of this disciplinary shift see Ansdell (1997, 2001, 2004), Cook & Everist (1999), Williams (2000).

[11] It may seem strange that I select as a case study something not identified as 'Community Music Therapy' as such. Sarah sees herself working in this tradition however, and it is characteristic of the thinking of CoMT that not all activities as music therapist involves herself in be identified explicitly as 'music therapy' (see Stige, 2003). The point for this article is that *Musical Minds* shows the aspect of performance so clearly in relation to wider issues of music, health, therapy, community and culture.

[12] There is, of course, a real risk in this kind of 'synoptic surfing' over the complexities of other scholarly disciplines. Each one has a tradition of ideas (and 'celebrity authors') and usually a whole raft of critiques and counter-critiques following these. For example (as Carolyn Kenny, 2002, has argued) Victor Turner's work has been followed and critiqued by a whole subsequent sub-field of Ritual Studies within anthropology. What, then, I suggest in this section are mere 'starting ideas' which should be taken only as indicators of fuller perspectives from each disciplinary field.

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**To cite this page:**

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**Moderated discussion**

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**Comments to this essay:**

- **Kathy Goodsell**, March 24, 2006.
- **Colin Northrup**, December 6, 2005.

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