

Community Music Making: Challenging the Stereotypes of Conventional Music Education

Kari Veblen

Why is it important for music and arts educators to consider community as a frame of reference for music education in the public sphere? How does this expansion sit with older, narrower conceptions of music education? How might community music (CM) interact, intersect, or enhance what happens in schools, and vice versa. What are the implications of CM activity for the future of Canadian music education? Everything suggests that music education is undergoing a transformation as all forms and all interactions of formal, informal, intentional, and incidental music making become questioned, recognized, valued, or devalued. In fact, if music education does not undergo massive transformation to keep pace with new learnings, as found in the research and to reflect the multiple aspects of our pluralistic society, then the limited music education we currently have in public education could be at risk. From a postmodern vantage point, we need to acknowledge that music education in Canada is about music making and education in many contexts, including both formal and informal settings that may or may not exist side by side and which may or may not interact in a variety of ways. These experiences are not limited to public schooling, but extend more broadly into the community

where music education is known as community music — often music education at its most diverse. This chapter offers a perspective on the broadening views of music education that CM engenders when we consider music education in Canada through discussions of the Canadian context for CM, an examination of who is involved in CM, structures of CM in Canada, and challenges facing music education in the community.

Community Music in a Canadian Context

As in the United States and much of Europe, community music in Canada accommodates many networks, organizations, and individual enterprises.¹ Although CM persists heedless of outside or central organizing forces, music educators seem to take an interest in this area only periodically. Peter Dykema, an early advocate, defined CM in 1916:

Community music is a term that has obtained great vogue the past three years and yet so far as I know it has never been defined. It may be worthwhile, however, for the sake of definiteness in this paper and the discussion, which may ensue, to indicate one conception of a proper definition. First of all, it may be said that community music is not the name of a new type of music . . . It is not so much the designation of a new thing as a new point of view . . . Stated positively and concretely, community music is socialized music. (p. 218)

Dykema went on to talk about the efforts in his day to give all people opportunities to hear and make music. He described some programs as being profit-motivated and some as initiatives of public-spirited citizens. Dykema felt that all of these new programs were important because they were “giving the opportunity to every man and woman for free and frequent participation in music” (p. 223).

Although CM has expanded and grown in complexity, almost one hundred years later Dykema’s comments remain central to an understanding of CM and its place in our postmodern society. Music making and music teaching/learning are certainly a major part of the CM dynamic. However, social factors — “socialized music” as Dykema puts it — are also essential. These include aspects of community building, self-expression, identity, awareness of national heritage, recreation of myth, group solidarity, networking, bonding, consciousness raising, healing, and others. Clearly, CM as a force in Canada is developing rapidly. Factors such as expanded life expectancy, increased leisure time, prosperity, access to technology, and rapid movement of people play their part. I also think that there may be unique aspects — particularly “Canadian” aspects — in this develop-

ment. Some parameters of the Canadian scene will be explored in the next section.

Those Who Take Part: From Infants to Raging Grannies, Klezcampers to Young Offenders

CM programs in Canada, including intergenerational events, accommodate a wide range of people from the prenatal to the elderly, serving the privileged and the hard-to-serve populations. Participants include people from diverse cultures, ability levels, socio-economic circumstances, political, and religious traditions. While some programs are geared to marginalized and disadvantaged populations, taking place in site such as hospitals and prisons, others are intended to celebrate and entertain, with community centres and parks as their settings. A variety of alternative structures, formal and informal, and planned and unplanned, exist to teach, experience, and perform music. In contrast to conventional music education, a trained professional or a volunteer, either a specialist or generalist, may facilitate such activities. For example, many community music programs are geared toward early learning that include specific activities for pregnant mothers, infants, toddlers, and pre-school children. One such example is Nova Scotia's Kids First, which features parent and child interactive music and movement programs as well as many other services (Kids First, n.d.). Some programs for infants and young children are formalized, traditional, and affiliated with conservatories, university outreach programs, libraries, or community programming, while others occur in informal settings as parents of young children come together within their own communities for their children's well-being as well as their own. In both cases, however, the emphasis is on parental interaction with their children through traditional nursery repertoire, finger and toe plays, bouncing rhymes, and lullabies, such as espoused by the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program, a free program with chapters throughout Canada (The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program, n.d.). There are also a variety of CM programs that target school-aged children in the form of summer camps, community groups, religious-based groups, university outreach programs, and private or group music instruction.²

Music education, however, is no longer only the domain of the young. Adult learners are valuable contributors to CM activities and frequently form voluntary groups who perform in secular or religious areas. One such is the London Jazz Orchestra from Ontario, composed of community musicians from high school students to seniors, who meet together every week to play. Once in a while they may perform, but public performance is not a significant part of their mandate. Other groups come together for

a purpose beyond music making. For example, the Raging Grannies — a singing group for social justice that formed in Victoria, BC, in 1987 to protest US warships containing nuclear weapons docking at Canadian ports — now have forty chapters worldwide (Roy, n.d).

Music education also plays a role in the rehabilitation and healing of hard-to-serve populations through therapy programs in institutions and the community (Knox, 2004; Knox et al., 2005; Curtis & Mercado, 2004). Numerous small-scale opportunities exist for prisoners to learn and play music. One such example, called “New Music in New Places,” occurred in Dorchester, New Brunswick, and is sponsored by the Canadian Music Centre. There, twelve inmates took part in “Hum-ming and Drumming,” an experimental, meditative, and improvisatory musical project (Canadian Music Centre, 2005). Another resource of note that provides rehabilitation and healing is the Canadian Music Therapy Trust Fund, which provides powerful opportunities to experience and participate in the many roles that music plays in hospitals and other healing facilities.³

Context and Structures in Canadian Community Music

CM in Canada takes place through various structures, some highly organized, others informal. The following discussion represents both formal organizations and contexts, and is expanded from an earlier typology.⁴

Community Music Schools

Community music schools offer private or group lessons and workshops in music. While generally of excellent quality, often these schools are only accessible to the privileged, who are able to pay fees for private instruction. However, most would agree that private instruction provides the foundation for Canada’s professional performers in the classical genre.

CM Performance Organizations

Community music performance organizations promote performance ensembles ranging from choirs to jazz quartets, punk bands, orchestras, and drum and bugle corps. For example, most large cities that have a professional symphony orchestra also have one or more youth symphonies for aspiring young professional musicians.

Ethnic/Preservation Groups

These groups exist to preserve traditions for both immigrant groups and indigenous First Peoples or Native North American groups. Such groups not only preserve traditions, but they may adopt, improvise, recreate, or invent traditions. Cherished customs and gatherings preserve old ways,

celebrate passages, mark uniqueness, and recreate idealized versions of a former context. As one First Nations participant describes the significance of a powwow:

[The powwow] gives you a sense of identity...it makes you realize that you're a First Nation's person and dancing is just a way to celebrate that...I guess it's a universal thing where all tribes can come together and celebrate...And then as well we have our own different cultural rites and rituals as Ojibwe, Cree...the different nations. (Broad, Boyer, & Chataway, 2006, p. 44)

Space and Place Sponsorship

Some community music groups exist to provide space or room for music making. Coffeehouses, community drop-in jams, 'open-mike' night at bookstores, clubs, and pubs all serve to nurture local musicians and local genres.

Festival Gatherings

Festivals are another structure created to allow people to come together for an exciting occasion, often with chances to hear and learn a variety of musics, to dance, to eat, to make art, and to connect. A great deal of recent research has been done on festival gatherings, including Fernandez (2006), who documented the Dosh Pardesh Arts Festival, a diasporic arts and culture festival rooted in the South Asian gay and lesbian communities of Toronto, and Snell (2005), who explored the growth and empowerment of an alternative arts and music community through the Om Festival in Ontario. A multitude of music festivals bring people together for blues, country, jazz, pop, folk, classical, and various traditional musics. There are significant annual choral festivals in Laval, Quebec, and Newfoundland. Other festivals celebrating history, dairy or farm products, seasonal themes, and so forth have musical events as a major theme.

Religious-Based Community Music

Church musicians and choirs representing traditional and modern musics are often the mainstay of smaller, rural communities in Canada. However, as Canadian society becomes more secular and more diverse, the Praise Band — with new facilities that support a huge stage, band pit, electronic keyboard, drums, and electric guitars — is replacing the traditional music of Christian-based churches that usually centred on an organ and choir loft. Gospel and "Jubilation" choirs are common. Not to be forgotten in this discussion is the growth of religious institutions in many communities

that support religions from all over the world.

Associative Community Music

Many non-profit and professional organizations, such as orchestras and opera companies, maintain associative relationships with schools. The fabric of association may take place through collaborations limited in a relatively short time frame; however the influence of such events may have far-reaching results. Band Aid is one such initiative that provides band instruments to deserving schools and seeks to provide “musical instrument grants to schools whose music programs have great potential yet are in need of funding to ensure their sustained growth” (Canadian Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, n.d).

Outreach Initiatives Associated with Universities and Schools

A number of universities and colleges sponsor outreach programs, which may include initiatives in schools, hospitals, senior centres, and early childhood centres. Other kinds of outreach may include sponsorship of local arts and music events, collaborations with community music groups, or formation of choirs, bands, orchestras, and other ensembles.⁵ Documentation of successful programs includes Lamb’s (2006) description of university/symphony/school partnership in Kingston, Ontario, and Babineau’s (2000) research with outreach initiatives such as the Music in Medicine through Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. In addition, Caruthers (2005) described partnerships in Manitoba and (2006) suggested changes in university structures to meet needs of lifelong music learners.

Informal Affinity Groups

This category takes its name from Slobin (1993), who deemed such groups to be “charmed circles of like-minded music-makers drawn magnetically to a certain genre that creates strong expressive bonding” (p. 98). This category allows for very informal gatherings, cyber groups, new ways of music making, and new reasons for making music.

A Penny for the Piper: Funding in Canadian Community Music

Funding for CM and community arts projects is limited, and most structures operate as non-profit organizations. Some initiatives may be aided with government grants; however, a critical point is that the federal Canadian and provincial governments make minimal provisional support for arts programs through grants and awards. Most CM groups are self-funding, non-profit groups supported by participant fees and the tireless work of volunteers. As Sealey (2005) pointed out:

Democratization of the arts is not making art available to everyone, it's making art meaningful to everyone. Citizen musicians will also become very important... We are seeing the return of micro-artistic production. In classical music, house concerts are making a comeback. This is just like in the age of Schubert. And it's usually practicing amateur musicians who are hosting these events in their homes... In the Communist régime of Russia, samizdat were the primary way of communicating new and, as it was at the time, illegal writings. Today, under ground and over ground music makers are putting their music on the net in a sort of samizdat way. It's just electronic instead of dog-eared photocopies. In the old days of the USSR it was raging against state controlled culture; today it is raging against the cultural hegemony of international corporate giants — like Sony... We must be more encompassing in thinking about arts and the community. New economic models have to be put into practice. We must also be aware of new ways of participating in and creating the arts, staying in tune with new movements and trends. Above all, we must listen to our kids. (n.p.)

With government, foundation, and non-profit funding structures lacking, the entire territory of CM seems to be populated by enterprising individuals. CM workers/independent musician-teachers use their entrepreneurial skills to make music education possible, often renting or borrowing space in public venues. Volunteers are the heavy lifters for much CM, and not only do volunteers make up the ensembles and audiences, they also initiate, shape, lead, and often finance them. The scene for funding in CM in Canada is fluid and rapidly changing, with much potential.

Challenges to Community Music and to Music Education

Community music in Canada is lively, follows multitudinous courses, and changes frequently in response to particular contexts and specific needs. It happens energetically and takes place in a variety of ways on its own terms as a result of individual and collective energies. The diversity of music making in the community sometimes interacts, intersects, or enhances what happens in schools. And, at the same time, this vital area certainly complements and augments deficiencies in music education as offered through school systems. Although responsive to school systems, especially the limitations of opportunities for students to make and create music, in my opinion, CM is not in competition with schools. By acknowledging the significance of CM, music educators can open their minds to enlarge perspectives and see music education's mission in Canada as beyond schools

or school-aged students. Nevertheless, while CM can support music education in schools, it cannot, will not, and should not save or replace music education. CM is another form of music education and, although it offers a varied spectrum of musical activities to a wide range of participants, it lacks basic mandates, such as access.

Music education is about *access*, and every Canadian has the right to a comprehensive, sequenced, and excellent education in and through music. However, the reality is that both public music education and CM programs fall short of this ideal. Like school music courses, some CM programs are available for all, while some admit only those who can afford them; some are available in one place and not another; some support broad views of the world in which we live, while others profess a dogma and proselytize to its adherents. As a result, a major challenge is to somehow yoke together structured and unstructured programs to serve the common good — if one could determine what that is. The bigger question, however, is how can we make connections and structures so that all Canadians of all ages and circumstance can learn and make music in ways that are meaningful and fulfilling for them.

Community music faces numerous challenges, some of which are shared with public education. Some critics of CM challenge the quality or worth, in the artistic domain, of some forms of music making, and equate CM with not-so-good music. This is clearly a misconception of what CM may be about. This particular notion arises without consideration of at least four factors: (1) that genres of music may be understood and heard differently (i.e., one expects crystalline voices from a children's choir and smoky vocalizing from a jazz chanteuse); (2) that creative processes and emergence of new forms of expression may take a variety of forms; (3) that music has many purposes in lives; and (4) that each possible CM function (therapeutic, social, political, advocacy, bonding, heritage, identity-asserting) may sound distinct from each other and from, say, a concertgoer's musical experience. However, there is a challenge here — not just that music making happens, but how to make links, support, and work for excellence in expression in whatever way a particular group defines excellence. Another challenge faced by the music education community concerns funding and, indirectly, recognition and professionalization. What things are important to Canadians? Should music making be accessible to marginalized populations and to those who can't afford to pay? What about accreditation, adequate wages, and benefits for community musicians? Community musicians are fellow music educators who do valuable work, often without pay or recognition, and sometimes find themselves working in subversive ways to bring about social change or, at the very least, recognition. As we

expand the definition of music educator beyond the customary to take in wider-ranging ideas and ideals, this discussion may help music education grow closer to what it could be.

Notes

- 1 While music making in communities is certainly not new, the notion of CM as a research field, a unifying ideal, or an emerging professional practice is still a new idea in some places. For a discussion of community music as it is defined variously and internationally, please see Veblen and Olsson (2002) and *Proceedings of the 2000 ISME Commission on Community Music Activity* over the past decade, as well as recent research in the *International Journal for Community Music*.
- 2 For example, the University of Saskatchewan sponsors both summer band camps (www.saskband.org) and music camps (communitymusic.usask.ca) for children. Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra sponsors the Music Alive Program to bring school music programs to rural areas in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Nunavut (see www.nac-cna.ca/pdf/education/education_newsletter_spring2010.pdf).
- 3 See Canadian Music Therapy Trust Fund for an exhaustive listing of their many programs (<http://www.musictherapytrust.ca/>). In Regina, Saskatchewan, Cool Moves combines research and practice for severely disabled individuals. This project enables users to play instrumental sounds by their physical movements linked through electronic devices. Montreal-based Auberge Transition is a shelter for abused women and families that uses vocal and instrumental improvisation combined with relaxation and empowerment strategies. Doctor Peter Centre in Vancouver, BC, is a day centre and hospice for adults living with HIV/AIDS. In addition to other things, this centre makes contemporary instruments and amplifiers available for jamming, forming bands, and musical creating.
- 4 I've expanded an early North American CM typology here (Veblen & Olsson, 2002). The initial configuration was drawn from Leglar and Smith (1996), who surveyed community music groups in the United States and found what they describe as "compatible pockets of diversity" (p. 95). They classified CM groups as belonging to: (1) community music schools; (2) community performance organizations; or (3) ethnic/preservation groups. In 2002, Bengt Olsson and I augmented Leglar and Smith's model with four other classifications: (4) religious; (5) associative organizations with schools; (6) outreach initiatives of universities and colleges; and (7) informal affinity groups. After some study and reflection, it occurred to me that there were two other distinct categories: (8) spaces for music making sponsored by volunteer groups, such as coffeehouses and pubs for Irish session musicians; and (9) festivals of all kinds. Research seems to indicate that similar configurations are found throughout Canada and the United States; thus this typology is meant to include all of North America at this time.
- 5 McGill's Conservatory is a hybrid of this category and community music schools.

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