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## Lifemusic: Connecting People to Time: A Review Essay

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Rod Paton is a composer, horn player specializing in jazz and improvisation, and senior lecturer at the University of Chichester. He is also a community musician and tireless defender of everyone's right to music regardless of training or background. In *Lifemusic: Connecting people to time*, Paton describes the philosophy and practice of his concept based on creative improvisation and a participatory ideal. Following Christopher Small's clarion call (in Stevens, 1985) to "give back to people the music that belongs to them", Paton makes a case against what he describes as hegemonies that are dependent on experts who create, control and mediate musical activity, reducing others to passive consumers. He agrees fully with Small about the problematic social implications of musicianship and music education under these circumstances, notably cultural imperialism and the way practices intimidate the uninitiated by demanding normative perfection.

However, Paton's point of departure is not primarily sociological but poetic, mythological and spiritual. In the first part of *Lifemusic*, he outlines a vision inspired partly by Neoplatonist thinkers (Ficino, Steiner, Hillman), partly by Nietzsche, and above all, archetypal psychology

and symbolism as represented by Carl Gustav Jung. Music is seen as a natural reflection of life and time. Chapter 1 deals specifically with notions of time and transition and the meanings we give to them, arguing that the “kairos” (the unique moment in history) has come for radical musical renewal. Connecting people to time in this context means, among other things, a hands-on approach: getting involved and creating music together in the real, living, present here-and-now, instead of “fetishising” absent historical composers and their works. Chapter 2 builds on mythological stories and images such as the tragedy of Orpheus, which is interpreted as an example of how “soul” is lost when music becomes too rational, theoretical and technical. In chapter 3, Paton defines improvisation as “the primary act of music” and points to the curious ambivalence surrounding its history in Europe, contrasting this with practices in other cultures. Chapter 4 gives an overview of the therapeutic potential of group improvisation, drawing on Winnicott’s (1971) observations about transitional space but also on poetic sources; references to clinical and neuroscientific research on music therapy are more rare.

The second part of the book, chapters 5-8, is devoted to the practice and uses of Lifemusic, laying out the precepts of this form of music-making: (1) it is natural, everyone can do it, (2) there are no wrong notes, (3) every sound is meaningful and revelatory, (4) it serves well-being and health for individuals and communities. According to Paton, experiences of close connections between life and music happen in states of deepened awareness, but these are made possible through quite down-to-earth musical activities that are detailed in the last chapter.

Jung described the world, the famous “collective unconscious” and the human mind as containing compass-like binary opposites: animus-anima, light-darkness, masculine-feminine, individual-collective. Paton extends this idea to musical processes, suggesting alternatives to static polarization (p.150), yet clearly stating his own position in favor of spontaneous over controlled, improvised over notated, unconventional over conventional. He defends the idea that contemporary cultures are in danger of losing some of the qualities of the pre-modern era, and suggests renewal through a return to music’s archetypal roots. Drawing on the symbolical struggle between Apollo and Dionysus also at the heart of Nietzschean philosophy, Paton speaks for a re-affirmation of ecstasy, trance, “the intelligence of the body”, and “those natural processes which maintain the cycles of life and nurture living process” (pp. 98-99). The aim is reconciliation and balance; meanwhile, Paton takes a firm stand for values represented symbolically by anima and Dionysus. Logically then, free improvisation fares better than standardized levels, much like in the book title *How to play the piano despite years of lessons: What music is and how to make it at home* (Cannel & Marx, 1976). Paton has little confidence in the role of canon other than for purposes of maintaining hierarchical class

systems, but he acknowledges that it is “virtually impossible and certainly unnecessary to avoid totally the norms which result from our musical and social conditioning” (p. 119).

One might perhaps ask if binary structuring reflects the state of music and music education, or if it creates “dramas of lack and supplement [in] a system of oppositions that produces and sustains them” (Altieri, 1990, p. 3). Dionysian culture as expressed through rock events and rave scenes seems to be reassuringly alive and well, whereas Esa-Pekka Salonen stated almost two decades ago that “classical music has gone underground and counterculture” at least in Los Angeles (Salonen, cited by Fineman, 1994). Social climbing does not necessarily happen via the art categories described by Bourdieu and bullying is not always the privilege of the privileged. Boys crossing the playground with their violin cases live dangerously. Teachers who love Bach and Mozart may run into ridicule for being old-fashioned.

Technology and globalization have altered the music world’s power balance irrevocably. It is easy to agree with Paton about the responsibility of musicians and music educators to facilitate access for those who are musically inactive and/or have had experiences leading them to believe that music is not for them. But in many ways, music is more accessible than ever before. Young people can move straight from Lego to creating music with building blocks available on GarageBand. Online communities have millions of members who are composing, publishing and discussing music with a whole new sense of independent ownership. Schippers (2010) reminds us that experiences of musical cultures other than those we are familiar with are now “available in almost any culturally diverse city in the world for the price of a bus ticket” (p.14).

Binary systems always run the risk of ending up as zero-sum games where one side has to lose in order for the other to win. This may be how the well-founded advocacy in this book occasionally generates surprising – or perhaps deliberately provocative – moves such as dismissing musicologists and record reviewers as “phoney professionals” or maintaining that classical training tends to produce inhibition. Cognitive and emotional aspects of musical activity are not mutually exclusive, although Paton’s invitation to go with the flow should probably be read within the context of improvisation: “if we stop to think or rationalise, the brain switches into a different mode” (p. 117). As Johnson & Cloonan (2008) point out in *Dark Side of the Tune*, ecstatic community-making through music may be beneficial, but it has also been deployed since antiquity to blunt awareness and incite violence.

Throughout his career, Jung struggled with one particularly tough dichotomy: he argued that he was a scientist, not a metaphysician. Lachman (2010) writes that Jung possibly “aimed at bludgeoning his readers into acceptance by the sheer volume of his work, what I’ve come to call the Herr Doctor Professor effect” (p. 5). Paton is less worried about the risk involved in

shuttling between academic and esoteric discourses. He does not necessarily claim his book to be a work of scholarship. In fact, it could read as one text, or at least four: a manifesto, a poetic meditation, a musicological essay, and a handbook on musicking. Any of these can provide a rich and compelling starting point for debate. Readers who are not put off by transpersonal psychology or mystical healing will be comfortable throughout the book. Others may prefer to focus on musical themes and the practical guidelines for group improvisation, illustrated by an accompanying CD and permeated by Paton's long experience and inspiring presence as a musician and teacher.

As Lehtonen (2011) has remarked, Jung himself seemed curiously uninterested in music. Bunt (1994) argues that the reason for this reluctance was that in Jung's opinion, musicians and music therapists were handling very deep archetypal material without being aware of it (pp. 37-38). "One can be musical without possessing a scrap of intellect", Jung sneers in *Psychology and Education* (1946/1969, p. 129). Admittedly, music has a sometimes astonishing capacity to bypass psychological defense mechanisms and start avalanches of memories and emotions, and Paton reminds readers who want to try the Lifemusic concept in health care settings that sessions need to be carefully discussed and clinically documented (p. 225). This is an important disclaimer, because anyone who practices a "therapeutic" method is certainly under an obligation to state if it is simply meant to enhance well-being or if it is psychotherapy with its expected professional, ethical and legal framework.

Connecting to time is one dimension of music foregrounded in the book. Another is interaction which, one might emphasize, is neither entirely individual nor entirely collective. Seen from the perspective of Trevarthen's theory of communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009), "archetypal" functions of music may have their origin in intersubjective attachment processes and thus be profoundly personal and dialogical. Importantly, this would mean that music provides a form of connection to significant others, present or not, and to times in life, present or not. Music is certainly about celebration and well-being but it can also be about finding ways to stand loss and to get by somehow with realities which for most people (and according to Winnicott), are simply not bearable in their most literal form.

In Paton's preface, he states that while he casts a critical eye on many aspects of contemporary musical activity, it is not his aim to "argue for the dismantling of *any* musical practice" (p. 14). At any rate, that would seem like a challenging project. Different people live by different musics, some of which are sometimes called obsolete, unimportant, commercial or decontextualized. Listening has values of its own and is anything but passive or second-rate in terms of meaning. A rich ecosystem of musical possibilities and connections probably stands the best chance of sustaining all the complexities of human life, thought, memories, emotion and action.

The activities described in *Lifemusic* provide a valuable contribution to this diversity of practices. One of the major strengths of the concept is a framework where participants are relieved of the ubiquitous pressure to perform and achieve. Instruments and sounds from different cultures and traditions readily blend into the “holding form” (p. 135) of improvisation and beginners can make music alongside seasoned professionals. A related aim is to reclaim the spontaneous and apparently universal musical expressivity that children often lose, at least partially, during their school years. Finally, Paton hopes that bringing participatory music into social arenas where it is currently absent, for example corporate board rooms, might contribute to greater interpersonal trust. I am probably too skeptical to share this particular vision entirely. Nonetheless, Paton’s deep and long-standing commitment to non-formal, attentive, emancipatory music-making deserves nothing but wholehearted respect and applause.

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