Participatory Experiences in Music Ensembles with Technology

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May 2, 2012

APA Style, 6th Edition

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Young music ensemble students today have a plethora of diverse opportunities to make music, whether they are traditional or technological experiences. Let us take a look at a hypothetical day in the life of a high school music student named Morgan. She starts her day with a band rehearsal, where Morgan and her peers work diligently to prepare for upcoming concerts and festivals. During lunch, Morgan listens to a few of the latest pop tunes on her iPod. Next, she meets with a jazz combo to rehearse a several charts in preparation for a gig that night at a local coffee shop. After school our talented student visits a computer to create a track on Garageband, read new comments on her jazz combo's Youtube channel, practice her combo music with a track on Soundcloud, and check out a video posted by another trombonist in her district. That night the student hurries to the coffee shop to perform with her combo. She sticks around for the open jam session.

The scenario above illustrates two distinct types of musical experiences that will be an integral part of this paper: *participatory* and *presentational* modes of music making. Musicologist Tom Turino introduces these categories in his book *Music as Social Life* (2008) to help his readers be mindful of the purpose and goals of a music performance. The majority of the student's ensemble experiences—rehearsals and gigs—typify the field of "presentational music" (Turino, 2008, 26), where one group (musicians) provides music for another (audience). Even in the context of a rehearsal without an audience, a future presentation is the purpose of the activity. On the flip-side of the spectrum is the field of "participatory performance" (Turino, 2008, 26). Turino explains this as a field of synchronous music making where there are "only participants and potential participants" (26) who "actively contribute to sound" (28). Morgan's open jam

session offers an example of this field, where the goal is to involve everyone in the performance and diminish the audience-artist distinction.

Turino would argue that most experiences in school ensembles practice presentational music making, not participatory. This is apparent in the case of our student's hypothetical ensemble experiences, as is the case with many performance-based school groups. However, his perspective is less concerned with the ideas of technology and the influence it has on the values and practices of music makers. Much of Morgan's music activities outside of the ensemble class are very involved, interactive, and on the surface seem more participatory. The student's use of technology invited an interactive, social form of musical participation, even though much of it was not face to face or synchronous. Consequently, the use of technology in music making presents a gray area worth discussing because it goes beyond what Turino would define as participatory. Do tech-based asynchronous music experiences fit with Turino's concept of participatory music making? And how might the use of technology in ensemble classes alter the presentational medium?

The objective of this paper is to connect Turino's fields—presentational and participatory performance—with the framework and values of music ensembles and their use of technology. Turino's definition of participatory excludes the new technological experiences described above, so I want to explore how—and if—technology might transform the ensemble setting into more of a participatory experience. First I will investigate more deeply the beneficial components of participatory performance and how the associated values, goals, and practices might connect with the notion of technology in education. I will compare these with the work of educational technology experts Collins and Halverson (2009); specifically their descriptions of participatory learning experiences with technology. In addition, the growing presence of online music making

communities, as discussed by Mark Katz in his book *Capturing Sound* (2010), will provide an insightful example of how technology might foster a "participatory culture" (173).

Participatory Experiences

The quality of a participatory performance, according to Tom Turino (29), is gauged by how the participants feel. Many of us have experienced the inherent joys of making music with friends, family, and even strangers. Whether I am playing with my saxophone quartet or jamming to a few bluegrass tunes with my casual musician friends from the Forest Service, I often get completely immersed in the moment, where everyone is collectively concentrating, reacting, and having fun. This is a mental state that Turino (2008) references, and one that psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi calls "flow" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990) He describes it as a feeling of energized focus and full involvement that is attainable while being fully immersed in the process. Turino points to Csíkszentmihályi's idea of flow as a key dividend gained in participatory musical experiences, thus creating a source for deep connections with ourselves and our community. Turino adds (2008), "musical participation and experience are valuable for the processes of personal and social integration that make us whole" (1). This pertains to various roles within the context of participation; as we create music within the given community we contribute in personal yet meaningful ways to the group effort. In the exploratory process, we learn more about the practices, values, and goals of the group. Consequently, Turino (2008) believes the participatory format is beneficial, both personally and culturally (5). It must be noted, however, that presentational performance is not a lesser form. Turino suggests that each field is different and should be "conceptualized and valued as such" (25) and to understand that the values, practices, and goals associated with participatory and presentational music making are simply different.

Even though their specific meaning of participatory experiences differs from Turino, Allan Collins and Richard Halverson, authors of *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology* (2009), argue that integrating technology into a class can broaden the participatory experiences for students (28). In fact, Collins and Halverson (2009 highlight the concept of *flow* when discussing the benefits of online games and simulations. They write that children who spend hours with technological activities such as video games "create flow-like experiences that can be powerful learning opportunities" (23).

Another example that can help us understand Turino's idea of participatory music making in a technological context is introduced by Mark Katz in his book *Capturing Sound* (2010). He describes a community of modern mashup artists that relate to the music technology activities of our hypothetical student, Morgan (170). The modern mashup—a digitized blend of two or more recorded works—is a readily accessible activity to anyone. Katz (2010) explains how people of nearly all skill levels post their mashups online, comment on other posts, and contribute to lengthy and diverse discussions with other mashup artists (170). Everyone can participate and contribute to the group in a variety of different ways. The mashup sites actively engage potential members of all levels and motivate individuals to learn from each other. The mash-up community illustrates how online participants develop a "participatory culture" (173), though asynchronous, that integrates the components of Turino's participatory field while making music with technology.

Technology in the ensemble

I believe the findings of Collins, Halverson, and Katz could apply to learning opportunities in band, choir, and orchestra. The use of technology in educational ensembles could provide the right conditions for a participatory environment, where students can attain a

flow-like effect. For instance, portable recorders, DAW systems, and smart-phones in the classroom can more fully engage students of the ensemble, in and out of class, consequently shifting the current presentational model into more of a participatory framework. In addition, utilizing online resources and communities--such as blogs, Youtube, etc.--can provide additional interactions and music making beyond the rehearsal. In essence, with the help of technological resources, music students can develop increased connections with their peers and communities and contribute in meaningful and diverse ways, thus emulating the participatory field.

I believe technology offers a means to explore alternative practices and goals in the band, orchestra, or choir. The creative and open communities described by Turino, Katz, Collins, and Halverson offer an alternative to presentational music practices and could serve as a model for teachers seeking to develop more participatory experiences for students. However, simply adding computers and recording units to the ensembles' practices will not shift the mode of learning, nor align the goals with those of participatory music making. The values and intent of the music making process will require a shift from the presentational goals and teacher control, just as Turino (2008, 51) and Collins/Halverson encourage (2009, 18). The teacher will need to evaluate and develop goals and practices to foster more of a participatory environment.

Our challenge as educators, according to Collins and Halverson (2009), is to "build technologies into the core practices of school" (29). Will the choir only rehearse in order to prepare for a concert? Or can the class function—with technology as a resource—to inspire full participation, to encourage social connections, and to make music for the sake of the process? As Turino puts it, participatory music making can "inspire involvement and develop skills in these life enriching activities" (35). School ensembles have the potential to foster more of these enriching activities through the use of technology.

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