Chapter 2. The relationship between music, culture, and society: Meaning in music

Introduction

In Chapter 1, I introduced the concepts of music, culture and society and argued that these are inextricably linked. In fact, researchers have noted this important relationship over many years particularly in the research area of ethnomusicology (Barton, 2004, 2006; Brennan, 1992; Campbell, 1996; Dunbar-Hall, 2009; Lundquist & Szego, 1998; Swanwick, 2001, 2016). Understanding how these phenomena relate is integral to answering the question:

> How are socio-cultural aspects reflected in the teaching and learning of music, and what are the implications of this knowledge for classroom music education practices?

This chapter will provide an in-depth exploration of the literature on music, culture, and society and the interaction between these phenomena. Chapters 3 and 4 will then explore these concepts in relation to various teaching and learning environments, and how this association impacts on music teaching products, processes, and practice.

As this book is concerned with how culture and society are expressed in music teaching and learning as well as what modes are implemented to do so, the literature presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will focus on work that illustrates the diverse nature of the meaning of music as perceived in the teaching and learning context. An examination of music, culture, and society within diverse learning and teaching contexts, and comparison across cultures will illustrate a range of methods, frameworks, and theories. When discussing the interaction

between culture, society, and music, an examination of both ethnomusicological and music education literature that focuses on the transmission and acquisition of music knowledge will be important to analyse.

This examination includes literature that from both non-western and western music cultures as it will be important for music teachers to understand the differences in the ways in which music teachers teach. Some sources of information for this chapter have come from personal interviews with people who are professional music teachers so that not just written recollections are privileged over oral recounts. It should be noted that extensive information found in people's direct knowledge and experience may not available in written form.

Music, culture, and society

Research about music has generated diverse beliefs, views, and theories that explore its nature and meaning. A recurring theme in the early literature on this topic is the view that the particular cultural context that surrounds a distinct music practice influences the music produced within those cultural boundaries (Herndon & McLeod, 1982; Lomax, 1976; Merriam, 1964; Nettl, 1992). More recent accounts on how music learning and teaching practices are influenced by socio-cultural characteristics and vice versa have discussed how the ongoing impacts of globalisation create new and innovative music practices worldwide (Gaunt & Westerlund, 2013; Hargreaves, Marshall, & North, 2003; Ho, 2014).

Back in 1980, Harris viewed culture as "learned and shared behaviour", something in which feelings are expressed through many facets including "language, art and religion" (p. 19). In 2008 however, Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht and Lindsley revealed that such definitions illustrate western societies misunderstand the concept and rather culture is an "'empty vessel' waiting for people to fill it with meaning" (p. 4). Regardless, it is evident that culture impacts on the ways in which music is learnt, taught and performed. Indeed, Radocy

and Boyle (1979) stated that “culture clearly affects musical behaviour [and that] music may influence the culture [in which it is produced]” (p. 27).

Others reflected on how society impacts on music traditions (Kelly, 2016; Small, 1996). Kelly’s (2016) work, for example, explored how music teachers in schools can understand better how music is inherent in society and in turn that many aspects of society impact on students’ lives. He believed that schools should consider how to appropriately teach students cultural knowledge and expectations by inviting the whole community’s involvement. This he said will allow schools, students, communities to function more effectively (Kelly, 2016). The society in which we live thus has great import when we consider how to teach music.

In unpacking this notion further, research in the field of ethnomusicology provides detailed analyses that explore the interaction and unique relationship that exists between music, culture, and society. Alan P. Merriam’s work, *The Anthropology of Music* (1964) has been particularly influential in this area and is still considered a reliable source amongst students and academics (Campbell, 2016; Elliott & Silverman, 1995; Feld, 2013; Stone, 2016; Swanwick, 2001). The text outlined the importance of cultural influence on music traditions and noted the significance of this when exploring teaching and learning practices (Merriam, 1964, pp.145-163). Further exploring this point, Merriam believed that “concepts and behaviours must be learned, for culture as a whole is learned behaviour, and each culture shapes the learning process to accord with its own ideals and values” (p. 145). Merriam (1964) explored the process of enculturation further and explained that learning is a lifelong process where culture persists.

> It is through education, enculturation, cultural learning, that culture gains its stability and is perpetuated, but it is through the same process of cultural learning that change takes place and culture derives its dynamic quality. What is true for culture

> as a whole is also true for music; the learning process in music is at the core of our understanding of the sounds men [sic] produce (p. 163).

Nettl (1975) agreed that “through an enculturation process, each social order develops its institutions and artefacts for perpetuation of itself, and music’s existence is one of the few things common to all cultures” (p. 71), highlighting how music, as a common element to all cultures, can be the point of contact in determining cultural and social foundations of any given society.

Expanding this further, strong support existed in early ethnomusicological literature for the idea that music can tell us many things about a particular culture through its instruments, instrument makers, and its performance structures that encompass the interaction between performers, audience and/or composers (Lomax, 1976; Merriam, 1964; Spearritt, 1980). Lomax’s (1976) work is still significant in this area, as it explored the specific way that culture was reflected in music practice and it highlighted a correlation between social structure and song structure. Lomax (1976) believed that a culture’s song performance style “has a special cultural and social role to play among human communication systems” (p. 12). Even earlier, Lomax (1968) had written that “a culture’s favoured song style reflects and reinforces the kind of behaviour essential to its main subsistence efforts and to its central and controlling social institutions” (p. 133). Further, Feld’s (1984) work with the Kaluli people in the highlands of Papua New Guinea demonstrated a similar relationship between social structures and musical experience as discovered by Lomax (1976).

> ...Kaluli seem to have no investment in rationalising differences in competence; they simply assume that skills for interpreting and making sounds are naturally acquired and required, and that with instruction and encouragement, all children will learn to sing and compose as part of their general socialisation (Feld, 1984, p. 391).

Feld's (2013) work continued to uncover how the cultural customs of the Kaluli were expressed in the ecosystems and environment in which they were produced.

Views such as those expressed by Feld (1984), Lomax (1976) and Merriam (1964) highlighted the impact that culture can have on music and in some cases music on cultural expression with each author concluding that music is, in fact, culture and cannot be separated from life experience. In a similar vein, Dewey (1958) also noted that "for while it [art] is produced and is enjoyed by individuals, those individuals are what they are in the content of their experience because of the cultures in which they participate" (p. 326).

Such work asks how the concepts of *music as culture* and *music is culture* are reflected upon, and taught about, in contemporary learning environments. Even though there is strong evidence to suggest that for some people music *is* their culture and a direct expression of who they are other researchers have investigated this view through a more technical lens; by deconstructing the music habits themselves.

Taking a different view, Blacking (1973) argued that music can be a "product of the behaviour of human groups, whether formal or informal: it is humanly organised sound" (p. 10). Blacking's use of the phrase 'humanly organised sound' denoted a sense of music beyond an unintentional or random sound event but as a process that is purposefully engaged in by the members of a particular society albeit in ways which align with dominant or accepted socio-cultural norms. Walker (1990) held a similar position by stating:

> The place of music in the belief systems of all cultures suggests that music itself must be, to some degree, systematically organised, just as the society to which the music contributes such a powerful force is systematically organised. What is inherent in both these views is that music is as much organised by its presence in a

> context as it is influential on that context and this dynamic interaction is best understood as a whole system. (p. 195)

Harwood's (1976) earlier work also explored this notion by suggesting "that music functions symbolically in several ways" (p. 529). These include the expectations of the performers and audience, the standards of judgement proper to the culture, the context proper to a particular performance, and the listener's way of perceiving the world in general. Of course, this ideal has infiltrated work in the last decade including: Campbell (2004), Dunbar-Hall and Wemyss (2000) and Green (2002, 2011).

Such conditions could well apply to music teaching in the classroom in that it relates to commonly held and culturally determined expectations, standards, appropriate context and perceptual appreciations. Accepting these, it is important to recognise the cultural influence and unique interplay between the many roles evident in the music-making and learning process. Merriam (1964) supported this view, stating that "music is a product of man and has structure, but its structure cannot have an existence of its own divorced from the behaviour which produces it" (p. 7). He believed that to conceive music as an organised sound, the behaviours involved in its production and the meaning underlying these behaviours must be understood.

Crucial to understanding the notion of 'organised' sound is that several elements of music can be treated or used in certain 'organised' ways (Blacking, 1973). This idea embraces the view that music comprises various elements such as pitch, rhythm, harmony, melody, and form (Turek, 1996). Andersen and Lawrence (1991) and George (1987) presented these elements as common to all music cultures. Others perceived the common elemental approach to understanding music useful to a point, but note that it fails to capture the less tangible socio-cultural meanings assigned to the processes of making music (Ishimatsu, 2014; Leong, 2016; Pratt, Henson, & Cargill, 1998; Small, 1998; Smith, 1998). Blacking (1973) and Walker (2001) and others argued that if

elements of a given piece of music generated in another cultural context correspond with the tonal patterns, melodic composition or rhythmic structures found in western art music, it is a less than robust method of analysis since such observations rarely give rise to any meaningful understanding of the social institutions, social practices, and social meanings which underpin the process of music in a given society.

There is also some evidence to suggest that an elemental approach may have a detrimental effect on student outcomes. In particular, Walker (2001) posited that “just concentrating on the musical elements and performance techniques alone without developing an understanding of what the music is about [its archaeology] left some students feeling bored and alienated” (p. 16). Additionally, the elemental framework for understanding music may obscure other important phenomena (Ishimatsu, 2014; Pratt et al., 1998; Smith, 1998). Smith (1998) claimed that using an elemental approach “is bound to deprive students of potentially exciting and enlightening opportunities to share music interculturally, not simply viewed from west-centric perspectives...” (p. 10). Pratt et al., (1998) provided an expanded list of elements they termed ‘raw materials’, which constitute such ideas as pitch organisation, space, and density. These present broader concepts of what musical elements are, and Pratt et al. (1998) critiqued the common notion of the other more general aspects of music. Elliott and Silverman (1995) highlighted that it is important to recognise that the preceding common elements that constitute music are “features of some music, but they are not necessary features of all music” (p. 21).

These aspects aside, an elemental approach may assist in understanding unfamiliar musics as well as bridge various music practices (Glickman, 1996), but it is important to also be aware of views such as Campbell’s (1991) who stated that “music is not a universal language: it communicates fully only to those who know the unique treatment of its components” (p. 101). Campbell (2004) continued to caution against attempting to derive meaning from the

elements that constitute a particular music since such meanings are likely ascribed and mediated by the specific culture and context in which they occur.

At this juncture, it is important to emphasise that some cultures view music as a distinct phenomenon integrated with other experiences in cultural life. For example, Nattiez (1990) highlighted Nwachukwu's work with the *Igbo* who see singing, performing with instruments and dance as one unified experience. Further, in the Australian Indigenous culture, music is not isolated from the performance of dance, song and its connected meaning to landforms (Ellis, 1985; Payne, 1988). Ellis (1985, p. 70) noted that there is no word for 'music' in the Aboriginal context and that there has been, in the past, a strong tendency for researchers to measure music to western art music theory and frameworks (Oku, 1994). Oku (1994) explained that "We tend to understand unknown music by means of the concepts of our familiar music. Therefore, one may easily misinterpret world musics with the conceptual approach, which is based on Western music" (p. 120).

As a result of their work with non-western cultures, Gourlay (1978) and Smith (1998) asserted that ways to assess musical behaviour, structures and processes without measuring them to western constructed models is paramount and long overdue. In relation to this suggestion, Lamasisi (1992) discussed the wrongheaded expectations for him to present research on Papua New Guinean music, in a 'eurocentric' framework to validate the research findings. Lamasisi (1992) further noted that the process of documenting many non-western music cultures brings many anxieties for 'insiders' of the culture under investigation. Both McAllester (1984) and Steier (1991) highlighted this dilemma. Consequently, a large array of experiences, activities, and artefacts are excluded by a western art music's elemental focus and analysis.

In support, Stock (1994) noted that:

> ...we cannot necessarily apply our own, familiar, definitions of music to foreign musical sounds, and that basic, fundamental principles which we take for granted in our own music may not be reflected in other kinds of music. (p. 8)

Some authors (Walker, 1990; Shepard & Wicke, 1997) argued that sound and the nature of its organisation through the use of elements by people are important considerations in reaching an understanding of music but these are not the only aspects that need attention. It is also clear that as Walker (1990) asserted, “Western music theory reflects a culture that values predictive and descriptive functions of scientific method” (p. 194) something, which cannot apply without prejudice to more holistic cultural practices such as those encountered in non-western music traditions.

Nattiez (1990) further stated that “music is whatever people choose to recognise as such, noise is whatever is recognised as disturbing, unpleasant or both” (p. 47). This infers that peoples’ experience of the sound organisation in a particular context affects how they perceive music. As this book centres on the relationship between culture, music, and education sensitivity to the influence of culture not only in terms of the way teachers teach music but also how they conceptualise and understand it is desirable. It is, therefore, anticipated that advancing a definition of music as Nattiez (1990) suggested, offers a greater degree of responsiveness as a research tool than imposing a foreign definition of music upon those who study music. The topic of the next section of this chapter addresses a related issue about how music demonstrates meaning.

Meaning in Music

Several authors offer extended commentary on the importance of meaning in music particularly noting the relationship between music and culture (Inskip, MacFarlane, & Rafferty, 2008; Meyer, 1961; Small, 1996; Whitman, 2005). An integral part of the music making process according to Blacking (1973) and Small (1998) are the non-music elements that “contribute to the nature of the

event that is a musical performance" (Small, p. 9). These elements are also noted to contribute to people's understanding of each other's musics across cultural contexts (Ravignani, Delgado, & Kirby, 2016).

Blacking (1973) believed that "all processes relevant to an explanation of musical sound" are to be explored or a "context-sensitive analysis of the music in culture" (p. 17) must occur if the true meaning is to be gained. This includes understanding the purposes of non-music elements such as spiritual significance that includes such aspects of loyalty or economic import, social purpose or event biological structures (Blacking, 1973). These are usually learnt in the teaching and learning context whether conscious or unconscious but nevertheless a significant part of the process (Ravignani et al., 2016).

Bennett Reimer (1989) argued that music is more than just the experience of making and can be defined by its aesthetic contribution to the Arts. In particular, Reimer (1989) believed that "to translate the 'meaning' of art into non-artistic terms, whether cognitive or emotional, is to violate the meaningfulness of aesthetic experience" (p. 23). Reimer's philosophy reflects the work of Langer (1953, 1957) whose "key claim is that the aesthetic qualities of musical works capture and represent the *general* forms of human feelings" (as cited in Elliott & Silverman, 1995, p. 28). Therefore, the musical material or work, not the practice, becomes the focus of meaning in this context.

Views such as Langer's and Reimer's were influenced by the work of Mursell in the 1930s and 1940s and Leonhard in the 1950s. From these beginnings, a philosophy for Music Education was developed called Music Education as Aesthetic Education (MEAE). The main idea of this philosophy according to Reimer (1989, p. 95) was "to help people share the meanings which come from expressive forms". For Reimer, central to music education is aesthetic experience through the music work. Expanding this view further Reimer (1989, p. 117) noted that "the responsibility of music education, at every level and in every part of the music program, is to reveal more fully the musical conditions

which should be perceived and felt". Elliott and Silverman (1995) claimed that this type of music education "is grounded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries assumptions of the aesthetic concept" (p. 28). This pervasive view is still present in current literature (Kelly, 2016; Leong, 2016; MacDonald, Barton, Baguley, & Hartwig, 2016) and as such, there is a demonstrable need to move forward music education's philosophical thinking generally.

Aside from the many proponents that consider the value of music residing in the music-making process or as an aesthetic experience, Langer (1953) and Swanwick (1999) situated music-making within a broader dynamic of symbolic form and meaning. Langer's philosophy has had a far-reaching influence on music education (Reimer, 1989; Swanwick, 1999). Swanwick's (1999) work, for example, reflected that of Langer's as he viewed music as a primary mode of communication where music acts as a discourse between actors within the musical experience: a symbolic exchange between audience and performer. In comparison, Suzuki (1982) saw music like language operating on a different level through symbolic processes using different units of exchange and this work has advanced even further under Almén (2017) and Rampton (2014).

For Swanwick (1996) "the pedagogical emphasis would be on music-making as a way of understanding ourselves and others, on direct knowledge of music rather than knowing about its cultural genesis, on music as human discourse—a non-referential activity but one which is highly expressive" (p. 19).

In Swanwick's (1999) later work he asserted that the musical work provides an essential basis for deriving symbolic meaning. This resonates with Reimer's aesthetic argument. One of the difficulties with discerning symbolic meaning through the musical work is that it may be misleading on two fronts. Musical works as products of culture are context specific and bounded by time and place (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2004). As such, their meaning is finite and not open to transfer (Walker, 1990). To illustrate, however, Swanwick (1999, p. 46-

51) provided an example of ‘teaching music musically’ using a small excerpt of music composed by the author, which is characterised as Hungarian (p. 50).

This short excerpt featured an eight-bar melody in duple meter in D major. Bars 1, 3, 5 and 7 centred around the tonic note of D and utilised notes from a D major triad. The final bar rested on the sub-tonic of E indicating a lack of resolution. The bass part featured an open 5^{th} chord of D-A in bars 1-7 shifting up a tone to E-B in the final bar.

The problem with identifying this small musical work as ‘Hungarian’ is that while it may use melodic, rhythmic and tonal structures if analysed by the common elemental approach, that is like music produced by native Hungarians and, to the uninitiated, may even sound ‘Hungarian’, yet it cannot pass as ‘Hungarian’ unless the work undergoes a verification process of authenticity (Campbell, 1996) by the Hungarian people themselves. Walker (1998) agreed and argued that unless such a work undergoes a verification process to establish its authenticity by those who know the musical tradition most intimately, the use of melodic, rhythmic and tonal structures that are like music produced by musicians from a particular cultural background and, to an inexperienced listener, may even sound like music from a specific cultural tradition, it cannot be defined as such.

Further to this, Campbell (1996) believed that it may not be possible or even desirable to “transcend” (Swanwick, 1999) the cultural and social origins of a particular music. Likewise, Walker (1998) asserted that transcendence may disrupt a particular music tradition’s symbolic meaning. In this sense, for a musical experience to be symbolic it must be reflective of the broader culture and social circumstances that produced it in order for it to be meaningful. From this stance, Swanwick’s (1999) position may negate the importance that social function plays in defining a piece of music within a given culture and which only ‘insiders’, through their in-depth appreciation of the music and its social construction, can accurately recognise and interpret meaning.

Walker's (1992) work with the Pacific Northwest Indian people provided a strong case against transcendence. He wrote that to teach something about the potlatch ceremony one must have attended and participated in one (Walker, 1992, p. 172). In this sense, Walker suggested that non-music aspects contribute just as much, if not more to the meaning of music and music that was taken out of this context will not have the same meaning. Ravignani et al., 2016 draw similar conclusions.

This aside Boyce-Tillman (1996) believed that "such a philosophy...spells death to any attempts at multiculturalism in education" (p. 45). Swanwick's theory of the "space between" (1999) then, can fit into contemporary education practice that values the diversity of music cultures and the increase in global communication whereby musicians "transcend" their own music culture to create new ones. Born and Hesmondhalgh (2000) in contrast stated, "there is a need to acknowledge that music can variably both construct new identities and reflect existing ones" (p. 31). McAllester (1996) noted that "it is better to teach anything about other cultures [music] than nothing at all" (p. 66). Miller (1996) took a different stance and believed that there are cases where some music cannot be taught because of the value and meaning that it holds. He posited that one must experience the holistic picture in order to truly understand this worth.

Behaviours associated with music making cannot be isolated from the social and cultural context in which such behaviours take place because it is within this space that music has a purpose and is assigned meaning (Walker, 2001). Small (1998) and Elliott and Silverman (1995) concurred that music's meaning is located in the process of music making. David Elliott and Marissa Silverman (1995) in their prominent text, *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education*, explained further that "before there were musical compositions there was music making in the sense of singing and playing remembered renditions and improvisations; that many cultures still view music as something people *do*" (p.49). For Elliott (1994) "music making is essentially a matter of knowing how

to construct musical sound patterns in relation to the traditions and standards of particular musical practices. Music-making is essentially a matter of procedural knowledge, or non-verbal knowing-in-action" (p. 9).

Green (1990) argued for a "dual integral meaning of music" (p 141) which is determined by the surrounding context—whether formal or informal. This duality includes both inherent and delineated meaning of the music context (Green, 1990). In this view, the aesthetic concept of art consists of any delineated meaning for the listener or learner—a meaning detached from social or cultural purpose but one that can see the music work objectively. Inherent meaning in contrast, according to Green, occurs for learners in their own temporal world where the creative experience of musical material has personal meaning (1990, p.25). Green argued that both have relevance in an attempt to redefine the meaning of music in context. In other work, Merriam (1964) and Dillon (2001) argued that when people engage with others in the music-making process they tend to identify as part of a group and value their role as an individual within the group. In this light, the construction of roles and social meaning within the context of 'music making' is an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

Summary

In summary, the argument put forward in this chapter concludes that to discuss music as phenomena in and of itself would not be possible without acknowledging the ways in which both the cultural context and society impact on music practices. Music traditions have been noted to be dynamic, not static and as such, can shift and change over time; and this has increased substantially due to global movements of people but also due to the incredible access to others' music cultures in an online environment. To deeply explore the notion of how culture and society are reflected in music one needs to understand the meanings associated with it. Many researchers in the field of literacy for example, often discuss the ways in which people make meaning of

the world around them by referring to these as literate practices. This view can also be applied to the range of music practices around the world and increasing our understanding of such practices has the potential to improve the ways in which we learn and teach music. Chapters 3 and 4 will explore this idea further.

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