

**FROM ASPIRATION TO EVIDENCE:  
MUSIC, LEADERSHIP, AND ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION**

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## FROM ASPIRATION TO EVIDENCE: MUSIC, LEADERSHIP, AND ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

*“But music for the time doth change his nature.  
The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;  
The motions of his spirit are dull as night  
And his affections dark as Erebus:  
Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music”*

William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act V, scene 1

Music- and art-based interventions in organizations have become more common, yet to date little research-based evidence has existed to support the efficacy of such approaches. This chapter reviews a range of music-based approaches that have been used throughout the world, including in situations of extreme conflict and consequence, noting that, thus far, the aspired to outcomes have remained just that: aspirations rather than evidence-based change. Addressing the question of if music-based interventions have the capacity to deliver positive outcomes, this chapter presents initial research supporting the potential for efficacy. Music, as a form of leadership, may in fact offer more than aspiration.

### INTRODUCTION

*“Transforming ourselves, our relationships, or our culture need not await the intervention of some expert, a set of laws, public policies or the like. As we speak and write at this moment we participate in creating the future for good or ill. If we long for change, we must also confront the challenge of generating new meanings, of becoming poetic activists.”*

Kenneth Gergen (1999, p.12)

Art transforms apathy into action.<sup>1</sup> Social scientist Ken Gergen (1999, p.12) invites us all to become “poetic activists”. Perhaps there is no better label for the use of musical interventions in global and organizational crises than that of poetic activism. Activists, great artists, and great leaders share three fundamental perspectives (Adler, 2006; 2010). They all demonstrate the courage to see reality the way it is. They all exhibit the courage to imagine possibility – positive futures – even when the world labels such imagination as naïve for daring to express optimism. And they all have the courage to inspire people to move from current reality back to possibility.

Over the past half century, with no singular organized movement or unifying philosophy to guide them, artists and artistic processes have attempted to transform reality in numerous contentious situations. In particular, music has been used to address extreme conflict and the possibility of conflict, along with the dysfunction and degradation that conflict so often causes (see Tongeren, 1999; Urbain, 2008).<sup>2</sup> Music, most often when combined with other approaches, appears to have produced generative outcomes in some, although certainly not all, situations in which it has been introduced. In many circumstances, musical interventions, and their direct participants, have inspired the broader community (see Tongeren, 1999; Welch and LeBaron, 2006; Ippolito, 2008;

Cohen, Gutiérrez Varea and Walker, 2011). Many of such initiatives exemplify the frame-breaking perspectives and approaches that music has the potential to offer.

**Poetic Activism:  
Going Beyond the Dehydrated Approaches of Economics, Politics and War**

*“The radical shift in the structure of the world begs for creativity; it asks us to rethink who we are as human beings... It may be that writers, painters, and musicians have an unprecedented opportunity to be co-creators with society’s leaders in setting a path. For art, after all, is about rearranging us, creating surprising juxtapositions, emotional openings, startling presences, flight paths to the eternal.”*

— Rosamund and Benjamin Zander (1998, p.7)<sup>3</sup>

Musicians and musical ensembles have a history of poetic activism—of acting as leaders by revealing the truth of reality and by giving shape, form, and sound to ‘the possible’. The act of creating music and the music itself inspire people to go beyond ugly, dysfunctional, and all too often brutal reality to create possibility, thus offering the beauty inherent in newly-found opportunity. Musicians and ensembles do not rely simply on intellectual constructs and commitments, but rather powerfully influence situations through emotions and strong subconscious dynamics (see McNeill, 1997; Freeman, 2000, pp.417-419; Benzon, 2001).

Musical interventions have not been universally successful, no matter how broadly success is defined (Bergh, 2010; 2011; Bergh and Sloboda, 2010). What is universal is aspiration: the aspiration to do better than we have done previously; to return to the best of what humanity is capable of; to move from ugliness back to beauty (Adler, 2011). Examples in this chapter highlight collaborative musical interventions among both like-minded people and adversaries. With the former, music inspires, motivates, supports, and encourages people in their quest to collectively achieve goals that are of the utmost importance to them and their society. With the latter, musical initiatives bring foes together to attempt to heal the seemingly insurmountable divisiveness that prolonged conflict produces. The selected examples are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather illustrative of how musical interventions are used in response to individuals’, organizations’, and societies’ very human desire not just to function better, but to thrive. The caveat, of course, is that whereas such exemplars reveal an apparent universal yearning, they neither represent a catalogue of successful endeavors nor a step-by-step guide for guaranteeing such achievement. Unfortunately, the world has yet to discover such an assured approach – arts-based or otherwise – which is but one of the reasons why this is a time for research, and not just for action – poetic or otherwise.

The brief descriptions that follow present musical initiatives that have been used in situations of extreme tension. Those in Venezuela, the United States, Estonia, and South Africa highlight proactive attempts by unified groups of people to transform aspects of society. Those in the Middle East, the former Yugoslavia, Cyprus, and Northern Ireland reveal multicultural initiatives that are attempting to heal society by bringing together opposing factions.

## **Venezuela: Music Providing the Potential to Escape Poverty**

Venezuela's El Sistema program provides a powerful example of music-based societal development, focusing on offering young people a route out of poverty. Founded in 1975 by economist and musician, Jose Antonio Abreu, El Sistema now involves almost 400,000 young people, many from Venezuela's poorest communities, in a network of 500 choirs and orchestras across the country. El Sistema offers young people quality music education along with the individual discipline and community values that come with ensemble music-making. Thus beyond excellent musical training, the program provides participants with the skills to escape poverty and an explicit alternative to the country's endemic crime and drug culture. "Children engaged in the programme attain above-average results in school and show a tremendous capacity for collective community action. The orchestra and the choirs, the heart of the programme, help create a sense of solidarity. Involvement becomes a weapon against poverty and inequality, violence and drug abuse" (Abreu, as quoted in Burton-Hill, 2012). According to Abreu, music teaches "citizenship, social awareness, and an aesthetic sense of life" (as quoted in Apthorp, 2005) and "transmits the highest values - solidarity, harmony, [and] mutual compassion (as quoted in Tunstall, 2012, p.273)." Ensemble music-making helps to build a culture of cooperation and mutual respect (Uy, 2012).

The El Sistema model is neither culture-specific nor limited to a particular age cohort. The model is now being used not only in Venezuela, but in more than 50 countries worldwide (<http://www.elsistemausa.org/el-sistema-around-the-world.htm>). In addition to young people, the El Sistema model is also being employed with adults, including in the Venezuelan prison system (Asuaje, 2008). The original pilot project involved three jails, with each jail constituting a different section of the orchestra – strings, winds, and percussion. The prison-musicians practiced by exchanging CD recordings of each other's sections, and then came together for the first time as a unified ensemble when they performed in concert. In spite of handcuffs and two guards per inmate, the response was enthusiastic. Based on the success of the pilot, the program was expanded to include seven prisons with plans to add three more (Grainger, 2011). El Sistema, whether involving young people or adults, demonstrates how community – and a respectful collaborative culture – can be built through ensemble music-making.

## **United States: Music Humanizing Incarcerated Prisoners**

El Sistema is not the only program that has brought music into extremely challenging organizational settings. The Carnegie Hall-Weill Institute's Musical Connections Program in the United States, for example, also supports the offering of musical experiences to prison inmates. Composer Daniel Levy facilitates one such initiative at New York's Sing Sing Correction Facility, a maximum security prison. This music composition program assists inmates with an interest and aptitude in music to compose works which the inmate-composers subsequently perform together with professional musicians. Concerts showcasing the compositions are held in and for the community (<http://www.carnegiehall.org/MusicalConnections/>). Experts contend that artistic interventions in correctional systems offer inmates a form of creative engagement that is educational, therapeutic, and rehabilitative (Djurichkovic, 2011; Cohen, 2009). Given that traditional prison philosophies are typically based on punishment and pain, advocacy for positive, arts-based programs requires enormous courage on the part of those who attempt to bring

beauty, empowerment, and happiness into the lives of incarcerated individuals (Johnson, 2008, p.115). As program director Levy explains:

[Prison] Superintendent Heath said when these men get out of prison they're going to be your neighbors. Who do you want to have as your neighbor? Someone who's been through a process where they're learning to think and work and engage with life or someone who has just been left in their cell for 15 or 20 years. That's a pretty potent argument." (*Behind Bars: Music in Sing Sing*, 2012 Video, available at <http://www.carnegiehall.org/MusicalConnections/>)

In addition to arts-based interventions assisting in educating, improving, and rehabilitating incarcerated individuals, Djurichkovic's (2011, p. 26) review of studies from multiple countries suggests that such programs reduce inmate incident rates, decrease recidivism, enhance general well-being, and create opportunities for positive transformative change. Such efforts have been found to benefit inmates, correctional institutions, and ultimately the society to which former prisoners return (Cohen, 2009, p. 58). The Musical Connections program, among numerous prison projects around the world, underscores the potentially transformative nature of music and collaborative music-making under the most extreme conditions.

### **Estonia's Singing Revolution: Intense Conviction and Harmonized Will Lead to Freedom**

Among initiatives that aim at societal transformation, numerous examples exist in which collaborative group music-making has promoted unity and solidarity, empowering members of the general public to persevere during times of extreme duress while working together toward desired change. Aspirational anthems and protest songs, sung by large groups of people, have a history in almost every culture (Whitehead, 2008). In the United States, for example, the spiritual "Wade in the Water" supported the slaves during the 1800s when they endured enormous hardship fighting for their freedom. A century later, "We Shall Overcome" became the anthem of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (Whitehead, 2008).

Choral singing as a form of non-violent protest during the Soviet occupation of the Baltic States provides a powerful example of a successful music-based societal initiative. Referred to as "The Singing Revolution"<sup>4</sup>, song inspired Estonians to persevere against Soviet oppression, to find their united voice, and to sing until they achieved freedom. Estonians have always had a strong singing tradition. Since 1869, Estonia has held a national song festival every five years to celebrate the folk traditions of each region, with thousands of Estonians of all ages gathering to sing in mass choirs. While the Soviets permitted the festival to continue throughout their almost 50-year occupation, they required the Estonians to sing pro-Soviet songs. In response, the Estonians adopted their own folk songs as de facto national anthems, musical symbols of their fight for freedom. In 1988 with the rise of *glasnost* ("free speech"), singing became an essential form of non-violent protest. In June 1988, 100,000 people spontaneously gathered for seven nights to sing songs that had previously been banned by the Soviets. Confident that the Soviet military would not attack the gathered singers, particularly while the world watched, the Estonians realized the real power of their voices. Three months later, 300,000 Estonians held a massive demonstration on the song-festival grounds in Tallinn, singing protest songs and listening to

political speeches demanding the restoration of Estonian sovereignty. After years of oppression and struggle, Estonia achieved independence in 1991. Music succeeded in binding Estonians together in a community of intense conviction and harmonized will. Through song, they not only found the sustaining power of hope but also the motivating strength that ultimately led them to freedom.

### **South Africa: “A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony”<sup>5</sup>**

Similar to Estonia, music united and sustained Black South Africans during the repressive Apartheid regime. For 50 years, song formed a powerful narrative in their struggle against oppression. Referred to as “a revolution in four-part harmony”, musicians, singers, and composers – poetic activists – became the voices of leadership, confronting the State with their lyrics and powerfully advocating political change. Songs, chants, and the *toyi-toyi* war dance served to mobilize millions of South Africans. As one activist described, “The *toyi-toyi* was our weapon. We did not have the technology of warfare, the tear gas and tanks, but we had this weapon” (Blackstone, 2008). Music, as a form of underground communication, united the oppressed and gave them inspiration to continue fighting. At a visceral level, the Apartheid regime understood the *Amandla* – power – of music. As Plato expressed it in *The Republic* more than two millennia earlier, “Any musical innovation is full of danger to the whole State, and ought to be prohibited. ... [W]hen modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them” (Book IV, p. 115, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/republic.html>).

The South African police and military constantly arrested musician-activists, revoked their passports, and censored their songs and radio broadcasts. Music and the courage of South Africa’s poetic activists played an instrumental role in shaping the political struggle and, ultimately, in ending Apartheid (see Schumann, 2008; Makky, 2007; among others).

### **Music Healing Society: Multicultural Ensembles Composing Friendship out of Enmity**

Whereas the previous examples from Venezuela, the United States, Estonia, and South Africa describe musical interventions among like-minded people, the following examples reveal how music can bring people together from multiple cultures who are publicly perceived to be enemies. In these examples from the Middle East, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, and the former Yugoslavia, the musical interventions aim to heal the damage and divisiveness that both causes conflict and that conflict causes.

In each example of poetic activism, one must respect the profound courage it takes for musicians to publicly crossover and be seen together with “the enemy”, often in ways that previously would have been unimaginable. History is littered with cases of individuals who have paid the ultimate price for such forward-thinking displays of courageous community building, perpetrated not just by ‘the enemy’ but all too often by extremists on their own side who view the artists as traitors for collaborating with the enemy. In all cases, whether involving world-renowned political leaders or completely unknown poetic activists, the act of joining with ‘the other’ to co-create music and a better world is inherently risky and requires profound courage.

## **Israel-Palestine: West-Eastern Divan Orchestra Performing the Poetry of Peace**

Whereas the initiatives in Estonia and South Africa aimed at influencing and engaging the general public, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra primarily targets a subset of the population, elite Arab and Israeli musicians. The Orchestra focuses on high-profile collaborative music-making to create communication and relationship bridges among people from opposing cultures in the Middle East conflict. This world class orchestra of 19-25 year olds was the inspiration of Israeli pianist-conductor Daniel Barenboim and the late Palestinian literary scholar Edward Said. The orchestra has both an Israeli and an Arab concert master and players from opposing sides of the conflict on each music stand. Every summer since 1999, orchestra members have met for a 3-week intensive rehearsal workshop. Throughout the workshop, the musicians eat, sleep, and share their daily lives together. Each evening they join in social and political discussions. The supposed enemies then tour as a unified orchestra. The goal is for participants to take home positive experiences of engaging with the “enemy” and for those experiences to subsequently have a cascading impact on their family and friends. In viewing “music as social medicine” physician David Washington notes that

...permanent healing in [the Middle East]... can occur only with the institution of social structures that provide a stable source of positive and novel interaction; that is, peace depends on activities that can construct society rather than destroy it. The [West-Eastern] Divan Orchestra does just that. (Washington and Beecher, 2010, p.131)

Admittedly, critics have questioned the ability of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra to achieve its non-musical goals, regarding it as a “problematic utopia” (Beckles Willson, 2009a, p. 21). To date, however, evidence suggests that attitudes and behaviours toward fellow musicians have, in fact, become more positive, but that similar positive changes have rarely extended beyond the members of the orchestra (Beckles Willson, 2009a; 2009b; Riiser, 2010). Supporting the contact hypothesis on which the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra was founded, Barenboim recalls a personal performance he gave in Ramallah for 300 Palestinian children. After the concert, a young girl told Barenboim how happy she was that he was in Ramallah. When asked why, she responded that he was the first “thing” from Israel she had ever seen in Ramallah that was neither a soldier nor a tank. While no individual concert can end the conflict, as Barenboim states, “at least for a couple hours, it managed to reduce the level of hatred to zero” (Barenboim as quoted in Smaczny, 2005; see also Barenboim and Said, 2004).

## **Greek & Turkish Cypriots’ Communal Choir: Daring to Sing Across the Green Line**

The Bi-Communal Choir for Peace in Cyprus provides yet another example of collaborative music-making. Exhibiting distinct moral courage, Greek and Turkish Cypriot musicians cross the Green Line, a demilitarized zone that divides the country, to rehearse and perform together (Ungerleider, 1999). By singing traditional songs of Cyprus, performed in both languages, and by commissioning works by Greek composers and Turkish lyricists, and *vice versa*, these musician-activists present a powerful message reflecting their unique identities and interconnected roots. The symbolism and embodiment of their plea for trust, reconciliation, and affirmation became highly visible once again in 2014 when the Choir joined cultural, religious, business, and trade-

union groups to sing at the 40<sup>th</sup>-anniversary effort aimed at achieving reunification (see <http://www.unitedcyprusplatform.org/activities.php>).

### **Northern Ireland: Different Drums Symbolizing Synergies Born in Unique Identities**

Similarly reflecting courage, Different Drums of Ireland (see <http://www.differentdrums.net>) brings together musical instruments carrying immense symbolism from both sides of the conflict. The group purposely uses the *lambeg*, a large military-style Protestant/Unionist drum, and the *bodhran*, a smaller stick-played Catholic/Nationalist hand-drum. During the conflict in Northern Ireland, referred to as “The Troubles”, the consequences of playing the ‘wrong drum’ in a public venue could result in being beaten or even killed. Members of Different Drums have not been immune to such threats as their music-making confronts deeply held prejudices. Once, for example, when Different Drums played at a Belfast festival to a working class Protestant audience, all their *bodhrans* were smashed. Despite such hostility, the group continues its efforts to divest the drums of their divisive political connotations and invest them with a new symbolism of coexistence that comes from co-creation. By uniting the distinct voices and rhythms of the two drums, the ensemble shows how unique identities can be used to create harmony.

### **Former Yugoslavia’s Pontanima Choir: Singing Sacred Synergy**

The Former Yugoslavia’s Pontanima Choir provides an example of collaborative music-making being used for reconciliation and healing following conflict. In Latin, *pontanima* means ‘soul bridge’. The Pontanima Choir was founded in 1996 during the Bosnian war when a Catholic church in Sarajevo could not find enough members for its choir. Choir director Josip Katavić asked the parish priest, Father Marković, if it might be possible to invite ‘the others’ to augment his choir’s vocal ranks. That courageous frame-breaking request resulted in a choir made up of Christians, Jews, and Muslims who sang each other’s sacred music to the alternating outrage and support of their respective communities. In reflecting on the unorthodox approach, Father Marković understood that the Choir was encouraging the most important form of communication. Singing each other’s sacred music “...doesn’t mean we lose our identity, [but rather] that we all win. We have a new mirror” (Marković as quoted in Gienger, 2003). “The diversity forms a beautiful, ecumenical mosaic, which eliminates mistrust and xenophobia, and restores communication, cooperation, dialogue, coexistence, pluralism, empowerment and enculturation (Marković, 2004).”

The Choir has not only become an accomplished ensemble but also a dynamic community that models the possibility of an integrated society for all of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Choir does not just “talk ecumenism”, it lives it. Their music spreads a message of enlarging the self by embracing the other. As Father Marković (2004) explains

The song of our neighbor affects us and we receive it and grow through it. Likewise, our song becomes our neighbor's heritage and impacts their growth. In that interwoven spirituality and in the discovery of our own reflection in the other, no one loses, but instead it is the only way to grow.



The Pontanima Choir has won numerous peace prizes, despite opposition that continues to this day. By singing their aspirations, the Choir inspires participants and audiences alike with their message of unity, synergy, and the possibility of a shared future.

### **Sarajevo: A Cellist Reclaims Humanity in the Face of War**

A final example of particularly potent musical leadership and individual courage took place in Sarajevo during the Bosnian War. In response to sniper and mortar attacks on civilians during the siege of Sarajevo, cellist Vedran Smailović, formally dressed in his tails and defying sniper fire, positioned himself in the ruins of the National Library and played. People gathered to listen. Uplifted and encouraged by his music, they repeatedly asked him to play. Smailović returned to this and other sites and played again and again in honor of the people who had been killed in the conflict (Smailović, 2008; CBC News, 2008; Sharrock, 2008).

Smailović's actions caught the attention of the world press. During a lull in the shelling, a journalist probed, "Aren't you crazy for playing music while they are shelling Sarajevo?" (Lederach, 2005, p.156). Smailović replied, "Playing music is not crazy. Why don't you go ask those people if they are not crazy shelling Sarajevo while I sit here playing my cello" (Smailović, 1998 cited in Lederach, 2005, p.156). Smailović's cello was not a tool to end war. Rather, his music reclaimed life in the face of war. Music reminds us that there is life beyond war – humanity beyond degradation. Scholar and poet Swati Chopra (2007) captures the profound meaning and impact of Smailović's poetic activism, "Smailović played to ruined homes, smouldering fires, [and] scared people hiding in basements. He played for human dignity that is the first casualty in war. Ultimately, he played for life, for peace, and for the possibility of hope that exists even in the darkest hour."

### **Music Transforming Mindsets: From Aspiration to Initial Evidence**

*"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes,  
but in having new eyes." – Marcel Proust*

To date, poetic activism, including music-based interventions, has been rooted primarily in aspiration, not in evidence. As the examples in the prior section highlight, people worldwide yearn for better societies, organizations, and leadership, but fail to have sufficient evidence that artistic initiatives are efficacious – that they lead to desired outcomes or even have the potential to do so. To address this critical need, research was conducted to begin to ascertain if and how individuals' abilities to address conflictual situations could be enhanced and transformed by music. Whereas a wealth of studies demonstrate the positive impact of arts-based interventions on children (see Catterall, 1998; 2002; Deasy, 2002; Rooney, 2004; Bamford, 2006; and Ruppert, 2006 among others), extensive and systematic research on adults, including those working in organizations, is only now beginning to be conducted (Berthoin Antal, 2009; 2011; and Johansson Sköldberg, Woodilla and Berthoin Antal, 2015).

### **Music and the Musical-Ensemble Metaphor**

According to linguist Deborah Tannen, language

invisibly molds our way of thinking about people, actions, and the world around us. Military metaphors train us to think about – and see – everything in terms of fighting, conflict, and war. This perspective then limits our imaginations when we consider what we can do about situations we would like to understand or change. (1998, pp. 7-8)

Metaphors act as cognitive frames dictating how people think, feel and ultimately respond to situations. If conflict and the ways of resolving it are perceived as war then we think, feel, and act accordingly. If, however, we break frame and apply a new metaphor to our view of conflict, our perceptions and behaviours should similarly shift. Experts in arts and management contend that “... the arts can...open up the mind in such a way that it can change behaviour” (Buswick as cited in Amundson 2011, p. 7). Buswick argues that

By using or observing creative skills ... [people] are taken out of a purely analytical framework, and that helps them view not only business issues, but the world at large, from a different perspective. That changes the way they see things, and ultimately the way they do things. (as cited in Amundson, 2011, p. 7)

### **Initial Research on the Use of Music in Resolving Disputes**

The first author of this chapter conducted research to study an arts-based approach to learning how to achieve desired outcomes in solving problems and resolving disputed situations (see Ippolito, 2015). Replacing traditional competitive and combative metaphors, the study used the musical ensemble as an overarching metaphor for collaboratively negotiating and solving problems. Conducted at a leading North American law school, the study employed three distinct music-based experiences to attempt to alter perceptions of conflictual and contentious situations as well as to change how people would behave within such situations.

The study engaged participants in music-based experiences designed to take them beyond relying primarily on a cognitive approach – a purely rational analytical framework – and provide them with an integrated cognitive-affective-and-behavioral approach to solving problems and resolving disputes (Goleman and Senge, 2014; Alexander and LeBaron, 2013, p.544; LeBaron, MacLeod and Acland, 2014). Thus, the research utilized musical experiences to develop participants’ emotional and social intelligence. Whereas numerous researchers have identified such intelligence as essential to organizational and managerial effectiveness, it remains an under-developed competence among most professionals and absent from most professional training programs (Goleman, 1995; 2006; Goleman and Boyatzis, 2008; Boyatzis and Saatcioglu, 2008; Boyatzis, 2008a, 2008b; Goleman and Senge, 2014).

The set of music-based experiences, including the creation of playlists, an interactive workshop with a string quartet, and team-based music-making, were designed to support participants in exploring the nuances of communication and in building effective collaborative communities. In this study music served not only for “skills transfer, projective technique, illustration of essence, and making” (Taylor and Ladkin 2009, p. 56), but also as an explicit tool within a complex negotiation. For comparison, the researcher offered an alternative, traditional set of experiences

to a separate group of participants using non-music-based collaborative metaphors and experiences.

In summary, the research focused on discovering 1) whether the negotiation and problem-solving skills and behaviors of ensemble music-making can be learned by adults who are not musicians; 2) whether such skills learned in a musical environment are transferrable to non-musical environments in which there are complex conflictual situations; and 3) if so, whether these practices, once learned, can change cognitive frames and affect, and thus lead to more effective behavior and more desirable outcomes.

### **Structure of the Study**

All participants engaged in a series of experiential exercises in dyads, triads and multi-party ensembles, culminating in simulated negotiations and problem-solving exercises. In addition to recording the outcomes of each exercise and negotiation, participants regularly recorded their reactions in reflection papers and on questionnaires using both open- and close-ended questions. The researcher then used a modified grounded theory methodology to analyse the observational and self-report qualitative and quantitative data.

Collaborative metaphors, in place of more traditional competitive and combative metaphors, were introduced to both the music and non-music groups in the first week. The concepts of collaborative negotiation and a team approach to solving problems and resolving disputes were then reinforced throughout the three-month study. In addition, the researcher presented the musical ensemble, as a new metaphoric frame, to the music group in the first week. During the second week, participants in both groups engaged in a reflective exercise that allowed them to explore their personal cognitive and affective responses to conflict and its handling. As a part of this reflective exercise, the music group created a playlist of music as an adjunct to their verbal responses, while the non-music group responded by using words only. In the fifth week, music-group participants attended an interactive workshop with a string quartet. At the same time, the non-music group engaged in an interactive talk on cross-cultural negotiations with senior legal counsel from a major financial institution. In the seventh week, the music group engaged in a series of hands-on group music-making activities, while the non-music group attended an interactive session with a judge and the director of a mediation clinic and also took part in a series of verbal question-asking and active-listening exercises. During the eighth week, both groups took part in the Ugli Orange negotiation. In the tenth week, both groups participated in the World Trade Center Redesign, a complex multi-party negotiation. As a part of this multi-party negotiation, the music-group chose a piece of music to bring to the negotiation that they believed would help them in achieving a satisfactory outcome.

### **The Musical Interventions**

Critical thinking must be balanced with the development of emotional and social intelligence for effective performance in most fields (see Goleman, 1995; 2006; 2014; Boyatzis, 2008a; 2008b; among others). In keeping with other researchers' observation, namely that "[r]ational analytical competencies are obviously valuable but insufficient by themselves" (Nissley 2010, p.14), the study included activities to engage participants in reflective practice and to help them to consider

conflict from an emotional as opposed to strictly a cognitive perspective. The music-based experiences provided a consistent arc during the three months, first emphasizing reflection, then observation, and then doing.

**Creating Playlists: Developing an Expressive Lexicon.** The intention of the first exercise was to foster the development of a lexicon for expressing the sensed and felt dimensions of conflict. To explore the role of emotions in conflict and its impact on people's responses to conflict, the researcher asked both groups to recall a conflict situation in which they had been involved and then reflect on how the conflict had made them feel. The music-group then composed a playlist of three songs that not only expressed their feelings but also could act as a vehicle to communicate their feelings to their colleagues. Participants in the non-music group engaged in the same reflection, but without associating their feelings to music. Both groups subsequently described their conflict-related feelings to their colleagues.

**Observing the String Quartet: Viewing Collaboration in Action.** Both groups received lectures on the importance of communication, community-building, and interpersonal connection for successfully negotiating. Music-group participants then took part in an interactive workshop with the Cecilia String Quartet. Watching the rehearsal provided them with a unique opportunity to observe how the Quartet communicated, collaboratively approached solving problems, utilized rotating leadership, and engaged in consensus decision-making. The Quartet provided a musical-metaphor-in-action and illustrated the essence of the collaborative negotiation process. At the same time, the researcher introduced the same concepts to the non-music group, but without the use of music or musical metaphors.

**Group Music-Making: Moving from Knowing to Doing.** In the final musical intervention, which aimed at behavioral integration, music-group participants composed and performed music themselves. Using a variety of percussion instruments, participants attempted to incorporate the concepts of communication, team building, and interpersonal connection into their individual and team behavior. Rather than simply observe, as they had done previously, the ensemble music-making required them to 'perform' their understanding of the dynamics of communication, including finding a tempo and rhythm within their work as a team. At the same time, the non-music-group engaged in a parallel, equally-engaging series of verbal questioning-and-listening exercises.

## **The Simulated Negotiations**

After participating in the three previously-described experiences, both groups took part in the same two simulated negotiations. By comparing the two groups' process and performance, it was possible to assess both groups' overall learning as well as the relative impact of the music-based interventions.

**Direct two-person negotiation.** The Ugli Orange is a classic two-person negotiation in which each party needs the same finite resource (all the oranges) to save people from catastrophic harm. When negotiators use open communication, demonstrate trust, and employ an interest-based negotiation strategy, the potential win/win solution – that one party needs the juice and the other the rind – readily becomes apparent. By contrast, when parties engage in traditional

positional zero-sum bargaining and fail to build sufficient trust and rapport to discover why each party needs the orange, the results are disastrous, with at least some people hypothetically perishing.

**Complex multi-party team negotiation.** In the World Trade Center Redesign, participants representing five stakeholders engage in a time-limited negotiation to reach consensus on four critical issues needed for the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> fallen towers. Prior to the negotiation, all participants receive a list of possible resolutions to each issue. At the same time, the researcher asked music-group participants to bring a piece of music to the negotiation that exemplified their resolution goals, which they could then use in any way they chose during the negotiation. For example, they could use the music as an initial ice-breaker, as a tool for addressing an impasse, or as a ritual to mark progress or resolution. Non-music group participants prepared for the negotiation without incorporating music into their planning or actual negotiating.

### **Initial Results: Music-Group Out-learns and Out-performs Non-Music-Group**

The results from this initial study are encouraging. It appears that non-musicians in non-musical environments are able to learn from musical metaphors and ensemble music-making and that such learning translates into changed and more effective behavior. Moreover, professionals exposed to musical metaphors and other music-based learning appear to outperform colleagues who do not participate in similar music-based learning. Overall, the results of the study indicate:

- **Cognitive learning:** All music-group participants, as compared to less than three-quarters (71%) of those in the non-music group, reported a shift in their perceptions regarding conflict and how it could be handled;
- **Affective learning:** None of the non-music group participants, as compared to almost half (47%) of the music-group participants, described feeling differently about the importance of emotions and relationships in dispute resolution processes;
- **Behavioral learning:** Both when acting individually and collectively, music-group participants embodied more of the new learning (80% as compared to 40-60%). When compared with the non-music-group, music-group participants communicated more effectively, formed more efficient negotiating teams, and generated more creative outcomes; and
- **Learning transfer:** music-group participants were clearly able to transfer concepts and skills from the music to the non-music domain.

Both groups' initial descriptions of how problems should be solved and disputes resolved revealed deeply entrenched, very traditional assumptions about professional norms and behaviors, including how success is defined and achieved. After three months, participants in both groups reported a better appreciation of the collaborative approach to managing conflict; however, the music-group participants incorporated the learning in practice, not just in theory.

Both groups reported: (a) a shift away from an adversarial mindset, (b) an expansion away from a limited self-orientation to encompass a focus on 'the other' and on the process, and (c) an

increased awareness of the role and importance of emotions and relationships in resolving disputes. The extent of the shifts, however, differed markedly between the two groups:

- More than three-quarters (76%) of the music-group reported a **shift away from adversarial thinking** as compared to only 17.6% of the non-music group. For example, music-group participants reported:

“A massive shift, actually. I used to be 100% convinced that a more aggressive, “zealous advocate” approach to conflict was the way to get what you wanted .... The relationships and other dynamics seemed “touchy feely” and impractical...I feel that emphasizing common interests and approaching conflicts in a way that is open to compromise will benefit me hugely, both as a lawyer and in my life outside work.”

“It is clear that there are a number of things that go into good conflict resolution skills. It is not all about fighting for your client but about understanding the needs of both sides and then using that to come to a mutually beneficial agreement.”

- More than half (57%) of music-group participants reported a **shift away from a self-orientation** to a perspective that encompassed ‘the other’ and the process, while not even a third (29%) of the non-music group reported an equivalent shift. Music- group participants described personal insights they gained as well as having enhanced their personal awareness. Their descriptions revealed an increased subjective awareness of the importance of skills acquisition related to self, others, and process for successfully managing conflict and resolving disputes:

“I’ve learned that knowing one’s own interests is not as important as gathering information from the other side because the former leads to a narrow set of acceptable results while the latter leads to a broader value-creating [set of] results.”

- Almost half (47%) of the music-group reported an **increased awareness of the importance of emotions and relationship** in resolving disputes. In comparison, no one (0%) in the non-music-group described a similar awareness. Non-music group participants, in describing their learning, more frequently restricted themselves to describing their acquisition of practical and analytical skills and to having gained new theoretical perspectives regarding the conflict and dispute resolution process. As one music-group participant reported:

“In the beginning, I was more pessimistic on the true possibility of both parties leaving the table feeling satisfied with the outcomes. However ... most of the parties had a great deal of their interests met. I discovered the importance of understanding the interests and values of the parties in order to create a feeling of community and trust. The more people feel that you are taking into account their interests the more they are being heard and respected. This allows for a

positive and collaborative approach to the discussions. My understanding changed most in this regard.”

The following section describes how participant learning grew during the series of musical experiences and negotiations.

### **Creating Playlists: Developing an Expressive Lexicon**

Already after having been introduced to just the first musical experience, the music-group differed markedly from the non-music group in both their self-reflective insights and their demonstrated depth of understanding. Compared with the non-music group, the music group expressed greater insight relative to:

- **diversity:** the extent of diversity among people and the importance of developing an awareness of differing values, beliefs and worldviews;
- **the role of emotions:** the role that one’s own and others’ emotions play in contentious situations; and
- **the uniqueness of each negotiation:** the need to respond to the uniqueness of each conflict situation, including to the unique parties and issues involved.

Music-group participants indicated that the music gave them an expanded expressive lexicon with which to describe the sensed and felt dimensions of conflict. Some participants found that music provided them with an outlet that they did not usually have to express feelings about conflict situations. Music thus expanded their expressive lexicon by providing a way for them to communicate “where words cannot go” and where words, in the past, had fallen short. In contrast, non-music group participants restricted their descriptions to reporting external observations rather than more subjective self-reflections. They tended not to use their own words and meanings, but rather relied primarily on existing standardized categories (such as the standard Thomas-Kilmann (1974) conflict modes) to label themselves, others, and the negotiating process itself.

Music-group participants reported that their learning was enriched through the use of the music playlists. Creating playlists helped them to access their inner emotions and to see the significance of such emotions to the context. They stated that creating playlists was particularly relevant and meaningful as it drew on their personal, real-life experience and required them to use their own creativity and imagination. Participants’ observations fit with experts’ understandings that arts-based reflection is a form of “problem-solving from within” (Adler as quoted in Amundson, 2011, p. 7), and thus a way to help people develop “from the inside-out” (Purg as quoted in Amundson, 2011, p. 7). By creating playlists, the music-group not only gained a greater depth of cognitive comprehension but, more important, that depth encompassed emotional, social, and interpersonal learning not expressed by those in the non-music group.

### **Learning from the String Quartet: Collaboration in Action**

Following their meeting with the Quartet, participants easily translated their learning from the music to their own professional domains. They quickly identified similarities between musical and

non-musical negotiations, including the need to try out all ideas without a priori negative evaluation and the importance of working toward an overarching common goal. One observer noted that for the Quartet to perform at a high level, “disputes had to be resolved throughout, which required a consideration of alternatives and agreement. This is highly analogous to the negotiation process, where the goal is agreement, which requires a consideration of alternatives and decision-making throughout.”

Another participant observed the similarity in communication styles: “[The] same principles apply to a negotiation: Tone, pitch, tempo, dynamics... . When negotiations go well they are harmonious and creative and transforming; when they do not, there is discord. [The Quartet] ... adjusted tone and volume when criticizing to make it clear that the idea was a non-threatening, non-accusatory suggestion.”

“I loved that one of the violinists described herself as being a trapeze artist in saying that her fellow musicians know when to “catch” her, even if she “jumped” at the wrong time. This demonstrates the importance of being present in the “here and now”. I think that this is just as important in the legal field because if you are not present to catch another party after they try to communicate with you, this may very well botch the entire negotiation process.”

As documented in their reported reflections, the Quartet heightened participants’ cognitive and affective understanding of collaborative negotiation skills and behaviors.

### **Group Music-Making: Moving from Knowing to Doing**

Following the third musical experience, the group music-making, participants described an array of learnings that they believed would not have occurred without the musical interventions. They reported further deepening their understanding of collaborative negotiation and problem-solving concepts and practice skills. They believed that the music-making had enabled them to experience the full range of understandings and skills needed for successfully resolving conflict, including the nuances of communication, team-building, and individual and group behaviors such as risk-taking, option generation and evaluation, and the development of group strategy, trust and rapport. In addition, they perceived that they had increased their ability to deal with the unknown, be spontaneous and flexible, adapt to change, and be present (“in the moment”). They described learning the feeling of re-establishing a group goal upon encountering unexpected challenges. Likewise, they reported understanding the impact on the group of mistakes and failure and learning to recover from such potentially undermining, unintended occurrences. Participants in the non-music group who took part in the active listening and curious-questioning exercises appear to have learned less and incorporated less of what they learned into their own behavior in the subsequent negotiations.

### **Impact of Music on Performance in Simulated Negotiations**

Behavior in the simulations that followed the musical interventions demonstrated the extent to which: the learning that was introduced through music was translated for use in a non-music professional domain, the learning was internalized, and the actual negotiating behaviors changed.



**Two-person negotiation.** The differences in outcomes between the music and non-music groups in the Ugli Orange negotiation were striking. In the music group, 60% (12 of 20 negotiators) reached win-win solutions. The majority uncovered the key fact that both parties could achieve their goal by sharing all of the resource and thus arrived at an integrated solution. In the non-music group, 87.5% (14 of 16 negotiators) failed to make the same discovery and thus failed to achieve a win/win solution. Based both on outside observation and participants' own reflections, music-group negotiators approached their communications and engagement from a collaborative perspective, whereas the non-music group defaulted to using more conventional, competitive approaches. Non-music group negotiators appeared unable to transcend the limitations of the traditional win/lose perspective and behaviors despite being aware of those limitations.

The results of this two-person negotiation indicate that interacting with music more effectively reinforced the core concepts that had been introduced to both groups in the preparatory presentations on communication, community-building, and interpersonal connection, and more successfully enhanced skill development. Music-group participants disproportionately realized that neither side could achieve the superordinate goal of resolution without the cooperation of both sides; that is, that a win/lose dichotomy would never support a satisfactory resolution.

**Complex multi-party team negotiation.** Similar to the outcome of the two-party negotiation, the results of the more complex multi-party World Trade Center Redesign negotiation were striking. First, the music-teams were more efficient. All three music-teams completed the negotiation within the allotted time whereas two of the three non-music teams failed to reach consensus by the deadline. Second, in comparison to the non-music teams, the music-teams demonstrated more creativity in crafting their own resolutions to the issues. Two of the three music-teams rejected all pre-set options in favor of inventing their own resolutions to each of the four issues. The remaining music-team accepted two of the pre-set options while creating two options of its own. In contrast, non-music teams resorted to using all or most of the pre-set options in formulating their resolutions. Only one non-music team invented its own resolution to more than half (3 of 4) of the issues.

Third, the music-teams demonstrated a greater ability to translate learned concepts into behavior. Non-music teams appeared to have more difficulty putting what they had learned into practice, defaulting to prior commonly-accepted adversarial, position-based bargaining and persuasive-argument habits. Strikingly, the non-music teams reported being aware of their shortcomings and possessing a desire to improve, however, the standard lectures and skills-training failed to produce the hoped-for changed behavior in the actual negotiations.

Fourth, the non-music teams limited themselves to a narrower range of process options. Music-teams used multiple modalities to address the issues in the negotiations: they talked, used their computers, drew diagrams, and engaged in multiple parallel discussions within the main negotiating room. In contrast, non-music-teams either just talked, or used their computers but not interactively, and went outside to caucus rather than hosting multiple simultaneous discussions within the main room.

Fifth, the music teams appeared more able than their non-music counterparts to recognize and translate into action difficult-to-grasp concepts. Having seen process-in-action through the lens of the Quartet, as opposed to simply observing mediation and negotiation sessions, provided the music group with a new and dynamic perspective on how to resolve disputes. When they then engaged personally in music-making, they experienced the concepts of communication, team building and interpersonal interactions first-hand. The music-making allowed the concepts to come alive through embodied learning, with the depth of their assimilation revealed in how the music-teams negotiated. In contrast, non-music participants, who had received standard dispute-resolution training and had interacted with legal professionals to learn the process of negotiating, displayed a less complete assimilation of concepts. Non-music group negotiators were less able to apply the concepts and to effectively obtain desired results.

In addition, after watching the Quartet rehearse and then making their own group music, music-group participants embraced the ensemble concept that the overall goal is more important than the sum of the individual parts and negotiating positions. Participants also reported that using a more cooperative, team-oriented approach enabled them to work more effectively toward achieving mutually beneficial outcomes:

“...I realized that communication and getting all team members on the same page is key...[F]eelings of personal and group responsibility can arise and strategies to solve the problems and minimize risks. Trust can develop once the team is collaborative, comfortable with each other, and participates in the strategies we all helped develop.”

“In the end you learned that other person’s catching was often based on how good your throw to them was. It was interesting putting trust into both the person throwing to you and catching your throw to make you look good...The biggest takeaway was seeing just how much the slightest change can mix you up.”

Music-group participants were clearly more willing to abandon an argument-approach and to repeatedly ask and answer the question “Why?” They also appeared more willing to risk revealing information and therefore less likely to withhold information.

### **Emerging Patterns from Initial Research**

Taken together, the results from this initial study indicate that people not only learn from music and ensemble music-making, but they are also able to transfer that learning to their main non-musical domains of professional work. Moreover, the specific learnings appear to be commensurate with much of the learning considered most important for 21<sup>st</sup>-century success (Delors, 1996; Goleman and Senge, 2014). In summary, the study reveals that:

- the metaphor of ensemble music-making and music-based experiences appear to have the potential to shift perceptions, cognitive frameworks, emotional responses, and behavior away from competitive positional bargaining and zero-sum distributive approaches toward more collaborative, interest-based approaches to solving problems and resolving disputes;

- music-based experiences appear to support deeper understanding of abstract concepts and the complexities inherent in conflict and its management;
- music-based experiences appear to support the development of emotional and social intelligence which, in turn, can lead to more effective performance and better outcomes in resolving disputes and solving problems; and
- engagement with music appears to reconnect people to their creative potential and lead them to see the efficacy of employing creative thinking in professional environments where analytical and critical thinking have generally been over-emphasized.

Although the sample size was too small to generalize the outcomes, the study offers encouraging evidence of the potential for our aspirations to become tangible reality.

### **Hope for the Future**

The world is rife with challenges that so seriously and pervasively threaten the stability and sustainability of the planet that the future of civilization, as we know it, is in question. Faced with such a reality, we cannot help but appreciate Albert Einstein’s prescient observation that is as true today as it was more than a half century ago when he first stated that “We cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” Society needs new approaches that can only be found “outside of the mainstream of international political traditions, discourse, and operational modalities (Lederach, 1997, p. 25).” Contemporary society, and the challenges it faces, demands innovation; it urgently requires “...the development of ideas and practices that go beyond the [conventional] negotiation of substantive interests and issues (Lederach, 1997, p. 25).”

Based on the range of important and impressive societal interventions, music-based approaches would appear to offer hope for transforming conflict, developing more generative organizational and societal cultures, and ameliorating serious world challenges. Rather than repeating past approaches and expecting different results,<sup>6</sup> music-based interventions go beyond previous approaches, and their repeated failures, to explore the potential for future success. The stakes are very high. Notwithstanding, guarantees of success are non-existent or fraudulent (see Bergh, 2007; 2008; 2010; 2011; Beckles Willson, 2009a; and Bergh and Sloboda, 2010, among others).

This chapter has presented a range of music-based societal interventions that highlight the hope that the dynamics of music and ensemble music-making are robust enough to transform both major and day-to-day organizational and societal dysfunction. The new initial research summarized in the chapter demonstrates that the promise of positive outcomes from musical interventions is neither strictly idiosyncratic nor based only on the aspiration inherent in ‘wishful thinking’, but rather, appears to be grounded in demonstrable shifts in cognitive frameworks, attitudinal change, and behavioural outcomes.

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Title of Adler's 2009 art exhibition at The Banff Centre, where she was an artist in residence.
- <sup>2</sup> The literature suggests that extreme cases are valuable in revealing phenomena that are often camouflaged in less extreme, more common, and therefore more familiar, circumstances (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006; Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe, 2010).
- <sup>3</sup> Ben Zander conducts the Boston Philharmonic and serves as a guest conductor for orchestras worldwide.

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- <sup>4</sup> The Singing Revolution is commonly used to refer to events between 1987 and 1991 that led to the restoration of independence in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (Thomson, 1992; Ginkel, 2002). The term was coined by Estonian “poetic activist” (activist and artist), Heinz Valk, and published in an article a week after the June 10–11, 1988 spontaneous mass night-singing demonstrations at the Tallinn Song Festival Grounds (Vogt, 2004, as cited at: <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing\\_Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing_Revolution)>). Also see Vesilind (2008) and *The Singing Revolution* the 2006 documentary film by James Tusty and Maureen Castle Tusty.
- <sup>5</sup> From the 2002 documentary *Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony*, written and directed by Lee Hirsch, which presents interviews, archival footage, and filmed performances highlighting the role that music played in South Africa’s struggle against apartheid. Singer-activists include such voices as Vuyisile Mini, Miriam Mekeba, Dorothy Masuka, and Roger Lucey. Also see the 2013 BBC documentary by Canadian film maker Jason Bourque “Music for Mandela: A Legacy with a Backbeat” depicting the same history and impact.
- <sup>6</sup> The saying, as it is often reiterated, is: “Insanity is repeating the same course of action while expecting different results.” Available at: <<https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20120718134727AAaL4rX>> [Accessed 14 August, 2014]. Alternatively stated as “Insanity is repeating the same mistakes and expecting different results.” attributed to Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, Rita Mae Brown, and an old Chinese proverb (see <<http://www.en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Insanity>>) or “Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results” Albert Einstein at <<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alberteins133991.html#f2UVmkWTGLbEZbKg.99>>