

Making Links between Group Analysis and Group Music Therapy

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Abstract

This paper discusses the nature of group music therapy when its practice involves both free musical improvisation and verbal exchange. It considers in particular how music therapists may valuably draw upon group analytic theory, both traditional and contemporary, to inform their thinking about clinical events and their practice as group conductors.

Music therapists and group analysts have much to offer one another. The language of group analysis helps us to bring into words, when we need to, something of the meaning of the group's interactions in its music; the music itself and our implicit understanding of it may enable the group to pursue its processes, conscious and unconscious, through shared, non verbal expression.

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“I was not the composer who wrote the music, but the conductor who interpreted it, the conductor who brought it to light. I remember saying to my colleagues: ‘I feel like a conductor but I don’t know in the least what the music is which will be played’.”-S. H. Foulkes

Music therapists from within a wide range of theoretical traditions and cultural backgrounds work with groups; perhaps it is often assumed by referral sources, other clinicians, and group members themselves that the innately social and collaborative nature of much music makes the establishment of clinical groups in music therapy a natural decision. But group music making may be turned to in many ways in the service of clinical practice, from the use of structured and directed group musical activity in the interests of social skills development, to an emphasis on its function as a source of community cohesion, to a desire to find in improvised music some insights into our unconscious processes and inner worlds. Our own thinking about group music therapy emerges from our backgrounds as therapists working in the analytic tradition in both music therapy and psychotherapy, and from our interest in the ways in which group analytic theory might inform our thinking about events in group music therapy.

But the starting point for this discussion might be: Why work with music at all in analytically informed group therapy? Since its inception, the mainstream analytic tradition has taken words to be its ordinary means of external exchange; the term “the talking cure” arose not only to distinguish it from other, more medically based interventions, but because of the active power of language to identify and symbolize feeling and experience. In the early years of the developing psychoanalytic movement, discussion of music and the experience of it had little place, and Freud famously described himself in 1936 as a “ganz unmuskalischer Mensch”—a “quite unmusical man” (Jones, 1957, p. 226). Certainly he had more to say about the visual arts, perhaps

in part because they offer the possibility of some discussion, however broad, about what images may represent. In the case of music, any inquiry into generalized meaning is necessarily more speculative and perhaps redundant. Any analysis of the formal structure of music, which has to be framed in terms of the conventions of the music itself, can only take us so far; after that, the emotional implications of those structural events are intimately related to the composer's (or player's or listener's) inner world. Perhaps it was precisely music's resistance to discussion in terms of its meaning that Freud found so difficult. In 1914, he wrote:

Works of art do exercise a powerful effect on me, especially those of literature and sculpture, less often a painting. This has occasioned me, when I have been contemplating such things, to spend a long time before them, trying to comprehend them in my own way, i.e. to explain to myself what their effect is due to. Wherever I cannot do this, as for instance with music, I am almost incapable of gaining any pleasure. Some rationalistic, or perhaps analytic, turn of mind in me rebels against being moved by a thing without knowing why I am thus affected, and what it is that affects me. (Freud, 1958/1914, pp. 209-238)

Nagel (2008) suggested that:

Prior to the 1950s, music was viewed by psychoanalysts primarily as a regressive, non-pathological experience reaching directly to primary process and the unconscious. By 1952, shifting from a topographical model toward ego mastery and the structural model, Kohut was arguing that music was related to secondary processes, serving the mature ego, yet simultaneously coexisting with primitive pleasures; explanations about music and mind now pointed to greater complexity.

So perhaps it is more helpful to think of music as carrying something of the quality of a dream, in which, in its essentially nonverbal nature, dealing purely in aural sensation which at first appears to

defy cognitive analysis, it can bring us toward an encounter with unconscious processes.

Psychoanalytic writing is full of language that has immediate associations with music. Words such as “harmonious,” “resonance,” “dissonance,” and “counterpoint,” all of them implying something about the relationship of one musical component to another, appear regularly in discussions of analytic theory and practice, suggesting that the experience of music is in fact close to consciousness when we are trying to articulate something about therapeutic interaction. Furthermore, like an analytic session, live music moves through real time within an imposed time frame (we cannot pause, rewind, or repeat at will), so we are affected not only by the sounds themselves but by the pace and order of events: What is repeated? What appears once and never again? What is repeated with variations? What is transformed? Where are the silences?

Analytically informed music therapy groups are important because they offer the possibility of using both talking and the playing of improvised music as their methods of communication. We have facilitated and participated both in music therapy groups that use free improvisation and in analytic talking groups, and have been curious about the similarities and the differences in the dynamics of both. What follows is an exploration of these dynamics and of the interface between the two currencies of words and music.

To begin, we present two short vignettes that illustrate musical exchanges in a music therapy group. In this paper, we will not describe group processes in detail, but these interactions might provide a flavor of musical communication in the context of therapy. Tuned and un-tuned percussion as well as ethnic instruments are placed in the centre of the group. There is often a piano available and there are larger instruments around the periphery of the room. All instruments can be played freely, with no “right” or “wrong” way of using them.

A Music Therapy Group for Adults in a Mental Health Setting: A First Meeting after a Break

There is an initial exchange of “outside-of-the-group happenings over the break,” then one member picks up a tambour drum and plays a slow rhythm; another joins in on a djembe drum. After a while, a third member plays a tune on the xylophone that is easy on the ear and inviting for other members to join in with. The feeling created by the music at this point is of a communal need to be together in sound and in the music. There is an initial feeling of containment and safety. Then one member makes an abrupt cut in the music and moves to the piano. He hits a loud cluster of notes that jolts the music out of its safety zone. The flavor of the music that follows is one of sparring, energetic sounds interspersed with the original rhythms on the drums that try to hold a sense of grounding. The music comes to an arresting halt with a loud crash on the Chinese gong.

What emerges in the subsequent talking, as a direct reflection of what has been played in the music, is both something of the need to regroup and “be” together and some angry and irritated feelings with one another, with the group leader, and with the fact that the recent break seemed very long.

A Music Therapy Group for Patients Who Have Recently Left Psychiatric Care: Two Members’ Approaches to Music in the Group

D is a quiet, unassuming young mother who is suffering from postpartum depression and who has developed what she describes as a “social phobia.” After much persuading to join the group, she attends, but is too withdrawn to converse with other group members. However, in the safety of the music, she begins to express intense feelings, often choosing the resonant metalophone to create tunes. When this happens, other members of the group respond to her by creating accompaniments to her music. There is a sense that she is beginning to find her voice.

H, another member of this group, is very dominant and overbearing in his verbal exchanges with others. It is easy to see how he finds relating to others difficult, as he displays a narcissistic

self-importance that group members find hard to address. However, when he is persuaded to play music in the group, he most often chooses the delicate Tibetan bells, interjecting with very small sounds that are just enough to say he is present but which make little impact on the shape of the music. Over time, H is able to talk about the “small” part of him that feels inferior and frightened; he is able to get in touch with this aspect of himself more readily through the music. It is observed by both the group members and the group conductor that his participation in the music is in stark contrast to the dominant, pompous self that takes over in relating verbally to others in the group. Group members are then able to be curious rather than attacking about the two aspects of him, the dominating part and the timid part, which the music has helped to point out. Thus begins a journey of self reflection.

Early Interactions and Gestures

If music is a direct, primary communication of feeling, then it is connected with something that has been part of our experience from the first moments of life. Much has been written about the caregiver’s gaze, the mutual gaze of caregiver and infant, and the infant’s need to find herself mirrored in her caregiver’s eyes. If that mutual gaze cannot be found, the infant is left with the terrifying sensation that there may be no recognition or containment of her intense feelings and experience. Perhaps the same can be said of sound. An existence in which the caregiver’s voice is absent, or in which the caregiver seems not to hear and respond to the infant’s urgent sounds, may be equally traumatic. If the caregiver cannot listen to or be moved by the infant’s voice, there is no opportunity for the pleasurable and wholly necessary development of the idiosyncratic vocabulary of shared sounds that needs to form their unique mutual (and “musical”) repertoire and be at the heart of their interactions. Stern (1985), who based his ideas partly on analytic thinking and partly on a social perspective, used the term “attunement” when discussing the necessity for the infant that

the caregiver respond to her gestures. Attunement is what makes moments of change and development possible, both in infancy and in adult relationships. Stern and others have also drawn attention to non-analytic aspects of therapeutic change, pointing to the realm of “implicit relational knowing” that arises out of “moments of meeting” between analyst and patient, or between members of an analytic group (Stern et al., 1998, p. 905). Those moments, which become “lit up subjectively and affectively, pulling one more fully into the present” (p. 911), are seen as potential instigators of the process of change. With its currency of freely co-improvised sound, music therapy may open the way to such processes with great power and immediacy.

Stern (1985, p. 146) identified those areas of behavior that can be “matched” without being precisely imitated: intensity, timing, and shape, which he then broke down into further sub-categories. These areas immediately lend themselves to musical understandings, with their clear parallels to some fundamental aspects of musical material. In improvised music, there is the opportunity to encounter in what emerges the moment-by-moment shifts of dynamic energy which may reflect the player’s inner world and the subtleties of interaction with others. The emerging, organic nature of improvised music allows immediate access to Stern’s “vitality affects,” and the musical exchanges can allow the player’s internal world to “mix with another’s and be known to another” (Bartram, 1991 p. 17).

The group analyst Stacey (2003) noted, “How we experience ourselves in relation to others provides a basic organizing perspective for all interpersonal events” (p. 82). Also drawing upon some of Stern’s theories of child development and of how the self emerges, Stacey wrote about the “conversation of gestures.” This is the avenue through which an infant’s identity emerges, involving basic feeling states or emotions such as happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, interest, and so on. Picking up on this, Stacey (2003) noted that each of these emotions is signaled to others

through discrete facial displays present at birth and subject to little change throughout life. Elias (1989), cited in Stacey (2003 p. 83) identified these dynamics as “species- specific symbols”. Each of these feeling states or affects is considered to have various ranges of intensity and activity of differing degrees, from pleasure to non-pleasure. Stacey provided an example of “a ‘rush’ of anger [being] experienced as might a ‘surge’ of joy” (p. 83). Stern (1998, p. 53) called these states of being “vitality affects,” or the coming and going, as he put it, of emotions and thoughts. The quality of these feelings could be described in such dynamics as “surging, fading away, fleeting, exploding, bursting, floating, rushing and so on” (Stacey, 2003, p. 83). Langer (1942, pp. 243-4) described states as “forms of feeling” or, more poetically, “how feelings go.” The drive to relate, to connect with others, is innate in the infant’s struggle to survive in the world. Stern’s belief, as described by Stacey (2003 p.86) is that as far back as pre-birth, and certainly at birth, babies have the ability to “evoke from caretakers what they need both physically and emotionally”. Stern’s position is in direct departure from some earlier psychoanalytic theories, which suggest that the infant begins life in a symbiotic state in relation to the mother.

Many music therapists, because they work at least in part with a nonverbal medium, have naturally turned to ideas about early infant interaction to inform their thinking about musical responses. They have been making use of the ideas of Stern and others for some time to examine in detail the nature of nonverbal exchange. The music therapist Brown (1999) wrote that she is “reminded how often the first signs of growth in a musical improvisational relationship are seen when the previously ‘affect-less’ playing of the client begins to have dynamic shape, sense of phrase, rubato, and so on” (p. 65). Drawing on Stern’s concept of “vitality affects,” the group analyst Zinkin (1991) wrote: “Vitality affects seem to me like the musical signs that are not of the notes to be played but indicate how they are to be played. The musician learns the shape of a

crescendo, diminuendo, sforzando, calando, subito piano, accelerando, con fuoco, allegro ma non troppo, and even con amore” (p. 65). Another music therapist, Pavlicevic (1997), in her account of Stern’s concept of vitality affects, described these states as “dynamic form” that is “explicitly musical in character” (p. 121). As these descriptions are closely linked to feeling states, these so-called “vitality affects” are central to understanding what is communicated in groups between participants.

Improvised music, entered into freely in a music therapy group, can be the means of some of these connective gestures. If communication through music is essentially one of intuitive feeling and of sensation, what could observations of the musical interaction add to the understanding of the group’s emotional process and the individual’s emotional state? Our interest is also in the observation and the potential naming (that is, bringing into words) of what is being expressed in the music after it has been played. This may take us to the heart of what is being felt in the group but not yet spoken about. (Although the feeling sense of the music has an important potential to be brought to thought and to verbal interpretation, the music may also, of course, be felt to speak for itself, with an implicit understanding by the whole group of what has been shared together.)

An Example

A music therapy group has been silent for some ten minutes at the beginning of a session. The conductor senses an un-ease. The conversation skirts around what seem like trivialities, pointing to a feeling of stuckness or avoidance. One member, E, who is normally quite forthcoming in the group, remains silent with her head down as if in deep thought. After some time, in which group members occasionally look toward her but don’t say anything, the conductor remarks on the feeling of preoccupation in the group. Finally, E says that she has something on her mind but does not wish to share it with the group. The group, sensing in her both a fragility and hostility, falls

silent. The conductor at this point suggests the group play some music. Everyone in the group plays except E.

The feeling of the music that follows, resonating particularly on metal xylophone and autoharp, is of overwhelming sadness with the occasional rather angry outburst on the cymbal and a drum. As the music unfolds, E becomes tearful. Another member, T, playing soft stroking sounds on a tambour drum, begins to cry also. When the music stops, there is a long pause before E manages to break the silence and tell the group that her sister is potentially terminally ill, and that she hasn't been able to tell the group for fear of upsetting them all. She says she had hoped to hold onto her emotions until the group finished for fear of "infecting" others. But, she says, the music was so powerful that she could not restrain herself anymore.

At this point, there is a palpable feeling of sadness in the group as other members identify with both her and their own experience of loss. The whole group is able to feel, support, and express through the music what is not being said in words. From then on, the group opens up with an exchange that is tearful, sensitive, and supportive. Above all, there is a strong sense of relief that whatever was being defended against at the beginning of the group is now out in the open and available to be shared by others. The next group, the following week, began with E saying to the other group members that the previous group had been an important group for her and she thanks the members for being there for her.

This example illustrates that the spontaneous playing of music reached a place that could not be expressed in language or defended against. Music can therefore be an indication of the underlying feelings of the group. A group that, for instance, has unexpressed sadness within some members will almost inevitably find themselves showing that sadness in the music. The feelings can then more easily be talked about because they have been clearly present in shared sound.

Putting these musical expressions into words may make it a safer place for the individual because there can be direct reference to the music and, thus, indirectly to the feelings. It is as if the music provides a safe transitional object. Feelings, then out in the open, can be available to be named.

Music

So what is there in the nature of music itself that may form part of our understanding of these events? The critic and cultural theorist Steiner (1997), exploring the nature of truth in music, wrote:

Can music lie? ...Can music, in its autonomy, be false? (False to what?) Can it be counterfactual and convey, by its own integral means, 'that which is not the case'? Concomitantly, what are the 'truth functions' in music, in what sense can a musical statement be said to be true? (True to what?) (p. 71)

If music "cannot lie," are those feelings that spontaneously arise in an individual and emerge through improvised music true expressions of what is happening unconsciously? Can the music reveal in its own emotional terms what is being defended against by bypassing those defenses? In that sense, could the music bring us closer to the truth of the emotional climate of a group through the nature of what group members find themselves playing together? Free floating discussion in an analytic group, as proposed by Foulkes (1948), has obvious parallel links with freely improvised music in a music therapy group.

Steiner (1997, p. 74) addressed what he calls the "beyond words" of music, suggesting that it is "beyond adequate, logical-rational explication," and adding:

The overpowering, ubiquitous force and necessity of music has its source near the paradox of its intimate strangeness to man. It has its prologue in the organic and animal worlds. It is uniquely expressive of the highest states of human consciousness. It functions

outside truth and falsehood, good and evil. (p. 75)

Langer (1942) pursued this further in relation to the structural/ emotional elements of music and their contributions to unspoken understanding:

Music is revealing, where words are obscuring, because it can have not only a content but a transient play of contents. It can articulate feelings without becoming wedded to them.

...The assignment of meanings is a shifting, kaleidoscopic play, probably below the threshold of consciousness, certainly outside the pale of discursive thinking. The lasting effect is... *to make things conceivable* rather than to store up propositions. Not

communication but insight is the gift of music; in a very naïve phrase, a knowledge of “how feelings go.” (pp. 243-244)

We can ask what makes a minor key sad, an arousing march with drums feel heroic, or a romantic idiom stir our passions. But can we use rational thought to explain these sentiments? A knowledge of “how feelings go,” “outside the pale of discursive thinking” is the crucial arena of therapy. Langer (1953) noted elsewhere that, even when outward experience may feel chaotic, there may be some deeper coherence that gives meaning to each of its apparently disparate elements because of their underlying (and unconscious) relation to one another:

The great office of music is to organize our conception of feeling into more than an occasional awareness of an emotional storm; i.e. to give us an insight into what may truly be called “the life of feeling” or subjective unity of experience. (p. 126)

The Group Matrix

One of the main theoretical ideas developed by Foulkes (1948) was that of the matrix, which can be fruitfully explored in relation to free improvisation in a music therapy group. In their discussion of the matrix, Behr and Hearst (2005) stated, “The matrix is a metaphor for the

operational basis for interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships in the group” (p. 270). They compare the individual to a “nodal point in a field of interaction, in which conscious and unconscious reactions meet” (p. 270). For another perspective, they quoted Stacey: “Defining the matrix as a process that is continuously replicating and potentially transforming patterns of inter-subjective narrative themes that organize the experience of being together.” Still in relation to the matrix, Behr and Hearst refer to Goldstein’s concept of a biological organism, especially of the brain, as a “whole organism...a ‘gestalt’ (literally an organized whole that is perceived as more than the sum of its parts)...The system functions as a whole, therefore any given stimulus must produce changes in the whole organism” (Behr & Hearst, 2005, pp. 3-4).

These notions of the matrix seem to have direct parallels with a piece of music in which the individual parts are reliant on each other and influence the change and direction of the music. Foulkes saw the individuals in a group as forming a network of interactions, or acting as a whole unit made up of individual communications. Regarding the matrix, he wrote:

Each individual contribution is understood in the context of this network. Each individual—
itself an artificial, though plausible, abstraction—is basically and centrally determined,
inevitably, by the world in which he lives, by the community, the group of which he forms a
part. (Foulkes, 1948, p. 10)

The free improvised music of a music therapy group can be readily linked to these ideas. Foulkes described the dynamic matrix as “the theatre of operation of ongoing change” (Powell, 1994, p. 13). We would like to consider the improvised music of the ongoing group as being one of the means by which change can come about at a feeling level, moving from a possible unconscious response by the individual to another’s music to a more conscious awareness of what the milieu of feeling is for both the individual herself and for the group as a whole. The space for the music can

be thought of as a transitional space in the Winnicottian sense; a space that is owned and contributed to by all the participants, whether playing or listening, rather like a web or matrix of multilayered interactions of feelings through sound. In the music there is the possibility of an experience of a shared cognitive and non-cognitive arena arrived at by free-floating, improvised musical interaction.

Foulkes' proposal that the actions, sounds, or utterances of group members do not take place in isolation, but instead in the context of, and in response to, a network of events is a readily familiar idea to musicians. A sound, chord, melodic shape, silence, accent, or dynamic shift in the texture of a piece of music acquires both its expressive and its structural function from what is going on around it. It makes no emotional sense on its own. Similarly, the ultimate meaning of what is happening in a group rests in the relatedness of all its various events.

Regression and Maturity

Elliott (1994) wrote about how the idea of the group representing the mother's body has been taken up by various group analysts. She discussed the possibility of the "memory trace of life in the womb" (p. 123) being enacted and re-experienced in the group. She wrote: "This early form of relationship is primarily concerned with being part of and surrounded by, without being separate in any sense" (p. 123). In a music therapy group, this dynamic is often observable in the group's music, especially at the early stages of the group's formation.

The music played may be rather soporific, with nobody standing out, and the rhythmic element being continuous and perseverative. When the group is in this particular mode, the harmonies, if tuned instruments are used, are usually consonant and easy on the ear, with musical ideas and sounds merging. The group conductor may feel sleepy and bored when listening to it and perceive this feeling as indicative of a need for the group *not* to think, but rather to be swept along

by the warm symbiotic nature of the music. Perhaps this is an attempt at a regressive state or a search to create a container experienced rather like the womb. Although it is often at the beginning of a music therapy group's life together that this attempt at musical merging occurs, it may also be reverted to by the group at times of anxiety during the group process. The marking of "thought" seems to come when a different sort of energy is present in the music, one of challenge, variations of dynamics, the introduction of new motifs, changes of key, and disruption of harmonies that lead into new themes and musical events.

That brings us back, perhaps, to questions of coherence. While an anxious group in its early stages may seek to find reassurance in verbal expressions of mutuality, or in improvising music that is warm in its texture and harmonic language, a more mature group may find it possible to allow its music to be more apparently dissonant, or rhythmically disorganized, or simply fragmentary, without such fear of losing a sense of connection. The developing tradition of some Western music in the past century has, in its own terms, articulated some element of this move away from harmony and structure. "Classical" music of the period until about 1900 was based upon strongly shared implicit understandings about the expressive and formal coherence that could be found within certain kinds of harmonic progressions or formal design. Individual idioms varied, of course, but some common understanding of the nature and working of tonality was present.

In the early twentieth century some composers, notably Schoenberg and some of his Viennese successors, began to produce music that, although it had its roots in the work of preceding generations, engaged much more actively with dissonance and shifting tone colors, bringing sounds and progressions that did not fulfill traditional expectations of musical language, and which left many listeners baffled. Schoenberg sought to expand the possibilities of relationships in sound, so that coherence might be found not in the external phenomena of recognizable idioms, but in the

emotional comprehensibility of successive sound events. In other words, he sought an idiom that was less concerned with beauty, in the traditional sense, than with emotional truthfulness. If the group can engage in interaction at that level and feel the “truth” of its improvised music, even if (or actually because) it is not seeking to recreate familiar idioms from elsewhere, then it can begin to find some aesthetic satisfaction in the group process itself, whatever form that may take. For a group working through the medium of words, perhaps that experience may arise through unconscious recognition of an emerging shared idiom which has its own capacity to develop; for the group, that process in itself, even when it proceeds in the context of discomfort or conflict, may be felt as something alive and energizing.

One of us recalls an early experience as a student clarinetist in a group preparing for the first performance of a new composition by a fellow student. The piece was complex, very demanding technically, and seemed at first shapeless and unremittingly dissonant. The conductor, a specialist in working with new music, was at great pains to work with the ensemble toward a coherent performance. Before that could begin, however, he had to take on another task, which was working with the group to simply find some meaning and satisfaction in what we were doing. Faced with a group of players who were finding their limitations quickly exposed, and who repeatedly said they could not see the point of it all, he set about inviting the players to look at the music in detail, to pause and simply listen to the texture and resonance of certain chords, and gradually to become a group who could feel both the process of becoming a functioning ensemble and the process of the music itself. In time, the group began to value it. In other words, he modeled for the group his own conviction of the underlying counterpoint, or connectedness of things, and established a way of working that allowed the players to be curious, rather than simply defensive or cynical.

The analytic group conductor, whether working with music or not, may equally find herself in a place where things seem stuck or where it is hard to sense curiosity or excitement. The music or talk in such a group may simply feel baffling or dull. It may be the task of the conductor alone, at the start of things, to hold the place of valuing the process and finding pleasure in it; when that can begin to be shared by other group members, there is the beginning of what Powell (1983) called an “interpretative culture” (p.).

In Rance’s (1992) words:

Group analysis can be seen as an aesthetic experience allowing each group member, acting in concert with others, to perform the simple act of sensual perception of beauty, together with the intellectual apprehension of thought, which together provide that pleasure that transforms the self. The transformation of the self is mediated by transformation in relationship between internal and external worlds. This is not simply an emotional or intellectual process, but an intuitive interaction between subject and object that is simply aesthetic. (p. 27)

Speech Structure and Music

Schlapobersky (1994) wrote about primary forms of speech, identifying three aspects of speech that arise in the matrix of any group: “*monologue*—speaking alone (with or without an audience)...a form of individual self-expression. At the next level, *dialogue*—a conversation between two people—is the form of communication that distinguishes a bi-personal exchange. And at the third level, *discourse*—the speech pattern of three or more people...that distinguishes the communication of a group” (pp. 211-212). These aspects have their musical equivalents: “solo,” “duet,” and “tutti,” the last being the playing together of a group of instruments in the way Schlapobersky described as a “chorus.” He continued: “The use of free floating discussion allows a

pattern of exchange to move freely between these different speech forms, each of which constitutes a distinctive type of communication” (pp. 211-212).

It is not hard to see the similarities in free musical improvisation: the chorusing of instruments playing together; the solo theme that emerges with a supportive rhythmic accompaniment; the solo that is then taken up by other instruments, as they come forward to take the forefront; the phrases that are stated and then answered by others, extended and then perhaps developed into a unity of togetherness in a shared rhythmic pattern. The fluctuations of volume, intensity, and pace are elements of the vitality affects emerging through group improvisation. Improvised music brings, of course, the opportunity for the group to “speak” together. Verbal exchange is necessarily sequential; only one person (usually) speaks at a time, and while other non-speakers may be full of feeling it cannot at that moment be directly expressed. Group improvisation, on the other hand, offers utterance to the group as a whole.

Returning to Steiner (1997): “By uses of inversion, of counterpoint, of polyphonic simultaneity, music can house contradictions, reversals of temporality, the dynamic co-existence within the same overall movement of wholly diverse, even mutually denying moods and pulses of feeling” (pp. 65-66). What better description of a lively and engaged analytic group?

Conclusion

In this paper, we have set out to illustrate how the use of free improvisational musical interaction can, by its nonverbal and intuitive nature, be a powerful group experience in the “here and now.” This experience may facilitate or enhance verbal exchange, or the music may stand alone as an expression of the group’s life in its own terms. Drawing upon theories of early infant interaction and communication, we have outlined the way in which the experience of the music can be a precursor to putting states of being, relatedness, and the emotional climate of the group into

words and, thus, making them available for thought. We have looked at the potential characteristics of improvised group music and their parallels with forms of verbal interaction, and considered the deeper levels of emotional coherence that may be experienced through free group improvisation.

This paper has necessarily focused upon the value of music as a nonverbal medium and its potential function in that respect as a preliminary to verbal exchange. In group work of this kind there may equally, of course, be moments where the movement is in the opposite direction, and the group elects to further its hitherto verbally based process by turning to improvisation, thus actively seeking to move from the relative structural constraints of language to the freedom of sound and feeling.

Above all, perhaps, it is the element of improvisation that carries such potential power in relation to emotional movement. It is common for musicians (in the worlds of jazz or folk music, for instance) who are fluent improvisers to be admired, not only by the wider public, but often by other musicians, especially those trained in more formal, “classical” traditions, in which faithfulness to text and to stylistic conventions is held to be of high importance. In fact, any conversation that is alive is on one level an improvisation between the participants; on another level, however, our human interactions are often constrained by our defensive clinging on to deeply internalized patterns of feeling, and our apprehensiveness about entering emotional territory that is, in consciousness at least, unfamiliar. The freedom and playfulness of exploring through sound may bring its own uncertainties at first, but its relation to some of our earliest, unworded experience of interaction may bring us toward a freedom of expression that can find its way not only into our musical playing (in both senses), but also into our wider emotional boldness and creativity. In Barenboim’s (2008) words: “Improvisation—going in an unexpected direction, allowing the fingers, the heart, the brain, the belly, to cooperate in an unpremeditated way—is a very blessed

state in the life of a human being, as well as the basis for making music” (p. 58).

Finally, T. S. Eliot reminds us of:

“Music heard so deeply

That it is not heard at all, but you are the music

While the music lasts” (Eliot, 1944).

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