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Sound Escapes

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To begin at the beginning, the title is courtesy of the sound research group at the London College of Communication, who explore art and sound in the natural environment. In this chapter, it is being used as a pun on sound: in one sense sound, by its transient nature, does indeed ‘escape’; in another, I want to encourage pupils to be able to escape into sound, or maybe through sound; finally, in a third sense, I want the way they do this to be ‘sound’ in the epistemological and pedagogic sense.

While viewing education from a holistic standpoint it would seem to make sense to disregard the traditional dualism between mind and body in favor of a tripartite division between mind, body, and spirit. However, tripartite comprises three parts and this is still not the same as ‘holistic’, as the whole is known to be more than the sum of its parts. While these parts can be identified as three distinct aspects of an individual, the body, mind, and spirit are inseparably intertwined, and influence one another. The spirit, therefore, lives and acts in unison with the body and mind. As I show later in this chapter, one of the terms used most commonly to explain spiritual experience is ‘connected’, this being a precondition of holism.

It is not just in education where seeing students as whole human beings is important. Senge (2005), in his book *Presence: Exploring Change in People, Organisations and Society*, says that we need to understand everything in nature as a whole but also how parts and wholes are interrelated. He makes the distinction between machines and living systems saying, “They [people] are not mere assemblages of their parts but are continually growing and changing along with their elements” (p. 5). Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls this same process “flow”, which he describes as reaching a state of concentration and enjoyment which is effortless, an idea that has also been taken to heart in many enlightened fields of inquiry, such as medicine. This can be seen in a research report produced on behalf of Museums and Galleries at Leicester University (Dodd & Jones, 2014). They act as a public forum that can influence individual and community health and provide a space to help people make sense of their world. Surely education as a discipline should provide opportunities to influence wholeness, or flow, and I argue that it is through an understanding of spirituality that music education can do this.

**Spirituality as a Stochastic Process**

A light came on for me when I began to view spirituality as a stochastic process, a sequence of events that combines the random with what is known already in such a way as to only allow certain outcomes that are of use to either an individual or a community. I want to argue that feelings associated
with spirituality can be seen as a stochastic process, and for spirituality to be a useful concept, it is necessary for both individuals and communities.

Stochastic process is an idea more commonly referred to in math or science, particularly evolution and genetic change, than music or spirituality. Stochastic comes from the Greek, meaning to aim at, or guess, but for a better understanding of how I could use the term, I went to Bateson. In his chapter dealing with the stochastic process he described it as:

... a stream of events that is random in certain aspects and in each case there is a non-random selection process which causes certain of the random components to “survive” longer than others. Without the random there can be no new thing.

(Bateson, 1979, p. 163)

Bateson relates this to the twin ideas of evolutionary and somatic change, somatic meaning “the characteristic was achieved by bodily change brought about during the lifetime of the individual by environmental impact or by practice” (Bateson, 1979, p. 252), which includes learning and thought. He argues that Darwin was right only up to a point and that it has come to be accepted that body and mind have evolved simultaneously and are both stochastic processes. What is important, and indeed necessary, is the unity of the combined system of mind and body and, I would argue, spirit.

Incorporating the random is, of course, not new in music; see, for example, the aleatoric music by John Cage and Iannis Xenakis, the Romanian-born, Greek–French composer, who used stochastic processes or elements in some of his work including probability, game theory, Boolean algebra, and computers to create his compositions (for example, his huge multimedia performances he called Polytopes). A happy consequence of the stochastic process being used to describe spirituality is Bateson’s view that there is no creative process unless the random and the non-random are engaged together. However, I believe it might also be used as a model of understanding the notion of spirituality in music. For, as well as the prior knowledge gained from teachers, music books, fellow musicians, and our experience of a specific genre, we must also consider the random. The latter might include our non-musical experiences such as our upbringing, attitudes, ethnicity, beliefs, our imagining or dreaming, and the significant traumatic or joyous events in our life, which for each individual will be different, in other words our “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

So, when a group of musicians meet to play or compose, it is a bringing together of individuals, a mix of both their common, shared, prior musical understandings that we call the ‘knowns’ (those things we might expect in terms of the musical understanding and experience of such players), but also the personal experiences, both musical and non-musical, and beliefs of each individual, the ‘unknowns’, or ‘random’. In fact, without this random human element, compositions and performances would be less diverse and the creative process impoverished. This is not a new idea, nor is it limited to the arts. For example, Ashby (cited in Bateson, 1979) points out that: “no system (neither computer nor organism) can produce anything new unless the system contains some source of the random” (p. 174).

I would argue that the process of combining the known with the random is also in operation during listening. For listeners, whether they are trained musical performers or listeners with little or no musical training, bring with them this randomness of their prior knowledge and understanding each time they listen to music. It is this randomness that contributes to each music class, and each music lesson, being different in response to the same or similar learning experiences. Taking into account these variables, I would argue that it is understandable that we find it difficult to plan for a spiritual response in the music classroom.

As music teachers, the careful selection of music for children to listen to is unlikely to be a random process. It is the experiential influence of the music on pupils that is random and unpredictable. What teachers need to guide the process is an integration between knowledge and randomness in such a way as to ensure that the experience leads to something useful both for the individual and for society. The following is research into how the notion of spirituality in music education can fulfill...
this process. The report on this research is a fresh look at this question and may perhaps lead us
towards an answer that holds practical implications for life and for the classroom.

Introduction to the Research

The research that I am about to describe emerged from the writing of Music Education and Muslims
(Harris, 2006) and the critical insights that came from this study. The book explored pedagogical
issues surrounding music and Islam and intended to answer why some Muslims found music lessons
in school raised complex issues. I was asked by the editor of a series of books on music education if
I could look at the relevance of music in relation to other religions. I did not feel I had the expertise
to do this but did have experience with the concept of spirituality, and an interest in how it can be
explored within music education. Although aspects of religion informed some of my ideas, spirituality
arose as fundamentally a secular concept.

Research into the Notion of Spirituality and Music (1)

In a previous publication (Harris & Mackrill, 2013), data were presented from mainly qualitative research.
Forty respondents and four focus groups of children (Harris) were included. Quantitative research from
questionnaires completed by 38 trainee music teachers (Mackrill) also informed the research. Interviewees
came from various contexts, cultures, and backgrounds and were all music students in tertiary educa-
tion, teachers, performers, or composers. The children were from music classes in Christian, Jewish, and
Sikh schools. Thematic data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was employed and from these data five
themes were identified relating to the respondents' understanding of the term 'spirituality' in relation to
music. The paradigm position is interpretive with the original interviews in a narrative format (Soler,
2012). Ideas about spirituality were first discussed in general terms, leading on more specifically to spir-
ituality and music. Having analysed these data, subsequent interviews and questionnaires addressed these
specific themes. The questionnaires arose from this thematic analysis and were developed specifically for
a cohort of teacher training students at the University of Sussex, where Mackrill was director of music
education. The ideas presented in this discussion constitute a summary of the key findings under each
thematic heading.

Spirituality and Religion

A split emerged between those participants who associated spirituality with religion and those who
did not. This split was fairly even. Of those who associated it with religion, the majority were from
a traditional religious upbringing, who still considered themselves religious, and for whom all aspects
of life were underpinned by their religious convictions. A significant group still linked the idea of
spirituality with God, but not a specific organized religion. Those who did not consider either God
or religion to be relevant to their lives still mostly expressed a belief that spirituality could be found
in/through music. One performer, who had been brought up as a Christian, but no longer consid-
ered himself to be, admitted he was in an ambiguous situation by saying that he found music written
for a religious context was still the most spiritual for him.

An Inner or Outer Experience

On the whole, spirituality was most often seen as a private affair and not one that was shared
with other people. To some extent this changed when music was part of a specifically religious
experience. However, for many, the response was on a continuum depending on the context of
the music being played. One university lecturer, a member of the Salvation Army, said that he
experienced spirituality only as part of a community, always in relation to other people.
**The Relevance of Words**

Overwhelmingly what emerged here was that words were not the most important factor. Some considered that words could lead them to a particular spiritual place, but more expressed the view that words tended to be a stumbling block that directed the listener/singer in a direction that was unhelpful. The reason given for this was that the music itself was communicating something more powerful than the words could express. The words then became a distraction because they guided you in what you should be feeling.

**Knowledge and Emotion**

It became clear during the data analysis that the knowledge being spoken about applied almost entirely to technical knowledge, the knowing ‘how’ (Philpott, 2001). It came as no surprise to us that the definitions of ‘emotion’ and ‘spiritual’ took some teasing out. The determining factor seemed to be the depth of the experience/feeling. Spirituality seeming to encompass more depth than emotion. Another difference that emerged was that emotion was a more spontaneous reaction. For some, the knowledge of music allowed them to express themselves more spiritually or feel more spiritual. A student in Nepal believed his performances were made up of technical aspects influenced by his brain and a spirit guiding him as to how to make the performance musical. He defined this as thinking one thing and playing another.

**Listening or Performing**

As a musician, I find that I can ‘lose’ myself in music more readily as a listener and was perhaps surprised to realize that this is not the case for all musicians. One teacher talked of an ‘outer, other worldliness when performing’ which he said came from the idea of communicating with other people, both those he was performing with and the audience. A cellist agreed, because she said that performing felt more immediate, especially playing an instrument that resonates like the cello. However, in a focus group in a Sikh school, a year 9 (age 13–14) girl said:

> When you’re playing it it’s more about trying to get all the notes right and get the sound right but when you listen to it it’s a different . . . like in assembly when everybody’s singing to the harmonium and everybody joins in, that’s like, that’s when you get the feeling that you’re actually . . . you’ve got a connection with God.

Overall most people responded to the idea of the power of listening to music and being moved by it, sometimes without any understanding of how this happens. Perhaps we might have asked whether this response is random or if it can be predicted in some way. Might the same piece of music be powerful on one occasion but not another? As educators tasked with determining what music to play to children, this seems an important question.

As part of the same research project (but not reported in the 2013 paper) I asked the question of the 40 interviewees: How do you think the concept of spirituality could be relevant to class music? In looking at the term spirituality in general, it is perhaps not surprising that many people link it with peace and calmness. One School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) music student believed that to achieve this calmness the first step would be to become aware of the breath. He said: “everything we need is inside, so the peace that we look for is inside, so we need to find a way that we can find the peace”. Monks from the Tashi Lhunpo Buddhist Monastery in Tibet use music and dance to bring an awareness of Buddhism to schools around the world. They start their workshops by coming in and sitting quietly with the children, then begin to chant a quiet prayer to still the mind as a preliminary to meditation. Their coordinator in the UK said:
We’ve found that we can get a roomful of 120 children, from the ages of 5 to 12 sitting silently and really entering into that and that’s fantastic. After that the peace is shattered as they begin to play their instruments and dance.

They explain to the children that although the music and dance is loud and exciting, it is still a form of meditation because they are imagining themselves as wrathful deities who are ridding the world of evil, and it is all part of mind awareness, or getting into a particular mindset. When they play the long horns, in particular, the little children squeal with excitement. The children then learn about how the monks went into the monasteries when they were as young as 7 and the children get a chance to talk with the monks in order to try to relate to them, to understand that behind the costumes, music, and dance these are ordinary people.

When I visited a Jewish secondary school in London, I had the opportunity to talk to the headteacher and the music teacher. To begin with, the conversation revolved around singing because women and girls are not allowed to sing in front of men, unless it is their own family (Summit, 2000). Since the music teacher was a woman, it meant she could not sing to her classes in the boys’ part of the school. However, the boys themselves were very good at singing because it is so much a part of the Jewish tradition. Conversely, she could sing to the girls’ classes, but found it difficult to get the girls to sing because it was alien to their life. This means that music classes in both parts of the school had an emphasis on instrumental work. In order to link Judaism with modern music, they have a project whereby they look at the history of Ashkenazic, Seraphic, and Hasidic Jews and how that has fed into pop music, especially in Israel.

For instance, if we play some rap and have it on the interactive whiteboard and it’s all very cool, and so on, we then ask if this is Jewish music? They have endless debates about it, it’s really quite fascinating. They get confused because the message is right but the style feels wrong to them.

(Head of Music, Jewish school)

As with many teachers, the Jewish music teacher questioned what spirituality really was in the context of teaching music, and whether it is really possible to promote it. Although she had been talking about Jewish music, she did not see spirituality as something that needed to be linked to religion. She spoke about a gamelan lesson that she teaches, which was observed by a school inspector who said it was “a spiritual experience”. In mentioning this, she said: “I thought right, okay! But I think it was simply because everyone was completely focused and the whole expression was non-verbal”. For this teacher, it was when the girls were composing for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (14–16) and Advanced Level (16–18) that she thought something approaching an expression of spirituality might be happening as she accessed their creative thoughts. Many of them chose to set a piece from the Siddur (Jewish religious texts) to music. The headteacher felt it was through this exercise that they identified the importance of their faith. However, I would want to emphasize at this point that looking at spirituality only from a religious point of view in a secular school would not be desirable or acceptable. A workable definition for spiritual education might be “any intended or unintended circumstance or effort that promotes the development and flourishing of spirituality, in particular, the capability of and the disposition to transcendence and raised awareness, including relational consciousness” (Wong Ping Ho, 2006, p. 77).

Research into Notions of Spirituality (2)

Research data from music educators at the Practice and Research in Integrated Music Education (PRIME) week-long symposium in Solothurn, Germany, were collected. All those who attended
were interested in how music could be integrated within other subjects in the curriculum. The paper and workshop I presented examined the use of art to represent thoughts and feelings aroused by music. This kind of arousal was considered to be the beginning of a spiritual experience. A questionnaire was given to the 15 participants after the workshop. Having written their answers mainly in German, the text was then translated. There were only three open questions: How would you define spirituality? How do you see spirituality in terms of music? Have you any ideas about how spirituality might be included in the music classroom? Several people discussed their answers with me.

Throughout the participant responses, the word most used in relation to spiritual experience was ‘connection’. Ten participants either used this actual term or it was implied. Many talked about connectedness in terms of the universe, the world, everything. Three specifically mentioned that spirituality has to do with connecting to other people. The second aspect most mentioned was directly in relation to personal experience. Of the nine who talked about themselves, only three did not refer to other people. As well, one participant was particularly interesting in saying that spirituality is a preoccupation with oneself, thus apparently denying a connection with others.

In view of the way spirituality has traditionally been associated with religion, it was perhaps surprising that only three of the 15 participants mentioned religion. One of the teachers wrote: “Spirituality involves the invisible, often also the transcendental. For me, it also involves the preoccupation with oneself, especially one’s own emotions. But spirituality quickly becomes a subject of religion…”

Another wrote about how her ideas were changing:

Having been raised in a Greek Orthodox Christian tradition spirituality was always connected to religion and I hadn’t given much thought to it in another dimension. However, during the last [few] years, through my reading, I have started to think in a different way. I could not define spirituality only as part of a religion anymore, but I can’t yet define it in a satisfying way…”

And the third brought in the concept of the known and unknown, thus linking with my thoughts on the stochastic process, by saying:

I see it as a state in which we feel a deep connection with the self, but this connection is also and always in relation to others – present and not present, known and not known, situated temporally in the ‘now’ and in the past. I see it as separate from religion, which can be a “choice”.

A fourth used the term ‘the divine’ which may, or may not, have been a religious concept, although I would contend that the use of the definite article suggests a more sacred meaning than the word divine alone would: “Spirituality is our search beyond our limitations, to understand – love – experience the other and other beings more deeply. We know the divine briefly; [we] are always going home.”

**Spirituality and Music**

The answers to the question of how spirituality relates to music were equally diverse. Here, one person directly mentioned the link between music, spirituality and religion: “Music is strongly emotional. It promotes one’s own expression of emotions and it can also evoke emotions. At the same time, music plays a major role in most religions, especially for connecting with the invisible world.”

Another respondent listed a series of music he found spiritual, some of which is also religious: “Gregorian music, chorales within a religious context, Bach oratorio, and others; contemplative music. Compositions by Oliver Messiaen (Saint Francis of Assisi, Birds Awakening, and others).”

Continuing to look at spirituality more specifically in relation to music, some of the same themes exist as in defining spirituality more generally, for example, five of the respondents here mentioned being ‘connected’. Another theme is in relation to whether people expressed personal feelings. This is difficult because, of course, to some extent everything is subjective, but here it feels as if there
is a difference between those who talk about spirituality and music in direct relation to themselves and those who are talking in the third person. The third aspect I have drawn out here is in relation to energy, and, although this was mentioned by only two respondents, this feels like a powerful idea, which related back to Csikszentmihalyi’s ideas about flow. For example, one wrote: “I find spirituality in music everywhere, I am touched within by the music and where I perceive vibrations that let flow the energy of my life.”

Spirituality in the Music Classroom

When it comes to how music may be used to allow for spiritual development in a classroom, there were again many different ideas. This question produced the most diverse response and these responses could be divided into expected areas within the music curriculum, namely listening, performing, and composing/creating, and those that could be said to be more generic: for example, promoting respect and caring. One person wrote: “by creating opportunities for immersion in experiences that are ‘musical’ – which begs[sic] the question how do we define a musical experience . . .” Others were more specific about what musical experiences could include:

Listening to music and painting at the same time, dancing, moving;
Translating a poem into sounds;
Creating experiences for the senses: distinguishing sounds;
Painting mandalas/representing as a group/meanwhile humming, singing quietly;
Exploring symmetric forms (for example, snail-shells (sounds by blowing), singing bowl: observing the waves);
Representing scenes from fairy tales with music after concentrated journeys into the land of fantasy.

Integrating music with other subjects was hardly a surprise, in view of the nature of the conference. A more extended response highlighted the idea of integration:

By integration of actively doing something such as painting, creating, moving or other forms for example from mathematics from geography or cultural history. By this integration, the pupil becomes more ‘whole’ and develops a more connected and interlinked view of the world.

Another key concept was that of emotion, and it appeared that, for some, spirituality and emotion might be thought of interchangeably. One felt that spirituality could only be dealt with in the context of emotions. She wrote that creating music helped to express emotion, but also music was important for releasing emotions.

Finally, relaxation was a key term used. Making music or listening was thought to encourage relaxation and a time for play, especially important for younger children. This, then, might promote talking about experiences and listening to music from different cultures and religions to expand an awareness of a greater range of music. One person advocated relaxation, stillness, calm, and quietness, before giving performances as a way to help self-belief in herself as a performer.

Discussion

In this research, four key concepts have been identified in relation to music education: spirituality, stochastic process, creativity, and connection, which all relate to being ‘whole’. Draper said:
“Spirituality is not about seeking some floaty state of disembodied reverie but being here more fully, more soulfully . . . bringing matter and spirit together to make something that is greater than the sum of its parts” (Draper, 2017, para. 8).

Bown (2015) discusses Simonton and Csikszentmihalyi in his paper on creativity, claiming that both call for heterogenous groups of participants when researching the creative process. It seems to me that heterogeneity is necessary for the stochastic process as well. It is the putting together of many different, perhaps random, ideas that create the ground necessary for spiritual development, and, by extension, ideas that will be of use to both the individual and society. Shah (2013) reminds us that creativity is different in every culture and acknowledges that context and experience influences creativity. Thus, myriad cultures will allow for a cornucopia of connections. The arts have the opportunity to embrace the awe and wonder that is so key to what Draper (2017, para. 12) calls “finding our place more fully”.

Plater (2017), looking at evidence for spirituality across the curriculum, discusses the spirit in relation to the soul. He argues that we should be looking at the contemporary Wholeness Movement, which perceives the spirit as “that in us which seeks vision and transcendence”, and soul as “that which seeks engagement, depth and rootedness”, in looking for “personal and community maturity” in a “balance and wholeness of body, soul and spirit” (Plater, 2017, p. 14). This view from Plater mirrors the responses from the participants in the Solothurn research in connecting the personal and communal aspects of spirituality as the way forward in music education of the future.

In this chapter, I have offered a sample of the many thousands of words, and many hours of recordings, collected during these two research projects. I hope that I have convinced you, as readers, that a truly holistic approach to education must take into consideration the spiritual development of a child, and that music education may be a good place to begin this process. However, there may well be many of you who doubt whether spiritual is the right word, primarily because of its long association with religion. You may be happier with terms like presence (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2005) or mindfulness, as taught by the Paws b programme (developed in 2012 by the Mindfulness in Schools Project with Tabitha Sawyer and Rhian Roxburgh). Whatever you call this concept, it cannot be developed in any sense that can be measured; it cannot be interrogated in the classroom. With younger children, it may not even be relevant to focus on it directly. Spirituality blossoms at its own speed. This is only possible when the teacher recognizes it within her or his own life. As teachers, though, we can all make spaces, silent spaces and surprising spaces: spaces that may appear to contain random sounds but may provide opportunities to allow the connections so important to thinking about spirituality—maybe we should call them stochastic spaces . . . or sound escapes.

References


