

Humans making sound:
An exploration of participatory music
(Spring 2015)

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Introduction

For the past three years I have been exploring one fundamental question from several different angles: how can I bring music making to the non-musician? Put another way, the question might read, “How can I create structured situations in which people feel comfortable to participate in music making?” In this way, I focus on the importance of in-person, social, participatory music making events, of bodies sounding in the presence of other bodies. This paper will explain how I first came to ask this question, and how I have tried to answer it.

The following chapters will progress in chronological order according to my time at Tufts University. I have structured them in this way so as to show the evolution of my thought process as I moved through the classes of the music major, and developed relationships with different professors in the Music department. Also, in the event that a future undergraduate decides to take this document off of the digital shelf, it is my hope that they might see how the investigation of a single question can lead a student to places previously unknown and unplanned during the course of their undergraduate career. Finally, I hope the chronological progression of this paper helps to illustrate how each supposed “failure” in my process led to a new way of thinking about and approaching my fundamental question. If I am lucky, my process will only continue to evolve throughout my life after college, for *running water never spoils*.¹

Cheers to the journey,

Daniel Joseph

¹ A Ghanaian proverb.

The Composer as Facilitator (A final paper, and a book)

Course: Music 143 –
History of Western Music (1750 - now)
Professor: Alessandra Campana
Time: Spring of Sophomore year

I. A final paper

Prior to college, I had very little experience with 20th century music. For my final paper in the second of two courses in the history of Western music, I wrote about three 20th century composers who seemed to challenge traditionally held notions about the role of the composer in Western art music. In particular, I focused on Terry Riley and his composition *In C*. Composed in 1964, *In C* can be characterized as an open work, as it leaves many musical decisions that would usually have been made by the composer, up to the performers.²

in C.

The image shows the beginning of the musical score for Terry Riley's 'In C'. It consists of ten staves of music, each starting with a measure number from 1 to 53. The notation is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music is characterized by its repetitive, rhythmic patterns and the use of simple intervals and chords. The score is presented in a clean, black-and-white format. In the bottom right corner of the score, there is a copyright notice: © 1964 Terry Riley © 1989 Celestial Harmonies.

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² J. Peter Burkholder, *A History of Western Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), p. 970.

³ Image taken from [http://imslp.org/wiki/In_C_\(Riley,_Terry\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/In_C_(Riley,_Terry))

As seen in the score above, Riley numbered each measure of music, and left blank space in between them. He did not indicate instrumentation, dynamics, or how many times each phrase should be played, leaving the performer to make these decisions. These intentional omissions, or lack of instructions, give an enormous amount of autonomy to the performers and effectively guarantee that no two performances of *In C* will be alike. Indeed, the size and instrumentation of the ensemble and the duration of the piece can all vary from one performance to another, and a seemingly endless number of sonic patterns can emerge depending on the combination of numbered measures that are sounded together at a given time. Riley's willingness to leave so much of the musical outcome up to choices made by the musicians led me to posit that his composition provided a reframing of the role of the composer in the typical process of Western art music.

In its essence, *In C* provides a framework within which musicians can feel free to make expressive musical decisions. As opposed to asking musicians to intensely study and rehearse *his* music, I argued that Riley was extending an invitation to musicians to come and make their own musical decisions within this general structure. Perhaps the piece serves the musicians, and not the other way around, just as Christopher Small noted in his seminal book, *Musicking*, "performance does not exist in order to present musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give something to perform."⁴ Small suggested that the typical composer-musician-audience dynamic of Western art music conceives of music "as a one-way system of communication, running from composer to individual listener through the medium of the performer."⁵ Riley disrupted this dynamic with *In C*, as he assumed that musicians can make creative musical decisions themselves.

⁴ Christopher Small, *Musicking: the meaning of performing and listening* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), p. 8.

⁵ *Musicking*, p. 7.

His role in this piece, instead, was to extract such musical decisions from the performers by providing the appropriate circumstances; he acted more as a facilitator for musical activity. Upon reading and discussing this paper with me, Professor Campana recommended I read a book entitled *How Musical is Man?*, a book which happened to be exactly the one I was looking for.

II. A book

Written by John Blacking in 1973 as part of the Jessie and John Danz lecture series at the University of Washington, *How Musical is Man?* asks a fundamental human question, as its title would suggest.⁶ Put one way, the question can be stated as follows: to what extent do social inhibitions, rather than an actual lack of musical ability, prevent man in the West from making music? Blacking was led to this question after doing fieldwork studies with the Venda peoples in South Africa. According to Blacking, “the Venda ideal [was] that all normal human beings are capable of musical performance.”⁷ Blacking adopts this point of view, suggesting “there is so much music in the world that it is reasonable to suppose that music, like language...is a species-specific trait of man.”⁸ He points to our ability to listen as evidence of an innate musical ability, noting, “the very existence of a professional performer...depends on listeners who in one important respect must be no less musically proficient than he is. They must be able to distinguish and interrelate patterns of sound.”^{9,10} If, in fact, humans have an innate musical ability, then a

⁶ It is hard to describe the experience I had while reading *How musical is man?* for the first time. It was one of the more powerful experiences I have had with a book, in large part due to the fact that Blacking seemed to articulate everything I was thinking about at the time.

⁷ John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973) p. 34.

⁸ *How Musical is Man?* p. 5.

⁹ *How Musical is Man?* p. 90.

latent musical potential exists in Western society –a society where some people are “branded as unmusical”, and left out of the process of active music making.

This concept of a latent musical potential, that we do not know “to what extent these qualities [of musical ability] may be latent in all men,”¹¹ resonated strongly with me. All too often I heard such phrases as “I wish I could sing”, “I wish I was musical”, or “I wish I played an instrument.” With this concept of innate musical ability, I went back and revised my ideas about composition as facilitation.

In *In C*, I viewed Riley as a kind of musical facilitator. Operating under the premise that musicians have the ability to make expressive musical decisions themselves, Riley created a framework under which musicians could come and express themselves musically. Taking this idea one step further with Blacking’s assumption that all humans have the ability to make music, the concept of the composer as facilitator could be applied to all people, not just musicians:

I. **Humans** have the ability to make musical decisions.

II. What if I can create a framework under which **humans** can come and express themselves musically?

¹⁰ We will be using Blacking’s definition of music throughout this paper, of music as “humanly organized sound” (p.10). We will not be dealing with such philosophical questions as whether bird song can be considered music.

¹¹ *How Musical is Man?* p. 7.

Motion Music

Time: Summer after sophomore year

One particular passage in *How Musical is Man* led me to investigate the relationship of music and motion. In this passage, Blacking describes how a group of Venda women correct another woman's playing during a piece of drumming and dancing, called *domba*. When the woman began to play offbeat (incorrectly) and move out-of-sync with the other drummers, she was "told to move in such a way that her beat is part of a total body movement: she plays with feeling precisely because she is shown how to experience the physical feeling of moving with her instrument and in harmony with the other drummers and dancers."¹² Here, the intangible concept of "feel" was made tangible.¹³ There is "no suggestion that [the player] is an insensitive or inadequate person", and the method of correction "is essentially technical, and not ego-deflating."¹⁴ This anecdote made me wonder about the performance possibilities of using the entire physical body as the time keeping and expressive mechanism.

I spent the summer after my sophomore year investigating total bodily motion as a way to organize music making for non-musicians. The image below shows a large grid outlined on a painter's tarp. I constructed this grid¹⁵ as a kind of notational system after thinking about what, fundamentally, musical notation tries to achieve. Staff notation can be thought of, in a way, as a system of lines and spaces that help musicians keep track of their location in musical time (rhythm) and space (pitch). This grid similarly helps

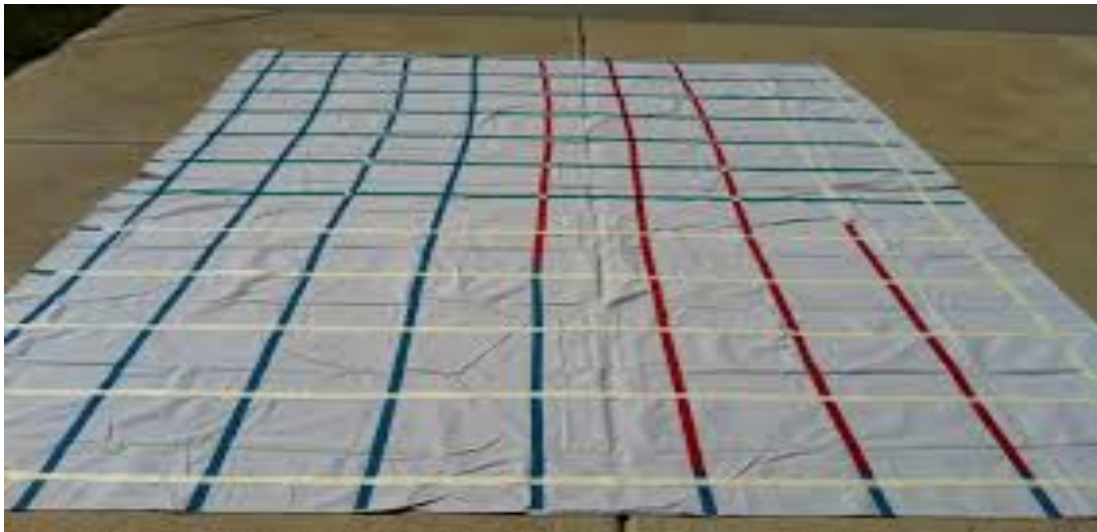
¹² *How Musical is Man?* p. 109-110.

¹³ In my experience, musicians often cite this intangible quality of "feel" when lauding or scolding the technique of another player.

¹⁴ *How Musical is Man?* p. 110.

¹⁵ This particular image was taken from google images. Mine was essentially the same design, except the lines of the grid were all the same color.

players keep track of their location in musical time, but uses their total bodily movement through physical space to do so, as opposed to the left to right movement of the eye across the page. As a player steps from line to line¹⁶, they have immediate feedback as to whether they are moving correctly (in sync), or incorrectly (out of sync), in relation to their neighbor in the adjacent lane. In this way, the lines of the grid act like checkpoints, analogous to measure markings on staff paper.



My goal with this sort of musical hopscotch, which I called motion music, was to try to see if supposed non-musicians could have a musical experience using this system. To return to language used in the first chapter of this paper, this grid, and the accompanying instructions for how to move through the grid, was meant to act as the facilitating framework under which people could express themselves musically.

Once a week throughout the summer, I rounded up my non-musical¹⁷ friends and tried out different movements and instructions (compositions) with them. More often than not, moving through the grid felt too much like an exercise, like marching, as

¹⁶ Note that players stand directly on the lines and step from line to line, not from a space between the lines to the next space between the lines.

¹⁷ By describing these friends as “non-musical”, I simply mean that they would not consider themselves musicians, not that they lack the ability to make music.

opposed to fluid music making, or dancing. There were, however, a few distinct occasions when some of my non-musical friends had musical experiences.

On one such occasion, I was trying to see if I could get everyone to operate (“groove”) in odd time signatures. I had instructed everyone to step from line to line, and make the motions clap-snap-snap-hit thigh-hit thigh, before stepping to the next line. Each clap came on the point of arriving at a line, the first step at a particular line, which gave a metric emphasis of ONE-two-three-four-five. The group stayed in time¹⁸, and the division of the five beat measures into three beats and two beats became clear. Next, I had the group place the word “shh” on beats four and five (hit thigh), and then slowly decreasing the volume of the word “shh” to silence. This subtle adjustment enabled the group of non-musicians to stay together in time, in an odd time signature, while incorporating two beats of rest. After finishing this exercise, a friend of mine who had no prior experience making music stated, “so this is what making music feels like.” Undoubtedly, he had had an experience of what Blacking called the “invisible conductor”, or the good feeling that comes about from playing rhythms that “cannot be performed correctly unless the players are their own conductors, and yet at the same time submit to the rhythm of an invisible conductor [organizing the group].”¹⁹ Though this moment was surely a success, most of my efforts did not go as well.

The rigid structure of the grid and the accompanying instructions led participants to get bored quickly. Unlike Riley in *In C*, I had not allowed for much personal expression or creativity within the framework I had created. The pieces felt mostly like exercises, or marches, as they lacked the expressive, affective, quality of music. Though

¹⁸ All of the pieces we tried out that summer had every person moving at the same rate. In this way, it was easy for a player to see if they were out of sync with the group, and, if so, adjust accordingly.

¹⁹ *How Musical is Man?* p. 31.

it was by no means the answer to my goals, this summer of experimentation was a step in the right direction toward facilitating music making amongst non-musicians.

Participatory & Presentational Music

Course: Music 186 –
Ethnomusicology in theory and practice
Professor: David Locke
Time: Fall of Junior year

During a course in Ethnomusicology in the fall of my junior year, Professor David Locke introduced me to another book that proved invaluable to furthering my ideas about active music making. In *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*, Thomas Turino makes a distinction between participatory and presentational musical performance. Participatory music, Turino states, is “a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions, only participants and potential participants performing different roles, and the primary goal is to involve the maximum number of people in some performance role.” Presentational performances, on the other hand, include situations “where one group of people, the artists, prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in making the music or dancing.”²⁰ Western classical music provides the most paradigmatic example of presentational performance, as audience members in a concert hall silently listen to the work that the musicians have prepared for them. In contrast, examples of participatory music would include congregational singing in churches, line dancing, and group sing-a-longs; situations in which majority participation is desired, and even necessary, to the success of the musical event. From these examples, one can see that the main distinction between participatory and presentational performance relates to corporeal participation;

²⁰ Thomas Turino, *Music as Social life: the Politics of Participation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008) p. 26.

participatory performance requires some sort of bodily engagement with the music, while presentational performance encourages stillness of the body, and more quiet, contemplative listening.

I want to make one point clear before moving forward. While this distinction between participatory and presentational music is crucial to understanding the focus of my work, creating such a divide can often lead to a warring mentality of this-versus-that, presentational-versus-participatory. I believe this sort of arguing is unnecessary, and counterproductive to improving musical engagement and overall musical life. I agree with Turino that “sitting in silent contemplation of sounds emanating from a concert stage is certainly *a type* of musical participation”²¹ that can be incredibly rewarding to the listener. Indeed, I have had a number of significant, life-affirming moments by experiencing music in this contemplative way. I have also, however, had just as significant experiences while actively making music in group settings. Turino holds that a central thesis in his book is that “*music* is not a unitary art form, but rather [music] refers to fundamentally distinct types of activities that fulfill different needs and ways of being human.”²² In this way, quiet contemplative listening, and active bodily music making fulfill different needs, and nourish different aspects of an integrated and meaningful musical life. Moreover, the two types of musical participation are symbiotically related; active corporeal music making hones one’s ability to engage with a sonic object when listening in a more contemplative way, and contemplative listening informs and encourages different ways of relating physically to the creation or expression

²¹ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, p. 28.

²² *Music as Social Life*, p. 1.

of musical sounds in the body.²³ My argument can be viewed as a kind of balancing of the scales, as opposed to a this-or-that binary. Finding opportunities in Western society for active musical participation are harder to come by than finding opportunities to listen contemplatively to music, be it at a concert or through recorded means. My goal, then, is to create more opportunities for “participation in the restricted sense of actively contributing to the sound and motion of a musical event through dancing, singing, clapping, and playing musical instruments when each of these activities is considered integral to the performance...attention is on the sonic and kinesic interaction among participants.”²⁴ After hearing Blacking, Turino, and Professor Locke describe their experiences with music cultures in which such corporeal participation with music pervaded normal life, I decided that in order to effectively organize and promote a participatory music culture, I had to experience one for myself, firsthand.

²⁴ Turino, *Music as Social Life*, p. 28.

“Why would I feel shy?!”

Course: Independent Study
Location: Volta Region, Ghana
Time: Spring of Junior year

I spent the spring of my junior year studying abroad in Ghana, focusing in particular on the participatory music culture of the Anlo-Ewe. The Ewe are an ethnic group of people who migrated to the Volta Region of southeastern Ghana from Notsie, Togo. Anlo-Ewe typically denotes the group of Ewes living in the southern portion of the Volta region.^{25, 26}



²⁵ The term Anlo has a much richer, and more complicated history than just the geographic area of the South Volta region, however. For more information on the term Anlo, see Abodeka, 1997, p. 8-9.

²⁶ Here it should be noted that culture is not a fixed entity, but a complex, ever changing process: “the nature and outlines of a ‘culture’ are partly a theoretical construct of the researcher. An authoritative interpretation of ‘a culture’ that is inclusive of all the views of each member of an entire population is not possible. This includes ‘a music culture.’ If one assumes that social or culture based research must always lead to hard and fast or unvarying rules, or to fixed boundaries of the normative as opposed to the uncommon, then admitting to such a tangle of complexity is indeed a problem. But if one places this research and the concomitant problems of interpretation in the context of the humanities, it gains a different intensity and begins to get interesting. A conversation is joined that is probably as old as the human being. The conversation is about none other than the nature of reality.” (For further discussion of the difficulties of fieldwork, personal choice, and representation, see Knoll, in Barz & Cooley, pp. 163-186, 1997).

²⁷ Images taken from <http://www.ghc-ca.com/frm-e-location-maps.html> and http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghana_regions_named.png, respectively.

While I had some experience playing Ewe music in *Kiniwe*, the Tufts African music ensemble during the fall semester of my junior year, my goal while conducting this study in Ghana was not to develop my musicianship, but rather, to develop an understanding of the structure of music making in Anlo-Ewe society.^{28,29} In particular, my research focused on asking five categories of questions about Anlo-Ewe music culture:

- I. **What** do the Ewe consider to be music?
- II. **Who** do the Ewe consider to be a musician? Who can become a musician, and how?
- III. **Where and when** do participatory musical events typically occur? How often do people attend these events?
- IV. **How** is the actual music making structured, and how do participants relate to one another?
- V. **Why?** What reasons do people cite for wanting or not wanting to participate in music making?

I spent one month living in Klikor, a town in the Volta Region of Ghana. During this time I traveled within Klikor and to outside communities, and conducted both informal and formal interviews with 45 different informants, 37 of which provided answers to a standardized list of questions that allowed for comparative analysis. I also

²⁸ This chapter represents a condensed version of my findings. The full manuscript of my study exceeds fifty pages. I have chosen not to include the full paper, so as not to impede on the narrative of this paper. If you are interested in obtaining a copy of that manuscript, feel free to contact me at dpjoseph4@gmail.com.

²⁹ Note that my focus was on *participatory* Anlo-Ewe music making, particularly in the traditional musical setting. Recorded music and more presentational models of musical experience certainly exist, as well, in modern day Ghana.

conducted both participant and non-participant observations at large participatory musical events, attending a total of twelve such occasions.

The emphasis on the direct action of making music came through in the informants' responses to the first research question. Instead of saying, "I'm going to make music", or "they're playing music", informants used the phrase (translated from Ewe)³⁰ "I'm going to the place where drumming and dancing are taking place."

There were mixed perspectives on the concept of who was considered a musician. Interestingly, several informants (22 out of 37) stated that the traditional conception of a musician included only the *Henoga*, or leader of song, and that drummers were not to be considered as musicians. The subject was controversial, though, as some people acknowledged the importance of drummers to successful musical events, and affirmed that drummers could, in fact, be considered musicians, while others restricted the title of musician to the *Henoga* since they were the ones who could sing, compose, and teach songs. When asked who had the ability to become a master drummer, *Zagunoga*, or leader of song, *Henoga*, most all persons interviewed said that anyone could learn to play if they so desired (29 out of 33), reflecting a belief in an innate human potential for music making. I included master drummers in addition to song leaders in my definition of musical ability so as to allow cross-cultural comparison.

I identified three major locations of regular, participatory group music making were found: funerals, Christian churches, and shrines. Significantly, almost all informants participated in music making (drumming, dancing, singing, clapping) twice per week on

³⁰ Certainly another shortcoming of the study was that I do not speak Ewe. I worked with a translator, Dodzi Fiamavor, who did well to articulate differences from Ewe to English, but nevertheless, fluency in Ewe would have greatly improved my findings. This proved particularly difficult when discussing a question like "What do you consider to be music?", or "What is music?".

average, at one of these three locations. Only four informants stated that they felt shy to participate in music making at these events, though they each noted that they nevertheless enjoyed the presence of the music, and liked to hum or sing along quietly to themselves. The overwhelming response to the question of whether they felt shy to make music was an emphatic “*Why would I feel shy?!*”

This experience provided a concrete example of how a participatory music making culture can be organized. Informants noted several benefits from their active practice of music making, including strong feelings of social solidarity, the importance of song to the overall social structure of the community, and the opportunity for positive socialization in the sharing of a song or a dance with another person. The emphasis on inclusion resonated with me, especially when I heard such statements as “God gave everyone something...[everyone] can find something to do within the music...play rattle, bell, dance, sing.”³¹ The structure of the drum ensemble mirrored this attitude of inclusion.

Music making at these events was both highly structured – be it through organized social societies, church ensembles, or the generally understood hierarchy of drum and player importance – and highly participatory. The structure of the music included a continuum of instruments according to difficulty that provided a clear path through which one could progress. Starting out on accessible instruments that most anyone can play, such as rattle (*axatse*) or bell (*gankogui*) one can choose to further their learning and progress to more difficult drums, until ultimately learning to play lead drum, and become a lead drummer. These three features of Anlo-Ewe music culture – rigid

³¹ Personal interview. Anani, 17 April 2013.

organization, an openness to have all attendees participate in music making with their varying degrees of expertise, and a clear and path for self-development and learning – appear to be fundamental to a successful and engaging participatory environment. Energized by my experience, and eager to try to implement some of the musical structures I had learned while in Ghana, I returned to home to Tufts to try to create participatory musical opportunities of my own.

Composing Participatory Music: a failed attempt

Time: Summer after junior year
Advisor: Professor John McDonald
Course: Summer scholars program

Through the Summer Scholars program at Tufts, I received a grant to conduct a study in composing participatory music during the summer after my time in Ghana. Working with Professor John McDonald, I composed pieces of music that would be able to be performed by anyone and that made use of the body as the sounding instrument and temporal reference point, the timekeeper. In a sense, I used concepts from my motion music, but did away with the giant grid on the painter's tarp, so as to be more portable. The summer was supposed to be spent composing these sorts of pieces, and trying to enact them with volunteers in parks and other public spaces. The first piece, entitled *baby steps*, consisted of a series of rhythmic instructions. All of these instructions were related back to a side-to-side, stepping left and right motion in the body, so that participants could easily keep track of whether they were off from their assigned rhythmic pattern.

I tried putting on the piece in John F. Kennedy Park, outside of Harvard Square on a sunny summer day, and failed miserably. This was not at all a musical failure, but rather a failure due to extra-musical reasons, namely that nobody was willing to make music with me in a park. My asking was not taken kindly. Since the study technically fell under the umbrella of social science research, participants were required to sign IRB forms before participating. This made people reticent to participate, as they assumed I was conducting some sort of odd psychological experiment. Though I approached about 50 people that afternoon, and engaged in some enlightening conversations about personal

musical histories, no one agreed to participate in actively making music. Though the rejection of that day was anything but encouraging, it forced me to rethink certain underlying assumptions about the public spaces in which I had hoped to create participatory musical events.

A park has a certain set of associated, acceptable activities that come with it. People often go to parks to walk their dog, read, or throw a Frisbee, amongst other things. People do not go to a park, however, intending to make music with a stranger, especially if they do not consider themselves a musician. Indeed, social music making does not readily come to mind as something to do in parks and public spaces. But what if it did? What if there was a public space for music making? Around this time I began to uncover the history of a sound sculpture, called *The Musical Fence*. The story of this piece drastically changed the course of my summer, and revealed a new strategy for encouraging music making in public spaces.

The history of *The Musical Fence*

Created by Paul Matisse, *The Musical Fence* currently resides at the DeCordova museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Children frequently walk or run by its 58 aluminum sounding bars, ringing each one as they go. Parents notice their children's excitement, and cannot resist playing the fence for themselves, as they strike individual bars with whatever nearby sticks they can find, occasionally discovering a simple pattern or melody to repeat.



³²

The Musical Fence was not originally confined to the limits of the DeCordova walls, however. Funded by a National Endowment for the Arts parklette program in 1980, *The Musical Fence* initially stood outside of City Hall in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The piece, and its other “sister” musical fence that now resides in Vermont, provided a space for musicians and non-musicians alike to participate in making sounds by welcoming less confident non-musicians to just walk along and ring the bars, and also providing an opportunity for more interested, perhaps “musician” passersby to stand and play out melodies, patterns, or songs. Pamela Worden, the

³² Image taken from <http://www.paulmatisse.com/the-musical-fence/>

Cambridge Arts Council director at the time who played an instrumental role in the realization of the piece, noted that the community loved the piece. She described one particular man who “would take a little stick out of his briefcase just as he would come off the subway, come down the street...and start to play the piece on his way home”, and other “people [who] would come in the evening sometimes and they would play the piece...these sort of ad hoc performances would happen.”³³ Worden expressed the effect that the piece had on the community most profoundly in the following quote:

“As a society we spend millions and billions of dollars trying to do what [*The Musical Fence*] did. As much as we try through the process of urban development to get things to happen that will create community in a city, very little actually manages to do that.”³⁴

Despite overwhelming community enthusiasm for the sound sculpture, *The Musical Fence* faced removal less than two months after its installation. One Cambridge resident took issue with the piece, claiming that it “disrupted his TV watching at night.” This man happened to be a large financial supporter of a Cambridge city councilman at the time, Walter Sullivan, who spearheaded the effort to remove *The Musical Fence*. When the community got word that the City Council wanted the piece removed, they “pulled together” and approached the Arts Council and Worden, saying that they wanted to “raise money to hire somebody to create a fabric piece to put over [*The Musical Fence*] at night,” in theory solving the concerns of Walter Sullivan’s disgruntled supporter. Sullivan was unmoved by this effort, though, and still wanted the piece gone. When Worden relayed this news back to the community, the citizens resisted again, asking to be

³³ Personal interview. Worden, 13 09 2013.

³⁴ See Worden, “Community support for the musical fence”, <http://decordova.toursphere.com/en/paul-matisse-18471.html>.

put on the agenda at the next city council meeting. “Dozens of people showed up at city council” the night of the meeting, according to Worden, only to be told that “this item [regarding *The Musical Fence*] will not be heard tonight.” “The next thing we knew [the piece] had been schedule for removal.”³⁵ Although it currently resides in a museum, the story of *The Musical Fence* and the musical interaction it facilitated during its short time in public space lit a fire in my imagination about the potential for public sound sculpture to encourage participatory “pick-up” music, akin to pick-up sports. What if I could give this idea another chance? What if I could revive the *The Musical Fence*? What if I could design a space that fosters spontaneous participatory music making?

³⁵ Personal interview. Worden, 13 09 2013.

Public Sound Sculpture: A Sound Studies Perspective

Course: Music 151 –
Sound Art and Sound Studies
Time: Fall of senior year
Professor: Joseph Auner

A course in sound art and sound studies with Professor Auner during the fall of my senior year furthered much of my thinking around the importance of *The Musical Fence*, and public sound sculpture in general. The course introduced the field of sound studies, an intellectual framework that provided a way to understand the broader significance of *The Musical Fence* and similar works.

Public sound sculpture provides much more than an ability to participate in music making, as I had understood it. By playing a public sound sculpture, a participant not only engages and participates in music making in a personal sense, but also engages with, and transforms a more social, public, sonic space or *soundscape*. Coined by R. Murray Schafer, *the soundscape* denotes one's sonic environment. Schafer pioneered a field of acoustic ecology that works to bring a critical ear to the soundscape, and asks "what is the relationship between man and the sounds of his environment and what happens when those sounds change?"³⁶ Schafer and like-minded peers hope to heighten awareness of noise pollution. One such like-minded peer, Stephen Connor, notes "undoubtedly, the world has got vastly noisier since the onset of industrialization...[and] perhaps the most significant factor about this noise is not its increased level but its endogenous nature;

³⁶ Schafer, R. Murray. "The Soundscape" in *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012). p. 95-103.

modern man is surrounded by man-made noise.”³⁷ In response to this ever-present noise, Schafer calls for a creative engagement with our soundscape, asking “is the soundscape of the world an indeterminate composition over which we have no control, or are *we* its composers, and performers, responsible for giving it form and beauty?”³⁸ During its short time in public space, *The Musical Fence* presented an opportunity for citizens to compose the soundscape, so to speak. That citizens responded so positively to its presence suggests that this sculpture provided sounds they wanted to preserve and encourage. Examples of such affirmative engagement with the social, public soundscape are rare, though.

As opposed to changing outward circumstances, most often people in public spaces alter their personal soundscapes through personal listening on an iPod, smart phone, or similar device. Michael Bull articulated the effects of iPod listening in his article *The Audiovisual iPod*, which incorporates a number of accounts from listeners on when, where, and why they listen to their iPods. Bull found that the iPod provides an aesthetic sense that elevates listeners “beyond mundane concerns, placing [them] in a position of an empowered interpreter of the world whilst remaining distant...in the act of interpretation [the listener] remains silent, impenetrable to others.” His “enlightenment”, therefore, “remains a mute and private one in which others are unaware as they move through space with their own unknown preoccupations”³⁹. On the contrary, the hitting of a public sound sculpture in a public space is a kind of tangible sociality, as the sound fills

³⁷ Connor, Stephen. "The Modern Auditory I" in *Rewriting the Self* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996) p. 203-222.

³⁸ Schafer in Sterne, p. 96.

³⁹ Bull, Michael. "The Audio-Visual iPod" in *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012) p. 197-208.

the surrounding air for others to hear. Public sound sculptures seem to fight against a private, imaginary omnipotence by providing a more social, tangible sonic addition to a specific time and place in the world. This specificity of time and space fights against another concern raised by R. Murray Schafer, that of *schizophonia*. Schizophonia describes a “dislocation between what you hear and what you see...when a recorded sound is split off from its original source.”⁴⁰ Hearing recorded birdsong while not in the presence of the bird that produced these sounds is one example of a schizophonic situation. Public sound sculptures present an alternative to such a schism, as there is congruence between what one hears and sees. Sculptures such as *The Musical Fence* can encourage people to remove their ear buds, and enjoy more structured and intentional man-made sounds; the soundscape can be musical, rather than noisy.

Coming to understand the underlying statements made by a public sound sculpture in this way only encouraged me even more to try to realize a sculpture of my own.

⁴⁰ Geere, Duncan. "Schizophonia: Its cause effect and solution." *Wired*. 23 07 10. <<http://www.wired.co.uk/news/tes/2010-07/26/audio-environment-julian-treasure-schizophonia-cause-effect-solution>>.

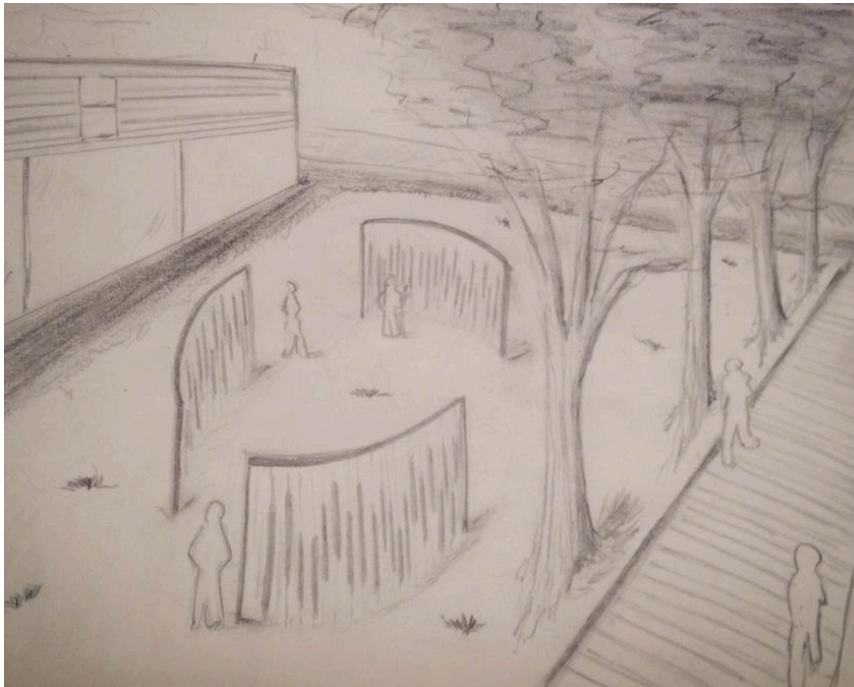
Arriving at now: Final thoughts and the way forward

Course: Music 199 –

Senior Honors Thesis

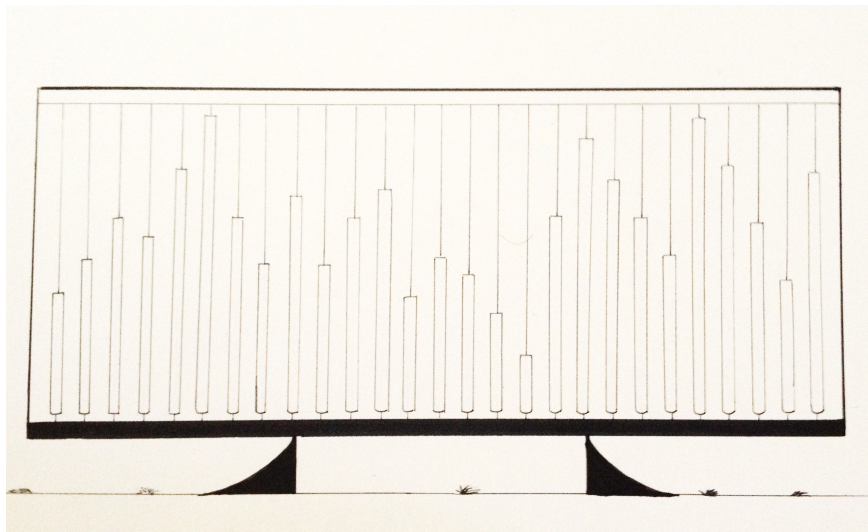
Time: Spring semester senior year

During my senior year I received a project grant from the Somerville Arts Council to build a public sound sculpture. The sculpture is in progress, as is the process of obtaining necessary permission for its installment in a public space. The final destination of the sculpture remains to be seen, though I am pushing to have it installed in Seven Hills Park, behind the subway station in Davis Square, a place with heavy foot traffic. Initially, I designed a circular sculpture for this particular location, so as to encourage sociality and playing from both sides of the chimes.



This design would take up too much of the park's green space, however, so in all likelihood the structure will end up being linear, like Matisse's fence. While I eventually would like to construct a sound sculpture permanently located in a particular public

space, this particular endeavor will be more temporary, as pitching anything permanent to city government to date has been well nigh impossible.



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In the future, I hope to create a public space that, like a park, has a certain set of activities associated with its location, and that those activities center on sonic participation. A public basketball court consists of a kind of underlying invitation to come and join the game, to play pick-up basketball. Why not create a space that has an underlying invitation to come and join in making music, to play pick-up music? This public sound sculpture path is, however, only one approach in working toward the broader goal of facilitating musical participation.

Ultimately, I hope to make music making more accessible, enjoyable, and less anxiety provoking for all. To further the analogy with sports (perhaps the best way to the American heart), as a society we enjoy watching professional athletes play, but also understand and emphasize the value of athletics and exercise in every individual's own life. I haven't heard anyone say, "Usein Bolt is much faster than I will ever be, therefore

⁴¹ Illustrations done by Amelia Wellors, Tufts class of 2013.

I shouldn't run." While the achievements of Mr. Bolt are remarkable, they do not in any way discourage one from enjoying his or her own practice of running and exercising; we recognize that this activity is intrinsically important to each individual's health and well-being.

I hope we can come to view music in a similar way, that the activity of making music is important to an individual's well being. The grand symphonies composed by Mr. Beethoven are remarkable, but they do not in any way discourage me from enjoying my own musical process. Turino takes a similar approach in comparing sports and music, stating that, due to "their universality in societies around the world" they "appear to be basic to being human." Both activities offer important, varied "ways of knowing and developing the self, are prime activities for achieving flow states, and are key resources for connecting intimately with others...[and] beyond and amidst all of this, music making and dancing can be great fun."⁴² The way forward, then, involves creatively organizing and presenting opportunities for such fun to those who may not otherwise have access to them.

As suggested by Lee Higgins, a professor of music education at Boston University, a field of "community music" could do well to achieve these aims. "Committed to the idea that everybody has the right and ability to create, make, and enjoy their own music...[community musicians] seek to enable accessible music-making opportunities for those they're working with."⁴³ Community musicians "recognize that the participants' social well-being and personal growth are as important as their musical

⁴² *Music as Social Life*, p. 133.

⁴³ Higgins, Lee. *Community Music in Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 174.

development...and advocate lifelong musical learning.”⁴⁴ Though Higgins cites several examples of currently active community musicians from around the world in his monograph, the field of community music has not yet gotten to a point where musicians and music departments more widely recognize and validate community music as a profession and field of study. If and when the field grows and solidifies itself, however, it could present an effective means for uniting disparate participatory efforts, and provide an organized voice to advocate for broad, lifelong musical participation.

While written justification and advocacy can be very effective in advancing the argument for active musical participation, a direct experience of a meaningful moment of *musicking* can be so compelling that it needs no further explanation. Such moments of being in seamless synchrony with one another, of arriving at a unified present, a *now*, can be so incredibly life affirming that I will not try to capture them in prose. The way forward, then, does not require writing more statements such as this one, but rather actualizing such moments in the material world.

⁴⁴ *Community Music in Theory and Practice*, p. 177.

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“I am convinced that any creative effort is the synthesis of an individual's responses to all the good things that others have given him; and so these brief acknowledgements represent only a fraction of the gratitude I owe to all those who have helped me to appreciate and understand music.”

-John Blacking, *How Musical is Man?* (xii)

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