

# COMMUNITY MUSIC VICTORIA'S CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY MUSIC

Jon Hawkes

We have a dream: we imagine a society in which everyone makes music, where music making is an utterly normal and constant activity of all.

We don't chase this dream just because we think that a culture without music is not worth living in. After all, there's plenty of music around already - symphony orchestras, advertising jingles, venues of all complexions, CD shops galore, music radio and even lots of music teachers.

We chase this dream because we believe that making music is a fundamental human right and essential to becoming a fulfilled and healthy human being. We can all make music and a society that does not actively encourage, facilitate and promote this capacity in its citizens and their children is deeply flawed and probably doomed.

Yes, music making is essential for survival, or to put it in the words of the public policy makers, communities making music is a fundamental ingredient of wellbeing and sustainability.

This is because making music together creates a crucible in which the synergy that comes from collaborative effort is directly experienced and productively channelled. There is no other activity that provides such an immediate and tangible manifestation of the power and joy of co-operation. It is the creative manifestation of community. It transforms the metaphor of harmony into a real life experience.

Healthy and creative communities depend upon there being regular opportunities for citizens and their children to come together in safe and supportive environments in which mutual respect and validation, co-operative interaction, and joyful outcomes are the normal result of engagement.

Community music making offers the most productive context in which these conditions can be realised.

With these experiences as a base, community vitality, capacity, confidence and energy will flourish.

Not only is community music making the foundation of community strengthening, it is also the best starting point for unleashing the creativity that is bubbling in all of us.

Exercising this creativity is not simply something to which every individual has a right, it is also a survival necessity. Unless a society's creative capacities flourish, it will lose the ability to effectively face the challenges of existence, of change, of positively solving the problems that life on this planet presents us with every day.

We're convinced that it is through making music (and possibly the combination of music and movement) that communities can most effectively discover (or re-discover) the joy and value of community creativity.

Through the utilisation of just the body and the voice, with no external tools, no difficult-to-learn skills, people can discover, explore and celebrate their creative capacities in ways that no other activity can offer so easily, accessibly, inclusively, and possibly most important, so immediately gratifyingly.

Experienced facilitators can guide groups through experiences where their abilities to make their own music are made real, quite literally, within minutes. And this is not just their capacity to sing a 'given' piece, but to improvise and to compose.

This is not mere theory. At Community Music Victoria (CMV) we have personally witnessed this apparent miracle so many times that we are beginning to forget that we live in a society in which so many, perhaps most, people have been convinced that they can't sing, that they are 'tone deaf', that making music is best left to the experts.

This tragic manifestation of cultural cringe might not matter so much if it wasn't for the fact that making music together is such a basic part of living a fulfilled life. We owe it to ourselves and to our children to do all we can to rediscover our musicality.

There are, of course, already infinite manifestations of music in communities. They range from families singing together around the fireplace, hymn singing in the local church, cheer squads singing their club song, through amateur choirs aspiring to performances of the highest quality and garage bands dreaming of winning the Battle of the Bands, to professional artists whose music has profound connections to the contexts that inspire them.

At CMV, we recognise and respect all these forms, but the focus we have chosen is the most basic, the most fundamental.

What we aspire to is, to edit Abraham Lincoln, music that is made by and of the people. It is this belief in the innate musicality of all humans, and of the need to unleash and valorise this musicality, this need to democratise and demystify music-making, that informs our conception of community music.

Building directly out of these ideas, we think of community music as:

- music making in groups (with a significant degree of collaborative decision-making);
- music making that reflects and illuminates the culture of the participants;
- music making in the moment (that is, not in preparation for some future public event);
- music making that is built on and unleashes the creative capacities of the participants in the immediate situation in which it is occurring.

Our sense of community music is that it is, or at least has the potential to be, totally inclusive. While community music is always made by specific groups (real sounds coming from real bodies), we believe that ALL people have the right, and the capacity, to make their own music.

We certainly don't see community music as being all music, nor even all music in a community. For us, the key issue is that it is music being made together by 'ordinary', 'everyday', 'regular' people.

This belief in the innate musicality of human beings has profound ramifications: not least, in putting music on the same level as language. Contemporary linguistic theory affirms that the capacity to communicate using sounds is innate, or, to use contemporary jargon, 'hard-wired'; we believe the same goes for music.

In which case, the development of musicality is not learnt but uncovered. Just as a child discovers how to speak, so the capacity to make music is discovered rather than acquired. Development in this usage is the exact opposite of envelopment: unwrapping the potential that is in all of us.

And just as formal grammatical rules and extended vocabulary can be taught to children who already understand the essential dynamics of speech, so it is with music. The facility to make music, just as with the facility to speak and to understand speech, comes before the facility to read, to write, to appreciate the symbolic frameworks we have invented to surround these innate human qualities.

And the ramifications continue: children are creative with language from the moment they start using it: so can, and should, they be with music. Yes, hearing and learning the stories and songs of one's culture is an essential part of growing up, but it should not be at the expense of developing one's own stories and songs.

And more: children learn language through using language - as much, if not more, through testing their own expressiveness as through listening to the intense beauty of those that have transformed the mundane into the sublime.

And even more: the facility to converse develops through making conversation, through exchange, through doing it together. So can, and should, it be with music.

If we are to survive and be happy - to maximise sustainability and wellbeing - we must make music together. It's as simple as that.

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