Societal judgment silences singers

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ABSTRACT

This article outlines recent recognition of the instinctive nature of human musicality against a backdrop of individuals who feel that only the talented have a propensity to be musical. Where notions of performance, judgement and talent undermine attempts to engage in music as a natural human communicative action, it is important to recognise societal expectations which leave some individuals disengaged from a healthy aspect of what it means to be human. As participant stories uncover an 'unnatural' phenomenon, they bring an understanding of how pathological educational practice continues to estrange individuals from a natural human activity. Experiences of those who have been distanced from their inherited potential can contribute to our understanding of music in our society to offer ways towards healthy attitudes to music and musicking in schools and wider society.

I wouldn't sing… out in public. People would look… and think
'oh my god she's just so different from everybody else'
- High school teacher

February, March, April… just three months… I was a goner!
… crying… staring at the walls… too distressed
- Drop-out from Performing Arts Institution

INTRODUCTION

Music is a 'natural' part of our lives (Green 2009, pp. 127-9) because music 'practices transcend…contexts' and occur in all cultures 'by [themselves] without conscious or formal intervention' (p. 128) over time. Contemporary research continues to reveal the intrinsic and instinctive nature of human musicality (Dissanayake 2009; Peretz 2003 p. 192). In addition to this, Cross and Morely (2009) recognise the evolutionary nature of music as they consider the ways that it has evolved to become a ubiquitous part of human culture; an embedded aspect of our social human development which provides ways of knowing who we are and of discovering where we belong. Music continues to define who we are as it evokes our emotional response and promotes cohesion of group members, even where 'current Western musical practices [dictate that] music is produced by few and consumed by many' (Cross & Morely 2009 p. 66).

Children reflect their musical environment as they absorb their musical heritage and learn to be musickers within their particular culture. A heightened sense of identity and acceptance within a group are part of the benefits gained by those who experience communal music making, whereas, those who develop within a non-musical environment may succumb to societal expectations and categorise themselves as 'non-musical'(Ruddock & Leong 2005; Small 1998). Many 'learn' to inhibit their musical responses by the time they reach their teens so that, when they leave school, 'a malfunction of our enculturation processes' (West 2009 p. 215) leads young people to believe that they should not sing.

In my recent project involving self-perceived non-musical non-musicians (Ruddock 2007), contradictory layers within participant stories tell of non-musical selves despite musical nuance in language revealing persistent musicality. In contrast to their convictions, my study revealed that these self-perceived non-musical humans were 'self-deceived' by layers of societal expectations dominated by notions of performance, judgment and talent. Participant revelations expose a society that is directed by notions of musical persons (those who have innate talent) versus non-musical persons. The latter necessarily become the consumers; the receivers of music products made by those who are considered to be musically 'talented'. This paper draws on lived experiences of individuals caught in a judgmental society that has a powerful potential to dissuade individuals against instinctive human action.

CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

Recent research (Ruddock 2007; Ruddock & Leong 2005) shows the extent to which our perceptions are affected by the notion of music as *performance*; indeed, this ran as a consistent undercurrent that stopped individuals from singing for fear that others might hear and judge them. This scenario presents a reality of the arts

in our society where it is the performance that counts; participants' experiences showed that they 'learned' to doubt their musicality when their singing was judged to be not acceptable for others to hear. Interestingly, an Australian Government report, just released, asserts that the 'Arts and culture play a vital role in the lives of all Australians' and that 'Australian's value the arts!' (Australia Council for the Arts 2010). Key findings deliver the following:

> *Nearly all Australians intentionally listened to recorded music and over half attended live performances. Most went to watch live music such as pop, rock, country and dance. Musical theatre/cabaret was the second most popular form of music attendance at 22%, followed by classical music (13%), and opera (8%). Making music was also popular (15%) with one in ten playing an instrument and 5% singing (p. 4).*

This report aimed to supply information to 'arts marketers and policy makers' and its findings illustrate to what extent the 'arts are strongly supported by the community'. However, the focus appears to rest on passive engagement of individuals as consumers of others' musicking; only 5% reported that they sang. These findings contrast with situations in a nurturing environment where creative music making allows for improvised human expression that enables 'learners [to] feel safe and valued' (Wiggins 2009 p. 120). With a focus away from marketing, industry and consumption, the musical arts (a natural fusion of music, art and dance) can become powerful entities that garner human inventiveness towards imaginative vibrant survival (Nzewi 2003).

'My breath is music. My body is dance' (Nzewi 2003 p. 221). Nzewi's vision of arts as a holistic expression for all is clearly distant from our reality in the West. In his reflections on modernity, Habermas (1997) notes how professionalisation of the arts not only separated them into disparate spheres but distanced those who were not trained as artists, dancers or musicians, so that many individuals experience an 'impoverished...lifeworld' (p. 45). Indeed, recent research shows how this widespread misconception of human musicality affects everyday living (Ruddock 2007; Welch 2001). West (2009) views this denial of an inherent human trait as a psychosocial disorder (2009 pp. 214-5) and suggests that our dysfunctional attitude may be overcome by reconceptualising music and music making. In her proposal for remedial action on a fresh interpretation of essential aspects, West first insists that 'singing is... both the most basic form of music making and an indicator of the musical health of the individual' (2009 p. 214). However, one participant of my recent study (Ruddock 2007) would have a serious problem with this view; a senior teacher educator was at pains to point out that he had no inclination to 'burst into song'. He was one of many whose music education at school had been limited to singing along to the radio in his primary school classroom; he remembers singing along with his classmates. But since his teens he has carried a belief that he cannot sing at all; like others, he was deterred by the 'talent' myth. He never thought to challenge the widespread assumptions in our society that 'musical' persons are only those who are born with a natural gift which enables them to acquire music skills with ease (Sloboda, Davidson, & Howe 1994 p. 349).

Contrary to this assumption, however, multidisciplinary research projects (Bannan & Woodward 2009; Bowman 2010, 2002; Dissanayake 2009; I Peretz & Zatorre 2003; Small 1998) now show how music is integral to human development and health. Unfortunately, much of our current music education in Australia fails to provide adequate developmental musical learning (Pascoe et al. 2005). Before we may properly address this widespread void, it is important to explore societal perceptions that view active music making as something necessarily restricted to those talented individuals who have the ability to become professional musicians. It is necessary to be aware of how it feels for those many individuals in our communities who feel that they cannot sing (West 2009 p. 212). We need to understand more clearly how it is that individuals come to accept such an 'unnatural' condition, especially since restraint from engaging in an instinctive human action can cause unnecessary stress

(West 2009 p. 215) and contribute to pathological symptoms within society (Habermas 1997). As West points out, young people do not knowingly become *non-singers*, rather they 'learn' to feel that they should not sing as 'a malfunction of our enculturation processes' (p. 215).

Contemporary thinkers are exploring the extent to which many in our Western societies fail to fully engage with their musicality (Bannan & Woodward 2009 p. 478; Nzewi 2007; West 2009). Rather than being a source of communication, the '[m]usical arts have become a diversion instead of a core business of life' (Nzewi 2007 p. 26) where individuals are manipulated for profit by the music industry and where the cohesiveness of these creative arts have been shattered 'into isolated enclaves of specialization' (p. 26). This restricts human connection by limiting a means (through musical activity) whereby individuals can express emotions and engage in a vibrant way to achieve wellbeing for themselves and the functioning community to which they belong. If music is viewed as a performance object with a focus on judgment and talent (Ruddock 2007; Small 1998; West 2009) then an artificial void is created in our Western culture, with a culturally constructed musical/non-musical (Nettl 2006) dualism. Such a societal view disenfranchises many individuals from their innate musicality (Ruddock 2007) as it reduces the power of music to act as humanising 'glue' (Spychiger 2001 p. 65) towards a coherent and connected society.

From birth we demonstrate innate musicality (Trehub 2003) but children, whose early experiences do not include musical influences, may commence primary school and then be 'branded' as non-musical because they have not yet developed culturally defined singing skills. Welch argues convincingly that this 'limiting conception of humankind as either musical or non-musical is untenable' (2001 p. 22) since the apparent non-musicality is merely an outcome of their experience to this point (Welch 1986, p. 297). An investigation into everyday experiences of music (Ruddock 2008) uncovers educational experiences that become a 'process of demusicalization' (Small 1998, p. 212), where music teaching practice focuses on teacher and/or school kudos with little awareness of the potential negative effects on long-term musical self-perceptions of individuals. Small (1998) laments detrimental effects that can occur because of:

> *... those music teachers who care more for what people will think of their ensemble than for the real musical development of their students. Some children do indeed have difficulty in learning to sing in tune, but the difficulty will be overcome by practice and encouragement, not by telling the child that she should open and shut her mouth and make no sound, a practice that seems to be as common today as when I was at school. The voice is at the center of all musical activity, but it is all too easy to silence and very hard to reactivate, since those who have been silenced in this way have been wounded in a very intimate and crucial part of their being. In my opinion any music teacher caught doing such a thing or using the epithet tone-deaf of a pupil should be sacked on the spot (p. 212).*

However, West also offers some defence to erring educators because they are 'surely part of our culture as well' (2009 p. 213). But, at the same time, she notes that '[s]inging seems to be a particular problem for both adults and children' (2009 p. 212) and that many individuals perceive themselves as non-singers; she goes on to report that there is 'a decline in interest in singing as children move through school' (p. 212). By the time many individuals complete school, they become part of those '... many adults [who] are unmusical, as evidenced by their inability to sing in tune' (reported in Trehub 2003, p. 3).

EMBARRASSED? EVERYDAY EXPERIENCES OF SINGING REVEALS 'UNNATURAL' REJECTION

It was during a conversation with this researcher (Ruddock 2007) that a nineteen-year-old participant inadvertently revealed a widespread assumption that reflected societal beliefs. He doodled absent-mindedly as we considered puzzles relating to his perceptions of music; while he did not comment on this (see Figure 1) at the time, he later reported that it was a 'pretty obvious phenomenon' (Ruddock 2007 p. 147).
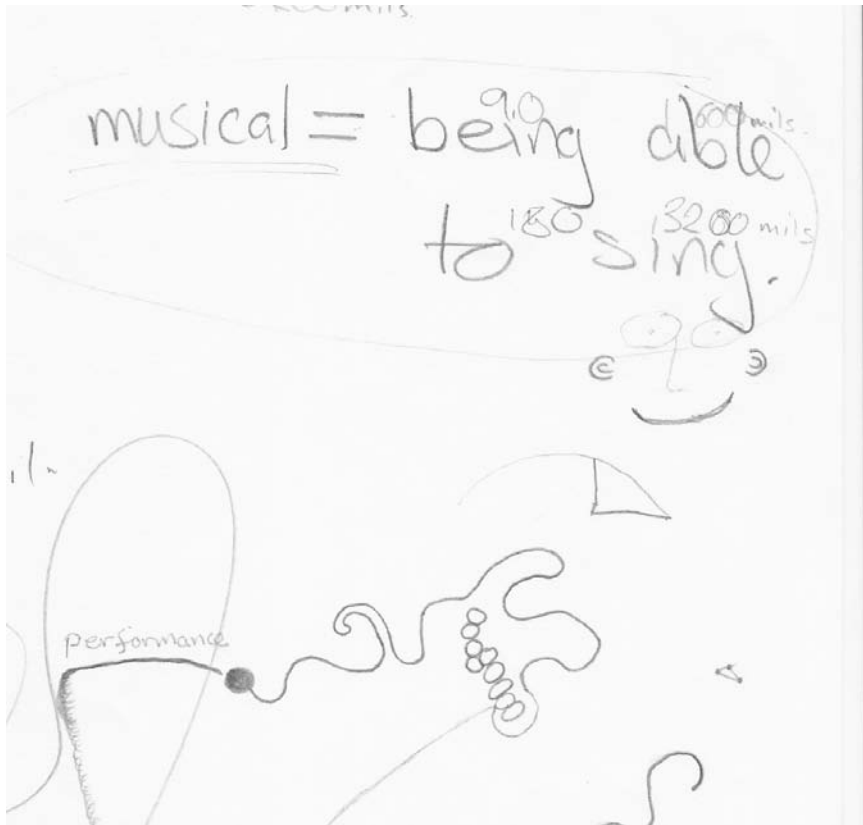

Figure 1: Musical = being able to sing (Ruddock 2007, p. 147)

His doodling emphasises the central role played by singing as it highlights the dilemma faced by those who have been led to believe that they cannot sing. They are musical beings who respond to and wish to engage in musicking yet feel that they have to 'accept' a subtle societal message that they are non-musical. Self-perceptions of participants' views of their singing ability from this study are presented in Table 1.

Participant	Participant raw data
Harry	Can't sing, not even in the shower.
Vi	Me sing? I have no voice to sing! I would love to be able to sing. Knowing that I have a hopeless voice I would not like to inflict my singing on someone else… some people might consider themselves good singers and their sounds come out as utter noise. I would be one of those. I would hate to inflict that on someone else. I did singing at school and high school. I've got one of those voices that just fall all over the place.
Caterina	My husband, he's from Ireland… they sing all the time'n his Irish friends sing all the time. 'n I always think 'God I wish I could sing' I've always believed that I'm a bad singer. I love music but I've never believed that I'm someone who can sing in any way. I'm just an observer of music.
Howard	In school I… I know I wasn't very good… the music teacher would listen to all singing and say 'there's someone over there that's just not quite in tune' 'n and 'just do it again' 'n so we'd all sing again, but this time I would just mime it. I wouldn't actually sing… and get her very upset…'N she never quite picked out that I was singing and then miming 'n she was trying to listen for really out of tune voices coming through. It felt like I couldn't sing and I guess that's why… I have always felt like I can't sing. I'm not a very good singer.'
Ada	We always sing (in Croatia). [But when I went to singing lessons here] I started to sing - 'oh my God, that's awful'. I was sure I was singing all the time out of tune. [At the eisteddfod] I thought 'all these poor people, all these poor ears'.
Rhonda	I love singing. But I wouldn't sing… out in public…'cos I don't think I've got the voice to sing out in public. I sing at home with my family or I might sing… if we were having Christmas carols. It's the society we live in and… the judgmental nature of and the critical nature of people… [to sing in public would be] perhaps drawing attention to yourself… like wearing… something that's a really loud colour like a- a vivid green or a bright fluoro pink… people would… look at you and think oh my god she's just so different from everybody else…
Meg	My Dad was very flat. He'd try and sing and you know, he'd put everybody out of the room. Neither of the children could sing – in tune – they sing very flat like we all do
Vic	[Sing?] No not me! But my young bloke sings a bit – Elvis and that. You're born to play football (or to sing). Born with a gift… sort of in your blood I reckon. [Music] wasn't in mine though.
Andy	A lot of blokes in my generation are very… if you sing then they'll go: 'oh shut the fuck up… fuckin' hell I don't want to listen to you fuckin' sing'… and they'll put on the radio or something and listen to it… but they don't sing along. [It's] probably worse with males… I don't know…

Participant	Participant raw data
	just a suspicion… it's just like the denial of emotion. I think… they're probably related… that masculine construct that everyone's talking about? I'd say on par with that. When you're totally drunk… all your mates do[sing]… then, it's not only o.k. It's kosher. It's the done thing. You know… and they love it too! They love it!

(adapted from Ruddock 2007 p. 191)

Table 1: Participant views of their own singing

Similar views were colourfully caught during some research into acoustics that was commissioned by the Vauxhall motor company in England. Researcher Dr Stuart Colam found 'that almost 60% of people admit they can't carry a tune and 41% of us who sing in the car refuse to sing in places where others might hear us. And when busted, most of us try to pretend we're on a phone call' (this version was reported by Easdown 2008 p. 54). Unsolicited comments from participants (Ruddock 2007) reflect Colam's findings where their stories include many instances of being able to enjoy singing in the car – as long as the window's up! This subverted place of singing continues to emerge in my current study into the phenomenon of everyday musical experiences (research in progress). A 23 year-old honors science student, for instance, relates a story regarding her boss; this professional preferred to accept a warning from a traffic policeman rather than admitting that she was singing:

> *My boss actually was singing… she doesn't think that she's a very good singer… she was driving to work one day and she was singing in the car to the radio… a police officer pulled her up and said that he was warning her for talking on her mobile phone. She was too embarrassed to turn around and say that actually she was singing. She got a warning. She said she was getting really into it! She was more embarrassed about getting caught singing than getting a warning for talking on her mobile phone.*

This tale confirms a general view that emerged from the earlier study (Ruddock 2007) where participants perceived that an ability to sing is a gift restricted to the talented few and that only these gifted individuals had a licence to sing in public. Unless inebriated or safely alone, the consensus of the cohort of self-perceived non-musical non-musicians from the study (Ruddock 2007) was that singing in public is something performed by talented musicians for an audience.

Details from conversational partners in my new study continue to tell of situations where singing is discouraged; conversations centring on everyday musicality tell how these individuals have been silenced. Their experiences resonate with the understanding that '…most people believe that musical "talent" is inherent and not something that can be taught, and therefore do not really believe that music education is necessary or realistic for all students' (Wiggins & Wiggins 2008, p. 18). That such a belief can have a negative impact on a child as early as Grade One is illustrated by the experience of the 23 year-old participant of my current research (mentioned above). It was when Lily first went to school in her little country town that her teacher made her 'try-out' to become a member of the school choir. But Lily and one other very young child 'failed' their auditions to be part of the choir. Lily's brothers and all the rest of the school were in the choir; she was not yet 6 years of age. She recalls:

I remember...
like I was tiny
I had to audition to go into the choir
I had no real interest to be in the choir
but everybody was in the choir
I had to sing 'Twinkle, twinkle little star'
and then she wouldn't let me in
and I was so embarrassed and
I went home and I cried.
(Lily's words were spoken exactly as presented here.)

Another example comes from a 26 year-old who, in Grade 5, was asked to mime when her class was about to sing in a big hall with students from other schools. Now, she says:

I don't sing for anyone
Not since I was nine.
When I belted out the song
My singing was just fine.
The teacher, then, I think she said
Just to move my lips instead.
(These phrases are selected directly from Jamie's transcript.)

These participant reports show how individuals' childhood musicality was undermined by cultural constraints; how their musical development was 'sacrificed' to enhance performance 'standards' of their choirs. They reveal a system where judgment has become a normal part of the process of musical action as listeners become 'judges' who determine whether the 'product' is satisfactory or not. As their conversations reveal, long term effects of such exclusion remain part of an individual's musical self-perception.

Illustrating our culturally based reticence to embrace music as an essential part of our human lives, these lived experiences reflect serious gaps in the provision of music education throughout Australia (see Pascoe et al. 2005). West defines SMS (Selective mutism for singing) as a syndrome where individuals maintain physiological ability to sing but, for 'psychosocial reasons' (2009, p. 214), they remain mute. In her definition of the problem, West (2009, p. 212) mirrors findings from my work (Ruddock 2007) where participant experiences show that our musical world is dominated by the notion of performance; most of us are reduced to being consumers of products provided by the talented.

Unnatural restraints on instinctive human actions place an unnecessary stress on the individual and such imposed inaction can add to pathological symptoms in a society (Habermas 1997 p. 45). As West points out, young people 'learn' to feel that they should not sing as 'a malfunction of our enculturation processes' (2009, p. 215). Similarly, in her study of English students in 2001, Lamont (p. 2) attributed her findings of children's negative musical self-perceptions directly to their everyday school context. Then, during a radio interview, she noted that this issue where individuals believed that they could not sing 'is a peculiarly western construct… and perhaps also a kind of Anglo issue' (in conversation with Mitchell 2002).

A SINGER UNSUNG

It may not be a surprise that the SMS syndrome (West 2009) affects those who have been judged as non-singers in their childhood years, but we might not expect to find that a successfully launched performer, doing well-received paying gigs with her trio, had also been vulnerable to losing her sense of musical self. When Simone tells her story (as part of this my current research) it is clear that, for her, one of the most precious aspects of singing and teaching singing is to be emotionally connected with others. Her experience as a developing musician reflects current research in musical development that emphasises the importance of the initial nurturing environment to the enculturation process (see Trehub 2006, pp. 43,44). Singing and playing the piano had always been a part of life for Simone. In her words:

> *During high school I couldn't walk past the piano without playing it… just loved playing it… took refuge in it during my 20's… singing was a way of coping and of carving out an identity. Singing with the Songbirds [pseudonym for her professional trio] was important… felt it was something I'd created myself, rather than fitting into a pre-determined job or position… helped create an identity for myself.*

Before she auditioned for the jazz course at a prestigious performing arts institution (AI), her confidence was boosted not only by a recent distinction for the AMEB eighth grade singing examination but also by the assurance from current students of the jazz course that she would have no problems succeeding in the audition and in coping with the course because her vocal skills were superior to singers who were already studying at the AI. Despite these assurances, during the audition she became acutely aware of the effect of the judges: 'two people down below… sitting there in the dark… adjudicating'. As Bowman recognises, our bodily responses to music 'in Western culture [are] decidedly secondary to the serious business of knowing' (Bowman 2010 p. 2) and Simone was to discover this to the detriment of her musical career.

She clearly expressed her perception of being musical:

> *Musical is something a person 'is' – and people differ in the degree to which they 'are' musical. The more competent they are the more musical they can be considered. However, I would also consider someone musical if they were passionate about and committed to playing music, even if they weren't terribly 'competent' at it. My answer surprises me.*

> *I'm musical in the sense that sometimes I just want to sing for the pure joy of it, and lose track of time when I do; and have in the past, worked to improve my singing. I'm non-musical in the sense that I don't want to do this all the time i.e. for a living – my life's purpose isn't fulfilled purely from singing. And I'm non-musical in the sense that I don't think that I've excelled in any of the genre's of music I've engaged in – pop, classical and jazz.*

But then she revealed how her feelings had undergone a dramatic change. 'Currently, I sing only as a way of making money by teaching singing… get no personal joy from music at present… only listen to it or learn a song for the purposes of teaching'.

From the moment of her audition, her musical self dissipated. 'February, March, April… three months… I was a goner!'

At the tertiary institution for arts (AI), Simone unexpectedly experienced an environment that was sapping the vitality from her singing. Her embodied joy turned to fear. 'Positive aspects of a performance were not acknowledged, only performance flaws. It was often a humiliating and belittling experience. I learned to hate singing and performing'.

Not feeling free to be 'in the world', she retreated not only from the institution, but also from her world of music; she entered a period of grief. For more than a week, she cried. Self-confined, she slowly began to view her reality as that of another. While she could not face returning to the AI, an awareness of what had happened emerged within her reflections. Her loss was overwhelming; no longer part of a musical or social world, she had a heightened awareness of how, in the words of Merleau-Ponty:

> *… forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire; it slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world and thus brings them to our notice; it alone is consciousness of the world because it reveals that world as strange and paradoxical. (1962 p. xiii)*

Simone recognises how those strong negative 'judgments' were turning against her deep inner musicality to endanger a treasured part of her identity. Musical connection with people, so crucial to her singing (and her being) was undermined; joy was taken out of singing itself. She began to feel that she never wanted to sing again. Her means of making herself 'feel better emotionally… means of connecting with people [of giving] a purpose in life' had been taken away, yet she found herself in a position where she was free to discern complex hidden influences that are part of our structured capitalist reality (see Faubion 2000, p. 86); influences that curb much musical expression.

Thus, after only three months into her jazz course at AI, Simone knew that she was a 'goner'. As she spent 'a week sitting in a room crying… staring at the walls… too distressed' to either contact the institution or to engage with her daily living, Simone found her consciousness escaping the everyday norm towards a new knowing. She felt that it was not her acts alone that led her to this place. She recognised that, musically, she was as capable as others who successfully completed the jazz course and that her personality contributed to her reaction. 'With voice you're completely naked you know, it's part of you and any disapproval of your voice is like, you know… disapproving of part of you!' At the same time she recognised that the technical preferences of her lecturers were not those of her own favoured jazz styles; she was being judged for not meeting criteria that were both unfamiliar and uninviting to her. The negative experience that affected her most was the loss of connectivity in her singing: '… music making *is* about connecting; communicative musicality *is* about entering into the space of others and how they feel'. Simone believed that the teachers had failed because 'they tell you what they want from you but they don't tell you how to get there'. She knew that she was 'technically competent but stylistically incompetent [from the perspective of her teachers since she) didn't fit… the style of singing that they were looking for'. With the focus on technical competence and judgment relating to preferred jazz styles, experiences at the AI have destroyed Simone's instinctive human musical connectivity. Her lament tells her music story:

> *[Music is] therapeutic and it's communicative… but we've turned it into something that needs to be… technically competent, and that's taken all the joy out of it. The most destructive music education experience was when I started the Bachelor of Music (Jazz) at AI. What I was to supposed to achieve was clear, however, how to achieve those objectives was not made clear. Being a performance art meant that if those objectives were not achieved, it was obvious to all in the class. It was often a*

humiliating and belittling experience. Positive aspects of a performance were not acknowledged, only performance flaws. I learned to hate singing and performing.

For Simone, the joy of musicking began to diminish from the time of the audition itself; judgment took over connection; all that mattered was effective style. As Faucault noted (Faubion 2000 p. 83), we need to question the value of a system where value lies in work and in the product of work; Simone's capacity for healthy musicking disappeared when dominated by systemic politics in a tertiary institution.

A WAY AHEAD

Since the creative arts are now being recognised as a useful means towards product innovation and increased wealth, they have achieved political importance (Burnard 2008a, p. 2); they are included in governmental planning as a necessary element of a competitive economy (EDWA 2005, p. 4). However, music is more than a useful contribution to our knowledge economy. When participant Andy exclaims of his friends singing, 'It's the done thing. You know… and they love it too! They love it!' (Ruddock 2007, p. 148), he reflects our natural desire to engage in musicking as a response to our own instinctive drives as we respond to our environment (see Bannan & Woodward 2009, p. 465).

If the making of music is dominated by notions of performance, then active involvement (particularly singing) is too easily perceived as something that is reserved for the 'talented'. In order to reverse such a narrow conception of music making, an effective mechanism would be the introduction of enlightened music programs in schools so that children can learn to become musickers in their own idiosyncratic way. Where programs are based on inclusion, innovation and understanding (Wiggins 2009), individuals grow to be part of a community freed from constraints where narrowly defined judgment preempts action; they can enjoy a 'humanising' (Nzewi 2007), communicative music as it plays its part in maintaining a healthy society.

If we are to meet the many challenges in our complex educational reality where planners attempt to fuse divided ideals towards effective policy (Burnard, 2008a), we can ill afford to ignore the 'hidden' world of individuals such as Simone. Insightful researchers have already begun to alert us to the powerful impact of language. Burnard, for instance, illustrates how societal use of the word 'musical' is not merely 'descriptive, but rather a form of discrimination which denies individuals the opportunity to develop their innate musical potential' (2003, p. 36), thus allowing us to take a new look at how we understand and use the word 'musical'. Further, in the light of reports on the current exclusive practices in the arts and the need for new perspectives in music education in England (Burnard 2008b, p. 61) we may recognise that similar problems exist in Australian schools (Pascoe et al. 2005). Once we can accept the extent to which the arts reflect societal values and acknowledge the dysfunctional view of cultural pursuits being measured specifically in terms of their capacity to effect economic potential without the essential attendant wisdom (Craft 2008), we will then give ourselves the opportunity to properly address the policy conflict between 'education' and 'work' (Burnard 2008a, p. 2) and move towards an increasingly healthy society.

CONCLUSION

Although the musical nature of humans has been substantiated in recent research, participants' everyday experiences considered in this article highlight continuing unhealthy examples of cultural restriction. An appreciation of how these instances can repress individual musicality can provide a deeper awareness of how music is actually experienced in everyday life in our society. We may recognise how the notion of singing as performance can override potential acts of singing as communicative action and lead many individuals to perceive themselves as non-singers. While some people maintain their robust sense of musicality and continue their listening and responding to music, there are many instances of people whose embarrassment in the face of expected societal judgment means that they refrain from musical action. To truly recognise participant experiences, such as those reported in this article, is to begin to become aware of the many others like them in our communities. Their experiences can also alert us to those elements within our society that sustain such a phenomenon and, through such recognition, encourage us to ensure that we provide an educational environment to change judgmental attitudes. We can learn to listen and respond to people, so that their songs are no longer judged as a 'performance' but a way of human connection.

Participants in my on-going research reveal experiences that expose a judgmental society dominated by a belief that only some individuals are born with sufficient talent to sing to an acceptable standard. Such a 'societal' perception contributes to a false musical-unmusical divide that undermines musical opportunities for those individuals who find themselves unnaturally silenced. This phenomenon sits uncomfortably with recent cross-discipline research that shows singing to be a normal human action. It is important, then, to question how it can be that this phenomenon is prevalent in our society, given that singing, arguably, a preeminent aspect of human musicality, is known to promote health and a sense of community.

We might question how, in this month's report from the Australia Council for the Arts, research findings record that only 5% of individuals report that they sing, at the same time as a declaration that the arts are playing a 'vital' role in Australia. That the report was commissioned at all, however, is a positive move towards an enhancement of the arts; as is the increasing governmental support now being given to healthy programs that encourage active engagement in singing (Australian Music Therapy Association 2010). To have long-term impact, it is necessary that such initiatives as 'Active music making for wellbeing' (Australian Music Therapy Association 2010) are supported over time so that their informed work practices can help to redress pathological divisions that allow for only the 'talented' to develop their musicality. To be alert to research that substantiates human musicality is to be informed; it can enable us to reject unnecessary judgment that undermines musical development that restricts communicative musicality. Informed educators, parents and the general public are in a position not only to question detrimental negative judgment but also to take advantage of innovative thinking and outreach music programs that can offer refreshing and inclusive perspectives.

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