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Exploring Performing

1. Introduction

"On the face of it, performing is what musicians do". So begins Keith Evans' exposé of musical performing in Chapter 9 of *Learning to Teach Music* (3rd edn). But as Evans so rightly highlights, is this the sole reason why musical performing should have a place in the secondary music classroom? Should performance be a question of understanding music, or of making music? Of mastering an instrument, or of practical exploration?

In order to address these questions, in this chapter I will consider the nature of musical performing and the role it plays in today's society. I will first reflect on current classroom performance practices and the ways in which they can become dominated by high-stakes, exclusive "presentational performance". I will then explore how "participatory performance" could provide an alternative, accessible means of cultivating diverse inclusivity, social coherence, and cognitive flexibility. Drawing on the introduction to whole-class workshopping in Chapter 9 of *Learning to Teach Music* (3rd edn), I will conclude by considering how to design, deliver, and assess lessons which build upon the foundational principles of low-stakes, inclusive, whole-class participatory performance.

2. Excavation

In Chapter 9 of *Learning to Teach Music* (3rd edn), Evans discusses a wide range of performing practices suitable for classroom contexts, including whole-class workshopping, whole-class singing, small-group performing, and individual keyboard playing. He also describes possible motivations for including these performing practices in lessons, such as the development of technical, interpersonal, and interpretative skills.

Task 2.1 *Musical performance in the classroom*

Revisit Chapter 9 of *Learning to Teach Music* (3rd edn). In your planning and teaching, how do you usually incorporate:

1. ... whole-class workshopping?
2. ... whole-class singing?

3. ... small-group performing?
4. ... individual keyboard playing?

What are your motivations for including these different performing practices? How do they complement each other and fit with your wider teaching aims and learning objectives?

Although in theory the four performing practices Evans discusses have quite different characteristics, often in the classroom they are reduced to a homogeneous set of outcomes – the quality of the performance determined by the quality of its musical product. Whole-class workshopping might end with a performance in a school assembly; whole-class singing in a concert for parents; small-group performing in performances to the rest of the class; and individual keyboard playing in an assessment of keyboard skills. This emphasis on presenting a well-prepared, high-quality musical product is known as "presentational performance". Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino coined this term to refer to

> situations where one group of people, the performers, have the responsibility to prepare and provide music for another group, the audience, who do not participate in producing sounds or motions that are deemed fundamental to the performance. (Turino, 2009, p. 101)

In presentational performance, "performers emphasize and work to control the quality of the artistic product" (Turino, 2009, p. 101). Performances have high stakes: their success is measured by the engagement and interest of the audience. And performances are exclusive: performers are selected or rejected depending on their existing experience and ability.

Presentational performance is often the norm in music classrooms, especially when Western art music is the primary focus. Thomas Regelski (2014) describes how music teaching in the United States "slavishly emulat[es] university models", "with the enormous time given to studio lessons, recitals, ensemble requirements, conducting classes, and concert attendance requirements" (p. 79). Likewise, in the United Kingdom presentational performance can become far-removed from young people's everyday communal and holistic music learning, promoting high-status knowledge and perpetuating exclusionary social structures (Spruce & Matthews, 2012). For many young people today, much of their musical experience takes place through recordings rather than live performance, and is mediated through digitisation. Their experience is one of a "postperformance world", where presentational performance "is

sometimes an option but often an impossibility, and rarely the avenue by which we experience music" (Thibeault, 2012, p. 518). In the classroom, therefore, an overemphasis on presentational performance potentially "militates against lifelong participation and engagement in music" (Mantie & Tucker, 2008, p. 218), leaving young people with musical skills and expectations they perceive to be disconnected from those which would equip them for further participation outside the classroom (Pitts, 2017; Pitts & Robinson, 2016).

Task 2.2 *Presentational performance in the classroom*

Reflect on your answers to Task 2.1. In your experience...

1. ... in what ways – if any – do young people encounter a disconnection between performance in the classroom and their musical experience outside the classroom?
2. ... how can presentational performance be used beneficially to mitigate against high-stakes, exclusive practices?
3. ... what are the limitations of using presentational performance to mitigate against high-stakes, exclusive practices?

3. Provocation

While some young people thrive in a culture of presentational performance, for others the value of musical performance in a postperformance world lies in *participatory culture* and *participatory performance*. Participatory, imaginative, and informal practices are integral to many young people's everyday music-making: jamming, covering, DJing, dancing, and remixing is their musical currency. Compared to presentational practices, participatory practices are low-stakes and accessible. They foster *inclusivity*, *unity*, and *flexibility*, teaching shared ownership and responsibility, nurturing social belonging, and supporting cognitive and emotional processing (Campbell, 2010; Harwood & Marsh, 2012).

Participatory culture

Participatory culture is a definitive aspect of musical performing in a postperformance world:

> one might experience remixes or mash-ups of covers and other iterative versions interconnected and networked across a range of time, spaces, and media. This engagement is representative of 'a public desire to participate within, rather than simply consume, media' – what media scholar Henry Jenkins identifies as *participatory culture*. (Tobias, 2013, p. 30, original emphasis)

Although many practices facilitated by new media – such as covering, DJing, or remixing – do not traditionally fall under the remit of "musical performance", for many young people they have become normal aspects of performing. Using social media, it is possible to interact with others' creative work, render it in new ways, and connect with a wider network of performers and mentors (Tobias, 2013). Regardless of whether these performances ever become "live" or "public", they emphasise the low-stakes, inclusive culture which underpins a society where young people are creators and performers as well as consumers and listeners.

Participatory performance

Regelski (2013) has expanded upon the idea of participatory culture as realised in new media contexts and considered how such cultures can also emerge in live performance situations. He refers to Turino's (2008) definition of participatory performance:

> 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. (Turino, 2008, p. 26)

In participatory performance, which is traditionally associated with practices such as American old-time music and Malian djembe and konkoni drumming, different participants take on different roles depending on their ability, but everyone is welcomed. Unlike in presentational performance, the success of the performance is judged not on the musical product, but on facilitating as much participation as possible. Certain musical attributes encourage mutual participation: repeated patterns and subtle variation of the basic musical material provide "security in constancy"; and dense textures and heterophony create a "cloaking function" in which individual parts are subsumed within the collective whole (Turino, 2008, pp. 40–46).

In many societies, and especially among young people, participatory performance is where "ordinary citizens derive the musical and social benefits of performing" (Regelski, 2014, p. 79), through clapping games, jam sessions, or communal dancing. The low-stakes, highly inclusive nature of such practices, regardless of participants' prior experience or ability, has rendered them resilient to the postperformance world. They capitalise on the adaptive evolutionary benefits of group music-making (Cross, 2005), supporting and sustaining the development of social coherence and cognitive flexibility in ways sometimes neglected in presentational performance.

Image 1. *A school folk band give a presentational performance in a major concert hall (left) and engage in participatory performance as passers-by clap, dance, and play along (right)*

Task 3.1 *Musical performance for inclusivity, unity, and flexibility*

Look at Image 1. Compare how these examples of presentational performance and participatory performance could foster...

1. ... inclusivity. Who counts as a "performer"? Is there differentiation between "performers", "composers", and "listeners"? Is the quality of the performance determined by performers' contribution to the musical product or performers' inclusion in the musical process?
2. ... unity. Is the performance directed by a teacher (formal learning) or guided by the young people (informal learning) (D'Amore, 2009; Green, 2008)? Is the musical decision-making autocratic or democratic?
3. ... flexibility. Is the focus on training in existing modes of music-making or experimenting with new modes of music-making (Bowman, 2012)? Is it about "learning to play music" or "playing music" (Folkestad, 2006)? Who is involved in musical problem-solving?

How do young people's own modes of musical performing – such as jamming, covering, DJing, dancing, and remixing – foster inclusivity, unity, and flexibility?

4. Exploration

In Chapter 9 of *Learning to Teach Music* (3rd edn), Evans explores the benefits and limitations of whole-class performing for remedying potentially high-stakes, exclusive classroom practices. He suggests that whole-class workshopping – in which the teacher initiates the activity, but the young people determine the outcome – can provide low-stakes and inclusive performing opportunities. Provided that it is handled in such a way as to emphasise its "cloaking function" and "security in constancy", workshopping can be an effective means of fostering accessible participatory practices (MacGregor, 2020).

Yet even in the case of whole-class workshopping, it is still worth asking, "is there any goal other than a perfect performance? Does this performing activity merely seek to develop skills at the expense of understanding?" (Evans, 2016, p. 133). Or at the expense of inclusivity?

Task 4.1 *Exploring whole-class participatory performance*

Expand the table in Task 9.3 of *Learning to Teach Music* (3rd edn) to include the ways in which whole-class workshopping benefits or limits the opportunities for developing participatory performance in the classroom.

Benefits	*Limitations*
• Everyone gets the same experience. • Differentiated parts can provide equal access for individuals of different abilities.	• Risks being a showcase for confident performers. • Participating with a large class may not be representative of participatory practices outside school.

I have previously explored the benefits and limitations of whole-class participatory performance with young people aged between eleven and thirteen (MacGregor, 2020). Over the course of several lessons, we played Terry Riley's 1964 composition *In C*. The inclusivity of *In C*, which can be performed by any number of participants working through a number of

simple ostinati at their own pace, made it particularly well-suited for participatory performance. We each learnt the opening ostinati individually on keyboards or instruments of our own choice before playing together as a whole class. Over a number of attempts to play together, we came to a greater realisation of the way our different roles cohered in emergent and self-directed models of leadership. In the following extract, we discussed how we overcame a particularly muddled section through following the example of the most confident participant, Jason:[1]

ME:	What happened after [the muddled section]?
JASON:	I came in.
	[...]
PIETRO:	Jason was the main thing – he could play everything. He was good.
RENÉE:	He went onto the other...
ME:	So Jason moved pattern, which meant that it reduced that texture a bit. What else happened, as a result of that perhaps?
JOE:	It quietened down a bit...
ME:	Joe, thanks. Yes, it quietened down, and people got back into tempo. Asil?
ASIL:	And just like in the [wildebeest stampede] video you showed us Miss, we all followed, like if Jason was the man at the head, we all followed him like in a chain reaction, because we saw what people were playing next to us, and what they were playing we were playing too.

The participatory nature of our whole-class performance allowed us to overcome the potential tension or paradox between our individual desires to prove our own ability, and our collective desire to achieve interpersonal affinity and unity (MacGregor, 2020, p. 234). In this way it built upon the unique values of participatory performance, fostering inclusivity and collective achievement, social coherence, and cognitive flexibility.

[1] All names have been changed to protect participants' anonymity.

Task 4.2 *Initiating whole-class participatory performance*

Consider the following vignettes of participatory performance in the classroom. How could you incorporate similar activities into a lesson or unit of work focussing upon whole-class participatory performance?

1. The class are sat in a circle, clapping in time as Jason keeps a steady tempo with the woodblock. Lavinia, Hannah, and Amelia have their eyes fixed on Jason. When Jason catches her eye, Hannah improvises a complex, syncopated pattern of claps and stamps lasting eight beats. "Show off," Paul mutters as the class continues clapping. The improvised solo continues to be passed around the class until it reaches Damian, who has been struggling to stay in time. He hesitates, before clapping a rapid-fire succession of short, irregular rhythms. The class maintain their steady tempo. After eight beats, Pietro nudges Damian and helps him fall back in time with the rest of the class.
2. Matthew and Seth are sat close together, their attention rivetted by the sheet music on the keyboard in front of them. After a couple of initial attempts, their class is playing Riley's *In C* together. Matthew is confidently playing the sixth ostinato with his right hand, while using his left to point out the notes for Seth, who Matthew noticed did not get further than the second ostinato in their last attempt. When the woodblocks fall silent, a collective hush falls over the classroom. "Yay!" exclaims Joe. "That was much closer than the other one!" calls out Paul. The class break into spontaneous applause: they all managed to stop in time, and Seth made it to the ninth ostinato.

The principles of whole-class participatory performance can also be incorporated into composing activities (MacGregor, 2021; Savage & Challis, 2001). How might you draw on the vignette below to design a low-stakes, inclusive composition project?

3. Damian comes to the front of the classroom as his class are writing melodies to compose a whole-class rondo. Damian struggles to read and write musical notation, but he has finished the first four bars of his melody. He leads his teacher back to his keyboard, and demonstrates his idea, which is full of dotted rhythms and disjunct intervals. His teacher transcribes it alongside the melodies from the rest of the class, and plays it back for him to check. When the class listen back to their finished composition, they discuss what changes they would like to make to their piece. They suggest that Damian's melody could start in a different octave to fit better with the rondo refrain, but overall they agree that his melody

works well with the others. The finished piece is almost six minutes long, but they listen to it with rapt attention and applaud each other at the end.

Think particularly about how you could implement your lesson or unit in a way which emphasises the unique values of participatory culture and performance:

- inclusivity and collective achievement – everyone participates rather than consumes, and individual parts are subsumed by the collective whole;
- social coherence – everyone works together;
- cognitive flexibility – everyone engages in problem-solving.

Assessing participatory performance

Assessment protocols vary dramatically across different traditions of whole-class performing. In the United States, summative Music Performance Assessments focus on skills such as intonation, technique, and rhythm. Whole-class performing in the United Kingdom tends to be assessed differently depending on whether it is viewed as an opportunity for instrumental performance training or broader musical learning mediated through the affordances of learning an instrument (Fautley, Kinsella, & Whittaker, 2019; Johnson & Fautley, 2017).

Assessing whole-class participatory performance which has at its heart inclusivity, unity, and flexibility is far from straightforward. As Turino explains,

> in highly participatory traditions, the etiquette and quality of *sociality* is granted priority over the quality of the sound per se. Put another way, participatory music and dance is more about the social relations being realised through the performance than about producing art that can somehow be abstracted from those social relations. (Turino, 2008, p. 35, original emphasis)

How can assessment take place if the ultimate aim is not to produce a stand-alone artistic product? Is it possible – or desirable – to assess qualities such as sociality and inclusivity? And if so, is it possible to do so in a way that is considered reliable and valid in wider assessment practices and policies?

One possible answer to these questions lies in *ipsative assessment*. Ipsative assessment is a means of formative assessment in which young people are responsible for measuring their

progress against their own values and past achievements. Participants pursue particular aspects of development which they themselves deem to be desirable: such as mastering one then two hands at the keyboard; progressing from the second to the third phrase of a new piece; or improving the speed of a riff or ostinato (Fautley, 2015, p. 521).

Within participatory performance, however, ipsative assessment should be understood not as an individual endeavour (consider the Latin singular *ipse*: "-self"), but as a collective endeavour (consider the Latin plural *ipsi*: "-selves"). Participants should work together in a process of "community evaluation" (Odendaal, Kankkunen, Nikkanen, & Vakeva, 2014, p. 172) to establish how they could develop and improve as a collective whole – assessing their own individual progress according to how it contributes to the overall performance and community formation. This might be stimulated through dialogic engagement with the teacher, such as in this discussion after performing *In C*:

ME:	What was particularly good about that performance? Pietro?
PIETRO:	We got quite far.
ME:	We got quite far, good. So why is getting far good in this piece, from a listening perspective Pietro?
PIETRO:	Because if it's just the same thing over and over again it's boring.
ME:	Good. So we got through more patterns, that's more interesting. Renée?
RENÉE:	There were a lot of patterns going on.
ME:	Great. Lots of different patterns going on – and they were going at different times, which made it more interesting. Asil?
ASIL:	Well, like everyone else said, it did go on quite long, until the point that we didn't know where we were.
ME:	Good – so it did get to a point where it sounded like people weren't going to come back in. But that was OK – we had a kind of natural diminuendo. [...] Now, if we were to do it again [...] how could we have improved it further? Jason?

JASON:	It's very loud in the middle, and you can't hear anything, so someone should just break [drop out], or something.
ME:	Good.
PIETRO:	Or turn their piano down...
ME:	Yes. So it got to a point where it was very loud and the texture was very thick, and perhaps someone should have dropped out, or perhaps people should have played quieter. Thanks Jason. Anything else? [...] Lawrence?
LAWRENCE:	Yes?
ME:	What do you think? Were there any bits of that which you particularly thought, "I would never listen to this"?
LAWRENCE:	I mean, when everyone was getting really loud, and there was kind of like... there was some stuff, and then some people were just smashing their keyboards, and you kind of couldn't hear.

In this instance, we identified which features of the performance we particularly valued: progressing through lots of the ostinati and maintaining lots of overlapping patterns. We then evaluated our collective shortcomings which detracted from these positive features: the dynamics being too loud, and participants "just smashing their keyboards". We focussed on the collective nature of the performance – "*we* got quite far", "*we* got through more patterns", "*everyone* was getting really loud" – and made suggestions for improvement which would benefit everyone: "it's very loud in the middle, and you can't hear anything, so someone should just break [drop out], or something".

Task 4.3 *Assessing whole-class participatory performance*

While designing and delivering your lesson or unit of work from Task 4.2, consider how you could incorporate aspects of ipsative assessment. Remember that in participatory practices you are one of the participants too – what are your aims?

1. What individual aims do the participants have?
2. What collective aims do the participants have?

How could you structure your lesson or unit of work so that these aims are realised through the active process of performing or composing rather than the summative assessment of an end-product?

5. Reflection

Trying to initiate a flexible and dialogic approach to incorporate whole-class participatory performance in the classroom can feel daunting. My own experience teaching *In C* felt chaotic and disorderly, and discussions were frequently interrupted by tangential chatter and distractions. However, persevering in such situations can be the key to creating an environment which is conducive to the development of inclusivity, unity, and flexibility.

Task 5.1 *Evaluating whole-class participatory performance*

Reflect on your experience of designing, delivering, and assessing a lesson or unit of work focussed on whole-class participatory practices. What worked well? What would you change? What did you enjoy? What did you not enjoy?

Think back to your responses to Task 3.1. Now compare your own experience of whole-class participatory performance to your past experiences of presentational performance in the classroom (Task 2.2). Complete the following table contrasting their impacts on inclusivity, unity, and flexibility:

	Presentational performance	*Participatory performance*
Inclusivity		
Unity		
Flexibility		

Within a classroom which fosters participatory culture and participatory performance, these values – diverse inclusivity, social coherence, and cognitive flexibility – offer a secure foundation for teaching music in a postperformance world. Not only do they exceed the high-stakes, exclusive values commonly perpetuated through presentational performance, but they may also undergird accessible improvisation and composition activities, remixes and mash-ups, and even community outreach projects (Image 2). In such a classroom, musical encounters have the potential to resonate with young people's own participatory cultures, foster genuine engagement, and equip them with the skills and values necessary for lifelong participation in and enjoyment of music.

Image 2. *A school folk band play for a local ceilidh*

Further resources

A summary of Turino's work on presentational and participatory performance can be found in:

- Turino, T. (2009). Four Fields of Music Making and Sustainable Living. *The World of Music*, *51*(1), 95–117.

Examples of participatory performance projects for the classroom can be found in:

- D'Amore, A. (Ed.). (2009). *Musical Futures: An Approach to Teaching and Learning, Resource Pack* (2nd ed., pp. 51–60). London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.
- MacGregor, E. H. (2020). Participatory Performance in the Secondary Music Classroom and the Paradox of Belonging. *Music Education Research*, *22*(2), 229–241.
- Thibeault, M. D. (2015). Music Education for All through Participatory Ensembles. *Music Educators Journal*, *102*(2), 54–61.

Examples of participatory composition projects for the classroom can be found in:

- MacGregor, E. H. (2021). Repeats and Refrains. In J. Finney, C. Philpott, & G. Spruce (Eds.), *Creative and Critical Projects in Classroom Music: Fifty Years of Sound and Silence* (pp. 203–208). Abingdon: Routledge.
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Abstract

Today more than ever before the nature and role of musical performing in society is under scrutiny. We live in a "postperformance world", in which musical performing is no longer essential for accessing or consuming music. What, therefore, is the place of musical performing in today's classrooms? This chapter will reflect on current classroom performance practices and the ways in which they often resemble high-stakes, exclusive "presentational performance". Alternatively, "participatory performance" – in which there are no artist-audience distinctions – could be incorporated into the classroom to provide an accessible means of cultivating the unique evolutionary values of making music with others: diverse inclusivity, social coherence, and cognitive flexibility. Drawing on the introduction to whole-class workshopping in Chapter 9 of *Learning to Teach Music* (3rd edn), this chapter will consider how to design and deliver lessons involving whole-class participatory performance, and explore the role of ipsative assessment and community evaluation. It will conclude by evaluating the benefits and challenges of whole-class participatory performance and its potential to be integrated with improvisation, composition, and community initiatives.

Biography

Elizabeth MacGregor is currently a doctoral student at the University of Sheffield, where, under the supervision of Stephanie Pitts, she is researching the experience of "musical vulnerability" in the secondary music classroom. After studying with John Finney during her undergraduate degree at the University of Cambridge, Elizabeth worked as a secondary music teacher in two schools in Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire between 2016 and 2019. She has previously published work in the *British Journal of Music Education* and *Music Education Research* and has contributed to the volume *Creative and Critical Projects in Classroom Music: Fifty Years of Sound and Silence* (ed. Finney, Philpott, & Spruce, 2021).

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Image 1	Gill Booker, Highworth Folk Band	N.A.
Image 2	Gill Booker, Ashford Folk Dance Club	N.A.