

Music: An Alternative Education Source for Correctional Facilities

by

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Introduction

I had never planned on working at York Correctional Facility. The thought never even crossed my mind prior to starting my final year at Wesleyan University. I had taught music to Sudanese children in a refugee camp in Cairo the previous year and was looking for local community centers to work with children of similar ages. Instead, Emily Sheehan, a friend and fellow music major, invited me to join her in teaching a music workshop at a women's correctional facility in Niantic, Connecticut. Before fully understanding what I was getting myself into, I began facilitating a workshop at York Correctional Facility in October of 2009, where I introduced different styles of music from around the world and taught West African rhythms and music weekly to 5-10 incarcerated women between the ages of 17 and 65.

Since Emily and I were young undergraduate students still studying and learning ourselves, the incarcerated women were more able to feel comfortable and open up to us. Through our weekly interactions, the powerful effect music had on each individual became gradually more apparent. Holding workshops in a correctional facility and striving to fulfill the needs and wants of the women participating in our workshop called for much observation and flexibility. It often required a lot of prior planning and experimentation with different ideas. With good communication and a better understanding between facilitators and participants, we reworked newly discovered expectations into the original plans. The process allowed the flow and function of the workshop to unfold itself in

many unexpected and surprising ways, prompting me to question the criminal justice system and wonder what role education, and specifically art-based education programs might have in preventing future acts of offending or other changes in behavior. What are the roots of offending, and what factors earlier in life may cause one to commit a crime? What may or may not prevent or promote offense? What sort of “skills” may need to be acquired to prevent re-incarceration? How may art and art-based programs encourage these skills?

Having had previous personal interest, “music in prisons” and therapeutic uses of music were not completely foreign concepts to me before I began working with the women in York. The belief in the music therapy field is that interventions can be designed to promote wellness, manage stress, alleviate pain, express feelings, enhance memory, improve communication, and promote physical rehabilitation (American Music Therapy Association 2009). In the context of penitentiary systems, music therapy has been approached as an intervention with the opportunity of self-experience in a supportive, confidential environment for interaction and discussion. The hope is that by reflecting on the experience, there is a possibility of finding terms to describe, locate, evaluate, change, and adapt certain behaviors (Romanowski, 2007:470). Past art-based education programs have also discovered that music promotes accredited basic and key life skills programs that can help offenders gain employment on release from prison and prevent re-offense. *Good Vibrations* is a pilot program that uses Indonesian Javanese Gamelan as a part of their education program in

correctional facilities in the UK that focuses on the deployment of these skills as their main goal.

As I began researching and familiarizing myself with the experiences, methodology, and evaluation reports of *Good Vibrations* in the last seven years, my own approach of West African rhythms and music at York Correctional facility pointed towards a noticeable number of similarities and parallels. My experience drove me to delve deeper into the musical experience for those in correctional facilities and the music of gamelan and West African drumming. Can changes in behavior really be attributed to music? If so, what is it about gamelan or West African music that may be triggering these changes? Could other types of music encourage similar effects?

In order to answer these questions, I began to explore a number of issues surrounding the connection between arts and crime – recidivism, criminology theories, music therapy, the aesthetics of music from different cultures, and existing music programs in correctional facilities. This interdisciplinary thesis will begin with an explanation of why music is being utilized as a tool in education programs in correctional facilities. I will take a close look at the current crime climate (with a focus on the United States and the UK), issues surrounding behaviors of crime, and theories addressing the roots of criminal behavior and the possibility of transformation and change. This will lead into an exploration of current crime prevention programs, education, and how the role of creativity connects to recidivism. I will then look more closely at a specific music program in correctional facilities in the UK, *Good Vibrations*, where

Indonesian Javanese Gamelan is the creative tool used to encourage skills that could prevent recidivism. Following after is a detailed explanation of my personal experience in facilitating a West African music workshop at York Correctional Facility. Lastly, I will compare these two projects and draw conclusions about the qualities Javanese Gamelan and West African music both have that may be more generally applied to other types of music. It is my hope that the discovery of a set of beneficial qualities will expand the usage of music in alternative education programs in correctional facilities, broaden the styles and resources for these programs, and make learning more engaging and accessible to the incarcerated population.

Why Music in Correctional Facilities: Theories on Art and Offense

Correctional-based art education programs are hardly a new concept in certain parts of the world and received focus in penitentiary systems even before the early 1990s. Pilots for art programs in California correctional facilities began in the early 1970s (Brewster, 1983:1), and incorporating art into the education programs of correctional facilities has been a national movement in the United Kingdom for two decades now (Wilson, Caulfield, and Atherton, 2008:5). Arts activities are considered to have a range of benefits – from increased self-confidence to transferable skills that may help divert people away from pathways to crime and break the cycle of reoffending (Hughes 8).

Recidivism

The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics collects data on a broad spectrum of topics regarding the correctional population in the nation, including statistics of particular crime populations, capital punishment, state and deferral prison facilities, law enforcement, court sentencing, and recidivism. Recidivism refers to act of reoffending, sometimes repeatedly, and pertains to any of the following three consequences: re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration. According to the most recent data collected three years ago in 2007, the number of adults in the correctional population continues to increase and chances of reoffending remain high in the Unites States. By tracking released incarcerated individuals for the first three years after release in 15 states, the Bureau learned that out of

the population of 300,000 released incarcerated individuals, 67.5% were rearrested for a felony or a serious misdemeanor within 3 years, 46.9% were reconvicted, and 25.4% were resentenced to correctional facilities for a new crime (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2007).

In just three years, the fraction of formerly incarcerated individuals experiencing recidivism represented over two thirds of the released incarcerated population in the United States in 2007. The study included a wide range of demographics such as race, gender, age, criminal record, offense made, and length of stay during incarceration. Previous studies have also revealed that in the 1980's, re-incarceration rates were only at 62%, meaning that recidivism rates have actually increased in recent years. As the numbers from these studies have shown, recidivism is clearly an ongoing issue in the United States, as well as within other countries. In the UK, an analysis showed similar numbers, with about 60% of the population reoffending (Hughes 15).

Criminology: Pathways to Offending

In many cases, the principal reasons for people entering a correctional facility go far beyond the crimes they have committed; often those who are or have been incarcerated have long, emotionally complicated backgrounds that extend into the early years of their lives. Incarcerated populations include an alarmingly high proportion of people that suffer from early trauma – unstable broken homes, poverty, physical and sexual abuse, or exclusion from school (Greenhalgh 2007). Reports on the study of crime risk factors during the early

stages of life have shown that family influences such as substance use, exposure to physical aggression, and low socioeconomic statuses can trigger future violent acts of crime (Hoffman 2004:58). Wally Lamb's compilation of testimonies written by women of York Correctional Institution during his 11-year writing workshop reveals the common pattern of sexual abuse and/or incest in incarcerated women's pasts, sometimes even from a number of men. *Couldn't Keep it To Myself: Testimonies from the Women of York* is a collection of story after story describing the drawn out process of abuse, repression, the complexity of the women's pent up emotions, and the one split moment in their lives where they broke down that then resulted in their sentencing and incarceration.

Criminology is the science of crime and the complex, multidimensional situations that cause criminal actions. The field now draws from a range of disciplines - from social policy, psychology, and history to anthropology, biology, law, and political science, each field striving to shine a different light on the associated problems and provide a distinctive way of looking at, explaining, and understanding what leads an individual onto the pathway to offend (O'Brien, Yar 2008:x). It is important to understand that the science of criminology should not be viewed as a "field of study", but rather as insight to the workings of the criminal justice system and those who take part in it. The theories deal with complex human behavior and therefore allow room for hypotheses, probabilities, exceptions, and ongoing exploration and further development of the science rather than hard, generalizing statements (See 2004:5).

These theories, explanations, or “reasons” for crime may not excuse someone from committing them, but they do provide a deeper understanding as to *why* crimes are committed and the roots of behaviors that have led to incarceration (Greenhalgh 2007). Art-based education programs in prisons are currently seeking a better understanding of crime risk factors and addressing the roots of these issues. The hope is that by releasing untapped creativity within the incarcerated population, the arts can promote healing and change that relate directly and/or indirectly to the offending.

The Role of Education in Recidivism

With the understanding that many of the trajectories that lead to offending stem from specific and multidimensional situations and circumstances, there is ongoing research that seeks to directly address the possible factors that lead to offending. These studies are gaining prominence in the present justice system. Correctional education programs were believed to have the potential to impact the behavior of incarcerated individuals during and after release by providing hope for their students and the tools for an avenue of change. Leaders of such programs hoped that the changes in the behavior of those incarcerated elicited by education programs could promote better conduct within correctional facilities as well as prevent recidivism after release. However, due to the skepticism and criticism of the direct effectiveness of educational programs in correctional facilities, most states were, and still are,

struggling to keep education programs in facilities (Steurer, Smith, and Tracy 2001:8-9).

It was this reality of the difficulty of maintaining education programs in prisons that prompted The Correctional Education Association to conduct a detailed, lengthy study -- *The Three State Recidivism Study* for the United States Department of Education Office of Correctional Education in 1997. The study was designed to focus on gaining insight into whether there was a cause and effect relationship between education and the behavior of incarcerated individuals, and to assess whether or not correctional education programs were reducing the risk of recidivism for those individuals reentering their communities. The hypothesis was that incarcerated individuals who participated in correctional education programming would have lower re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration rates than those who did not participate. If proven, it was the hope that more emphasis on education programs as rehabilitation as well as a crime reduction tool could be implemented (Steurer, Smith, and Tracy 2001:11).

To conduct this study, the CEA surveyed the entire population of roughly 3, 200 incarcerated individuals released between 1997 and 1998 in Maryland, Minnesota, and Ohio. The research was designed by a number of correctional researchers and collection of data to be analyzed included the following:

- 1) Pre-Release Survey: Information of incarcerated individuals (given by self-report) on factors closely correlated with criminal behavior, i.e. socioeconomic, criminal history, family life, educational experiences,

and work history. The survey also included release plans, i.e. post-release residence.

- 2) Educational/Institutional Data: Covered criminal behavior, demographic information, institutional behavior, and education participation during incarceration. The data provided histories of long-term substance abuse, mental illness, and unstable family backgrounds.
- 3) Parole/Release Office Survey: Designed to collect data on subsequent criminal behavior, employment, and education experiences.
- 4) Post Release Criminal History Data: Supplied recidivism rates and data. Focus placed on 1) re-arrest, re-conviction, and re-incarceration
2) Time to recidivism 3) Type of offense
- 5) Employment Data: Described the kinds of jobs and amount of wages earned after release (Steurer, Smith, and Tracy 2001:13).

Incarcerated individuals participated in this survey on a voluntary basis, and data from the pre-release surveys showed that the refusal rate was very low. The studied population was separated into two groups – one comprised of those who participated in correctional education programs, and a comparison group of non-participants in correctional education programs. Due to the understanding that certain demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, and living environment place individuals at a greater risk for recidivism, the research made sure that the characteristics of the education participants compared to the non-participants were not significantly different and determined as sufficiently

equivalent, and that the motivations of individuals were more or less balanced. With a careful and cautious process of study, the results of the OBE/CEA *Three-State Recidivism Study* were able to evaluate the data and confirm that correctional education significantly reduced long-term recidivism for incarcerated individuals released in late 1997 and early 1998. The re-incarceration rate decreased by 29%: 31% of those who did not participate in education programs experienced re-incarceration whereas only 21% of those who participated education programs experienced re-incarceration. These results support the hypothesis that education can provide a real payoff to the public in terms of crime reduction and improved employment of ex-offenders, and that it may be wise to continue investments in correctional education programs (Steurer, Smith, and Tracy 2001).

The Role of Creativity and Alternative Education Programs

The arts are a special form of communication that has an integrative function – integrating and uniting the members of social groups, but also integrating individual selves, and selves with the world. [Artists communicate] through a different type of form and pattern that serve as an integrated map of sensations, imagination, and experience. It is through these patterns that we are most deeply connected to and part of the natural world. This integrative wholeness of individuals developed through artistic experience is crucial to experiencing deep connections with others and with the environment, which is crucial for social and ecological survival.

– Gregory Bateson, *Anthropologist/Scientist*
(Adapted from “*Music as Social Life*”)

While education programs in correctional facilities address many of the issues surrounding a lack or loss of basic and key skills for survival and strive to provide training during incarceration and post-release periods, it is believed that the artistic realm has the ability to address the emotional aspects that may also impede the acquisition of these basic and key skills. As the limitations of more traditional and/or conventional forms of education were recognized and acknowledged, correctional education programs continued, but alternative education programs embracing the arts, such as theater, dance, music, and visual arts also began to surface.

Artistic creative therapy studies have shown that the effect of psychological trauma on individuals can manifest in a range of well-documented effects: shattered belief systems, disempowerment and deskilling, and feelings of helplessness and dehumanization. Other effects include a loosened grasp of reality, mind/body alienation, disturbed sleep, acute attacks of fear, inability to engage in pre-trauma relationships and lifestyle, and inability to trust or to feel safe. Many of these effects of trauma can lead people to make sporadic, rash decisions, and some may even fall into a cycle of retaliation, a common result of traumatic abuse. The suffering of victims of abuse or early trauma often can cause brutal and inhumane feelings towards others, and if these victims are more unfortunate, their actions may result in arrest, sentencing, and incarceration, as seen and described in the women's testimonies from York Correctional Facility (Sutton 2002:74-75).

Art therapy theorizes and believes, because of numerous case studies, that creativity can be used to address effects of trauma and change the present “reality” that has taken control of the victim’s mind and body. Psychologists often associate those who have suffered from abuse and trauma with feelings of helplessness, silence, and dependence. Creativity can resist these oppressive associations and refuse feelings of victimhood and helplessness because the creation of something new is an *act of defiance* in the face of destruction. To overcome these oppressive states and recover, it is important for people with a traumatic past to find their own voice and power and define their own thoughts and decisions, allowing them to finally break free from the effects of trauma. June Boyce-Tillman stresses that there is “great stress on *freedom* that is a necessary part to the creativity process.” The arts are often viewed as a place in time where one is allowed to play, explore the subconscious and make mistakes – important arenas of self-development. The notion of rebellion, challenging conventions of society by exploring new ideas, is a vital part of the free play, creative process (Boyce-Tillman 2000:19).

Case studies and verbal feedback showed that patients were able to arrive at new understandings and insights by processing events in a creative way, for instance through music, dance, or drama. These feelings surfaced especially in a case study facilitated by a number of therapists that involved working with survivors of a war in Northern Ireland that resulted in massive numbers of deaths caused by explosions and shooting. Art therapists believe that creativity is necessary to the process of rebuilding one’s shattered belief system

resulting from abuse or trauma, and that it allows people to reconnect with a rebuilt, “new” reality, and transform repressed anger, bitterness, and depression into more tolerable and healthy forms of emotion (Sutton 2002:76-77). By incorporating an artistic aspect, education programs in correctional facilities are more likely to provide people with the chance to rebuild themselves from previous traumas, regain the necessary emotions to abandon previous behaviors that put them at risk for incarceration, and acquire the tools for future acceptable behavior and skills to live within society.

Challenges and Difficulties: Evaluating the Complex Process of Change

Although studies have demonstrated evidence that education and art based correctional programs may encourage changes and prevent behaviors that lead to recidivism, some prevailing challenges exist in evaluating the effectiveness of the programs in the various correctional facilities. One of these challenges lies in establishing a cause and effect relationship between arts based educational programs and change in behavior. It is crucial to understand at this point that defining “change” is much more difficult than many theories and studies are willing to acknowledge and explore. Studies of intentional modification and alterations of behaviors demonstrate that while change is possible, it involves processes that are not well understood, so it is difficult to define a cause and effect relationship between an artistic tool and a transformation. There are many other factors, or combinations of factors, that

could have led an individual to make the transition. In the developmental stages of life, understanding the process of change is even more challenging.

Those who have conducted research acknowledge that significant psychological and conscious change is a non-linear, multi-dimensional process involving both personal journeys and interactions with other people that guide the transformation. It is a complex result of numerous individual, conscious, and sometimes difficult decisions. Many people need guidance from a mentor or supportive network of people to make a significant change in their psyche. The key here is that although change is a personal decision, social and interactive processes are vital. Gregory Bateson argues that, “the integrative wholeness of individuals is crucial to experiencing deep connection with others and with the environment, which is crucial for social and ecological survival” (Cited in Turino 2008:4). The acquisition of social skills for everyday interactions and activity is essential to the lives of each individual, as we all undergo numerous daily changes and decision-making processes. With this in mind, anti-social behavior and social environments that trigger or encourage anti-social behavior have become one of the main issues crime prevention programs address, especially amongst the youth and adolescent age group.

There are several approaches that have proved to be effective in reducing crime and violence in younger age groups; one common approach they take aims to prevent association with antisocial peers and/or redirect peer group behavior toward pro-social activities. Another approach is to focus on involving

individuals in conflict resolution with peers, such as peer mediation and conflict resolution programs (Hoffman 2004:107-165).

Regardless of method, change takes time and effort, and since old patterns are easy to fall back into, the process is rarely a very smooth one. However, studies have shown that those who *acknowledge* the need for something to be different and want to undergo what it will take to find an alternative from the present situation have already begun the process of change and can be worked with in a number of ways. It should therefore be recognized that when incarcerated individuals *choose* to participate in an education or alternative education program on a voluntary basis, they are already taking a step towards the process of transformation, and are more likely to change. Art-based educational programs hope to attract and engage members of the incarcerated population that may have had negative experiences with traditional forms of education and feel more reluctant or unwilling to learn.

A crucial point in aiding and guiding change is that the “*styles* of helping and modes of treatment, services, and opportunities must be closely matched to the preferred learning style and abilities of the particular individuals” (Hoffman 2004:196). Therefore, even though change is a complex process with fluctuations between high and low points, its multi-dimensional nature also allows room for creative interventions to address certain stages and processes of evaluation and self-reflection that more traditional modes of intervention may lack.

Why Music?

Putting the theories of arts in therapy into practice has shown that the arts have the potential to offer a range of innovative ways to enhance and extend educational, developmental and therapeutic programs across the criminal justice sector. The arts in general have been tied to positive criminal justice outcomes and can play an important part in changing the individual, institutional and social circumstances that lead to criminal behavior. They not only offer participants a creative outlet, but can also encourage participants to engage in further learning and education (Hughes 8). Combating recidivism involves highlighting transformation at all levels of the process. Using education to rehabilitate incarcerated individuals and support their re-integration into the community outside correctional facilities requires “an educational discourse and methodology that is embedded in concepts of emancipation and empowerment, where creativity and heuristic learning enable personal transformation” (Wilson, Caulfield, and Atherton 2008:6). Although the aims and rationales of each arts program in each correctional facility vary, the general application and impact of arts practice is targeted towards the following four aims:

- 1) Engaging the incarcerated individuals in the processes of learning and education.
- 2) Intervening to assist reintegration and resettlement in society
- 3) Improving behaviors within the correctional facility and as a result positively affecting the relationships between the incarcerated individuals and the facility community staff.

4) Preventing recidivism and the risks of reoffending (Hughes 8).

Music, specifically, plays a crucial role in art programs in correctional facilities because of its embedded and innovative social role. Music therapist Bob Romanowski describes the relationship of music to our lives in this way:

Music and the musical experience are essential to human culture. It is among the oldest forms we know. It serves purposes of mental hygiene and social integration. Music is the key technique to ensure contact and synchronization between individuals in groups. It is embedded in social relations and fulfills its functions in all sorts of contexts. (Romanowski 2007:468)

Many anthropologists have similar viewpoints and suggest that the arts are “central to human evolution and human survival”. Many festivities and cultural customs include activities surrounded by music and dance that articulate the different collective identities of various social groups. Interaction between groups and the sharing of cultural knowledge and styles is often articulated through the performing arts, frequently in public venues. As Turino puts it, “musical performances are key to identity formation because they are often public presentations of the deepest feelings and qualities that make a group unique” (Turino 2008:2-3). Music is social intimacy, something humans simply cannot and should not live without.

Music therapists who have worked with various types of patients in hospitals, residential homes, and correctional facilities have found that music can be used to unlock both painful and pleasant areas of memory through playing, improvising, performing, or listening (Boyce-Tillman 2000:264). It was brought to attention earlier in this section that the process of change is multi-

dimensional and multi-layered. Music is also capable of having multiple meanings – personal, cultural, and inherent – that can be explored internally and externally. This ability allows music the possibility to work well with the complex dimensions and layers of emotions involved in change that cannot be addressed through other traditional or conventional functions, such as verbal speech or written words. As Hanne Metter Koretegaard says: “The function of the music in music therapy is to provide a space for the exploration of feelings attached to transference, counter-transference, and the new symbols created through this therapeutic relationship” (Boyce-Tillman 2000:204).

It is certainly difficult to quantify the power of music, but it is undeniable that humans have always been aware of the relationship between music and emotions. Boyce-Tillman states that, “free expression of emotion or feeling and its encoding in musical structures features highly in the literature on music.” She goes on to argue that someone in touch with music can explore their own feelings, even those that are unspeakable and contained, sometimes hidden so deep that accessing the emotions might be too overwhelming to handle. Boyce-Tillman brings up an interesting feature of music to address these overwhelming situations. While music can release blocked emotions, she believes that “the very process of music-making from these deep sources is also a containment of potentially overwhelming feelings and emotions.” She describes an experience in which a classroom full of disruptive, aggressive behavior can be contained in the process of drumming (Boyce-Tillman 2000:40-41). Since anti-social behavior is often believed to be a factor that can lead to future behaviors of offending, the

experience of music-making with other individuals may provide everyone with “an equal opportunity for communication and socialization” (Boyce-Tillman 2000:209).

Some therapists believe that the use of music with two or more people playing together encourages a greater degree of intimacy than is possible through the more common medium of words. Boyce-Tillman explains the importance of community music making with the idea of “the process of entrainment”. When a group of people makes music together, a process of entrainment may take place in which the formation of a rough common pulse occurs, so that amongst even the most diverse of groups, all are involved in some type of synchronized action. This unifying moment creates a potential for a close, intimate relationship (Boyce-Tillman 2000:36-37). If the intimacy and trust is built, the interactions allow one to further understand and form their own individual personality and find their real self. Part of this process also establishes boundaries in which participants discover the limits of other people and distinguish them from other people (Boyce-Tillman 2000:209-215). These qualities make music an especially useful tool in addressing the anti-social behaviors that are believed to be a prominent factor in the cycle of offending.

With this power of music in mind, music programs in correctional facilities are becoming more and more widespread and valued. Currently in the United States, there are many drum circle facilitations in juvenile centers in San Francisco and church groups across the nation bring in music equipment to lead choirs in county correctional facilities (Elsila 2010). *Storycatchers Theater* is a

foundation based in Chicago that uses the creating, writing, producing, and performing of original musical theater for incarcerated youth to set goals, link decisions to consequences, and find their voices. *Jail Guitar Doors USA*, an organization originally founded in the United Kingdom, focuses on providing musical instruments for the incarcerated population to be empowered through the creation of songs and better the facility environments through reducing violence. Billy Bragg first launched *Jail Guitar Doors* in the UK in honor of the life of The Clash founder, Joe Strummer. The project is named after the song released by The Clash that describes the imprisonment experience of their fellow musician, Wayne Kramer. Not only is the organization bringing in musical experiences to education programs designed for the incarcerated populations across the United States, but it uses its influence to produce events and campaigns that promote awareness of issues surrounding correctional facility reform and new solutions for the justice system.

One the largest projects that utilizes music in correctional facilities is the Irene Taylor Trust in the UK. The Irene Taylor Trust “Music in Prisons” was first set up in memory of the late Lord Chief Justice Peter Taylor, who had personal interests in both penal reform and music. The idea was first brought up by the Taylor family after the death of Irene Taylor, and was begun in collaboration with Sara Lee, a music coordinator at the facility HMP Wormwood Scrubs, where they organized and delivered the first three projects in her front room.

Since then, The Irene Taylor Trust has been working “at the forefront of arts and rehabilitation since 1995, bringing creative music projects to men and

women of all ages in prisons through the UK.” They acknowledge that the incarcerated individuals they work with are “some of the most socially disadvantaged and excluded, having faced a range of issues such as abuse, violence, drug abuse, mental health problems, exclusion from school, and homelessness. Their philosophy is that by allowing the incarcerated individuals the freedom to create and perform music, these music projects provide the space for them to “develop new skills, raise life aspirations, and play a positive role in their community. They hope that the music programs can allow their experience inside the correctional facility walls to be “more than just the stigma of having been there.” Since 1995, when the trust was first set up by the Taylor family and Sara, the team has grown and delivered over 170 projects in over 50 correctional facilities involving more than 2,000 incarcerated participants with performances shared by almost 10,000 audience members (Plater and Pearson 2010). One of the renowned projects delivered and funded by the *Irene Taylor Trust* was “Good Vibrations”, an Indonesian gamelan music project.

A Closer Look into Music in Correctional Facilities: Good Vibrations

“Gamelan has opened a new door, it could change how I think.”

“[It was an experience of] pleasure, relaxation, and inspiration

– I’ve never said those words about anything before.”

“I learned to trust others, appreciate what others can do, that

sometimes I need help and can’t do everything on my own – [it

will help me] in other group situations.”

- Participants of Good Vibrations

Good Vibrations is a pilot “Music in Prisons” project started and coordinated by Cathy Eastburn in year 2003. The project was originally devised during the preceding year with the aim to bring Javanese Gamelan, Indonesian percussive music, into a range of correctional facilities and incarcerated populations in the UK: HMP Wakefield, HMP Nottingham, HMYOI Glen Parva, HMP Brixton, and HMP Wolds being the first few. Before Eastburn established *Good Vibrations*, she had been vigorously involved in community Gamelan classes and groups and was struck by the ensemble’s ability to develop teamwork and communication skills (Mendonca 2009:19). Having observed Javanese gamelan and its role as an educational performance tool, she was

interested in exploring its potential in environments with marginalized groups such as correctional facilities.

Since its very beginning, the goal of *Good Vibrations* was to assess the effectiveness of particular attributes associated with playing and performing Javanese gamelan in enhancing an incarcerated individuals' self-esteem and developing certain basic and key skills that could "boost their employability". When the Local Education Authority in the UK first delivered education in correctional facilities in 1991, they established a Core Curriculum four years after, where education in correctional facilities focused on literacy, numeracy, IT (technology), social, and life skills. (Wilson, Logan 2006:7). The *Good Vibrations* team kept this in mind and aimed towards encouraging and promoting basic and key skills that were developed by the education establishment where basic skills cover literacy and numeracy, and key skills cover communication, application of numbers, working with others, improving one's learning performance and problem-solving. The reasoning for the establishment of *Good Vibrations* was the growing awareness that there was a link between poor educational experiences and unemployment and/or re-offending. Research studies released by the Social Exclusion Unit in 2002 estimated that out of the current incarcerated population, 60% lacked literacy skills and 75% lacked the necessary numeracy skills to apply and work for 96% of the jobs on release from correctional facilities: "Half of all prisons are at or below Level 1 (the level expected of an 11-year-old) in reading; two-thirds in numeracy; and four-fifths in writing" (Wilson, Caulfield, Atherton 2008:7). This deficit of skills along with the prejudices and unequal

chances many incarcerated individuals face when returning to their communities drove *Good Vibrations* to address these specific skills as part of their goal in applying gamelan music to education programs.

However, studies showed that many incarcerated individuals have had previous negative experiences with more traditional and conventional forms of educational means. The House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee recommended that education in correctional facilities not only focus on reducing recidivism through increasing the employability of the incarcerated individuals, but also focus on “developing the person as a whole”. The committee suggested that education in correctional facilities have a mechanism to develop ways of engaging with incarcerated populations that are different from those used in other communities, based on the individual needs of “previously failed learners” (Wilson, Logan 2006:8-9). The team believed that using the arts – in this case Indonesian gamelan music making – might encourage future engagement with more conventional and traditional modes of learning as well as empower the incarcerated individuals through personal development, growth, and increased self-confidence. The hope was that the attainment of basic and key skills would then have a long-term impact on the incarcerated individuals during the remainder of their sentence as well as during the re-integration process back into their communities and the rest of their lives after release. Since 2003, *Good Vibrations* has worked with 24 correctional facilities across the UK, including

Category A, B, and C¹ correctional facilities, young offenders institutions and secure hospitals.

Why Indonesian Gamelan?

Javanese gamelan music is the music of the bronze percussion orchestras of Central Java. The music is full of interlocking rhythms, layers of melodies and rippling textures. In Java, gamelans are usually housed in palaces, radio stations, wealthy merchant houses, and business offices, and are a vital component of celebrations as well as a part of everyday life. It is an integral part of all cultural activities, performances, and dance. A particularly interesting feature of the Javanese gamelan is that tradition dictates the function of each instrument, and the instrument's function usually remains the same for all pieces in the repertoire. The instruments can be classified under the five following functions: melodic, accentuating, abstracting, elaborating, and tempo leading. In Java alone, there are thousands of gamelans, each one unique in their own construction and ornamentation, and many are given their own name to express the specific *rasa*, emotional feeling, created by their sound (Vetter 1977:1-4).

There are currently over sixty sets of gamelan ensembles in the UK, many of which are used in the community – school groups, young people with learning disabilities, individuals with mental health issues and substance abusers. Cathy Eastburn and the team believed that Indonesian gamelan had particular attributes that made it appropriate to utilize in a community or correctional

¹ The Category A, B, and C is a system of the United Kingdom that can be similarly translated to the Level 1-5 minimum to maximum security used in the United States.

facility setting. The following noteworthy attributes are an accumulation of Eastburn and her team's viewpoints as well as my personal studies and observations:

1. **Gamelan is neutral.** Although Javanese Gamelan has made its way around different places beyond Indonesia, its expansion is not always directly linked to the immigration of Indonesian individuals. This is a positive aspect in this particular context because the UK still does not have a sizeable population of Indonesians, so ensemble players, instructors and incarcerated individuals alike share a "lack of familiarity" with the music. There is no specialist in the group, and all learn and develop together as a group on equal footing. Gamelan does not have any social connotations that might alienate people, and it is socially inclusive.
2. **Gamelan is accessible.** From a technical music point of view, gamelan ensemble percussive music is easy to learn even when participants have no previous musical experience, because the underlying structure is easily understood and is not too technically challenging. In gamelan, teaching and playing the music does not rely heavily on notation, so the ability to read music is not required. Gamelan was traditionally an orally transmitted tradition, and a standard system of notation still does not exist (Vetter 1977:2), so it is quite natural to learn Gamelan without being able to read music. The more straightforward forms of gamelan music frequently used in the

workshops can be learned and performed very quickly. Often, a group can play an entire piece of music of decent quality after just once quick two-hour session.

3. **Gamelan is communal and egalitarian.** The ensemble does not have a role of authority of any traditional form (i.e. leader or conductor). Players are often encouraged to swap instruments. Each player is of equal importance. Cooperation is emphasized in order for the music to come together. Many of the musical changes (i.e. dynamics, tempo) are discussed and negotiated together as a group during the course of learning to play the piece.
4. **Gamelan has a “flexible” quality.** Vetter stresses that in Javanese Gamelan, as long as the melody, tuning system, and mode of a piece are known, a realization of a particular piece on a particular instrument may not be the same as another realization, but both are acceptable. The overall result of any one piece can also vary from one performance to the next, depending on how many times a piece or section is repeated, what tempo it is performed at, and whether or not certain variable section are inserted, allowing a wide range of possibilities (Vetter 1977:2-3). In the specific case of *Good Vibrations*, the realization of each piece that is taught and learned is discussed and decided together as a group. Furthermore, many of the musical relationships within a composition are fixed before the performance, although the perception of these relationships can be affected to a

degree by the performance itself. In a Central Javanese gamelan piece, only a few musical relationships exist before performance, so the formal relationships resulting from a number of performances of the same piece can be, and usually are, markedly different (Vetter 1977:90). This means that the product of the performance put together by the group is unique and a team effort, and a collaborative event, a shared creation.

5. **Gamelan encourages social interactive skills.** The instrumental parts are interlocking, creating numerous, natural musical connections between players. An important and unique formal aspect of Gamelan is the way in which accents are produced in a piece of music. The creation of stress through tonic, dynamic, and agogic accent that occurs in Western music is not found in gamelan music, but instead, accent is brought about when a pitch in a melody unit is reinforced by the elaborating and abstracting instruments more than other pitches within the same unit (Unisonal accent), and when a stroke of one or more instrument coincides with a melodic pulse (Colotomic accent) (Vetter 1977:91). The action of creating stress/accents is also a collaborative effort and is not done by one individual or a single effort, encouraging participants to work with one another in order to produce the desired sounds and effects.

Other attributes of Gamelan music that are related to this study include:

6. Playing instruments encourages focus and concentration. Participants need to listen carefully for cues, to count, and to build up physical coordination.
7. Gamelan encourages discipline. There are specific rules required by the gamelan ensemble and Indonesian culture that participants are expected to respect and follow.
8. Gamelan can be therapeutic. Its sounds are full of resonance and complex harmonies that can be particularly aesthetically pleasing. The hard striking of mallets and padded sticks can be a venue of release for anger and frustration that is non-violent, harmless, and possibly therapeutic.

With regard to *Good Vibration* projects of more recent years, observations showed that the unfamiliarity of Gamelan presented opportunities for incarcerated participants to reflect on their lives without the potentially intimidating context of formal “therapy sessions”. One participant commented that playing the Gamelan was similar to taking drugs because it gave her a similar high and ceased her worrying about her problems for the period of time she was engaged with the music. In addition to self-reflections, it was also a springboard for one’s own and others’ personalities. The ensemble was able to verbally communicate that playing the music was very much like a spoken, lively conversation with a large variety of agreements, frustrations, backing down when necessary, disagreements, and at times aggression (Digard, Sponeck, Leibling 4).

It was an especially engaging and interactive situation where instructors encouraged group members to spend time reflecting on how much time was spent 1) *observing* what other participants were playing in order to know when and when not to play 2) *leading* the group, when there were moments where some participants were able to learn and pick up patterns faster than others and guided their peers 3) *following* others, and lastly 4) *opposing* the group in order to move the piece in a new direction. These principles of performing gamelan music allowed certain participants to reflect on the analogous characteristics and personalities of people as well. These examples provide evidence that Gamelan music not only discourages participants from engaging in anti-social behavior, but it also addresses specific social “etiquette” (Digard, Sponeck, Leibling 4-5).

The Process: Format and Methodology

The pilot format of *Good Vibration* workshops began with running a few short “taster” sessions for the participants to get a feel for the experience, in which then they were given the choice to sign up for longer, “in-depth” workshops that would last several days for the remainder of the week. Most workshops would last at least a week, sometimes longer. The project was available to any incarcerated individual. Later projects sometimes worked with targeted groups such as the unemployed or addicts. The program did not require any musical training prior to participation, and for many individuals it was their first educational experience in the facility setting (Wilson, Caulfield, Atherton

2008:8). These weeklong workshops included learning how to play traditional pieces of Gamelan music and “creating” their own compositions as a group (due to the nature of Javanese compositions). They concluded with a concert performance in the presence of staff, peers, family members and others who were invited, as well as with a CD recording that was distributed to the participants to keep and send to family members.

In order to assess and rate the impact of the workshops on the incarcerated participants’ basic skills and their self-esteem, rigorous monitoring and evaluation were obviously crucial to the project’s overall success. It was therefore essential to construct, obtain, and analyze the correct data during the project. For assessment purposes, the team defined specific project outputs that would vary from facility to facility, and a set of outcomes that were desired. These outcomes were related to the impact of the project on the participants.

During the first year of their pilot project, there were significant gaps in the data collected, and many of the questionnaires were not completed, especially in the taster sessions. However, it was noted that voluntary and willing feedback were probably more valuable and accurate, and therefore still provided the team with a “successful” evaluation.

The Results of the Project

During the pilot project of Good Vibrations in 2003 supplied by Cathy Eastburn, a total of 124 incarcerated individuals participated in the taster sessions and 64 completed the in-depth workshops. The project was believed to

be an overall success, and an analysis of the data and feedback gathered suggested that the gamelan music workshops helped participants in developing basic and key skills and in building more self-esteem.

After six months of completing the Good Vibrations project, research suggested that participants experienced the following:

- Greater levels of engagement and an increased openness to join and participate in wider learning opportunities. Statistics from more recent projects show that over 50% of the participants that were involved with the *Good Vibrations* Gamelan project continued to other, more mainstream, forms of education.
- Improved listening and communication skills
- Improved social skills
- Improved social interaction
- Improved relationships with staff of correctional facility
- Decreased levels of anger and violence; a greater sense of calmness

It is important to note that *Good Vibrations* strived to “work” on a variety of levels. Through discussion and observation with incarcerated populations and staff members of more recent projects of *Good Vibrations*, three dominant themes for the process of change and transformation emerged from the evaluations, which are metaphorically referred to by the project as “breaking down walls” (Wilson, Logan 2006:12). These three themes are as follows:

1. Break down walls individuals felt prevented them from socializing with other people.

“On the wings we’re in our own little world, just surviving. I wanted to meet people and build bridges. I can work with people now, and I’m helping. It can help me to see the person. On the wings they used to just blank me out. I felt that I was a loner, but here I’m developing social skills.” – BXT6

As mentioned before, difficult decisions that help individuals move towards the process of change often involve a social and interactive process, and require some sort of mentor guidance and/or role model, a particular person that made a difference, and/or supportive network of people. To quote Gregory Bateson again, “the integrative wholeness of individuals is crucial to experiencing deep connection with others and with the environment, which is crucial for social and ecological survival” (Turino 2008:4). *Good Vibrations* observed that the wall of socializing was one of the most prevalent during their engagement with the incarcerated populations. The team observed that feelings of “[being] a part of something” and “building bridges” gave the individuals a sense of belonging and encouraged them to develop social and group working skills. By making friends and gaining a social network, individuals obtained a supportive group to help them overcome the various pressures and difficulties associated with being in a correctional facility (Wilson, Logan 2006:13).

2. Break down walls – dependent on individual cases – that prevented them from moving forward in their lives by empowering them, and building up

their self-confidence and self-esteem. *Good Vibrations* observed that many of their incarcerated individuals suffered from addiction problems, often related to drinking and drugs – realistic barriers that prevent them from moving forward (Wilson, Logan 2006:14-15). As mentioned before, creativity can be a tool in addressing changing the present “reality” that has taken control over the victims mind and body. Creativity can resist feelings of helplessness because the creation of something new is an *act of defiance* in the face of destruction, and where one can find their own voice and power and define their own thoughts and decisions. June Boyce-Tillman stresses that the creative process is a place in time where one is allowed to play, explore the subconscious, and make mistakes – important arenas of self-development, which can promote self-esteem (Boyce-Tillman 2000:19).

“Nobody’s an expert in gamelan and so everybody’s equal. Who’s going to know if you play a good note or the wrong one? I don’t even know what a good note sounds like!” – Participant

Through the creative process of playing Gamelan, learning instruments together with participants that have also never played a musical instrument before allowed the group to explore with this new experience and make mistakes without feeling as disadvantaged or vulnerable as they might have in a more traditional learning setting. This advantage of Gamelan helped the growth of individual self-confidence and the sense of

accomplishment after performances gave them an achievement to be proud of (Wilson, Logan 2006:16).

3. Break down walls to future learning. It was *Good Vibrations* observation that incarcerated populations' enthusiasm for engagement with education in general were not high, and with certain cases, some had negative associations with education due to previous experiences. The different nature of learning and performing in a gamelan ensemble provided an academic learning environment that seemed less threatening and seemed to contain less room for failure and disappointment. "Whereas basic maths might have intimidated, the Gamelan [seemed to persuade]" (Wilson, Logan 2006:22). Evaluations have described this process of breaking down walls to further education to be less "successful" than the previous two. Many associated fears or negative feelings remained present in the classrooms that impeded further interest in learning. However, the project still introduced a gateway to more formal education courses. Several participants continued to other courses in the education programs within the correctional facilities, which can be seen as the first step to opening themselves to the possibility of change through education (Wilson, Logan 2006:17-18). As previous studies have shown, willingness to engage with education and learn new skills could better their chances of employment as well as prevent them from reoffending.

Recent Advancements – Breaking Down Walls

Since the project was first launched, *Good Vibrations* has been carefully evaluating and modifying their projects year by year to better suit the incarcerated population in the UK by stressing an ethnographic focus, and expanding their work to reach out to a larger number of correctional facilities. A previous *Good Vibration* evaluation made by the Firebird Trust in 2005 made the claim that “participation [brings] about a fundamental change in thinking and behavior through developing an [incarcerated individuals’] self confidence, improving their listening and communication skills, and their ability to work as a team. As such, the potential exists to help break a prisoner’s cycle of abuse and violence, and help contribute towards desistance from further crime on release (Wilson, Logan 2006:3).

Their more recent take on an ethnographic approach reveals *Good Vibration’s* understanding of the complexity of the criminology theories explained earlier in this thesis. Ethnography is broadly defined as “the study of people in their natural setting, typically resulting in the researcher being present for extended periods of time in order to collect data systematically about a groups’ daily activities, and the meanings that they attach to them” (Wilson, Logan 2006:4-5). With experience, the team also recognized that the incarcerated populations they were working with often came from “hard to reach” groups, and desired a deeper understanding of a “difficult community group (Wilson, Logan 2006:21). The two forms of data collection that resulted from this were participation observation and in-depth interviews, which they

believed allowed the participants to “speak for themselves” and have a more prominent voice in the research data-collecting process (Wilson, Logan 2006:5). With the understanding that the process of change and transformation is a complex one, and labeling cause and effect is tricky, it is the team’s belief that in order to better understand *desistance*, the causal factors that stop people from committing crime, is important to pay attention to what the incarcerated individuals themselves say and how they describe what is happening to them. Participants interviewed at length were asked to describe their experiences of the project and what they felt they gained from it. It also asked them to elaborate on their experience and behavior after the project (Wilson, Caulfield, Atherton 2008:11). The personal accounts give the team an added advantage of observing and realizing what particular roles individuals find themselves in when participating in *Good Vibrations*. They also shed light on their own personal growth and self-development (Wilson, Logan 2006:10). They also allowed the team to assess and quantify any potential emotional and psychological changes experienced during the project and the upholding of these changes in the long term (6 month after participation was the time frame between participation and interview) (Wilson, Caulfield, Atherton 2008:11).

What is most important to *Good Vibrations* is that it acts as a gateway to other learning and encourages incarcerated individuals to engage with additional training and education opportunities, especially those who would have never considered enrolling in education departments within correctional facilities. By promoting self-confidence and self-esteem and developing better

interactive social skills through the experience of playing and performing Javanese Gamelan, *Good Vibrations* hopes to address the number of tensions related to education that occur in many incarcerated populations, and play a major role in empowering incarcerated individuals to take their first steps towards what it takes to break down their walls and move forward in their lives (Wilson, Logan: 2006:22-25).

It is apparent that the growth and improvements of *Good Vibrations* in the last seven years have had a positive impact on the incarcerated populations in the UK. And it comes as no surprise that the project continues even today and is gradually gaining more press attention in the UK. When I first became aware of *Good Vibrations* during the early stages of leading my own music workshop at York Correctional Facility, my understanding of the project strengthened my belief in the potential West African music might have with the women at York. It also stirred up a deeper curiosity about the possibility of similar qualities between gamelan and West African music that allow them to interact with people in a positive way.

West African Music in York: A Personal Experience

What we generally consider most wonderful about art is its enduring ability to affect us, to withstand the test of time, as the saying goes, and to transcend the limitations of its particular historical and cultural location.

– John Miller Chernoff

I first began working at York Correctional Facility in October of 2009, where my friend Emily Sheehan and I would facilitate a weekly music workshop for one and a half hours on early Tuesday mornings. Focusing on West African Rhythms with the women at York Correctional Facility was not my original plan. During a training session with the York education program librarian we were advised to approach the workshop with a rough plan in mind, but with the mindset that we would need to adjust as we gradually learned how to meet the needs of the group of women we were working for that period of time. For the first workshop I held with Emily, I brought in a selection of music from around the world, half of which were film scores, an earlier musical interest of mine. Since the very beginning, I noticed the enthusiasm and rise of energy level when I played songs that had a more exciting rhythmic pattern or heavy bass beats. The actual Ghanaian drumming piece I brought in early on got them excited for more, and I was requested to bring in similar pieces.

I had personal experience with West African drumming and dance at Wesleyan University, having taken both courses simultaneously with our professors from Ghana, Abraham Adzenyah and Iddi Saaka, the previous year. In a journal entry about the drumming course, I had recalled the experience to be one that I could not explain in words, which had a positive internal and external impact on my own daily life that semester. When I returned to the ensemble with my professor and his teaching assistant Brian Parks to ask for assistance on my work with the women in York, I was reminded of the way drumming allowed me full concentration and focus that kept me centered the rest of the day during my academic studies. I also recalled how Ghanaian drumming engaged my mind with my body and pumped up my adrenaline with each repetitious rhythmic pattern. I often finished drumming in a better emotional state than I was before, and feel encouraged to continue with the rest of the day just as engaged and connected with myself. It was then that I decided that West African drumming would need to be the music I wanted to consistently bring in to the women, in the hope that it would open up the opportunity for the women to experience how rhythms run through the body. I hoped it might provide an engaging sensation with the self, as well as a general de-stressing, relaxing time, even if just for the hour and a half we spent together weekly.

Why West African Drumming?

"This isn't about drumming, it is about relationship!"

Arthur Hull, "Drum Circle Spirit"

John Miller Chernoff, author of *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* and other ethnographers studying and interacting with African art forms and dance suggest in their writing that there is a completely different aesthetic standard beyond the general Western perspective of viewing, a whole other worldview – an African worldview. It is my belief that this different perspective opens new doors for people to engage with themselves and deal with certain inhibited emotions that can possibly prompt change in feelings and/or behaviors. It is important to state at this point that Chernoff and most of the other ethnographers focused their observations in a specific area of Africa – West Africa in his case – and their descriptions of certain characteristics should not be generalized to apply to the entire continent when the experience only pertains to one region. However, in this particular case, his arguments of West African music aesthetics can be applicable and useful because his experience was specifically in Ghana, therefore directly correlates to the Ghanaian rhythm and drumming I was introducing to the women at York Correctional Facility. For this reason, I will be substituting what John Miller Chernoff describes as “African” to be “West African”.

Chernoff argues that when we try to understand music from a culture or historical period other than our own, we must be prepared to open our minds to the possibility that people will have different standards for judging musical quality. He goes even further to suggest that sometimes other cultures may have an entirely different conception of even what music itself is (Chernoff 1979:30-31). Chernoff observes that in Western music, rhythm is most often, if not

always, secondary in emphasis and complexity to harmony and melody. In many cases, the melodic and harmonic structure will determine the rhythmic structure in reference to them. However, in West African music, this sensibility is almost reversed, and that there will always be at least two rhythms going on at the same time, and that is what actually creates music to their ears. This simultaneous use of different meters in order for different rhythms to be played together is often referred as *polymeter* or *multiple meter* by musicologists, meaning that if notated, West African music can only be notated by assigning different meters to different instruments in an ensemble (Chernoff 1979:41-45).

It is therefore important to note that in a West African ensemble, musicians do not always find their entrances into a piece of music by counting out the pulse, or main beat, but rather, they can, and often will, find their entrances in relation to the other instruments in the ensemble. No one player is ever playing all the time, and space and pauses are to be present in every part to allow another to come in and fill in the spaces. The manner of taking turns in space and time is similar to a way a verbal conversation would flow between people. In fact, some West African music is related to their tonal language, and a West African drummer can duplicate the speech patterns of his/her language through drumming. While a certain high degree of specialization is required for one to render the exact duplication of speech, the nature of drumming as strongly communicative can still be applied to the experience of West African drumming (Chernoff 1979:45-48). It was my hope that this interactive and communicative aesthetic of West African music would allow it to engage with

those who have the tendency to be anti-social, or have trouble communicating with others in a natural setting, to be able to communicate with others in another form – through creating music for an entire group of women to listen and enjoy. June Boyce-Tillman describes in the introduction of Constructing Musical Healing that she first began to explore the idea of music therapy when she experienced the way musical traditions, “especially the drumming”, allowed her to engage with her body and eventually her internal being, which in turn drew her to engage with her social environment (Boyce-Tillman 2000:23).

Another significant point about the rhythm of West African drumming is that while each individual rhythmic pattern and line of each individual instrument may seem simple, in combination with the patterns of the other musicians, its relationship to the other instruments can be quite complicated. Music patterns and accents have an ongoing relationship with each other that sometimes crosses, converses, sometimes overlaps, and changes slightly in between (Chernoff 1979:46-47). Since there are so many different things going on at once, focus and concentration on each of her own parts is crucial in order for each individual not to become confused and for the music not to fall apart. I have had personal experience with the transcendence of this immense focus and concentration to the time period following after a drumming experience, and it was my hope that the morning rhythm and drumming workshops at York might encourage the women to focus and concentrate on their other academic studies in the education program, especially the younger adolescents.

For an ensemble of West African musicians to make music, not only does each individual have to keep their rhythm and time steady by perceiving the rhythmic relationships with the other members of the ensemble, she must also concentrate on her individual part by feeling a common pulse within the body that is musically in relation to the other ongoing individual parts (Chernoff 1979:47). The realization that the ensemble cannot exist without each part coming together in a specific, intricate way puts an emphasis on the significance of each and every role of a West African music ensemble. Therefore each participant in the music making is equally important to those beside and across from them. Partaking in a social activity while on an even plane with the other participants in a group can build up the self-confidence of the women at York that might have been lacking, and perhaps encourage more active participation in general. I expected that some women may have been coming from environments that fostered exclusion, and that the equality of drumming together in a West African ensemble might develop some sort of sense of belonging. This sense of belonging can help the women to feel that they are a part of something larger than the self and create a more “well-rounded self identity” (Aigen 2005:101). Equality is further stressed through the execution of the music itself in West African music.

In the specific example of the Ghanaian piece, *Gahu*, there is an ongoing conversation between the *Kidi* and the *Sogo*, where the *Kidi* plays two notes with the drumstick pressed lightly on the membrane of the drum so that the sound produced is a little muffled, allowing room for the *Sogo* to enter in. As described

by Chernoff, “a rhythm which cuts and defines another rhythm must leave room for the other rhythm, and therefore the West African drummer concerns himself as much with the notes he does not play as with the accents he delivers” (Chernoff 1979:60). Even in the technique of playing the *Kagan*, the execution and stress of each stroke produced by the left and right hand are expected to be equal. Given this strong sense of equality between the significance of each beat, their relationship towards each other, and the role of each musician, I believed that West African drumming had the potential to create a safe and comfortable musical space in the workshop.

While the rhythmic relationships between each instrument and player of a West African ensemble may be complicated, there is heavy repetition, which serves to clarify its meaning. This repetition can be compared to the way Catholics pray the rosary and repeat the same prayer a number of times in a continuous cycle until they reach the last bead, in order to remember the prayers as well as create the space for the prayers to sink in and actually be experienced. In the West African musical context, when rhythms change too abruptly and frequently, the music can lose its meaning (Chernoff 1979:80). Staying with one rhythm pattern before moving onto another for a length of time allows one to fully experience the engagement of the music within them, to allow the music to sink and speak into deeper parts of the self. Repetition also allows one to be more perceptive to the slight changes that happen, to feel when the music comes together, when rhythms begin to feel more natural and internal, and to small changes in emotions and/or state of minds. This repetitive quality

of West African music also relieves the pressure of having to learn the patterns within a certain amount of time and helps diffuse any competitive feelings that might develop as a result.

The main reason that I believed that West African music could be used to engage with situations and emotions beyond its musical context is the nature of its relationship with social context and behaviors. It is Chernoff's understanding that someone playing in a West African ensemble, he/she does not focus purely on the music, but rather on the way the music fits into a larger social context. In West African music, something else is always going on when the music is being made. Making music is never a matter of just playing and improvising within the boundaries that are allowed, but a matter of expressing the sense of a particular occasion, the appropriateness at that moment of the part the music is contributing to the present situation. The master drummer fulfills the complex social role of integrating social situations into his music and having the music behave in a certain way that is "proper" to the situation. More importantly, there are many African musical idioms that provide further insight into deeper issues like moral and civil behaviors. Music often can hold esoteric knowledge that has the power to support these behaviors (Chernoff 1979:66-71).

With this strong interrelationship between musical and social expressions, the musician in a West African ensemble is expected to be both observant and self-conscious in order to bring out the full effect and potential of music. Music is essential to life in West Africa because people use music to mediate their involvement within a community, and participation in an African

musical event characterizes a sensibility with which Africans relate to the world and commit themselves to its affairs. Music becomes an education for socialization, and an understanding of the potentials and limitations of participating in a communal context. Although it might have required the participant to have an understanding of the cultural context in order for these behaviors to manifest, West African music is not conceived to be apart from its community setting and cultural context. It was my belief that by seeking to learn, understand, and play West African music, the experience could still reveal the nature of the culture and community life, and perhaps promote a consciousness of self as well as others, and create better personal and community boundaries. I hoped that these qualities and aesthetics of West African music could foster a safe and trusting environment that might create space for social interaction, encourage a reflective setting, and perhaps even promote certain changes in behavior.

The Pedagogy of West African drumming

The pedagogical techniques of introducing and bringing West African rhythms and music to the women at York Correctional Facility were those adapted and developed by Abraham Adzenyah, the revered Ghanaian professor at Wesleyan University, with his years of experience teaching diverse college students, as well as by Brian Parks, an excellent student, assistant, and mentee of his, who later taught his classes while Abraham was on sabbatical. In order to facilitate my workshops and get as much as possible out of the time I had with

the women weekly, I had to learn to experience the rhythms and rhythmic relationships both in the way that I have naturally learned, where I would feel the relationships before understanding how they were musically interrelated, as well as learning how to explain the rhythmic relationships in accordance to a unified pulse. The idea was that I needed to have many ways of seeing the rhythms in order to assist the various ways of perceiving the rhythms that women with different backgrounds and musical experiences would have. To train myself, I was given the opportunity to have private workshops with both Abraham and Brian during the year to “find my polyrhythmic body.”

During these private workshops, I learned how to play and show one rhythm by beating it out loud with the *ganjogui*, the bell, or saying the rhythm pattern phonetically, while my body kept the steady pulse, either with a walking pattern using my feet that often correlated with the traditional dance movements, or by swaying my body. Occasionally, I would be able to pulse with my feet, beat the bell pattern with my hands, and sing a traditional Ghanaian song all at the same time. The idea was that by physically seeing the various movements between my body parts, the visual image would help the women understand the complex relationships between the different rhythms.

While learning these rhythmic relationships on my own, Brian expected me to be able to play any one of the rhythm patterns on any drum given another rhythm pattern on another instrument, so that I might understand the West African piece as a whole, as well as the individual relationships between each

instrument. The idea was to be able to show the various ways one can enter the piece and choose the one that makes the most sense to the individual.

This emphasis on providing multiple routes and pathways to learning West African music can create a non-threatening environment with no expectation for learning at a specific pace in a specific way. Constant demonstration and consistent repetition was always stressed as a facilitator, and I had to observe closely where everyone was in terms of the comfort with what they were playing before allowing the group to move on to something new.

Especially with West African drumming, repetition never hurts the situation, and only pushes the body to truly feel the rhythmic pattern and internalize the interactive relationships. These pedagogical techniques together could provided the incarcerated women the liberty to explore different forms of thinking and viewing the musical relationships and then allow the liberty of deciding which one fits them best. By understanding the relationships between the instruments, they could also transcend this relationship with each other, discuss and figure out their interactions together, and create something as a whole.

The Logistics

Emily and I were given the opportunity to work at York Correctional Facility in collaboration with the Prison Solidarity Project at Wesleyan University. For several years now, Wesleyan University has been sending professors and student volunteers to hold classes and workshops at various

correctional facilities in the area with their various incarcerated populations – juveniles, women, and men. Topics and syllabi of workshops and classes were self-designed by the professors and students and submitted to the correctional facilities in the hope that there would be enough participant interest and attendees. In the specific case of the workshops at York Correctional Facility, the women were allowed to choose workshops of interest on a voluntary basis, and depending on the popularity, workshops would be selected to occur weekly for that particular semester, and hopefully for the entire school year.

Prior to working at York Correctional Facility, all volunteers were required to a background check and screening before being approved and scheduled to enter the facility as a long term volunteer in the education program. After approval, all students involved went through a brief training process on safety and facility regulations. Soon after, Emily and I were scheduled to hold an hour and half to two hour music workshop on early Tuesday mornings on a weekly basis with women who had voluntarily signed up for our workshop.

The weekly workshop required us to drive about half an hour from the Wesleyan campus to Niantic, where we were required to remove all the top layers of our clothing and any other objects and accessories that might set off the metal detector and undergo a security check before we were allowed through the doors into the facility. Each time we were required to sign in and sign out with government issued IDs to indicate our coming and going. Due to its voluntary participation, our group was inconsistent each week and varied from 5-11 women weekly. However, they were required to stay with the workshop

that they had originally signed up for, so at least we were working with the same women each week, giving us the opportunity to build a relationship and become more familiar with them.

To keep an account of each workshop without violating the facilities' regulations of strict bans from any audio or visual recordings, we relied on written feedback and personal journal entries. Emily and I alternated between who would spend the workshop focusing more on observing and recording specific happenings, depending on who was teaching the workshop that specific day. After each workshop, during the half hour car ride home, we would debrief and discuss what had just occurred and then type up a journal entry of our observations, thoughts, reflections, and advice, which we would send to each other before our next meeting. All situations and events described in the following section are based on our discussions and journal entries.

We were particularly careful with the way we made observations, especially written ones. Body language was especially important when trying to create a safe, accepting, and trustworthy space for people to be engaged and open with each other. The most significant aim of these music workshops was for Emily and I to stress the importance of our role as a student facilitator. It was important for us to communicate clearly that the workshop was called a "workshop," and not a "course" or "class" for the specific reason that we were not there to "teach," but to "facilitate." While we had explained early on that we were both music majors, we explained that we were still studying in school, and that the materials and ideas brought in were open to constructive criticism and

discussion because we were there to explore music together. While we had the ability to introduce fresh ideas, many of the older women were able to convey deeper insights.

The Format

Emily and I had very different musical focuses and we agreed on splitting the workshops at York Correctional facility in half, where she and I would alternate weeks between her songwriting workshops and my West African music workshops. Weekly planning meetings occurred a few days prior to holding the workshop in order to keep each other in check with what we were planning on doing and to ask for any assistance that might be necessary. We coordinated the syllabi, however, so that common topics and underlying themes would occur in consecutive weeks but in different forms of music. At times when it made more sense, and for a better sequential flow and memory of previous workshops, we would divide the workshop in half where we would both teach the same day for an hour.

Ideally, the format of my personal workshops was two weeks of rhythm workshops where I would bring in a number of rhythmic patterns from a specific West African piece and teach as much as I could in the given amount of time, and then one drumming workshop where the actual instruments would be brought in for the full experience. Due to school logistics, I was unable to bring in actual West African drums and instruments to work with inside the facility without some sort of administrative supervision. Brian Parks, the assistant and now

instructor of the West African drumming ensemble at Wesleyan University, agreed to assist and accompany me to York once a month for the women to actually experience playing the various instruments. However, due to unexpected lockdowns and reconsiderations of continuing the education workshops at York Correctional Facility, planned workshops to bring in instruments did not actually follow as I had originally hoped.

Emily and I always began and ended workshops by listening to music. Music brought in and played at the start of workshops was often new, fresh, and for the most part, unfamiliar and different. In my workshops I brought in a number of film scores from around the world (Sakamoto Ryuichi, Ennio Morricone, etc.) and a variety of music from places other than the United States (Brazil, Africa, Italy, etc.). We felt that it would be a good way to end every workshop with a few songs that the women requested to hear. During the very first workshop, the women were asked to hand in a list of songs they liked or wanted to hear, and Emily and I would randomly choose two or three weekly.

Sometimes during and after listening, a discussion session would be included, but occasionally we would just allow the music to penetrate whatever state of mind they were in. Especially in the case of Emily's focus on songwriting, discussions were especially important in order to point out the various techniques and styles that go into putting a song together. Often for my workshops I would bring in pieces with similar rhythmic patterns so the group could get a feel for what the product of the piece they were learning would sound like. It was also important to us to ask for their insight and comments

about the music we were bringing in each week in order to gain more understanding of their musical taste as well as to discover what sort of newly introduced qualities might or might not appeal to them.

The Experience

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*

Since the women who joined Emily's and my workshop came on a voluntary basis, with the unstable environment involving many unknown reasons, each week's participants and group dynamics changed. On certain weeks, the participatory energy was higher, and sometimes the general enthusiasm was high but consisted more of chatting amongst themselves than engaging with what we had prepared for our workshops. However, only two to three workshops into the semester, we noticed that some women would object to some of our activities or suggestions, commenting that they were "too difficult," or that they did not particularly like the music we were bringing in. While it may have been easy for us to feel slight dejection from their negative feedback, I also noted that their willingness to be honest with how they felt about our workshops revealed a certain level of comfort that we were beginning to establish. Emily and I made a point of always participating and joining in whichever activity we were conducting, be it drumming out rhythms on tabletops or a songwriting exercise, and tried encouraging feedback about our participation as well. Joe Lea, the facility librarian, had given us advice about adjusting our workshops as we became more familiar with the group of women,

which came in handy as I spent more time with the women at York. The first few drumming workshops revealed to me that I needed to feel very comfortable and confident with the rhythm combinations that I chose to introduce so that if someone were to feel especially confused or frustrated, I would have suggestions to make about approaching their understanding in a different way. This prompted me to seek additional help from Professor Adzenyah and Brian Parks. I also learned to admit when I was confused or unsure myself, a point I found important to the experience in order to create the trusting and safe environment we were striving for. Not only did I feel the need to be truthful about what I knew and did not know in order to stay true to the music tradition and Ghanaian culture, I would also be able to reveal to them that I, too, was still learning West African drumming, and was nowhere close to being a master or professional.

In general, the women were fairly social during our workshops because it was one of the few opportunities they were given to socialize “unsupervised” by facility officials, and probably were able to feel more relaxed. However, it is my belief that the West African drumming sessions fostered an even more interactive and accepting environment, one that gave each member a sense of belonging. Especially as more rhythmic relationships were introduced, it was important for each group member to understand her interaction with other members of the group and to listen and watch for their cues. I was particularly struck by their willingness to try new things and take on the challenge of putting the rhythms together, even though after most demonstrations or listen of recordings they would comment that it seemed too difficult and challenging, and

sometimes that “I’d rather just watch.” I stressed that we needed everyone in the group, in order for us achieve the desired sound of a West African ensemble, but also encouraged them by telling them that they could also wait and observe those around them and join in and enter after they felt more comfortable. Each time, every single one of the women in the group joined in eventually, and when the rhythmic relationships locked together, even for the briefest moment, there was always a shared sense of accomplishment and enthusiasm.

During a particular workshop, one of the women, Robin, had to step out midway for some sort of medical checkup and was not able to return until the last few minutes before Emily and I wrapped up with ending songs requested by them. At the moment that she stepped in, the section of *Gahu* I had taught that day had only just slowly begun to come together, and they were slowly starting to feel better about learning the new rhythms that originally sounded a little bit intimidating. Although it may have been a risky choice, I chose to not stop the piece and keep the momentum we had built up going. As soon as Robin sat down, she began looking around and observing what each of us was playing. The girl sitting next to her, Linda, immediately paused and slowly beat out her rhythm pattern to Robin so that she could see the breakdown of it and catch up with the group. Patsy also turned to her and smiled, encouraging her to join in. Robin did continue to “beat” with us for the remainder of the time, and although at certain points she may not have been beating out the pattern correctly, she became a part of our ensemble immediately. I think the fact that we were all sharing a new experience and still feeling less confident about our own abilities of West African

drumming prompted others to be more willing to share the learning experience with new members.

Zoey

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*

Zoey was one of the youngest girls in our music workshop at York Correctional facility – only 17, African American, with a tough exterior. She and another teenager, Diana, were a friendly pair in our group that stuck with each other amongst the group of middle-aged women. During the first few workshops, any participation in discussing the music from either of the two was nearly impossible, and Emily and I were often relieved that they were even willing to stay for the entire workshop. There was a particular workshop where Zoey did actually walk out of the workshop, vaguely explaining that she really just “wasn’t feeling it” that day, and stepped out, leaving Emily and I with feelings of slight frustration and dejection.

The first time I saw a distinctive change in Zoey’s demeanor was during my first rhythm workshop, when I began to teach the rhythms through clapping and beating rhythms on tabletops. Not only did she focus and concentrate on learning and playing the rhythms with the group during the duration of that particular workshop, but also made eye contact with me and the other women at several points during this workshop, and I observed that she also paid more attention to what others were doing rather than just shying away to her own corner, doing her own thing, or having a private conversation with Diana.

During one particular listening, when I brought in the live recording of *Gahu*, (a traditional Ghanaian piece in which I had drummed and danced the previous year at Wesleyan) the entire group was very excited to hear the end product of what they were learning. I had brought in a few other pieces to play, and at the very end, when asked how they felt about it or any general comments and/or feedback they might have, quite a few described *Gahu* as “more exciting.” Zoey, in particular, asked that we bring in “more rhythmic things like that” in the future. While some girls had commented to me in earlier workshops that complex rhythmic patterns could be difficult to follow and “give them a headache”, Zoey was fairly engaged with the West African music I had brought in both times. It was one of the rare moments when she chose to voice her opinion.

The last workshop that Emily and I were allowed to hold in the fall semester before the unexpected lock down occurred was probably the one with the biggest breakthrough with Zoey. During this particular workshop, most of the women in the group had had some sort of experience with West African rhythms while attending one of the previous workshops, so I attempted to introduce at least three of the rhythmic relationships and try to play them together at some point. Perhaps it was their younger age and their ability to pick up new things faster, or even just their general interest in rhythm, but both Zoey and Diana picked up the rhythmic relationships quickly and were able to play together accurately for quite some time. Unlike the older women in the group, they were less intimidated by the apparent complexity of the rhythmic relationships, and remained focused and determined to understand what was

going on. There was also a sense of urgency (and/or anticipation?) for the group to quickly learn the rhythms so that we could continue to move forward in learning the piece to completion.

At some point, I split the group into two and had one group play the *kidi* rhythmic pattern while the other played the *sogo*, and with Emily's assistance, tried to teach the group to see and hear how the two fit together. After trying for some time and having some women give up halfway through because they became confused or were frustrated with the two not coming together, I observed Zoey turning to the two women sitting by her, beating out the pattern slowly and having them follow her. By having them pay attention to her hands and her verbal cues, eventually the women joined in again. After some time, the group finally came together, and when the rhythmic relationships locked, I observed a change in the women's demeanors – some had a change of expression, and a few began to groove to the music with their bodies. When I reluctantly ended the piece and praised their playing, the group expressed excitement that the piece had finally come together. The sense of accomplishment changed the atmosphere of the room as they chatted amongst themselves about what they had just played, including Zoey and Diana. Perhaps in some way I had touched upon one form of their “preferred learning style and ability” that Joan Hoffman argues is crucial in the process of change, and West African drumming had qualities that attracted the two to engage and participate in a group setting.

When asked for general feedback, the women described that sometimes when they felt a little lost or confused, they would pay attention to what was going around them instead. A few commented that they would watch my hands or Emily's hands intently. Others said they would listen hard to those around them, tuning out the other part to just concentrate on their individual rhythmic pattern, and then when they felt comfortable, would then allow the other part to come in and form a relationship with them. The community effort definitely gave each member a sense of belonging and the group a sense of unity that day. Even though that was unknowingly the last workshop I was able to teach, the change in Zoey's social interactions with Emily and me and the other women in the class seemed substantial, and I only hope that the facility continues to provide opportunities for her, and others like her, to open up and engage.

Good Vibrations and Prison Solidarity Project at York: A Comparison

“When a group of people makes music together their unity is restored”

- June Boyce-Tillman, “Constructing Musical Healing”

The Differences

It is evident that the *Good Vibrations* project and the workshops Emily and I facilitated at York Correctional Facility had vast differences. The *Prison Solidarity Project* at Wesleyan University has faced its many challenges in the past few years as it struggles to continue building stronger ties with the communities around Connecticut. Trust is difficult to build in a sensitive environment like a correctional facility, and any minor transgression can result in a lifetime ban of outside groups from certain facilities. Prior to the year I began volunteering, an incident occurred with a student at York specifically, and since then, the university has had to work extra hard to gain their trust and allow us back in. Students have also been released without any negotiation for the possibility to return and volunteer in the future. Due to these sensitive issues, it was difficult for any workshop to gain full support from the officials of the facility, and we were not given much flexibility. All instruments that Emily and I planned on bringing in had to be officially proposed to the education program, then reviewed and approved by the warden of the facility long before the actual date of that particular workshop. Audio or visual recordings were not allowed and non-negotiable, and a performance that might allow others from

outside the facility to attend – family members, friends, and professors from the university – would have been nearly impossible. Changes to the programming regulations at York Correctional Facility also caused the education program to eliminate the workshops from Wesleyan University altogether the second semester Emily and I had planned to continue our class.

Good Vibrations is an organization that is being sponsored and has received funding from various resources, which allowed them to overcome many of the challenges I faced at York Correctional Facility. Since the pilot project, it has gained recognition to receive official evaluation and analysis of its methodology and process from teams of professionals, which allows them to adjust, expand, and improve their process each time. In general, they are much larger and more professional, and therefore had more concrete and practical goals. Emily and I were but two undergraduate students still receiving training in music on the material we were facilitating. Much of what we wanted to do with the workshop required us to research, self-teach, and to seek outside help away from our actual academic focuses. Without direct connection and communication tools with York, we were often faced with no alternatives or explanations when workshops were unexpectedly canceled. In some ways, the two projects seem incomparable, and my personal project far too inferior. However, personal research and studies of the *Good Vibrations* project and observations from my own music workshops at York remain to convince me of the presence of certain common qualities between the two that I believe are worthy of discussion.

The Similarities: The Music

In the *Good Vibrations* report “Promoting Positive Change,” Wilson, Caulfield, and Atherton conclude that participation in Javanese Gamelan had sustained a positive emotional and psychological impact on participants that led to positive behavioral changes. However, the report noted that certain benefits to *Good Vibrations* appeared to be specific to participation in gamelan music, but that “some important beneficial aspects of the Good Vibrations approach [were] likely to be replicable in other projects.” I would like to propose that there are many similarities between specific forms of music from other cultures, especially in this specific case between Javanese Gamelan and West African music that allow for the participation in these ensembles to promote beneficial changes.

Music as a Form of Participatory Performance

One of the primary distinguishing features that Javanese Gamelan and West African music have in common is that they are both participatory events where there are no artist-audience distinctions, and everyone present, including the audience can, and in most cases should, participate in the process of music-making (Turino 2008:29). “West African societies have many more people who participate in making music...music making is a group activity” (Chernoff 1992:34). When everyone is participating in a specific event, it is difficult not to join in, and the climate encourages each person present to become a part of the inclusion process. Hull explains that in participatory music-making such as a drum circle, it is important to have each participant to “communicate an attitude

that welcomes anyone who comes to your [group] to participate at any level they want,” even if it is something as simple as standing and watching while clapping or tapping their feet in time with the music (Hull 1998:37). Participatory performance also includes a variety of musical roles that require a wide range of abilities within the same group, and the challenge of finding the “right role” that each is comfortable with in order to produce the balance necessary for the piece as a whole creates a level of challenge that encourages continuous participation and inspires people to try different, if not new things (Turino 2008:30-31).

Participatory music traditions also allow exploration with each individual’s potential and constraints. It is the responsibility of all participants in an ensemble to perform and play their parts in a way that will not exclude others. In order to successfully produce a piece of “high quality” in Javanese Gamelan or West African drumming, it is important for the performer to understand the limits between personal expression and experimentation and to stay within the construct of the music. In these highly participatory traditions, “etiquette and quality of *sociality* is granted priority over the quality of the sound” (Turino 2008:33). Often, it is disrespectful to display feelings of impatience and show signs that may discourage participation from other members of the group. The process of making music becomes an opportunity to connect with people in different ways by sharing a unique experience (Turino: 2008:33-35). These built-in “social etiquettes” of music-making can be applied to other social settings where responsibility, social boundaries, and negotiation may apply, but are such an innovative process of Gamelan and West African

music that the incarcerated individuals have the ability to learn these more acceptable social behaviors through a fun experience rather than experiencing negative connotations of exclusion or rejection. In addition to their social implications, participatory music traditions dictate the aesthetics and musical qualities in specific ways that allow individuals to engage with them in beneficial ways.

Form, Repetition, and Synchrony

Javanese Gamelan and West African music have qualities that allow certain pieces to be learned and played in a rather short amount of time and without prior musical experience. Forms of participatory music such as Gamelan and West African drumming are often short and cyclical, without a designated duration between the entrance and ending. Since both types of music are used to accompany other social events such as theater performances and dance, the length of pieces are dependent on the interaction between the two art forms. Especially in the case of West African music and dance, the master drummer that provides the cues for transitions, changes, and endings decides on the duration of playing between these cue changes on his/her observation of the energy and vitality of the dancers. There is interplay between the two events happening, and the two feed off each other.

In the specific case of Gamelan and West African drumming, music is mostly percussive and what strings the piece together to generate the end produce of music are the interlocking rhythmic patterns. While the relationships

between these patterns can sometimes be slightly difficult to understand, the rhythmic patterns are not too long and difficult to remember and are very repetitious, with occasional variations that allow participants to move freely from one to another. Turino states that heightened simple, short musical forms and repetition are an important factor in participatory forms of music because they provide the participants with “security in constancy” (Turino 2008:40). Especially when working with incarcerated populations that are often heavy with individuals coming from backgrounds of unstable and vulnerable living conditions, to present an experience that feels stable and constant can be an emotionally relaxing environment and a stress relieving experience.

Of course, the quality of cyclic form and repetitious forms has the potential to lead to boredom and lack of enthusiasm quickly. However, both in the case of *Good Vibrations* and my experience running a music workshop in York Correctional Facility, the repetitiveness has actually made the music more accessible to an inconsistent group of people like the incarcerated populations we worked with, because new people could always join in and interact with the group at any time and still have the opportunity to learn the music through lengthy repetition. Eastburn’s reports showed that some of the goals desired were only applicable to those who stuck with their program longer, implying that some participants may have joined later or quit early. Owing to the facility’s medical checkups, work schedules, and unjust treatment of transgressions, and even the mood and attitude changes of the women, Emily and I experienced frequent coming and going of participants. Rather than disrupt the workshop,

the influx of unfamiliar members opened opportunities for the group to learn how to interact, assist, and include the new participants.

Turino argues that, “in participatory settings, the focal attention to synchrony becomes the most pronounced and important” (Turino 2008:44). This does not necessarily mean that in Gamelan or West African music the rhythmic patterns are constantly in line with each other, but rather that the complex rhythmic relationships are constantly “locked” in synchronization in order for the piece of music to come together. Playing the piece together therefore becomes a *product* of a shared musical knowledge and experience. Especially addressing the anti-social issues at the root of many criminology theories, this quality of Gamelan and West African music is essential, because the desired synchrony, the process of moving together and sounding together within a group generates a sense of similarity amongst the other participants, a belonging, a *social identity* (Turino 2008:43). Especially when engaging with those who have experienced exclusion from previous learning experiences, the new sensation of belonging, and the possibility of learning on an equal plane amongst others and together *with* others, can promote a more positive feeling towards the process of learning itself.

Musical Texture and Density

In the musical context, *dense texture* refers to “music in which different parts overlap and merge so they cannot be distinguished clearly,” meaning that the music does not occur in unison and musical lines are moving out of phase

with each other (Turino 2008:45). A dense texture can be created in a number of ways, but in gamelan and West African music, this dense texture is created by the interlocking rhythm patterns. However, in the case of gamelan orchestras, the “non-standard” tuning of instruments is wider than what the average Western-trained musician is used to, and pitches of the percussive instruments produce overtones that are slightly different from each other, thus creating an even richer sound. Turino argues that a dense, richer texture in a piece of music “helps inspire musical participation” (Turino 2008:46).

The reasoning for this is simplistic but useful in a correctional facility setting. Music with a texture that is denser allows more room for mistakes to occur unnoticed because an individual line does not stand out as much than in a solo performance or a piece where all the parts are moving in unison or the same direction. Gamelan music and West African drumming are not meant to be listened to by picking out individual parts, but instead, the entire ensemble is viewed as a collective whole. Similar to a verbal conversation setting, making music together is less stressful, and those who might suffer from stage fright or embarrassment are more inclined to join in and participate. This is especially important when striving to create a non-threatening, safe, and engaging environment in a classroom, both in correctional facilities and even regular classrooms in school functions. At the same time, with the repetitious cycles, individual participants are still able to develop their skills over time, but are given the liberty and unpressured, uncompetitive space to move forward at their own comfortable pace (Turino 2008:46)

Conclusion

Careful logistical planning and facilitating is necessary for any workshop or education program held in a correctional facility. However, the repertoire, materials, and tools implemented in the setting can make quite a difference as well. *Good Vibrations* and my workshop with Emily at York Correctional Facility have given evidence as to how Javanese Gamelan and West African music have in some ways been successfully utilized to promote positive attitude and change of behavior among the incarcerated population. Participating a gamelan or West African ensemble can build self-confidence, create a sense of belonging, and encourage healthy social interactions. It can also indirectly train certain disciplines and skills and promote an attraction to future engagement with learning. At the same time, the close comparison between gamelan and West African music not only supports the idea that the two forms of music should continue to be used and expanded in education programs of correctional facilities, it also implies that other participatory music traditions have the possibility of creating the same environment and encouraging similar results.

In addition, the participants of *Good Vibrations* and the women of the Prison Solidarity project were participating voluntarily. By making the conscious decision to spend time in a classroom setting learning something new, each participant is acknowledging that there is a need for something to be different (Hoffman 2004:196). Simply by voluntarily coming to Emily and my workshop or the gamelan sessions with *Good Vibrations*, each participant has already

taken the first step towards the process of change, which increases the likelihood for some sort of transformation to occur (Hoffman 2004:196).

It is not specified in the evaluation reports of Good Vibrations how an individual chooses to participate in the gamelan sessions. However, at York Correctional Facility, students at Wesleyan interested in leading a workshop plan out a rough syllabus of the topic they wish to facilitate and submit it to the education department of the facility. The women are given a list of all the possible workshops and descriptions and choose the one they would like to join, and only workshops that were chosen by enough women were selected into the education program for that semester. By allowing the women to choose their workshops by interest, it increases the chance for the education program to find ones that more closely matched the learning style and abilities of the participating women. Since music and the musical experience is embedded in most human cultures, a music-based workshop is likely to be very attractive. Especially in a setting like correctional facilities where there never is privacy, much open space, or freedom, participatory musical activity can be especially attractive.

While highly populated correctional facilities still exist, I will continue to hope that music programs in correctional facilities become more widely reviewed, critiqued, and used in incarcerated populations around the world. Perhaps other types of participatory music traditions with similar qualities can be explored more in music-based education programs in other correctional facilities. On the other hand, there are several key issues that should be

addressed in regards to the continuation and expansion of music in correctional facilities.

The Pedagogy and Representation of Ethnomusicology

As the study of music other than what we consider “our own” has become more popular, especially in universities in the United States, more critiques, evaluations, and reflections are being made about the teaching and representation of music around the world. There is much debate about how to approach the cultural distance of teaching and interacting with music, something that is so deeply rooted and intricately intertwined in our lives. Benjamin Brinner argues that teaching music of other cultures requires musical competence, but that our ability to function in another culture and aesthetic world requires further competences, “including social and emotional competence” (Solis 2004:2). Often the understanding of another culture’s music comes from an understanding that extends beyond what verbal communication is capable of, and requires direct relation and experience with the music to “know the music as it is” (Solis 2004:3-4). With the multi-layers of a musical tradition, introducing music of another culture to a group of people musically *and* aesthetically to realize a piece of music can be tricky and challenging.

Especially in the case of introducing West African music in the United States and other Western countries that were part of the previous colonization of portions of the African continent, some scholars have argued that African music does not, and perhaps cannot, always remain on the simple level of

learning and familiarizing the music of a new culture to producing something that is pleasing to the ear and body. Studying, learning, and introducing African music can dig up political issues related to the history of African slavery and the “troubled race relations” that resulted (Solis 2004:168). The process that one would need to go through in order to learn and gain experience from African music would often require one to go to the home country, create relationships, and be immersed in the culture. David Locke mentions that the dynamic of the relationship will remain “imbalanced” on some level, because while scholars often have the resources to go and attain what they need and bring back what they have learned, many African musicians do not have as much liberty and flexibility (Solis 2004:170). In some cases, certain musicians were given the opportunity to live with their families in the United States while exchanging musical cultures with American music scholars. However, being a foreigner in the country, the exchange of musical capabilities and culture does not provide the same advantages and security as a professor at a prestigious University. This imbalance brings up the currently debated issues of ethnography in general, and negative connotations may result. As Cathy Eastburn’s reports describe, Javanese Gamelan was believed to be an especially good musical tool because of its “neutrality”. People tend to have fewer preconceived impressions of the culture and music of Java prior to engaging with it. Not only is the Indonesia-Western relationship less sensitive than the Africa-Western relationship, there also is not a large a population of Indonesian immigrants in the United States or

the United Kingdom for the possibility of racial issues to occur in the correctional facility setting.

However, Solis argues that the pedagogy of music of other cultures continues through the justification that it has a few advantages, one being that it allows those without previous musical background to participate and engage with the music-making process, increasing the accessibility to a larger population (Solis 2004:11). This was an observation that Cathy Eastburn, her team, and I encountered through our experiences working in incarcerated populations. In the academic realm Solis is addressing, he stresses that ethnomusicology has enabled interdepartmental relations between music and other disciplines, a difficulty music departments often face in universities (Solis 2004:11). This indirectly addresses my observations of how sharing an unfamiliar and new experience (such as learning West African rhythms) can encourage interactions and relationships that might have originally seemed unlikely.

While Indonesian Javanese Gamelan may be perceived as a more “neutral” musical tool, I would argue that I did not personally experience or observe the racial issues that Locke described. Perhaps this is due to the fact that a correctional facility is a high-intensity environment where, especially in the case of the women I worked with at York, many learned to bond over their difficult experiences and circumstances, so perhaps were more likely overlook the harsher racial divisions of the United States. West African ensemble is also more accessible and convenient to bring inside a facility. However, from

conversations with others who have facilitated workshops at York and other correctional facilities and interactions with those who have had experience serving time in a facility, it is my understanding that the prison environment is very harsh in general, and in most cases, racial divisions do exist, and the quality of neutrality may come in handy.

The Limitations of Correctional Facilities

It is crucial to recognize that correctional facilities rely on government funding supported by taxes. It is even more important to realize that in most, if not all, cases, after the taxes are paid, how the funds are being used to support the correctional facilities are often unheard of and unknown by the public. In fact, writing on the conditions and realities of the incarcerated experience – prison literature – remains to be scarce due to the strict regulations kept within the prison walls that prevent writing from being preserved and released. As a result, word of the realities of the prison environment often does not travel far beyond the prison walls, and it is impossible for the public to truly understand what conditions are like inside facilities.

Specifically at York Correctional Facility, and certainly in many others as well, the education program is limited to those under the age of 24. Those who enter the facility after they have reached the age of 24 have a very slim chance of attaining education without submitting form after form, proposal after proposal, plea after plea. Without the initial drive and determination to be proactive about learning, most who offend over 24 have no access to education in correctional

facilities. This regulation seems especially obstructive to the prevention of recidivism in that many incarcerated individuals may have negative associations with education and learning, and rarely do individuals enter a facility with the motivation and determination to learn what they can while serving their sentence.

Lynda Gardner is a recently released woman who served her sentence at York Correctional Facility. She describes that, “the cycle of offending and reoffending is present and prominent in the current incarcerated population because those who enter a correctional facility often enter with “a lifestyle, a habit, or circumstance that prompted them to offend”, very much similar to the criminology theories addressed earlier (Gardner 2010). Her explanation for recidivism is that women who enter York Correctional Facility only know “a certain way,” and have no deeper knowledge of “another way,” one that could prevent them from falling into the patterns of ending up in prison time after time (Gardner 2010). She described how her experiences with drawing workshops, bible studies, and Wesleyan University’s Shakespeare workshop shone new light on ways of handling situations and how filling void of previous addictions and “less acceptable behavior” with interactions, prayer, sharing, and creative processes “helped her heal” (Gardner 2010). Gardner argues that to break the patterns of offending, access to the means of education needs to be easier. Of course, for educational means and music programs like *Good Vibrations* to become more accessible, there needs to be certain amount of care and investment from the public and the government, and a better sense of awareness

of the impediments to breaking the cycle of offending and the injustice that occur in many facilities. It is my hope that this thesis advocates not only for further music programs to be implemented in existing correctional facilities, but also that it provides a deeper understanding of the marginal populations of the incarcerated and encourage more attention be paid to reform the broken “justice” system as a whole.

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