

A Musical Dialogue

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Humans are a musical species no less than a linguistic one.
—Oliver Sacks

Martin Buber laid the foundation for his dialogic approach to relation in *I and Thou* where he described humanity's two-fold nature expressed through the primary words "I-Thou" and "I-It." The former expresses the ontological primacy of relation in human experience, and the possibilities inherent in the meeting of persons. The latter speaks to the world of direct experience as we come to know it through such modalities as language. To take a dialogic orientation toward the act of meeting is to commune with a mind to the primacy of relation and a willingness to give ourselves to others while being open to their influence when taking a mutual stand in the "living center" of relation.

Dialogue is often acknowledged by scholars of human relationships as the ideal condition of meeting between persons as it advocates for a mutual give and take between diverse selves and others. But this acknowledgement often takes place through the lens of linguistic relationships, and dialogue is by no means limited to the worlds of experience expressible through language. In *Between Man and Man*, Martin Buber spoke to the relationship between dialogue and aesthetic expression that provides warrant to explore the significance of non-linguistic modalities of relation:

To all unprejudiced reflection it is clear that all *art* is from its origin essentially of the nature of dialogue. All music calls to an ear not the musician's own, all sculpture to an eye not the sculptor's, architecture in addition calls to the step as it walks in the building. They all say, to him who receives them, something (not a feeling, but a perceived mystery) that can be said only in this one language. (25)

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This essay seeks to perform the relationship between dialogue and aesthetic expression through exploring non-lyrical music's capacities to presence dialogic ideals of relation between diverse selves and others.

The following pages describe one musical meeting that unfolded between myself, two music therapists, and six members of a non-profit, drop-in center for people living with mental illness known as The Gathering Place (The GP). In the rendering of this performance, I begin by describing in broad strokes the sociohistorical context that situates mental illness socially and politically within the rehabilitative structure of The GP. Then, in a hermeneutic fashion, I draw upon theoretical discourses that legitimate music as a modality of meaningful self expression and communal relation as pertinent to my narrative ethnographic rendering of making music with the music therapists and members of The Gathering Place. Finally, I share the practicality of conceiving music as a meaningful modality of relation between persons. My ultimate goal in this essay is to perform music's dialogic capacities that allow distinct selves and others to stand mutually in the living center of relation to create the possibility for connection across difference. At this point, we shall now turn to the sociohistorical/physical context in which this particular musical performance unfolded.

Mental Illness And The Gathering Place

The significance of mental illness within this essay is that it is a marker of difference capable of creating distance between those to whom the label is attached and the communities in which they live. Mental illness is, in part, a discursively constituted identity with the capacity to stigmatize those to whom the linguistic label becomes attached. Michel Foucault described madness as an experience of being that challenges civilized and rational understandings of humanity and has been equated with "animality" (81). Further, Erving Goffman described the qualities of the mental illness stigma as a blemish of individual character, though today, it may be more apt to describe it as an abomination of the body (4). But regardless of how it is understood, it still marks those with the label as persons other than "normal." And in the United States in particular, with the increasing amounts of mass shootings plaguing the social landscape being linked to mental illness, such as in the cases of Adam Lanza and James Holmes (among others), the stigmatized quality of the mental illness identity does not seem as if it is going to improve.

The stigma surrounding mental illness exists not solely with the bodies of those to whom the label is attached, but in the linguistic construction of the idea as it has been passed from person to person over the years. Consider the following from Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay *Discourse in the Novel*: "The word in language is half someone else's. . . it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own" (294). Language is saturated with the

ideological intentions of its the users, but it is more than just a vehicle for meaning to pass from person to person across space and time. As Bakhtin argued, “Consciousness finds itself inevitably facing the necessity of *having to choose a language*” (295). Consciousness from the Bakhtinian standpoint is a linguistic accomplishment. Taking these two quotes together, we arrive at a linguistic understanding of consciousness gifted to us by others who have come before. In the case of mental illness, the previous uses to which the term has been put still echo in current uses of the idea. What we feel is the stigma of mental illness reverberating not only in the linguistic utterance, but in the consciousness of the persons to whom the label is applied. Granted, we as persons have the agency to repurpose the words through which we make sense of our experience and grasp the experiences of others, but we have to grapple with the fact that the linguistic modalities of expression have already been worked over with centuries of meaning. Considering the experience of mental illness, though great strides have been made to reduce the stigma surrounding the state of being in the world, one has to recognize that the specters of the past still hover around the idea. But that does not mean there are not efforts to humanize persons living with mental illness by acknowledging the significance of ontologically affirming relations in their lives. Here, we turn to acknowledge the role The Gathering Place plays in humanizing mental illness.

Since 1976, The GP has provided a space for person living with mental illness to find support and a sense of belonging in and around the area of Athens, Ohio. The organization opened in response to the drawn-out closing of the Kirkbride-style state mental hospital on the outskirts of the city that unfolded between 1963 and 1993. The closing of this hospital was precipitated by John F. Kennedy’s signing of the Community Mental Health Centers Act in 1963 (CMHCA) that sought to replace a system of institutional care with a system of community mental health centers. This act was pursued in order to reduce the civil rights violations associated with the involuntary commitment of persons living with mental illness into state hospitals such as the one in Athens, as well as the experimental treatments administered to patients, the most infamous being the lobotomy. In the place of the state hospitals, a network of community mental health centers focusing on outpatient treatment with the aid of psychotropic medications would be implemented so people living with mental illness may have the opportunity to live independently in their respective communities. The CMHCA formally heralded the era of deinstitutionalization that currently defines the stance of the United States government on mental health as of the writing of this essay.

Though signed with the hopeful aim of reducing the involuntary commitment of persons living with mental illness in state hospitals, mental health practitioners and policy experts still debate as to whether this act has improved the condition of those living with mental illness. Many ex-patients discharged from the state mental hospitals were, as Erving Goffman described, “disculturated”

and lacked adequate social and vocational skills to find supportive relationships and meaningful employment in their respective communities upon their return (13). The stigma associated with mental illness often left ex-patients alienated from their families and without social relationships leaving them alone and experiencing their symptoms growing more intense. As a result many who were unable to take physical or financial care of themselves ended up on the street. Instead of helping people living with severe and persistent mental illness lead independent and meaningful lives in their respective communities, it seemed that deinstitutionalization legislation simply relocated them from one institution to another—from the asylum to the jail. In 2001, Psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey went so far as to describe the Los Angeles County Jail as the largest mental institution in the United States (2). However, places such as The GP that were sensitive to the social and vocational needs of ex-patients living in the community began to emerge on the United States landscape to address the unanticipated consequences of deinstitutionalization.

The GP operates in a fashion similar to the clubhouse model of psychosocial rehabilitation pioneered by Fountain House in Manhattan, New York, beginning in the late 1940's.¹ Clubhouses are modeled on the belief that all persons, regardless of the presence of severe and persistent mental illness, have an innate need and desire to contribute meaningfully to their respective communities through work-oriented relationships (Beard, Propst, and Malamud 42). Their design is in opposition to the institutional forms of treatment practiced at state hospitals in that they encourage voluntary participation as opposed to involuntary confinement. Members are encouraged to help with the day-to-day chores such as cooking and cleaning, as well as participate in social and creative programs including card games, movie nights, poetry workshops and in the case of this essay, music therapy (among others). Moreover, clubhouse staff encourage members to take charge of their rehabilitation at their own pace as opposed to outsourcing their decision-making capacities to psychiatrists who offer little time to know them as persons (Robbins 9). Moreover, clubhouses help bridge the distance within communities that exists between those living with mental illness and the “mentally sound” persons alongside whom they live. The GP is able to remain open to the members in part through the efforts of volunteers from the community, and moreover, there is a standing invitation for members of the community to come and spend time at the house at their convenience to become acquainted with the experience of mental illness. Club-

¹ On a minor though relevant note, The GP is not an official clubhouse as sanctioned by the International Center for Clubhouse Development, the governing body that oversees the implementation and operation of clubhouses world wide. However, The GP does not make any claims that they are a clubhouse, and this detail does not diminish the efficacy of invoking the clubhouse model as a useful heuristic for understanding the rehabilitative aims of The GP.

houses have demonstrated success worldwide in helping persons living with mental illness lead meaningful lives contributing to their communities and often at more efficient costs than outpatient treatment alone (Plotnick and Salzer 128). Speaking to the dialogic notions introduced at the opening of this essay, the mission of The GP embodies the significance of relation in human experience and the possibility of the human spirit when that relation is taken seriously.

This is a succinct rehearsal of the history of deinstitutionalization and the experience of living with mental illness. The whole story is much more complicated and nuanced than portrayed in this particular rendering (assuming of course if the whole story may be told), but this essay's focus is on making music and not mental health policy nor the experience of living with mental illness. The important points to bring forward for exploring music's dialogic contours are that mental illness is a stigmatized identity category and organizations such as The GP provide a meaningful bridge between people living with mental illness and the communities in which they dwell. In other words, this musical meeting unfolded within a space that emphasizes the personness of people living with mental illness and actively cultivates relationships between the community and those living with mental illness to reduce the stigma associated with this state of being in the world. At this point, we may now turn to the sharing of the musical performance that inspired this essay and the possibilities such moments may create for inspiring meaningful connections across difference.

Warming-Up

Gray clouds hang low as I walk along the tree-lined avenue towards The GP with my encased acoustic bass guitar banging clumsily against my side. From outside, this three-story, brick house appears much like the other residential buildings lining the avenue. The only difference being that The GP is well maintained in both landscape and outward appearance in contrast to the other homes that are occupied mostly by undergraduate students enrolled at the local university. Otherwise, casual passers-by observing the house may arrive at the conclusion that a family resides there (and in a sense, they would be correct).

As I near the house, I see a couple members smoking cigarettes on the secluded back porch. One of the members waves at me when he sees me walking up the sidewalk. Over the course of my multiple years serving The GP, I have grown to develop somewhat of a friendship with some of the members. I return the wave but do not follow the ramp to the back porch. The music therapy session is about to start, and if I go up the back porch, I will be tempted to have a cigarette, share in some conversation, and likely arrive late to the musical meeting probably already convening in the sitting room on the first floor. Instead, I walk past the ramp towards the front door by way of the concrete steps connecting the large, covered front porch to the sidewalk. As I approach the front

door, the murmur of voices and sound of drums become increasingly audible. I turn the knob and let myself inside.

The smell of a meal, most likely chicken noodle soup, envelops me as I enter the foyer and close the front door behind me. Several people sit in a circle in the sitting room adjacent to the foyer on my left. A variety of percussive instruments sit in the center of the circle including tambourines, bongos, güiros, and wood blocks among a few others I am unable to identify. Two people who I recognize as Jordan², a member, and Paige, one of the music therapists, have guitars resting in their laps. Jordan's gaze is fixed on his knee at a small, black box with lights alternating between red and green as he plucks the strings and adjusts the tuning pegs on the headstock of the guitar. When the light shines a consistent green, he plucks the next string and repeats the process. Paige looks around the circle; her guitar presumably tuned. Derrick, another member, sits at the piano in the corner of the sitting room and meanders his way delicately through scales lightly saturating the room with his sound.

Continuing my gaze around the circle, I see other members with various percussion instruments in their hands. Two of whom include Paul and Adam who sit next to each other in front of the bay windows overlooking the avenue from which I came. Paul holds maracas, and Adam has a djembe between his knees. Both look around the circle in what I perceive as anticipation of the beginning of the music therapy session. Next to Adam is a bearded man with broad shoulders holding a djembe between his knees who I do not recognize. In front of the fireplace opposite the passage between the foyer and sitting room is a young man with dirty blonde hair standing in front of a set of bells who I also do not recognize. In his hands is a pair of rubber mallets. To my knowledge, this is the first time the bearded man and the man with dirty blond hair have participated with the group. Eric, Paige's music therapy counterpart, sits in the center of the room in front of a laptop computer alongside the various unclaimed percussion instruments. An empty seat next to Jordan catches my eye, and I move through the circle towards the available chair.

"How you doing," Jordan asks placing the tuner to the side as I take a seat next to him and set my case on the floor.

"Not bad," I reply. "How about yourself?"

"I'm doin'," he says.

I reach down and undo the latches on my case, extract my bass, and play an E-major scale. Though there is a discernable scale in my progression, sonic waves clash against each other telling me that the strings are not in tune. I look over at Jordan.

"You're in tune, right?" I inquire recalling him tune his guitar a moment prior.

² All of the names in this essay are pseudonyms.

“Yeah,” he replies as he strums a G-chord that rings bright and harmoniously throughout the room. “Would you like to use my tuner?” he asks as his chord fades.

“Nah,” I follow. “That’s not necessary. How about you float me an E instead?”

“Sure,” he says plucking his low E-string.

I follow suit on my bass. The frequencies of our notes are not aligned creating sonic waves that reverberate through the bass into my body. I adjust the tuning peg on my bass’s headstock. The waves intensify the closer they get to becoming in tune with one another making my body feel on edge—a reminder that sound is an embodied experience that is tactile as well as aural (Shepherd and Wicke 175). When aligned, our instruments sound in smooth harmony. I tune the remaining three strings of my instrument using the E-string as a reference.

“Thanks, man,” I say to Jordan. “We’re in standard, right?” I ask making an attempt at conversation while continuing to tune my bass.

“Yeah,” he replies. Jordan is a terse individual. But despite his terseness, he and I have had little trouble engaging in musical conversations with his guitar and my bass during our shared time at The GP.

“Alright, guys,” Paige says, bringing us in. “We have two new members to our group who have decided to join us today. This is Billy,” she says gesturing to the man with dirty blonde hair behind the bells. We in the circle turn our attention toward him and offer a variety of waves and nods. “And here we have Pete,” she says gesturing over at the bearded man with the djembe between his legs.

“Hey, Pete,” say Adam and Jordan almost simultaneously in a sarcastic tone suggesting they already know him.

“Nice to meet you guys,” Pete says extending the joke with a smile and chuckle.

Billy remains silent during this interaction. The other members do not give him the same response as they do Pete.

“So, guys,” Paige says with a smile on her face looking around the circle. “We recently found out that Eric’s computer has a microphone and thought that it might be fun to record a jam that we can listen to later and perhaps include on the CD we had talked about making this term. Now that we know this might be possible, is this something we are still interested in?”

Nods go around the circle. Paige’s smile widens.

The GP hosts two music therapists from the university every term and each pair often suggests a project to work on during their time with the organization. Some of the previous projects have included private concerts for members, staff, and volunteers of The GP on the back porch and public concerts held on the front porch for passers-by.

“Good,” Paige says. “First, I think it would be wise for those of us with strings to make sure our instruments are in tune.” She looks at Jordan and myself, and asks, “How about we play a C?” Her question is more of a statement.

Together, Jordan and Paige strum a C-chord, while I pluck a C on my bass. Our major sounds coalesce harmoniously without the clashing waves that would indicate our instruments are out of tune. At the piano, Derrick’s fingers meander softly on the white keys on the piano contouring the major quality of our C. Paige nods as she hears our instruments sound together.

“Yeah,” she says. “That sounds great.” Then she turns her attention towards Jordan and asks, “Jordan?”

“Yeah,” he replies snapping his head up to meet her gaze.

“Do you remember that chord progression you were playing as we were leaving last week?” Paige asks. “I really enjoyed listening to it, and think it might be neat if you shared it with the rest of the group. I think that has potential as a jam that we might be able to include as a part of the record.”

“Yeah, I think I remember it,” he says meekly grabbing the fret board with his left hand and preparing his right hand to strum the strings. “I think it was,” he says trailing off as he begins experimenting with various chord progressions. Major and minor sounds fill the air until Paige’s eyes light up as Josh play’s through one of his minor progressions that has a particularly somber and mysterious tone.

“That’s the one,” she says with a grin.

“Okay,” he says. “Well, this is E-minor, C, and then A-minor.” He plays through each of the chords again, and the minor quality of the progression fills the room. I sound whole notes on my bass that provide tonal support for Jordan as he runs through the chords for everyone else to hear. Derrick’s fingers do a little dance on the piano keys along with Jordan that contours his progression with a haunting quality.

“Yeah,” Paige says nodding along with the meandering jam sustained between Derrick, Jordan, and myself. “This is sounding good. Do you all remember the progression or do you need Jordan to repeat it again?” she asks looking at Billy, Pete, and Adam. Each of them shake their head indicating they are ready to start.

“Excellent,” Paige says before turning her attention to her partner. “Are we about ready to go, Eric?”

“Yeah,” he replies. “I’m all set.”

“Now,” Paige continues. “We should be quite, then I’ll instruct Eric to begin recording. When he pushes the button, we’ll sit silent for a brief second, then I’ll nod at Jordan who will start with the progression.”

Her instructions are met with nods from around the circle. Then a thick silence descends upon the sitting room, as Paige looks around at each of us.

“Alright, Eric,” Paige starts. “We’re ready.”

Eric clicks a button on the computer and nods at Paige. After a few seconds of heavy silence, Paige looks at Jordan and nods.

The Expressive Qualities Of Music

Before sharing the jam that is about to ensue, it will be helpful to arrive at a shared understanding of music's expressive and relational capacities prior to making explicit connections to its dialogic contours through the performance. Like linguistic modalities of expression, music stems from the lived experiences of persons invoking them. John Dewey, in his aesthetic pragmatist text *Art as Experience*, argued that the "aesthetic is no intruder in experience from without, whether by way of idle luxury or transcendent ideality, but that it is the clarified and intensified development of traits that belong to every normally complete experience" (48). Positioning music as an expression of lived experience, we may explore further its capacities as a modality for the expression of self in relation with others distinct from linguistic modalities.

Musical and linguistic modalities of expression differ in the relation they share with that which each is invoked to express. Linguistic modalities express through the use of symbols that delineate specific objects, feelings, and experiences in a referential relation with the experiential world. Musical modalities of expression, specifically non-lyrical modalities, do not share this referential relationship with the world. Rather, music is *manipulative* in that it, as Steven Mithen described, induces "emotional states and physical movement" (25) within those who listen. Susanne Langer described this manipulative quality of music as "*non-discursive symbolism*, particularly well-suited to the expression of ideas that defy linguistic 'projection'" (93). Though alyrical musical expressions do not culminate in the same concrete specificity as linguistic expressions, this does not mean they are incapable of arousing significant meaning within those who listen intently to song. In fact, with regard to the emotional and temporal contours of human experience, music is the showing to language's telling.

Sociologists and cultural critics John Shepherd and Peter Wicke offer the term "states of awareness" to describe the embodied experience of music that is suitable for fleshing out the affective and temporal dimensions of musical expression (171). The affective quality of song refers to the emotional states that musicians are able to arouse within the listener, and it should be noted, the minor and major chords of Western music arouse feelings of sadness and happiness respectively (among other emotional states). These emotive states have the potential to signify meaning across cultural divides. Steve Mithen argued that unlike language, music does not require knowledge of a shared symbolic system between persons for them to derive meaning from musical expression. He wrote specifically, "Whereas we can translate Japanese not only into English but into any other language spoken in the world . . . it makes no sense to attempt to translate the music used by one culture into that of another, and there is no rea-

son to do so" (14). To support Mithen's claim, a psychological research team headed by Thomas Fritz found that three emotions—happiness, sadness, and sacred/fearful—were identifiable expressions of Western music by persons of the Mafa, a native African tribe who had previously no exposure to the Western style (573). Though the transferability of Western musical meanings to one cultural does not support music's capacities as a universal language as suggested through anecdotes, this does not foreclose upon music's capacity to express meaning independently of linguistic means.

There is also a temporal quality to the experiences aroused through musical expression. Alfred Schutz, drawing from the philosophy of Henri Bergson, referred to the temporal qualities of song as the *durée*, or the inner sense of time as expressed and experienced musically by both performer and the audience (31). In these moments, though the duration of a song may be measured in minutes and seconds according to clocks on the wall or our wrists, the song is not experienced in a similar fashion (unless the tempo is 60 beats per minute). Taken together, the emotional and temporal dimensions of song are intertwined intimately with regard to the arousal of particular states of awareness that carry with them the possibility to be made meaningful by those who let themselves be moved by the experience.

To set the stage for the dialogic qualities of music, we would also do well to consider the relationship between music and voice expressed through the notion of *timbre*. When we hear and are able to discern the difference between a guitar and piano, we are making a distinction based on timbre. This idea may be applied to the human voice as well, such as when persons are able to differentiate between voices other than their own (keep in mind, though not the focus of this essay, the voice itself may be utilized as a musical instrument). Within the context of this ensemble, the distinct voices present include Derrick's piano, Jordan's and Paige's guitars, Adam's and Pete's djembes, Paul's maracas, Billy's bells, and my bass. And in the case of Jordan's and Paige's guitar, as well as Adam's and Pete's djembes, it is important to note that instruments of the same type have sounds unique to themselves due to variances in the wood used, as well as the quality of the craftspersonship of the instrument's construction among other differences. With this understanding of the relationship between timbre in voice in mind, as well as music's capacity to arouse affectively and temporally contoured states of awareness, we are in a position to describe the expressive qualities of sound as a communal relation that will prime us for this dialogic rendering of musical performance.

Mikhail Bakhtin offered the term "polyphony" in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* that is useful for exploring the dialogic qualities of music as a modality of communal relation. He described polyphony as a "plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness" (4). Songs may be comprised of multiple instruments/voices simultaneously sounding individual and ideologically situated phrases that, taken together, contribute to a dynamic whole. Listening solely

to a particular instrument, one may get the feel for specific aspects of the song such as its rhythmic qualities—in the case of the upcoming jam, those about to be voiced by Adam, Pete, and myself on our drums and bass respectively. Additionally, we may get a feel for its harmonic structure as voiced by Josh, Paige, Derrick, and Billy on their guitars, piano, and bells. But, as Bakhtin argued, to focus on a *single* word, voice, or accent in the meeting between self and other is to overlook the consequential ways in which sometimes contradictory ideologically situated persons resolve themselves into a polyphonic unity (37). It is with Bakhtin's notion of *polyphony* that we are in a position to speak directly to music's dialogic possibilities. And now we turn to the phenomenological experience of the dialogic capacity of music as we listen to the polyphonic unity of the jam that unfolded between the members of The GP, the music therapists, and myself.

The Jam

*At this time, I encourage the reader to listen to the enclosed track⁵ both prior to and while reading the following vignette. Of significance with regard to this essay, the reader would do well to remember this jam was not rehearsed, nor was this jam ever played again. What you are listening to is what Mikhail Bakhtin referred to in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* as a "once-occurrent" interaction enacted by individuated persons within uniquely situated contexts that is never repeatable (40).*

Jordan begins strumming the progression in the key of E-minor in a moderate tempo. Upon completing the phrase, Paige and I join in on guitar and bass respectively—our sounds provide both depth and volume to Jordan's progression. Pete and Adam also enter into the progression this time hitting a mixture of quarter and eighth note beats on their djembes. Paul, meanwhile, shakes his maracas more or less in time with the rest of us embellishing Pete's and Adam's percussive contributions. Billy and Derrick begin to weave in melodious phrases on the bells and piano accentuating the minor contours of the sound creating a tremulous, uncertain "state of awareness." Their phrases inspire me to incorporate octaves into my bass line to fatten our sounds and improvise transitions by playing notes accentuating the minor contour of the progression while providing a sense of forward movement.

When ensemble musicians make music together, they take a mutual stand in what Martin Buber described in *I and Thou* as the "living center" of relation. In non-musical relations, the living center is the presencing of the unity of mutually influencing selves and others in their meeting within a simultaneously shared and unfolding present giving rise to a sense of community (115). In the musical relationship, the living center of relation is the song in which ensemble

⁵ The track is housed on the *Liminalities* website at <http://liminalities.org/11-5/dialogue.mp3>

musicians take a mutual stand. The relation between performer and audience when taking a stand in song is one that provides definition for self and other concurrently in the event of the polyphanous meeting while remaining sensitive to the unfolding quality of the present. But, at this point in our performance, we are distinct voices with some of us taking a stand in living mutual relation and others, notably the drums, playing as if not present in that relation. As Buber wrote in *I and Thou* "It is not the periphery, the community, that comes first, but the radii, the common quality of relation with the Centre. This alone guarantees the authentic existence of the community" (115). Community, in this passage, may just as easily be read as "song," and songs come to exist only when musicians stand in living mutual relation to the song. We have yet to take our mutual stand in the living center.

I want to give myself over to the *durée* and indulge the state of awareness waiting to blossom within me. However, Pete and Adam have yet to agree upon a beat to which they both can commit. Their strikes lack a certain precision and at points sound as if they are playing two different beats. For the most part, the ensemble as a whole is able to effectively hold the progression together, but Pete and Adam have yet to take a mutual stand in the living center of song as maintained by the rest of us. Despite the slight irregularities in the rhythm stemming from Pete's and Adam's drum beats, I still feel as if this progression is taking us somewhere.

We continue to play as an ensemble. Our concerted efforts still giving rise to the mysterious quality of Josh's progression in E-minor despite the rhythmic negotiations taking place between Pete and Adam. Paul begins to cough causing me to open my eyes, which pulls me further away from the experience of the living center song. I look at Paul and watch him continue to shake one maraca as he coughs into the back of his free hand. I glance briefly at Pete and Adam, who are looking at each other and still negotiating a beat. Billy's attention is focused on the bells, and Derrick is bent over the keys. Paige continues to strum her guitar and is looking around the room at each of the performers. We make brief eye contact, and she offers a smile that I return in kind. I look over at Jordan who continues to play while staring absent-mindedly at a spot on the floor near his feet. Eric continues to sit in the center of the circle alternating his attention between looking around the circle and monitoring the program he is using to record our jam. Again, I close my eyes and try to fall into the *durée*.

Suddenly there is a subtle feeling emerging in the song that I cannot quite explain. The progression feels as if it is beginning to pull together (this happens at the 1:44 mark of the song). Pete and Adam cease their negotiations over a beat and have settled into a driving march pulling my bass along with them. I get the feeling that if I stopped playing now, the beat established by Pete and Adam would pick me up and move my fingers for me regardless of my intentions. Paige, Jordan, and I strum our instrument in unison. Billy's bells contin-

ue to sound their mysterious aura. Derrick falls silent on the piano for a few measures, but in a run of the keys, he returns, dancing his notes atop our mysterious progression. I am able to give myself completely to the *durée* and let the mysterious quality of the song overwhelm my consciousness.

This is a significant moment. The only shared knowledge of this song we are playing is that the chord progression is E-minor, C, and A-minor. The phrases Billy and Derrick play on the bells and piano and the beats Pete and Adam pound are unique to this playing of the song and created in this meeting. Dialogically, Goodall and Kellet referred to such moments that presence the connected nature of human experience in the meeting between self and other as “peak experiences.” And Eric Eisenberg provided an especially musical take on the “peak experience through the idea of “jamming,” or experiences of “fluid behavior coordination” creating moments of transcendence when the group feels as one (139). But regardless of how we may refer to this gelling of sounds, what stands out in this experience is the multiple voices taking a stand in the living-center of song. Each voice simultaneously shaping the other voices in the ensemble and being shaped by those same voices. In this particular present, this ensemble is performing the dialogic ideal of relation.

Eventually, the drumbeat loses its urgency and precision. The moment when the relation between all of us is presenced disappears as quickly as it arrives. Taking a mutual stand in the living center of song is at times a tenuous act and an act that is often dependent upon both the willingness and capacity of others. As Buber exclaimed in *I and Thou*, “How delicate are the appearances of the *Thou!*” (p. 98). We would do well to remember music’s ephemeral quality with respect to our perception. Unlike those aesthetic expressions that culminate in tangible objects like painting or sculpture, music exists in our perception only so long as it is being played. Adam and Pete go back to negotiating a beat between the two of them. Our sound as a whole falls as if it has lost the unity established when Pete and Adam brought our progression to a culmination with their deliberate and driving beat. Derrick begins to meander around on higher notes with a feel insinuating this song is coming to a close. I play a run up a scale and let my bass ring out. Paige and Jordan slow the tempo of the song. They strike the final chord and let it reverberate around the room. Then Jordan plucks an E and octave above Paige that punctuates the end of the song. Silence follows the end of the progression. Eric reaches up to the laptop, presses a button, then looks at us and says, “That’s it.”

Music As Dialogue

I opened this essay by invoking the dialogic philosophy of Martin Buber, particularly his articulation of human experience through the primary words *I-Thou* and *I-It*. What is of use in such a division is an acquired sensitivity to the primacy of relation in human experience and the possibilities inherent in the

meeting of self and other as expressed through the primary word *I-Thou*. And through the primary word *I-It*, we gain an understanding of the capacity of a distinct self to render his or her experiential existence in a modality such as language that is graspable by another. But what we also gain from such a division is the capacity to view language as *but one* possible expression of personness and rendering of experience (and a limited one at that). Approaching linguistic means as *a* rendering and not *the* rendering of experience should give us pause to consider other modalities of self-expression and communal relation. At this point, we are in a position to explore in-depth music's dialogic contours. So, let us fall back upon and imagine the *I-Thou* and the *possibilities* inherent in relation. What may happen when we choose to go the route of music as an expression of the *I-It* as opposed to language? What do we gain? What do we lose? But I think the question is more aptly stated, what do we gain in what we lose?

As noted above, music bears a nonreferential relation with the experiential world of objects and feelings. Though we lose the capacity for expressing ourselves in a concrete and referential fashion when adopting a musical orientation to relation, that should not lead us to the conclusion that music is an inferior means of expression. What we toss out with the bathwater of linguistic expression is the ideologically saturated baby of meaning. This is not to say that music somehow exists outside ideology, that would be a rather naïve claim. However, when considering the context of mental illness in which this performance unfolded, we find in music a modality of expression that does not necessarily invoke the histories of marginalizing meanings associated with this term. Instead, what we discover is a modality of relation that has the capacity to meaningfully unite diverse persons in living mutual relation both with regard to the actual performance of this song, as well as those who will become audience to subsequent performances of this jam via this recording. At this point, I will speak directly to the once-occurrent performance as a dialogic expression, as well as highlight the dialogic qualities of this performance that invite others to make situated meanings.

In and of itself, the performance of this jam is a dialogic expression—in fact, music is powerful because it is a dialogic expression. The ensemble was a polyphonic composition both in the diverse instruments involved in the jam, as well as the diverse backgrounds and experiences of each of the performers. The differences between the notes when sounding simultaneously and each performer both influencing and being influenced by the others in the ensemble is where music's capacity to mean resides. Major and minor sounds derive their quality when a performer plays a series of notes that exist in a certain relation with each other or between notes sounded simultaneously by two or more performers. In this case, the minor quality of the performance stemmed first from the intervals of the notes established by Jordan's progression, and the minor quality of the song grew more pronounced as it was deepened with the sounds of Paige's guitar and my bass. And the progression became more contoured in

its minor quality as it was shaped by Derrick's and Billy's harmonic embellishments on the piano and bells respectively. Further, the drums provided a sense of purpose, the presencing of the living center that held the ensemble in a state of uncertainty and then a state of unified purpose. As Buber noted in *I and Thou* with regard to the primacy of relation and the promise of a dialogic orientation in human experience, "But it teaches you to meet others, and to hold your ground when you meet them" (33). In other words, a musical ensemble requires of musicians that they meet the others musicians in the ensemble and hold their ground during that performance. Each performer plays his or her individuated role within the context of the song in order to evocatively contour the affective dimensions of the song.

We find the most pronounced dialogic qualities of this jam listening to the drummers negotiate their beat. Though neither Adam nor Pete were trying to draw attention to their individual playing styles, the fact that throughout the first part of the song they were not playing with the rest of the ensemble in a clear fashion prevented me, for instance, from entering fully into the *durée*. The listener, as well, may have experienced a spot of trouble trying to get into the flow of the song while the drummers were negotiating their rhythm. But the moment when the drums began playing in unison at the 1:44 mark of the recording, the living center of relation became presenced clearly. What we learn dialogically from this moment in the song is if we focus on ourselves we lose sight of the relationship holding us together. Our individuality becomes significant only while taking a stand in living mutual relation with others. Again, as Buber noted in *I and Thou*, "And in all the seriousness of truth, hear this: without *It* man cannot live. But he who lives with *It* alone is not a man" (p. 34). Music demands individuals playing their part in relation to the other, even if that other is not a musician but an audience bearing witness to the musically unfolding present. To fail to uphold one's end of the deal is to put the integrity of the song, the living center of relation, into question.

But this performance in and of itself is an easy argument to make for the dialogic capacities of music. Yes, ensembles are comprised of distinct voices speaking from their own situated locations that contribute meaningfully to a whole when taking a mutual stand in the living center of song. However, the relational possibilities created through the dialogic expression of song implicates not only the performers but those who bear witness to the song and stand in living mutual relation with the performers. It is in this invitation to construct individualized meanings that music's dialogic capacities become more apparent.

Every piece of music is an invitation for persons to experience corporeally an expression of humanness voiced by the performer(s) for an audience (even when the performers are the audience). Unlike linguistic meanings that reach the body by way of the mind, music reaches the mind by way of the body. Consider the following from musicophile and neurologist Daniel Levitin:

If music serves to convey feelings through the interaction of physical gestures and sound, the musician needs his brain state to match the emotional state he is trying to express. Although the studies haven't been performed yet, I'm willing to bet that when B.B. is playing the blues and when he is feeling the blues, the neural signatures are very similar. . . . And as listeners, there is every reason to believe that some of our brain states will match those of the musicians we are listening to. . . . even those of us who lack explicit training in music theory and performance have musical brains, and are expert listeners. (Chapter 7)

Without the specific meanings attached to specific linguistic utterances, the listener has the freedom to individualize musical meanings based upon his or her corporeal experience, the aroused state of awareness, of the song. But what Levitin's words suggest is that the meanings inspired stem from bodies that resonate at a shared corporeal level allowing for the expression of potentially diverse experiences from similar corporeal feelings. In part, we have here one contour of music's dialogic capacity, what meanings are inspired through sharing a corporeal experience with diverse others? To you, the reader, what meanings were aroused, if any, in your situated experience of this song?

Earlier in the essay, I drew upon briefly Eisenberg's description of "jamming" for understanding music's dialogic possibilities. A quality of his idea of jamming is that it is a possible state to achieve within non-disclosive relationships – participants need a rudimentary knowledge of the others involved, if any, to enter into such a relation. With the exception of Jordan with whom I have come to develop an extensively relationship during my time volunteering at The GP, the others in the circle were relatively unknown to me beyond the musical relationship we established in this moment. Yes, I knew their names, but little did I know beyond that cursory bit of information. Moreover, this is the first time I had jammed with both Billy and Pete. But despite the absence of a shared relation beyond this meeting, we were still able to enter into a polyphonic relation – the "living center" of song. This quality of musical expression speaks to a virtue of the states of awareness in that the meanings inspired in them do not require outward expression. As Shepherd and Wicke argue:

Individuals can, in other words, experience states of awareness without rendering them public and therefore giving them material existence in the external world. In thus differing from elements of signification (which depend on public articulation to come into being), states of awareness can exist independently of elements of signification. (171)

Though music may not result in the sharing of experiences through other modalities, such as linguistic expression, that does not suggest that such meanings inspired musically must be expressed in order to acquire significance. Within the context of arts based therapies, Harter, Quinlan, and Ruhl argued that "[a]rt-making can open up dialogue that otherwise might remain dormant" by

enabling opportunities for conversation without making an explicit demand for conversation (38). Rather, the emphasis is on *presencing* human experience as aroused in the musical relation while offering an invitation to share without requiring the act. And further, this allows us the opportunity to be present with others musically knowing in that shared presence is the possibility of mutual understanding and the promise of relation.

In sum, music provides persons a modality of self expression and communal relation into which they may enter that arouses corporeal states of awareness with the capacity to inspire situated meanings across differing persons. As a volunteer with The GP, I found that music was a means of relation I could enter into with the members without having to understand directly the experience of living with mental illness. John Dewey argued in *Art as Experience*, “In the end, works of art are the only media of complete and unhindered communication between man and man that can occur in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience” (109). Ultimately, music’s dialogic qualities rest in its capacity to allow people from diverse backgrounds and experiences to enter into, *mutually*, a shared yet highly individuated experience. Music is an expression that is shared simultaneously by the performer and the audience, while also allowing for individuated and open-ended meanings. To bring this essay to close, we are left with the dialogic possibilities of music. What meanings may music inspire within those who enter willingly into the musical relationship whether as a performer or a member of the audience? What possibilities may music create for persons to commune across seemingly irresolvable differences when we approach it as a meaningful modality of relation that allows for the communion of highly situated selves and others? As to what those meanings and possibilities may be, the answer is not necessarily important. Rather, what music affords us is that possibility, and that is enough.

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