

The Power of Music: Famous Professional Musicians' Experiences of Health and Wellbeing – a Qualitative Study, Norway

Kari Bjerke Batt-Rawden

NTNU Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Abstract: The aim of this chapter is to document, investigate and explore how coping with life can be strengthened through musical, artistic, and cultural expertise from a salutogenic perspective. This project has two research objectives: (i) to explore the role and significance of music in the lives of renowned, professional musicians in or through different life phases, situations, events, issues and contexts, and (ii) to explore how these issues might be connected to self-musicking, health, wellbeing and coping capabilities. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight Norwegian musicians aged 54 to 85 (four men and four women) who had achieved considerable success in a variety of musical genres. The interviews, taking place in Oslo, lasted about two hours. On average, the musicians have had active careers lasting 55 years. Data were collected during 2021–2022. Inspired by grounded theory, three main themes emerged from the interviews: (i) learning to practice for joy and enrichment – establishing skills, (ii) musical highlights – a sense of meaningfulness, and (iii) self-musicking, enhancing coping capabilities. These results may be transferable to school settings and lifelong learning from a salutogenic perspective. Learning musical skills at school may emphasize the beneficial and health-promoting properties of music. It seems important to understand the potential of learning music both at home and in school as a health resource. These findings may be of significance for acknowledging music's power as an interdisciplinary theme in the educational system. Focusing on musical activities as a lay-skill practice may provide health-promoting activity for children and young people throughout their education.

Keywords: music, health, musicians, Norway, qualitative, education

Citation: Batt-Rawden, K. B. (2024). The power of music: Famous professional musicians' experiences of health and wellbeing – a qualitative study, Norway. In A.-L. Heide, K. B. Batt-Rawden, M. Stranden & E. Angelo (Eds.), *MusPed:Research: Vol. 7. Health and life skills through music, arts and culture in education* (Chap. 4, pp. 95–117). Cappelen Damm Akademisk. <https://doi.org/10.23865/noasp.216.ch4>
License: CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Introduction

For centuries, music has been recognized for its therapeutic properties in healing the body and mind and for treating physical or mental illness. Singing and music constitute a unique activity that is important for the whole person on a physical, cognitive, social, emotional and psychological level, and in relation to meaning and context in life (Balsnes, 2014, 2018; Clift et al., 2008, 2010; DeNora, 2000, 2003; Erkkilä et al., 2011; Fancourt, 2017; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Fancourt & Poon, 2016; Fancourt et al., 2016; Ruud, 2013; Welch et al., 2014). Recent studies show how people who are engaged in music, singing, and the theater had a 27% reduced risk of cancer-related mortality when compared to non-participants (Løkken, 2023; Løkken, et al. 2020). Tchaikovsky once wrote: “Truly there would be reason to go mad if it were not for music” (Steinberg, 1995).

However, learning musical skills through a more formal musical education may entail a lack of pleasure. This may be due to directing attention solely to competence and competition rather than shared amusement and enjoyment in the musical act. A qualitative study by Roos et al., (2021) describes a culture where musicians of all ages lack health-related education and are pushed to achieve high levels of musical performance by maximizing their practice volume. Music students collectively develop the culture that the more they practice, the better, and many experience pain from a young age. All participants in this reported study agreed that health-related education was essential and must be included in the musical curriculum from a young age. The importance of having healthy strategies to reduce barriers to health and health promotion was underscored. As reported, contextual and environmental factors, including social influences, seem to have a critical impact on musicians’ wellbeing, dictating many of their health determinants in this study (Roos et al., 2021).

The new curriculum (LK20) in primary and secondary schools in Norway introduced “*Folkehelse og livsmestring*” (Public health and life management) as an interdisciplinary theme in education (Danielsen, 2021). Moreover, in 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) published a scoping review showing how art and culture have a positive effect on people’s physical and mental health (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Blomberg

(2020) states how teachers' understanding of art and its link to public health and coping with life evolves through the feeling of joy in creating. Dalstein (2022) showed how creativity supports the student's own problem-solving process. This way of working with art creates a potential for coping with life through problem solving, whereby students/pupils build up the ability to handle adversity and challenges in life.

From this viewpoint, the purpose of this study is to explore how professional musicians perceive and experience music as turning points and highlights in their lives. Renowned professional musicians are in a special position when it comes to making a living from music. This project was conducted together with Professor Olav Garsjø from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) who participated in data collection and analysis, but only for a coming book.¹ The project has two research objectives.

1. To explore the role and significance of music in the life of renowned, professional musicians in or through different life phases, situations, events, issues and contexts.
2. To explore how these issues might be connected to self-musicking, health, wellbeing and coping capabilities.

In this study, relevant and significant data have been analyzed and selected, showing how arts and cultural activities can strengthen public health and coping with life in an educational setting. It seems to be particularly relevant for the musical program in upper secondary education, which focuses very early on educating pupils for a professional music education, and for a future as professional performers. Thus, the aim of this chapter is to document, investigate and explore how coping with life can be strengthened through musical, artistic, and cultural expertise from a salutogenic perspective (Antonovsky, 1996).

Although previous studies indicate a variety of health challenges among musicians, less is known about the roles of work-related and

¹ Professor emeritus Olav Garsjø, NTNU, was not interested in co-writing this chapter and is therefore not listed as a second author. He is working with this material in collaboration with the first author of this chapter, hopefully to be published in a Norwegian book soon.

personal factors associated with the musicians' mental health (Aalberg et al., 2019). These authors emphasize a need for the early development of a sense of mastery and social support in music education and industry. The study by Vellacott and Ballantyne (2022), which sought to contribute to the emerging body of knowledge of professional musicians' practice, gave new insight into the areas of slow practice, listening and mindset, and emphasizes how further research into these specific topics would also be valuable. As these authors argue, slow practice primarily involves playing passages more slowly than intended and speeding up each new time until the correct tempo is reached. It's a great way to develop fingering, technique, articulation, and your understanding of the melodic and harmonic structure of the music (Vellacott & Ballantyne, 2022).

There are few studies assessing musicians' lifestyles, and few comparisons of student musicians with already employed and accomplished musicians. Previous research also shows how an early positive musical experience in informal settings or contexts seems to contribute to why several participants continued musical practices (Forbes & Bartlett, 2020). This seemed to affect their self-esteem, social confidence, or competence positively (see also ch. 1, Løkken et al.; ch. 5, Kibirige; and ch. 7, Nygård-Pearson). Their lay-skill practice of performing self-health through musical activities and building social capital seems to be beneficial. From this viewpoint, active music-making may be linked to self-musickers' skills and competence "in-action in-situ" constructing social capital. Self-musickers are defined here as singing or playing for themselves or others (Batt-Rawden, 2018). This constitutes a valuable by-product of cultural activities, i.e., contributing to health and wellbeing (Green, 2002, 2003; Stige, 2005, 2012). Psychological distress was more prevalent among musicians than in the total workforce sample in a study by Vaag et al., (2015, 2016). Solo/lead performers, vocalists, keyboard instrument players and musicians playing within the traditional music genres reported the highest prevalence. According to these authors, further research needs to map the possible psychosocial and personal factors and mechanisms contributing to this discrepancy. A recent study from Musgrave (2023) has presented prominent contributions in the respective fields of interest to highlight academic contrast between views from scholars

examining music and wellbeing, and lay persons who are working to understand musicians' wellbeing. Pop stars can suffer high levels of stress in environments where alcohol and drugs are widely available, leading to health-damaging risk behavior. As such, their behavior can also influence would-be stars and devoted fans (Bellis et al., 2007).

Theoretical perspectives

The focus in this study is on music's "health-affordance", which is based on Gibson's (1977) "Theory of Affordances" on how availability, arenas, environments, objects, and cultural rituals influence action and the adoption of behavior. The term "health-affordance" is in line with Tia DeNora's (2000) interpretation of how people construct meaning, mastery and ability to act in different contexts with experiences of music. The term "agency" is linked to how musical practices can construct health by means of a reconfiguration of new skills and knowledge. The work of Israeli sociologist Aaron Antonovsky (1987, 1996) and his concept of salutogenesis illuminate health as linked to energy, inspiration, creativity, sense of coping, self-efficacy and secure identity. For Antonovsky (1987) a "sense of coherence" is key. This involves understanding, managing, and making sense of change. When life is felt to be comprehensible (predictable), manageable (conceivable) and meaningful (valuable), people feel coherence and continuity in life, and experience wellbeing.

As a complementary theoretical foundation in this study, Even Ruud's (2001) theory about the importance of musical activities for health and quality of life has had a great influence. Ruud's work (1997, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2013) points to how music may be a "kind of technology" (2002, p. 2) that improves health and contributes to quality of life and is thus relevant for the promotion of health. Ruud (1997) suggests music may contribute to quality of life. Music may be a provider of vitality and concerns the ability to experience emotional nuance, as well as being a tool for developing agency and empowerment. Thus, music becomes a social resource and a way of providing meaning and coherence in life. From this viewpoint, music is a type of aesthetic behavior that may protect or maintain health or prevent ill-health.

John Sloboda's (1992) empirical study of emotional response to music provides one example of how music sociology and music psychology might work together to a common end. He describes how music is capable of arousing deep and significant emotion in those who interact with it. These emotions are often linked to autobiographical memories of musical events, and music users highlight repeatedly the ways in which they view music as having power over them: for example, "music relaxes me", "releases emotions", "motivates and inspires me" or "reconnects me to myself" (Sloboda, 1992, p. 34). As such, the impact of music on emotion is not direct, but interdependent on the situation in which it is heard.

Methodology

A qualitative, cross-sectional study

In-depth interviews were conducted with eight professional, highly successful musicians, to explore the role of music in their lives – their experiences, thoughts and feelings. This study employed a qualitative approach (Malterud, 2001, 2012), and relevant theories and a conceptual framework are presented related to current knowledge of the role of music in well-being and health. Inspired by grounded theory, the research questions attempted to explore themes as they emerged from ethnographic data (Charmaz, 2003, 2017).

Grounded theory permits conceptual knowledge to be derived through close inspection of the data. It can enrich our understanding of music's mechanisms of operation in naturalistic settings in ways that are derived from the meaning given by the participants themselves. This notion of flexibility is important in allowing themes to emerge from the participants' own accounts (Charmaz, 2003). Recurrent themes emerged several times within one participant's account and/or among the sample.

Recruiting and selecting a convenience sample

The interviewees were recruited by sending information letters describing the study by e-mail to artists or directly to the musicians. The researchers' names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers were provided, leading

to phone calls and introductory meetings. It was up to the participants themselves to take the first contact with the researchers, thus the willingness and motivation of the participants to dedicate time and effort to the study can be described as a convenience and strategic sample (Charmaz, 2003). Selection criteria: professional, famous musicians in Norway representing different genres of music (jazz, pop, rock, folk, classical) and in a position where they can look back on a long and successful career which may provide qualified reflections.

Data collection and participants

Data were collected during 2021–2022 through one-off interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. Eight highly successful Norwegian musicians (four women and four men) were interviewed. The interviews, taking place in Oslo, lasted about two hours. The participants were given fictitious names: John, Joan, Cora, Mary, Linda, Peter, Paul, David, and the age range is 54–86 years. On average they have had long and active careers spanning five decades.

Data analysis

Digital audio recordings of all interviews were transcribed between interviews, enabling the process of analysis to begin. This influenced subsequent data collection. The analysis of data was carried out as follows: The first major analytic phase of the research consisted of coding the data through open coding to identify descriptions of thoughts and ideas related to the interview questions. Then line-by-line coding was used for identifying concepts, detecting themes, defining events, actions, and situations (Charmaz, 2003).

The next step was a more selective, focused coding for verifying relationships between concepts. In the focused coding, a limited number of line-by-line codes were applied to a large amount of data. By staying close to the data through labeling recurrent themes, this process reflects the substance of the data. To analyze patterns and tendencies, we used different colors for significant concepts, keywords, emergent themes,

and important phrases. These were compared to strengthen the reliability and trustworthiness of the study (Charmaz, 2017). The coding was undertaken independently by two researchers and discussed and compared before finalizing labelling. Several sub-themes emerged, but we have chosen to highlight and present three main themes. Since this study has a salutogenic approach, we focus on themes that were related to what predicts good health, subjective wellbeing, and a sense of coping with life adversities, and complications of the musicians are in focus.

Ethics

All participants were given written information about the project prior to data collection, and all participants had to sign a written consent. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw from participation during the study. They willingly consented to participate, and there were no problems of access to the field of study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In January 2021, this project was declared not to be subject to notification by the Data Protection Official for Research, Norway² since all electronic data processed through the entire research process were anonymous. Consent forms were kept securely and separately from transcribed data.

Results

Three main themes are presented in the result section in the following order: (i) learning to practice for joy and enrichment – establishing skills, (ii) musical highlights – a sense of meaningfulness, and (iii) self-musicking, enhancing coping capabilities.

Learning to practice for joy and enrichment – establishing skills

The analyses revealed that nearly all musicians had grown up in a musical, stimulating environment which inspired and motivated many of

² (<http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvernombud/en/notify/index.html>) (SIKT).

these participants to be musically active, both as informal learners and with early engagement in music education. For the majority of the participants, there seemed to be a link between a person's self-musicking³ and influences from significant others during childhood or adolescence, e.g., observing or listening to musicians (both professional and non-professional), playing/singing, which increased their motivation or inspiration to learn musical skills. As Cora narrates, her mother was very musical, and she strongly stimulated her three children to start playing an instrument. Cora started to play piano at the age of five and began singing very early. Mary explains how her parents were very interested in music, and how her great-grandfather was a composer and a fiddler. John talks about how as a child, coming from poor conditions, he learned very early to play the harmonica, and used to walk around playing in the yard, the street and neighborhood in order to earn money, and people used to "throw coins to him". John also talks about how he lost an interest in composing at a very early age due to criticism from close relatives which negatively affected his future motivation for composing. John thought his self-composed piece of music was good, but his relative said that "you have stolen that piece from someone else – I've heard that many times. Since then, I haven't composed a note ... because a child is so sensitive".

The significance of practicing and motivation to do so is a topic that seemed to play a vital role among all the musicians, who often described how their upbringing gave space and time to execute their early passion for music. As Cora stated, the point is to enjoy music, and "the joy of music is under threat when you push young talents". Several participants pointed out how professional musicians could feel pressure, competition and tiredness compared to amateurs. Cora speaks of her work with an amateur choir, and how these 50 people really enjoy themselves even though it sometimes sounds "bad". However, it is the enjoyment and the social connectedness despite a less professional or "good" sound that really counts.

Linda has the same opinion of amateurs: "They have more fun, it's not that kind of obligation – they don't have to be at their best". From another point of view, John believes making progress is a very good driving force,

3 Self-musickers are defined here as: Singing or playing for self or others.

and you find flow either through imitating, playing by ear or reading music. These participants believe it is of great importance not to kill the desire to play music, but to maintain the desire to learn and continue practicing. As John narrates, he looks forward to picking up the violin every day whether it sounds good or bad, and if doesn't sound good, he has learned to have a relaxed attitude, not forcing himself: "I don't force myself and the violin, then I do something else, have a cup of coffee, and it often goes better". David believes music elevates us to a spiritual dimension. These emotions lift us, inspiring musicians to practice: "Playing music is pure mental hygiene ... that's how important it is ... and that's why those who are musicians practice".

Musical highlights - a sense of meaningfulness

All participants described their experiences with music as being transcendental, instigating emotional release and often tears, or as a "genuine feeling of being filled with something that makes you high", or "moved by" music such as Mozart at his best or the best chorister in a cathedral singing solo. How one receives the music seems to be very subjective. Mary narrated a special event which she recalls as a very strong emotional and divine experience:

When I entered the church [her own concert] something happened to me, take away the drums - take away the bass - one just floats up here, I felt a spiritual relationship with it [music], and it has been much more rewarding for me, it has opened up, and given me more meaning ... and why I should sing - these rare moments I have experienced ... it's just like the whole music takes off from the ground ... and we can look at each other [the musicians in the group] and we know we feel the same... something is happening here and now - a sense of meaningfulness.

As previously mentioned, musical highlights and special occasions where they recalled genuine musical moments were remembered by each participant over a long period of time, acting as a treasure trove. John narrates how as a young man, he attended a philharmonic concert in Oslo and was "blown away". It was this special event that convinced him to continue with a musical career:

I stood at the back by the dressing room, the philharmonic played a Tchaikovsky symphony, and I was blown away - I have thought about that many times afterwards - it was the greatest experience of my life. It was certainly not a perfect orchestra - there are certainly better ones today than then, but for me who had never experienced a live symphony orchestra, for me it was huge - I was knocked straight to the floor ... and I started to cry, it was so strong ... and I had some of the same effects later when I went to Copenhagen and studied ... Yes, when I heard this, there was no doubt that I should continue with this [being a musician].

As Peter says, he believes that being involved in music gives a social connectedness with the other musicians that is meaningful. They have become dependent on each other in a positive way, saying that they “know each other very well, like being a big family”. Peter describes how he always looks forward to playing, being on stage, and having fun, i.e., being a performing artist:

I think that it has given me so much joy, that any person who is happy for the music you give, just that in itself ... to be happy ... then something positive happens in your body that creates health, I think - as opposed to popping pills or running away ...

David describes several happy childhood memories, particularly when his father played his fiddle, but also when his mother sang to the cows - often called *kulokk* in Norwegian. This is a special type of folk-singing used when calling the cows in for milking. These early, musical highlights are still a “treasure trove” for him:

When I was a young boy, I enjoyed listening to my father play “Fanitullen” on his fiddle, because there was a bit of real speed in it, it suited me as a boy, I remember that - and such great musical experiences are many - for me ...

Self-musicking enhancing coping capabilities

It seems as if the time spent on self-musicking had taught participants a lay-skill practice to be harvested for “dark days” as a way of gaining

access to their inner *self*, vital for their feelings of progressing and mastering either singing, playing or both. A major finding in this study was how music was used as a source of enjoyment and enrichment in the participants' lives. As such, there seems to be a connection between beneficial musical experiences, personal motivation, and inspiration to continue a professional career. This is illustrated through Joan's statement: "Why we do it, again and again and again". The majority of the participants believe that this has to do with "crossing a threshold of enduring the hours of practice" to the point that they could "harvest enjoyment and feelings of excitement". As illustrated through Mary's words:

Yes, it is hard work (practicing), but you have to have that drive, be passionate about it. It has taken a few years then, it's a long way ... and the joy of working with the best musicians. Life without music ... it would be very boring. It's your best friend.

It seems as if music has a special power to enable one to connect to oneself and other people, to heal the body, mind and soul and to act as an eminent provider of joy, humor and fun. As this study reveals, these musicians explain how music has not only given them meaning and purpose in life but also acted as a vital social arena. Music has a strong power to move, transcend or transform life into another dimension. Paul believes that music has made him stronger and gives him self-confidence:

I was very shy - and when I went to school I never tried to raise my voice ... but eventually I dared to ... music has made me more confident in myself, and it has made me more daring - saying things that I would otherwise not have dared to say anything about.

Three of the female musicians (Cora, Anna and Linda) had experienced long-term illness with cancer, and they describe how they used music as a way of coping with these difficult periods in life. Joan describes how a strong connection between her and the audience constructs feelings of being "healed by it ... and being able to say things - to express things - and be crazy". Anna describes how she had to make a choice between a regular job and being a professional musician when she got cancer a few years ago. She chose music against all odds, the most uncertain way then,

and “decided to quit a perfectly good job”. It seemed to be the passion for music that was the most important and meaningful activity in life, if it was to be short-lived. As Cora also narrates, music lifts her and gives her a feeling of being pulled forward. Also, the fact that her own music has helped other people in adverse life situations is important:

I have received so many letters over the years. It's the only thing that kept me going when I got cancer ... or it stopped me from taking my own life. Music has meant everything to me in my life ... for me, music is life on earth then ... people's place on earth, it's a tough place, even if it's beautiful and there's a lot of nice things ... then it's an incredibly tough place to live your life ... and you have to fight for existence - and we have the best life in the world, but imagine how the people around you feel ... and then I think of music as a gift from the creative forces ... as soothing the pain - that is ... that relieves you, it's one way of looking at music.

Discussion

Strengths and limitations

In qualitative studies, the researcher's gender, age and personal characteristics need to be considered (Dawn & Spencer, 2003; Silverman, 2011). There was an ongoing process of self-reflection during this project in our role as researchers, which contributed to the trustworthiness and credibility of this study (Dawn & Spencer, 2003; Malterud, 2012; Silverman, 2011). However, a researcher is not without history, and needs to be reflective throughout the research process. Both researchers in this study are amateur, non-professional musicians in addition to having academic careers, hence we were both personally and academically interested in the topic. In this respect, our personal style, enthusiasm, and interest when undertaking the fieldwork may have influenced the participants in a positive manner. An aspect worth considering is whether these results would have been comparable if someone else had conducted the research. To assess the validity or credibility of the work, we acknowledge the limitation of a small sample incorporating only eight professional musicians situated in a central region of Norway. Therefore, although this qualitative work is

not generalizable to other populations, nevertheless some tentative general interpretations may be proposed.

For our study, we chose in-depth individual interviews as this method seemed more relevant and appropriate for sharing and discussing more personal matters. Regarding the one-to-one relationship between an interviewer and the participants, the individual's experiences in qualitative interviews are represented in dialogue, which formulates the interviewee's own life world. A limitation of this study was its lack of a longitudinal design, which would enable comparison of participants' experience and practices at two or more different points in time, thereby linking these findings to context, attitudes, and situation and meaning, including participatory action research (Crowe et al., 2015).

Learning to musick for joy and enrichment – the act of practicing for enjoyment

Early, positive musical experiences may contribute to continuing musical practices, which again may affect social confidence and self-efficacy. As Lamont (2002) argues, a strong musical identity is an important step on the way to becoming a more sophisticated musician. Having musical instruments in a home may promote the development of identity, self-knowledge or aesthetic self-realization (Procter, 2004, p. 228) by discovering or trying out instruments in practice. In this respect, music can be experienced in a highly intensive manner (Shepard & Wicke, 1997). Strong feelings arise through music as being part of something “bigger” than themselves, e.g., playing with people whom they had admired or respected for some time may become overwhelming. In this sense, it might be worth including regular musical practices resulting in “being part of it” and as highlights to remember and treasure, in music education. It is possible to transfer these results to the importance of the subject of music in schools, and also to kindergarten, choirs and voluntary, community musicking.

As these results show, it is of great importance not to kill the desire to play music, but to maintain the desire to learn and continue to practice. John narrates how he looks forward to picking up the violin every

day whether it sounds good or bad, and if it just doesn't sound good, he has learned to have a relaxed attitude, not forcing himself. In line with Vellacott and Ballantyne's study (2022), practice strategies among participants revealed the importance of having intrinsic motivation towards practicing and taking breaks. The findings from this study are useful both to those who might seek to become a professional musician one day as well as to professional musicians who might learn to de-stress their practices (Vellacott & Ballantyne, 2022). The key here is the nature and quality of the practicing, not just the hours spent; its essential element is mindfulness, being present while practicing, rather than mechanically repeating motions. At its best, practicing includes learning how to practice; it involves both reinforcing what is already known and 'pushing the envelope' into what has not yet been mastered. Music as a free tool – to express, to play, to create – has many positive benefits for wellbeing, while music as employment, and a form of performance perfectionism and optimization can have negative wellbeing ramifications for some (Musgrave, 2023). An interesting aspect is how musicians' performance anxiety seemed to decrease as musical and social skills, competence and capabilities increased, hence reducing the risk of music-making as a potential source of turmoil, pain or even psychological distress (Musgrave, 2023; Vaag et al., 2013). These issues may be linked to the curriculum and the call to explore music in schools using a self-determined, critical approach, and also to the curriculum and framework for the primary and secondary schools, the Schools of Music and Art and even kindergarten.

As illustrated in this study, the joy of music is under threat when you push young talents, according to Cora. Several participants pointed out how professional musicians could feel pressure, competition and tiredness compared to amateurs. The work of Trondalen (2013) seeks to grapple with this tension, suggesting that musicians need to experience the joy of music-making and focus less on the career element of their musical work. It is vital to motivate individuals to find engagement and joy in learning and practicing. Through musical activities, individuals will be able build social-cultural capital and find pathways to enjoyable and rewarding fellowship through musicking. (See also ch. 1, Løkken et al.). These musical skills have a huge significance for coping with challenges

later in life and are a way to sustain and promote health (Batt-Rawden & Andersen, 2019).

Musical highlights and peak experiences – a sense of coherence

Musical high points are occasions participants describe as feelings of togetherness or connectedness, and are linked to concrete episodes, moments or events in their lives that are retained as happy memories. These participants speak of peak experiences (Maslow, 1970, 1976) or emotional responses to musical listening or performances that may be referred to as aesthetic emotions (Becker, 2004). As Maslow (1970, p. 236) argued when he discussed the mystic peak experience:

The mystic experience, the experience of awe, of delight, of wonder, of mystery, and of admiration are all subjectively rich experiences of the same passive, aesthetic sort, experiences that beat their way in upon the organism, flooding it as music does.

Fellowship and community in music is also an important aspect of LK20, and these results may inspire teachers to explore and create musical experiences in schools that will provide highlights in music for the individual.

Previous research relates to similar phenomena described as “strong experiences with music” (Gabrielsson & Lindström, 1995, 2001), pointing out how there is no set of musical works which is guaranteed to provide such experiences. This notion is in line with the experiences of the participants in this study and their subjective experiences of a spirituality and sense of meaning, described here as feelings of being “filled with” or “moved by”, being emotional. As Sloboda suggests (2005, p. 175): “We don’t really understand what music is, how it comes to have such a profound effect on us, why it moves us, fascinates us, brings us back to it again and again”.

For the participants in this study, music has the power to induce a trance, or create a special state of consciousness, and it is interesting to consider whether these peak experiences inspire to continue being a professional musician. As reported, beneficial musical experiences, personal

motivation, and inspiration to continue a professional career are illustrated through the statement: “Why we do it, again and again and again”. Becker (2004) also depicts this state of trance as a profound mystery, where one loses a sense of self, of ego, one feels one with the music, a sense of losing passing time. These mystical descriptions of trance experiences, such as the sense of closeness to the divine are also described by Sloboda (2005). (See also ch. 5, Kibirige.) People having had such peak experiences were more likely than others to pursue involvement with music for the rest of their lives. Cora’s peak experiences show a kind of transformed consciousness as a way of using music “*to think with*”, similar to what DeNora discusses (2003, p. 3). She explains how “these rare moments have given her meaning and why she should sing”, also in line with sense of coherence and coping capabilities (Antonovsky, 1987).

As we have seen in John’s narrative (page 8) while experiencing a musical highlight, a future scenario becomes a reference point or template for how to envision and produce that future, saying “there was no doubt that I should continue with this, being a musician”. According to Sloboda and Juslin, (2001), individuals with a lifelong commitment to music were much more likely to report strong emotional reactions to musical content than those individuals who were not involved with music. Thus, it seems that musicians who have had many strong emotional reactions to music may be better equipped to mobilize knowledge of the emotional consequences of expression in their performance. Viewed from this perspective, music is used to regulate and constitute the self, the thing that “gets them going” (Sloboda, 1990, cited in DeNora, 2000, p. 55): “The reason that many people engage with music, as performers or listeners, is that it has power to evoke or enhance valued emotional states”.

An interesting aspect of this notion from a previous study (Batt-Rawden, 2018) shows how non-musicians perceive musicians as having a specific emotional awareness, social capabilities or competence, things that they wish to be a part of. Sensing how musicians seem to “belong to another dimension” or “another world”, these opinions may sometimes result in mixed feelings, for example envy, admiration, positive remarks, critical comments or even jealousy towards people who perform music.

Self-musicking and coping capabilities – a road to health and wellbeing

People often talk about the importance of music in their lives, not least during personal crises, and how music can change their state of mind (Gabrielsson & Lindström, 1995). A narrative that includes all other experiences of a particular piece of music is part of a “musicked autobiography” (Becker, 2004, p. 6). This is no difference from professional musicians in this study. Early, musical practices seemed not only to increase self-efficacy or self-confidence, but the joy of playing seemed to be rooted in the pleasure of mastering an instrument among these participants.

As mentioned in this study, three of the participants have survived cancer, but this study does not give any answers to or causes for their recovery, although music seemed to be a vital part of their lives. One might assume that these participants may perceive music as being a form of “cultural immunogen” (Ruud, 2002, pp. 3, 5) – a type of “aesthetic behavior” that may protect or retain health or prevent ill-health. A previous study by Maranto (1993) suggested some years ago how involvement in music and its ability to enhance the body’s self-healing could be further investigated. The relatively new area of psychoneuroimmunology seeks to confirm the suspected intimate relationship between psychological events, the nervous system and immune system. Løkken et al., 2023 found a reduction in cancer-related mortality where creative activities were also performed; music, singing, and theatre engagement were the only creative activities that were significantly associated with a reduced risk of cancer-related mortality. These findings are supported by many clinical studies that have shown such activity to have a therapeutic effect on cancer patients. Music has been linked to immune response (Fancourt et al., 2014; Nunez, 2002; Theorell, 2014), with stress reduction as a possible pathway, and may impact individuals’ neurological and immunological systems. Self-efficacy beliefs seem to affect the body’s physiological responses to stress, including the immune system, and are thus important for the management of stress and perceived threat (Snyder, 2002, p. 281). Accordingly, if engaging in cultural events promotes immune functions by serving as a buffer against stress, this might be a valid factor among those with cancer in this study. This notion is also in line with

how musicians emphasize the importance of maintaining physical and mental health, and how career satisfaction encompasses financial, creative and emotional wellbeing (Brydie-Leigh et al., 2020).

To summarize, music is a health determinant and as such, a vital component in public health issues, hence learning and coping with life's challenges and adversities through music-making is a valuable salutogenetic approach that must be highlighted. Although this needs further investigation in light of the small sample and selective nature of the participants involved, this study provides valuable findings to take into account. There is no doubt that the complex reality of musicians' careers warrants more research on musicians' need to seek meaningful work which sustains them psychologically, while providing a living wage. Musicians of all kinds – educators, performers, community workers and others – overwhelmingly pursue a music career, because music is what they love (Bartleet et al. 2020). Based on the perspectives presented in this chapter, it might be of significance to acknowledge music's power as an interdisciplinary theme in the educational system. Thus, the new curriculum (LK20) in primary and secondary education in Norway should include a focus on public health and life management, and music as a health-promoting activity.

References

- Aalberg, A. L., Saksvik-Lehouillier, I. & Vaag, J. R. (2019). Demands and resources associated with mental health among Norwegian professional musicians'. *Work*, 63(1), 39–47. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-192906>
- Antonovsky, A. (1987). *Unravelling the mystery of health*. Jossey-Bass.
- Antonovsky, A. (1996). The salutogenetic model as a theory to guide health promotion. *Health Promotion International*, 11, 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/11.1.11>
- Balsnes, A. H. (2014). I get sick when I don't go to choir practice. In U. K. Geisler & K. Johansson (Eds.), *Choral singing: Histories and practices* (pp. 232–250). Cambridge Scholars Publishers.
- Balsnes, A. H. (2018). Singing for a better life: choral singing and public health. In L. O. Bonde & T. Theorell (Eds.), *Music and public health – a Nordic perspective* (pp. 167–186). Springer Verlag.

- Batt-Rawden, K. B. (2018). The fellowship of health musicking: A model to promote health and well-being. In L. O. Bonde & T. Theorell (Eds.), *Music and public health - a Nordic perspective*. Springer Verlag.
- Batt-Rawden, K. B & Andersen, S. (2019). Singing has empowered, enchanted and enthralled me. Choirs for wellbeing? *Health Promotion International*, 140–150. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/day122> <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/day122>
- Blomberg, E. (2020). Skapergledens muligheter. Kunst- og håndverkslæreres forståelse og koblinger mot folkehelse og livsmestring [The joy of creating, related to public health and wellbeing] [Master's thesis]. OsloMet. <https://oda.oslomet.no/oda-xmlui/handle/10642/9107>
- Bartleet, B.-L., Bennett, D., Bridgstock, R., Harrison, S., Draper, P., Tomlinson, V. & Ballico, C. (2020). Making music work: Sustainable portfolio careers for Australian musicians. Australia Research Council Linkage Report. https://makingmusicworkcomau.files.wordpress.com/2020/06/mmw_full-report.pdf
- Becker, J. (2004). *Deep listeners: Music, emotion and trancing*. Indiana University Press.
- Bellis, M. A., Hennell, T., Lushey, C., Hughes, K., Tocque, K., & Ashton, J. R. (2007). Elvis to Eminem: quantifying the price of fame through early mortality of European and North American rock and pop stars. *J Epidemiol Community Health*, 61(10), 896–901. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2007.059915>
- Charmaz, K. (2003). Grounded theory. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology. A practical guide to research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Charmaz, K. (2017). Continuities, contradictions, and critical inquiry in grounded theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, 1–8.
- Clift, S., Hancox, G., Morrison, I., Hess, B., Stewart, D. & Kreutz, G. (2008). *Choral singing, wellbeing and health*. Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health. <https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au/bitstream/handle/10072/150743/DeHaanPUB28.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Clift, S., Jennifer, N., Raisbeck, M., Whitmore, C. & Morrison, I. (2010). Group singing, wellbeing and health: A systematic mapping of research evidence. *Research Involvement and Engagement*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-015-0003-x>
- Crowe, S., Fenton, M., Hall, M., Cowan, K. & Chalmers, I. (2015). Patients', clinicians', and the research communities' priorities for treatment research: There is an important mismatch. *Research Involvement and Engagement*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40900-015-0003-x>
- Dalstein, G. S. (2022). Kreativitet og livsmestring i kunst- og håndverksfaget. En studie av kunst- og håndverkslæreres forståelse av kreativitet og koblinger knyttet til livsmestring [Creativity and wellbeing in arts and crafts] [Master's thesis]. Oslo Met. <https://oda.oslomet.no/oda-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/3014954/dalstein-mest2022.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

- Danielsen, A. G. (2021). *Lærereens arbeid med livsmestring* [Teachers work with students wellbeing]. Vigmostad & Bjørke AS.
- Dawn, S. & Spencer, L. (2003). The foundations of qualitative research. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers* (pp. 1–23). Sage Publications.
- DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge University Press.
- DeNora, T. (2003). Music sociology: Getting the music into action. *British Journal of Music Education*, 20(2), 165–177.
- Erkkilä, J., Punkanen, M. & Fachner, J. (2011). Individual music therapy for depression: Randomised controlled trial. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 199(2), 132–139.
- Fancourt, D., Ockelford, A. & Belai, A. (2014). The psychoneuroimmunological effects of music: A systematic review and a new model. *Brain, Behavior and Immunity*, 36, 15–26. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2013.10.014>
- Fancourt, D. & Poon, M. (2016). Validation of the arts observational scale (ArtsObs) for the evaluation of performing arts activities in hospitals and nursing homes. *Arts & Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice*, 8(2), 140–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2015.1048695>
- Fancourt, D. (2017). *Arts in health*. Oxford University Press
- Fancourt, D. & Finn, S. (2019). *What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and wellbeing? A scoping review*. *Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report*, 67. World Health Organisation (WHO).
- Fancourt, D. & Steptoe, A. (2019). Cultural engagement and mental health: Does socio-economic status explain the association? *Social Science and Medicine*, 236. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.112425>
- Gibson, J. J. (1977). *The theory of affordances*. *Hilldale*, 1(2), 67–82.
- Forbes, M. & Bartlett, M. (2020). ‘This circle of joy’: Meaningful musicians’ work and the benefits of facilitating singing groups. *Music Education Research*, (22)5, 555–568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2020.1841131>
- Gabrielsson, A. & Lindström, S. (1995). Can strong experiences of music have therapeutic implications? In R. Steinberg (Ed.), *Music and the mind machine*. Springer-Verlag.
- Gabrielsson, A. (2001). Emotions in strong experiences with music. In P. N. Juslin & J. A. Sloboda (Eds.), *Music and emotion*. Oxford University Press.
- Green, L. (2002). *How popular musicians learn. A way ahead for music education*. Ashgate.
- Green, L. (2003). Music education, cultural capital, and social group identity. In M. Clayton., T. Hergbert & R. Middleton (Eds.), *The cultural study of music – a critical introduction* (pp. 263–273). Routledge.

- Løkken, B., Merom, D., Sund, E., Krokstad, S. & Rangul, V. (2020). Cultural participation and all-cause mortality, with possible gender differences: An 8-year follow-up in the HUNT Study, Norway. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 74(8), 624–630.
- Løkken, B. (2023). Engagement in cultural activity and public health: The HUNT Study, Norway. [Doctoral theses]. NTNU. <https://ntnuopen.ntnu.no/ntnu-xmlui/handle/11250/3064857>
- Malterud, K. (2001). Qualitative research: Standards, challenges, and guidelines. *The Lancet*, 358, 483–488.
- Malterud, K. (2012). Systematic text condensation: A strategy for qualitative analysis. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, 40, 795–805.
- Maranto, C. D. (1993). Applications of music in medicine. In M. Heal & T. Wigram (Eds.), *Music therapy in health and education*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Maslow, A. H. (1970). *Motivation and personality* (2nd ed.). Harper & Row.
- Maslow, A. H. (1976). *Religions, values and peak-experiences*. Penguin Books.
- Musgrave, G. (2023). Music and wellbeing vs. musicians' wellbeing: Examining the paradox of music-making positively impacting wellbeing, but musicians suffering from poor mental health. *Cultural Trends*, 32(3), 280–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09548963.2022.2058354>
- Nunez, M. J., Mana, P., Linares, D., Riveiro, M. P. & Balboa, J. (2002). Music, immunity and cancer. *Life Science*, 71(9), 1047–1057. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-3205\(02\)01796-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0024-3205(02)01796-4)
- Procter, S. (2004). Playing politics: Community music therapy and the therapeutic redistribution of music capital for mental health. In M. Pavlicevic & G. Ansdell (Eds.), *Community music therapy* (pp. 214–230). Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Roos, M., Roy, J.-S. & Lamontagne, M.-E. (2021). A qualitative study exploring the implementation determinants of rehabilitation and global wellness programs for orchestral musicians. *Clinical Rehabilitation*, 35(10), 1488–1499. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02692155211010254>
- Ruud, E. (1997). Music and quality of life. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 6(2), 86–91.
- Ruud, E. (2001). *Varme øyeblikk* [Happy moments]. Unipub.
- Ruud, E. (2002). Music as a cultural immunogen – three narratives on the use of music as a technology of health. In I. M. Hanken, S. G. Nilsen & M. Nerland (Eds.), *Research in and for higher music education. Festschrift for Harald Jørgensen*. NMH-Publications.
- Ruud, E. (2005). Music: A salutogenic way to health promotion? In G. Tellnes (Ed.), *Urbanization and health. New challenges to health promotion and prevention*. Academic Press, UniPub.

- Ruud, E. (2013). Can music serve as a “cultural immunogen”? An explorative study. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing*, 8, 205–209.
- Shepard, J. & Wicke, P. (1997). *Music and cultural theory*. Polity Press.
- Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting qualitative data*, (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Sloboda, J. A. (1992). Empirical studies of emotional response to music. In M. Riess Jones & S. Holleran (Eds.), *Cognitive bases of musical communication*. American Psychological Association.
- Sloboda, J. A. & O’Neill, S. A. (2001). Emotions in everyday listening to music. In P. N. Juslin & J. Sloboda (Eds.), *Music and emotion: Theory and research*. Oxford University Press.
- Sloboda, J. A. (2005). *Exploring the musical mind*. Oxford University Press.
- Steinberg, R. (1995). *Music and the mind machine*. Springer.
- Stige, B. (2005). Music as a health Resource. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 14(1), 15–32.
- Stige, B. (2012). Health musicking: A perspective on music and health as action and performance. In R. MacDonald., G. Kreutz & L. Mitchell (Eds.), *Music, health and wellbeing* (pp. 183–195). Oxford University Press.
- Theorell, T. (2014). Psychological health effects of musical experiences: Theories, studies and reflections. *Music Health Science*.
- Trondalen, G. (2013). Musical performance as health promotion: A musician’s narrative. In L. O. Bonde, E. Ruud, M. S. Skånland & G. Trondalen (Eds.), *Musical life stories. Narratives on health musicking* (pp. 173–191). Norwegian Academy of Music.
- Vaag, J., Saksvik, P. Ø., Milch, V., Theorell, T. & Bjerkeset, O. (2015.) Sound of wellbeing; revisited – choir singing and wellbeing among Norwegian municipal employees. *Arts & Health*, 5, 93–102.
- Vaag, J., Bjørngaard, J. H. & Bjerkeset, O. (2016). Symptoms of anxiety and depression among Norwegian musicians compared to the general workforce. *Psychology of Music*, 44(2), 234–248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735614564910>
- Vellacott, C. & Ballantyne, J. (2022). An exploration of the practice habits and experiences of professional musicians. *Music Education Research*, 24(3), 312–326, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2022.2053513>
- Welch, G. F., Himonides, E., Saunders, J., Papageorgi, I. & Sarazin, M. (2014). Singing and social inclusion. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 29(5).