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Music Education Through Popular Music Festivals A study of the *OM Music Festival* in Ontario, Canada

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Music Education Through Popular Music Festivals

A Study of the *OM Music Festival* in Ontario, Canada

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Introduction



Most people think of the teaching and learning of music as taking place in formal, institutional contexts like schools and universities. This study will look at the transmission of music teaching and learning that takes place in a more informal, musical environment, namely at a *popular music festival*.¹ In particular, it will discuss the OM music festival, which has taken place for the last six years in northern Ontario, Canada. Through in-depth interviews with four people, individual musical experiences are explored. These individuals' recollections help to demonstrate that there are unique forms of the teaching and learning of musics from a variety of cultures and genres that take place at the OM festival. As such, popular music festivals like the OM festival can be seen as valuable (and relatively unexplored) sources for music educators and sociologists to consider when exploring music education in community contexts. The present analysis of the OM festival is intended to help demonstrate the potential of all kinds of festivals as music education tools.

Live performance contexts are integral to musical meaning. Past studies in popular music have looked at the sociological and cultural implications of live performances at concerts and clubs (e.g., Brewster & Broughton, 1999; Cohen, 1997; Fuchs, 1998; Lull, 1987; Thornton, 1995; Whiteley, 1997). Some others have discussed the uniqueness of popular music in its spatial mobility (touring - Grossberg, 1987; street parties and cars –

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Kirschner, 1987; Swiss, Sloop & Hermann, 1998). Few, however, have explored any distinction between single concerts or club experiences and the multiple, consecutive and outdoor format that performances tend to follow at music festivals. Popular music festivals have been, and continue to be, widespread and well attended in the United States, Canada, European countries, and in many other countries all over the world. Since the ground-breaking Monterey festival in 1967, followed by the historical events at Woodstock in 1969, many musicologists have written historically and sociologically about these and other significant popular and folk music festivals (Budds & Ohman, 1993; Kaufman, 1974; Sander, 1973; Wenner, 1967); but very little, if any consideration has been given to the role these festivals may play in community music teaching and learning.

The unique context of the outdoor music festival has been, if not acknowledged outright, then certainly implied in much writing about these festivals. Many newspaper, magazine articles and websites about music festivals discuss the great atmosphere that is created at these outdoor events.² Interestingly, it seems that even the owners of popular nightclubs have recognized the uniqueness of the outdoors as a context for taking in favorite popular music performances. When discussing the trendy, Manhattan club, ‘The Saint’ in their book, *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life: The History of the Disc Jockey*, Brewster and Broughton point out that the décor at the club was designed to simulate the night sky as a means of inspiring the ‘clubbers’ (Brewster, 1999, pp. 196-197). However, although the contexts of both indoor and outdoor venues for viewing live performances in popular music have been discussed in light of their sociological, historical and personal significance for fans and taste cultures (Brewster, 1999; Lewis, 1987; Thornton, 1995), very little attention has been given to these contexts in light of their possible effects on the transmission of music teaching and learning. “All music must be seen as intimately tied to social and cultural contexts and conditions, and the theory and practice of music

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education needs to account much more for this situatedness of music and music-making” (Mayday Group Website, Agenda - Guiding Ideals 2).

The outdoor music festival will be the focus of this paper because it provides a unique, sustained period of musical experience for those involved. A single evening concert or club gig would also be interesting to consider in light of its possible effects on the teaching and learning of music, but the music festival is exceptional because it will often take place over an entire weekend. As such, participants are immersed in the musical context for several consecutive days and evenings. They have a chance to grow from the musical experiences in which they participate throughout the weekend. They might hear a performance on Friday evening that inspires them to participate in a workshop the following day. Such a rich continuum of musical learning would not be available when considering a single performance.

The festival community lends itself well to musical involvement and interaction among participants and performers. People who travel to the festival, whether as participant, volunteer and/or performer, have committed themselves to being a part of the festival community for the weekend. Everyone camps together, eats the same food and drinks the same water. Performers and participants all have to deal with the challenges of the weather as they experience the benefits and drawbacks of living in the outdoors. There’s something very special about walking through a quiet, darkened, wooded path, only to come across a wonderland of sound, light and images. Although the performers are separated from their audience by a ‘stage’ of sorts (be it a more formal stage, as some of the OM sound stages feature, or simply behind their sound equipment at ground level), there seems to be much less of a spatial division among performers and audience members at the OM festival than there is at most popular music concerts and club gigs (i.e., single-evening performances). When performers and participants alike are all under the same sky, out in the same woods, a communal feeling is created, which helps lead to

an open exchange of musical ideas among performers and audience members. This produces an ideal environment for the teaching and learning of music.

Background on the OM Festival

The OM music festival was chosen for this study due to its increasing popularity and success, because of its holistic approach to the presentation of music, art and culture, and because, as a participant myself, I am in the unique position to have experienced it first-hand. In the words of the OM organizers, “the goal of OM is to foster awareness, and to encourage personal growth through immersion in creativity” (OM Website, background page, ¶ 3). The first OM festival was held in 1998, and it has continued to run each year since, over the weekend of the summer solstice in June. It takes place in a remote location in Ontario. For the past several years, it has been held just outside the small town of Killaloe, a few hours north of Peterborough, Ontario. The vast majority of participants travel from larger centers like Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal to attend the festival, and they camp on site from the Thursday or Friday evening through to the Sunday afternoon in order to fully appreciate all that the festival has to offer. The OM festival organizers spend countless hours planning, setting up, directing volunteers and participants, and cleaning up, in order to make the festival run smoothly. There are hundreds of volunteers who help out before, during and after the festival each year. This amazing system helps to distribute food, water, health care, as well as a variety and breadth of musical, artistic, and cultural performances and activities to the participants, volunteers and performers (who now number a total of approximately 4, 000 people). OM is a non-profit festival. The organizers and volunteers donate freely of their time in order to bring this unique experience to all who choose to participate. With such dedication evident in every aspect of OM’s community, it is understandable how their “leave no trace”³ philosophy is followed almost religiously among the vast majority of participants.

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Musically, OM features, for the most part, forms of popular music under the general umbrella of *electronic music*.⁴ However, it also includes a variety of performances of classical, jazz, folk, and world musics each year. For example, the main stage at OM in 2003 featured *North Indian Kathak* dancing⁵ and a sitar teacher/performer during the Saturday afternoon. Every year, the organizers create several, separate sound stages (there were six in 2003), each of which features a more specific, sub-genre of popular music as its focus. All of the stages feature live performances throughout the weekend, and many also highlight dance troupes, drumming circles, instrument demonstrations, and DJ workshops. All stages feature artistic and visual materials that help to enhance the environments at the specific stage. For example, in 2003, one of the stages was run by the Blacklight Activists and featured *Psy Trance* (or *Goa Trance*) music.⁶ In order to get to this stage, you had to walk down a winding, forest path. The visual display at the actual stage area was remarkable (especially at night). It was more of a circle than a stage, with the DJ booth in one ‘corner.’ You could walk all around the area and look at a variety of art (all done in blacklight paint, which lit up the area with an array of wonderful colors).

At various times throughout the evening, authentic *Poi*⁷ dancers performed using real fire. There was a community fire pit where you could sit for a rest. Many of the participants wore clothing that reflected in the blacklight, becoming, in their own way, part of the whole spectacle. This is just one, small description of a corner at the OM festival. With such a wide variety of rich musical, artistic and cultural experiences to explore, it seems clear that the OM festival is a perfect location for community music learning to take place.

Methodology

The OM music festival is an ideal study to approach ethnographically for several important reasons. As a participant at the festival, I have had first-hand experience with the festival atmosphere and community. While attending, I recognized the potential of the music festival as a rich (and, I thought, relatively unexplored) context for the teaching and learning of music. Some researchers go so far as to claim that a reliable account of a community “necessitates at least some firsthand familiarity with the environment acquired through the temporary assumption of an inhabitant’s point of view” (Radway, 1988, p. 366). As such, having camped with other participants and performers, as well as attended performances and workshops at the OM festival in June of 2003, I am in the ideal position to shed light on much of the information put forth in this paper.

For the past ten or twenty years, studies in musicology and ethnomusicology have also begun to acknowledge the researcher’s familiarity with the musical genre being studied as an important factor in the authenticity of such work (Krimms, 2000; Walser, 1993). People who are involved in certain genres of music as fans and/or performers have insight into the practices of such genres those ‘on the outside’ would not. This is perhaps even more important for popular forms of music than for other musical genres, because of the lack of ‘scholarly’ literature about popular music (and this literature is especially lacking about popular music festivals specifically). As Tony Kirschner (1998) points out, “ethnography allows us to participate in the nuances and eccentricities of popular music as lived experience in order to ‘get it right’” (p. 258). As a fan and performer of a variety of styles of popular music, including many of those featured at the OM music festival, I am in the unique position to provide insight into this study. In other words, popular music lends itself well to analysis by someone who is in touch with this music.

Finally, the organizers of the OM music festival view musical culture as a living process. They are dedicated to a holistic approach to community music. “OM unites spectrums of individuals into a festival of the whole where multiple villages, hosting a

broad range of talented DJs and live acts, become the axis of an entire community of celebration” (OM Website, background page, ¶ 1). It would seem almost absurd to approach the study of such an environment using anything other than a qualitative and holistic form of research (i.e. allowing the experiences of the people involved to speak for themselves). Personal interviews with four people provide such an approach. A variety of musical experiences at OM are explored through the four individuals’ recollections. As organizers, volunteers, participants, artists and/or performers, these four help to clarify the impact that the OM music festival has had on their lives, as well as the lives of many others. Their discussions about the value of a context like the OM festival for the teaching and learning of music in a community setting is invaluable. Based on their insights, future musicologists, ethnomusicologists, sociologists, and music educators will be able to look at popular music festivals as a valuable context for music teaching and learning.

Interviewees

Four people were interviewed for this study. Mark Pemberton is a forty-year-old, married, self-employed graphic artist. He presently lives and works in Toronto with his wife. Mark grew up in South Africa and moved to Canada as a young adult, after living and studying in England for a few years. He attended the OM festival as a participant in 2002, and then volunteered his services as a graphic artist to the OM organizers during the preparation stages of the 2003 festival. In this capacity, he helped to design and implement the *zine*⁸ given to all participants who attended the 2003 festival. Mark also attended the 2003 festival as a participant.

Heidi Eisenhauer is a thirty-year-old bookkeeper and arts administrator. She grew up in Alberta and now lives with her partner in Toronto. She, along with three other female friends, helped to conceive of OM in 1996. They “wanted to add a holistic

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approach to the community that they had come from. So they organized their thoughts around creating a music festival that would incorporate other aspects of their lives (giving workshops on nutrition, holistic medicine, etc.)” (Eisenhauer, 2003). Heidi has helped to organize and run the festival ever since it started in 1998. She has volunteered her time to be part of the main collective (the founding organizers of OM), and as such, has been involved for countless hours, in some capacity, in almost every aspect of the festival. Some of her specific contributions over the last few years have been organizing and running the kitchen and giving workshops on holistic medicine.

Sara Thompson lives and works in Toronto as a graphic artist. She is thirty years old. Sara has attended OM every year other than the first year. She has been an active participant and she has volunteered in various capacities each year for the festival. In the first few years, she worked as a safety patrol and lifeguard during the festival. For the last two years, Sara has used her skills as a graphic artist to work as zine coordinator. In 2003, Sara performed at OM for the first time as a DJ.

Andrew Hamill is 27 years old. He lives and works in Toronto. He is an active DJ in and around Toronto in the Psy Trance genre of electronica music. However, he does not always get paid for these performances, so he works delivering organic foods to make extra money. Andrew has attended the OM festival every year other than the first year. He was an official performer with a group called the Blacklight Activists, who had a stage at the 2001 and 2003 OM festivals. Andrew had performance slots as a DJ with this group in both these years. Andrew attended the OM festival in 1999, 2000, and 2002 as a participant, but for two of those years (1999 and 2000), he also ended up performing an impromptu, ‘fill-in’ DJ set at one of the stages.

The Interviews

During the interviews with the four participants, several recurring themes appeared. All of the interviewees talked about the setting and context of the OM festival as being very

important to them. They discussed the great impact that the outdoor environment had on their enjoyment of the festival, and they referred to the community context as being an essential part of the OM festival's appeal and success. They viewed the music made at OM as being intimately connected to the social and cultural contexts and conditions in which it was performed. All four people that were interviewed also expressed their thoughts about the value of the music festival as a unique and significant musical experience in their lives, one that could not be reproduced easily in other settings. As such, music festivals like OM are worthy of study as unique social and historical musical happenings, as well as in relation to the teaching and learning of music that takes place in such a unique community. Finally, all interviewees recounted some profound musical experiences they had at the OM festival. Several participants also discussed effects that the OM festival had on their personal musical direction outside of the festival.

Setting/Context

The Outdoor Context

Popular music festivals take place in a unique setting. The majority of popular music performances occur in large, concert halls or arenas, or in smaller bars or clubs. These concerts tend to occur during one evening performance, lasting a few hours. The music festival, on the other hand, usually takes place over the course of several days and nights. The participants will often camp on the festival site for this whole time, which puts them in the unique position of being totally immersed in the musical and outdoor context for an extended period of time. Festival participants experience the natural environment as a unique and very influential component in their enjoyment of the music festival experience.

Andrew: When you put music into an outdoor setting, it makes a world of difference. The music, the trees, and the hills, and the grass, and the air,

they all go together synergistically, and they have a shared relationship for sure.

Sara: I think that being in a natural environment really helps. Personally, I am more relaxed, and really happy to be outside, really feeling connected to the earth. I am in an environment that I'm really comfortable in, because I'm happy to be breathing clean air and waking up under a tree. This just puts me in a good mood to start with. And then, to be surrounded by so much creative energy, and to feel a lot of love. It's just really nice. The combination of everything is really good. So I think that the context of being in a natural environment makes a big difference.

This experience of hearing music in the outdoors also helps to connect the performers and the participants, as everyone lives through the benefits and drawbacks of the weather together. People feel united in a common experience.

Mark: You don't often go somewhere where the performers have to camp down just like the rest of us, in tents, and if it's raining, in mud. They have to put up with that too, so they're definitely part of the community.

The outdoor setting of music festivals like OM, contrasts sharply to the experiences of most performers and audience members at more typical, popular music performances (i.e. in city concert halls or clubs).

Heidi: I look at my partner's band and how, when they do a big show at somewhere like The Opera House [in Toronto], they don't get to talk to anyone [in the audience]. It's like they [the organizers] create a separation. They keep all the performers in the back before and after they play. What we encourage [at OM] is to have the performers come out.

This atmosphere encourages exchanges between performers and participants at the OM festival, which provides an ideal situation for the transmission of music teaching and learning.

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The Community Context

Another important aspect of the music festival's setting is the sense of community that is created. Many music festivals, including OM, are "organized to honour community and interconnection" (OM website, background page, ¶ 3). The OM organizers have certainly made this a priority goal for their festival.

Heidi: We use the music to bring them there, and then we bring in all those other aspects, to try to get them involved in their own life, beyond just going and taking drugs and dancing. And we've seen huge progress in a number of people and from just watching the community.

In the eyes of the participants in this study, this sense of community has not only been achieved admirably, it is essential to their enjoyment of the OM festival.

Andrew: It's a desire for people to come together as one unit again, you know? To escape the traps of Babylon, get out of the concrete jungle.

Sara: The community vibe at OM is the actual experience of walking around and being greeted by so many familiar, not even familiar, but just friendly faces. Most people are in a really good mood, and they're just happy to be there and [are] really relaxed. . . . If something bad is going to happen to you, if you're at OM, it's like the luckiest place that it could happen to you in the world. You're going to have the help you need. And that's kind of what I love about it. Everyone is just their best self. . . . The vast majority of people there put their best self forward. [And this is because of] the sense of community and connectedness.

Heidi: I think of OM as a kind of family reunion. You come, you get together, and you sit down with people you've met before, and new people, and you have time to spend with them. A lot of people say, "don't bring in headlining DJs," because it's not about that anymore. It's about coming together, and community.

Another very important aspect of the OM community is their communal kitchen. This is one aspect that makes the OM festival different from many other outdoor, popular music festivals. Not many organizational teams for music festivals have the resources or capabilities to create a kitchen that will feed thousands of participants, performers and volunteers for an entire weekend. The OM kitchen is run entirely by volunteers. Participants at the festival are asked to bring enough of one food item to feed themselves for the whole weekend. These items are given to the kitchen, and the kitchen crew prepares meals.

Heidi: I think a lot of the festivals that do similar things to OM, have varying levels of community. But, I think that the kitchen allows people even more to step in. It's a community project.

Andrew: The community kitchen is a huge part of OM I think. That's a mind-blowing concept for a lot of people, especially first-timers. They think, "Wow! Free food for all these people." That's a really important part of it for me. To encourage community growth. . . . If you can't vibe with the kitchen and the community thing, then you shouldn't even be at the festival in the first place, because you've got a whole bunch of issues that are attached to the city life that you've got to work through before you can really appreciate that sort of thing.

Many participants also help out at the kitchen during peak traffic times. Preparing and eating meals together profoundly intensifies the OM sense of community for festival participants and performers alike.

Mark: Every time I ever walked past the kitchen, at any time of the day or night, there were always volunteers from the festival, from the crowd at the

festival, working in the kitchen, chopping up vegetables, or making coffee or tea for people.

Andrew: Right away, people are into helping out too. Within an hour or so [of being at the festival], everyone's chopping carrots and making soups for people. That's the magic of the kitchen. People are like, "Wow. This is so great that these people want to do this." And right away, you're inspired to help make it happen. So you put your own energy into the effort.

The outdoor setting and community context are essential to the success and appeal of the OM festival. Popular music festivals have uniqueness to their setting that other performance venues do not. In a rare discussion of the atmosphere at a large, outdoor music festival in San Francisco, one researcher notes: "This event stirs friendly feelings for those who attend, bringing together some people who may otherwise not have much in common. Music, and contexts of its live creation, becomes useful to listeners for many purposes. These large outdoor gatherings provoke sentiments that may not be achieved any other way" (Lull, 1987, p. 149). Although this paper discussed an outdoor classical music festival where participants did not camp out for several days as part of their experience, the above observations help to show how festivals of all kinds can be considered as providing unique contexts for the transmission of music teaching and learning.

The Popular Music Festival as a Unique and Valuable Musical Experience

Popular music festivals are an exceptionally unique experience within the realm of popular music performances. In no other performance venue are you totally immersed in the musical experience for several days and nights. "Being immersed in beats that don't stop, overnight, and how that affects you. I think that's really interesting" (Thompson, 2003). Also, as previously discussed, the outdoor setting and community context of a festival like OM, lend distinctiveness to the experience for participants and performers

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alike. As such, festivals are worthy of study in so far as their influence on the sociology and history of popular music in general, and of their importance to more specific sub-genres and taste cultures as a venue for meeting and sharing common tastes in music. The OM music festival is a perfect example of such a unique experience.

Many participants at OM are surprised by the depth of their experiences at OM, when compared to other musical happenings in their lives.

Mark: It affected me profoundly. It definitely had a life-changing impact on my life . . . the sort of energy that can thrive in a festival like this. I'd never experienced that before. It was very powerful and at times, overwhelming. . . . I wasn't really expecting anything, but as it turned out, there was definitely something spiritual in the experience.

Performer-Audience Connection

The overall impact of the OM festival on people who attend is intensified for many because the OM festival organizers emphasize local performers and encourage them to interact with the audiences they play for by being involved as festival participants as well. The OM festival organizers and many of its participants want it to remain true to this local intent and spirit. While the festival does usually feature one or two more well known musical acts, the focus remains on giving opportunities for smaller, local acts to perform. The organizers (and many of the participants) want to avoid having OM turn into a large-scale, commercial festival. This approach fosters a sense of connectedness and community spirit among organizers, participants and performers.



Andrew: At bigger raves,⁹ of course, like if Paul Oakenfold is playing, he's not going to be wandering around the Kind Kitchen with everyone. He's going to be in the VIP tent, doing whatever that I won't even mention. Basically that's the difference with OM. . . . Some other electronic dance festivals will have 60 or 70 world, big-name talents flown in for that party. OM has

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more of a local vibe, instead: local talent is featured, with one or two bigger names thrown in as well.

Sara: There's no VIP area at OM. It's not like there's anywhere where only 'special people' can go. There's a kind of egalitarian view and I think that that makes a big difference, in terms of the performers being connected to the participants. . . . [The OM organizers] want people [performers] who get it, who aren't pre-Madonnas. . . . I think I'd rather have somebody [performing] who is experiencing the festival for what it is, as opposed to feel outside it. . . . I think, for people who are new to the festival, they are used to going to things and having people perform for them, and they experience it, and then they go home, and that's that. I think after you come away from OM, no matter what experience you have had, that has inspired you to participate more the following year.

Heidi: We also really encourage, we almost demand that our performers come and participate in the festival for the whole weekend. We'll never invite somebody back who just comes and leaves. We really want them to have the whole experience of being there.

This unique, local feeling at the OM festival is purposely encouraged by the organizers because they recognize the positive atmosphere that this helps to create in the sense of community spirit and positive audience/performer relationships. Many participants return year after year because of this exceptional atmosphere that is created at OM

Heidi: A vast majority of people are returning participants. And, other than that, it's passed on by word of mouth. We have always chosen never to do grand scheme marketing. We've been approached by *The Star*, *The Globe*; *Tribe Magazine* wanted to do a three-page spread on us. We've always said no. We don't want people to find out about OM through [this kind of] printed media. We always want it to be through word of mouth. We might

suffer some years, because we don't have the number of people that we need, but we still believe in this.

This lack of advertising and press coverage makes OM different from many other popular music festivals and encourages the local flavor that helps to create the sense of community and connectedness at OM

Variety of Musical Performances

Another unique aspect of OM is the variety of musical performances and activities it offers. Although a lot of OM's musical performers would be classified as being part of the electronic music genre, OM organizers make an effort to select acts that also feature other genres of music. Also, within the electronic genre, many of the featured performers at OM are unique in their approach to this type of music.

Sara: You have the whole electronic music thing going on, but you also have somebody playing sitar, and they put it over a drum and bass beat.

OM festival organizers have even encouraged and developed unique blends within sub-genres of music by pairing bands together.

Heidi: One of the things we've done is mentorships. So this year we had a Jungle¹⁰ stage, but we had them paired with a group called Balance. The Jungle group had never done a stage before, so Balance helped them out. It also gave them some opportunities to merge their music. . . . [Y]ou had a sort of bridge of the two genres. We've tried to do that across the board.

As well as a variety of DJs and live acts within the electronic genre of popular music, OM consciously tries to bring in performances from a variety of other genres and world musics. They've had groups in such diverse musical areas as: "African tribal drumming, Calypso, Ska, Celtic, North Indian, Jungle, Electro, Hip Hop, Reggae, House, Electra Clash, Techno" (Eisenhauer, 2003), and much more.

Heidi: We have an application that encourages different things. We ask them what they are going to do that's alternative on their stage during quiet

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times, trying to encourage them to bring in aspects of different types of acoustic music. Most of the people come from an electronic background, but we don't want people to be exposed to only electronic music.

Mark: It is certainly an alternative music scene, but within that, there is a lot of variety. Every year there are [around] five sound stages, and each sound stage features its own style of music. It's quite a breadth of music.

Andrew: Generally the music is electronic dance music, but there are so many genres within that, that cover the whole spectrum. There are live bands too, that aren't electronic at all.

Workshops

Finally, the workshops offered at OM make it distinctive and exceptional in comparison to other popular music festivals. These workshops provide participants with the opportunity to learn about musics from a variety of cultures and genres through critically reflective music-making.

Heidi: We've always had DJ training, where we bring in someone who teaches people how to set up the equipment, and then somebody to teach beat matching, and then somebody to teach the production of how to 'get out there.' And then we've always had drumming workshops, in varying styles. This year we had a kids' drumming workshop as well. And then there's been spiral dance, chanting, and lots more.

Mark: I went to one of the drumming circles this past year, and, everybody there was so into sharing. I walked up and I hadn't even gotten into the tent where it was happening yet, and somebody got up and gave me a drum It's just a communal sense of learning. Everybody wants to share. . . . I think that's part of their philosophy [the organizers], strength and diversity and communal learning.

Clearly, the OM festival provides unique and in-depth musical experiences for many of its performers and participants. Positive encounters and interaction between performers and audience members are encouraged through OM's emphasis on, and support for, local talent. OM encourages not only a breadth of musical sub-genres within the electronic dance music focus; it also promotes a variety of musical performances and activities in other genres and from other cultures. Finally, OM is unique when compared to many other popular music festivals because it fosters the teaching and learning music through workshops. For all of these reasons, OM can be seen as having unique, educational potentials in music. As such, it should be viewed as an exceptional model for other, similar and even more specifically "music education" oriented festivals and community music events (e.g. school-sponsored community music festivals).

Individual Musical Experiences

Live Performance Experiences

All of the participants in this study had intense memories of musical performances that they experienced at OM. The importance of music's social and cultural context has helped this type of live context to create exceptional experiences and lasting memories for many people. The OM festival is in a particularly unique position to provide such experiences for participants and performers because of many of the reasons already explored in this paper (e.g. outdoor setting, community context, immersion in the musical context for several nights and days, performer-audience relationships, variety of music, etc.). As such, all of the participants in this study recounted profound experiences during live performances at OM, either as audience member or performer.

Mark: I think one of the most memorable things was, when they [band called The Legion of Green Men, who performed in 2002)] came on at about 12:30 at night and one of their songs had the sounds of Canadian geese honking in it. And everyone in the crowd looked straight up in the air, all at once. . . .

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[Another memorable moment happened at a performance of the band, Inter-galactic Fairy Funk in 2003], the performers, halfway through a song, jumped off the stage and started dancing with the people, [with] the crowd on the floor. It was really a much better performance because of this. The party got a lot better.

Sara: Being asked to perform and become a performer at one of my favorite events, I just felt so blessed. . . . I got to play my dream gig at OM. What I got to do was experience the other side of what I'd been enjoying for years. To be on the other side of it, and have people respond to your music, and dance for you and say thank you. . . . I was playing a 6:30 in the morning set, so whether it was the person who couldn't get out of their chair, who was really tired, but sitting there nodding at me, or my friend who never dances, ever. I've never seen him dance in my entire life, and he was jumping up and down.

Heidi: [I think of] Susannah Haas. She was playing last year [in 2002], and I was walking down from my shift . . . and I could hear her singing. And it just moved me so much that I actually had to sit down. I was moved so much, I had tears in my eyes. I was crying. And I talked to people about this afterwards and found like, five other people who had all had the exact same experience with her performance. Her singing was just so powerful.

Andrew: [At OM] people will come up to you right away while you're playing or after you've played. . . . There will always be five or six people who come up to me, even into the DJ booth while I'm playing and they'll be like, "Wicked! Thanks. This is great!" . . . You know you're getting through to people and you're getting in touch with them; . . . the energy that you're putting into it, they're receiving it As far as the dance floor at the Psy Trance stage goes, there are profound moments that come and go like

clockwork. Just where the whole crowd is into a real tribal thing. They're chanting and screaming. Everyone is throwing their arms in the air, and it's basically just one, big, love vibe at that moment. And I feel it every time. You can feel it, you know? You can't avoid it! You could close your eyes and curl up in a ball, and you'd still feel it. It's so powerful.

Clearly, both performers and audience members at the OM festival take away unique, musical memories of live performances they experience there. With such a rich context of musical performances in a variety of musical styles and genres, in such a unique setting, the OM festival is in a perfect position to have a lasting impact on many participants and performers.

Experiences in Musical Learning

There are various types of musical learning that take place at the OM festival itself, as well as outside of the festival (but as a direct result of the festival's influences). First, there is the more directed type of learning that occurs at the OM workshops, where the OM organizers help guide and expand the musical initiatives of the participants through explicit teaching of or about something musical (e.g. African drumming techniques, DJ training, spiral dancing). Then, there is the vast array of less formal learning that takes place while people are immersed in a musical context for several days and nights. This more informal learning can take on many different forms. For example, people can learn musically through: talking to performers or other participants about a certain genre or performance, being exposed to new genres and styles of musical performance, being exposed to new instruments, observing the performance techniques of musicians at performances, and so on. Lastly, there is musical learning that takes place outside of the OM festival, but is a direct result of something musical that was experienced at the festival. For example, a participant may decide to become a DJ after experiencing a specific performance (or several performances) at OM. Another participant may decide to take music lessons on a particular instrument or in a particular style of musical

performance they observed while at OM. The participants in this study recounted some of their own musical learning as a result of the OM festival. Interestingly, all four of the interviewees had either very little music education at school (or outside of school) while they were growing up, or they had essentially negative things to say about the experiences they did have. Those who pursued music as performers (e.g. Andrew and Sara) did so on their own (i.e. outside of formal musical institutions). Almost all musical pursuits as adults recounted by the interviewees were influenced by their experiences at the OM festival (and, for some, at other, similar popular music festivals).

Direct (and directed) musical learning at OM.

From the initial stages, a priority of the OM festival organizers has been to include a variety of workshops at the festival. Through these workshops, the organizers act as music educators who help expand and shape the musical initiatives of the participants and performers at the festival.

Heidi: We organized our thoughts around creating a festival that would incorporate other aspects of our lives. We each came from different areas of giving workshops [As] an organizer, [I had to make] sure that workshops happened. The first year, there was tabling, sort of like an expo, which happened organically, so I made sure that happened again. . . . We've always had DJ training And then we've always had drumming workshops.

Mark: With everything that's going on, the workshops and things that they have available there, everything is about teaching and learning. . . . The people there are very open-minded to learning something and the exposure and encouragement is right there. All through the communal spirit, people are more likely to go over and pick up a drum.

Unstructured musical learning at OM.

Many people who are involved in the OM festival take part in the workshops that are offered each year, but *all* participants and performers benefit from the rich, unstructured and informal learning that permeates the entire OM context. Some participants even recognize the differences in the structured musical learning at workshops, and the less formal musical learning that is taking place as you walk around and ‘experience’ all of the performances.

Sara: I think that there’s the whole performance area of OM, and then there’s the more educational, workshops area of OM. I think of these as sort of, two different [educational] experiences. All of it is very self-directed, obviously, but whether you’re going to learn something specific at a workshop, or whether you’re wandering around from stage to stage dancing, it’s a different thing. It’s much less structured when you’re just going around to different musical performances.

The self-directed aspect of all musical learning at OM, but especially the learning that takes place outside of the workshops, is especially appealing to many OM participants. For some of the participants, this may be due, at least in part, to its contrast with the more formal, music education many associate with music in schools and other formal institutions. Some of the participants I interviewed agreed in their own words that, “institutionally-mediated expressions of musical culture are unpredictable and often self-destructing or self-limiting” (Mayday Group Website, Agenda - Guiding Ideal #4).

Andrew: Teaching [in formal institutions] seems to be just forcing information into people’s heads and I think music in school is the same concept. You know what I mean? They don’t really give you avenues and say, “Here, go this way and see what you want to learn.” Whereas at OM, you’re just immersed in this musical field where all kinds of things are going on. Where you can just basically wander around and if you hear something

you like, you're inspired. . . . It's totally your own prerogative. It's not like, these are the hours you have to be here, and you have to listen to me, and you have to learn this. You know? People don't like being told what to do.

Heidi: It's like free school [at OM]. You go there and you can find what you want. If you want to learn it, you'll go and you'll start taking the initiative. And, even just through talking and asking questions and having people be open. And I find that a lot of our performers are very open to talking to people and explaining where they are and how they can do things. A lot of people can't work within a formal structure. They need that fluidity of being able to discover it on their own, without being told what to do.

Mark: It's getting people to approach the music through a desire. . . through a sensory desire, as opposed to a more formal approach.

The variety of genres and styles of music help to enrich the choices of musical learning available in this unstructured environment of musical learning.

Sara: You'll have that kind of learning that involves "What kind of instrument is that?" or "I didn't know you could do that with a sitar!" sort of thing. . . . And then there's the kind of genre learning where you kind of go, "Is this House Music or Drum and Bass?" . . . [And then there's] the person who has never picked up a drum before who's sitting around a campfire [and tries it for the first time].

Heidi: You're constantly being amazed. Just over and over again. And there are so many different genres and so many different styles that you can touch upon that you might never have experienced before. I find that a lot. People are saying, "Oh! I've never heard that before." And, it's just an opportunity to continually explore.

Clearly, these people recognize the benefits of the less formal and unstructured approach to musical learning that is available for them to explore at the OM festival.

Musical learning that takes place outside of, but as a result of involvement at OM.

The OM festival has influenced many people to pursue musical learning, in various forms, outside of the festival context. Many participants have been inspired by the official DJ training workshops and/or by watching various electronic music DJs in performance at OM, and as a result, have begun to DJ themselves.

Andrew: OM is an extension of the rave thing. Although it's very unique, it's grown out of the rave scene, which is basically how every DJ has become a DJ. They went to an electronic dance music party [like OM], were blown away and then they went out and bought turntables the next day. . . . For the last ten years, Technic 1200s¹¹ have been out-selling guitars like mad. . . . My whole life has been guided by inspirations by musicians. Music has always been the biggest thing in my life. You see a great DJ; you hear him [or her], or a great live act [and you're inspired].

Sara: For me, it's the kind of thing that between listening to music, practicing, and watching people who are really good DJs. That's what DJ school is.

Heidi: I know that a lot of people who have become DJs after OM That has always been a really interesting process for me, to watch people who are learning. Like all of the Sum Kidz [the group who organize the music at OM], they were never DJs before OM started, but they go and they're playing all over North America now.

The OM festival organizers continue to promote, guide and inspire musical learning throughout the year, outside of the festivals themselves. They do so by keeping in contact with many of the people who put on OM workshops and performances.

Heidi: I've had people come to my work [in Toronto] and ask about taking Kathak classes, and that's just because they saw it there [at OM] and want

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to experience it. And looking at the performance arts, the drummers and the things that happen in those workshops, before OM, they might have had 10 people show up to their Tuesday night workshops (in Toronto) and now they have over 100 people that come. And they're all drumming together, and learning to do Poi together, and dancing together, and doing performances together. These are all workshops in the Toronto area that have really been affected by OM. We try to encourage workshops to be run at least once a month outside of OM. And the people who did the kids' drumming workshop, the tribal rhythms, the first nations drumming workshop from this year at OM, they are doing workshops here in Toronto now. So one of our networks is to send out E-mails to let people know that this is happening. To keep people involved and to get people involved in all of those things. I will call up someone who has done a workshop before and ask them, "Do you want to do a workshop now?" And try to keep them going. It's so easy for them to let their skill just sit there, unless they have an outlet for it.

Although the organizers at OM are not trained specifically as music educators, it is clear that, through their work with the OM festival, they show a desire to provide a variety of music-education oriented experiences for the community. This year-round connection to the community helps the OM festival to keep its ties to the local music scene and shows the potential of festivals like OM to be used as productive and inspirational educational tools within the community-at-large.

People who have attended OM are also often turned on to new forms of music, both as listeners and performers, which they later seek outside the festival.

Andrew: Because of what we're doing at OM, like a hundred new people are blown away each year. And then they start coming out to our parties [in Toronto]. I must have 30 or 40 people at OM [each year] who tell me they

haven't ever heard this type of music before and that it's really affected them and changed their life.

Some participants even seek out more formal musical instruction once they have found certain (or more general) musical interests at the OM festival.

Mark: I think for me, the idea of formal musical tuition seemed somewhat daunting, somewhat scary. But approaching it from the back door, if you will, it suddenly makes it much more approachable. . . . I'm forty years old and I've never done anything musical in my life. And, after the first year I went to OM, three months later, I started singing lessons, which was the first musical thing I've ever done. And now, I'm taking up drumming lessons. . . . I had no idea, in any way, that I could be musical, that I could hold a note. . . . I definitely have a much better appreciation of music now. I am starting to get really interested in music construction, rhythms and pitches. Having gone into singing, I'm thinking of music in this different way. And all of this has spun out my experiences at the festival.

Evidently, for many organizers, participants and performers, the musical influences of the OM festival do not end when they leave the campgrounds at the end of the weekend. As such, it seems clear that by looking at the experiences of these four people, festivals like OM can provide us with theoretical insights concerning the unique and ongoing educational potentials of similar community music events.

Conclusion

The OM music festival is an ideal location for the teaching and learning of music in a community context. At many popular music festivals, participants and performers are immersed in unstructured and informal learning that takes place continually over an entire weekend. This is something that would be almost impossible for music education in more formal settings to replicate. However, in acknowledging such unique contexts

when studying popular music, formal music education can encourage students to seek a variety of community music experiences outside of the school setting. Also, considering the value of the outdoor setting at music festivals, the existence of similar events that help to create a relaxed and inspired atmosphere in which to experience a music performance, is something music educators should take into account when seeking out performances to take their students to outside of the institutional context. Day-long, outdoor musical events in the local community could also be promoted by schools. Attendance at such events would also foster an ongoing musical relationship between school and community music, and between children and youth and adults.

The longer, festival setting could also be discussed and critically evaluated by students and teachers in the classroom. Looking at the unique musical opportunities and values offered by a weekend long type of festival would encourage such pursuits to be organized and supported in our communities. Guiding students to use such festivals in pursuit of lifelong music education outside of the school setting will help us to encourage critically reflective music-makers and appreciators.

Smaller, local music festivals and events are often similar to OM in that they prioritize supporting local artists and performers. This ideal of connection between music education and the performances of local musicians can be carried into more formal, classroom contexts. Music educators should encourage local musicians and artists to attend their schools as guest performers and clinicians. Such performances, workshops and discussions in school settings will help promote student participation in local music-education oriented endeavours in their communities. Hopefully, this connection with community music will be a value that many students will continue to nurture into adulthood.

Festivals like OM are unique because of the great variety of musical genres and sub-genres featured. Also, for some of these types of festivals, the emphasis put on giving a variety of music workshops is an exceptional example of how such diversity can

encourage self-directed musical growth. This ideal could be transferred to more formal, educational contexts by allowing students opportunities to follow more self-directed types of musical learning. Visiting community festival performances, having local musicians perform and/or give workshops in the school, and allotting a sizeable amount of time in the curriculum to the teaching of musical genres that are of specific interest to the individual student population, are all important steps toward the inclusion of students in their own learning process. For example, through the study of popular music genres (including popular music concerts and festivals), we will be showing our students that they can (and should) be critically reflective of the musical genres that are most important in their lives outside of school. In short, connecting our students with music in the community will help with one of the main goals of music education; producing thoughtful, critically reflective, lifelong music-makers.

Notes

¹ Throughout this paper, the term ‘popular music festival’ will be used to refer to an event that lasts for several days and that features a variety of musical performances by artists within ‘popular music’ genres.

² For an excellent example of this, visit the Burning Man Music Festival web site at www.burningman.com or the OM web site at www.omfestival.com.

³ This philosophy is outlined in detail on the OM web site, www.omfestival.com and in their zine from the 2003 festival. It is essentially the strong encouragement for all people who attend the festival to pack up everything they bring, including their own garbage, and even such small things as cigarette butts (which the OM volunteers actually clean up, if they are dumped on the ground). They advise all participants to stop at a proper garbage and recycling depot on their way home.

⁴ Electronic (also called electronica) music is an umbrella term commonly used to identify types of music within the more general, popular music scene, that use an electronic keyboard or computer-generated sounds as their principle instrument (rather than the more traditional, guitar-based music commonly associated with most other genres within popular music). “Electronica - A genre of music which is mainly created by the use of computer systems and other electronic devices. Includes many different styles such as Techno, Trance, Breakbeats, NRG, Melodic, etc.” (<http://www.jam2dis.com/j2delectronicadef.htm> p. 1, ¶ 1).

⁵ “*Kathak* is the major classical dance form of northern India. The word *kathak* means “to tell a story”. It is derived from the dance dramas of ancient India. When the patronage shifted from the temples to the royal court, there was a change in the overall emphasis. The emphasis shifted from the telling of religious stories to one of

entertainment. Today, the story-telling aspect has been downgraded and the dance is primarily an abstract exploration of rhythm and movement”

(http://www.chandrakantha.com/articles/indian_music/kathak.html p. 1, ¶ 1).

⁶ “Goa or psy trance takes its name from Goa, India. An incarnation of trance music with a more complex texture of psychedelic sounds woven into a kaleidoscopic tapestry. Goa tracks tend to be finished, complete pieces of music and are therefore less conducive to beat mixing. The beat is a steady 4/4 kick but is often buried in layers of analog sounds”

(<http://www.ravelinks.com/raveradio/goatrancemusic.htm> p. 1, ¶ 1).

⁷ Poi (also called Fire dancing) is a form of dancing that has recently had a surge of appeal in the electronic music scene. “Poi spinning is a fun and beautiful way to express yourself through dance. Poi are weighted balls at the end of strings, often with ribbons or flags attached, that are swung around and spun in beautiful patterns”

(<http://www.firepixie.com/balloons/what/poiworkshops.html> p. 1, ¶ 1 & 2).

“For daytime performances we have poi with long tailing flags (like comets) which add a beautiful and unique element of motion to any daytime venue”

(<http://www.firepixie.com/balloons/what/glow.html> p. 1, ¶ 5).

“(For nighttime performances) we use UV (blacklight) reactive poi or staff with blacklight clothing and makeup to create a stunning ‘tribal-yet-modern’ look. . . Fire dancing is a beautiful art form that is rapidly emerging and spreading in the United States. Derived from a Maori and Polynesian tradition, fire dancers have been popular in Hawaii at luaus for years, and fire dancing has taken on some new and exciting twists in the past few years with its expanding performer base and new audiences and venues”

(<http://www.firepixie.com/balloons/what/firedancing.html> p. 1 ¶ 1 & 2).

⁸ A zine is a type of publication that has become quite popular among music taste cultures over the last several years. It is often similar to a magazine, but it rarely features advertising. Rather, its purpose is to spread the message of certain genre groups and taste cultures. This message often includes political and/or social commentary as well as details and information about the musical community it is addressing. The OM festival zine included much of the group's philosophy, and details about the community/holistic approach to the festival. It also provided needed information, like schedules of performers and workshops and maps of the site. The designers of the OM zine included all of this information incorporated into a date book for the year (beginning and ending at the June summer solstice).

“Zine - a crudely-made magazine often dedicated to the thoughts and musings of its creator, and sometimes devoted to a particular art form or celebrity”

(<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Zine>, Alex, p. 1, ¶ 1).

⁹ “Rave - a dance party that lasts all night and electronically synthesized music is played”

(<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/rave> p. 1, ¶ 1).

¹⁰ “Jungle Music - Originated in London, England by black urban musicians, jungle merges a syncopated hip-hop rhythm with dub reggae bass lines and sampled break beats. As with hardcore, speeded up samples of other records are also incorporated for the rhythm tracks, giving jungle a dense and complicated rhythmic base”

(<http://www.ravelinks.com/raveradio/junglemusic.htm> p. 1, ¶ 1).

¹¹ Technic 1200s are a current, popular brand of turntable used by many amateur (and some professional DJs).

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