

How Participatory Music May Reduce Stress of Students Major in Performance

Xiaolong He
Western University

As a music student whose main instrument is the piano, I have experienced tons of pressure since I decided to change my major to music. Under the China's admission system, students have to take and pass China's college entrance examination before they go to colleges, and only half of them can enter universities. Those students who take the music examination face even more challenges, and the situation doesn't get better when they actually enter into colleges or conservatories.

Participatory music as a means of learning

Under Chinese unified curriculum in music, students who major in music must perform solo many times during college time, following overt evaluations posted to everyone. Under the pressure, students tend to be addicted to video games or nicotine to relieve pressure, with committing suicides occasionally. By talking to those Chinese students both in high schools and in colleges, I found that the pressure was from their parents, teachers, and peers, and their experiences made me recollect mine: few collaborative music options, such as choir and ensemble, and many solo performances developed into syllabus. As such, participatory music may become a measure for the students to reduce their pressure.

Though participatory music, students enjoy and create music together as "social interaction" (Mitchell 2018) rather than professional composition. Mitchell also takes Karaoke (Mitchell 2018) as an example of students' interacting to break the distinction between artist and audience. Chinese students who major in music can be separated into two groups: those who play western musical instruments and those who play Chinese folk musical instruments. I knew those two groups of students, both of whom wanted to learn something different. Thus, creating an interactive environment for them to exchange their instruments may reduce pressure, cement friendship, and further their interest of community music.

Participatory music as a means of teaching

Participatory music can not only give the students an opportunity as participants but an avenue to learn how to teach. After graduating from colleges, many students who major in music tend to teach music for a living, transferring the pressure to their students through the one-way teaching methods. Some teachers were trying to gather their students and have ensemble concerts for relieving their pressure. However, those students may also deem those concerts as serious performance so that they will feel even more pressure. Participatory music can give them opportunities to try other instruments and perform spontaneously.

With the development of the society in China, the demand in music education field targeting adolescents and the disabled is also rapidly needed. Participatory music can give everyone an avenue that people are treated equally in "music-making, learning, and independence" (Baldwin

2017). As the market for professional musician is still very small in China, many graduates chose to become educators in middle schools. By learning participatory music, those graduates can get involved in music activities in communities to serve people who have special needs.

Bringing participatory music into communities in China

The first step is to ascertain the autonomy of the organization; I believe El Sistema provides one such suitable example. The biggest advantage of El Sistema is for teachers and students to create an environment that they feel comfortable together. Different from the unified curriculum made by the National Education Bureau, the El Sistema organizations can choose their own music, such as popular songs that the unified curriculum makers believe that is not suitable for children. Money should be raised from donation and be overt to the society according to related Chinese laws.

Once the basic formation has been set, the next step for those organizations is to recruit volunteer teachers and students. Recruiting volunteers is a difficult one in China, especially in the context of people having less trust between each other. Another worry about the recruitment is from the pressure of those big commercial chains and public schools funded by the government, the pressure caused by xenophobia that is hidden in the national educational policies and that my project aims to address.

The two steps are the fundamental factors that I can imagine to establishing the organization. What we should do next and how we are going to face off those difficulties will be the heart of the project. As I did not get any information about such organizations in China, those difficulties above should be dealt with with the development of the organizations. I hold positive attitude of running the organization for two reasons: the increasing investment from rich businessmen, and the enthusiasm of those students from universities. I will gather materials related to participatory music and do practice of having dialogues with Chinese students to facilitating my project.

Conclusion

Reducing pressure is my main purpose. Through participatory music, students who major in performance can be benefited by being as learners and educators. Furthermore, participatory music can be applied into curriculum and community activities towards influencing the Chinese educational system and including more people engaging in musical activities.

References

1. Elizabeth Mitchell. (2019). Community Music Therapy and Participatory Performance. *Voices*,19(1). P4
2. Baldwin, A. (2017). Community music-making for everyone via performing ensembles: here are five groups that make an inclusive, musical difference in their communities.(Lectern). *Teaching Music*, 24(3). P21