

## **ETHNOMUSICKING: A VALUED MUSIC OCCUPATION OR AUDACIOUS ANTICS IN THE PURGA MUSIC MUSEUM?**

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### **Abstract**

Music history research of Indigenous and Scottish groups in Ipswich, Australia, reveals that people have had varying levels of access and engagement in music making that is related to their music heritage and culture. There is no suitable terminology to describe this active cultural engagement, so I propose the term 'ethnomusicking.' In this paper I will outline my concept of ethnomusicking and discuss examples from participatory action research. The aim is to critically analyse the social significance of ethnomusicking and the role of the music museum curator in facilitating community-based education – particularly the design of programs for reconciliation and healing.

### **Introduction**

There are many fields of inquiry that relate to community-based education in the Purga Music Museum. The rise in the demographic proportion of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in Australia has necessitated attempts by many professional groups to deal with issues of cultural relevance and cultural safety (Awaad, 2003; Iwama, 2006). As a music and health professional who established a regional music museum with community groups in Ipswich, I have drawn on my experience of ethnomusicology and occupational therapy practice to critically explore whether people's cultural engagement with music heritage has benefits to their social health and well-being. In this paper, I will investigate the new concept of 'ethnomusicking,' and the function of the music museum in society.

### **What is ethnomusicking?**

Christopher Small introduced the word 'musicking' to describe people's active participation in music events (1998). He argued that a verb was needed to separate the action and event from 'music' which could be understood as commodities, such as music scores or recordings (ibid., p.7). His emphasis was on music in the real life situation, "music as it is actually practiced by the human race." Musicking is also linked with places where it is performed. Small argues that music events in concert

halls are accompanied by socialising, but the socialising and listening are kept separate by allocating separate spaces (ibid., p. 23). At the core of his philosophy is the idea that “to music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practising, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (ibid., p. 9).

When ‘ethno’ is added to ‘musicking,’ the term can refer to how people engage with music in a way that is meaningful and relevant to the socio-cultural situation, place, and people’s values and beliefs. Ethnomusicking can relate to a people’s own ethnic heritage and culture, or it could refer to active engagement with the music heritage and culture of a particular place – perhaps the place where they live, work or play. ‘Ethno’ introduces the concept of meaning and the emotional, social and spiritual aspects of musicking that I contend may be related to well-being. I noticed that powerful interactions were occurring when I was facilitating a Music Memories group with people who used to live on the Purga Aboriginal Mission or in the surrounding neighbourhood. I wrote in my research journal:

Community music and creative arts seemed to ‘lift the lid’ on emotions as stories that had been long hidden started to be shared publicly across generations. People started to develop and share insights about creative visions for the future. I observed that there were powerful processes at work as old acquaintances were renewed and friendships developed across ethnic groups, but I could not fully understand or explain the theoretical reasoning behind what was happening. That is why I am undertaking this study to develop frameworks for culturally engaged community music practice in rural Ipswich.

I found the phrase ‘culturally engaged community music practice’ cumbersome to use. It involved group conversations, oral histories, review of primary source music scores and recordings, writing stories with community groups about their music history, playing and listening to music that was meaningful and relevant to the participants, and reflecting on this through newspaper, conference presentations and radio interviews. There was a high degree of social artistry involved with facilitating the dynamics of group interaction.

### **Reflection on practice**

I worked with two community groups to help them write music stories. The first, *The Purga Music Story and Harold Blair*, was a community education package that I wrote about the music history of Purga (2005). It was a children's story that had activity ideas interspersed throughout the book and multi-media resources that could be used as teaching aids. Ideally the *Purga Music Story* is told by local people who play music and interact with the children in their own way.

The second music story, *Turn of the Century: Ipswich Thistle Pipe Band 1909-2009* I wrote with band members and supporters for the band's centennial celebrations (2009). Both of these music projects involved participatory action research processes that encouraged people to share their music heritage and culture through creative activities, auto-ethnography, and performance. This was not always easy because I discovered that involving people as co-researchers can bring about some hair-raising experiences.

For example, a minister of a church in Rosewood found an elderly lady climbing up into the rafters of a church to bring down some trophies of a 1930s eisteddfod that had been long forgotten. He told her to get down because it was dangerous, but the curiosity that spurred her on was life-giving. She had discovered something meaningful to share with others and proudly told the story at the Seniors Week dinner and for the local newspaper. I went with two young university students to interview a former member of the Ipswich Thistle Pipe Band to learn more about the band's history. He dressed up in a blonde wig, showed the girls a piece of scanty underwear that he was given for his birthday, and proudly honked his walking stick that spoke with electronic messages. This was an autoethnographic music history performance that we will never forget.

Why do we give up musicking? Most elderly people that I spoke to no longer played musical instruments but could easily engage with music through storytelling and showing us old photographs and music memorabilia when given the opportunity. We valued people's knowledge by encouraging them to share stories with others. The storytelling was part of a group conversation that was videotaped by peers. I was amused and delighted by the details that people chose to record. One camera person

recorded an Indigenous elder eating a pikelet with honey dripping down her chin, while he completely ignored the person who was giving an account of music history in another part of the room. People mostly videotaped their young grandchildren, regardless of what else was happening around them. When I asked to see the videorecording, I realised that they had not necessarily recorded the music performance.

People cherished the family relationships and social reunions most. The atmosphere of sharing food and drink invariably drew a crowd and created a convivial atmosphere for ethnomusicking. Conversations usually centred on what family members were doing and where they were going, or memories about places where they used to live, who they knew and what they used to do. When asked about music history, the music activities that people talked about were enmeshed with people, places and challenging aspects of living. I can not vouch for the truthfulness of all the accounts because there was creative embellishment of stories, with humour, hugs, dramatic pauses and gasps, followed by reels of laughter. People came into physical and social contact with one another, which is not always the case when listening to music recordings at home.

I sometimes used counselling methods and found that genograms (Bowen,1980; McGoldrick, 1999) were useful for mapping and interpreting the way that music was passed down from person to person within a geographical locality. People wrote the names of musicians, bands, orchestras and music teachers on squares of coloured paper and then attached them to an old door. I helped people to rearrange the pieces of paper to show the lines of musical transmission that occurred across generations. This was very telling because it revealed the broken relationships of the Stolen Generation and the regrettable loss of traditional Indigenous music heritage, culture and language. In contrast, newspaper articles and the minute books of the Caledonian Society revealed that the Scottish music traditions were continuous from the first gathering of the Caledonian Society in Ipswich in 1873 to the present.

Analysis of music scores and recordings that were discovered in the Purga Church cupboard revealed the social attitudes that were prevalent in particular historical periods. For example, the final verse of “The Queensland Children’s Song” by E.W.H. Fowles and George Sampson (1912) states:

This land is ours; we can till or spoil.  
God grant that from age to age,  
We cherish more, come peace or war,  
Our Queenly heritage.

The lyrics “This land is ours; we can till or spoil...Our Queenly heritage,” seem to contain the notion of *terra nullius*, the assumption made by European settlers that Australia was uninhabited so could be used in any way the settlers wished. This thinking was inculcated in the minds of school children through singing in schools.

During the music history project with the Ipswich Thistle Pipe Band I researched U-tube examples of performances of the Scottish song, *Auld Lang Syne*. This was intriguing because the traditional Scottish song is performed at New Year Eve celebrations in so many different ways by people around the world. There are variations that are related to ethnic groups and different performance genres. People with a disability are also represented. The musickers in their revelry have had the audacity to change the traditional genre to perform the song in whichever way they chose. This cross-cultural exchange does not seem to have detracted from the music tradition or caused anxiety for Scottish people. This is similar to the spirit in which the Yolngu Chooky dancers performed *Zorba the Greek* on Elcho Island, Australia (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-MucVWo-Pw>).

There are, however, sensitivities involved with ethnomusicking. It is very important to question exceptions and to try to find plausible explanations as to why some cultural groups are not represented, or why they may not wish to participate. There is clearly the need to provide space in the music museum experience so that people are not overwhelmed by global traditions that over-ride local interests. It is unclear why Indigenous Australians were not represented on U-Tube performing *Auld Lang Syne*, whether it was related to the history of British colonisation or whether the recording and uploading of videos has not yet appealed to people. U-Tube is not necessarily a reliable barometer for judging people’s ethnomusicking preferences, but it is a window that can give insights into how music participation is an integral part of social events.

### **Social significance of ethnomusicking as valued music occupation?**

I sometimes question whether ethnomusicking is a valued music occupation or audacious antics that are performed in the Purga Music Museum. Occupational therapists use the term ‘occupation’ to refer to the everyday activities that people do as part of their daily work, rest and play – either as individuals, or with families and communities. The process of doing, being and becoming occupies our time and can bring meaning and purpose to our lives (Wilcock, 1999, p. 1). Participation in meaningful activities relies on our capacity to freely make choices and decisions for ourselves. The concept of supporting local communities to engage with their music heritage and culture is based on the belief that “everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits” (Article 27, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, United Nations, 1948). Local music traditions are important to this engagement because they are connected with places where people have lived and seem to reflect the spiritual understanding, values and ways of life of people of diverse cultural backgrounds (Richards, 2007).

Since the introduction of the *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (World Health Organisation, 2001), there has been widespread agreement that there needs to be terminology to describe how people’s well-being is related to environmental context and their participation in activities. This applied focus represents a shift away from bio-medical models to psycho-social and socio-ecological perspectives of well-being. The emphasis on quality of life is also related to the health promotion conventions that stress the importance of the social determinants of health (2009). The functional classifications used in health may be relevant to ethnomusicking when it is viewed as a human occupation in a particular context.

Occupational therapists and others use terms to describe situations in which people’s freedom to occupy themselves through meaningful activities is restricted. “Occupational injustices exist when participation is barred, confined, segregated, prohibited, undeveloped, disrupted, alienated, marginalised, exploited or otherwise devalued” (Townsend & Whiteford 2005, p. 112). Occupational apartheid is “the segregation of groups of people through the restriction or denial of access to dignified

and meaningful participation in occupations of daily life on the basis of race, colour, disability, national origin, age, gender, sexual preference, religion, political beliefs, status in society, or other characteristics. Occasioned by political forces, its systematic and pervasive social, cultural, and economic consequences jeopardise health and well being as experienced by individuals, communities, and societies” (Kronenberg & Pollard 2005, p. 67).

If ethnomusicking is regarded as a music occupation, then there can be instances where it could be perceived as a valued activity, but this depends on social attitudes and policy. People may experience musical deprivation, injustice or even musical apartheid in circumstances where ethnomusicking is devalued or restricted. In Australia, Indigenous people were deprived and restricted from participation in traditional ethnomusicking through their removal and segregation on reserves -- based on welfare officer judgment of skin colour. At present there are inequalities in people’s musical opportunities due to poverty, geographical isolation, or social exclusion. Personal responses of apathy and disinterest can also self-limit people’s opportunities for ethnomusicking. Sometimes younger people may not wish to take the time and effort to learn music traditions that elders wish to pass on to them. It is estimated by the Music Council of Australia that most music learning occurs in informal situations outside of school environments. This implies that there is a large degree of personal and community responsibility for how people choose to engage with music heritage and culture. Australia has recently ratified the UNESCO *Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* (2005) so there are some guidelines available that flow on to development of policy and practice that would strengthen the resolve for equitable opportunities for participation.

### **Social significance of ethnomusicking as audacious antics?**

Ethnomusicking can also be viewed as audacious antics in circumstance where people have not developed sufficient understanding of the interplay between ‘personal’, ‘professional’ and ‘political’ values. Gelya Frank and Ruth Zemke (2009) described 3P archaeology as a method that incorporates the interplay between personal, professional and political factors. They recommend asking a series of questions to elucidate better understanding of the conflict or cooperation situation. It is often

necessary to negotiate informal agreements or memorandum of understanding with people involved in ethnomusicking in community contexts because there can be complex personal-social, spiritual and moral issues to resolve. Professional guidance is required on ethics, and this is not always available to community musicians. I recommend that therapists, curators and ethnomusicologists work together in collaboration with local people and communities through a Community of Inquiry approach (Burgh, 2006).

Some contentious issues may include whether groups wish to express their religious, political and personal beliefs and values in front of others. In some circumstances groups may decide to hold separate religious services or ceremonies so they do not offend certain members of the public who may be in attendance. Beliefs of one group may inadvertently compromise the rights of others if they feel obliged to sit through a performance when it is converse to their beliefs. It is necessary to be diplomatic and to discuss who will be involved, where, when and how before the event. After ethnomusicking, people may wish to debrief and discuss what worked well and what they would like to change in future. Critical reflection on practice is essential.

### **Community education through the Purga Music Museum**

The curator of the music museum may become involved in walking the dangerous tight-rope of trying to negotiate different views of people and community groups. Naturally, the role will be influenced by personal views and the range of skills and abilities of other team members -- but it is difficult to escape the politics of community, especially if one lives or works in the neighbourhood and has social ties. The aim of our Creative Communities team is to get to know people and to develop better understanding of music traditions and how they are to be performed. We rely on culture bearers and respected elders to teach and inform about what is appropriate in any given environmental context and invite participation in decision making.

Ideally, the music museum at Purga runs on flexible frameworks for culturally engaged community music practice that were developed through focus group consultation, reflection on practice, literature review and critical review of what happens in other locations. We aim for cultural engagement that recognises that music

traditions are living and change over time in response to myriad factors that can be plotted on a spidergram that has different variables for action (figure 1 and figure 2).

Figure 1: Plotting ethnomusicking variables with spidergram/ radar chart

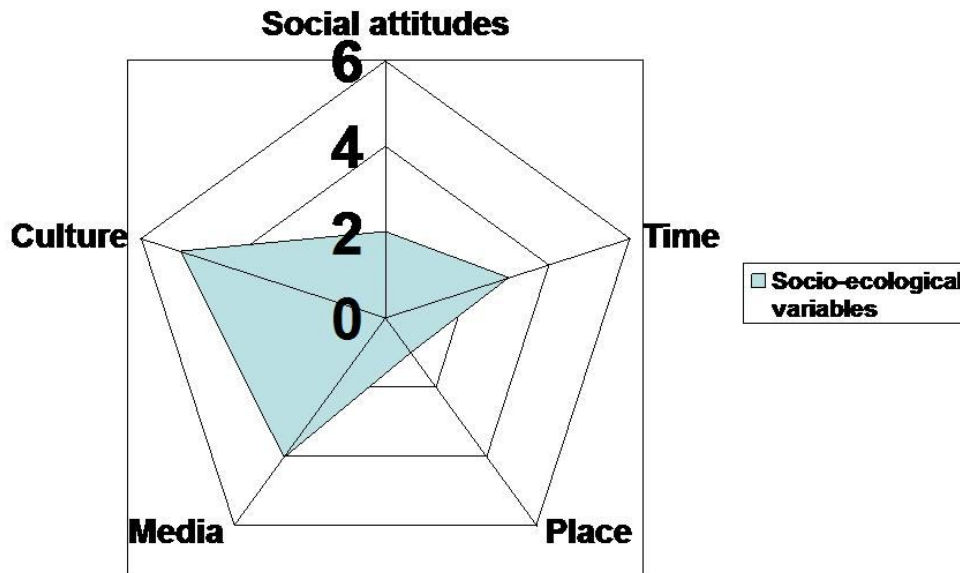
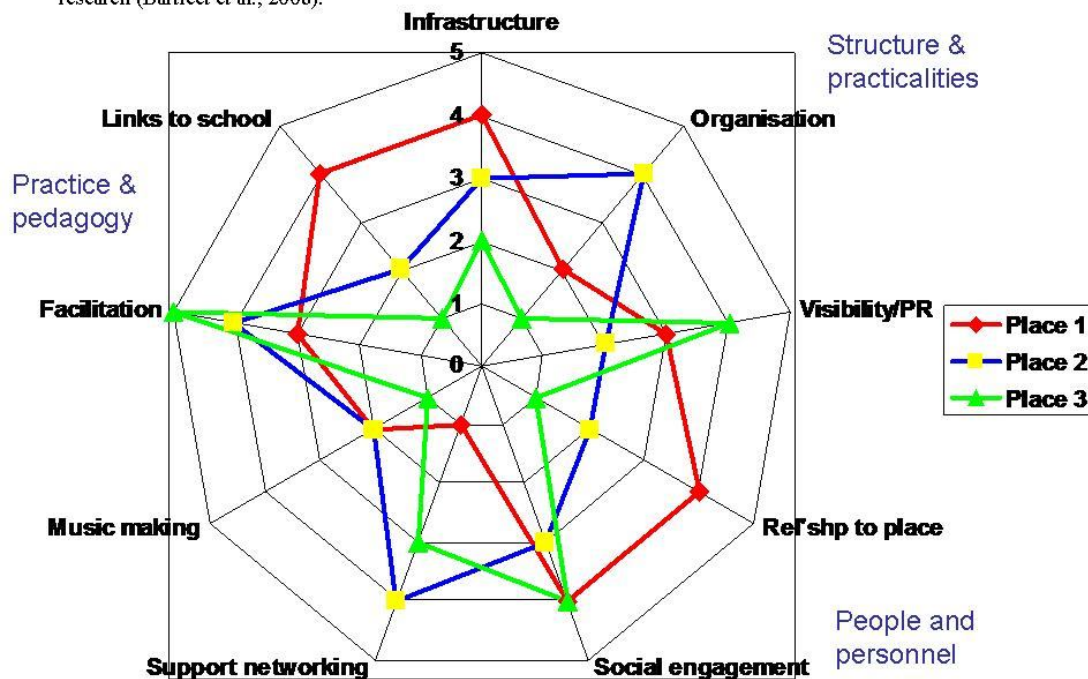


Figure 1: Example of graphing perceptions of the nine domains of community music described in SoundLinks research (Bartleet et al., 2008).



Through ethnomusicking, people can have the opportunity to improvise, or play known repertoire and experience each other's responses. This process is usually shaped and manipulated by participants. It appears that ethnomusicking provides people with first-hand experience of music heritage and culture, even when it is removed in time and place from the present. This experience can tend to have a moderating effect that stabilises or enriches social relationships, or the reverse can apply. People may use musical expression in various ways, such as to have a particular emotional effect on those present. The potential of ethnomusicking for giving people a voice in public is very important, especially to the process building supportive relationships that may lead to reconciliation and healing.

Ethnomusicking can be highly contentious and rebellious. For example, the Purga Creek Biker's rallies became so loud and associated with anti-social behaviour that a local progress association agitated until the rallies were relocated. This maintained the status quo music tradition of singing 1960s pop songs in the local church as the only public form of music-making. There seems to have been a corresponding dislocation of young people, with few attending community events. The potential of ethnomusicking for reforming and instilling certain social attitudes, values and belief systems seems to have been most fully utilised by the middle and elder generations in church services. Links have not yet been formalised with schools to enable participation of students so young people have not yet fully realised their potential for expressing themselves through music in public places. In the context of the music museum, ethnomusicking is a way that people can collaborate creatively to produce, interpret and encode their own culture rather than accept mass media or institutional representations with imposed meanings.

### **Conclusions**

Through this discussion, I have described some of the complexities and contentious issues involved with supporting and enabling ethnomusicking in a rural music museum. Some of the issues involve concerns about the interplay of global and local music traditions and ensuring equitable participation. There is the need to develop understanding of different music cultural traditions and also to negotiate how people wish to display and perform music heritage in particular environmental contexts. A community of inquiry can be useful for critical reflection on practice. I consider that it

is important for local people to develop their own frameworks for culturally engaged community music and to organise their own events. This allows people to encode culture creatively through music and other collaborative group activities. Ethnomusicking in the music museum seems to sustain living music traditions that are inter-related with people and their experience of the world around them. The museum functions as a meeting place for stakeholders and also a keeping place for recordings and music memorabilia. The venue and the participatory ethnomusicking practices are an important part of safeguarding music heritage and culture so it can be shared with future generations.

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**Bio**

Sandra Kirkwood is a musician and occupational therapist who worked with community groups to establish and curate the Purga Music Museum from 2003 to 2008. She has conducted a number of music projects in Ipswich that were funded by Ipswich City Council and Arts Queensland. In 2008, Sandra established Music Health Australia – an inter-professional network for provision of music and health services. The Ipswich Thistle Pipe Band and Sandra recently published a book about the band's history for their centennial. Sandra submitted a higher degree research thesis for examination through Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University in August, 2009.