Qui sarai sempre il benvenuto: Welcome, willkommen, добро, velkommen пожаловать, 欢迎, ترحيب.[1]

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Abstract

In this chapter, Birch and Higgins explore the first moments of the encounter between community musician and participant. What does it mean to be welcoming? One might say that a well-placed and genuine welcome might make those whom receive it feel like the new place is 'home from home', setting up a positive situation – one where the wish is to repeat the experience. But is this achievable or even appropriate in every contextual location, and how can we navigate the murky waters of 'messy' hospitality? Examples of practice illuminates the complexes of human relationships within set boundaries and across profound social barriers.

Key words: hospitality, welcome, boundaries, contextual location, inclusive practice

Introduction

The notion of community music as 'an act of hospitality' (Higgins, 2012) has become an important idea for practitioners world-wide. Deeply rooted within this action of inclusive encountering between individuals, is the 'welcome'. As a gesture toward another, the welcome becomes "a preparation for the incoming of the potential participant, generating a porous, permeable, open-ended affirmation of and for those who wish to experience creative music making" (p.137). Under this banner there is an intentional move towards the 'other', wherein practitioners seek to ensure an open workshop space, through which to enable warmth and empathy in an effort to unlock both musical and dialogic communication. The desire for inclusive, participatory music making is often framed through the concept of 'cultural democracy'. This idea reinforces a commitment to valuing diversity and difference (Graves, 2005). However, the workshop space can become a site of provocation for the community music practitioner when key concepts that guide the work are challenged and potentially threatened. If 'challenge' can be seen as a call to prove or justify something, the community musician encountering such circumstances needs to critically reflect on the situation at hand. This may require a change of course or a rethinking of music making activities whilst still operating within a hospitable environment.

In this chapter, we consider some examples of what these challenges might look like in practice. We examine hospitality as a 'messy' concept and offer an example of how practitioners might find ways to navigate through its complexity and limits. The pull between what we might term radical or unconditional hospitality (or openness) and the bounded limitations that spring from it, are fraught with 'violence' and ever present in our engagement with it. Community music practitioners have a desire towards and a heart longing to embrace an openness that has no boundary. But hospitality by its very nature – its etymological

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construction even – entails certain limits and boundaries. One might say misunderstanding, or ignoring, its limits in practice may render the idea unhelpful. Simply put, hospitality is not hospitality without boundaries or limits – the conceptual and practical negotiation between the unconditional and the conditional can provide the strength, or vision, to face the limits in the hope of minimalizing violence and harm for those whom may be excluded.

The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to delve into the complexities of specific sites of community music activity, examining both the theoretical and practical applications of the notions of 'welcome' and 'hospitality', where these can be disrupted and how this difficult terrain can be safely travelled.

You Will Always Be Welcome

Whether explicitly or implicitly, encounters between self and others tend to be conceived in a language that defines place. Examples include openness and closure, inclusion and exclusion, border patrolling and boundary crossing each communicating hospitable moments in terms of specific locations. Our encounters with each other consists, as philosopher Brian Treanor (2011) reminds us, "in giving place to another and, as such, occurs as part of a relationship between an emplaced person and a displaced person" (p.50). Put another way, place becomes a point of negotiation – a way to map the interaction between the host and guest – or in our case the teacher and student, or music facilitator and participant. It is hard to imagine the phrase 'Qui sarai sempre il benvenuto' (You will always be welcome) without displacement because the 'stranger' who might be welcomed or turned away - that is the student or music participant - is most often characterized as the one who has been spatially mobilized or displaced.

Inclusion, and subsequently exclusion, is at the core of these ideas and actions. The conceptualization of the welcoming musician – the teacher's friendly invitation toward a student – happens across a threshold signifying inclusion, equivalence among groups, and reaffirms insiders as socially similar. Implicit to this is the converse of exclusion of an unwelcoming gesture to 'others' that stand on the outside.

In the context of this chapter we might think of the following four examples: 1. a new viola recruit to the community orchestra; 2. a professional zydeco band setting up for a gig; 3. a class of elementarily children about to sing a new song, and 4. a first-time piano student turning up at a studio. In each example those involved have to cross a threshold into an unfamiliar space and then contend with how the host - conductor, bar owner, or teacher - negotiates their initial encounter.

A well placed and genuine welcome might make those whom receive it feel like the new place is 'home from home' setting up a positive situation – one where the wish is to repeat the experience. Of course, the initial 'ciao' might not be meant or heard in such a positive way. We probably have all experienced these situations and can recount its impact. In the context of this chapter, the intention behind the phrase 'You will always be welcome', is not to be mixed up with duty. From the perspective of duty, the educative exchange is economic rather than hospitable. In other words, the door of the music classroom or workshop is open under obligation and the potential music participant is admitted under tight conditions.

However, leaving the music classroom 'door' ajar is a rule or condition of being welcoming. In this literal or metaphoric action there is an invitation, an offer of hospitality towards those we know are due to arrive. However;

- What of those students we cannot see, potential musicians waiting in the wings or hiding in the shadows?
- What of the strangers that wish to participate but have not received a direct invitation?
- What about the potential visitors who might 'show their faces' to see what is happening?
- Or those for whom crossing the threshold needs to initially be done on their own terms?

There are many reasons that these scenarios could be so: perhaps there have been past experiences that have made people wary, cautious, or frightened, previous music encounters that have caused one to tread carefully. The idea of 'benvenuto' might therefore become a force that drives democratic thinking. Its connotation should be something that worries us, something that haunts our actions and helps shape our decisions. Rather than being merely a shelter, the 'benvenuto' might evoke visitations as well as invitations.

The key idea - the cornerstone - of the phrase 'Qui sarai sempre il benvenuto' is the concept of place, a location, a home. This notion can be conceived very personally and comes to us rich in distinctive content. From this perspective the, or our, welcome (our willkommen, добро, velkommen, пожаловать, 欢迎, ترحيب) is always temporal in as much as invitations take place in time whilst visitations might be said to give time. For example, a community musician arrives at the local community centre to lead a drumming workshop for ten participants – this is the invitation. However, ten more people show up because they have heard how good the session the week before had been. This impacts the activity in such a way that the pre-planned session takes a different shape – this is the visitation. As music educators, situations reflective of this simple example are everyday challenges. We have to make decisions in the moment and in these initial seconds the integrity of the welcome is at stake. We might reflect on the words of Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1987) who states that, "I do not define the other by the future, but the future by the other" (p.82).

The Impact of the Welcome in Trauma-Informed Community Music Practice

In response to the idea of place being paramount in communicating hospitable moments in terms of specific locations, the following section will seek to address the considerations and challenges surrounding the initial moments of the 'welcome' in an intensely complex community music setting.

Based in the UK, the York St. John University Prison Partnership Project provides a creative arts partnership between education, the arts, and the prison service. It seeks to bring together two kinds of communities – those from the university, students and staff, and those from a high security prison, female prisoners and prison staff. Addressing issues of social concern through creative collaboration the project aims to bring these two communities together through quality arts engagement with the intent of exploring perspectives and perceptions of women in the criminal justice system.

Under this umbrella a new project has developed. Using trauma-informed community music practice the intention is that making music together and participating in an inspiring shared arts practice encourages hope and an equal voice in the learning experience, as well as improving self-esteem and confidence. The women engage in vocal work and songwriting, and within the complexities of the setting, challenges arise around the rigid parameters of life in prison, and the, sometimes unspoken, profound effects of both the contextual location and past experiences that have led to this moment.

Within this context, how then do we extend and sustain a welcome that is both 'well placed' and 'genuine'? How do we navigate the limitations of the unfamiliar space, and enable creative exchange in a situation where the social barriers are immense and the participants are, at this point in time, no longer free citizens? In the context of this project, it is the workshop facilitator who is the one unfamiliar with the space, and an outsider. This is the women's space and, as such, needs careful consideration and negotiation.

The space used for the project is specifically designed to facilitate creative work, a rarity within this context, and the product of the support of one or two key members of prison staff. These staff members are the gatekeepers of the project and are crucial to its ongoing success. Prison staff can be resistant to creative projects, misunderstanding the concept of arts programmes that promote restorative justice[2] or desistance.[3] To have their support is vital, and as such, the 'welcome' needs to be extended to any staff involved, maintaining positive relationships and a foundational structure within which the work can flourish.

As a first encounter, a focus game is the starting point for each week's session. The importance of using eye contact, saying each other's names, and working collaboratively enables a sense of unity, belonging and ensemble right at the outset. One ongoing challenge within the setting is that, for all manner of reasons, attendance of participants is variable. The focus game offers an opportunity for all present to re-group, whatever has taken place outside of the workshop space, and to welcome each other.

Questions around inclusion and exclusion and 'who stands on the outside?' are crucial. What about the participant who voluntarily removes themselves from the invitation and evokes their right to opt out? In the context of this work, with participants who have had many of their rights taken away, the gift of choice is a weighty and precious one, one a workshop facilitator can generously give. Life for the women outside of the workshop space is hugely complex, and external factors can potentially make it impossible for fully engaged participation. These 'visitations' will entirely change the shape of the session and are to be expected within the complexities of prison life. This calls for the facilitator to develop responsiveness and a heightened sensitivity to both the intricacies of the group dynamics and the individual needs of participants. Equally, sessions can be can pre-planned but must be adaptable, making 'decisions in the moment'.

Literally speaking, the door to the workshop space can't be 'left ajar' but what is the impact of this? Even practically speaking, the project only extended an invitation to a particular group of women, those with a history of experienced trauma and, as a result, ongoing

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[2] A process whereby offenders can examine their crime in the light of interaction with those affected by it (i.e. the victims and/or their families) and seek to move forwards re-establishing positive relationships within their own circle and the wider community.

[3] Where the intention is for a convicted offender to abstain from re-offending behaviour

difficulties with their mental health. This may be challenging territory for the community musician who has built their practice on the foundational principle of hospitality. And the 'home from home' in this setting is both a comfort, most especially for the women serving life sentences, and a potential point of caution. In the context of the creative arts space, are we being responsible to the participants by encouraging sessions that act only as a means of escapism? By avoiding the uncomfortable dialogue surrounding the circumstances the women are in, are we preventing them from experiencing freedom of creativity and expression? Careful handling of potential trigger points is needed, alongside continual reference to the five values of trauma-informed practice: safety, collaboration, empowerment, trustworthiness and choice (Covington, 2016, p. 2), unpacked in the following paragraphs.

What needs to happen in order for the workshop space to be safe? Engaging in 'working with' not 'working on' people and enabling social transformation necessitates community musicians to find ways to empower and provide a safe space for participants. The issue of physical and emotional safety is of paramount importance within this project. For women who have experienced trauma in their past, a safe space might mean one in which they can voice their fears and anxieties, whether applied to specific or generic circumstances. The ability to opt out of an activity or session is a necessity. Equally, songs and themes raised need due consideration and a flexible approach, as the lyrics or emotional pull may trigger distressing responses.

What will enable effective collaboration to take place? "If community musicians can think beyond comfortable understandings of what usually constitutes community, then they may be more successful in providing increased and richer opportunities for the 'voices' of participants to be 'heard'" (Higgins, 2012, p. 115). The collaborative process of songwriting is a key component of this project. Out of mistrust and a lack of confidence, perseverance and sensitive guidance have enabled the women to be amazed and delighted at what they have created together.

How can participants experience personal empowerment and growth? Offering choice, enabling the women to take ownership in the collaborative songwriting process, giving them the freedom to voice opinions or concerns and express themselves in a non-judgemental space, all aids in the development of their internal emancipation. Reflecting on the work of philosopher Martha Nussbaum, Pam Burnard *et al* (2018) note that "Concurrently there is a further realization […] that *care-related* factors such as love, empathy, collaboration, reflexivity, power, empowerment, and voice, are central human capabilities that practices *of* and *for* social justice need to promote" (p. 230).

As an expectation of hospitality, trust and respect are significant ideas. How can a relationship of mutual trust be developed within community music enviroments? In synergy with an ethics of care it does appear that community music facilitators consciously seek to cultivate trust and respect through an overarching desire to 'hear' the others' 'voices'. In this context, the workshop may start outside of the formal parameters of the session, as the initial conversations as participants arrive are as crucial to the work as any other part. These encounters are vital in establishing trust and enable facilitators and participants to meet on common ground, demonstrating the generosity and hospitality that is essential for the underpinning of this work and reaffirming the social similarities in these moments.

‘Messy’ Hospitality

The practice of community music, by its very nature, is to be engaged in encounters within ‘community’, whatever the variants between specific contexts may look like. But communities are complex and involve interactions that may directly challenge how we perceive of and action the notion of ‘hospitality’, with the need for theoretical and ideological concepts to impact and influence our practice. *Take, for example, a situation shared by a colleague which they termed "the messy side of hospitality", involving a choral director running an open-access, non-auditioned and inclusive community choir.* What response and actions are applicable or appropriate when a known sex offender joins the group, at the invitation of another? When longstanding members of the choir are leaving because their sense of safety and ‘home from home’ is directly challenged, even if the individual is no longer a threat, how can hospitality be openly and inclusively navigated at this moment? In our example, the person was once known by the community – but the community at large now, understandably, sees them as a ‘stranger’. They thought they knew this person but now have to question their judgement in the light of an ‘unforgivable’ crime. The choir director and members stand at a doorway, the threshold of a possible hospitable moment. But doors can be shut, open, or left ajar. The situation might lead to an embrace or a rejection. From a phenomenological perspective, the choir members who are leaving or are uneasy might be said to be experiencing a sense of ‘not-being-at-home’. The strangers’ weight is causing their displacement. Maybe this is acceptable, maybe this is part of the process. In other words, maybe it is an example of what being hospitable really is. If it was easy, then the world would look very different. Life is messy so why should hospitality be any different?

In this situation is there a potential of opening up the issues to the group? If an open dialogic could be facilitated skillfully then maybe this could be useful. There may be issues around whether the community think ‘justice’ has been served or not. But one might think that justice, as a force of law, never fully arrives. Like hospitality it is always something we strive towards but perhaps never quite manage to achieve. But justice is inscribed by hope and maybe there is hope for this situation. If the choir has a mission of social justice at its heart, then these conditions are probably reflective of particular promises it has made to itself through its members.

There is a power in these promises – an affirmation or giving that opens the possibility of transformation – an opportunity to make something radically change. There will, however, need to be a decision. This could be individual or collective. This decision will operate as an interface between what is known and what is unknown. This is a unique situation and demands a unique interpretation, for the choir, and for the community. The decision to walk towards, and importantly into, a messy hospitality requires someone to take this decision. Of course, there are certain calculations that can be taken but, in the end, the actions decided will take the group forward into the unknown. Making these types of decisions can provide the opportunity to energize citizenship and make political action responsible. There will never be all the evidence to hand so a decision to respond to a call for musical participation is always made in a context that is not fully calculable. Embracing hospitality puts us, the community musician, in this predicament. It is messy indeed.

Hospitality and the Host

In continuing an examination of hospitality in its different facets, this next section will provide a more in-depth analysis of the role of the host, explicitly what considerations are needed within the complex setting of the York St. John Prison Partnership Project.

A host will: send out invitations with a location, timings, and a sense of what the occasion is for; find out who is coming to the event, so appropriate preparations can be made; plan for unforeseen circumstances (a last-minute cancellation, the appearance of an unexpected guest); find out preferences for food and drink and know any additional requirements of the guests; ensure the space is ready before the arrival of the first guest; be ready to welcome people as they arrive; and finally will continue to offer hospitality throughout the event. In short, a host is someone for whom knowledge and understanding of the guests and the context is key to the success of the occasion as well as an adaptability and flexibility within the set structures and boundaries of the event. With the understanding that a community music facilitator is a 'host' of sorts, the concept of 'success' (although a potentially problematic term) in relation to the delivery of the practice will have the same key ideal of awareness, both of the participants and specifically of the contextual location.

To elaborate on the role of the 'host' and hospitable moments within the context of the Prison Partnership Project, necessitates a consciousness surrounding the very particular circumstances of the women participating in the singing and songwriting workshops. "Some of the most neglected and misunderstood individuals in our society are the women in the criminal justice system" (Covington, 2016, p.13). In order to give some broader context, it is important to look at some statistics surrounding women in the criminal justice system in the UK.

According to the Prison Reform Trust, currently, women make up around 5% of the prison population (Prison Reform Trust, 2013). A majority of women (81%) are convicted of non-violent offences. The average age of those entering prison is twenty-seven, and 25% of the prison population is under the age of twenty-one. Almost half (46%) of women in prison have attempted suicide at least once in their lifetime. On returning to the community, the women are thirty-six times more likely to commit suicide than women in the general population. Only 8% of women find positive resettlement outcomes for employment on release and almost half (46%) are re-convicted within a year of being released from prison (Covington, 2016, pp.22-24). For 85% of the women, being in prison is the first time they have been separated from their children, and annually over seventeen thousand children are separated from their mothers (usually their primary caregivers) due to imprisonment.

Women involved in the criminal justice system have also experienced the highest percentage of abuse and (consequently) of mental health issues in the UK. A recent Ministry of Justice study states that:

> Forty-nine percent of women prisoners […] were assessed as suffering from anxiety and depression. (Only nineteen per cent of the general female UK population were estimated to be suffering from different types of anxiety and depression.) Forty-six per cent of women in prison have been identified as having suffered a history of domestic abuse; Fifty-three per cent of women in prison reported having experienced emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse (compared to twenty-seven per cent of men) (Berman, 2013).

To truly understand all of the implications of these statistics is to understand that women in the criminal justice system need to be treated differently than the men for whom the system has been established. It is for this reason that the ethical obligation for the facilitator, or 'host' of adapting to women's needs, is gradually being recognised as crucial, to their ongoing health and wellbeing, their rehabilitation, and reduction in recidivism. The development of gender-responsive and trauma-informed practice is gradually being implemented and provides a framework within which both prison staff and external practitioners can operate effectively and with appropriate sensitivity to the women's needs. To be gender-responsive means to become trauma-informed

The Five Values of Trauma-Informed Care as cited previously (safety, collaboration, empowerment trustworthiness and choice) have been identified and developed based on the knowledge of what is known about common responses to physical, sexual and emotional abuse (Covington, 2016, p.3). In addition, trauma-informed practice also:

- takes the trauma into account - to be involved in this community music practice is to engage in understanding the ethics of care towards the women. Immense sensitivity to the contextual location needs to be shown and as a practitioner in this complex community setting, responsiveness, reflexivity and obliquity is crucial.

- avoids triggering trauma reactions or re-traumatising the women - the strategies used are 'reading the room' (in other words, continually observing body language and emotional signals), giving space and time for reflection, understanding potential triggers and, in response, avoiding particular topics or themes.

- adjusts the behaviour of practitioners to support the women's coping capacity - facilitation needs to be at an appropriate pace, with a loose structure and the ability to adapt and be flexible. The Gatekeepers, in this context the prison wardens, who enable the creative work to take place, are vital in helping to develop the level of trust and support the women need.

- enables survivors to manage their trauma symptoms successfully so that they are able to access, retain, and benefit from these sessions - Ways of Working (the group contract agreed by the women at the start of each singing and song-writing project) enables shared values and the authenticity of individual voices to be expressed.

The community music facilitator as 'host' within this complex setting, has to have a deep understanding of both the participants, the women, and the context, the prison itself, as well as the underlying circumstances surrounding incarceration of women in the UK. The rigid structures within the Criminal Justice System make adaptability and flexibility all the more important. The community music facilitator is admitted under rigorous security procedures; there is a set time and entry into the space for the women; and the facilitator and participants are locked into the space together for a finite amount of time. Not only is the door not 'left ajar' but the 'opt out' is limited – the women cannot leave the workshop, but they can emotionally withdraw whilst still being physically present; any tensions have to be dealt with as they arise and within the confinements of the space. All of which goes against our understanding of the role of the 'host' as outlined previously.

Conclusions

The ‘act of hospitality’ (Higgins, 2012) then, for the community music facilitator, is not as clear cut or performative as it may first appear. Hospitality as a welcome without reservation, without previous calculation, and in the context of community music, an unlimited display of reception toward a potential music participant is a transcendental ideal, one toward which we might aspire, even though it remains inaccessible. As such, it is our responsibility as community musicians to re-examine how the foundational values and underlying principles of our practice can be adjusted within the bounded limitations of the contexts within which we work.

But boundaries are there to serve a purpose, and the constraints we face can offer us an opportunity to sharpen our focus and acuminate our practice. In this sense, boundaries are not meant to be fixed or rigid, but permeable and porous (Cloud and Townsend, 1992), with boundary lines being able to shift or be re-drawn and crossing of boundaries as an option. The fixed boundaries and parameters of the Prison Partnership Project necessitate an enhanced awareness for the facilitator, and therefore a place in which skill, dexterity and versatility can all be honed.

To be in the role of a ‘host’ within the complexities of a community setting, enables the possibility of generosity and openness to the individual ‘guests’, while maintaining the ability to set limitations and make decisions that determine the levels of safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment and choice of the group. The ‘messiness’ we may face as practitioners can cause unease and distress, especially when our deeply-held values are directly challenged. But it is the prerogative of the community musician to draw upon their resilience and courage to harness the wisdom needed to respond creatively in these situations, and find solutions that enable a constructive move forwards, benefitting as many of the participants as possible.

The community musician’s ‘welcome’, within the moments of hospitable encountering, will be all the more valuable in its authenticity, when not just understood as a prerequisite of the practice. When offered freely, within the limitations and complexities of the many and varied settings across which community music practitioners engage, hospitality, generosity and welcome can provide a powerful backdrop to the creative and personal growth and development of the participants for whom the work is intended.

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