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TRAINING AND RETAINING TRADITIONS

The Grainger Wind Symphony

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The Grainger Wind Symphony (GWS) is a community music group that was established in 1986 and named after one of Australia's foremost composer and composers, Percy Grainger (1882–1961). This ensemble illustrates another of the diverse and unique ways in which community music functions (Higgins, 2012). This voluntary group was founded on the principle of providing a performance and community music outlet for musicians, music education teachers, and graduates, and advancing advocacy and promotion of quality music performance in the concert band tradition. At the time of interviews, the GWS maintains a performance schedule of eight concerts per year, in a variety of venues around Melbourne and at regional centres throughout Victoria. More information about the ensemble can be obtained from their website (<https://graingerwindsymphony.asn.au/wordpress/>). The group has built a relational ecology that centres itself on musical excellence.

The core goals of the GWS are to represent and perform wind ensemble music of the highest calibre and undertake quality advocacy and outreach. With an enduring commitment to music education, the GWS stages Conductor workshops, school workshops with secondary school musicians, and composition bursaries and prizes, providing inspiration to conductors, instrumentalists, and school directors towards performance standards and sharing a love of playing in a wind symphony. These practices resonate with their namesake who often performed free in return for the opportunity to rehearse or perform his works (Bird, 1976). The GWS also offers a Young Players scholarship open to final year high school instrumental music performance students, seeking to encourage and support young musicians to pursue wind band music performance beyond high school. The GWS is self-funded with money raised through box office takings at concerts and fees from undertaking some professional development for conductors. Members pay a yearly subscription of \$280 to be part of the ensemble. Funds are used to hire and sometimes purchase music and some instruments.

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The ensemble comprises professional, semi-professional teacher musicians, tertiary music students, and graduate school music students, drawing on challenging repertoire from the highest standard music available within Australia, and internationally. The group has premiered compositions in Australia by noted local and international composers such as the late American composers, Alfred Reed (1921–2005) and Vincent Persichetti (1915–1987). Its founder and musical director is Roland Yeung, a highly respected musician, educator, and conductor of wind ensembles in Australia. The GWS was established not only to expertly perform challenging Australian repertoire but also to celebrate conductor, composer, inventor, and champion of wind band music Percy Grainger. His contribution to the repertoire and the establishment of the wind ensemble as a musical institution and force is globally recognised, particularly in the USA, encouraging the development, performance, and appreciation of concert symphonic wind bands as a branch of instruction in secondary schools and colleges (Bird, 1976).

Each concert represents the culmination of both a prolonged creative process and a substantial musical journey, involving commitment, dedication, and eliciting of musicality. Through performance, mentorship, and scholarship programs, the GWS sees itself and its members as advocates for the promotion of technical education in the art, practice, and appreciation of wind music and music generally. The ensemble also encourages the development, performance, and appreciation of concert symphonic wind bands as a branch of instruction in high schools and colleges.

The wind band in Australia

Australia has an extended history of band music making that dates to the earliest British convict settlements in Sydney (then Port Jackson) (Fraschillo, 2014). Groups, most likely brass or drum and fife bands, provided music for certain occasions, particularly for governmental official ceremonies and during the early nineteenth century these groups were progressively formalised and developed along the traditional British model. Although these bands began on military lines (Herbert, 1991), they quickly became a feature of community and school life in colonised locations such as Australia (Southcott, 1992). Bands of various permutations were introduced into schools and communities during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Many early bands were informal organisations sharing, at most, a common commitment to community music making and the employment of some combination of wind (predominantly brass) and percussion instruments (Hazen & Hazen, 1987). The music performed by many of the less formal groups was often an eclectic mixture, usually arranged by the bandmaster (conductor/organiser) or other band members who were notationally literate. Banding existed in communities as a musical practice predicated not upon a pedagogical function or even, as was and is the case with most orchestras, a so-called ‘artistic’ function, but rather a socio-musical ethic. Such ensembles, when associated with schools were co-curricular, almost always rehearsing outside of timetabled classes. The social roles of the school and community bands often overlapped and sometimes

merged. For example, in 1967, a senior state schoolteacher, Bruce Worland, received permission to recruit four members of the Royal Australian Air Force Band to join the Victorian Education Department to teach instrumental music in schools across the City of Melbourne, Victoria and organise concert bands in several public high schools (Fraschillo, 2014). During the 1980s most bands were co-curricular, rehearsing before or after school, led by itinerant instrumental music teachers who often taught private students and across several schools (Thompson, 1983).

Due to existing conceptions of musical legitimacy linked to the values of existing music faculty members (those possessing ‘high status’ that is, classical music knowledge), concert bands were inevitably considered as inferior to those of the symphonic tradition with ‘dubious’ artistic and educational value. The solution was found in the symphonic wind band, a form established in the early nineteenth century, in which instruments are grouped in sections analogous to those of the orchestra (Polk et al., 2001). Symphonic or concert bands acquired educational legitimacy, by adopting the presentation of ‘art music’ as their *raison d’être*.

At the beginning of 1983, the Melbourne Council of Adult Education Wind Symphony was established. It was initially promoted as an experiential band pedagogy for preservice teachers, promoting passionate graduates of wind band repertoire and expertise in band direction, and performance experiences. One year prior to the establishment of the GWS, the first Australian National Band and Orchestra Clinic, led by Russell Hammond, initiated a collectivity and community of instrumental musicians and school band directors across Australia. Despite the rapid development of bands in Australia in numbers, performance standards and quality of repertoire was poor, with little understanding of what might be achieved (Doyle, 1997). From the outset, the GWS has attempted to capitalise on potential and enact excellence.

Participation in music making

Adult amateur musicians spend time music making in community ensembles (Booth, 1999; Busch, 2005; Slobin, 1993), and participation in music into adulthood has often been framed within the concept of lifelong learning and connected to social engagement (Cavitt, 2005; Coffman, 2006; Goodrich, 2013). McNeill (2000) found that participation in a music ensemble contributed to a sense of unity, cognitive coordination, shared emotions, and establishment of trust among adults. Weren et al. (2017) identified a correlation between more highly motivated adult musicians and integration into social networks, suggesting that social aspects exceeded the musical reasons for participation. Social benefits have been asserted as important reasons for participation in a musical activity (Creech et al., 2013; Goodrich, 2013; Hallam et al., 2016), and social interactions contribute to feelings of being in a community as a whole, not just as an individual (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). Langston and Barrett (2008) found that music making participation facilitated cooperation and friendship among its members. As will be evident, this was not the case for the GWS, where musical reasons were ascendant, although a little socialising occurred.

Method

In this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995), we sought to understand into why participants in this ensemble devoted considerable time, aspirations, effort, and commitment to music making, with focus on personal aims derived from predominantly musical and some social interactions. With ethical oversight, we purposefully sampled participants from this community band (Patton, 2014). We selected participants based upon our initial observations and recommendations from the conductor. To avoid interrupting playing time, interviews of participants occurred before and after rehearsal. In these we uncovered various facets and complexities, involving participation in the ensemble, relationships with the conductor, the overriding ethos, and how this reflected on interviewees' thoughts towards musical and social interactions. This allowed us to explore the particularities and complexities of this phenomenon of interest by gathering fine-grained detailed participant accounts. The individual or small group interviews occurred during rehearsals, with the conductor determining who came when according to his rehearsal schedule. All interviews were transcribed and returned to participants for checking. We then analysed the data both singly and together by reading and re-reading the written transcriptions to determine patterns and consistency of the data (Bazeley, 2013; Stake, 1995). We include verbatim quotations to give voice to our participants, all of whom agreed to be named. Following coding, we formed emergent themes, then built overarching themes: enculturation through participation, aspiration, and challenge; commitment to band and conductor; and a unique ethos of reciprocity.

Enculturation, participation, aspiration, and challenge

For the participants, the GWS is a common interest, through which participants aspire to develop musical community through ensemble commitment. The band's focus is upon the music, rehearsals, and concerts, upholding their espoused values of high-level performance, advocacy for modern wind music and Australian repertoire, and sharing their chosen music with others. Although the ensemble champions the repertoire of Grainger, the ensemble is adept at a vast array of wind band works.

There is a consistency about how our participants talk about the GWS and a clear awareness of the expectation of musical excellence. The band members are all very good players and strive to maintain this level of engagement. Membership is not assured and there is an audition process. Depending on numbers of particular instruments, there may be a waiting list for membership. There is strong respect for the musicality and skill of their fellow band members and their conductor. This mutual respect contributes to their clear sense of purpose, drive, and camaraderie. Tray encapsulated the latter, "in my high school band, we had something to bond over and a real sense of camaraderie and achieving something together. I like achieving things with other people" and this is what he found in GWS.

Beyond camaraderie, for some playing in the band is a necessity. Christine explained, "I'd stop playing if I wasn't in this band. I need this music in my life". For

her, GWS was a unique opportunity to be with like-minded people that she did not find in any other community music ensemble. Alana spoke of not only being able to play, but also to use her professional personnel skills as

concert manager for the ensemble, but I love playing flute in the band – I like our ethic – we practice intensely sometimes for just four weeks before a concert. Even during the performance, we are hearing and experiencing new musical pinnacles. Those tight-rope moments are the most exciting moments for me as a musician.

Even with their desire to perform at a high level, the participants did not appear to compete with one another. Although applicants applied for membership of the band and entry was based upon the need for a particular instrument, a respect for one another's abilities permeated. Holding shared goals players were given positions within the bands. This process was managed by section leaders. Even after successfully auditioning, Stuart was "initially intimidated because its reputation as one of Melbourne's best ensembles ... With them I found great music written for this band, at a high level. I found that by being in this band I could have artistic aims".

The aspiration for musical excellence was reported by all, regardless of individual musical pathways before joining. The conviction of this shared ethos cemented the relational ecology built within the band. For some participants there was a familial link to both music and the GWS, thus the web of connection became for some a family matter. Angus explained that:

I took up music because my mother deemed it important. I played in the school bands; we did concerts and tours. My brother joined Grainger and soon I got involved as well. I found it clicked with me, a group of people collectively aiming to play at the highest level we can – it's all about the music.

Ian was an experienced player, in "various community bands, brass band, Navy band; my son urged me to play in Grainger, he plays trombone and enthused about it, so I joined too, its ended up being doubly inspiring – for me and watching my son flourish". Chelsea, summed up the positivity and camaraderie of the group who are from

all walks of life but who are passionate about performing at a high standard in this group and upholding the values inherent in this ensemble. There is a solidarity and a shared ethic when we are rehearsing. It's not verbal, and it's not that we are judged, we are all supportive of each other encouraging each other to play and learn and grow.

Others progressed through other ensembles before joining the GWS. Chelsi "played music in school, playing flute. My teacher played in this group. I did a music degree and got the skills to get into the group on a Young Players Scholarship,

and now teach in secondary schools too”. Sally was first chair clarinet in her South Australian high schools, completed a music teaching degree and then taught in regional Victoria. She invited the GWS to come to the region to give workshops for a cluster of schools. Then, Sally “went to England after a while but came back to Melbourne. The first thing I did was join the Grainger, and I’ve been with them since 1997”. She plays with other community orchestras but loves “the challenge Grainger gives me”.

All the participants recounted multiple musical experiences in their past before joining the GWS. A valued commonality was the culture of musical excellence and challenge. All also noted their appreciation for their conductor, Roland Yeung, and for the clear organisational structure. Kara captured this when she stated, “I was used to good conductors and effective organisations”. Roland explained the behavioural tenets that underpinned the functioning of the ensemble:

We have goals of community that we try to deliver on: how we talk to people, how we give instruction, how we support, how we don’t ridicule or embarrass, it’s part of mine and theirs’ music education training, and it’s a mode of work and respect for each other and what we all bring to the ensemble.

To facilitate this, the committee talks monthly,

to discuss the way we want to move forward. We review these things together, what goals do we want to set, what we can afford, do we want to play at more schools to raise money. We have small audiences, our music is quite dramatic to the ears, and complex. We are different to the orchestras and 19th century repertoire.

Roland

These values are based on a long-established enculturation experienced formatively in their own upbringing, crystallising in their adult lives as a way of functioning and continuing their desire of performing in an instrumental ensemble with high musical standards. All the participants spoke of valuing their dedicated and acknowledged place and role within the GWS, with the leadership of the conductor being a central aspect of the ensemble dynamic.

Commitment to band and conductor

Not all the participants in this study were full-time musicians/music educators. A significant number of players pursue various professions but had continued to perform on their instruments since high school. Their commitment to this ensemble began when they joined. The commitment to the ensemble was not undertaken lightly. Each player made a significant time commitment to attending rehearsals and concerts. Whatever their ‘day job’, Stuart thought that “anyone joining definitely need to be all about the music”. This was not a group for the musically ‘faint

hearted'. Concomitant to this was the commitment to practice so that when they rehearsed, everyone was ready to play their part, not to learn. Ian expounded that, "It makes me practice every day – takes me back to school in a way, but I thrive on this challenge and ethic. It meets my passion for musical excellence – I'm having fun on that journey".

Repertoire served as the basis for how the participants enjoyed their time with music making in the ensemble. The modern and frequently original repertoire did produce some challenges for the participants. All participants spoke of the attraction of playing challenging and less often performed pieces. They joined not only because they wanted to continue playing their instruments with other expert musicians, but they were also attracted by the repertoire. Tray explained, "As a composer being in this band privileges me to insights of some great writers of concert band repertoire. I've learnt to appreciate the compositional decisions made in pieces that flows into my work".

The underlying tenets of engagement were shaped by the conductor and music director, Roland. This infused all aspects of band practice. For example, Roland explained how rehearsals worked:

There is a sense of togetherness and commitment to each other – it's not through telling jokes or having cups of tea, we don't break. We operate on a set of six rehearsals before performance, so after the first one, we settle into a very high level of rehearsal and performance.

The assumption is that everyone knows their part, so the rehearsals are for musical understanding and interpretation. Roland explained that, "We get to know each other through the parts – who we double or blend with, in certain sections, who's featuring and who's the harmonising accompaniment. A lot of our communication comes through the players listening and responding". The relational ecology of this group is primarily musical not social. People come to know each other as musicians with a shared goal of musical excellence. Roland explained that, "we actually get to know each other [during] the 10 minutes between sound check and performance, and they really get to know each other". Roland admitted that, "There is some pressure, and when we get to the performance, we're actually collectively elated to making a successful performance". He explained that, "When the music speaks like that it's a real joy. People are exhausted but there's a great deal of satisfaction".

Roland is central to the continuation of GWS. He was a member of the founding committee in 1986 and followed George Logie-Smith as the main conductor. Roland is a very experienced conductor, music director, and music educator. He was music director in schools known for their musical excellence (Blackburn High School for 14 years, then Carey Baptist Grammar School for 19 years). Roland is now retired and so can "devote more time to this ensemble". He is tireless in his work for the ensemble, modelling commitment, and excellence that is clearly communicated to others. Tray stated that, "Roland is a great conductor – he knows

his stuff – he and the band give me a sense of direction – I learn a lot more in this ensemble”. Sally considers that “Roland is the constant – Grainger is Roland [and] it’s hard to think of him not being there”. Roland has become a mentor for the members of GWS. He is both advocate and facilitator (Fowler, 2017), offering opportunities for members of the ensemble to build skills and achieve shared success. This occurs in a practice “rooted in integrity, trust and support” (Johnson, 2016, p. 62). Roland’s musical expertise is respected by all members of GWS and it is recognised that he brings extensive knowledge of composers and their master works to the group. Roland states that, “I try to convey the right features that allows us to get to the highest possible understanding of the music”.

A unique ethos of reciprocity

The GWS provides several ways of giving back and supporting wind bands in Australia. First, it regularly commissions original works and provides opportunities to premiere these works. Roland explained the initial process of selection:

We invite composers to contribute and there is a submission process. We play through them and initially offer feedback to composers, offering ways that works can be improved. We give them [the composers] an opportunity to respond before we have another series of working through the submissions. And [then] the Committee makes a decision.

The composers are not offered a financial incentive as the benefit for them is the opportunity to workshop their piece in rehearsal with the band before the premiere performance. Roland considered the event “a great celebration” and added that “we’re really tickled that so many quality composers are contributing”. Through this process, new works for wind band are created and added to the repertoire, plus composers are given a unique opportunity to hear their works played by excellent musicians. As a member of the GWS, Stuart was enthusiastic about this practice: “I think it’s fantastic that we provide an opportunity for developing Australian composers to write and work with us. I love being part of that process, it feels like a community service of the highest order”.

Another outreach strategy undertaken by GWS is offering themselves as a medium for professional development for conductors who might otherwise only have opportunities to work with small ensembles (or even just a pianist). The trainee conductors videorecord their work with GWS for later analysis. Roland described that,

The group is excellent as they are led to respond to conductors’ gesture and nuance. They will sound different depending on the conductor leading them. We do four conductor workshops a year and that is about contributing to the development of bands and band directors, and that’s built into our work.

Chelsi added the player's perspective:

we can react to their gesture and discuss with them how we respond and get the conductors to reflect on their techniques and explain effective aspects as well as shortcomings. Then the mentor conductors get to work and we hear their feedback, I really enjoy that aspect.

Some of these conductors are band directors in training, others are directors of music in schools. Sometimes, these events occur in the schools and students are able to take part. Sally found the “reaction of the kids is priceless, as well as the parents – that blows the universe away, and helping the conductors get better at their direction”. As a conductor, she is well aware “how valuable that is to them”.

Reciprocity underscores much community music engagement (Higgins, 2012; Southcott, 2009). This sense of validation and contribution strengthens the sense of purpose that drives commitment from conductor and instrumentalists. They give back to different communities – composers of wind band music, conductors of ensembles, and the wider community who can attend their performances.

Discussion

GWS is an unusual community music ecology. It is not driven by perceived need for equity and inclusion, for building a community of practice, or by a need for social engagement. This community ensemble is driven by a shared belief in the importance of their musical goals including performance excellence and the performance of new works of high standard. This group in some ways reflects more the tradition of exceptionalism and excellence of school band ensembles that hold tenets of “belief in strong leadership, belief in commitment to a larger collective, and belief in meritocracy” (Allsup & Benedict, 2008, p. 157). In accord with this tradition, GWS holds “an orientation toward performance and interpretation that is passionate, inventive, and imaginative” (Allsup & Benedict, 2008, p. 160). The members of GWS make a significant commitment of time and effort devoted to practice, rehearsals, workshops, and concerts. They share an imagined practice of demanding musical excellence. There is competition for positions and a mutual respect for the skills of the other, particularly the conductor and music director. This ensemble engages in serious musicking – any social engagement is serendipitous and peripheral.

More than a performing ensemble, GWS undertakes outreach to different communities that are satellite to it – composers, conductors, schools (teachers and students), and the wider public. Members of the ensemble find the ensemble through various connectivities – professional, personal, familial, and so forth. The GWS offers good players the opportunity to maintain and hone their craft. Some continue from school ensembles, whilst others follow a teacher or a family member. Some take time away but may return. This ensemble offers good amateur musicians the opportunity to continue their musicking while pursuing other careers. It also

offers music teachers a milieu in which to maintain their playing skills and expand their musical horizons. What joins the group is the shared belief in musical excellence and the desire to perform challenging music to the best of their ability.

From the narratives offered by participants we find a number of shared traits. All had early and purposeful enculturation into musical activity either via music lessons or positive/supportive environment. All had experience of belonging to a music ensemble and many were adept at more than one instrument. Everyone we spoke to espoused the desire to play and play well, maintaining their musical skills to the best of their ability. All sought ongoing connectivity with other musicians, some with other music educators (both classroom and instrumental). The participants all understood GWS as an iconic ensemble with a particular purpose, ethos, and practice unlike other groups they had experienced.

This ensemble is an example of an exceptional community music group. It is a musical ecology formed by shared pursuit of musical excellence. This is not a formal group based in an institution, it is an informal music group with formal, hierarchical practices. They bring a shared episteme of music ensemble traditions and behaviours to their practice as a community music ensemble. Veblen (2008) posits that there are many answers to the question “What is community music?” (p. 5). This ensemble falls within the notion of independent organisations, but GWS is not a place for shared learning in a social-educational context. GWS is a place of musical rigor that demands commitment. As such, they broaden the scope of how we understand community-based music ecologies.

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