Editorial

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This special issue of the Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies (JIMS) focuses on the theme “Participation”, the focal topic of the most recent Conference of Interdisciplinary Musicology, CIM22, which took place in hybrid format, online and in-person at The University of Edinburgh, UK and with a hub at the University of Hong Kong from 8-10 June, 2022. The rich programme included three plenary sessions, featuring three esteemed Keynote speakers and interdisciplinary Respondents; twelve parallel sessions of new research presentations; and a dedicated session of video flash-talks.

From Charles Keil’s (1987) influential article for Cultural Anthropology, ‘Participatory Discrepancies and the Power of Music’, to the recent edited volume of music psychological research, Together in Music: Co-ordination, expression, participation (Timmers, Bayles and Daffern, 2021); from music educationalist, Stephanie Pitts’s 2005 monograph, Valuing musical participation, to Thomas Turino’s (2008) Music as Social Life: The politics of participation, the matter of how, why and where we participate in music is underpins scholarship in music in both the humanities and the sciences.

Current scientific music research yields an extensive body of knowledge on mechanisms for participation, for example in research on expressive microtiming, co-ordination and joint action. For writers and thinkers within the humanities, participation as a theme is one that helps to identify and articulate social, aesthetic, kinematic aspects of musical values and expressivity. The study of musical participation, then, benefits greatly from the reflective and deliberate approach towards interdisciplinarity with which the contributions in the present collection engage.

This present collection includes three peer-reviewed, systematically interdisciplinary manuscripts that evolved from presentations shared at CIM22: ‘Participation’, each of which develops a distinct perspective on the means and consequences of musical participation. Musical participation, for these authors, suggests various situations of interaction, from events of both face-to-face and online community, to the complex modes of collaboration which underpin indeterminate musical art-work, to the musical encounters enacted by an embodied mind, imagined in solitude.

The first paper in this volume presents the work of Trisnasari Fraser and Jane Davidson, whose contribution reports on their case study of collaborative emergence in participatory action research. Through the creation of a music and dance
performance in *ashra baladi*, an Egyptian improvisational form, the case study examines the creative and problems-solving processes by which six seasoned arts practitioners adapted their project to generate a digitally mediated, asynchronous translation of this deeply situated, embodied art form. Drawing on the Gibsonian concept of affordances to frame the participants’ engagement in music, dance and online creative interactions, the study is enriched by its theoretical consideration of intercultural understanding, based in contemporary revisions to Allport’s (1954) long-standing contact hypothesis. From their observation and analysis of participants’ social interaction – as documented through digital data trails - the authors consider the potential application of this approach in larger, culturally diverse settings. Such digitally mediated means of knowing and sharing in embodied practice present alternative opportunities for participatory engagement with the sociocultural background of the music and dance form.

The second article, by ethnomusicologist Flora Henderson, shares a deeply personal, bold exposition on what musical participation and embodied sense-making entail, articulated as auto-ethnography. The article integrates two distinct disciplinary bodies of knowledge, namely the theoretical framework of embodied music cognition, and methodological toolkit of ethnomusicology. Significantly, Henderson gives voice to a dyspraxic lived experience that is underrepresented in music perception research data, and in doing so reveals hidden non-verbal learning processes which may better inform understanding of music learning more generally.

Finally, Chia-Ling Peng explores a perspective on musical participation that is shaped by one of founders of modern social science, Max Weber. Peng brings Weber’s writings on religious rationalisation to bear on John Cage’s well-studied *Solo for Piano*. With reference to Cage’s incorporation of paper imperfection as compositional material, this article examines how *Solo for Piano* invites the practice of a core concept of Zen Buddhism. Peng explores how Weber’s theory of rationality reveals tensions between freedom and control, and between mediation and direct expression, in the bilateral participation of composer and performer.

I am deeply grateful to all members of the conference committee who supported the in-person event in Edinburgh and in Hong Kong, and indebted to all submitters, authors and reviewers. The generous editorial assistance provided by Jakob Leitner made this special issue possible, and we are particularly indebted to Richard Parncutt as the general academic editor of JIMS and the driving force behind CIM since its establishment as a conference series in 2004.

Participation, as CIM22’s theme, has highlighted music’s integration into other domains of individual and social experience. In reality, musical participation is constrained by socio-cultural and political identity, and influenced by expressions of these within broader social and institutional frameworks. Participation implies inclusion. As the backdrop to this special issue, CIM22 provided a meeting point for many who wished to reflect upon the constraints of existing discourse around musical participation, and explore new futures. Delegates raised and examined many reasons
to take a critical and questioning stance about the integrity of academia’s deployment of ‘participation’ to date. The conference saw contributions on the topics of empirical performance research on co-ordination and joint action; on community music research and reports from other applied sites of musical participation; on music cognition, including enactive perspectives such as participatory sense-making; on historical contexts for (and critiques of) musical participation; on critical music pedagogy and curricular renewal in related areas; on media, virtuality, and participation; and on participation as methodology. The proceedings are available online at https://doi.org/10.2218/cim22.1

Altogether, the contributions of this special issue continue the important and long-standing tradition of JIMS, to deliver thoughtful, reflective and novel insights on a specific topic within a strongly interdisciplinary framework.

References


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