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COMMENTARY

A commentary on "'That's what makes me authentic, because what we do makes sense' – Music professionals' experiences of authenticity: A phenomenological, hermeneutical interview study" (Bøtker, Christensen & Jacobsen)

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The term authenticity is much used today. I have lived through the 1970s and have seen it used in parallel with the word creativity. Many people from a variety of musical contexts have used creativity with a wide variety of meanings, some of them containing paradoxes and contradictions. It might mean improvising with students in a school classroom or performing a Beethoven sonata beautifully. Creativity was a useful word in that it brought musicians together despite the contrasting meanings within it. The term authenticity seems to have a similar function of uniting contrasting voices.

Authenticity is often closely associated with Charles Taylor's 1992 book. (This is most clearly done in an article by two of these authors; see Bøtker & Jacobsen, 2023) in which he laments the advent of the term authenticity in his critique of the challenges of modernity which he sees as a denial of common values in a search for self-fulfilment. He identifies what he calls the malaises of modernity:

> Individualism is, Taylor recognizes, both a major accomplishment of modernity and one of its most troubling attributes. It is a good thing that the personhood and agency of an individual has been recognized and greater freedom has come to make real human progress. At the same time, the loss of the sense of belonging, of purpose, and of one's proper place within the cosmos was swept away by what has become, in more extreme iterations, an existentialism full of dread… Individualism led to the breakdown of the sense of order in the cosmos, which led to disenchantment… These malaises all involve a high place for

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> "authenticity" as a central virtue of modern moral thinking. Rather than faith, hope, and love, which all bear a sense of duty and constraint, the central concern of modern ethics is to be authentic—to be true to oneself. (Spencer, 2023)

Taylor calls for a version of authenticity that includes not only being faithful to ourselves, but also faithfulness to a social authenticity which requires a respect for difference. This article in *Approaches* (Bøtker et al., 2024) is a valuable contribution to this debate.

To initiate their debate, the authors of this article in *Approaches* call on two musical theorists. The first is Peter Kivy who sees it necessary to pluralise authenticity in the title of his book *Authenticities: Philosophical Reflections on Musical Performance* (Kivy, 1995). This book was written in response to the historically informed performance movement in the Western classical tradition which had developed from the 1960s. Kivy's background is a philosopher and musicologist. His four notions of authenticity all relate to issues of performance. As a child, I was brought up as a piano student to play the right notes (i.e., to decode the musical notation) which represented the composer's intention, correctly; indeed, much of the judgements in these exams concentrated on this aspect alone. Kivy expands on this first area/notion by requiring the performer to understand the composer's intensions as expressed in the score. Going beyond this, he also debates where improvisational practice fits into the culture of the time of composition. The second area/notion, which he calls sound, includes both the composer and the nature of listening at the time of composition. The third area/notion concerns not only historical instruments but also the venue for which the composition was intended. Here, he sees that a concert-hall performance and a German romantic aesthetic way of listening may be in conflict with the original context. Specifically, I refer to German romantic aesthetic way of listening as associated with the rise of the concept of absolute music and based on the Kantian ideal of disinterestedness.Would Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) if transported into a 21st century car circling the M25 playing on Spotify one of her antiphons, say with some amazement and incredulity: "But I wrote it for the feast of St Ursula". How would Bach feel about his cantatas performed outside of a Lutheran liturgical context? It is possible that it is the contradictions between the various forms of authenticity that formed the plurality in the title of Kivy's book. His fourth authenticity concerns a "personal" ideal (Kivy, 1995, p. 108), suggesting that a performance is a "unique product of a unique individual" (p. 123). This allows the performer to make personal decisions about how to perform the work. This may mean additions and adaptations of the original score, including improvisational and arranging techniques of various kinds, which appear to contradict the notion of fidelity to the composer's intentions. The obligation of the performer is to "display the decorative object to the best advantage" (p. 286) and this amounts to presenting the best possible version of a work at a specific moment in time.

I am reminded here of early popular music competitions on television such as *Stars in their Eyes,* where performers had to replicate not only the notes of the song but the costume and gestures of the original artist, resulting in an almost complete reproduction of the original. As these competitions developed, the assessments have changed and moved towards more of a concentration on personal authenticity, that makes a version which is distinctively the performer's own version of the original song that they are covering. An example would be Eva Cassidy's version of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* as compared with the Judy Garland version from the film *The Wizard of Oz.*

In my own experience, I met a more extreme form of authenticity which is linked with the notion of appropriation. I found this when supervising students who were exploring some of the drum traditions of sub-Saharan Africa. In their original tradition, who could play was limited by gender, tribal identity and membership of a particular practising family. Should, or even can, this be maintained if the instruments are transferred out of their original context? I can remember the surprise of one student arriving at the university seeing me, an aging English woman (also wearing a clerical collar) playing a djembe. Traditional gender limitations to authenticity have also been part of debates in Western classical musical culture such as the maleness of British Anglican cathedral choirs.

The second theorist used in the article is Allan Moore who is Emeritus Professor in the Department of Music and Sound Recording, University of Surrey, where he researched questions of music and meaning, using music analysis and hermeneutics. Starting with the classical tradition, he became very involved with popular music, becoming the coordinating editor for *Popular Music* and initiating a network of music scholars researching all manifestations of Progressive Rock. Much of his writing is based on rock and contemporary folk. He, like Kivy, favours the plurality of authenticities based on the work of Gilbert and Pearson (1999):

> Artists must speak the truth of their (and others') situations. Authenticity was guaranteed by the presence of a specific type of instrumentation … [the singer's] fundamental role was to represent the culture from which he comes. (Gilbert & Pearson, 1999, pp. 164-165)

From this, Moore distils three types of authenticity:

> That artists speak the truth of their own situation; that they speak the truth of the situation of (absent) others; and that they speak the truth of their own culture, thereby representing (present) others. (Moore, 2002, p. 209)

I wonder if Bøtker, Christensen and Jacobsen were wise to choose these two theorists from the world of performing music in various concert situations to initiate the debate. They acknowledge that all the participants in their study were female. There might be gender-based differences which would account for some of their divergences from the concepts of these male theorists, particularly because of gender restrictions imposed in the musical traditions of many cultures. Furthermore, bearing in mind that up until the beginning of the 20th century, women were prohibited in some European cultures from playing many instruments, at least in public contexts.

These views of authenticity in relation to gender may be occasioned by the relationship to context of various types of musicking. Women's musicking was often in the home or school, and women seldom had access, in those times, to acquiring musical literacy. There is a profound difference between music traditions that are literate through some form of notation and those which are orate. In these two musical types, the relationship with the past is very different. The move towards historically informed performance cannot really be the same as the use of musical improvisation in music therapy which is much more rooted in the present without the constraints of a printed score. The traditions of Kivy and Moore are very much based on a musical product whereas the traditions examined by Bøtker, Christensen and Jacobsen are primarily concerned with process.

It would have been interesting to examine the development of the improvisational culture of music therapy which can be seen as a musical rebellion against the increasing control of the performer by the composer which developed within the 20th century Western classical tradition (Boyce-Tillman, 2000). So, in choosing Kivy and Moore as theorists of authenticity, the authors may be drawing on a musical tradition that is too different from the ones under scrutiny. However, I do love the development of the helicopter role and the "floating–anchoring" role as it does attempt to draw the tradition of music therapy into the process of analysis.

In addition to these two theorists dealing with musical performance, they also draw on music education in the form of Laursen (2005) who relates it to a combination of personal competence and personal qualities. The authors reduce this to personal competence. Competence in this area is very different from the technical competence of a music performer. They were also only able to recruit a limited range of subjects for their research, particularly from the musical performance world. The two performing musicians in the study appear to be largely in the music education area, which is not really parallel to the performances analysed by Kivy and Moore.

I do like the findings and development of the previous model of Bøtker and Jacobsen (2023). and the addition of Values (which figure in both Kivy's and Moore's research). This is particularly important in an age when the value of music in the education context is often reduced to what it contributes to what are regarded as more important subjects such as reading and mathematics. The literature that Bøtker, Christensen and Jacobsen reviewed at the outset (which I have critiqued above) may not be relevant except in so far as what is examined in the article are really authenticities rather than authenticity. I wonder how the six authenticities identified in the article sometimes conflict with one another in people's practice. Does personality sometimes conflict with professionalism or role with context? I wonder how the six authenticities identified in the article sometimes conflict with one another in people's practice. Does personality sometimes conflict with professionalism or role with context? The final conclusions of Bøtker, Christensen and Jacobsen are very helpful. The detailed identification of the six areas of relationship, role, context, professionalism, personality and values provide music therapists with a useful way of reflecting on the authenticity of their own practice

The article reveals some of the dilemmas present in Charles Taylor's view of authenticity. How far is being authentic being true and faithful to oneself (in line with Rousseau and Kant) and how far is it largely social even if involves moderating one's own sense of self in order to relate to others (in line with Hegel and Dewey) as in group improvisation (Yehuda, 2013)? These paradoxes are well expressed in this passage from the article:

> In short, the element of personality concerns the possibility to apply personal expression, creativity, feelings, and preferences in professional work. This includes sharing personal experiences or presenting material in a personalised manner. However, the element of personality also includes statements regarding the music professionals' ability to either emphasise or tone down one's own impulses, personality traits, and feelings for the benefit of the process. (p. 21)

If the authors had examined their adopted theories (or theoretical framework) in more detail, some of this dilemma may have become more evident. Nevertheless, this is a very useful article in that

it examines, in some detail, the need for reflection on the hidden and clear authenticities that characterise twenty first century musical cultures. I hope the authors will pursue it further.

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