

## **Music in the community: Investigating the effects of group music making programmes on older adults and higher education music students.**

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The present study starts from two premises that may seem very far from each other, and one of the aims of this project is to create strong links between them. The first premise, based on demographic data, tells us that the global proportion of the population aged 60 and over and that in many countries life expectancy increased drastically.

The second takes into account that nowadays for a musician it is very important to develop a wide portfolio of competences and to be able to deal with diverse professional opportunities. Each of these premises has countless implications, and what it is important to stress here is that music can have a relevant role also in nursing homes, and that it is important to provide musicians competences appropriate to make music for and with that population.

Consequently, this project address two questions. The first is: how do residents in nursing homes experience their group music making? And the second is: what benefits could musicians themselves derive from making music for and with the elderly residents? I was fortunate to be involved as researcher, musician and teacher in Art for Ages, an interdisciplinary project aiming to assess the effects of 10 music sessions delivered in four nursing homes in Switzerland. These music sessions were based on singing and rhythmic activities, and were delivered by one of our conservatoire teachers supported by our students trained to act as facilitators. Our research team assessed - through questionnaires and measurements of stress hormones levels - the psychological and physiological impact on the nursing home residents, and, within my PhD, I was interested to observe as closely as possible how both students and residents experienced these programmes.

To do that, data were collected in two ways. On the one hand, I conducted interviews with residents after the interventions, aiming to clarify what they liked the least and the most and to what extent making music affected their interpersonal relationships and the role of music in their daily lives. On the other hand, data about students were collected using pre-post interviews, questionnaires and oral diaries.

The interviews addressed three dimensions, covering students' professional identity, career expectations and their role in Art for Ages.

Along with interviews, it was also subjected them a pre-post battery of questionnaires related to their professional identity and their self-efficacy.

Finally, students were invited to keep an oral diary to be updated at the end of each session. To this regard, after each session they were asked to talk give feedback and to suggest how the music interventions might be improved.

The analysis of data is still on course and several themes already emerged from interviews and diaries.

Considering the older adults (average age 86.6), it emerged that making music is enjoyable and that both making and listening to music can function as mood enhancer. Furthermore, as the musical repertoire included several different styles (classical music, folk, jazz, pop, latin and soundtracks), many residents viewed this variety as an opportunity to approach music languages they had always

considered elitist or too complicated. On the other hand, many residents were also interested to observe how students would take care of his or her instrument, carry it, set it up and tune it. So, it seemed that the residents' interest in music interventions went beyond the actual music making.

With regard to students, it is interesting to see that they benefited too from the diversity of the repertoire. This is noteworthy because the engagement and the gratitude they saw in the residents while playing a familiar folk song or singing a tune in the mother tongue of foreign participants encouraged them to reconsider the imperative to perform "perfectly", and to reflect on the assumption that a "good" musician should practice and perform only highbrow repertoire. Furthermore, the observed engagement and gratitude seem to be related to the increase of motivation and self-esteem that the students reported in their interviews and diaries.

I would like to conclude my presentation sharing with you some questions which arouse from the different roles I had in Art for Ages.

As a researcher, I'm aware that some methodological and conceptual issues are still open. Just to mention two: how should we define and describe this community of our participants? And which specific features of our music making for and with these individuals are likely to be responsible for the observed effects?

As a musician, I still wonder what the more effective repertoire may be and how to share it with older adults who have very diverse backgrounds and suffer from mental and physical impairments.

Finally, as a teacher, I wonder how I can effectively prepare our music students so that they can move into a vague yet expanding professional area between performance and teaching, an area that seems a promising ground for them to affirm their role in our society.