Music & Arts
in Action

Singing Against Loneliness:
Songs of a homeless choir in Porto

GRAÇA BOAL-PALHEIROS

CIPEM/INET-md | School of Education, Porto Polytechnic | Portugal*

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, cultural institutions in Western countries have developed educational services and supported community cultural projects. Through the rhetoric of social inclusion, the concert hall Casa da Música (CM) in Porto, Portugal, tries to reach marginalized people in deprived contexts. This study investigated 'Som da Rua' ("Sound of the Street"), a music ensemble of homeless adults created by the CM, who perform in rehearsals and concerts supported by professional musicians and social educators. It explores the role of community music while reflecting on its possible effects upon the participants' development, its significance in their lives and its potential to build resilience among disadvantaged adults. Special attention is given to the songs, as relevant elements in the construction of the group's identity. The method is designed as a qualitative interpretive case study, combining various approaches: an evaluation of the project's aims and implementation; a semi-structured interview with the music director; field notes of observations of the musical practice; and an analysis of the song repertoire. The results suggest positive effects of musical practice in building a sense of belonging and a group identity among disadvantaged adults. Through singing and playing, supported by professional musicians, participants develop good interpersonal relationships which may foster their self-confidence and social skills. Achieving good musical results and being warmly applauded by the audiences gives them a sense of accomplishment. The musical repertoire is unique to this group, and some songs were built from the participants' inputs. The repertoire is therefore a key element in the construction of a new musical and social identity. The emotional character of the songs and the lyrics (sadness, despair, but also hope and resilience) reflects participants' moods and life experiences, while helping them to cope with their harsh lives and build resilience against adversity.

* Rua Dr. Roberto Frias, 602, 4200-465 Porto, Portugal

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, political authorities and cultural institutions in Western countries have attempted to "democratize" elite culture and later refocused their attention on the concept of "cultural democracy" treating diverse cultures as equal in increasingly multicultural societies, and supporting community cultural development efforts (Graves, 2005). Although cultural institutions have developed educational services that offer music performances to diverse audiences, the composition of those audiences is elite and social minorities are underrepresented, as research has shown (DiMaggio and Useem, 1978). Factors such as globalization, demographic shifts, and the media, have been rapidly changing contemporary societies. Cultural institutions and people in general are increasingly aware of minorities that are excluded from society because of economic, social, political, and educational reasons, among others (Boal-Palheiros, 2014). Thus, educational services of musical institutions try to extend their action towards the "outside" world, believing in music as a means of social inclusion. They reach marginalized, vulnerable people in deprived contexts and fragile situations, such as hospitals, homes or prisons (e.g. Brader, 2011; Caldas, 2008; Góis and Freitas, 2009; Rodrigues, 2008). This practice reflects significant changes in the views of cultural institutions on the functions of music towards increasingly social and therapeutic functions.

Social inclusion is defined as 'the process of improving the terms for [disadvantaged] individuals and groups to take part in society' (World Bank, 2013, p. 26). It means access to economic, social and political institutions, as opposed to *exclusion*, often related to poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment, and barriers to social and political institutions (Oxoby, 2009).

In line with the principle of "cultural democracy" and with concerns regarding sustainability, the development of educational services has also increased amongst cultural institutions in Portugal, which are sponsored by both public and private funding (Quintela, 2011). The rhetoric of social inclusion is increasingly present in cultural politics, which leads to changes in the strategies of cultural institutions, or in their needs of public legitimacy. The Casa da Música (CM), a concert hall in Porto, justifies their intervention projects through strategies that meet these challenges. They regularly release information to the media about their activities, and emphasise the strategic importance that the visibility of their community projects has obtained from the media (Quintela, 2011).

SOCIAL INTERVENTION THROUGH COMMUNITY MUSIC

The concept of community music includes various models and typologies (Veblen, 2008; Veblen *et al.*, 2012) and it embraces diverse perspectives, as outlined by Higgins (2002; 2007; 2012): music of a community; community musical practice by a group, with a local and musical identity and common traditions; active and intentional intervention of a music leader, in informal teaching and learning situations, with an emphasis on context and on equal opportunities. In the latter perspective, community music is practised by informal music groups of

disadvantaged people of society (Veblen and Olsson, 2002). Koopman (2007) identifies three main characteristics of community music: collaborative music making, community development, and personal growth. People collectively engage in active music-making, oriented by community musicians. Musical materials are adapted to the features of the group and the focus is on musical activities rather than final musical products (ibid.). Research recognized the positive influence of music activities in community development programs (e.g. Dillon, 2006), and community musicians claim that those activities "provide opportunities to construct personal and communal musical expressions" and they can "enhance the quality of life for communities" (Community Music Activity Commission of the International Society for Music Education, 2015).

Research has shown overall positive effects of music on people's intellectual, social and personal development (e.g. Hallam, 2010). Some studies indicate positive emotional, social, and physical outcomes of group singing in choirs (Bailey and Davidson, 2002) and benefits of active participation in singing for wellbeing and health (Clift and Hancox, 2010). Other studies suggest that engagement in musical activities may impact on social inclusion (Welch *et al.*, 2014) and describe positive therapeutic effects and a potential to build resilience through music practice among disadvantaged adults confronted with adverse situations (Brader, 2011; DeNora, 2013; Dillon, 2006; Mota, 2012).

Members of a choir for homeless men reported several benefits of group singing: it alleviated depression, required concentration to learn, and developed social skills (Bailey and Davidson, 2002). Furthermore, performing to an audience encouraged a sense of personal worth. Group singing and performance can produce satisfying and therapeutic sensations even when the sound produced by the voice is of mediocre quality (ibid.). Community music enhances health and well-being, and individuals facing extraordinary adversity have gained emotional resilience through music making (Procopis and Dillon, 2011). A music program for imprisoned women from poor neighbourhoods, with very low level of literacy and drug related crime, has promoted confidence in their capacities and contributed to the construction of resilience (Mota, 2012). A study on the effects of group music in adults with chronic mental illness and disability has shown that choir singing presents an opportunity for meaningful social interactions that help reduce social isolation (Dingle *et al.*, 2012). Other relevant benefits result from the choir's musical activities such as the reward of feeling pride from performing for the public (Bailey and Davidson, 2005) and the emotional and health benefits for the participants, associated with forming a new and valued group identity as a choir member (Dingle *et al.*, 2012).

RESEARCHING THE 'SOM DA RUA' PROJECT: METHOD

This study investigated the 'Som da Rua' ("Sound of the Street"), a music ensemble of homeless adults created in Porto in 2009, by the director of the Educational Service of the concert hall Casa da Música, who is also its music director. It explored the role of music as a means of social intervention in the community and the benefits of group music making for personal and social development.

The method was designed as a qualitative interpretive case study (Stake, 1995) combining various approaches: an evaluation of the aims and implementation of the project, by analysing the content of the presentation of the project in the CM Educational Service booklet; a semi-structured interview with the music director and informal talks with some members; field notes of regular observations of the musical practices; and an analysis of the song repertoire. The participants gave consent to my observations, photos and videos, and to their subsequent publication.

This paper focuses mainly on the director's views and on the group's musical activities and songs. It describes the observer's perception of the real situation (Robson, 2011) of the weekly rehearsals and some concerts throughout one year. The observer participated in singing and playing activities, sharing musical and social experiences with the members, while trying to capture their emotions and attitudes. The songs were recorded and transcribed into music notation by the observer and copies of the lyrics were obtained during the rehearsals. Both the musical content and the lyrics of the songs were analysed, as relevant elements for the construction of a new musical and group identity.

DISCUSSING THE AIMS OF 'SOM DA RUA'

The 'Orquestra Som da Rua', presented as a group of homeless adults, was founded by its music director Jorge Prendas, after his experience with a musical project in a prison. Projects of intervention in deprived communities are assumed as a strong element in the identity of the Educational Service of CM and Jorge conceived 'Som da Rua' as "the most challenging and inclusive project that we have ever done":

> The principle was to include the most excluded people (homeless, at risk, living in social institutions) and to collaborate with social institutions, to build up a full inclusive musical project (Interview with Jorge).

According to Jorge, the group name ("Sound of the Street") evokes people who live in the streets and the project aims to be both socially and musically inclusive. He emphasises a relevant difference between his "orchestra" and a classical orchestra, where the conductor "dominates over most musical options". Whenever possible, he tries to integrate proposals of the participants. He remembers Mr. C who, like most members, had a serious lack of self-esteem. He used to say "*I know that I am nobody, but I would like to say…*". Jorge believes that valuing their opinions is an adequate strategy: "*In this project, everyone feels useful*". This is a good example of Jorge's democratic beliefs and practice, which he further explains:

> Many of these individuals are excluded from society... In our group, they are integrated and respected and through musical practice they train basic rules of democratic life, such as the right to express ourselves, the capacity to listen to others and respect their opinions. Thus, this is definitely also an educational project that develops many relevant skills (Interview with Jorge).

The official discourse presenting the project on the CM booklet conveys a positive image of the institution and its staff (Quintela, 2011), while it also expresses a genuine will to include all people in situations of fragility who wish to participate.

> Everyone is welcome. This ensemble of social inclusion consist of dozens of men and women who know well the streets of Porto. They have in common difficult stories and a wish to mitigate them through music. During the rehearsals and concerts hope is reborn. This project has quickly become an artistic and social phenomenon. Strength, simplicity and dignity are the attributes of its identity. Public recognition, expressed in each live performance, is more than deserved (Casa da Música, 2014).

The ensemble is managed jointly by the CM and its partner social institutions,[1] whose directors and staff were invited by the CM and adhered to the project. They select the concert venues and make all the necessary arrangements. The ensemble is inclusive as entry is open to all members with no audition or previous musical experience required. All soloists are recruited from within the membership.

PRESENTING THE MEMBERS OF THE GROUP

The 'Som da Rua' participants are homeless adults, who live in accommodation facilities provided by social institutions. The majority (thirty-eight out of forty-two members) are men between 35 and 61 years-old and a few women (four) are between 65 and 77 years-old.[2] They are unemployed, have no family (or no family support), and are financially supported by the Social Welfare system. The social workers of these institutions also provide psychological support and promote their social reintegration. Thus, they encourage them to participate in 'Som da Rua' and in other similar projects. Members who live in the city centre walk to the rehearsals' venue whilst the others are brought in their institutions' vans. Most of them have social and psychological problems due to years of drug consumption, violence, hunger and loneliness, among other difficulties. Nevertheless, they enjoy happy moments while making music together as R., a 77 year-old woman said: "*I come here to wipe away my sadness*". Membership fluctuates, depending on factors such as the members' instability, their difficulties to adapt to the rules, or even their lack of motivation to attend to the rehearsals, which demand some effort and dedication to learning.

The social workers, all of them young women, have degrees in Social Education or in Psychology. They are responsible for their small groups of participants and actively join them, singing in all rehearsals and public performances, even out of their working schedule. As mediators they have a key role in motivating and encouraging "their" members to attend to the choir, as many of them would not take the initiative themselves. They show a range of attitudes, mostly kind and gentle, but also firm, depending on the situation. For example, they reprehend some men when their behaviours are not socially acceptable. For the music director, the social workers are fundamental as they bring the members to the group and without them it would not be possible to implement this project. According to a social worker, the interaction and the exchange of experiences among the social workers of various institutions are very interesting, as well as the feeling of belonging to a group and working for the same goal. In her own words, "we communicate and articulate with each other in

---

1   SAOM - Serviço de Assistência Organizações de Maria, CSPNSV - Centro Social e Paroquial Nossa Senhora da Vitória, Associação dos Albergues Nocturnos do Porto, Clínica do Outeiro, Abrigo da AMI do Porto, Casa da Rua - Santa Casa da Misericórdia do Porto, Liga para a Inclusão Social, e ARTES - Associação de Rio Tinto para a Evolução Social.
2   Data gathered from the institutional list of participants.

order to promote the group, to make better the lives of the members. We know what is best for each person" (Comment by MJ).

Four professional musicians paid by the CM (music director, guitarist, flutist, and percussionist) assist the group. Although they are not trained in educational or social sciences, the three instrumentalists have completed a year-long course in community music taught by British specialists. These musicians have a key role, by helping the conductor during rehearsals and concerts, and especially by playing relevant musical parts, which support the ensemble musically.

Although the director likes to call his group an "orchestra", the ensemble's main activity is choral singing. As some participants reported, singing is a very positive experience that may increase their growth and boost their self-esteem and the collective efficacy (Langston and Barrett, 2008). Singing is accompanied by an unconventional "orchestra" of percussion "trash instruments", creatively built by percussionist Paulo from recycled objects, such as plastic bottles cut into strips and colourful bottle tops (**Figure 1**). With these instruments they play rhythmic patterns that accompany the songs and produce interesting timbres that evoke particular atmospheres. Because these instruments are very easy to play and present no technical difficulties, they are accessible to *all* participants, who can learn them easily and quickly obtain the reward of a positive musical outcome. So, the instruments contribute to achieving the aim of inclusion, insofar they promote a musically inclusive experience for all participants, which might enhance their self-confidence and sense of belonging to the group.

Figure 1: percussion "trash instruments" played by 'Som da Rua'[3]

OBSERVING THE REHEARSALS

The following paragraphs describe my observations and perceptions of a rehearsal of 'Som da Rua' in October 2012. Entering the historical area of Porto, with its medieval streets and baroque buildings, I walked down a busy street towards the river Douro, enjoying the warm sunshine and the autumn blue sky. This postcard scenario suddenly changed as I entered a very narrow, dark street, where clothes are hanging

---

3   Photo taken by the author.

on balconies of old, poor, deteriorated buildings. A few modest restaurants and cafés and a mixture of smells in the air create a somehow nostalgic atmosphere.

The rehearsal venue is a house borrowed from the Foundation for the Development of Porto Historical Area. The door is always open. The weekly rehearsal is scheduled from 2 to 3.30 pm, but only a few participants arrive on time and most sessions start about 15 minutes later. The room is set up with chairs in U shape and four boxes on the floor, filled up with "trash" music instruments.

At one end of the room, the three professional musicians and a 40 year-old group member (the drums player) are standing on a platform, trying out some tunes. About 30 participants are sitting, some of them chatting, waiting for the session to start. The majority are men and there are only three women. The five younger women sitting amongst them are the social workers.

The director greets all participants and welcomes new members or those who have been absent for a long time, and briefly introduces me to the group. They are used to having regular visitors who attend to the sessions in order to learn about this project: journalists, social workers, students, and directors of similar projects from Portugal and other countries.

As in other amateur groups, attendance to the rehearsals is higher just before the concerts and much lower after these events. Attendance is optional, but as far as acquiring and developing social and musical skills is concerned regular participation is essential to get good results. The coordinator of the social institutions, who arranges the trips to the concert venues, regularly uses reinforcement techniques to increase participants' motivation and discipline. She recommends that they be present at the rehearsals, she warns them that their absence will prevent them from participating in the concerts, and she has recently implemented a control system, through an attendance list. This measure has had some impact as attendance became a bit more regular.

The rehearsal starts. Some men arrive later, after having chatted outside, while smoking a cigarette. Others leave the room in the middle of the session for a few minutes and come back. The music director greets them cordially by their names and some shake hands, while the rehearsal just goes on in a calm, organized and friendly atmosphere.

ANALYSING THE MUSICAL REPERTOIRE

The repertoire of songs is rather homogenous. Most melodies are minor and modal and refer to the pop and rock culture of the 1970's and the 1980's. Most of the songs are composed by the professional musicians. The Dorian mode, which is commonly used in Rock, Pop, Jazz and Blues, is Jorge's favourite mode: he chooses modes "to avoid the banality of the major and minor keys".

Generally, the *tempi* of the songs are quite slow and heavy. In most of them the percussion is based on 4/4 measures in which tempi 2 and 4 are accentuated by the

snare drum and tempi 1 and 3 by the basses. The pedal note in either the tonic or the dominant is often used. The solos of the flute and the guitar often replicate the themes and use pentatonic scales, avoiding harmonic tensions. The basses are simple and the homophonic texture facilitates the entry of the voices. Some sound effects and textures and other strategies developed by the flute, guitar and percussion in the performances occur mainly during the bridges between the sections. These moments are important, as they offer variations on the music materials. Interesting musical effects are obtained through playing simple instruments made from recycled objects. These unique timbres, which are specific to this group, contribute to create their musical identity.

The lyrics of the songs describe situations, experiences, emotions, characteristic places and people of the historical part of Porto.[4] These are intended to motivate the members and foster their identity and sense of belonging. Some early songs were created with the collaboration of the members, who suggested words inspired from their lives. Through this process, they can explore in a new frame their lives, possibilities, losses and aspirations (Ruud, 2008), and this results in "an increased sense of personal and/or musical identity" (Baker, 2015). According to Jorge, "*What they sing is theirs, all songs have to do with their lives*: '*Wish to live*', '*Tired body*', '*Confusion*', '*Song to Porto*', '*Other bridges*".… The song "*Spassiva*", after Russian words, was composed by Jorge, when an emigrant from Ukraine integrated the group for a few months. The lively melody in the Dorian mode is performed with an easy rhythmic accompaniment clapped on sticks. The lyrics of the song "*Turmoil*" tell about the privilege of living in "my" city of Porto, about the crowd in the historical city centre, which was declared a world heritage, and about typical feasts in popular neighbourhoods, where people can enjoy themselves. Some songs will now be looked at more in detail, in order to better understand the various mood states that they can elicit in the group members and audiences during the concerts.

A SONG OF "WISH TO LIVE"

The rehearsal starts with the first song of the repertoire "*Wish to live*". The director hands out copies of the lyrics. These symbolize the spirit embodied in the inception of the choir, as they were built out of loose words suggested by the group, during a brainstorming session, as explained by Jorge and a social worker. The lyrics express the value of community music to their members, the joy of group music making, and the belief that singing together may bring comfort to their lives, perhaps even the dream of some change towards a better life in the future.

Chorus   *Wish to live/ Communion/ Fantastic/ Present*

Verse 1   *We are here to sing/ Happy to be here/ To live*

Verse 2   *Friendship is union/ That warms up our hearts/ Dreaming*

Looking at the members' physical appearance and expressions on their faces, one can imagine their hard past and present lives. However, their behaviour and degree of participation indicate that they are involved in the session and seem to enjoy making

---

4   All song titles and lyrics were translated into English by the author.

music together. They learn the song through imitation, phrase by phrase. This lively melody is not easy and they show real difficulties of tuning in some passages, which are then repeated several times. After a while, the song sounds much better, especially with the harmonic and rhythmic accompaniments played by the guitar and the drums. Their effort is somehow rewarded by an overall sense of achievement and a feeling that this performance is musical.

A SONG OF SADNESS AND DESPAIR "HOMELESS BOY"

The following song is performed by a soloist (A.), a middle-aged man who lived in a social institution for twenty years, since he was a young boy. He is one of the earliest members and joined the group because he likes music. He brought this song with him, which he had learned years ago with people he knew. The lyrics depict the cruel reality of a tramp boy, homeless, starved and with no friends. The music matches the sadness and despair of the words: continuous percussion *senza tempo*, entry of bass and guitar in E minor, slow tempo, accents of percussion in the 4 beats of the 4/4 measure, and melody in E minor. A solo flute accompanied by strong drums accentuates the sombre atmosphere and the dark character of this song. A. is likely to identify strongly with it, as he once *was* this boy: he holds the microphone tightly and sings with a sincere and felt sadness, while tears are rolling down his face. Singing these words seem to produce a cathartic effect on him.

Verse 1   *Tramp boy, with no home, no door/ You live on the street of the death city*
            You own nothing, and everything is yours/ Tramp boy, born out of the darkness

Verse 2   *What hurts you, what kills you/ Tramp boy of the slum*
            You alone feel the hunger, you feel the cold/ Adult child, from near the river

Chorus   *Tramp boy living in my city/ You are the product of society*
            She leaves you homeless, with no bread/ And you spend your life with no friends

Verse 3   *Wait for the day of equality/ But I know it will not happen in my city*
            You don't believe in the people next door/ And you spend your life with no friends

A SONG OF HOPE "OTHER BRIDGES"

The song "Other bridges" is a beautiful ballad composed by Paulo, which they sing with pleasure. All members sing the chorus and a soloist sings the verses. According to Paulo, the lyrics are a poetic metaphor of life, as they describe the familiar scenery of a little boat navigating on the nearby river Douro, from its source unto the wild ocean. The Douro plays a very important role in the identity of the city of Porto and its inhabitants. In this rehearsal, the song just flows, like the boat on the river, with only a short passage being corrected by the conductor. The musicality of the performance is set at the instrumental introduction, by the guitar, the drums, and a special sound effect produced by gently twisting small plastic bottles, which emulate the sound of the boat floating on the dock, while the flute plays short notes, evoking the calls of the seagulls. All these musical techniques create a nice atmosphere that contributes to the participants' enjoyment.

Verse 1   *If I were a little boat/ Moored at this pier/*
            I would look at the river Douro/ As the fate of my life

Verse 2   *With many stories to tell/ From the source to river mouth*
               Before flowing into the sea/ Culmination of a whole life

Verse 3   *Amidst tides and adventures/ In the middle of strong waves*
               Even without being guilty/ Having bad influences from other "seas"

Verse 4   *But now I am a seagull/ Flying over this river/*
               From high I look at the horizon/ Wishing strongly to believe

Chorus   *Besides the bridges over the river Douro/ Other bridges I need to cross over*
               A harbinger of a good, sweet omen/ To arrive happy at the river mouth

               Besides the bridges over the river Douro/ Other bridges we need to cross over
               This is perhaps our best treasure/ Which we cannot damage

Some participants feel a bit tired by now and a man throws his sticks to the floor. During a short break, another man tells me that he has missed the rehearsals for half a year, because "*Some of them said unpleasant things about me, and since then I never put my feet in this place anymore*". He holds a plastic bottle in his hand: "*You know, this is a mixture of soda… and also red wine. I always bring it with me. That man said that I reek of wine. I got upset, of course, so I stopped coming here… but now I don't care anymore*". This suggests that rehearsal events do not necessarily eliminate potential conflicts that may arise in social and verbal interactions.

The rehearsal restarts with another song. Jorge asks Mrs. F to sing a solo, which she tries to do, but she is out of tune. He encourages her while trying to help her to get in tune, without success. A man shakes his head expressing disapproval: "*Hum… she really sings out of tune, she needs more training*". Then Jorge gives up but handles the situation with care: "*It is probably my fault, because this key is too high, it is probably not suitable for your voice*". Failure is part of learning and most of the times they make some progress in singing. As Langston and Barrett (2008) suggest, gaining confidence through participation, trust in their own abilities, and being encouraged by the support given by others is important to singers of lesser competence.

A SONG OF RESILIENCE "TIRED BODY"

"*Tired body*" is one of the earliest songs and its fluent and convincing performance makes it sound like a hymn for the group. Its creation followed a similar process to that described above, with contributions from members who suggested words to express their feelings and states of mind. The melody, in the Dorian mode with a regular rhythmic pattern, is supported by the harmonic accompaniment played on the guitar and by a simple rhythmic accompaniment stressing the upbeat, played by the drums and by all members with plastic bottles. These musical elements give this song a firm, calm, and ritual character that matches with the expression of resilience in its lyrics. The top-down large gesture of their arms playing the upbeat on the plastic bottles evokes a work song or perhaps it emulates the work itself, as if the whole group is determined to work hard to fight against loneliness.

Verse 1   *Tired body/ My face to the ground/ I cry from sadness/ Emotion*

Verse 2   *From my life/ I make this song/ I will walk/ Against loneliness*

OBSERVING THE CONCERT PERFORMANCES

For the participants, concerts represent the main goal and activities of the year. This can be seen, for example, in the higher attendance to the rehearsals that take place just before the concerts, and in the care for their physical appearance at the concerts: they dress up and some go to the hairdresser. Entry is open to performances that take place in the hall of the CM or in public schools. But most concerts are performed for academics in important concert halls during conferences in Social Sciences around social themes (e.g. social inclusion, poverty, drugs addiction). In the rehearsal Jorge had said: "*We are going to perform for people who are almost as important as we are!*" Performing for well-educated, understanding audiences who feel empathy and applaud warmly is a reward for their efforts and increases their self-esteem, as shown in some comments: "*It is good to sing in this place*"; "*I like to be on the stage*". And a social worker said: "*When they are applauded, it is wonderful for them!*" As Bailey and Davidson (2005, p. 289) state, the importance of participating in "a publicly recognized activity", the "feeling of pride which results from performing for the public" may have powerful effects on marginalized individuals. Performing is a way to gain access to highly regarded symbolic resources (Ruud, 2008). For these reasons, concerts are key experiences for all those involved, members, social workers and professional musicians.

Musical performance is by nature a group activity, which is shaped by sociocultural norms and by interactions between performers and audiences (Davidson, 1997). In Western classical concerts, the concert hall does not facilitate interactions among people (Small, 1998). Listeners are expected to remain seated and silent and express their feelings after the performance only. Although the director emphasised a relevant difference between his "orchestra" and a classical orchestra, the tacit rules and etiquette of the group's public performances are those of the classical concerts. The musicians stand upon a stage, separated from the audiences, and the conductor conducts the ensemble with his back turned to the public. They perform one song after the other and thank the applauses in the usual, formal way.

I will briefly describe one of the public performances that I attended in March 2013 in a small theatre in the North of Porto. The repertoire was well outlined in terms of variety, alternating solo parts with choir, and instrumental improvisations with melodies, and presenting a sequence of songs with different "moods" that are likely to elicit varied emotions from the audience. The concert begins with the music director explaining the aims of the project and introducing the group with the official text (Casa da Música, 2014).[5] His way of speaking, gestures, and tone of voice enhance the strength of his message: an adequate atmosphere is created for a positive response from the audience. The alignment of the eight songs is very effective, starting with the most dramatic ("Tramp boy") and ending with the most optimistic ("Wish to live").[6] The penultimate song was a Fado, a typical popular urban song of Portugal

---

5   An excerpt of this text is shown above in the section referring to the Aims of the project.
6   The eight songs of this concert: 1. *Menino vadio* (E minor), by a soloist/ 2. *Corpo cansado* (D Dorian), alternating between soloist and choir/ 3. *Spassiva* (D Dorian), for choir/ 4. *Turbilhão* (G minor), with a soloist and choir/ 5. *Jardim das virtudes* (D minor), with soloist and choir/ 6. *Outras pontes* (E minor), for choir/ 7. *Povo que lavas no rio* (Fado), by a soloist/ 8. *Desejo de viver* (A major) for choir.

that is familiar to most Portuguese people. A very beautiful Fado, which has been immortalized by the great Portuguese singer Amalia, the song "*People who wash clothes in the river*" has a melancholic melody and its lyrics tell about the hard paths of life of the lower classes. Listening to a 77 year-old lady, who had a sad childhood and harsh life, singing this Fado with great emotion, expressiveness and musicality, created a strong emotional moment in the audience who applauded enthusiastically, this being perhaps the strongest musical experience of the evening.

UNDERSTANDING OUTCOMES FROM PARTICIPATION IN 'SOM DA RUA'

Singing and playing together with professional musicians and achieving good musical results gives the homeless members a sense of accomplishment, which is visible in their smiles. They feel safe as those musicians take the greatest part of the responsibility for the concert, providing a reliable musical support. Performing on stage with the social workers also elicits positive emotions of feeling equal (Holden, Parsons-West and Moore, 2011) at least for a while, as reported by a social worker and confirmed by some members: "*They come here not only for the music, but also because they are treated as peers, as equals. They get affection that they don't have in their daily lives*". During the rehearsals and concerts, the social workers mingle with the homeless members and they become musicians. This is also a reward for their regular work and efforts, while it enhances their sense of group belonging.

The colourful and attractive tunics that all participants wear on stage may also be relevant for their success, as they fulfil multiple roles. Made out of the same fabric, these costumes convey a homogenous image, yet diverse because of the range of colours (**Figure 2**). This may enhance feelings of a collective identity, while it contributes to symbolically level out social differences between the homeless and the other members.

Figure 2: 'Som da Rua' performing at a concert[7]

---

[7]   Photo taken by the author with the participants' consent.

'Som da Rua' shows a solid and cohesive image, which may be considered a positive point. Relevant factors, such as institutional support, good interpersonal relationships, and a strong musical identity have contributed to maintain the stability and continuity of the ensemble and enhance positive outcomes for its members.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

The vision and determination of the Educational Service of the CM, the internal recognition of the project by the CM, and the high social prestige that the institution enjoys in the public space are crucial to support the project. The motivation of the music director comes from his own perception that "at the CM we are all proud of this project of public service. I believe that there is no better example of integration and of social work than this one done through music" (Interview with Jorge). Furthermore, there is a supportive organizational infrastructure, with easy access to both financial and human resources. An efficient internal organization, with the collaboration of partner social institutions, has established well-defined social and musical roles which are maintained by the competence and dedication of the social workers as mediators, the skills and commitment of the professional musicians, and the strong leadership of the music director.

GOOD INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

A safe environment including positive feedback, encouragement and motivation, facilitates the participants' involvement and learning. The director has relatively high expectations regarding their behaviour and performing abilities, which motivates them to improve. He believes that they have already developed social and musical skills: most of them can now adapt better to the rehearsals' schedule and respect the rules, and they also sing more in tune and are able to better memorize the lyrics. This kind of development is also reported in other homeless people choirs (Bailey and Davidson, 2005).

Good interpersonal relationships among leader, professional musicians, social workers and participants contribute to create ties, mutual respect, trust, complicity, and perhaps even friendship, as the director explained: "*I feel like a friend of them*". They call each other by their names and sometimes they call him "teacher". However, except in the specific period of the choir inception during which all members were engaging in a new and exciting experience, participants are not given many opportunities to express their opinions about performances or to suggest repertoire. This may contradict the genuine wish of the music director and his idealized image of the group being totally democratic.

The interpersonal relationships among the homeless members seem to be almost inexistent and in fact, they join for the weekly sessions only. The ties that are created during the rehearsals and concerts are ephemeral, not lasting beyond these good moments spent together. Sometimes the director and the social workers try to solve conflicts that arise among participants and may lead to long absences from the rehearsals for some. The relevance of strong charismatic leaders in community music projects has been pointed out (Robertson, 2010). Each participant has a strong

relationship with Jorge, which forms an important pillar of the group's social dynamics.

STRONG MUSICAL IDENTITY

A strong musical identity is created through the musical repertoire, which is unique to 'Som da Rua'. The musical elements described earlier contribute to create a melancholic, dark character, which matches the sad, gloomy lyrics of many songs. The emotional character of both music and text creates a well-defined musical identity that matches the members' unvalued personal and social identity as homeless people, but which also contributes to shape a new, valued identity as performers and choir members. The range of emotions conveyed by the songs – sadness, despair, hope and resilience – reflect and accompany the different emotional moods that members experience in their lives, thereby comforting them while also helping them to become stronger against adversity.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Musical activities can be effective as "catalysts for identity development because of the mutual engagement necessary between performers", and because of the "impact of being involved in valued activities on feelings of self-confidence" (McDonald, 2013). Even if only temporarily, a collective identity is formed through a unified purpose and shared values. People sing together without distinctions of social position and the sense of being part of a group is reinforced through performance events. As Wehlage (2000) suggests (cited in Langston and Barrett, 2008, p. 3), when people "share values, expectations, and goals, they can organize themselves to achieve some collective goals". Participation "generates social capital and develops community feelings" (Pastor Seller, 2013, p. 92). Another positive result from the choir's musical activities was the formation of a new and valued group identity as a choir member (Dingle, Brander, Ballantyne and Baker, 2012).

Music is "a fundamental channel of communication: it provides a means by which people can share emotions, intentions and meanings" (Hargreaves, Miell and McDonald, 2002:1). It also has a role in "bonding and bridging communities" and "expressing a sociocultural or group identity" (Baker, 2015, p. 286). Musical participation can develop feelings of ownership of a creative product (Hargreaves, Miell and McDonald, 2002). Singing this song repertoire has sometimes a cathartic effect, expressing the harsh lives of a sad past, while it also helps the members to be resilient in the present and points to possibilities in the future. The collective musical practice in rehearsals and concerts occurs apart from the rest of their everyday lives. This may have positive effects, as it enables them to create temporary imaginary worlds, thereby helping them to cope with the "real" life outside. Making music collectively works here as a musical "asylum" (DeNora, 2013) which provides momentary relief from their hard living conditions and problems. All members seem to engage in a "mutual tuning-in relationship" by "living together simultaneously in specific dimensions of time" (Schutz, 1951, p. 78, cited in Ruud, 2008). The song repertoire is essential in building self-esteem, and a sense of identity and belonging.

The feeling that members convey through the songs they perform with conviction and emotion is that they believe in what they are doing, they are determined, involved, and together in moments of social and musical share, among them and with the audiences. Herein might reside the most significant value of the 'Som da Rua' as a social intervention musical project.

REFERENCES

Bailey, B. A. and J. W. Davidson. (2002). Adaptive characteristics of group singing: Perceptions from members of a choir for homeless men. *Musicae Scientiae,* 6 (2): 221-256.

Bailey, B. A. and J. W. Davidson. (2005). Effects of group singing and performance for marginalized and middle-class singers. *Psychology of Music*, 33 (3): 269-303.

Baker, F. A. (2015). *Therapeutic Songwriting: Developments in theory, methods, and practice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Boal-Palheiros, G. (2014). Som da Rua, um projecto musical de intervenção social. In P. Delgado, S. Barros, C. Serrão, S. Veiga, T. Martins, A. J. Guedes, F. Diogo and M. J. Araújo (eds.), *Pedagogia/ Educação Social - Teorias & Práticas. Espaços de investigação, formação e ação*. Porto: Escola Superior de Educação do Politécnico do Porto, 378-383.

Brader, A. (2011). Producing better outcomes: music and public services. In A. Brader (ed.), *Songs of Resilience*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 3-18.

Caldas, M. (2008). A música como meio de intervenção social: a importação de um modelo de sucesso para o contexto português. *Revista de Educação Musical*, 131: 43-50.

Casa da Música. (2014). Serviço Educativo Set 2014 – Jul 2015. Porto: Casa da Música.

Clift, S. and G. Hancox. (2010). The significance of choral singing for sustaining psychological wellbeing: Findings from a survey of choristers in England, Australia and Germany. *Music Performance Research. Special Issue Music and Health,* 3 (1): 79-96.

Community Music Activity – Commission of the International Society for Music Education. (2015). http://www.isme.org/cma

Davidson, J. W. (1997). The social in musical performance. In D. J. Hargreaves and A. C. North (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 209-228.

DeNora, Tia. (2013). *Music Asylums: Wellbeing through music in everyday life*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Dillon, S. (2006). Assessing the positive influence of music activities in community development programs. *Music Education Research*, 8 (2): 267-280.

DiMaggio, P. and M. Useem. (1978). Cultural democracy in a period of cultural expansion: The social composition of arts audiences in the United States. *Social Problems*, 26 (2): 179-197.

Dingle, G. A., C. Brander, J. Ballantyne and F. A. Baker. (2012). 'To be heard': The social and mental health benefits of choir singing for disadvantaged adults. *Psychology of Music,* 41 (4): 405-421.

Góis, A. P. B. and M. F. Q. Freitas. (2009). Música nos Hospitais em Portugal: algumas reflexões a partir da Psicologia Social Comunitária. *Revista de Educação Musical*, 132: 59-64.

Graves, J. B. (2005). *Cultural Democracy: The arts, community, and the public purpose*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.

Hallam, S. (2010). The power of music: Its impact on the intellectual, social and personal development of children and young people. *International Journal of Music Education,* 28 (3): 269-289.

Hargreaves, D. J., D. Miell and R. A. R. McDonald. (2002). What are musical identities and why are they important? In R. A. R. McDonald, D. J. Hargreaves and D. Miell (eds.), *Musical Identities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1-20.

Higgins, L. (2002). Towards Community Music conceptualizations. In H. Schippers and N. Kors (eds.), *Proceedings of the ISME Commission on Community Music Activity*. Rotterdam, NK.

Higgins, L. (2007). The impossible future. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, 6 (3):

74-96. http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Higgins6_3.pdf

Higgins, L. (2012). *Community Music in Theory and in Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Holden, P., C. Parsons-West and K. H. Moore. (2011). Singing for mental health and well-being: community initiatives in England. In A. Brader (ed.), *Songs of Resilience*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 121-144.

Koopman, C. (2007). Community music as music education: on the educational potential of community music. *International Journal of Music Education*, 25 (2): 151-163.

Langston, T. W. and M. S. Barrett. (2008). Capitalizing on community music: a case study of the manifestation of social capital in a community choir. *Research Studies in Music Education,* 30 (2): 118-138.

McDonald, R. A. R. (2013). Music, health, and well-being: A review. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 8: 20635. doi: 10.3402/qhw.v8i0.20635.

Mota, G. (2012). A music workshop in a women's prison: crossing memories, attributing meanings. *Proceedings of the 24th International Seminar on Research in Music Education of the ISME Research Commission*. Thessaloniki, Greece, 167-174.

Oxoby, R. J. (2009). Understanding social inclusion, social cohesion, and social capital. *International Journal of Social Economics*, 36 (12): 1133-1152.

Pastor Seller, E. (2013). Ciudadania e participación en contextos de fractura y exclusión social. *Pedagogía Social. Revista Interuniversitaria,* 22 (2): 91-103.

Procopis, B. and S. Dillon. (2011). Voices of the unheard. In A. Brader (ed.), *Songs of Resilience*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 165-183.

Quintela, P. (2011). Estratégias de mediação cultural: Inovação e experimentação no Serviço Educativo da Casa da Música. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 94: 63-83.

Robertson, C. (2010). Music and conflict transformation in Bosnia: Constructing and reconstructing the normal. *Music and Arts in Action,* 2 (2): 38-55.

Robson, C. (2011). *Real world research*. (Third Edition). Oxford: Blackwell.

Rodrigues, P. M. (2008). O Serviço Educativo da Casa da Música. *Revista de Educação Musical*, 130: 58-64.

Ruud, E. (2008). Music in therapy: increasing possibilities for action. *Music and Arts in Action*, 1 (1): 46-60.

Small, C. (1998). *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening*. Middletown, CT, USA: Wesleyan University Press.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research: perspectives on practice*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Veblen, K. and B. Olsson. (2002) Community music: Toward an international overview. In R. Colwell, and C. Richardson (eds.), *The New Handbook of Research on Music Teaching and Learning*. New York: Oxford University Press, 730-753.

Veblen, K. K. (2008). The many ways of Community Music. *International Journal of Community Music*, 1 (1): 5-21.

Veblen, K. K., S. J. Messenger, M. Silverman and D. J. Elliott. (eds.). (2012). *Community Music Today*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Welch, G. F., E. Himonides, J. Saunders, I. Papageorgi and M. Sarazin. (2014). Singing and social inclusion. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5: 803, DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00803

World Bank. (2013). *Inclusion Matters: The foundation for shared prosperity*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graça Boal-Palheiros is Adjunct-Professor and coordinates the Master in Music Education at the School of Education of Porto Polytechnic, Portugal. She received a PhD in Music Psychology (University of Surrey, London), an MA in Music Education (University of London Institute of Education), a BA in Music Pedagogy (University of Leuven Lemmens Institute, Belgium) and a degree in Psychology (University of Porto, Portugal). Graça has been a member of the International Society for Music Education Board and Executive, chair of its INA Committee and co-chair of the ISME Research Commission. Former president of the APEM - Portuguese Association of Music Education and editor of the APEM Journal. Co-founder and president of the Wuytack Association of Music Pedagogy, she coordinates its Teacher Education Centre as well as editorial and musical projects. She is a researcher at CIPEM/ INET-md. Her interests include children's music listening and singing, music teacher education and social inclusion.