

INTRODUCTION

Connecting to Time

Time is one of the great archetypal experiences of man, and has eluded all our attempts towards a completely rational explanation.⁵

The universe was created with time and not in time. (St. Augustine)

This book is about time and how we connect to it, though it is not, as some readers may (or may not) be glad to discover, about quantum theory or particle physics but about music. Time is the autonomous, unconditional, inevitable and ultimately, mysterious process through which life grows and decays and music not only measures time, delineating in a purely abstract but palpable way its passage but it also infuses time with emotional significance and therefore, with meaning: in this sense, it creates out of time a hermeneutic canvas. So the connection to time, through music, becomes also a connection to ourselves, to our senses and how we make sense of ourselves in relation to the world. Music therefore connects us both to the rhythmic quality of our inner lives and feelings, and to those external events and rituals which measure our passage through life and determine our cultural understanding: music not only makes us conscious of time but it simultaneously deepens our awareness of time's significance. We therefore use music not merely as an accompaniment to life (although we may sometimes think that that is all it is doing) but as a barometer of the inner and outer patterns which make life more than a set of random events that somehow take place between birth and death. Music connects us to time and in so doing, it deepens our connection to life itself. The concept and the practice of Lifemusic grow out of this epistemology.

Throughout this book, I will be focusing on the degree to which the way we use music, culturally and socially, acknowledges (or fails to acknowledge) its capacity to articulate time and thus to express the significance of the moment. This places music more in the domain of "Kairos" than "Kronos". In Greek, "kairos" means not simply time but the appropriate moment for an event to take place or the significance lent

5 Von Franz, Marie-Louise (1978).

to an event through the moment in which it happens. It means “felt time” as distinct from delineated time, qualitative as opposed to quantitative. It is about our capacity to understand the import of where we are in time and then to act accordingly. If, through lack of awareness, lack of courage or simply bad luck, we fail to appreciate the fateful quality of the moment and “miss the boat”, then difficulties, if not tragedy can follow. The yellow lemon butterfly hatches at the precise moment when the lemon blossom, the source of its nourishment, appears; if it emerges too early or too late it flies around in vain and eventually dies⁶. Its survival therefore depends upon its alignment with “kairos”. “Kronos” on the other hand, regulates time with clocks, bells and timetables. The “old man of time” keeps the trains running and ensures that we turn up on time for our lessons but he may be insensitive to those inner needs which often require the timetable to be suspended or the carefully laid out plan to be abandoned or the journey to be more leisurely. I shall return to this theme in more detail in Chapter 1.

Defining music

As a teacher, I have often asked my students the simple question “what is music?” Answers to this question are inevitably variable in both length and content. Some will argue that music is essentially an expressive tool, their answers emphasising what music does. For example, “it uses sounds to express joy or passion” or, ‘it helps me to relax’. Others, of a more scientific frame of mind, will home in on the physical properties of music, focusing on what music is. For example, “patterns of sound and vibration in the air”. Unsurprisingly, many students, “schooled” musicians with perhaps many years of conventional and theoretical musical training behind them, will talk of melody, harmony, musical instruments or even scales or notated scores as the basis of their definitions. (Indeed, in English, since “music” also means the written texts which represent the sound music makes, a sentence such as, ‘did you remember to bring your music with you?’ could appear nonsensical.) Usually the discussion will develop in a reductive direction, searching for an axiomatic definition that will be true under all conditions and for all cultures. Is music simply “wiggling air molecules” (Zappa) or “organised sound” (Varese)? Is it capable of expressing “a whole world” (Mahler) or is it “incapable of expressing anything at all” (Stravinsky)? Is it a “portal to the soul of the world” (Kepler)? Is music

⁶ There is a beautiful poem by Eduard Morike called *Zitronenfalter in April*, set to music by Hugo Wolf, which expresses this microcosmic tragedy.

“the form of our feelings” (Langer), expression or form, or both (Meyer)?

Quite often, at some point in the discussion, someone will mention John Cage’s notorious or celebrated (depending on your point of view) composition, originally published for solo piano in 1946, titled “4’33””. It would be fair to say, that, over the years, in my own experience, this little piece has generated more discussion or, frequently, heated debate, than almost any other work I can think of. Why should this be so, when each of its three variable length movements is simply marked “tacet”, i.e. *silent*, requiring no physical intervention whatsoever from the performer apart from some indication that the piece has begun and when it ends. Some feel outraged or simply baffled that a work such as this should have achieved published status in the first place. “Who collects the royalties?” is an often asked question. Occasionally, when for example the work was recorded on CD or, more recently, when an orchestral version was performed at London’s prestigious Barbican Centre, the debate spills out into the media with the inevitable resulting discussion and punditry. Opinions vary widely, often revealing much more about the attitudes and feelings of the commentators towards the phenomenon of music than about the piece itself. Almost invariably, it is the lack of any concrete, objectified reality in “4’33”” which causes the most problems. People, it seems, require music, a) to make some sounds, b) to be entertaining, c) to stir the emotions, d) to demonstrate effort and skill on the part of the composer and the performer. In other words, people want music to be an identifiable object which has a cause (clever vibrations) and an effect (good feelings). An often heard argument in favour of the piece is that the sounds of the environment which occur by chance within the allotted time span actually become the music. Whilst I am sure this reflects the composer’s own interest in *aleatory*, that is, in the significance of chance events, it does not entirely convince. Indeed, during the recording sessions in the Royal Albert Hall some years ago, the production team decided on a re-take because of a background rumbling which turned out to be a distant tube train!

If, however, we shift our thinking towards the *experience* of the piece, as opposed to its existence as an *object*, if we can strip away the concrete nature of our expectations and expose the fluctuating qualities of our emotions, it becomes clear that the work provides an experience which rests, simply and uniquely, in time. After all, this property of the piece is neatly contained in its title: it does what it says on the label, it lasts 4’33”

but, more than that, it divides this time into three ‘movements’ each of different duration, a fact often ignored. So by stripping music down to its one essential ingredient, time, and then not requiring any further intervention in the process, Cage presents the listener with a satisfying, somewhat mysterious, even mystical realisation, that music is, quite simply, *intentional time*; periodicity with purpose; precisely measured, significant moments set aside in order to be mindful of time as it passes.

It often feels to me as if Cage’s genius in conceiving this work and then his courage in publishing it rests in his realisation that we, (in the developed world at any rate) needed to somehow ‘zero out’ before starting again: the *principle of renewal*. Music within the European tradition had become so complex, so composed, so clever and so self-conscious that it became necessary to reduce it to next to nothing in order to remind ourselves of its mystery. So if the answer to our question ‘what is music?’ is *intentional time* we might begin to see that this provides us with a starting point both for a fresh understanding of what music is and what music does. Moreover, it reveals the deep connection between music and life itself, at the heart of which stands the mystery of time. It might also point the way to how we might all be able to participate in its creation. These three pillars – renewal, connection and creativity – provide support for the discussion and ideas contained here.

Arnold Schoenberg, who would not accept Cage as a student due to his lack of skill in harmony, is quoted as saying “one always goes back”, yet even he was unwilling to take this radical step into the obvious but culturally neutral zone of pure time. He was, in a sense, ensnared by his own genius, having a comprehensive grasp of the great European tradition in his extraordinary musical mind which would not let him go. A ‘reluctant revolutionary’ he was in this sense, like so many other musicians working within the confines of the European canon, imprisoned in the cage of tradition and it needed somebody who was, ironically, called ‘Cage’ to discover how to open the gates, and fly free.

So what of time?

Time is a prayer

And time is a spirit,

And time is a shadow

And time is the wind.

These words of writer and lyricist John Mash⁷ express poetically something of the mystery, meaning and magic of time. It seems to me that the essence of both life and music rests in the fluctuating quality of our relationship with time and the passing of time. We spend endless time talking and writing about the past, trying to make sense of history; we spend even more time perhaps planning and fretting about the future; we are in danger of losing contact with the present. *Lifemusic*, both as theory and as practice, aims to connect people to time past, time future but, most importantly, to time present and in the process to articulate and deepen our relationship with ourselves, with others and with this ultimately mysterious essence of life. Throughout the book I shall be exploring the notion that Music is the universal language which makes our connection to time real, audible, coherent, sensate and therefore meaningful.

It was a musician, a mathematician and a seer, Pythagoras, who first demonstrated the natural properties as well as the inherent rationality of musical sound and, following his lead, we can safely say that the laws of music are deeply embedded in the autonomous laws of nature. More recently, Joachim Berendt (1985) in his radio broadcasts and books based on the Hindu principle of *Nada Brahma – the World as Sound* attempted to demonstrate how these fundamental properties of music are relevant for the contemporary world. As musical consumers living in the developed world, with its emphasis on music as a commodity, such notions might appear a little far-fetched but that only serves to demonstrate how narrow our definition of music has become. After all, it was not so long ago that music was considered to be our principal point of access to the mysteries of the cosmos, the *harmony of the spheres*. I hope therefore that this book will demonstrate how much more broadly music can be defined and applied in our own time and how its inherent but often forgotten properties may be accessed at a level where it can enhance our lives in a surprising number of ways. This esoteric function of music is at the heart of Peter Michael Hamel's (1978) book "Through Music to the Self" where he writes of virtually ignored contemporary pioneers developing musical practices only now in their infancy. Following Hamel's lead I aim to explore not merely the many ways in which music develops and expands the sense of "Self" but also how it takes us beyond the Self. This connection between music and life is what gives the book its title.

7 Mash is a writer who lives in Salisbury. These words form the refrain of a song called 'Chichester's Children' from his 2008 play of the same title.

The transpersonal quality of music

Although music may be considered a language, (and it is certainly governed by many of the prerequisites by means of which we define language) it is in reality an entirely unique phenomenon through which our connection to time is equally uniquely articulated. Time may be encountered most immediately through music since, unlike other means we use to delineate temporal experience sound itself is abstract and immaterial: after all, as Frank Zappa (1989) expressed it, music is no more than ‘wiggling air molecules’. Human beings have generally used moving objects to represent, measure or regulate the passing of time, whether these be celestial, (such as the sun, the moon and the stars), or human inventions which reflect the celestial, such as clocks, calendars and time tables, all of which give us some sense of control over time’s passage. More recently, time has been explored through the modern physics which emanates from Einstein’s theories in forms of mathematics accessible only to relatively (sic) few people. Yet, the theory of relativity only serves to reinforce the notion of time as a mystery which cannot be understood or explained by simple observation. But we do not need to be mathematical geniuses to experience music and it is only through music perhaps that we can *all*, regardless of background or ability, experience time, not merely as an objective phenomenon but also as an affective encounter, *felt time*. Only, it seems to me, do dance, theatre and film come anywhere near this special condition of music, since they are also time dependent art forms. Yet even these media work with moving objects and images or else with the literal and logical properties of speech and thought. Somehow, music suspends thought, continues where speech ends, extends gesture, enables us to experience images with peculiar emotional force and, whilst it may move the body as well as the emotions, it is in no way dependent on either.

This seems to place music within the *transpersonal* domain: the autonomous laws which govern music may be ultimately beyond human intervention and however far musical theorists attempt to measure and quantify its laws, they inevitably fall short, often missing the most vital point which is that, when composers compose or improvisers improvise they are simply following a trail, or, as Stravinsky famously remarked after creating the Rite of Spring, “merely vessels” through which the music passes. Both creating music and listening to music puts us in touch therefore with a reality which is beyond the self and in the process this

enables us to encounter the self at a different, enhanced level of consciousness. We have all experienced this, for example, in films where an otherwise perfectly innocent image or action is totally transformed by the addition of as little as a single held tone or the beating of a drum.

The transpersonal quality of music is also demonstrated by the term we most commonly use to describe the function of music in the contemporary world, “entertainment”. That this term has come to mean something which is peripheral to the real business of living reveals much about the way in which a culture centred on, indeed obsessed with, material objects, orders its priorities. Yet, ‘entertainment’ in essence means something which, far from being at the margins of life, is at the heart of things, literally holding us together, integrating soul and body. In this sense, “entertainment” makes it possible to experience life with greater integrity, in greater depth and with enhanced awareness. By entertaining us, music shifts our consciousness of things into a deeper space, a domain which is, literally, integral to our being. Music turns life into soul.

Participating in music

But *Lifemusic* is not just a concept and this book therefore also has a practical application, presenting a model for musical participation through which people and communities may readily connect to time. So whilst the first part of the book explores the nature and functions of music itself – *Lifemusic* as a concept, the second part demonstrates some of the ways in which music might be readily integrated into everyday life, including a range of activities and projects primarily designed for group music making – *Lifemusic* as a method. The foundation for these projects is the practice of improvisation since, as I will argue, it is through improvised music that we can become instantly and intimately connected to music and thus to time, to each other and to life as a whole. We improvise constantly, whilst conversing or cooking, for example, but also from moment to moment as we plan our futures and create the narratives of our lives and we might also presume that natural life is also a form of improvisation in its creative unpredictability (think of the weather). From the arcane world of particle physics there is also some evidence to suggest that the basis of living matter provides an analogy for, if not replicates and depends upon improvisation, or working with probabilities. But improvised music, literally the *unforeseen* but felt immediacy of the next

moment in time, provides a means, the only means perhaps, through which we can readily, from instant to instant, encounter time and its felt properties: time as motion and emotion.

However, human life, at least in the developed (minority) world has generated a strong belief in the primacy of planning and control (think of weather forecasts) and our general attitude towards music reflects this need for *predictable outcomes*. Composed music, which, together with recorded music, has become a cultural norm in the west and increasingly globally, both perpetuates this myth⁸ and keeps us at a distance from time since, by definition, it removes us from the immediate moment in which the music came into being: in other words, it dislocates us from time. In the case of music of the classical tradition this often means that we are experiencing music which was originally improvised and composed in some cases many centuries ago and in the case of recorded music the living process which gave the music life has been re-routed through digital electronics and speaker cones so that it comes to us essentially via a sophisticated system of numbers. Very often this re-routing means that we often listen to it in the most unlikely or inappropriate contexts, a dislocation of both space and time⁹.

Furthermore, composed and recorded music leaves us dependent on the expertise of highly trained individuals with specialist skills – composers, musicians and recording engineers mainly, who create and mediate the music for us, reducing many people to the role of passive consumers as opposed to active creators. This is not to pour scorn on any of the great (art) music which exists within these embedded cultural frameworks but the notion of *Lifemusic* aims to bring musical activity, creativity and mediation back to people, regardless of background, age, ability or training so that the music becomes a direct representation not only of the time and the place to which it belongs but also of the people who are making it happen. This restores to music a quality of action and creates a verb, to musick, out of the noun, *music*¹⁰. And perhaps NOW is precisely the historical moment when this renewal of our relationship to music and to time is not merely desirable but, perhaps inevitable.

8 I use the word “myth” here to describe a collectively held set of beliefs which are accepted, though often unconsciously, as social and cultural norms.

9 My favourite example of this is of hearing Gregorian chant on the car radio whilst stuck in a traffic jam on the M25!

10 The re-introduction of this verb into the English language has been advocated by Christopher Small in various writings, most recently in *Musicking* (1998). Wesleyan University Press.

About this book

This book is intended to be of use and interest to a wide variety of people: academics, musical and cultural historians, musicologists, professional musicians, music teachers and music therapists. It is also aimed at the rapidly growing numbers of musicians from all types of background and training (or none) who are seeking alternative ways of sharing their musical skills precisely at a time when people from many walks of life are looking for ways in which they can participate creatively in music making themselves and use music directly to enhance and enrich their own lives. It aims to contribute and seeks to support a growing area of cultural activity, now generally termed *community music*, through which, in the words of Chris Small it will be possible to “give back to people the music that belongs to them.” Since the primary precept of *Lifemusic* is “everyone is musical” this book is offered to absolutely anybody who wishes to discover how to use music directly and creatively in their lives and in their work.

Part 1 of the book – *The Concept of Lifemusic* – deals with the philosophical, historical and cultural background whilst Part 2 – *The Practice of Lifemusic* – outlines the method, suggesting where, how and with whom it can be used. This part ends with a set of guidelines for participatory music making and a CD which demonstrates some of the work in action.

The first chapter takes its title, “The Kairos of Transition” from an essay by James Hillman (1967/1979) in which he outlines the unique characteristics of the current historical period, a time of transition, polarities and conflict, warning of the dangers of the failure to acknowledge and respond to the special challenges which our time presents. If music has the capacity to connect people to time, then it might also be expected to play a primary role in our response to the contemporary world though not perhaps, as I argue here, in its currently available forms. This chapter therefore provides a context for *Lifemusic*, outlining what purpose there might be in making music in a way which, in many respects runs counter to prevailing notions of mediation, conditions which have in many ways objectified music and turned it into an inflated currency. The chapter concludes therefore, with an attempt to relocate music in the mind, perceptions and imagination of the whole person, underlining the importance of music as experience as distinct from object: something we create rather than something we consume.

Chapter 2 titled *Orphic States* then examines musical experience from an archetypal perspective. The notion that music flows with the underlying rhythms and energy of life itself is central to the *Lifemusic* concept and thus, archetypal imagery can be revelatory and invaluable in re-imagining the art of music. The archetypes are employed to demonstrate what are regarded as the four primary properties or functions of music – form, ritual, narrative and affect. This entails exploring musical meaning through some of the images and myths which exist at the roots of European culture and at the heart of musical experience, inevitably focusing on the Orphic tragedy which underlines music’s narrative function but equally involving Apollo (representing the archetypes of structure, form and spirit), Dionysus, (the archetypes of transformation, feeling and ritual) and Psyche (the archetypes of affect and soul). It is argued that through relocating musical practice in its archetypal roots, musical renewal becomes more achievable.

The title of Chapter 3, *Unforeseen Magic*, reflects the nature of its subject – improvisation, which means, literally, “unforeseen”. The chapter defines improvisation, examining its cultural positioning and briefly charts its curious history in European culture, where, like magic, it came to be regarded with suspicion. From this standpoint, we can begin to understand some of the negativity which still surrounds what is in effect, the primary musical act and more generally, the art of living.

Chapter 4, *Pathways to Healing*, examines the therapeutic qualities of music and considers what the practice of improvisation offers to the soul. It looks more closely at the nature of improvisation itself, how its structures provide a bridge between conscious and unconscious worlds, how it dances in this transitional space – a dance which transforms the dancer. The chapter presents a theory of improvisation, based around the notion of the *Holding Form*, which is intended both to explain something about the structure of the musical imagination as well as providing the basis for a practical and creative tool, something which facilitators, music therapists, teachers and community musicians may well find useful and which therefore leads directly into the second part of the book.

Chapter 5, the first chapter dealing specifically with the practice of *Lifemusic*, outlines the method, introducing four precepts, four ingredients and four levels of musical perception defined as hearing, listening, sensing and feeling. Chapter 6 then directly addresses how *Lifemusic* might be used in the contemporary world beginning by

examining the ways in which we define musical culture and suggesting how the notion of *carnival* provides a model for imaginative renewal, both psychologically and socially. The chapter then focuses upon a variety of contexts in which participatory music might have a significant effect, some of which may seem surprising. For example, how might creative music making be of benefit to civil servants, politicians, corporate management or even to the police and the military? It is only our tendency to separate the creative imagination from rational decision making which makes this seem a strange idea. The chapter concludes by suggesting how one of the largely lost functions of music might be restored, its potential to measure peoples' progression of experience through the annual cycle; how it can articulate those rituals which connect us to time in a form which is both practical and natural, renewing the capacity of music to mark the seasons and express the underlying rhythms and meanings of life.

Chapter 7 provides a practical set of guidelines for improvisation. The holding form approach is now reintroduced as a facilitating tool, providing creative frameworks through which improvisations can emerge and around which musicking can build and grow. This chapter also includes the 'Lifemusician's Toolkit', an outline of the most useful instruments currently available and some ideas as to how they may be best employed.

The final chapter presents the method itself, through exercises, games, projects and themes, a practical and useable but hopefully never over-prescriptive raft of ideas for people to use as they will. Each exercise and game is an access point into the deeper and more maze-like *Holding Form* . Even ten minutes of improvising a day can make a world of difference to a person's mood, energy levels, sense of well-being, attitude to self and therefore relationship to others. If *Lifemusic* really is about connecting people to time then some kind of regular practice might be both revealing and life enhancing.

The book is accompanied by a CD – a demonstration of how some of these forms can result in flowing, surprising, even startling improvisations. All the tracks are based upon games and exercises included in the final chapter.

How to use this book

Although this book sets out the concept before the method it is not intended in any way to be read from cover to cover. So if your interest is mainly theoretical, read on. But if you want to get straight into the ‘musicking’ turn now to Part 2 to start using some of the forms immediately. You may then wish to dip in and out of the theoretical ideas contained in Part 1 according to what interests you. The core of the practice suggested here revolves around improvisation so, in using the book please, *improvise*.