

1 How Can Music Help?

The preface to Gary Ansdell's book *How Music Helps in Music Therapy and in Everyday Life* contains a series of salutary warnings against readerly disappointment in the implementation of the title's promise. Music, we discover, does not always help, nor should we consider it a mere instrument for personal or societal repair (Ansdell, 2014, xvi–xviii). It has the power to contribute to human flourishing that may be therapeutic in application, but is not a panacea. Though this Element examines music's potential to help in a rather different context, a similar 'dear reader' moment seems to be appropriate here. And so, I offer my own caveats.

First, in what follows I explore both the descriptive ('in what ways') and explanatory ('by what means') aspects implicit in the question of 'how' music may be transformative of conflict. This traverses several distinct areas of study, from peacebuilding and philosophy to the political and cognitive sciences to several distinct strands of music studies. These explorations are not exhaustive. This is partly due to the concise nature of this format and partly due to a desire to open up a broader field of enquiry for studying music and conflict.

Second, both 'music' and 'conflict' are terms that encompass a range of situations and practices. In the next section, 'Theorising Conflict Transformation', I offer a definition of conflict as centred around negative relations, but I have deliberately left music under-defined. While the case studies focus on specific pieces and performances from broadly Western traditions, I write of music in general as a set of sonic relations negotiated and enacted in real-time performance and configured according to local conventions. In some traditions, including Western art music, these relations are partially determined by music as an object (e.g. a score), while regulating factors in other musical forms might be recordings, performance styles, or oral traditions. Even though the connections between sound and body, or between score, recording, and performance vary according to cultural-historical context, they constitute music, nonetheless. Music is multiple: at once activities, objects, and ideas about what those activities and objects are, do, and mean for particular people at a particular time.

Third, music in its multiplicity has many uses and effects. To argue for 'music transforming conflict' is not to suggest a further instrumentalisation of an abstract entity but an effort to come to grips with another facet of how people (as individuals and as groups) experience music and music-making in the world. Like all such efforts, this entails simplification and generalisation.

Finally, conflict transformation in any form is itself radically dependent on the commitment of individuals and societies to its difficult work. There is no magic pill, musical or otherwise, and the sobering assessment by Charles

Villa-Vicencio, former Director of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, remains as relevant now as it was when it was penned twenty years ago: ‘To expect every South African to undergo a cathartic experience in dealing with the past is to expect everyone to be caught up in the enthusiasm of an evangelical preacher on a Sunday morning. In reality, most people do not even show up to hear the sermon’ (1999, 199).

Although this Element may contain elements of preaching to the converted, it is not an evangelical tract for music’s usefulness within conflict transformation; rather, it takes a close look at the reasons scholars give for believing music can be transformative in order to determine whether those assessments of its potential are accurate. Following this introduction, the remainder of the first section ‘How Can Music Help?’ falls into two subsections, first introducing theories of conflict and its transformation before examining prevalent roles for music in conflict transformation. The next section, ‘Constructing Transformation’ expands on several themes that run throughout the remainder of the argument, from the complementary roles of musically mediated empathy and guilt to the impact of participatory and presentational performance formats on musical conflict transformation. In the ensuing sections, ‘Singing Sorry’ and ‘Chanie’s Story’, I present two case studies in musical conflict transformation before offering, in conclusion, some comparative assessment (‘Reckoning with Sonic Histories’) and suggestions for future approaches to music, conflict, and guilt (‘How Music Can Help’).

In many respects, this Element is the product of what the political theorist Hannah Arendt (1958) and others call the *vita contemplativa*, an abstract sphere of life characterised by reason, knowledge, and thinking that complements the *vita activa* of labour, work, and action. In it, I bring together and build upon work in a number of fields that touch on questions of music and conflict, particularly that of applied ethnomusicology. This juxtapositional style of thinking allows me to map out unexpected relationships and to ask how musical practices speak to and alongside one another. In examining how thinking shapes actions (and conversely, how actions shape thought) I expose the vital tension between philosophical contemplation and the ways in which human relationships are manifested, negotiated, and transformed in and through music.

In short, I ask two questions: first, what is it possible to say about the relationship between music and conflict transformation? Second, how might we (as scholars, as musicians, as human beings in a conflict-ridden world) think about it more deeply? These questions stem from a conviction that understanding how music makes conflict transformation available in new ways opens up possibilities for a fuller understanding of human experience. The prevalence of open and barely concealed conflicts in contemporary society over racial

injustice, economic deprivation, religious identity, political disenfranchisement, ecological collapse – not to mention the number of musicians and organisations working to transform these and other conflicts – suggests that the answers to these questions are a matter of particular urgency in music since 1945.

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In 1972, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson posited that the arts are a special form of communication that has primarily to do with psychic integration and identity (Bateson, 1972, esp. 128–52). This integration might apply to the social bonding amongst members of the same group, but it might apply equally (and perhaps even more forcefully) to the integration of different parts of the individual self, and of individual and group selves with the world at large. In all of these contexts, the arts allow for individuals and groups to articulate and enact their various identities in the world. More recently, the ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino (2008, 18) paired this integrative function with an imaginative one when he suggested that ‘artistic processes crystallize the very essence of a good life by dramatically emphasizing the interplay of future possibilities with experiences and things we already know from the past – all within [. . .] a specially framed and engrossing present’. The capacity of art to model ways of being through promoting identity formation and expression lies at the heart of anthropological arguments for its centrality to human evolution and survival. Fittingly, this also underlies many of the arguments suggesting that the arts have the potential to effect positive social change, whether by increasing individual wellbeing and improving health outcomes or by repairing fractured community ties and facilitating mutual understanding between different groups. This is a common feature of arts-based research as a whole, but in spite of (or perhaps due to) its non-representational character, often music is accorded a privileged position among the arts when it comes to this integrative and imaginative function.

Outside the context of academic scholarship, belief in music’s particular power to unify disparate groups and heal interpersonal conflict is commonplace, assumed by everything from Hollywood movies (think of the boombox serenade in 1989’s *Say Anything . . .* or Heath Ledger’s rendition of ‘Can’t Take My Eyes Off of You’ in 1999’s *10 Things I Hate About You*) to advertisements (e.g. Vertigo Music’s ‘Share Music. Share Life.’ campaign), to arts initiative funding committees and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in societies riven by current or past conflict. In the context of romantic comedies or marketing campaigns, the assumption that the appropriate grand gesture accomplished through music offers a conduit to restoring positive relationships is perhaps naïve, but is otherwise relatively trivial. However, in the case of

interpersonal conflict on a larger scale, the role of music becomes more complicated and a failure to interrogate it more consequential. Within the broad disciplines of peace studies and conflict transformation, this has resulted in a raft of initiatives and academic studies that focus on the arts in general – and on music in particular – as a means of mitigating the damaging psychosocial aspects of violent conflict, or what Arild Bergh and John Sloboda (2010, 4) term the ‘traumas and other invisible effects of war’. This attentiveness to music as mitigation has found particular expression within music studies in the sub-discipline of applied ethnomusicology, which is ‘guided by principles of social responsibility’ and seeks to put ethnomusicological knowledge to use ‘toward solving concrete problems’ in society (ICTM, 2007; for more, see Harrison, Mackinlay, and Pettan, 2010; Pettan and Titon, 2015). Yet despite this surge of scrutiny, the foundations for this conflict-transforming capacity of the arts remain only partially understood.

Thinking more deeply about the roles musical activities play in long-term processes of conflict transformation has the potential to open up new perspectives on both music and conflict. In particular, this Element confronts the normative underpinnings of current approaches to music and conflict transformation by critiquing their often-implicit reliance on an ethically inflected discourse of empathy. While empathy may play a significant role, I position it alongside the acknowledgement of guilt and moral responsibility as a fundamental component of music’s potential to transform conflict: through interlinking processes of identification and symbolisation enacted in music-making, participants are confronted with narratives of guilt and encouraged to accept their implication in the experiences of others. After marking out the theoretical ground, I then present two short case studies in music and conflict transformation in order to demonstrate how composers, performers, and audiences are already producing musical narratives of conflict that include, at least implicitly, the acknowledgement of moral responsibility as part of the reconciliatory process. This Element is thus structured first as an argument for expanding the discussion around music and conflict transformation, and then an exemplification through music case studies of how including themes of guilt, implication, and moral responsibility can shift the interpretation and understanding of how and to what extent music can help.

1.1 Theorising Conflict Transformation

A basic problem in thinking about the relationship between the arts and conflict transformation stems from the need to differentiate types of conflict and transformative responses to them. Just as individual relationships differ from those

between societal groups or between nations, so too do the requirements for dealing with conflict in each. Even within a particular relationship ‘category’, what conflict and its transformation look (or sound) like will vary both geographically and culturally, and is likely to change over time. In order to make sense of the role of the arts – in this case, music – in transforming conflict, we need to begin with a clear understanding of both conflict itself and approaches to its transformation.

Our sketch of the contours of conflict begins by acknowledging that it is a manifold phenomenon that can occur on one or more personal, relational, structural, or cultural levels; conflict is a negative relation existing in different shades and intensities that characterises the continuum between ‘war’ and ‘peace’.¹ In this sense, conflict implies the possibility of its own dissolution in a state of idealised concord. Its frequently episodic character (whether the eruption of an interpersonal argument or the outbreak of war) encourages the perception of it as a discrete situation arising within a particular time frame; however, pioneering peace studies scholar John Paul Lederach argues that conflicts also possess an epicentre, or a ‘web of relational patterns, often providing a history of lived episodes, from which new episodes and issues emerge’ (2003, 31). The intersection of immediate causes and underlying patterns of relationship (many of which touch on questions of identity, individualism, and authority) make untangling the origins of specific conflicts especially challenging.

The complex structure of conflict is mirrored in the multivalence of conflict transformation, which is at once a way of comprehending the phenomenon of conflict and a collection of practices aimed at mitigating its effects. Understood as an analytical framework, conflict transformation ‘seeks to understand social conflict as it emerges from and produces change in [. . .] human experience’ (Lederach, 2003, 26), while as a strategy of intervention it applies this understanding to promote ‘constructive processes’ that effect change. As an intervention, transforming conflict requires addressing both the immediate content of a particular conflictual moment, and its wider context. In the short term, the specific forms of redress are often ephemeral and context-specific, designed to provide solutions to immediate problems; over time, however, they generate adaptive responses that can transform structural aspects of conflict through increasing justice, reducing violence, and restoring or reconfiguring personal relationships.

Thus far, I have referenced the use of the arts as a tool for *transforming* conflict, but within the broad area of peace and conflict studies, the rhetoric of

¹ Of course, neither war nor peace is a static state. All of these are dynamic and constantly evolving.

transformation is itself controversial. Other potential terms include conflict settlement, management, and resolution, each of which indicates competing orientations towards conflict. The phrase ‘conflict transformation’ dates from the 1980s and is associated with Lederach (2003, esp. 3–5). Lederach argues that focusing on the settlement or resolution of conflict tends to avoid addressing the fundamental relational issues that cause conflict in favour of prioritising premature agreement, conciliation, and outside arbitration. Transformation, on the other hand, pursues a dual-sided process: the cessation of an undesirable situation accompanied by the construction of a more desirable one. It is thus primarily concerned with the transitional stage between conflict and post-conflict known as peacebuilding (as opposed to peacekeeping or peacemaking).²

In rebuttal, proponents of ‘resolution’, including Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, and Hugh Miall, claim that transformation is what is going on at the deepest level of conflict resolution, and note that – despite its positive connotations – transformation is a fundamentally indeterminate term of change that doesn’t specify how, or in what direction, a conflict may be transformed (2011, 9–10). While the objections they raise are persuasive, it seems to me that conflict resolution nonetheless emphasises the ending of something undesirable – and therefore reveals an orientation towards definitive or final fixes. Speaking of conflict settlement takes this static future orientation a step further with its connotations of finality and stability, while conflict management suggests a distinctly top-down approach that sidelines social change in favour of social control. In contrast, transformation suggests a process of ongoing change in the causes of conflict with the ultimate goal of constructing new social relations. In the context of music and conflict, thinking about the potential for transformation focuses attention on the processual, temporal character of music; moreover, transformation’s heightened rhetoric is congruent with the discourse that accompanies many musical efforts at confronting the causes and contexts of conflict.

Closely related to this debate over transformation is the presumed aim of reconciliation at the close of conflict. Etymologically speaking, to reconcile derives from Anglo-Norman (*reconciler*) and Latin (*reconciliāre*) and means to re-establish, restore, or to win back, usually in the context of restoring friendly relations between people or between an individual and God/the Christian church.³ In modern-day peacebuilding practice, there are multiple explanations of what reconciliation might look like – alongside some disagreement over

² For more on this three-part model see Sandole (1998).

³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd ed. (2009), s.v. ‘reconcile, v.’.

whether it should be the end goal of conflict transformation at all.⁴ Opponents argue that reconciliation is too enmeshed in a vision of communitarian social philosophy (based on the work of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas) that may have limited meaning in situations where previous social relations between groups were violent or discriminatory. When social groups do not have a positive history of relationship, bringing them back together risks restoring the social patterns that contributed to the conflict in the first place: for groups with no history of conciliation, what is there to reconcile? Supporters of reconciliation, such as the sociologist Johan Galtung, insist that true reconciliation is not the turning back of the societal clock but a deeper work of restoration: ‘the process of healing the traumas of both victims and perpetrators after violence, providing a closure of the bad relation’ (Galtung, 2001, 3–4). While it is not my purpose here to evaluate the specific form reconciliation might take in a particular conflict, Galtung’s description of reconciliation as a newly negotiated relationship provides a welcome foundation for increasing attentiveness to the change and flux of reconciliatory processes.

The increasing interest in conflict transformation and reconciliation – especially on the level of the nation state – is itself evidence of a shift in the perception of accountability for conflict and the necessity of taking concrete action to mitigate its effects. Throughout history, governments have perpetuated horrific violence on the people and lands under their control, but the idea that they, or their successors, might be held to account by a court of law, officially apologise, or make restitution for their actions is a relatively new one.⁵ Accordingly, there are multiple models for how societies have pursued reconciliation in the wake of serious violent conflict. Often, this has involved criminal proceedings against perpetrators of violence, and with this development has come a raft of new terminology. For example, the first charge of committing ‘crimes [. . .] against humanity’ is the 1915 statement by the governments of Great Britain, France, and Russia declaring the Ottoman government responsible for the massacres of ethnic Armenian civilians taking place in what is now Turkey, and the first prosecutions to use this rubric occurred in 1945–6 at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg.⁶ Many organisations now describe

⁴ See, for example, essays by Sonali Chakravorty, Erix Duxtader, and Adrian Little in Hirsch (2012).

⁵ The mistreatment of people has a lengthy and ongoing use as a pretext for military conflict and current efforts at providing legal remedies often are imperfectly applied (witness the recent case brought in the International Court of Justice by The Gambia against Myanmar over its treatment of the Rohingya people).

⁶ The history of the phrase ‘crimes against humanity’ extends back well into the nineteenth century, where it was applied first to the slave trade, and later as a description of the Belgian government’s actions in the Congo. The phrase ‘laws of humanity’ also appears in the Martens clause of the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907, but the Hague Conventions specifically apply only to

the Ottoman Empire's extermination of ethnic Armenians as 'genocide', and this term, coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1943, has been applied retrospectively to a number of other events. Genocide was not prosecuted as a specific crime until 1993's International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Across the intervening years, the high-profile spectacle of political and military leaders being tried (or escaping trial) for various violent acts has focused attention on the legal processes of establishing criminal guilt and retributive justice.

Despite the prominence of legal remediation in the past century, not all societies that have suffered conflicts have chosen to address it through establishing and punishing guilty parties. Cultural theorist Paul Connerton (2012) notes that obligatory forgetting imposed by the state has a long history, beginning at least as early as 403 BC with an Athenian proclamation forbidding the remembrance of crimes committed during a period of civil strife. Another historical example of prescriptive forgetting as part of a peace process is the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), which enjoined all sides to forget the horrific violence of the Thirty Years' War, while more subtle forms occurred in post-World War II West Germany, Austria, and France, where retributive processes of de-Nazification were suppressed by the 1950s for the sake of establishing cohesion in civil society. These examples are joined by one of the best-known acts of state-imposed amnesia in the twentieth century, which occurred after the death of the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco in 1975. Spain's Pact of Forgetting and Amnesty Law helped solidify the transition to democratic rule, but at the (still-controversial) cost of neglecting opportunities to establish what happened both under the oppressions of Franco's rule, and in the Spanish Civil War that preceded it. These examples demonstrate the social desire for stability and a sense of moving forward that also underpins David Rieff's critique *In Praise of Forgetting* (2016), which argues that continuous remembering of past traumas damages both the public and the state by excoriating wounds that should be left alone to heal.

Yet perhaps neither meting out justice nor adopting a policy of forgetting holds the key to transforming conflict. One increasingly common model, and the most important one for my purposes, is that which goes under the name of transitional justice. This is a comparatively young field encompassing the 'full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society's attempt to come

conditions of war between states and therefore do not cover actions taken by a government against its own civilians. See Clark (2011). According to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, genocidal acts are those 'committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group', whilst crimes against humanity are acts 'committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population', <https://bit.ly/3hbaxol> (accessed 7 January 2020).

to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation' (United Nations, 2010, 2). As such, it is closely aligned with a therapeutic vision of reconciliation and with many tenets of conflict transformation. Transitional justice often emphasises the role of truth; some of the most visible mechanisms of transitional justice are truth-seeking initiatives such as the 'truth commission', an official, but non-judicial, inquiry that investigates patterns of past abuses. More than forty of these have been established around the world since the 1970s.⁷ The purpose of such non-judicial commissions varies by location, but a common model, exemplified by Peru's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2001–3) and Timor-Leste's Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation (2002–5), attempts to bring out the truth about human rights violations undertaken by repressive states or by non-state actors as a means of encouraging reconciliation between various ethnic, religious, or social groups. In such cases, truth encompasses both *knowledge*, configured here as the recovery of factual histories of the past, and *acknowledgement*, by which I mean the sanctioning of this knowledge, or the making it a 'part of the public cognitive scene' (Thomas Nagel, qtd. in Weschler 1989, 93).

In theory, these approaches to conflict transformation and reconciliation apply equally to minor interpersonal conflicts and to entrenched intergroup or systemic violence, but in practice there is relatively little crossover between those areas in either the broad fields of study that touch on conflict or in the subfield of music and conflict transformation. On a small scale, interpersonal conflict is more often the province of, on the one hand, psychology, and on the other, music therapy and community music studies (see Stige et al., 2010). Meanwhile, within peace/conflict studies, substantial amounts of scholarly work on large-scale conflict transformation has focused on 'headline' situations in places that have suffered recent or ongoing violent conflict such as Colombia, Guatemala, South Africa, Rwanda, the Balkans, and Israel/Palestine; the same geopolitical areas have featured prominently in examinations of the relationship between music and conflict transformation (from an extensive literature, see Gray, 2008; Pinto García, 2014; Pruitt, 2011; Sugarman, 2010; Zelizer, 2003).

Although the case studies that appear in 'Singing Sorry' and 'Chanie's Story' later in this Element exhibit similarities to other work done in studies of music and conflict, certain distinctions are evident. For example, they both focus on musical engagement with the histories of white settler colonialism and its integral violence against Indigenous populations, rather than on recent armed

⁷ See the reports provided by *Amnesty International*, www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/40000/pol300042010en.pdf and by the *United States Institute of Peace*, <https://bit.ly/2YebR2t> (accessed 7 January 2020).

conflicts. These are conflicts that have been characterised by one-sided violence couched in (and cloaked by) legal language and government policies which served to distance their impact from wider society, but they are also conflicts which have recently come to national attention in new ways after decades of activism. The musical examples I have chosen are presented in ‘local’ (here Western-influenced) musical styles and are anchored in specific communities and the stories of individuals in Australia and Canada, respectively, but they also envision societal transformation on a grand scale. Composers, performers, and other associated individuals and institutions have integrated them into transitional justice efforts (including within education) as catalysts for a wide-spread reckoning with the past. The configurations of musical conflict transformation they demonstrate exemplify the particular role played by music as a sounded-in-time relation in both the recovery and broadcasting of factual truth and the conversion of those facts into knowledge sanctioned by institutions and by society at large. In this sense, then, the case studies will show how music helps in establishing truth about conflicts and, thus, in promoting reconciliation as part of long-term change processes of conflict transformation.

1.2 Studying Music and Conflict

The belief that music-making and listening can influence social behaviour, often coupled with assertions about the differing effects of musical types, runs deep in a wide variety of philosophical traditions.⁸ From this, one might expect the types of music used in conflict transformation to follow a discernible pattern, but beyond a general eschewal of specific genres or pieces that might contribute to conflict through inflammatory elements, musical activities used in conflict transformation exhibit astounding variety. Given its high prestige, it is perhaps unsurprising that Western art music is a frequent option: classical music education programmes such as Venezuela’s *El Sistema* have been widely popular as models for conflict transformation. In neighbouring Colombia, the state-funded *Música para la reconciliación* uses choral and instrumental ensembles to develop what the organisation terms musical, civic, and cognitive competencies among populations impacted by the nearly forty-year-long armed conflict in the country. Their website highlights the story of a young man named Miguel Antonio who aspires to study double bass at university and leads music classes for children; yet, underneath tracking shots of him clutching his instrument on the back of a motorcycle is not a snippet of art music, but the driving rhythms of

⁸ Plato (*The Republic*) and Aristotle (*Politics*) are the best-known advocates in the Western philosophical tradition, but see also the writings of Confucius (*Yue Ji*). More recent thinkers who have taken up such a position include Roger Scruton (2014) and Peter Kivy (2009a, 2009b).