Article

Art, Heart, and Soul Music: Spiritual Values and Implications of Relational Composition within Community Music

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Abstract: This paper re-examines research on composers within community music who embody *relational composition* in which they reflect philosophical and values' shifts, resulting in composition purposes that balance or prioritize well-being with musical products. The spiritual values that undergird the practices of certain community composers are examined through the lens of Sheldrake's definition of spirituality as a vision for the full potential of the human spirit to live out deep and meaningful values. While not ruling out the potential for personal transcendental experience, the framework of engagement rather than escape centres a type of spirituality that is community-focused and reflects the ways in which relational composers use engagement for beneficial purposes as they seek to overcome music's disconnections from its social contexts and extra-musical functions. This approach to composition could be viewed as a rediscovery and return to lost roles of composers in society, and it suggests that community music leaders realize the spiritual aspects of their roles in order to address healing, reconciliation, and local or global concerns and to facilitate the development of related repertoire and music-making.

Keywords: community music; relational composition; spirituality; values; participatory music; composers

1. Introduction: A Journey towards Relational Composition and Spirituality

What does it mean to be a composer in the present world? In 2019, I began research centred on this very broad question—a question informed by my own practice as a community musician and a community composer. I did not emerge from tertiary music education as a Composer (intentional uppercase C), but as a pianist and choral conductor who had discovered a new affinity for song writing. I later came to more complex composition as an intuitive way to heal after a distressing period by further expressing my own musicality and exploring engagements with others in my community more deeply. When I began graduate studies in Community Music (CM), I hoped to gain more skill in community composition. Unbeknownst to me, the graduate program adhered to a specific CM definition arising from the UK's grassroots counterculture, which proposes participatory music as a cultural intervention in order to restore lost or compromised practices of music-making to communities (Higgins and Willingham 2017; Bartleet and Higgins 2018). Smith (2021, p. 57) identifies the narrow focus of this open approach in which participants are engaged in meaningful music-making even if they lack a skill base. This is vital work that I myself am involved in weekly, but, as Smith points out, it also has the potential to exclude participants with developed skills, which is one reason why some scholars advocate for a wider CM understanding and engagement of participants at all skill levels (e.g., the improvisation workshop philosophy of Stevens 2007 and inclusive musical structures in Smith 2013).

At that time, I was introduced to Small's (1998) *Musicking*, in which Small broadens the concept of music makers and portrays composers in the Western classical tradition as relationship breakers in a hierarchical role of power. Through the symbolic power of the score (Small 1998, p. 115), composers tell musicians what to play, separating musicians from their innate musicality and creativity. This disturbing depiction was certainly not how I thought about my compositional interactions, which welcomed feedback and collaboration.

Small's discussion of reverence to the score also did not resonate since my habitus (Bourdieu 1992) formed in youth—that is, dispositions and assumptions about what are normal practices—led me to regard musical scores as merely a suggestion. Under the encouraging guidance of a church pianist who was a skilled improviser, my piano lessons incorporated a wide variety of repertoire from multiple genres. I was encouraged to improvise on hymns, enabling me to contribute creatively in various ways as an amateur to congregational music-making. These lessons modelled the concept that scores were just musical materials for expanding upon, simplifying, or otherwise altering for various purposes. This early training also grounded me in a Christian theology and practice of serving others through music and enabling active participation: everyone in the faith community is expected to engage musically, and the role (and skill) of musicians is in their ability to find ways for this to happen.

2. Grounded Theory Research on Community Composition

As a CM graduate student, I searched the scholarly CM literature for depictions of alternate interactions by composers, and the scarcity of findings led me in 2019 to undertake eight months (April–October) of personally impactful qualitative inquiry. In the first stage, through snowball sampling, 33 participants (22 male and 11 female, ages 20s–70s) from 11 countries shared their experiences and perspectives on the research question about what roles composers could play in CM. These participants were composers (some freely adopted the label *composer*, but others used alternate terms such as *facilitator*), CM leaders, and well-known CM scholars. I used grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 2006; Creswell and Poth 2018), gathering data through semi-structured interviews and examining participants' musical materials and related writings. Data were analyzed into themes using recursive abstraction (Arnold and Polkinghorne 2014), then developed into a grounded theory about composers' CM composition practices that I label *relational composition* (Evison Forthcoming a, Forthcoming b). The following theory was triangulated through rich description, multiple data sources, and member checking:

> Relational composition encompasses the values and methods of composers in CM settings in which they write and facilitate music-making to the benefit of communities. The composers' views reflect a paradigm shift and different values than those commonly aligned with art music production. As a result, their goals are to balance, or even prioritize, the well-being of community members with the musical product. These composers undertake a continuum of compositional activities in which their creative input and control vary. Formal training can potentially strengthen the multi-skilled approaches and relationship-based compositional practices of such composers.   (Evison Forthcoming a)

The theory was "field tested" in a second and third research phase involving two relational composition projects, in which interviews with CM leaders and anonymous surveys with music makers of all ages and skills were used to gather data on the impact of relational composition from their perspectives.

A key aspect of this theory is that it is encompasses more than the group composing that is prevalent in interventionist CM. The spectrum of possible composing interactions depends on the needs and context of the community participants and project, allowing for instances when the composer has much input, as, for example, might occur in a community opera or choral project. At other times, participant input will be prominent. Aligning with general CM priorities, the overall intentions of the composer are relationship building, inclusion, participation (which might sometimes be in the music-making rather than the composing), diversity, benefit to the community, and enacting people-centred values. This aspect of having participants not always supply materials or do all the composing (whether through improvising, arranging, lyric writing, etc.) might be a "sticking spot" for some within CM circles, and yet interventionist composers felt that relational composition was an accurate description of their scope of work, and CM leaders acknowledged times when

precomposed music fits the needs of a community, which can still be approached in ways that privilege the music makers rather than the music.

Investigating music-making, values, well-being, creativity, and inclusivity can readily reveal notions of spirituality. Indeed, relationality can be seen as a spiritual concept, as it is within indigenous epistemologies in which the concept of relationality is an understanding of interdependencies from peoples' relatedness to one other, to the spiritual world, and the physical world or environment (Antoine et al. 2018). Research participants often spoke directly or indirectly about what could be seen as spiritual values; however, prior to this present writing, I had not substantially explored the theme of spirituality in composition or in my research. This delay is linked to the fact that the topic of spirituality can be viewed with suspicion within academic discourses outside of the humanities (Palmer 1995), leading to minimal discussion within scholarly communities due to tensions from clashing worldviews (Speck 2005). With a growing interest and realization of the importance of spirituality (Sheldrake 2007; Jastrzębski 2022; Boyce-Tillman 2016), however, new journals and academic communities have formed around spirituality within specific disciplines (such as the Spirituality and Music Education Special Interest Group n.d.) and from interdisciplinary perspectives (e.g., the International Network for Music Spirituality and Wellbeing n.d.). Over the past two years of extreme musical and emotional disruption from pandemic restrictions, I have realized more deeply the importance of openly discussing spirituality and the tools that help us to navigate times of danger, toil, and snares (Evison 2022). Consequently, in this *Religions* article, I reflect more deeply about the values that relational composers hold that connect to spirituality in a broad sense. This discussion relates to the first research phase and the data gathered from the composer participants, which I have re-examined in an exploration of an overlooked theme: spiritual values within relational composition.

My researcher positionality is informed by being an active Christian and a lifelong community music maker as a participant and a leader for 40 years with/of community members of all ages and abilities in both sacred and secular contexts. I have also had a non-traditional path into formal music education and consider myself to be partly community-educated when it comes to music. Thus, I openly acknowledge my commitments and biases towards spirituality, community practice, and spirituality within community practice, which are vital elements of my identity.

3. Defining Spirituality: Individual or Collective?

It is important to identify how spirituality is defined in this paper. Lack of clarity about what is meant by spirituality impedes discourse and can evoke questions about spirituality's relation to religion (DeRoo 2021). Multiple definitions of spirituality have developed in response to particular lenses and academic fields (Jastrzębski 2022; Speck 2005). Consequently, defining spirituality is "fraught with numerous pitfalls" (Palmer 1995, 91) due to connotations, variations, disagreements, confusions, and imprecisions around meaning (Jastrzębski 2022). Current common understandings and associations of the term relate to individual introspection and contemplation (2022). As a result, one of the puzzlements that I have faced is how personal transcendent experiences might align with group activities in CM practice and community composition.

I suggest that one possible way to examine this question is through reflecting on varying historical notions of spirituality within Christianity. It is a faith tradition with which I am very familiar, and it holds intriguing possibilities for informing a framework for CM work and research. Christian spirituality originally had a community focus (Sheldrake 2007), with the central place of community arising from the Judeo-Christian theological foundations of loving God and loving others (who are regarded as the special creations and image bearers of God). This view reflects dual vertical and horizontal aspects to spirituality—an inner relationship to the Divine that is lived out in relationship with others. McGuire (2010) outlines biblical teachings on social bonds, noting that early Christians expressed their bond of "one heart and soul" (2010, p. xxvii) through family imagery, calling

each other *brother* and *sister* (which is still practiced in some traditions). A community focus is also found in the New Testament text, the *Acts of the Apostles*, which describes the early Church's communal care for members. Moreover, the New Testament is full of teachings about loving relationships. Thus, spirituality was understood as a way of living in consideration of others rather than just a God-directed devotional act. Of interest to this paper's focus, biblical exhortations on community life extended to music-making that was to be both devotional and others-focused: "teaching and admonishing **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . . giving thanks **to God**" (Colossians 3: 16–17) and "speaking **to yourselves** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart **to the Lord**" (Ephesians 5: 18–19).

It would, therefore, be misleading to insist that personal devotion was not also present, and Peters (2018, p. 2) gives evidence of a monastic tradition focused on prayer and study existing in Alexandria since the first century. Notably, some Christians became committed to the idea that separation from society rather than deep engagement with others was necessary for spirituality, and this belief was reflected in embracing ascetic solitude. The most obvious example is the hermit/recluse/anchorite (Frank 2006), viewed by St. Benedict as reaching "the goal and highest state" (McGuire 2010, p. xi) of asceticism. The term *monk* is etymologically linked to solitude, arising from the first monasteries being centres for hermits living in their own cells but coming together once a week for liturgy (Peters 2018).

Some monastic orders did emphasize the community within and without their enclaves (Sheldrake 2007; McGuire 2010; Peters 2018). As a result, they practiced a mixed contemplative–socially active life that included spiritual and physical care for those outside the monastery. Interest in social reform as an outgrowth of theology continued through the Protestant Reformation and following centuries in historically significant ways (Stanciu 2020). Key 20th century religious figures, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, also emphasized spirituality's dual nature (Sheldrake 2007), which is featured in Bonhoeffer's book, *Life Together* (Bonhoeffer 1954). These aspects are also found outside of Christian contexts, such as Lapierre's (1994) therapeutic spirituality model that includes transcendence and community as a way to account for personal spiritual journeys and the importance of community support and Hay's (1989, p. 25) framing of spirituality as "a capacity for transcending one's working realities, (physical, sensory, rational and philosophical), in order to love and be loved within one's communities, to give meaning to existence and to cope with the exigencies of life".

Although Western countercultural explorations of Eastern mysticism in the late 1960s and 1970s renewed wider interest in inwardly focused spiritual practices, prioritizing spirituality's communal nature is still common within certain faith traditions. For example, community life has been a prominent Catholic emphasis since Vatican II (McPartlan 2015), and a diverse array of congregations highly value social bonding—for example, my former congregation invites attendees to join *life groups*, which meet regularly for study, prayer, meals, and sharing/supporting experiences.

Sheldrake (2007) posits that spirituality's community focus has been the aspect least considered in the literature but notes growing interest in the connections between mysticism and social transformation. This link is exemplified in the New Age movement, which emphasizes self-sanctification, realization of human potential, and personal transformation alongside healing, planetary transformation, and institutional opposition (Ruah-Midbar and Ruah-Midbar 2012).

4. A Definition and a Framework: Engagement, Not Escape

In order to reflect the possibilities for spirituality to incorporate personal and/or communal elements, for this paper, I adopt Sheldrake's (2007, pp. 1–2) broad definition that spirituality is "a vision for the full potential of the human spirit to live out deep and meaningful values". This panoptic definition is just one possible articulation of spirituality, but it encompasses non-religious contexts, making it useful for this discussion.

The history that I have summarized in Section 3 leads me to consider a framework of engagement, not escape (ENE, my term) as one way to discuss spirituality in the context of community music-making. Saliers (2007) has noted that music is often a vehicle for meaningfully engaging with spirituality, stating:

> It is no accident that when poets or theologians wish to speak of the deepest realities, they move toward poetry and music in an attempt to sound spiritual matters . . . What moves us the most deeply rather than merely entertains us has both contemplative and prophetic powers and is visionary, carrying with it a sense of life and world. (Saliers 2007, p. 72)

This points to spiritual communication and activation in and through the music itself, but I also suggest that rather than "escape" from the world to inwardly focus on transcendent experiences, caring musical engagements with others can be viewed as spiritual actions. My use of ENE does not preclude individual spiritual/transcendent ecstasy (Marsh and Roberts 2012) for audiences, music makers, or composers (who, within relational composition, might be involved in the music-making or who might comprise the entire group of music makers). Other researchers have considered the dual nature of spirituality and also centred engagement, such as in the context of social action (Stanczak 2006), which has been found to be rooted in involvement in a spiritual community (Wuthnow 2012; Boyce-Tillman 2016).

5. The Role of Composers in Enacting Participation

Before I expand on the usefulness of an ENE framework for considering composers' methods, output, and perception shifts about music's functions, I will first examine the link between spirituality and creativity related to composition, inspiration, and participation.

Across many cultures, creativity is linked to spirituality, especially through the notion of inspiration (Summers 2018). English etymological connections provide interesting cultural insights—*inspiration* is originally linked with creation via the Creator's act of breathing life into the first human (Harper n.d.a). By the 1300s, inspiration was seen as an action directly influenced, guided, roused, or controlled by divinity. *Spirit* and *spiritual* are linked etymologically to inspiration—with spirit being the breath of life or God (Harper n.d.b, n.d.c). Some non-Eurocentric cultures view compositions as being channeled from an external source, such as ancestors or angels, through dreams or visions (e.g., Joseph Shabalala's interview in Ballantine 1996). It would be considered blasphemous for such composers to name themselves the music's originators. As another example, Sufi mystic Inayat Khan (1996, p. 243) described his musical process as being played as an instrument by a divine musician, with compositional inspiration coming from the divine as "a sign of God".

Similarly, the mysterious phenomenon of creative ideas in Western culture has sometimes been attributed to external sources. Medieval mystic Hildegard of Bingen saw herself as a channel of music from God rather than its composer (Boyce-Tillman 2001). Many present day famous popular music songwriters feel that their songs come through them in a mysterious, magical way that, when successful, represent a spiritual victory (Zollo 1991, 2003). The attribution to an external source of creativity is not confined to music, either. For example, the commercially successful *The Artist's Way* (Cameron 1992) book series explores creativity and inspiration with an overt spiritual focus unconfined to specific religious tenets.

The concept of inspiration, however, raises important questions related to participation. From a democratic perspective, does spiritual channeling of creativity mean that only certain "chosen" people can be creative? Can creativity be taught? Where do human effort and craft come into play? My own answers to these queries reflect intersections of my commitments to community participation, music education, and Christian theology—as Creator image bearers, all people have innate creativity to be nurtured. The expressive nature of humanity is "essential to the very functioning of human living, perhaps even to life itself" (DeRoo Forthcoming, p. 21); therefore, I see participatory music-making as a

vital outlet for that expression and feel a responsibility and call as a community educator to facilitate that process.

Others have different reasons for their commitment to participatory musical practices, and I turn now to examine my research participants' ideas in light of the ENE framework and understanding spirituality to be envisioning the full potential to live out deep, meaningful values. The following examination will help to determine if relational composition can be interpreted as a spiritual practice. As a reminder, participants shared their perspectives in answer to contemplating the role of composers in CM, but their responses have taken on new meaning with further reflection on music's spiritual importance. New inductive themes from the data are: (1) Composers having a non-mystical shamanic role of holistic creative leadership as "prophetic" specialists and (2) Composers having a spiritual role involving values' enactment, mediation, and humanization.

5.1. Shamanic Role

The theme of a mystical source of creativity is not prominent in the data; however, two composers described composers as a type of shaman, with non-mystical implications. "David" intended to present composers as having special insight or vision to write music with human impact. He is an atheist but recognized the spiritual overtones to his assertion. On the relational spectrum of composition, David has more creative control—he writes music with a group's needs in mind but without their creative input. "Cameron" also mentioned a shamanic role for community composers as a portrayal of wholistic, integrated, and undifferentiated musical leadership and participation that includes facilitating community creativity. Several other participants also spoke of their wholistic musical roles: they might not call themselves composers (even purposefully avoiding so due to the term's cultural connotations), but composition—whether alone or with others—is included in their music-making.

Reflecting the research's community focus, participants also spoke of creativity being inspired by situations, events, and group members' ideas and experiences. For example, "Anderson" stated the following:

> Ideas that have come from a collective setting, or from a shared experience, often make me want to work on them. I feel that because they come from a communal or shared setting, then they are more likely to have a resonance than if they just come from me. I also know that this is not entirely true, but it is a feeling that I have. (Interview with author, 8 May 2019)

5.1.1. Prophets of the Musical Times

Heschel (1969) describes a conceptualization of prophet as someone who is in the community, not distanced, seeing the needs of people, naming conditions, identifying problems, feeling issues, and promoting change. Relational composers could be seen to fit this description by the way that they point out and respond to issues in music-making, composition, and society. For instance, many participants questioned the "ownership" of musical creativity by composers. Echoing Small's (1998) concerns about power dynamics and diminished personal creativity, they saw themselves as disrupting prevailing cultural conceptions that music should only be written by geniuses. A common form of disruption is through shared composition processes but also through types of interactions, attention to accessibility, and non-musical goals beyond the realization of musical ideas. Community composers spoke passionately about being committed to community members' creative process and described instances when facilitating others' composition helped people to feel empowered to make changes in their lives (and then did so). Composers also provided examples of being physically in communities with socio-economic problems and using composition projects to overcome these issues and draw attention to them from a wider audience. One example is "Michael's" various work around the issues of domestic violence, job insecurity, and depressed local economies.

5.1.2. Specialists

Some participants, though committed to democratic ideals and approaches, said that composers have a duty to bring their personal skills to projects for the greater good. This action acknowledges expertise that has been developed through study, experimentation, and experience that becomes part of a knowledge exchange that results in better project outcomes. They stated that group composition projects need successful results because this is what participants desire, and it brings them aesthetic satisfaction. Herein is the tension between process and product—a common discourse in the literature and also in my research, with some interviewees asserting that both are necessary for well-being, while others insisting passionately that the product is not important at all. Relationships and attitudes, though, are paramount even if the musical product is valued. Thus, many participants spoke of the ethical need for training in facilitating group work (Evison Forthcoming a, Forthcoming b), which is so important in specialized contexts, such as "Brittany's" work with traumatized women, but also in more general projects.

5.2. Spiritual Role

5.2.1. Enacting Values

Reflecting the broad definition of spirituality used in this paper and without necessarily using the term spiritual, participants often felt that they have a spiritual role of enacting deep and meaningful values. For relational composers, this is through enabling heart-and-soul music-making marked by alternative values to an aesthetic model in which beauty is the goal. Participants often spoke of paradigm shifts that led to approaches motivated by equality, accessibility, love, care, service, and humility. This differs from the notion of composers as aloof, highly respected experts who prioritize their musical vision above all other factors (Evison Forthcoming a, Forthcoming b). Many participants stated that there are serious issues with common assumptions about composing and composition. One composer related how this had led him to explore alternative models:

> The model of musicking that we have is that composition is separate from music, which is just weird when you think about it. Composition is something that happens away from music and then you bring it to music, which is bonkers in lots of ways. But also, this idea that the composer is this solitary genius who sits in his hut—it is always a *him*, of course, isn't it?—sits in his hut, staring out at the lake, planning his masterpiece, and then shouting at people until they get it right. ("Hamish", interview with author, 12 June 2019)

Such distanced authority and interaction by one person do not fit well with participatory arts; however, the importance of skilled facilitators is acknowledged in various CM models.

Several participants referred overtly to spiritual matters—from various lenses, including Christianity, Buddhism, and New Age eco-spirituality. These composers were consciously using composition and music-making in communities to overcome issues such as social division. For example, "Tammy" described her path towards community practice in the following way:

> If there was more listening in the world, and I mean really truly listening, like listening to ourselves, listening to the trees, listening to each other, there would absolutely be no problems in the world … I thought, "Well, this is what I should do. I should try to do this in any way I can". (Interview with author, 14 September 2019)

"Janet", who is a choral composer, does not write for performance but to give her community the gift of learning and singing music intended to heal and uplift their spirits. When that music is shared by the choir in performance, the impact widens to the audience (who are often included in the music-making by learning and singing certain pieces).

5.2.2. Mediation

Composers sometimes spoke about intentional efforts at interfaith dialogue through music. This could be seen as acting as a mediator between communities of faith. For example, "Palo" from Brazil is involved in a youth orchestral social program. While not a religious group, the orchestra had been intentionally involved in interfaith projects, such as a concert that presented Christian, Jewish, and Muslim works in a Jewish synagogue. Palo's statement, "We have a role to make music a bridge to peace and a breath to the soul" is not overly religious, but it does indicate an intention for his compositions to aid the youth to live out important values of peace and reconciliation through musicking. This same intention was echoed by another composer who also tried to build musical bridges between these three same religions. A third composer, "Donald", composes in a way to reflect his values, which results in what he calls *heart-centred* music for community choirs that is accessible and facilitates deep connections in order to overcome society's divisions—a purpose echoed by many participants.

5.2.3. Humanizing

Three composers, who identify as songwriters and facilitators, use their music as a humanizing force within the dehumanizing prison systems of the United States and United Kingdom. For instance, "Marian" writes meaningful songs for a combined prison-community choir and facilitates (as do the other two participants) song writing with individuals and groups of incarcerated music makers as a way to provide choice and control in an environment where this has been removed. In a different context, "Gerald", who has the special training that hospice work ethically demands, writes music with people at the end of life. He understands the spiritual ramifications of that work and enacts values of care in facilitating reconciliation and peace with the past, connecting "with the humanity of the situation" (interview with the author, 6 May 2019).

5.3. An Example: June Boyce-Tillman

A vivid exemplification of spirituality within relational composition comes from a research participant who agreed to be identified. Over her long career, June Boyce-Tillman has reflected in diverse ways her dedication to engaged music-making. She uses relational approaches that come alongside others, attempting to overcome oppression and injustice and to heal, unite, empower, and break problematic paradigms. In this way, she displays Heschel's (1969) attributes of a prophet. Overt spirituality can be seen in her exercises for readers of her work on Hildegard of Bingen (Boyce-Tillman 2001) and in hymn texts such as "We Shall Go Out in Hope of Resurrection" (Boyce-Tillman 1993). Her view of spirituality as process-oriented, rather than creedal and as relationship and "primarily encounter" (Boyce-Tillman 2016, p. 346) fits the engagement framework. These examples also contain the broader values-related spirituality of ENE, with Boyce-Tillman's call to holistic and collaborative creativity that is connected to the cosmos (Boyce-Tillman 2001, p. 19). Her detailed explorations of spirituality (Boyce-Tillman 2016) underscore multiple links between spirituality, creativity, and musical experiences. Her work as an editor in the *Music and Spirituality* series (Peter Lang n.d.) clearly shows her commitments to authentic connection as a spiritual experience, achieved through engaged community musicking. Composition is a tool that Boyce-Tillman uses to achieve inclusivity while—like so many other participants—eschewing the connotations of the term *composer*: "I am a frame builder where everyone can build and can find their place, and I prefer that to composer" (interview with author, 3 June 2019).

6. Discussion

If spirituality is "a vision for the full potential of the human spirit to live out deep and meaningful values"(Sheldrake 2007, pp. 1–2), then a connection between relational composition and spirituality can be made in light of alternative, participatory values. Based on convictions that creative exploration, expression, and participation are ways to achieve

benefits such as well-being, social connection, and empowerment (Evison Forthcoming a, Forthcoming b), relational composers have humane visions for trying to bring meaning to others' lives or to provide settings in which that process can occur.

My writing on relational composition has used the phrase, "from art music to heart music" in an effort to describe two things. First, it indicates the wide range of music in relational composition depending on the context, and second, it portrays the shift that participants often described from composition focused on aesthetics and personal vision to composition focused on people. In the context of this article, a further element can be added—soul. Relational composers use art, heart, and soul music to make sense of the "the hope and the fear, the terror and the beauty of life" (Saliers 2007, p. 68).

The art music field has historically had the tendency to view music as an object alienated from social context and extra-musical functions (Goehr 1989; Wolterstorff 2015), but relational composers avoid such disconnections. Their work is situated in specific communities and has many goals besides the music. This approach to composition could be viewed as part of a rediscovery and return to lost roles of the composer in society (Evison 2021), and I suggest that this recovery includes spirituality. In so doing, I align with Sheldrake's (2007, p. 208) prediction that more engagement between spirituality and creativity would take place in the arts as a result of the desire to explore spirituality and human meaning.

There are definite implications for CM leaders, who might not realize the spiritual aspect of their role. They might ask themselves if they feel a "call" drawing them to participatory work (Willingham and Carruthers 2018, p. 601) and from whence that urge comes. They might explore using music for healing of self and others and for reconciliation of broken relationships and broken societies. They could ponder what more could be accomplished through individual and collective power in music-making. Such considerations can be contemplated across broad religious and secular contexts. For example, non-religious rituals have been found to produce positive emotions that enhance social bonding and well-being (Charles et al. 2021). An example from a Christian context is participatory music-making that includes "raw stuff from the earth and from the heart of the people who yearn to be free . . . a cry that transforms yearning into action" (Saliers 2007, p. 51). This music can agitate, disturb, and move individuals and communities, resulting from repertoire that includes lamentation and righteous indignation. Relational composers and/as CM leaders within participatory musical contexts can address local or more global concerns, facilitating the development of related repertoire, music-making, and social action. Of course, this is not a novel idea, as music has been a vital component of many protest movements, and political action has been a historical CM focus (Turino 2008; Darden 2021; Wong 2018; Gorelik 2020; Higgins 2012).

I posit that the importance of composers' roles and the spiritual implications of their work add strength to arguments for broadening CM definitions and recognizing that composers have a valuable place in the field—regardless of the terms they use to identify themselves. Given continued cultural connotations, some composers will still hesitate to use that label; however, it is worth noting that the connotations will never change if those working in alternate, participatory ways refuse to call themselves composers and/or what they do as composition. It would also seem that CM neglect of composers does not take into account cultural changes towards distributed creativity, collaboration, and audience participation that have occurred in the past 50 years within and outside of art music contexts (Clarke and Doffman 2017; Toelle and Sloboda 2021). This is not to imply that the caricature of the heroic individual creator does not still dominate many musical discourses (Clarke and Doffman 2017) but to point out that relational composition may help to balance ideas and discourses about creativity.

Several areas for future research emerge from this re-examination of the data. One is to explore relational composition's connection to collective effervescence (Durkheim 1915) and transcendent ecstasy (Marsh and Roberts 2012). I did not explore composition's connection to inducing feelings of being transported into a different world through collective action

because it was not discussed in participant interviews. Further investigation, however, could examine if being caught up in relationally composed music can help us to understand more about ourselves, our world, and our connection to another realm as "an essential element in developing a full appreciation of what it means to be human"(Marsh and Roberts 2012, p. 86). This future investigation could answer Boyce-Tillman's (2001, p. 176) call to creativity characterized by "loss of self-awareness, absolute involvement in the present, a sense of transcendence and connection with everything". Another area of investigation is if CM participants find personal spiritual connection through listening to music or individual, rather than group composition, as happens with spiritually minded contemporary art music composers (Sholl and van Maas 2017). The role of aesthetics in creating transcendence could also be explored and include Camlin's work on tensions between music's aesthetic and participatory dimensions (Camlin et al. 2020; Camlin 2022).

The overt focus of my research participants on community well-being is also a place for further investigation. Well-being has multiple aspects, and one model (i.e., PERMA) suggests five areas for measurement, assessment, and intervention: positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman 2018). The role of relational composition in these specific areas could be examined, and it would be interesting to discover and compare how the spectrum of compositional activity affects the five areas. For example, is accomplishment felt at higher levels with more or less creative control? What impact might this have on tensions about product and process? Moreover, is there a place on the spectrum where all aspects of well-being are high? I am currently preparing to undertake such research.

7. Conclusions: Further Pondering

In this article, I described the context of my research and theorizing about relational composition and connected it to discussions of spirituality as "a vision for the full potential of the human spirit to live out deep and meaningful values" (Sheldrake 2007, pp. 1–2). While acknowledging the potential for personal transcendental experience, I used the framework of engagement rather than escape to frame a type of musical spirituality that is community-focused. I linked this concept of spirituality to the ways in which composers in my research often used engagement for beneficial purposes related to humane values, and I provided examples from their vast range of compositional activities. To various extents, composers in this study had non-mystical shamanic roles of specialized, holistic, creative, and prophetic leadership related to being present in communities, seeing issues, and promoting change through music. They also had spiritual roles related to enacting values, mediating complex issues, and humanizing dehumanized contexts through music.

It could be said that the spiritual values of relational composition are tangential to my original study because spirituality was not an overt focus of the research questions. However, Hay's (1989, p. 25) framing of spirituality as "a capacity for transcending one's working realities, (physical, sensory, rational, and philosophical), in order to love and be loved within one's communities, to give meaning to existence and to cope with the exigencies of life" resonates strongly with the work that composers described to me. Furthermore, Swinton's (2020, p. 12) argument that spirituality's meaning comes from its humanizing impact on practice provides additional support for relational composition being a spiritual practice in light of CM composers' people-focused work.

Alongside the presence of spiritual values, the findings also highlight the spiritual power of music in general and in participatory music-making specifically. Although there will likely be doubters, I am not in that category. Instead, I see participatory music as having potential to change us personally and profoundly, and I believe that composers can have a role in this change across a wide spectrum of art, heart, and soul music.

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