

Author/Title:

Evert Bisschop Boele. Musicking in Groningen. Towards a Grounded Theory of the Uses and Functions of Music in a Modern Western Society.

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Abstract:

This study focuses on the uses and functions of music in the life of individuals in the province of Groningen at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The study is an ethnomusicological study representing the sub-discipline of ethnomusicology-at-home. It uses Andreas Reckwitz’ formulation of practice theory as a theoretical starting point and introduces methodological principles from the field of qualitative sociology. Central in the study is the individual. 30

theoretically sampled individuals recounted their musical biographies in narrative-biographical interviews, which were analyzed in detail and eventually led to a sufficiently suggested grounded theory of the uses and functions of music in Groningen AD 2010.

The theory consists of three interrelated compartments. The first compartment contains a description of the uses of music as expressed by the interviewees. 'Use' refers to the 'customary exercise of music' in concrete musical social situations. The result of this study is a detailed description of the six elements of musical social situations. Those six elements are: *persons performing behavior* ('musicking'), handling *things* and using *immaterial resources* at a specific *place* and in a specific *period*. The study shows that these six elements together describe, in the stories of the interviewees, an endlessly varied landscape of idiosyncratic musical social situations, where individuals use music in a multitude of ways.

The second compartment of the theory contains a model showing the functions of the uses of music from the standpoint of the (by definition social) individual. The model describes three overarching functions of music: the affirmation of the self, the connection of the self to the not-self, and the regulation of the self. *Affirmation* of the self takes place because music touches the self by way of a 'affirmative circle', and the self in turn likes the music that touches it – an incomprehensible and rather unpredictable process for the interviewees on which basis the self chooses music, a process often accompanied by talk about liking and about judging music. In this process a musical self is affirmed and re-affirmed. The affirmative circle enables individuals to make *connections* to the not-self: apart from connecting to music they also connect to the 'me', to others, to the supernatural, to the material, to time and to place. The affirmative and connective functions of music lead to effects which may be used in a feed-back loop in which *regulation* of the self takes place.

The uses and functions of music are to be considered as 'shared and disputed ways of doing and talking', as expressing shared and disputed cultural codes which form the socially standardized *and* socially standardizing cultural contexts in which individuals function. This cultural context of the uses and functions of music is described in a third compartment of this study. The study describes how three cultural codes seem to be shared amongst many (though not all) of the interviewees: the codes of playing an instrument, craftsmanship, and musicality, together forming the supercode of the music specialist. These three more general codes are combined with two further codes to form the highly specific and culturally hegemonic musical subject culture of art music, expressing that music is a specialism; it is the craft of playing an instrument by talented individuals; that this craftsmanship must be combined with expressivity; and that through this form of specialized expression musical objects come into being which represent the ideal realm of the artistic.

By discussing this attempt at a grounded theory of the uses and functions of music in Groningen AD 2010, a picture is delivered of how individuals become musical individuals. Through their musicking in the context of concrete musical social situations they use music for the functions of affirmation, connection and regulation of the self; and they do this in the context of a web of cultural codes labeling shared and disputed – and sometimes hegemonic –

ways of doing and talking. An evaluation of the theory and methodology used in this study shows that both assist in further developing the field of ethnomusicology(-at-home); an evaluation of the results in the light of existing research shows that they contribute to further insights into the uses and functions of music. Four areas for further research are mentioned: typologizing the uses and functions of music, musical discourses, musical subject cultures, and the place of the musical subject order of art music in contemporary society.

The study ends with a description of the possible implications for conservatoires. Conservatoires are recommended to encourage students to think of their future audiences in the broadest possible terms, taking into account the wide variety of uses and functions of music figuring in the daily lives of musicking individuals. They are encouraged to make students look upon themselves (also) as service providers, and as such to be open and non-judgmental in their relationships towards the musical other. Conservatoires are recommended to translate this into their curricula by devising transformative projects in which students meet 'musical others', and by encouraging their students to take their possible audiences into account consciously in any musical social situation they devise or find themselves in.