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## **PROPOSAL FOR A SYMPOSIUM: Children as playful changemakers**

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### **Introduction and background**

Recent research efforts across the field of music education underline questions of politics, and needs for change. Moreover, questions of children's agency and musical upbringing are addressed, and along with this, children's culture and children's music are explored. A hallmark of children's culture – besides children's musical engagement – is *play*. A recent report underscores *the power of play* in the sense that it helps optimizing children's development and management of toxic stress. Another line of argumentation addresses the phantasy and creativity inherent in play – "attitudes" that are of crucial importance to solve the challenges the world is faced with. Finally, an instrumental approach to play is criticized, the argumentation being that forcing people to play conflates the "headspace" that play offers. Linking with such a nexus of ethical considerations of the purpose and means of music education, this proposed symposium will explore and discuss the power of play and children's potential roles as change makers, with childhood, children's culture and children's music as pivotal points.

### **Paper I: The play, the player and the playful**

Ingeborg Lunde & Alexandra Kertz-Welzel

Music education seems to challenge the usual dichotomy of learning versus play because there is a deep connection between music, play and learning. Learning through playing or playing to learn seems to be a most natural part of what music education is. Music education understood as play can offer a free space and a realm of purposelessness. A Nordic take on "play" is indeed that it is an activity without any immediate purpose beyond the play/playing itself. Further, play has structure without being forced, is its own reward

and usually demands something from the players. Some theorists argue that “flow” is involved in play – a psychological condition that occurs when a task is adequately difficult as well as pleasurable and interesting, and also involves a loss of sense of time and place, so that one is captured and immersed in the activity at hand (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It may even be described as though the play takes over and plays the player (Gadamer, 1989; Øksnes, 2019). Play then, may be considered a free space of the utmost serious endeavors - a space where children are at once immersed in the imaginative and simultaneously utterly connected to the real (Winnicott, 2005). This provides opportunities for experimentation and trying out, for exploration and finding new ways of living and being, also for putting into practice ideas which one would not dare to implement in the real world.

Children and young people are often interested in political change, for instance in climate activism, and generally in working on a better world as many child activists show. The notion of children as changemakers has been of growing interest in recent years (Price-Mitchell, 2015). It underlines the transformative potential of a new generation, but one which cannot be left alone, but rather needs a certain amount of guidance or support as well as spaces for exploration and experimentation. Music education understood as play, we argue, can offer a space for artistic and aesthetic experimentation, thus significantly supporting the development of children as changemakers. Moreover, this presentation explores how musical play and playful uses of music create community, friendship, and family ties, and thus how children contribute to change the world they live in.

## **Paper II: Child vocality in recorded popular music**

Eirik Askerøi

In her book *Masculinity, Class and Music Education*, Clare Hall suggests that vocality can be used to describe ‘... not merely the spoken word, but the singing voice as a discursive ‘instrument’ (Hall, 2018 , p. 11). Understood in this way, vocality concerns the voice in relation to not only what is being said, but also how and by whom. As Stan Hawkins reminds us, in recorded popular music, vocality represents the singing subject, the protagonist, through a range of sonically identifiable details: ‘The microgestures of an individual’s musical makeup in a pop recording convey the vicissitudes of vocality, inherent in inflections, tones and nuances, all of which establish a sonic image; it is this that actually individualizes the body’ (Hawkins, 2016, p. 171). Rather than representing a specific protagonist, I argue that child vocality represents the child as a cultural demography, connoting playfulness and exploration by virtue of sounding like a child.

This paper explores child vocality as it appears in different forms in recorded popular music and addresses the potential effects of using children’s voices as expressive parameters in recorded music that is not specifically intended for a child audience. Based around a range

of musical examples, two categories of child vocality are discussed in this paper. The first is the solo voice of the child. What is the potential effect of a sole child singing about serious matters within the sonic framework of a commercial pop track? XTC's 'Dear God', featuring 8-year-old Jasmine Veillette (1986), and Pink's 'Cover Me In Sunshine', featuring 9-year-old Willow Sage Heart, are examples that will be discussed in this category. The second is the children's choir. This category will be discussed against Jay-Z's 'Hard Knock Life' (1998), Trick Daddy's 'I'm a Thug' (2001), P.O.D's 'The Youth of the Nation', Nas' 'I Can' (2002), Kanye West's 'We Don't Care' (2004), M.I.A's 'Paper Planes' (2007), Story of the Year's 'The Children's Song' (2010) and Clipping's 'Dominoes' (2014). The overall aim of this paper, then, is to discuss how child vocality, by connoting play and exploration, in turn contributes to enhancing the emotional potential of the songs in question.

### **Paper III: Boots, Banjos and Better Values: Children and Country Music in Festival Settings**

Stian Vestby

This study investigates how children appropriate music of the country genre in festival settings. Based on ethnographic and netnographic approaches, children's playful engagement with genre specific cultural markers will be discussed in relation to children's roles in changing cultures. Contemporary country music is in various ways dealing with its problematic past and stereotypical image as white, conservative, racist and male chauvinistic. By asking what is unique in selected country music performances for children and by highlighting children's playful engagement with the music and its surrounding aesthetics, the study aims to contribute new knowledge on how country music maintains and challenges cultural stereotypes. The study addresses how country music can and perhaps should be staged for and with children in today's cultural climate.

Data was generated through observations of physical and virtual live music performances at festivals and through the collection of media texts and documents. The results will be discussed against a multidisciplinary theoretical framework which includes contributions on children's play (Sutton-Smith, 2001), childhood cultures (Maloy, 2021), taste and distinction (Bourdieu, 1979/2010) and musical gentrification (Dyndahl et al., 2014, 2021). The study is part of a larger research project that investigates feminine identities and creative signification among artists on the Nordicana music scene, some of which perform country and Americana music for child audiences.

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