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## Abstract

This article describes a research project developed during the Practicum year of Minho University's Master Degree in Music Education. The project took place at Conservatório Bomfim\* (a specialized music school in Braga's city center) and involved Saxophone and Orchestra students from elementary to high school levels. The main goal was to understand if the exploration of the social functions of music during students learning process would promote a more complete music education and a better understanding of music. The project also aimed at bringing music lessons and classes closer to the different student profiles and at developing their motivation. After a thorough theoretical framework study, and with the help of data collection tools such as participant observation and surveys (to participant students and school community) it was possible to identify similarities between the students' perspectives about the social functions of music and the opinions of specialized researchers in music sociology. However, these perspectives are not to be found in the specialized music schools' status quo, which raises questions about the different meanings of music for students and teachers, and about present music programs, pedagogical strategies and social perspectives on the goals of music education.

**Keywords:** Specialized Music Education, Instruments, School Orchestra, Social Functions of Music

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\*Conservatório Bomfim established a Practicum Protocol with the University of Minho allowing for the identification of the school for research and research communication purposes.

## Music and the influence of social context

Since music, as Blacking underlined, is "sound organized by humans" (Blacking, 1973, p. 32), it usually assumes different roles and different purposes, depending on the individuals who make it or consume it, and depending also on the different societies who produce it and their cultural characteristics. Blacking's assertion is supported by pedagogues, sociologists, and other ethnomusicologists, such as Christopher Small (1998) who considers that music is generated as a contextualized activity, with a specific meaning and impact, with specific social goals, and in answer to objective cultural needs.

An educator must have knowledge of the music phenomenon, as a total social fact (Mauss, 2017) in order to be able to work with music in a complete way. Furthermore, the paradigm

goals of specialized music education are changing and there is a growing desire among educators to understand how to enrich the teaching process in meaningful ways for the students. Teachers look for answers to curricular requirements of school programs, and also to the students' musical interests and to the evolution of their learning process, particularly in terms of motivation. These facts are the basis for this research project, and for the focus on the social functions of music during a Practicum year with Saxophone and School Orchestra students.

## **Social Functions of Music**

Almost everything a human being knows and does is apprehended after birth. The way you react, think, speak and even how you feel is mostly the result of contacts with other human beings. Mário Vieira Carvalho, in his article "Sociologia da Música – Elementos para uma retrospectiva e para uma definição das suas tarefas actuais" (1991, pp. 38-42) quotes many authors who recall that music is not only sound, but it is "a moment of a social process or of a social structure" (p. 38) and it must be understood and studied as such. According to Abeles, Hoffman and Klotman music is, in fact, a type of "human behavior created by human beings for human beings, as well as speaking a language other than their mother tongue, showing affection, cooking, carrying out experiments in a laboratory and countless other actions" (Abeles, Hoffman and Klotman, 1994, p. 121). Considering that music is a human activity (and although it might often be seen as an appreciated and valued "product") it is necessary to consider an infinite number of aspects that influence it as a "process", such as biological, cultural, technological, and social factors (p. 123).

The social functions of music are part of a group of social factors that influence the music production of each community. Over time, they have been the target of studies and research projects, and even indicators that highlight the "social health" of communities (Vieira, 2012, p. 86). Jorgensen claims that philosophers of music conclude that "making music" is fundamentally a matter of motivated practices, constrained by (and understood within) their social and cultural contexts (1997, p. 35).

One of the pioneers in the study of the social functions of music was Alan Merriam, ethnomusicologist. In his book *Anthropology of Music* (1964), he underlines the difference between "uses" and "functions" of music: a song may be used in a certain way (to court a woman, for instance) but it may have a broader function in society (to preserve love rituals). So, the use of a work may determine a function that is different from the original and more immediate intention. Merriam organized the social functions of music into ten categories. The first, the **function of emotional expression**, confirms the capacity of music to express freedom

of feelings; ideas revealed (or not) in people's speech (p. 219). The second function mentioned is a **function of aesthetic pleasure**, and it includes aesthetics both from the point of view of the one who creates and of the one who contemplates (p. 223), and this should be clear to cultures other than our own. Since it is common sense that music has an entertainment function in all societies, the **entertainment function** comes in third place (p. 223). Presented by Merriam in fourth place is the **function of communication** (p. 223). Merriam does not consider music to be a universal language, but rather a language that is shaped by the culture to which it belongs. This function of communication is therefore the least known and least understood. Music always communicates something: what is not clear is what that communication consists of, to whom it is transmitted and why. In fifth place the author presents the **function of symbolic representation** (p. 223): there is little doubt that music has a representative function in all societies, making references to behaviors, ideas, or things – through the lyrics or by merging other elements. The **physical response function** follows in the list, presented with some hesitation since, for Merriam it seems questionable to insert a function about physical response (initiated by the individual body) in a list of functions with a social character (p. 224). However, it is known that music provokes a physical reaction, and this is true in most societies, even if the responses are modeled according to cultural conventions. The seventh function presented by Merriam (p. 224) is considered by him as one of the greatest social functions of music and it is called the **function of enforcing conformity to social norms**. Examples such as “social control” songs play an important role in many cultures, whether to directly warn errant members of society or to indirectly establish what is considered inappropriate behavior. The **validation function of social institutions and religious rituals** is considered quite like the previous function, and it is notorious when religious systems (as well as folklore) are validated by myths and legends cited in songs, and when social institutions are validated by music that enhances the adequate or inappropriate behavior in society (p. 224). The following function, a **function of the continuity and stability of culture**, appears as consequence of all the above. By allowing emotional expression, fun, communication, aesthetic pleasure, physical response, compliance with social norms, and institutional validity of social and religious rituals, music ends up allowing for the continuity of culture as well. Finally, the tenth function presented is the **function of contributing to integration in society**. Music provides a rallying point at which members of society come together to participate in activities for which the group's coordination and cooperation is needed. It is not a rule, but in all societies, there are moments marked by music, attracting members, and reminding them of their unity (p. 226).

This list was the starting point for many authors who were interested in this theme, such as Max Kaplan, Honigsheim or Gaston. In his book *Foundations and Frontiers of Music Education* (1966)

Kaplan wrote that the functions of music can be fundamentally grouped into two groups: **aesthetic** (free, independent, or internal) and **social** (dependent, external, or related). The author argues that these groups can be subdivided into four groups of social functions: **collective, personal, symbolic, and incidental** (p. 46). The **collective social functions** connect a person to other persons in a group, such as in a national or tribal song corner. The **personal social functions** bring a person out of his/her group, although briefly. The **symbolic social functions** represent the capacity to articulate complex concepts in music, such as God, love, joy, sadness, or a social ideology. Finally, music serves occasional purposes, such as non-aesthetic values, motives or interests (**incidental social functions**).

Honigsheim (1989, pp. 60-65) emphasizes that music is present in society, fulfilling six functions (**ceremonial, entertainment, accompaniment to work, use at home, concerts, and oratory**). The same author analyzed the structure and function present in each social process he identified. In his study of "Musical Sponsorship", for example, he described several structured and role-based categories, such as the influence of religious leaders, royalty, nobility, private individuals, entrepreneurs, agents, and schools (Jorgensen, 1997, p. 34). Gaston (1968) enunciates seven functions (**need for aesthetic expression, exaltation of religion, communication, emotional expression, rhythmic response, gratification and power of music in group situations**).

In a first analysis, looking at these three lists, one sees a clear overlapping of concepts, which would be expected. Abeles, Hoffman and Klotman (in the 1995 book *Foundations of Music Education*, pp. 123 - 127) point out that, in addition to these functions, there are others that are not highlighted and should be taken into consideration. In addition to listening or participating in a musical process for aesthetic reasons, music can also allow human beings to express certain ideas, moods or even to transcend normal life.

#### **Research results of a survey during a Practicum year: children's opinion on the social functions of music.**

To find out the student's opinion about the presence of the various social functions of music in their daily lives and in society, a survey was carried out. The students' school life was also object of analysis, regarding activities carried out in the educational establishment. Filters such as the genre, years of music study or the family of the instrument they play were used to see if the result of the questions was in any way influenced by these factors.

In a sample of 144 student respondents in this Braga specialized music school, a total of **144 responses were obtained**, with a response rate of 100%. Of these 144 students, **57.64% were**

**female** (83 students) and **42.36% were male** (61 students), aged between 8 and 17 years, thus covering students ranging from beginners to the last year in high school. The 7th grade of specialized music education was represented by the biggest number of students (note that students between 11 and 15 years old corresponded to 91.3% of the answers). 38.89% of the students who answered the survey played wind instruments, 34.03% played string instruments, 25% were keyboard players, 0.69% were percussion players and 1.39% were vocal singers (the latter are shown in the following graphs as students who do not have an instrument). Of all these students, 36.11% attended Choir as an Ensemble Class, 31.94% attended Wind Ensemble, 29.86% attended String Orchestra and 2.08% attended Symphonic Orchestra. This survey was divided into three parts, and the focus of the second part was **“What is Music for?”**. The data obtained from the answers to this second part allowed for the assessment of the students' opinion about the social functions of music in their lives and in society, and this article presents those results.

### **What is music for? The students' point of view**

In the first question of the second section of the survey (closed response) students were asked to rank the eleven social functions of music in decreasing order of importance in their lives. The functions were presented as follows:

Music is for:

1. expressing feelings
2. communicating
3. dancing
4. entertaining
5. describing behaviors, ideas, or things external to music
6. being taught and learned
7. influencing people and making them think according to accepted norms
8. enjoyment and entertainment
9. accompanying religious or institutional celebrations
10. integration in a community
11. preserving and promoting culture and tradition

According to the previously reviewed literature: Option 1 corresponds to the function of emotional expression; Option 2 corresponds to the communication function; Option 3 corresponds to the physical response function; Option 4 corresponds to the entertainment

function; Option 5 corresponds to the function of symbolic representation; Option 6 corresponds to the role of education (it is important to note that this function was not considered by the relevant authors previously mentioned); Option 7 corresponds to the function of enforcing compliance with social norms; Option 8 corresponds to the function of aesthetic pleasure; Option 9 corresponds to the function of validation of social institutions and religious rituals; Option 10 corresponds to the role of contribution to integration in society; and Option 11 corresponds to the function of continuity and stability of culture. The wording was adjusted for students' understanding to avoid the possibility of respondents facing concepts that they do not know (since social functions of music are not current terms for many school students). The options were also explained orally to younger children or any other children who had doubts.

The data resulting from the answers to this question is quite dispersed, because of the high number of functions to be sorted. The function that generated the highest agreement rate as the most important function of music was the **function of emotional expression**, selected as the most important function by 43,53% of the students. This means that, on average, almost half of the students inquired see emotional expression as the most important function of music in society. When selecting filters for 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders this function was selected as the most important by more than 50% of the students. And when selecting music instrument filters this social function was chosen as the most important by 33,93% of the wind instrument students, 63,89% of the keyboard students, 46,94% of the string students, 50% of the voice students and 100% of the percussion students.

The second most important social function chosen by the students was the **function of communication**, chosen by 27,08% of the students as the most important. Filters show slight differences between answering groups, but the most relevant information is that 27,08% of the students see communication as the most important social function of music in society. However, it is important to note that beginning students chose the function of communication as the most important more often than older students.

None of the other functions was selected as the most important by more than 30% of the students surveyed. However, in nine of the eleven functions presented, the two other functions selected by the students as most important are extremely close in number of answers: except for the symbolic representation function, the first of the other most selected functions was the tenth function ("**contribution to integration in a community**") with 17.36% of the responses and the second of the other most selected functions was the third function ("**dancing**"), with 13.89%). There was some difficulty on the part of the students in ordering the functions due to

their lack of knowledge in relation to this theme. These doubts were expressed during the survey, and the meaning of the sentences presented was often clarified when students asked.

**Tabela 4: Dados da função da expressão emocional**

Dados Gerais	
Importância	%
1	46,53%
2	16,67%
3	11,11%
5	6,25%
4	6,25%
8	4,17%
6	3,47%
11	2,08%
10	1,39%
7	1,39%
9	0,69%
Total Geral	100,00%

Início C. Básico / Importância	%
1º Grau	100,00%
1	59,09%
8	18,18%
11	9,09%
2	4,55%
6	4,55%
5	4,55%
Total Geral	100,00%

Fim C. Básico / Importância	%
5º Grau	100,00%
1	53,57%
2	21,43%
4	14,29%
5	7,14%
9	3,57%
Total Geral	100,00%

Instrumento / Importância	%
Sopro.	100,00%
1	33,93%
2	17,86%
4	10,71%
5	10,71%
8	8,93%
3	7,14%
6	3,57%
7	3,57%
11	1,79%
9	1,79%
Total Geral	100,00%

Instrumento / Importância	%
Cordas.	100,00%
1	46,94%
2	20,41%
3	16,33%
4	6,12%
6	4,08%
5	2,04%
11	2,04%
10	2,04%
Total Geral	100,00%

Instrumento / Importância	%
Percussão.	100,00%
1	100,00%
Total Geral	100,00%

Instrumento / Importância	%
Não estou inscrito em Instrumento.	100,00%
2	50,00%
1	50,00%
Total Geral	100,00%

Instrumento / Importância	%
Teclas.	100,00%
1	63,89%
3	11,11%
2	8,33%
5	5,56%
11	2,78%
10	2,78%
6	2,78%
8	2,78%
Total Geral	100,00%

Sexo / Importância	%
Feminino	100,00%
1	49,40%
2	16,87%
3	12,05%
5	7,23%
6	3,61%
4	2,41%
10	2,41%
8	2,41%
9	1,20%
11	1,20%
7	1,20%
Total Geral	100,00%

Sexo / Importância	%
Masculino	100,00%
1	42,62%
2	16,39%
4	11,48%
3	9,84%
8	6,56%
5	4,92%
11	3,28%
6	3,28%
7	1,64%
Total Geral	100,00%

Image 1: Example of tables resulting from the analysis of data obtained for the function of emotional expression (Gonçalves, S. M., 2018), p. 69)

The second question aimed to see if there were uses for music that, according to the students' perspective, were not included in the list presented in the first question. Students responded with a musical activity, which was analyzed and framed into a function, according to its characteristics, to better elucidate how accurate was the students' knowledge in relation to the social functions of music. The resulting data show that **34.72% of the students consider that the list presented in the questionnaire is complete and that it highlights all the social functions of music that are relevant**. Next are the activities mentioned by the students (but that belonged to the initial list) and that fall under the **Entertainment Function** (with 21.53% of the answers given by the students), those that fall under the **Aesthetic Pleasure Function** (with 11.11% of the answers) and those that fall under the **Function of Emotional Expression** (with 6.25% of responses). When the data resulting from the application of the gender filter are analyzed, the answers with the highest percentages do not differ from the general data. However, it is interesting to note that female students had much more response options than male students, and responses linked to emotion were much higher in female than in male students.

When the data resulting from the application of the grade filter are analyzed, interesting results are obtained: **students at the beginning of the school process associate music with entertainment in a much higher percentage than students who are at the end of the basic cycle of education.** This demonstrates that, throughout their school education, students lose this connection to music as entertaining and fun, as something that amuses them.

It can then be concluded that when the filters are applied, there are no major differences in relation to the overall results. However, when compared to the results of the previous question, it is interesting to note that the activities that the students thought should be added to the list and are meaningful to them (especially those related to Aesthetic Pleasure and Entertainment) are part of the same group of social functions of music that students do not think have great importance in the life of society.

### **Activities developed by the students and community involvement in the activities**

The results obtained during the data collection process (which were much more extensive than the examples presented here, and can be further analyzed in Gonçalves, 2018, pp. 65-126) helped in the planning of Practicum activities, both in the context of Saxophone and Wind Orchestra, and they were aimed at exploring the social functions of music with the students. In the Instrument school subject, students performed concerts outside of the school environment (some chose their home, others their general schools – where the other students do not usually hear concerts or recitals), an activity that some students had never done before. In addition, they held a class audition at the end of the year in which they orally contextualized the program for the public and reflected on the emotions they associated to it (this was done to explore the social functions of emotional expression and communication).

This sharing of emotional significance of the music program among students meant that they had to carry out a small research project about the program they performed, as well as an analysis of the score. A greater commitment and respect for the score (on issues such as dynamics or tempo) was evident, because of deeper analysis and a more complete study of the repertoire's origin and history. In the Orchestra subject the students created a song together during the class period that they presented at the Bomfim Foundation Day Center and Nursery, together with a piece from the program that they were working on and traditional Portuguese melodies (this was done to present their instruments to the public, and to explore the educational function and the preservation of culture function). They also participated in an activity at Casa da Música, in Porto, in the concert "Sonópolis" where they created and mounted



a show under the guidance of Pete Letanka and Paul Griffiths. The result was an hour-long concert in which students dealt with demanding rhythmic patterns and unusual harmonies in relation to those they usually dealt with, but they did it with immense naturalness, exploring the function of communication, the function of emotional expression, the integration function (by establishing contact with the other colleagues in the group, all coming from different backgrounds) and the educational function. The departure of students from the Conservatory for an activity outside the city, at Casa da Música, involved not only teachers and school management, but also parents or guardians (namely transporting students for 50 km between the Conservatory and Casa da Música). The students' interest was evident in their willingness to watch the entire creation process (they were present in all rehearsals) and in the numbers of audience they brought to the concert, resulting from their own personal invitations (as they wanted to share the music they created and their stage achievement with friends and family). This clearly demonstrates the impact of the social factors in music creation and music performance, in motivation and in the meaningfulness of music for students. The awareness of the social functions of music has a strong impact in the students' willingness to learn and in developing a greater connection between teachers, students, and their families. Playing instruments, singing, or composing become much more significant activities for the students.

## Conclusions

The surveys answered by the Practicum students allowed for the understanding that music (contrarily to belief) occupies a very important place in their lives. Some students even valued uses of music that are not related to the role of music in the specialized school they attend. However, this research project showed that the students recognize three different types of music: **music that is made in society** (a society that they belong to, but with which they do not identify in terms of musical preference), **music that is made and studied at the Conservatory** (which is the music they consider "serious", but sometimes "boring") and the **music they listen to and like** (which is a mix of popular music and some of the "serious music" they study at the Conservatory).

These results demonstrate that students cannot see music as a social art, with all these aspects, and they divide it between what they like to listen to and what they see is recognized by others as music. Thus, this same survey provided access to relevant data in relation to how students see music in society and in their own lives. Despite not knowing concepts such as "Social Functions of Music" and still finding them confusing, even after being simplified, it is possible to see these same functions represented in the various uses they present for this art. Students, in

general, show willingness to learn more and in different ways, not conforming to what the school offers. This survey also made it possible to identify some differences in responses, when the data is filtered by certain factors (such as the school level, gender, or musical instrument). One of the most striking results was the desensitization and demotivation of older students in relation to music learning. It would be expected that students undergoing several years of music education would be more sensitive to music and would be more willing to learn, but that is not the case. As they reach high school level, they value the entertainment function less, they find less pleasure in making music, in studying it and in dancing. We could say that, in the case of these students in particular, the school might have been partially responsible for the loss of enthusiasm and motivation, by not having been capable to reach them and attract them to the music learning process during the first five years of formal education.

The research project does not allow for the understanding of the cause of these results, nor is it possible to generalize results from this specific school, and restricted group of students. But the students' enthusiasm for the planned activities deliberately involving awareness of several social functions of music suggests that social context is extremely important for students' attribution of meaning to their activities and efforts, and that it should not be left out of the schools' pedagogical goals. Students find meaning for music in their lives, but they find it more difficult to attribute meaning or social functions to school music.

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