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Article abstract

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Demanding Epistemic Democracy and Indirect Civics Pedagogy: The Performance-Oriented Music Ensemble

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Abstract: The participation of young adults in performance-oriented music ensembles can be seen to enhance democratic capacities and virtues. Much, however, turns on the particular conception of democracy at work. Although contemporary currents in music education tend towards models of liberal and participatory democracy to govern music ensembles, this essay contends that demanding epistemic democracy allows performance-oriented music ensembles the achievement of democratic virtues without sacrificing excellence as a central regulatory ideal. The inclusion of both men and women is shown to be particularly significant in this light. Central to its democratic epistemic ambition, the role of the conductor is considered in the last section of this article.

Can music ensembles be indirect means for the acquisition of democratic capacities and virtues? If so, must the democratic goals of ensemble pedagogy sacrifice standards of excellence while nurturing democratic citizenship? While there is an emerging literature on democratic practices in music education (Woodford, 2005; Bladh & Heimonen, 2007; Tan, 2014; Delorenzo, 2016), the democratic pursuit of performance excellence in music education has received less than sufficient attention, as have the epistemic implications of the inclusion of women and men together in such settings.

This essay relates demanding epistemic democracy, a sub-variety of epistemic democracy, to music education. It maintains that demanding epistemic democracy relies upon a regulatory ideal analogically coherent with the pedagogy of the performance-oriented music ensemble (POME). It suggests that ensemble playing—where performance expectation is for the highest possible quality, where performance stakes are high, yet where quality is achieved without employment of authoritarian means—may be indirectly productive of citizens' democratic capacities and virtues. The epistemic significance of the participation of women and men together is shown to be central to the success of such ensembles.

Demanding epistemic democracy employs a regulatory ideal that calls upon participants to render

excellence in democratic, deliberative outcomes. The analogy of jury deliberation is useful in identifying this paradigm in democratic theory. An orientation to unanimity, the obligation to render justice, the prohibition of access to the press while deliberating, the responsibility of jurors to challenge the motivations of others when these are believed to be due to power acting upon or through them, the requirement for participation at least in determining outcomes, and similar features of deliberation all constrain jurors so as to enhance the likelihood that the best possible verdicts are democratically realized.

Just as juries are governed by the goal of rendering the best possible verdicts, demanding epistemic democracy orients the engagement of citizens so as to realize the best possible decisions regarding constitutional principles and public policy. This can mean that, both in juries and in demanding epistemic democracy, constraining some of the goals, values, and rights protected in liberal democracy—for instance, the extensive expressive liberty of citizens—is justified by considerations of excellence. (Ironically, the constraints governing the conduct of jurors are, to a degree, at odds with the principles that govern some of the liberal democracies in which they operate.) While there are some features and values in common between demanding epistemic democracy and liberal democracy, there remains a tension between them that is important to considerations of music education in ensembles.

Philosophic interest in the connection between music and politics is not recent, going back at least to Plato. In *Republic*, Plato held that musical education was crucial for the psychological development of the governing class, moderating passions inconsistent with all citizens' realization of the best lives. Music was held as central in mediaeval thought too for the alignment of the lives and political cultures of people to the church and to divinity. A bit more recently, eighteenth century political philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau can be read to have maintained that music, especially choral music with strong melodic lines and patriotic text, is important in binding and preserving properly-constructed democratic regimes.

Epistemic democracy can be traced historically to the Socratic Method, where dialogical/dialectical engagement is a productive means of deepening understanding, as well as to the eighteenth century work of Condorcet on juries (1785/n.d.) and Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (1754/1973a), which provided working assumptions for the determination of the "general will" at the center of his account of democracy in the subsequent work, *Social Contract* (1762/1973b). More recent treatments can be found in Cohen (1986) and in Pycz's employment of a demanding form of epistemic democracy in addressing contemporary issues in politics and ethics (2000) and democratic representation (2004). Such work builds upon the model of deliberative democracy advanced by Jürgen Habermas, albeit restoring a greater concern with psychological and other forms of power arguably at the heart of the early Frankfurt School of critical theory (Habermas, 1976; Marcuse 1987). It is worth noting that different sub-varieties of epistemic democracy can be identified, where differences are dependent upon the particular assumptions and regulated conditions associated with the democratic achievement.

Democratic ambition can today be found in many contemporary wind ensemble and orchestra programmes, where conductors try to balance democratic values with the pursuit of excellence in performance. A central contention of this essay is that one need not trade away excellence in the performance-oriented musical ensemble in order to achieve the indirect development of democratic capacities and virtues. Moreover, the essay holds that the capacities and virtues expected of participants in both epistemic democracy and POMEs are more demanding than those typical of competing

democratic paradigms. For this reason, they can be seen to have more formative and transformative potential.

In the next section, theoretical and conceptual features of the link between epistemic democracy and POMEs are developed. Here, attention is paid to the relative centrality of excellence in competing accounts of democracy. Following this, a section is devoted to the significance of gender inclusion in POMEs and epistemic democracy. The inclusion of gender difference is one of its most important requirements, and contrasts music ensembles with some other educative settings such as athletics. Finally, early attention is paid to how conductors of POMEs might apply these theoretical considerations.

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Just as in jury deliberations, epistemic democracy can be regulated in a variety of ways, depending on which assumptions, conditions and procedures are thought most likely to preserve the core of the democratic ideal while orienting discursive practice to the production of excellence in outcomes. The variety considered here is referred to as “demanding epistemic democracy.” It stipulates six conditions that distinguish it from other ideal-governed paradigms of democratic theory (Carmichael, Pocklington, & Pyrcz, 2000; Fand, 2004). The first four conditions are: (1) that the goal of discursive democratic practice is understood as achieving excellence, that is, the best possible outcomes; (2) that the stakes associated with demanding epistemic democratic participation are understood by participants to be high; (3) that unanimity (or near unanimity) is assumed as the effective end of democratic engagement; and (4) that the exercise of power is prohibited, at least prohibited or finessed to the greatest extent possible. Taken together, the first four stipulations entail a fifth and sixth: (5) that no one who has something of value to contribute can justifiably fail to contribute; and, accordingly, (6) that all have an interest in listening to the contributions of others. The account of democracy considered here is epistemic in its assumption that there are better and worse decisions and outcomes. It contends that democratic processes, at least in some contexts, ought to be set to achieve the best possible decisions or outcomes as informed by the knowledge and insight of participants. Similar stipulations are, again, revealed in the similar assumed conditions of jury deliberation.

Epistemic democracy is not, of course, the sole paradigm of democratic life. Nor is it even the most popular. Indeed, requiring as much as it does from citizens, it may be best reserved for decisions where a great deal hangs on getting things right, and especially where the goals of democratic engagement are foundational (transformative of self and society). Even when employed in a more occasional role, however, citizens need to possess and have exercised the capacities and virtues associated with such demanding democratic engagement for the realization of its epistemic goals.

Competing conceptions of democracy have corresponding notions of what democracy centrally requires of citizens and, accordingly, how respective requirements might be achieved directly and/or indirectly in pedagogy. Competing conceptions emphasize different values, skills, capacities, and virtues, essentially by definitional entailment. Liberal democracy, for instance, when related to pedagogy in music ensembles, entails terms of citizenship that are somewhat less demanding than those required in epistemic democracy, as they do not require a standard of excellence (see Woodford, 2005). Given their conception of democracy, a liberal democrat pedagogue would look to develop in ensemble

playing, just as liberal political theorists look to nurture and protect in liberal democratic communities, a respect for autonomy, diversity, consent, and individual rights, encouraging people to live on their own terms, as they themselves take these terms to be. They would protect for each the space necessary for self-construction through creative expression and free engagement with others. The traditional liberal democrat often focuses upon choice and consent, expressed directly or through processes of representation, as the basis for legitimacy. Accordingly, attention to the moral force of consent would be central to a liberal democratic rendering of indirect pedagogy. Liberal democracy traditionally emphasizes the importance of free elections. Such opportunities for participation, however, fall short of what participatory, deliberative and epistemic accounts require though they share some of the values and virtues of liberal democracy.

Some recent treatments of liberal democracy are more concerned than traditional views with developing and respecting the deeper autonomy (positive freedom) of citizens. The impact of psychological conditions of our freedom, as one dimension of our autonomy, is now thought addressed in some liberal theory. Harry Brighouse (2000, pp. 66–68) provides a clear account of what is commonly taken in democratic theory as our “positive freedom,” distinguishing the conditions of our autonomy more deeply than especially the Lockean definition and attending to some of the more insidious ways in which our self-determination may be undermined by the implicit power of others. Such treatments render the conditions of freedom in liberal theory considerably closer to the requirements of epistemic democracy than do traditional renderings of liberal democracy. The deeper form of freedom this account provides is a welcome if partial bridge between liberalism and epistemic democracy, though the demanding epistemic version takes the condition of deeper autonomy as but one of a number of constraints. Moreover, the definition and conditions of autonomy are contested in liberal theory and in liberal polities such as the United States.

A third democratic paradigm is found in participatory democracy. In participatory democratic theory, one favours the common, regular and enthusiastic participation of citizens in public life (Barber, 1984; Rosenblum, 2016; Mansbridge, 1980), often with the ancillary contention that such engagement effectively attaches participants to eventual decisions or outcomes. Participation is understood as centrally valuable as it enables citizens to develop a confident sense of personal and collective agency, and the shared sense of community thought essential to the full expression of our humanity. This competing conception of democracy is, as well, available in the practice of music ensembles, where players can be conducted with a mind to nurturing confidence of agency and common cause or community through participation.

In participatory democracy, extensive citizen engagement legitimates public decisions even when the very best possible outcome for the community is not achieved, distinguishing it from demanding epistemic democracy. Just as liberal democracy favours the value of individual expression over the achievement of a standard of excellence—as this is to respect individuality, identity and the right of individuals to live on their own terms—participatory democracy is more concerned with maintaining community solidarity. In both liberal and participatory democracy, of course, one hopes for the best, but advocates don’t sacrifice or moderate other favoured virtues and capacities in order to achieve excellence. In the music ensemble, accepting a standard of performance that is built upon the consent of players expressing their individual values, or one that maintains or builds upon the sense of community that participants enjoy, is thought by epistemic democrats not to have realized the full democratic potential of the group. Epistemic democracy is structured to induce players to agree upon a

higher standard even if this comes somewhat at the cost of going beyond their initial opinions or their preference for feeling easy or at one with others in the ensemble.

Democratic theory has recently turned to the value of more substantial, deliberative practices governed by a regulatory discursive ideal. The fourth variety of democracy identified here, deliberative democratic discourse, is normative and constructivist in its goals; a practice of reasoning together to generate shared values. It is held to be productive of ethical and public policy norms, building political culture, as it were, intentionally. Normative-oriented deliberative discourse is governed by (rational) conversational constraints. In generating normative outcomes worthy of our respect in this way, it too is held to provide a solid basis for community, solidarity, and civic friendship, as well as establishing grounds for political obligation. Deliberative democratic conversations also allow us to understand one another better, accordingly enabling us to predict others' likely conduct, where such knowledge is conducive to trust.

The deliberative reading of democracy holds considerable promise for musical ensembles committed to democracy. Such pedagogy maintains that the music ensemble develops not only musical technique and appreciation, but also participants' capacity to cite reasons, to listen effectively, to sincerely express their ideas, virtues and values, and generally to engage with values and cultures other than those with which they may be most comfortable. A musical ensemble following this normative deliberative democratic paradigm enables participants to see the value of their developing individual contributions to a community of common expression. Moreover, by together completing projects over time, such ensemble work can be seen to build a greater understanding and appreciation of community, as well as the virtues of trust, respect, and self-esteem. It could be seen to build the capacities and virtues necessary to enable alternate leadership and to share one's understanding while not over-determining or blocking out the similar expression of others. When governed by regulative democratic discursive ideals, the experience of the music ensemble can reasonably be expected to build musical confidence, consensus, and solidarity as civic friendship. Such achievements can be found even in performances that are not of particularly high quality. Indeed, sometimes surrendering the quality of performance serves to render normative achievements possible.

Demanding epistemic democrats are not opposed to the goals and processes of deliberative democracy, just as they find favour with some of the features and virtues of liberal, participatory and deliberative democracy. But they hold that the promise of democratic politics should not be limited to the creative self-determination that liberal democrats favour, to the sense of solidarity and civic friendship that participatory democrats seek to realize, to finding consensus regarding values as some deliberative democrats prefer, nor to the giving of reasons as the means of realizing outcomes as other deliberative democrats would have it. Epistemic democracy is more ambitious still, connecting the values, capacities and virtues of liberal, participatory and deliberative democracy as closely as possible to realizing standards of excellence in performance.

Return again to the practice of jury duty, especially in those cases where an accused's life will be deeply altered by a jury's rendering of justice. The democratic jury (when performing well) is not set to encourage the self-expression of jurors, to help them develop a greater sense of self-determination, to forge a sense of community with other jurors, or merely to agree. Such outcomes as these can be realized or they cannot, but they are rendered secondary to achieving the best verdict possible. Finding consensus is important in the regulation of their work. But getting things right matters more. To do so, jurors must bring the best of their insight to others, must listen to the insights of others, must not

tolerate the presence of power, and must understand and appreciate the high stakes involved in their deliberations. If what this essay identifies holds, POMEs provide the experience of enhanced capacities and virtues in democratic engagement the sort of which we expect jurors to be capable.

Such a practice in both cases is demanding. In high-quality ensemble performance, there is no “warm and fuzzy” on stage. Players bring their best possible individual contributions to realize the best possible collective outcome. To do so, they must set their image of themselves and their power resources and vulnerabilities aside, listen to the contributions of others, govern the anxiety that possible failure in performance can produce. And they must align themselves to an emergent identification of the best possible collective outcome in performance.

Epistemic democracy assumes a degree of non-relativism; at minimum that there are better and worse outcomes. This is not meant to suggest that other varieties of democratic theory are necessarily relativist, though they can be. POMEs too are governed by non-relativistic standards of excellence even as they concede that two different performances of the same work can be of equal aesthetic value. One need not establish that there is a perfect rendering of Bach’s Goldberg Variations to hold that there are better and worse renditions of it, even where two or more competing renditions can be said to be of the highest quality. Angela Hewitt and Glen Gould read Bach differently, but both are discernibly superior to the readings offered by the novice player or the random plunking of keys. Both Gould and Hewitt, and our assessment of them, are governed by a set of regulatory ideals concerning interpretation, technique, and the meaning, force, and integrities of Bach’s works for piano. Even if the perfect reading of Bach hasn’t been established, pianists, if they are to produce renditions of high musical value, need be governed by some (working) conception (and related justified criteria) of an idealized rendering. Simply put, they are governed by a working conception of what an excellent performance would be like. For the regulatory ideal of musical excellence to have force in musical conduct then it acknowledges some readings of value as superior to others. In similar fashion, in games and in sports, conduct is justified as being of a high quality (as approximating excellence) by a working account or vision of an ideal performance. In music, standards of excellence are identified and justified by reference to extensive knowledge of musicological intention and technique, by considerations of harmony and the like, by attending to the qualities of skillful execution, by (working) accounts of aesthetic value, by the value of authenticity, and by reference to the value of music in realizing our common and diversely expressed humanity. To be certain, epistemic democracy, as it relates to music education, need not commit to any particular standards (criteria) of excellence, as these can vary over time, between competing renditions of a work, and between different paradigms or periods of musical excellence. But it requires that standards of excellence are sought that go beyond (are not simply reducible to) the mere, or one might say, the easy consensus of an ensemble.

An example of a standard of excellence at work in music can be found, according to Lydia Goehr (1992), in the nineteenth-century emergence of the work-concept. The nineteenth century saw music’s emancipation from extra-musical considerations (religious or social) in the writing of theorists such as E. T. A. Hoffmann in favour of a concept of aesthetically autonomous music. For Romantic theorists, music’s freedom and indeterminacy endowed it with the ability, perhaps more so than the other fine arts, “to probe and reveal the higher world of universal, eternal truth” (Goehr, 1992, p.153). According to Goehr, the nineteenth century regulative concepts of music have become entrenched in our understanding of the musical work. An attempt to recreate a composer’s “intention” to the fullest extent possible thus often guides, in a regulatory function, the performance of a work. To be sure, such

standards are often contested, or developed further, but they still are sufficient to rule some conduct as inadequate and arguably some as being as close to an ideal as has been previously achieved. If such standards can do that, they can distinguish performances on a standard of excellence even where an ideal or perfect performance may be unattainable or perhaps not fully knowable. Excellence in musical performance does not require that there is a single expression of the best. It allows that there are different renderings of a piece, competing standards of musical excellence. Notwithstanding differences, more than one can intelligibly be taken to be of first-rate caliber, distinguished from lesser realizations of musical excellence. And this is all that is needed to get epistemic democracy and the demanding democratic ensemble off the ground.

One could, of course, counter that excellence in ensemble performance is a matter of subjective interpretation or differing taste; that the pursuit of the singular, ideal performance by ensembles is a misplaced ambition; that conductors, especially of younger performers, should accordingly aim more for self-expression, agency, respect for others, and community. In epistemic democracy and POMEs, however, a move to relativist grounding is to be resisted. Standards of excellence are thought to be available, just as there are thought to be better and worse jury decisions; better and worse public policy.

Most vexing of the perfectionist-oriented conditions of epistemic democracy is the stipulation against the tolerance of power as necessary to achieving excellence in outcomes. Attempts to dominate the participation of others are not new to political actors or to ensemble players and conductors, especially when high stakes or transformational potential are in play. In the regulatory conditions of demanding epistemic democracy (and in performance-oriented ensembles), all participants are required to leave their psychological “guns at the door.” It is this stipulation against the tolerance of even subtle forms of psychological power, such as exploiting others’ desire to “get along,” that most distinguishes demanding epistemic democracy and demanding deliberative musical ensembles from some competing forms of democracy, as well as from forms of authoritarianism. And it is the stipulation that is most difficult to achieve in practice. Democratic citizens have interests that they wish served in public decision-making, jurors have lives outside of the jury room, and the careers of ensemble players can be made or lost in competition with one another in university and high school POMEs, by grades or letters of reference awarded by ensemble conductors. Leaving power at the door seems an especially idealized requirement of epistemic democracy.

The angry, domineering or humiliating conductor or section head is not unknown to those who have played in ensembles. Constraining this sort of power is relatively an easy task. But less overt mechanisms of extracting performances from players by way of psychological manipulation are perhaps more common and they can be just as insidious in effect. Manipulating their fear of failure can be an effective means of exploiting the vulnerabilities of some ensemble players, even those who otherwise have something more to contribute to the excellence of an ensemble. Notwithstanding, when decisions are taken in a climate of fear or anxiety, where these are exploited by those who have a personal stake in the outcome, power players may simply be called out, referencing the epistemic purpose of engagement (excellence in quality of interpretation and performance). Even subtler forms of power may not be as intractable as they might first appear. When such power is in play, pointing to its possibility may be sufficient to undermine its force. While it may be challenging, then, power at work in juries, public meetings or ensemble rehearsal and performance can be mitigated, and some of the ways this may be done are discussed in the last section of this essay.

Some critics of the acclaimed force of (deep) autonomy, with which we are concerned here, hold

that few people are in fact susceptible to psychological or other forms of insidious power; that we are all relatively strong, autonomous human beings capable of resisting the psychological force of others in our lives. Others might hold that the prohibition of psychological or implicit power in demanding epistemic democracy (and deep autonomy liberalism) requires that we know or assume the internal workings of democratic participants' minds, particularly their psychological states and relative degrees of psychological vulnerability. Epistemic democracy assumes, that is, that we must know what perhaps we can't ever fully know empirically: the internal processes of feeling and thought of others. But the perfectionism that epistemic democracy enjoins requires not that we are perfect, but rather that we rigorously do the best that we possibly can. And the extent to which we know ourselves and come to know of others through the experience of epistemic deliberative engagement, governed to maximize the conditions of autonomy and the pursuit of excellence, would suggest that we know more than strict empiricists contend.

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The deliberative, epistemological model of democracy described above requires a form of reasoning and deliberation within a multiplicity of perspectives to achieve the best results; in the case of the POME, the ideal (or excellent) performance of the music. According to Elizabeth Anderson (2003), the epistemic model of democracy is often championed by feminists because it sees multiple perspectives “not simply as sources of error and bias to be eliminated or transcended through abstraction, but as *information resources* for *constructing* more global points of view through their critical interaction” (p. 241). In the epistemological model, the judgments made in the band room, like Anderson's pragmatic-epistemological model, move from local or individual perspectives to a more global perspective through experimentation and the process of learning,

of grasping an alternative previously unimagined, discovering its feasibility, trying it out and finding it more satisfactory than what one did before, recognizing that certain bad outcomes were caused by the alternative one had originally endorsed, or that certain good outcomes are caused by the new alternative, that disaster will not befall those who choose the new, and so forth. If there is such a path, this gives us reason to believe that the position at its end point provides a superior evaluative perspective to the other, which in turn gives us a reason to move to that position. (p. 251)

A melodic line may be interpreted in many ways. While often these interpretations are made spontaneously in the moment, and may change from one performance to the next, the prime solutions to questions of interpretation—questions that are inherently matters of judgment—are arguably influenced by information gathered from a variety of different emotional, cultural, aesthetic, experiential and music-experiential backgrounds. To gain a “superior evaluative perspective,” or an excellent performance, the inclusion of women as well as other marginalized groups brings vital, variable, epistemologically-necessary perspectives to the music ensemble. Leaving women (or other marginalized groups) out lessens the probability of getting things right.

One line of counter-argument is that, for instance, Toscanini's Beethoven cycle, considered by some as the greatest ever, was from an all-male orchestra. However, we do not, indeed cannot know

whether this performance would have been better still if it had been open to the playing insights of women. Nor is there any evidence that would secure the claim that contemporary orchestras are anything but improved by the inclusion of women players, and blind auditions convincingly illustrate that the performance and musical insights of women are often superior to those of the men with whom they compete. It might even be said that this line of counter-argument is begging the question, assuming the performative superiority of men in its assessment of Toscanini's Beethoven.

Engaging in a democratic model of music education creates "cross-group sympathy" (Anderson, 2003, p. 17); in other words, the ability to hear, appreciate, and adopt alternatives that are not your own. Other personal identification groups such as sports teams lay similar claims to fostering democratic attributes, such as cooperation, in achieving a unified, positive result. However, the interpretive nature of the judgments made in music require an openness to and sympathy for one another's personal and cultural backgrounds to an arguably greater extent than the decisions and reasoning required to succeed in team sports. This does not mean that every musician's ideas are accepted or discussed in every circumstance, nor is every musician the leader. Like a coach in sports, the POME requires one leader, the conductor, to negotiate the various musical interpretations being offered. POMEs, then, foster a deep appreciation for the ideas, talents, and perspectives of people who are different from oneself in order to achieve excellence in outcomes. Moreover, there are few sports that offer a truly co-ed team experience, as strength and physicality seemingly create a basis in favour of inequality. The wind ensemble, or similar instrumental or choral ensembles, accordingly provides a distinct opportunity for the development of gender equality, essential for epistemic democracy, as men and women, playing together, must rely on one another to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Although the integration of multiple perspectives and gender equality may be realized in liberal or participatory models of music education, as are arguably favoured by Anderson, the high-stakes setting of a performance-oriented ensemble raises the bar in gender equality. The progression not only towards a global perspective, one that may be similarly achieved by a normative model, but one that is regulated by an ideal of excellence, necessarily retains some alternatives and rejects others. Thus, all band members are required to work collectively to find the best outcome possible. This kind of excellence, if led without coercion, manipulation or bias, provides a model of gender equality that not only creates cross-group sympathy and respect, but a realization that only when deliberately evaluating different perspectives brought forward by gender, race, or other cultural differences may excellence be achieved. Moreover, especially where the stakes are high, the quality of genuine listening, central to social equality, follows. There is no way for men to "hog the ball" in a gender-inclusive musical ensemble, as the nature of the ensemble performance requires that all voices be heard. The presence of women, and the alternative perspectives they bring, is accordingly not only valuable within the contemporary band room, but completely *necessary* for the success of the epistemic democratic model.

Unfortunately, as has been noted, gender equality in music has not historically been the practice, especially in professional musical ensembles. If the above claims are right, that the POME is an ideal vessel to demonstrate the importance of gender equality in high-stakes democratic situations, it is still rarely realized, especially in professional ensembles. Many symphony orchestras, especially the European, have long held to the belief that a uniform gender in an ensemble produces a greater aesthetic expression. The Vienna Philharmonic, for example, is notorious for its exclusion of women. Although it began admitting women into the ensemble in 1998, they are still few and far between. Out of 130 musicians, there are currently only 7 female members. In an interview in 1996, Helmut

Zehetner, second violinist of the Vienna Philharmonic, expressed his belief in the importance of musical uniformity:

From the beginning we have spoken of the special Viennese qualities, of the way music is made here. The way we make music here is not only a technical ability, but also something that has a lot to do with the soul. The soul does not let itself be separated from the cultural roots that we have here in central Europe. And it also doesn't allow itself to be separated from gender. (Osborne, 1996, p. 6)

Claims of emotional distraction, sexuality, and pregnancy as reasons for the exclusion of women have plagued professional ensembles. While we have come far in the past few decades and, especially in North America, women now make up a significant portion of professional ensembles, there are arguably still significant flaws in the gender hierarchy of symphonic orchestras or wind ensembles. Notably, the presence of women conductors of professional ensembles, although increasing, is still remarkably rare worldwide. It remains a struggle for women to break through the glass ceiling in these leadership roles, though there appear to be more Canadian women taking on conducting roles in POMEs at the high school and university levels.

Questions of gender equality are not limited to professional ensembles. Gendered musical traditions continue to influence the functioning of both professional and school wind bands. Elizabeth Gould (2012) draws out several key paradoxes of gender in North American bands. First, she points to the paradox between the “overwhelming hegemonic masculinity of bands” and its “relationship to the feminized sphere of music in which they perform” (p. 113). While North American bands derive traditionally from a highly masculine, military tradition, music more generally has, as Susan McClary (1994) argues, historically been aligned with the feminine: “In a culture rigidly structured in terms of a mind-body split, music’s appeal to the body predisposes it to be assigned to the ‘feminine’” (p. 31). Similarly, Gould argues that the masculine nation-building function of band music (often used for social, civic functions) also works in counterpoint to the feminine role of nurturing and sustaining society (p. 114). While Gould’s argument overlooks the performative (and musical) nature of the band, her hypothesis that the ambiguities inherent in the aforementioned paradoxes create space for enacting “new ways of playing in the band and living in the world” is interesting.

One of the ways that perceptions of gender have manifested in school bands is through students’ instrument choices. Studies such as those by Abeles and Porter (1978) and Griswold and Chrobak (1981) have confirmed that students, whether music majors or not, associate instruments with gender roles. Drums, trumpet, tuba and saxophone are often identified as masculine, whereas flute, violin, clarinet and oboe are identified as feminine. In a 2004 study by Kristyn Kuhlman, these stereotypes were confirmed once again as results showed that a student’s timbral preference, when listening to an unidentified, synthesized instrument, is often at odds with their eventual instrument choice. Yet, in Canadian educational wind ensembles like the 2015 National Youth Band, these barriers seem to be breaking down. The principal flute part is currently held by a young man, while the section leader for the percussion section is a young woman.

Despite the gender gaps historically present in musical ensembles, we are seeing the epistemic model begin to take hold in Canada in high-calibre, performance-oriented youth ensembles such as provincial wind band and symphony orchestras, university ensembles, and the National Youth Band. Many of these ensembles audition students blindly, with no names, only numbers, attached to their recordings, levelling the musical playing field. Although holistic empirical (especially qualitative)

research is required to establish this claim, it is the experience of these writers that these youth bands, and particularly honour bands, offer an effective platform for students to develop demanding democratic skills by engaging gender equality in the high-stakes setting of the ensemble. By breaking through gender stereotypes, the National Youth Band—one of Canada’s highest-calibre performance ensembles for sixteen- to twenty-two-year-olds, at an age where they begin to move into the political world—is arguably creating an expectation of excellence that recognizes the necessity of a gender-diverse ensemble. Such ensembles then not only educate young people in music, but provide a rigorous example and a practice of demanding, deliberative (epistemic) democratic virtues. These virtues are developed by the realization that musical excellence is reached through a multiplicity of musical interpretations, negotiated through the conductor, where men and women interact on an equal playing field to construct a more global interpretation of a musical work.

4

While it is tempting to try, a complete account of the successful conductor of a demanding epistemic democratic POME is not provided here. Indeed, the conceptual analysis above is intended to enable greater empirical attention to the roles of the conductor and players in indirect epistemic democratic practice. Still, it is clear from the experience of both that a conductor is ultimately responsible for the tone of political culture in an ensemble. Moreover, the variety of player skills, techniques, and attitudes that conductors of especially younger POMEs encourage is complex and multidimensional. Democratic values should be construed as one feature in a taxonomy of these developing musical skills, techniques and attitudes. Paying attention to such values as well as to the processes of realizing a shared understanding of a work beyond what appears on the pages of their individual parts—and especially the attention that must be paid to players’ understanding of the contribution their playing makes in the configuration of the contributions of others—renders the conductor’s role challenging. Those unfamiliar with this role would be surprised to find how demanding and complex an endeavor it is, especially with young performers.

Given its difficulty, readers familiar with the complexity of achieving the performances of young ensembles may be loath to entertain more in the way of demanding expectations or conditions, as an epistemic account undeniably does. However, the acquisition of demanding epistemic democratic capacities and virtues, as these have been considered in this essay, can be, as we have said, primarily indirect. Much of the work is achieved by the high-stakes conditions of POMEs, the assumption of musical excellence, and the working assumption that all players have an epistemic role to play in identifying and realizing the best musical expression of which the ensemble is capable. Conductors of ensembles need not be expected to “teach democratic principles or virtues” directly, but serve rather in attending to what may be seen as the political culture and the way of understanding everyone’s value in the performance qualities of an ensemble. Indeed, the virtues of democracy, in one of the ironies of pedagogy, may be better achieved when it does not proceed directly, instead established in the practice of working together and by example, when governed by implicit regulatory principles.

How is it then that a conductor of POMEs might have realized in the lives of those with whom they are engaged the virtues of epistemic democracy? In what remains of this analysis, we identify features of the relationship of conductor to player, as these can be derived from the conception of

demanding epistemic democracy and employed implicitly in the conduct of a performance-oriented musical ensemble. It may be worth reminding readers that a competing conception of democracy (liberal, participatory or normative) would entail competing notions of preferred conduct for conductors and of the habits or political culture of ensemble players.

A conductor, beyond his or her role of steering the contribution of participants, typically has more in the way of scholarly knowledge of the works the excellent performance of which ensembles endeavor to realize. But this interpretative hierarchy is not always the case, nor is it necessarily complete. Players' responsibilities, in a POME regulated by principles of demanding epistemic democracy, are both to advance insights into the meaning of the full ensemble's expression and to play parts effectively and musically with effective attention to the contribution of others. The tasteful rendering of passages by a player is part of the way in which they inform a common interpretative expression of the full ensemble. The role of conductor, to co-ordinate and to coach contributions inducing players to contribute their musical insights and related expression, is far from straightforward or easy. And it can be frustrating, especially when what they take as excellence in performance cannot be achieved by authoritarian fiat, as it is prohibited by the regulatory ideal of demanding epistemic democracy. Indeed, even in authoritarian conductors' efforts to enable the best of performances of an ensemble, the ability of players (subtly) to foot drag in contribution is ever present. Accordingly, the excellence of the musical performance doesn't flow from the knowledge and quality of contributions singularly of either conductor or players. It exists, as it were, between them.

Some would say that achieving standards of excellence in POMEs requires a sort of negotiation. Others would say that they are discovered through the experience of adequately-structured engagement. The conductor's role, beyond attending to the skills and techniques of an ensemble as it performs to the best standard of which it is capable, also involves promoting civility in the interdependence between players. It nurtures an orientation to the production of excellence, in the practice of effective epistemic inclusion, in generating a sense of high stakes, in the language of engaged interaction, and in persistent awareness that the best in musical expression is found, as it were, between the conductor and ensemble. Providing a regular reminder of these features, while resisting and finessing forms of power, constitutes much of what would be expected of a conductor in a demanding epistemic democratic POME. Many contemporary conductors, especially of university-level ensembles, will not find such a list new or unusual. What they may find interesting is the relationship of such a role to the sort of political education associated with a more demanding reading of democracy than is usually identified.

Central to the account of the relationship of performance-oriented music ensembles and the demanding epistemic democratic regime has been the assumption that there are better and worse performances; that standards are not radically relativistic even if, in the end, people disagree about what the perfect performance would be. Getting as close as possible to the performance of excellence requires that all deliver the best of which they are capable. Especially interesting here is the fact that performances, just as do jury deliberations, typically operate in time (no pun intended); there is no "second chance" for any live performance. There are plainly other qualities, features, and conditions of the relationship between conductors and players, as between players, required for musical performances governed by standards of excellence. There is indeed more at stake in the performance life of young ensembles than initially meets the eye, especially in developing a democratic citizenship oriented to making the best in public decisions. It is hoped that enough has been said to show how

ensembles can serve democratic practice, while still principally oriented to the achievement of excellence, free of the authoritarianism once thought essential.

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