

## Harmony

GILLIAN HOWELL

Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre | Griffith University | Australia\*

### ABSTRACT

Harmony's semantic links across music and the social domain mean that when evoked in the context of music in peacebuilding, harmony provides both a description of musical action, and an aspirational projection of the desired social outcome. However, in both domains, harmony's foundational values and implied practices raise questions of how apt it is as a representation, tool, or goal of contemporary peacebuilding. This article seeks to answer these questions. Conceptual in scope, it examines the multiple concepts attached to harmony in the musical and sociocultural domains, and discusses these in relation to peacebuilding, illustrating some of the possible alignments and alliances with examples of cross-community music projects. It offers a heuristic for considering harmony and its values, practices, affordances, and implications from a more critical and nuanced perspective.

### KEYWORDS

conflict; cross-community ensembles; harmony; music; peacebuilding; social

\* [gillian@gillianhowell.com.au](mailto:gillian@gillianhowell.com.au)

## HARMONY

Harmony is a word with broad appeal but conceptual ambiguity. Located primarily in music and in the social domain, its evocation conjures ways of being and sounding that are generally accepted as desirable and uncontroversial. Its semantic links across music (as a description of sonic structures and of practices) and the social domain (as an idealised state of societal functioning) provide copy editors the world over with rich opportunities for attention-capturing headlines and pithy wordplays in media stories about music and social change. Harmony has been used to frame entire music education conferences (such as the 29th World Conference of the International Society for Music Education in 2010, *Harmony And The World's Future*) and music programmes with social change or equity agendas (consider *In Harmony* and *Harmony In Strings*, Sistema-inspired music and social action programmes in England and Australia, respectively; and *Cultures In Harmony*, a U.S.-based organisation promoting intercultural understanding through music and musician exchanges).

In such usage, harmony offers both a description of musical action, and an aspirational projection of the desired project outcome. It claims harmony as a public and moral good, a model of how the world is supposed to be, and positions harmony as a universal value. Such associations are widely accepted. However, they contain embedded assumptions and elisions that can obfuscate the relationships between music and social dynamics, and therefore between music in peacebuilding processes.

My interest in exploring harmony as a keyword for music in peacebuilding was prompted in large part by my discomfort with one association in particular: the suggestion that learning and playing music in harmony is a way to promote and create the conditions for living together harmoniously, beyond the boundaries of the musical project. This is an enduring – if romantic – notion. Orchestras and other large ensembles are frequently held up as ideal crucibles for this transference, particularly if their musicians represent ethno-religious groups currently in conflict. At the Afghanistan National Institute of Music, for example, students from a wide range of tribal affiliations and language groups form hybrid ensembles that blend Afghan and Western classical instruments and repertoire. The school's founder and director Ahmad Sarmast believes that:

When those kids are sitting in orchestra, listening to each other, playing together in harmony, respecting each other's melodic lines and instruments, it also teaches them that they can live in peace and harmony outside of the practice room and also have respect for each other's languages, way of life, or religious sects. (Ahmad Sarmast interview, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2015)

Similar rhetoric accompanies other 'orchestras as social action' projects, such as those linked to the Sistema music education model in Venezuela. Sistema alumnus and LA Philharmonic conductor Gustavo Dudamel contends that making 'harmony' is akin to a process of negotiation, claiming that "[w]hatever your differences are, *you have to solve problems to make harmony* [emphasis added]" (Swed, 2014, cited in Baker, 2014, p. 204). The conviction that orchestral playing creates a space for dialogue and negotiation forms the foundational narrative of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, an orchestra made up of young musicians of Arab and Israeli backgrounds. For chief conductor Daniel Barenboim, co-founder of the Divan with the late Edward Said, the agreement that is necessary for playing in harmony creates a metaphysical space for the possibility of dialogue. Music is

the language of the continuous dialogue that these young people have with each other. Music is the common framework, *their abstract language of harmony* [emphasis added]. (Barenboim, 2006, p. 3).

Not only do these examples imply contrasting conceptualisations of harmony, they make problematic elisions between the sonic properties of harmony, the practices and enactment of harmony, and the social challenges of the contexts the players represent. ‘Harmony’ thus performed becomes both a symbolic representation of an ideal social future, and a feasible vehicle for bringing it into existence. In the world of media hits and marketing, there may seem little harm in such wordplay. However, the implicit moral claim attached to harmony can seduce audiences with the idea that ‘this is how things should be,’ and mask a more complex socio-political reality. In time, harmony – like the ‘power of music discourse’ identified by Bergh (2010) – acquires ‘black box’ status so that it is offered up as an explanation for social transformations in the context of music-making, rather than one of many phenomena to examine. The semantic slippage functions as an “intellectual ‘sleight-of-hand’ between the material and ideal formulations” of how music functions and what its properties may afford (Fink, 2016, p. 36).

This is not to discard the beneficial social transformations that may occur through intercultural soundings and performances of harmony. Nor is it to ignore the opportunities that harmony’s conceptual ambiguities may afford in critical scholarship. For John Morgan O’Connell, writing in the Introduction to *Music and Conflict* (2010), harmony’s semantic associations and applications enable it to cut through the conceptual murkiness of the various relationships between music and conflict to provide an anchoring point for theoretical and practical explorations of those two words. However, as a keyword for the field of music in peacebuilding, harmony’s ambiguities and dubious claims point to the need for a deeper interrogation.

This article is conceptual in scope. I first examine the concepts attached to harmony in the musical and sociocultural domains. I then map these onto contemporary peacebuilding practices in order to explore what harmony in its varied guises may contribute to peacebuilding, and the values and practices it implies. The goal is to provide conceptual tools that support actors in the interdisciplinary field of music in peacebuilding to consider harmony and its affordances from a more critical stance. The findings I present make the case for deeper reflection on the use of the word harmony in music in peacebuilding, and increased scrutiny for its implications.

## **HARMONY IN MUSIC**

Let’s come together right now, oh yeah, in sweet harmony. (The Beloved, 1993).

Harmony in music has both technical and vernacular conceptualisations that lend it broad and narrow definitions. From the perspective of a dominant Western discourse, a widely accepted (albeit subjective) definition of musical harmony refers to “the simultaneous combination of tones, especially when blended into chords pleasing to the ear” (harmony, n.d.). This connects to a concept of ‘harmony-as-consonance,’ where harmony is understood as an absence of dissonance (Fink, 2016). However, harmony in a technical sense includes both consonance and dissonance. The technical concept is far broader, but less embedded in the public imagination than the presumption of sweetness and pleasantness.

This vernacular conceptualisation reflects the cultural dominance of Western harmonic language, also known as tonal functional harmony, which is built around triadic chords, and characterised by the establishment of a tonal centre (tonic, or home key) and the sequential relationship of the chords to each other and to the tonic. The creation of tensions and resolutions back to the tonal centre (often by increasingly expansive routes) creates an effect of linearity. Some have suggested that tonal functional harmony is to music what perspective is to visual art (Small, 1977): as techniques they are logical, replicable, and meticulously documented, and their development in post-Renaissance Europe mirrored the tremendous shifts in consciousness towards rationality and science that occurred at that time (Goehr, 2007; Small, 1977).

‘Harmony-as-tonal-and-functional,’ like harmony-as-consonance, is an incomplete concept of harmony from a technical (i.e. musicological) perspective; however, its prominence as a lay concept is understandable, given the ubiquity of this harmonic language in Western music practices, and its penetration into the music practices of other non-Western cultures. Contemporary composition in jazz and art music may subvert or liberate new music from standard harmonic theory, and related ‘dialects’ can be observed in rock and popular music (Björnberg, 1989); however, the rules of triadic harmony and tonal pulls remain the norm against which developments are compared and to which they are added.

The subjectivity of the definition of harmony presented earlier in this section immediately flags it as a concept arising within a specific cultural context, as the rules that govern what is considered to be ‘pleasing’ in music are culturally learned (Merriam, 1964, p. 27). Harmony specifically refers to the pitch domain, so if reference to chords is removed, the definition of harmony as “the simultaneous combination of tones [...] pleasing to the ear” (harmony, n.d.) theoretically becomes broad enough to encompass the many culturally-inflected ways to combine pitches for aesthetic interest. However, the concept of harmony is not universal (Merriam, 1964, p. 27). In many of the world’s musical cultures, pitch attracts considerably less interest than musical elements such as rhythm and timbre. Pitches may be combined by all kinds of compositional or organisational devices, but the sounds created do not necessarily generate aesthetic interest as ‘harmony’ for those living within that culture. Hearing these sounds and appreciating them as ‘harmony’ requires some level of cultural conditioning and may be more a case of making sense of the sounds through the conceptual language of Western European music than an alternative, more culturally-inclusive concept of ‘harmony.’ ‘Harmony’ might also be attributed to a musical performance in reference to the social phenomenon (symbolic or actual) of people working cooperatively together to make music, which leads to the concept of ‘harmony-as-performance’.

Harmony has a performative element: one can harmonise a voice or instrument with another or play/sing in harmony. These imply a degree of actor agency, where those producing the sounds are also in control of the harmony. However, a more passive experience of ‘harmonising’ also exists, where a single actor harmonises (i.e. combines, blends, balances) the voices or sounds of others, and in doing so, assumes considerable control over the sonic environment. Similarly, while most musicking requires a willingness to conform to the rules and parameters of the specific practice, some systems (such as the rationality and rules of tonal functional harmony) are more strictly codified and less open to exploration or subversion of the rules. There are thus varying degrees of agency available within the concepts of harmony presented above. These implications are useful to keep in mind as we

approach the task of exploring the relationships and interactions that different concepts of harmony may be modeling in a peacebuilding context.

## **HARMONIOUS SOCIETIES**

In the social domain, perhaps even more so than in music, harmony resists easy definition, and can be conceptualised as both a value and a practice (Beyer and Girke, 2015). As a concept it is deeply rooted in both Eastern and Western antiquity. In Plato's Republic, the desired harmony was 'harmony-as-order', characterised by strong and stable government, and obedient, compliant masses. Harmony-as-order could be realised when layers of society—guardians (those that could hold power), auxiliaries (soldiers and warriors, from whom the guardians would be chosen) and producers (everybody else)—conformed to the expectations of their roles and life station. In other words, when rulers ruled, auxiliaries supported and enforced, and producers obeyed, social harmony would ensue. Furthermore, it was the ruler's job to harmonise the different elements: different roles and interests were to be blended according to an overriding hierarchy of authority, supported by clear and unambiguous rules.

Once the different elements have been harmonised, a new concept emerges: 'harmony-as-blend.' Harmony-as-blend is constituted through the combining and blending of all the diversity (social roles, but also backgrounds, languages, beliefs, opinions) in society towards a functional whole. This model of harmony may place the 'notes' of the blend in a hierarchy so that some are more dominant than others; harmony-as-blend can privilege those at the top of a social hierarchy, as in Plato's Republic, leaving those at the bottom more vulnerable to exploitation. However, this is not always the case: harmony that blends difference into a single collective of common interests and action can also be a source of power for marginalised or oppressed groups (Nader, 1990). Speaking as one harmonious voice may be an effective way to get your voice heard.

Eastern ancient philosophers also established a concept of harmony-as-order as central to creating a functional and stable society (Brindley, 2012) and it remains a prominent value in contemporary North Asian and Southeast Asian societies, where 'order' is represented by political stability, and achieved through deference and respect for authority. However, Chinese concepts of harmony have evolved over time. Early Chinese writings emphasised harmony's man-made quality, achieved through effort and finesse (Brindley, 2012, p. 14). By the late fourth and early third centuries BCE, this began to shift to a more naturalistic conceptualisation, one where harmony "implied the intrinsic balance of cosmic forces in the world, in people, and in things, [...] a fundamental characteristic, pattern, and even structure of the cosmos" (p. 16). This was a development of harmony-as-order into 'harmony-as-balance.' As this idea became more prevalent, music (in the form of musicians, instruments, and sounds) came to be seen as important tools for helping to keep the cosmos – and the state as a micro-cosmos – functioning smoothly and ensured that Heaven and Earth remained within the parameters of their requisite roles (p. 21). In ancient China, therefore, we find an interesting precedent for the deployment of musical practices towards the task of realising and maintaining harmony.

Classical Confucian texts also emphasise harmony as consisting of higher-order values of benevolence and righteousness, and concern for humanity in general (Leung, Koch and Lu, 2002, p. 207), establishing an ideal of 'harmony-as-moral-behaviour.' Such behaviour did not preclude or avoid conflict, recognising that conflict can arise in the pursuit of righteousness and care for others. However, in



contemporary interpretations of Confucian philosophy, these values have been subsumed into a model of ‘harmony-as-conflict-avoidance,’ where individuals subordinate their personal interests to those of the collective (Leung et al., 2002). Cultural idealisation of conflict avoidance can be mobilised to pressure less-powerful individuals to accept personal transgressions in support of the status quo.

A concept of harmony-as-conflict-avoidance is also found in what anthropologist Laura Nader has termed the ‘harmony model’ of dispute resolution (2001). A harmony model in justice systems prioritises compromise and consensus over an adversarial or litigious model. While such an approach may be considered to be supportive of community bonds, Nader contends that, as with the neo-Confucian concept of harmony, it functions as an ideology, placing high moral value on agreement (presuming that everyone shares the same goals and that consensus is possible) and framing conflict as a source of tremendous social disturbance rather than a constructive human process. In this formulation, dissenting voices and legitimate claims for justice can be swept aside. Leung et al. (2002) suggest that this creates only a ‘surface harmony,’ leaving any unresolved conflict simmering below the surface.

These five concepts – order, blend, balance, moral behaviour, and conflict-avoidance – correspond with long-running debates in anthropological literature about the social and power dynamics of harmony (Beyer and Girke, 2015). This collection of characteristics (the blending of social roles; the avoidance of conflict; the coercion, imposition or presumption of consensus; and an approach to solidarity in order to resist and challenge) together indicates a social harmony achieved through the subordination of individual voices to the interests of a collective or imposed goal. This supports what Baker (2014) has noted, that historically, ‘harmonious society’ as an ideal has its roots in a strictly controlled social environment (p. 208). However, it is also useful to note that each of these conceptualisations of harmony – of living within a clear social order; of blending differences towards a greater social interest; of seeking consensus and avoiding divisive conflict; of living with balance and sensitivity in a complex cosmos – may hold great salience at all levels of a society, rather than just serving the interests of the most powerful. As Beyer and Girke (2015) observe, “there are people everywhere pursuing harmony and worrying that their societies, for whatever reasons, might fall apart” (p. 235). Harmony in the social domain can be depoliticising and coercive but can also be communitarian and a source of security and reassurance for small and vulnerable groups.

Thus, across both the musical and social domains multiple concepts of harmony prevail, spanning broad and narrow definitions, and suggestive of both open-ended and more rigidly-defined social dynamics. Often, it would appear that harmony relies on a degree of co-optation or coercion in order to reach consensus and unity, and the above discussions allude to the way that this may result in the muting of discordant voices. However, individuals with differing opinions may also relinquish their preferences willingly in support of a harmonious outcome, valuing this above their personal interests.

With these findings in mind, what is the role of harmony in contemporary peacebuilding? Where does it contribute, how is it manifested, and whose interests does it serve in its musical manifestations? The next section addresses these questions, exploring the different ways that the above concepts of harmony correspond with practices and values of peacebuilding, and illustrating some of the

possible alignments and alliances with examples of cross-community music projects.

### **MAPPING CONCEPTS OF MUSICAL AND SOCIAL HARMONY ONTO PEACEBUILDING**

Peacebuilding is multifaceted. It is a complex of tasks (structural, political, interpersonal, long-term, short-term) involving a vast array of actors (including community members, peacekeepers, religious leaders, relief workers, government and traditional leaders, and intermediaries) with component parts and priorities that represent entire fields of scholarship and practice (e.g. state-building, nation-building, reconciliation, human rights, law, justice, and security, etc.). All these approaches must be integrated and pursued, some from the top down, and others from the bottom up, some by insiders, others by outsiders or intermediaries, in order to build a sustainable and just peace (Bloomfield, 2006; Lederach and Appleby, 2010; Schirch, 2004).

Differing concepts of peace also prevail. Negative peace (the absence of war) predominates in the security sector but provides scant tools for identifying or tackling the root causes of conflict. Positive peace (a term first coined by Nobel Peace Prize winner Jane Addams in 1907) embraces a wider set of values and concepts, including justice, democracy, equality, collaboration, and liberation (Shields, 2017). Many argue that if the goal is sustainable peace, then social and economic justice are essential and central components, prompting the concept of 'just peace' (Lederach and Appleby, 2010; Schirch, 2004). Positive peace has strong intercultural salience: "most of the world's cultures have a concept of peace that goes well beyond the absence of war" (Shields, 2017, p. 8), including Indian 'ahimsa' (non-violence to all living creatures) and 'shanti' (maintaining a peaceful mindset), and the South African concept of 'ubuntu' (a person is a person through other persons).

Similarly, there are differing concepts for how peace should be built, ranging from the institutional focus (and arguably Western-centric templates) of the liberal peace model (Richmond, 2008), to agonistic approaches that accept conflicts as inevitable, potentially constructive of peaceful and just societies, and best transformed into non-violent relationships, rather than presumed to be resolvable (Klem, 2018). Connected to the agonistic approach is Lederach's (2005) concept of 'the moral imagination' as a key component of transforming conflict and building peace. Lederach emphasises the unpredictable and complex nature of peacebuilding, noting its necessary navigation of multiple competing interests and cultural norms. Rather than a linear process following a predictable trajectory of stages and phases, and applying a standardised set of tools, Lederach understands peacebuilding as a creative process, defining moral imagination as:

the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist . . . to imagine and generate constructive responses and initiatives that, while rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violence, transcend and ultimately break the grips of those destructive patterns and cycles. (Lederach, 2005, p. 29).

In this approach, peacebuilding is an engagement with the unknown. It is less about striving towards a predetermined end-state than engaging in a fundamentally creative process that rejects dualistic thinking, and that will repeatedly envision and re-envision a possible, yet inherently mysterious and not-yet-existing future.

Lederach's process creates the space for engagement with existing contestations, bringing injustices, diverse voices, and constructive conflict to the fore.

Lastly, it is useful to note Bloomfield's (2006) observation that peacebuilding requires both bottom-up and top-down initiatives. Bottom-up efforts are essential for transforming interpersonal relationships and rebuilding local-level trust; however, they need to be complemented with top-down political and structural initiatives aimed at societal shifts in norms and attitudes. Bloomfield emphasises that bottom-up peacebuilding work cannot be sustained without top-down efforts that communicate political/institutional support for peaceful co-existence and shared interests.

With these delineations in mind, we can explore how harmony in both the musical and social domains is located within the peacebuilding landscape. I shall refer to the conceptual labels introduced in the preceding sections in order to differentiate between concepts and minimise slippage.

I opened the music section of this article with the concept of harmony-as-consonance. Harmony-as-consonance offers a set of sonic relationships in which resolution prevails, and where dissonant elements are absent, or manipulated towards resolution. In this way, it functions metaphorically as a kind of negative peace (harmony-as-conflict-avoidance), characterised by the absence of something. The contribution of harmony-as-consonance to peacebuilding is in offering a representation of an ideal; albeit one that is likely to be of greatest interest to those that identify with the consonant elements within it (the dominant group, the majority), rather than those that identify with the muted dissonant elements. As a utopian representation, it can provide a source of meaning, motivation, and hope: an appealing version of a future world, and an end-state to aspire towards.

However, a projected end-state can be a source of tension for those living with the aftermath of war or protracted social division, particularly among victim groups. Idealised end-states "*where all is harmony, where all are equals, and, in particular, where all is forgiven*" (Bloomfield, 2006, p. 7, emphasis added) can provoke feelings of resistance. Declarations of peace may require victim groups to compromise or 'forgive' perpetrators without first receiving justice for their suffering. Harmony-as-consonance therefore does not necessarily correspond with delivery of justice.

It is also interesting to consider that when it occurs, the 'pleasing effect' of consonance is likely achieved through compliance with a particular tuning system. Read as a metaphor for a social environment, such systems share some characteristics with the concept of harmony-as-order with its pressure from the top-down and within peer groups to obey the established rules and conform. While the system's parameters effectively minimise new violence (discordance), they do so by removing the possibility of contestation from non-conformist elements. The resulting harmony is the product of this suppression, making it a problematic metaphor for building an inclusive or just peace.

Harmony-as-order may contribute to peaceful experiences in other relevant ways. When the external social context is *not* ordered or predictable, the experience of existing within a harmonious, ordered, predictable environment may provide individuals with much-needed respite. For example, in 'Most Duša', a multiethnic, interreligious choir in post-war Sarajevo (Robertson, 2010), choir members found tremendous meaning and comfort in singing material organised within the structures of tonal function harmony. In the choir, roles were prescribed, the rules



were clear, order abounded, and the music followed familiar and predictable trajectories. The experience allowed them to “transform into their musical identities” (p. 47), distancing themselves from the chaos, disorder, and corruption of life in post-war Sarajevo, and affording them a weekly opportunity to re-live (temporarily) their pre-war ‘normality’ of interethnic cooperation and cultural participation. For these singers, unambiguous rules and conformist behaviors were a relief. The certainty of the score and the trusted leadership of the director enabled the singers to place themselves under the protection of another. The desire and gratitude for a lived experience of order is not necessarily *peacebuilding*; however, the Most Duša example does suggest a possible bottom-up benefit of harmony-as-order for those trying to sustain resilience and hope in an un-peaceful, chaotic, and corrupted society.

While the experience of singing choir music in the Western harmonic tradition is part of the European heritage in Bosnia-Herzegovina, its deployment in aid of peace in other parts of the non-Western and post-colonial world warrants some critical reflection. This harmonic language remains entangled with the problematic, Eurocentric social roles and values that have long been assigned to Western Classical music. Particularly concerning in peacebuilding contexts is its historical role as a mechanism for ‘civilising,’ ‘pacifying,’ and ‘saving’ individuals and masses (Bull, 2014; Green, 2003; Mantie, 2018). Teaching the working classes and colonised peoples to sing in harmony (Beckles Willson, 2011; McGuire, 2009; Southcott and Lee, 2008) was benignly framed as benevolent care and provision of a “culturally-uplifting moral vaccine” (Booth, 2012, p. 229, cited in Mantie, 2018) but its paternalistic delivery ensured it was part of a larger apparatus of social control. Such ideas about the moral benefits of singing in harmony may now be outdated but their influence can linger in former colonised settings as part of the residue of the colonial values system, particularly among those elites that benefited (and continue to benefit) from it. Offering experiences of harmony-as-order to those still dealing with the ravages of imperialism requires considerable reflexivity and context sensitivity (an example of this is discussed in Howell, 2017).

Harmony-as-blend is similarly equivocal in its role and contributions to peacebuilding. This kind of harmony is produced by blending multiple different voices (ideas, opinions, interests) into a single unified whole, a homogenous blend, through which the many voices will speak as one. It can be seen in two particular political processes: the aforementioned combining of marginalised voices on a single issue in order to amplify them and more effectively lobby for political change; and top-down efforts to inculcate a population with a desired national narrative.

Harmony-as-blend brings to the latter process a symbolic representation of the task of constructing a nation out of disparate and possibly hostile tribes and clans through building a shared sense of nationhood. This enormous political task often arises in the aftermath of identity-based conflict and can be an important component of a larger peacebuilding project (Beyer and Girke, 2015), helping to reduce factional violence while also bestowing legitimacy upon an incumbent government. Music ensembles made up of representatives from the conflicting constituent groups offer both sonic and visual representations of harmony-as-blend. The multiethnic ensembles of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music are often rhetorically framed as models of this version of social harmony, symbolising “tomorrow’s Afghanistan [...] which embraces diversity and equal opportunity for everyone [and a] most beautiful mosaic of Afghan ethnicity” (ANIM founder and director Ahmad Sarmast, in Rasmussen, 2015, para. 20).

However, harmony-as-blend contains some ambiguous messages about diversity. Where Lederach's agonistic process seeks out diversity in order to be strengthened by it, harmony-as-blend gives greater value to the finished blend in which the distinctive edges and accents of the contributing voices have been smoothed away. There are numerous examples of nation-building projects that sideline the interests and rights of vulnerable groups, producing the appearance (but not the reality) of national unity (as has happened in Rwanda, for example, Thomson, 2011). A harmony resulting from *blending* therefore requires a very nuanced reading in order to identify its relationship to a socially just peace.

Thinking about the ways a cross-community ensemble may deliver wider national messaging brings the performative aspect of harmony to the fore. Music and musicians have long played an important role in providing symbolic language that reinforces the prevailing social system (Gad, 2017, p. 83), and harmony-as-performance has a potentially powerful role in embodying a model of future peaceful society.

Such performances of harmony are intended to generate hope, but they have multiple audiences beyond the citizenry. Both Dardashti (2013) and Brinner (2009) describe government and foreign instigation of 'co-existence music collaborations' in the Middle East that provide a symbolic representation of conflict transformation between Israelis and Palestinians. During times of heightened crisis (e.g. when negotiations stalled or when the ongoing conflict had escalated to be impacting daily life), *local* interest in these performances evaporated, as the relationships they depicted were incongruent with the local lived experience. Conversely, the appeal of cross-community ensembles to *foreign* audiences surged during times of crisis. The presentation of highly-curated and idealised harmony and cooperation helped distract foreign audiences' attention from the deteriorated political environment, giving motivation for the continued sponsorship of negotiations, and reassurance of their value (Dardashti, 2013, p. 36).

Similar marketing of a desired future is attached to performances by the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, whose Arab and Israeli musicians perform European orchestra music for predominantly European audiences and sponsors. Its modeling of co-existence both symbolises a complex conflict and simultaneously erases it for an audience eager for reassuring and optimistic endings (Beckles Willson, 2009a, 2009b; Riiser, 2010). Meanwhile, the ensembles of the Afghanistan National Institute of Music that integrate Western and Afghan instruments and repertoire symbolise a possible future of harmonious cooperation between two very different cultures. I have argued elsewhere (Howell, 2017) that ANIM's performances of harmony and hope are valuable currency for its high-powered Western sponsors (including the World Bank and the U.S. Government), enabling them to show their domestic audiences the positive results of intervention in Afghanistan. This in turn helps shore up continued support for aid and military interventions there (Howell, 2017; Turner, 2013), and avoid the political consequences of a military intervention deemed 'unsuccessful'.

An alternative reading of harmony-as-performance finds it offering cross-community ensemble members valuable experiences of harmonising and working in harmony with 'the other.' The intense process of engaging in aesthetic creation with others creates potential space for the interpersonal relationship-building, cultural sharing and dialogue that are important peacebuilding processes (Bloomfield, 2006; Cohen, 2005). Cheah (2009), for example, has documented examples of constructive relationship-building and dialogue among members of the

West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. Performances of harmony can therefore be crucibles of a dialogic and bottom-up interpersonal harmony while simultaneously symbolising an idealised *surface* harmony to specific targeted audiences.

Lastly, projects that work away from the structures of a pre-existing harmonic system merit some discussion, not least because they might offer the closest musical representation of Lederach's improvisatory, context-responsive, transformative approach to peacebuilding. Lederach likens building sustainable peace with a process that is in essence an engagement with the unknown, one that brings qualities of curiosity, creativity, discovery, and invention to the fore. The Arab-Israeli music collaborations that Brinner (2009) describes offer an example of how this might work in musical action.

These collaborations were cross-community *bands*, initiated by musicians rather than cultural or political brokers. Groups such as Al Bustan and Alei Hayazit explored, performed, and recorded hybrid music drawing on a wide range of influences: Arab, Jewish, Western, Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and Afro-diasporic practices. Through their navigations of multiple musical and sociocultural divides and using improvisation and composition, they created original bodies of work that were grounded in local musical idioms but that generated a new musical grammar (Brinner, 2009, p. 326). Their motivations and goals were musical rather than political.

The absence of external sponsorship in the instigation of these collaborations is significant. Several scholars have observed that musician-initiated cross-community projects tend to feature more negotiated and collaborative processes, reflecting and featuring (rather than homogenising) the voices and interests within the group. Unsurprisingly, the musical outcomes of these collaborations tend to hold greater significance for local audiences (Bergh, 2010; Brinner, 2009; Dardashti, 2013). These accounts suggest that the more bottom-up the process, and the less external interest or sponsorship is involved in a music project, the more it will resemble and function as a locally-driven *dialogue* than a top-down *harmony*, and the more closely it will resemble Lederach's principles for "giving birth to that which does not yet exist" (2005, p. 29).

The ensembles that Brinner describes do not neatly align with any of the concepts of harmony previously described. Harmony-as-balance – where balance refers to a dynamic process of maintaining equilibrium in response to constant small changes and shifts in a large, inter-dependent ecology – is perhaps the closest because of its engagement with constant change. However, it falls somewhat short of capturing the exploratory and creative characteristics of these ensembles' work. Harmony-as-balance presumes that balance is the ideal and natural state of things, returned to and maintained through constant calibration or fine-tuning. In contrast, the cross-community ensembles that Brinner describes are engaged in processes of construction and creation of something *new*. These processes share considerable common ground with the characteristics and qualities that Lederach assigns to his concept of the moral imagination, including the collective willingness to engage with 'conflict' (in the form of diverse and often divergent practices) in order to transform it. Arguably, Brinner's groups are not modelling harmony in any of its conceptualisations; rather, they are offering a metaphor for the *building* component of peacebuilding.

The cross-community ensembles discussed in this section illustrate the predominant ways that harmony, played or performed, might contribute to the larger peacebuilding endeavor. The contributions have both top-down and bottom-up

orientations. Bottom-up contributions tend to work at the interpersonal level and can be very meaningful for those involved, such as the tranquility that individuals found within the sonic and social order of an inter-ethnic choir, or the formation of constructive inter-communal relationships through performing musical harmony together in a cross-community orchestra. Meanwhile, top-down contributions may be more superficial, or mask agendas more concerned with social control.

The ambivalence of harmony's potential contributions to peacebuilding in these different conceptualisations suggests that harmony requires scrutiny when evoked in the context of conflict and social divisions. We might ask: what kind of harmony, and who is calling for it? Who will enact it? Who benefits, and how, from this particular performance? Is anyone excluded from this harmony? If the intention is to deliver a just peace rather than a surface harmony, then these are important questions, and uncritical acceptance of harmony as a goal, value, process or experience may undermine projects with more progressive or radical intentions.

### **CONCLUSION: HARMONY AS A KEYWORD FOR MUSIC IN PEACEBUILDING**

Harmony therefore often comes with strings attached (to extend the musical metaphor a step further), presenting both limitations and possibilities as a keyword for the field of music in peacebuilding. Through an examination of different conceptualisations of harmony in both the musical and social domains, I have created a heuristic through which harmony, its values, practices and affordances might be understood more critically. I have interrogated the ways that these contrasting concepts of harmony are enacted or metaphorically represented in music, referencing cross-community music projects that are often cited as modeling harmony in the public imaginary. The resulting discussion offers a more nuanced reading of harmony as a contributor to the task of building a more peaceful society than the word's definitional slippage often provides. My hope is that this can stimulate a more critical assessment of how and when harmony is rhetorically attached to music in peacebuilding work, and deeper reflection on the implications of those attachments, as well as any potential contributions.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Gillian Howell** is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre, Griffith University, where she completed her PhD in 2017. Working across community music, applied ethnomusicology, and music education, her research examines the contributions of participatory music and arts to post-war community building, wellbeing, and reconciliation, and the interactions of these efforts with international aid and development. She is a Commissioner for the Community Music Activity Commission of the International Society for Music Education, and a former Australian Endeavour Research Fellow. An active participatory music and community cultural development practitioner, Gillian has directed projects in many complex settings, including in remote Indigenous Australia and in post-conflict settings in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Asia.

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