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**Meaningfulness in DIY/DIWO Music Making and Learning:  
A duoethnographic exploration of a rock band and a high school choir**

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**DIY/DIWO Dispositions in Music Making and Learning**

Alongside and outwith the more structured music making and learning environments typical of music industry and educational contexts, many people derive meaningfulness through do-it-yourself (DIY) musicking practices (Quigley & Smith, 2021). In this article we highlight activities in two contexts broadly aligned with Bennett and Guerra's (2023) understanding of DIY practices as composed of appealing alternatives to "mass produced and commodified forms of culture... [and which are] aligned with an anti-hegemonic ideology focused upon aesthetic preferences" (p. 3). The phenomena we describe naturally exist and overlap in a wider cultural ecosystem, wherein "DIY and contemporary independent music practices and careers coexist with mainstream ones in a continuum" (Oliveira, 2023, p. 20). We set out herein to explore how musicians with DIY/DIWO dispositions (including the authors) found meaningfulness in recording rock album *Heart Radar* (Gareth) and from working with a high school choir (Austina).

Scholars in music, education and other areas such as arts entrepreneurship have underscored that DIY activities are rarely actually solo projects but are far more often deeply collaborative undertakings. As such, Hartley (2012) coined the phrase "DIY/DIWO (do it yourself/do it with others)" (p. 8), which Cayari (2021) observes as characteristic "dispositions" in how many musicians today co-create culture (p. 296). DIY/DIWO music makers and learners are concerned primarily with connective, collaborative practice (Smith 2022) – underscoring DIY/DIWO as dispositional, rather than being an approach one might adopt for a one-off project. Recalling Dawkins' (2010) notion of "self-fulfilling labor" (p. 273), Smith and Gillett (2015) note how "mutually sustaining" DIY/DIWO approaches to music making and learning embody a "democratic and facilitative pedagogical ethos" (21) that serves to boost connection among participants. This echoes Green's (2001, 2008) work on collaborative music learning approaches based on research into how popular musicians learn. Jenkins et al. (2009) similarly articulate how co-creators' "contributions matter and [they] feel some degree of social connection with one another" (xi). Finding meaningfulness in connecting through collaboration is a primary motivator and outcome throughout this duoethnographic study – for us (Gareth and Austina) as co-authors as well as in the two contexts we discuss below.

Gareth, a music education professor at a private research university in the Northeastern US, took part in the *Heart Radar* album recording as part of a longtime friendship with Stephen, who wrote the songs on the record to celebrate his recently deceased mother. As part of the authors' duoethnographic research process, Austina, a music educator at a public high school in Colorado, US, contemplated how she fosters and might continue to co-cultivate a DIY/DIWO environment (Cayari, 2020; Hartley, 2012) with students. Working within restrictions of course offerings and policies dictated by the school district (Lee, in press), Austina is motivated to

provide choir students with DIY/DIWO music making opportunities through which they can discover and foster their passions and engage in meaningful musical encounters that might inspire lifelong engagement with music (Mantie & Smith, 2017; Mantie & Talbot, 2021). In this duoethnographic study, we address two research questions:

- How did four musicians make meaning from preparing for and recording the DIY/DIWO rock album, *Heart Radar*?
- How did a high school choir teacher affirm and develop DIY/DIWO practices in her pedagogy in response to understandings garnered from the experiences for musicians in the *Heart Radar* project?

*Heart Radar*, on which Gareth played drums and sang backing vocals, is a DIY/DIWO project insofar as its making was independently funded by the band leader/songwriter, it was released independently of a record label, and received no support from commercial promotion or distribution services (Tanenbaum et al., 2013). As typifies independent, DIY/DIWO music projects, this was undertaken largely *by* the musicians involved, *for* the musicians involved (Dawkins, 2010) rather than serving commercial ends or goals (Gordon, 2012; Smith & Gillett, 2015). As Smith's (2017) participants noted, "the main thing... is collaboration... [we are] not terribly concerned with any external measurement of what that is" (p. 159). Austina was struck upon listening to Gareth reflect on this DIY/DIWO disposition, as choir culture in US secondary schools can be hyper-competitive and focused on canonical works, competition, ratings and other external motivators (Lee & Smith, 2023; Powell, 2023); *Heart Radar* hinted at and illuminated emerging aspects of a possible alternative choir culture that focuses on DIY/DIWO musicking. Herein we construe a DIY/DIWO approach in music education as "alternative" insofar as it differs considerably from US cultural norms; in other countries, such an approach is more commonplace (Hebert et al, 2017).

In our focus on meaningfulness in DIY/DIWO music making and learning (Silverman, 2020), this study builds on scholarship that (re-)centres how meaning is made by the folks making the music; in Mantie's (2023) words, "damn it! The teaching of music is about more than the music. There are people involved!" (p. 117). Throughout society, meaningfulness in making music can be derived largely from connection sought through social engagement (Sole & Cali, 2022; Mantie, 2022; Silverman, 2020). People instinctively seek out connection in musicking yet this is rarely prioritised as a justification or reason for making music in schools (Lee & Smith, 2023; Mantie & Smith, 2016); although we are not suggesting that music education is never already focused on meaningfulness among students. Silverman (2020, 2023) underscores how, in music making and learning, meaningfulness lies in deep intrapersonal and interpersonal connection, so we sought to identify practices that emphasise meaningfulness through authentic connection (Hendricks, 2018, 2021) among musicians with DIY/DIWO dispositions.

## **Methodology**

In this qualitative study we present "nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about *particular* lives, experiences, and relationships rather than *general* information about large groups of people" (Adams et al, 2015, p. 41). A key aim in qualitative inquiry "is to connect with

people on the level of human meaning” (Wall, 2006. p. 156). Herein, we acknowledge an emphasis on emotion over accuracy or verifiability, as is characteristic of such research (Freeman, 2015; Glesne, 2016), unlike in more traditional, positivistic research approaches. In exploring both authors’ contexts and practices, this article follows a duoethnographic approach – a development of autoethnographic scholarship (Jones et al, 2013) and “a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context . . . a method and a text” (Reed-Danahay, 1997, p. 9) that “embrace[s] vulnerability with purpose” (Denzin, 2014, p. 2).

Our duoethnographic approach (Sawyer & Norris, 2013) to this study is a vigorous DIY/DIWO research process rooted in our respective contexts in which we are deeply socially and emotionally invested. Duoethnography, developed from autoethnography (Denzin, 2014), conveys emotions evoked from personal experiences and portrays meaningful learning from in-depth reflection. This approach necessitates and nurtures interpersonal connection (Denzin, 2014), inviting collaborative reflection that can lead to findings and epiphanies that may not otherwise arise (Smith et al., 2022). We worked throughout the deeply discursive and reflective research process as co-researchers and co-authors (Sawyer & Norris, 2013). The study thus forms part of our respective and collective journeys toward better understanding ourselves as musicians and teachers, with the goal of engaging with fellow musicians and with students (DIWO) as effectively and authentically as possible, emphasising meaningfulness derived therefrom (Palmer, 1998; Jordan, 1999; Lee, 2023; Smith, 2023a). Our processes co-mingled, and as typifies subjective, immersive scholarship rooted in our passions and interests, there was often no clear boundary between the study and our lives (Barz, 2006; Ingold, 2011).

Duoethnographic scholarship is especially suited to studies of music education (Bartleet and Ellis, 2015; Kladder & Cummings, 2023). We selected this approach to garner rich understandings from the contexts explored, rather than opting for an empirical study design such as a comparative or experimental study (Stake 1995; Creswell, 2007). We hope we have been able to “uncover the nature of [our own and others’] actions and experiences and perspectives” (Glaser, 1992, p. 12), in our efforts as “artist-researcher[s] striving to portray, to depict, to describe... attempt[ing] in words to distil the essence of phenomena” (Smith, 2011, p. 27). As Kozel (2007) has articulated, “the strength of the researcher is precisely the ability to give up the guise of detachment” (p. 69). This study thus aligns with a burgeoning body of research in music education based on understanding that, while we can make no claims about generalizability, what we offer in particularization might help support other musicians and music educators explore their own contexts with a specificity and depth conducive to understanding the uniqueness of cultures in which they work. This can allow music teachers and students to work together based on greater understanding of one another’s expressed needs and interests, promoting reflection and self-discovery.

## ***Method***

In October 2022, Gareth travelled from his home in the US to visit Stephen at home in Wales over a weekend. After a recent missed opportunity to record music together that left the two friends crestfallen, they determinedly prepared for and prioritised an intensive recording

session. Stephen had written songs for the album, creating and sharing demos, sourcing a bass player, writing notation, discussing parts with band members, and crafting musical and logistical arrangements to ensure a successful weekend of making and recording music together. The recording team comprised Stephen (songwriting, guitars, lead vocals), Gareth (drums, backing vocals), Rob (piano), Dan (bass guitar) and Dave (recording engineer). The musicians rehearsed for two days and recorded for one, socialising and sharing meals throughout. Gareth invited the musicians to be interviewed about the process, and all agreed except Dave. Gareth interviewed his bandmates in April and May, 2023.

Gareth invited Austina to interview him in June 2023, hoping to garner more data than had he reflected alone. The interview proved so generative and energising that we felt compelled to work together throughout data analysis and writing. Gareth's invitation to involve Austina in the data collection and analysis of this project inspired her to reflect upon and lean farther into her DIY/DIWO pedagogical work. Within the framework of her choir classes, she encourages and empowers high school students to embrace personal passion projects amidst the strictures and structures of schooling (Lee & Smith, 2022). Writing this article about our practices and experiences in our respective contexts emerged from discussion that characterises our ongoing duoethnographic collaboration as scholars – an extended DIWO partnership rooted in exploring meaningfulness through authentic connection.

### **Fun, Fulfilment, Friendship and Familiarity**

Following established qualitative research protocols (Bresler & Stake, 2006; Robson, 2011; Stock, 2004) and in a collaborative manner consistent with duoethnographic research (Sawyer & Norris, 2013), we initially analysed the data intensively over two weeks through conversations via phone and video conferencing and exchanged hundreds of voice and text messages. We then undertook an iterative coding and writing process (Saldaña, 2021) that generated lists of recurring topics. Through the coding process, four themes arose under which we organised the data: fun, fulfilment, friendship and familiarity. The following sections depict analysis of data from the *Heart Radar* and high school choral settings, interlaced with scholarship that helps situate our discussion.

#### **Fun**

Scholars tend to parse fun or *hedonia* from fulfilment or *eudaimonia* (Deci & Ryan, 2008) – with *eudaimonia* pertaining to more serious and shared fulfilment, and *hedonia* associated with more frivolous or passing pleasure and personal satisfaction (Elliott, 2020; Mantie, 2020; Norton, 1976; Norton & Kille, 1971). Fun is often discussed in terms of play and playfulness (Gadamer, 2004; Huizinga, 1976), while Brown (2009) asserts that in pursuit of a meaningful life, “fun is your north star” (p. 213) because “play is what allows us to attain a higher level of existence, new levels of mastery, imagination, and culture” (p. 202). The musicians of *Heart Radar* engaged in musical and extra-musical play. The night following the rehearsals and prior to the recording day, they spent several hours eating dinner together, relishing fellowship and conversation. Dan recalled that “in the rehearsal room we’re all having a laugh, it’s so relaxed”.

Similarly, Rob said the weekend “was fun. I enjoyed the humour”. Their delight in the playfulness of the process recalls Huizinga’s (1976) assertion that “the need for [play is]... urgent” and “the enjoyment of it makes a need” (p. 51). Dan went on to say “I wish we could do this all the time!”, echoing Gadamer’s (2004) recognition of how, ideally, “the player loses himself in play” (p. 107). Stephen also exemplified Gadamer’s observation, finding fun integral to his “process of writing, recording, realising songs – the creative journey”.

In DIY/DIWO practices and contexts it is common for people to make music for “plain fun” (Waldron, 2016). Following Green (2001), Smith (2013) similarly noted musicians make music together “as a fun way to socialize” (p. 35). In this vein, Rob emphasised “doing something because you want to do it; do it because it’s fun!” Dan found rehearsing “fun; it’s addictive; it’s such a buzz!” Rob emphasised how the playful atmosphere enabled him to grow as a musician, identifying how “laughter and learning go together; if you have fun, you are relaxed, you’re more likely to take this in, you’re also likely to perform better. So I think it’s important not to be too serious or take things too seriously”.

Seriousness of purpose tends to characterise the stress of being a high school student in the US, including pressure students experience to perform in accordance with adults’ expectations. Balancing stressors with fun in Austina’s choir class involves providing opportunities for levity. Inspired by the fun experienced by the musicians making *Heart Radar*, Austina focused on encouraging students to reflect and identify ways they find music making fun then incorporated activities such as karaoke days and dance parties into the choir rehearsals wherein students sing with, perform for and move with one another in a light-hearted setting that invites collaboration and connection and inevitably leads to jubilation and laughter – thereby enhancing, not diminishing, learning (Cayari, 2021). It became evident very quickly that students enjoy singing, playing and performing music that they know well and with which they connect; in this way, they get to “do something because they want to do it” (Rob) which emphasises ways DIY/DIWO activities promote fun. These reprieves from the hard grind of school created an atmosphere steeped in meaningful connection that made other school experiences more tolerable: “Choir is wonderful. You make things fun... thank you!” (anonymous student note). Correspondingly, Brown (2009) urges people to “nourish your mode of play, and be with people who nourish it, too” (p. 215) – as exemplified in the DIY/DIWO *Heart Radar* and choral teaching contexts.

### ***Fulfilment***

Wolf (2010) maintains that the fulfilment/fun or eudaimonia/hedonia distinction is disingenuous, since pursuit of personal purpose is necessarily hedonic inasmuch as it deals with individualistic satisfaction. Our findings revealed Apollonian fulfilment and Dionysian fun as symbiotic in musicians’ experiences of meaningfulness – that which was fulfilling was also fun, and vice-versa. Members of the cultures of *Heart Radar* and high school music education revelled and flourished in opportunities “to socialize, engage, and relax with other like-minded people” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 100). The *Heart Radar* musicians found fulfilment through achieving their collective DIY/DIWO aim; they finished the three days with all basic tracks for

the album recorded. Each described how successfully meeting this goal was possible because of the diligence and care with which they had prepared. All were accomplished musicians with high levels of expertise to match their expectations for the project, which enabled them to experience it as fulfilling (Mantie, 2020). For instance, Gareth left enough gaps in his preparation that the weekend could be playful and productive, recalling “I wanted to know the songs well enough that I wouldn’t be surprised, but I didn’t want to over-prepare as I wanted there to be a creativity and vibe in the rehearsals and in the [recording] studio”.

The recording experience was fulfilling also because the music sounded like the kind they already liked, demonstrating what Moore (2002) termed “authenticity of expression” (p. 214), whereby musicians authenticate their own and one another’s musicking in a shared cultural tradition (Moore, 2002; Smith, 2022). Gareth noted that Stephen is his “favourite band”, and Dan asserted, “the songs are great... it’s nice to do something that sounds like something you would listen to, when you make music that you like”. Per Wolf (2009), this is evidence of how “meaningfulness [through DIY/DIWO activity] comes about when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness, and one is able to do something about it” (p. 261).

Austina has noticed choir students’ eagerness to pursue opportunities to independently prepare performances for peers. Initially this arose when Austina invited students to audition to perform solos between chorus songs at concerts and the uptake was consistently enthusiastic. Then, in online schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic, Austina’s invitation to record performances to include in a virtual concert yielded over two hours of music from students. In response to the enthusiasm generated by performing what they want in the way they want and with whom they want, Austina invites students to prepare solo or small-group performances for their classmates as a final project each semester and is perpetually inspired by the students’ investment of effort. This DIY/DIWO culture has led Austina, with student guidance, to schedule informal open-mic nights where students perform with and for one another.

Minimal direction and involvement from the teacher in preparation and execution in these settings allowed space for students to learn and discover. As Cayari (2020) stated, “there is no need for educators to walk students through every step of the process when cultivating a DIY disposition” (p. 8). Students invested tremendous time and energy into improving their skills to express themselves at the open mics through original and cover songs with which they connect emotionally. They find fulfilment in the process and in successful execution in a low-stakes setting. They celebrate and honour one another throughout the performances, deepening mutual respect and authentic connection. Although solo and small group performances of popular music are not the normative purview of choral music in public education, responding to obvious student interest by enabling these DIY/DIWO activities has engendered a positive alternative music education culture. Reading and discussing the *Heart Radar* musicians’ accounts affirmed Austina’s conviction that experiences emphasising authentic human connection could position students to continue meaningful musicking throughout their lives.

### ***Friendship***

Lewis (1960) described friendship as “a relationship between men [sic] at their highest level of individuality” (p. 76). Playing and recording his original music is completely core to Stephen’s sense of self (Smith, 2017a) and realising this music with Stephen is central to Gareth’s identity (Smith, 2022). Their DIY/DIWO practice is central to how these two are friends; Stephen (2023) described this as “great love and respect for one another that’s built up over a 25-year long friendship ❤️” (personal communication). Loving oneself (hooks, 2000) through being authentic in one’s actions, meaningfully for self and with others, defines friendship.

Stephen, Rob and Gareth had recorded together before, and discussed Dan joining them for *Heart Radar*. Stephen wanted someone with whom he connected socially (he bonded with Dan over beers) because “the camaraderie of the musicians is as important as the music... I need people to be on-side for the music to work”. Rob affirmed “Dan, yeah, no question”, and Gareth “knew Dan would be all right, because he’s married to Stephen’s wife’s friend... I trusted that friendship tree”, affirming his conviction that “making music with friends is important”. Dan found Stephen had “just got that kind of persona” to which he warmed. The mutuality of this sentiment became clear to Austina, who in the interview recordings observed tenderness and love in the musicians’ voices, conveying closeness and trust. All were keen to support Stephen in making *Heart Radar*.

Recording *Heart Radar* exemplifies friendship as love, including Stephen and Gareth’s friendship that has to date manifested over a quarter-century in rehearsals, concerts, albums and years of cohabitation. The musicians “share and enjoy the same thing” (Vost, 2018, p. 35), underscoring how “friendship must be about something” (Lewis, 1969, p. 85). The musicians experienced one another’s reciprocity of friendship, so could be fully themselves in “reciprocal benevolence” (Vost, 2018, p. 18). For instance, Rob said “I really love Stephen absolutely to bits”, love that was clearly reciprocated; Stephen said “Rob is just Rob and I admire that. And he was a great support to me when all the stuff was happening with my mum”.

During most of Austina’s choir rehearsals, there is little time for talking. However, creating and learning music together provides students with opportunities to connect without extended dialogue (Noddings, 2005), frequently leading to expressions of friendship. Inspired by *Heart Radar* to acknowledge these connections among her students, Austina incorporated an affirmations activity; during rehearsal students write notes to one another identifying aspects of their peers they appreciate or find inspiring. This has shifted how students interact during class as they have become more sensitive to ways they feel positively influenced by their fellow musicians. Feeling love as friendship in music can motivate students to pursue similar feelings elsewhere, especially since feelings are often experienced before they can be articulated (Childre and Martin, 1999). Following the focus on friendship in this choir culture, students have embraced a range of DIY/DIWO activities external to the course. For example, some meet for weekly jam sessions in the choir room, have formed rock bands outside of class and scheduled evening picnics, demonstrating the value they find in doing things with and for one another.

For Vost (2018), a “friend is a second self” (p. 35), nurturing philia – “the joy of loving and being loved... philia is active love” (Compte-Sponville, 2001, p. 268). Recording *Heart Radar* and

developing the collaborative culture in choir, exemplify friendship/philia in DIY/DIWO practice, whereby “if we truly wish good things for our friends, we will take action to achieve them” (Vost, 2018, p. 56). Wolf (2009) describes how people often do what we do for reasons of love”, which Silvermam (2020) explores in music making and learning contexts. In this vein, the *Heart Radar* musicians and choir community experienced meaning as based in DIY/DIWO activity through a shared desire for themselves and others (Wolf, 2009); they were “drawn by the particular values of [their] friend[s]... they are values [they] respond to, for which [they] have an affinity – a subjective attraction, if you will” (2009: 51).

### ***Familiality***

In their writing about music and family, Sole and Cali (2022) note how “popular music may create or strengthen emotional ties between people whether or not they are related by blood ties” (p. 17). In a similar vein, Kotarba (2022) asserts, “‘family’ [broadly construed] provides one of the most important and pervasive contexts for all music”, especially... as a feature of culture and everyday social life” (p. 128). There is perhaps little more “everyday” in Western society than four middle aged white men making rock music together.

The album title “Heart Radar” is drenched in meaningfulness for Stephen, associated with his experience and expression of familial love. Stephen explains:

I wrote a song called “Heart Radar”, which hasn’t been released... The “Heart Radar” title is two things: 1) at the end of the day when I’m in bed knowing that the doors are locked and we’re all safe, and reaching out knowing (not with “the force” or anything) but just thinking about my girls being safe in bed; and 2) like a reaching out to my mum’s spirit – a radar for that. It’s love, really. Love radar, you could say, but “heart radar” sounds a little more poetic – rings a little better (2023, personal communication)

Stephen’s vulnerability with friends through making music in which he openly grieves about his recently departed mother, demonstrates trust and love that engenders a sense of familiality with the other musicians; as our findings show, it was vital to Stephen that this album was more than DIY, that he undertook it as a DIWO project – with people close to him.

Gareth had wanted but been unable to hug and spend time with Stephen immediately following the passing of Stephen’s mother. As such, Gareth experienced drumming on *Heart Radar* as an even closer, albeit belated embrace through co-musicking – writing and playing drums on this record as a DIY/DIWO expression of familial and *philia*-type love for his close friend. Participants also described and demonstrated familiality through hospitality. The recording studio occupied two ground-floor rooms of Dave’s parents’ home. Dave’s parents made the musicians cups of coffee, mugs of tea and cakes, and shared small-batch craft beers with the band in kind fellowship. Rob described how he is so frequent a visitor to Stephen’s home he is essentially a member of that family, and co-creating this music in part enacted that familial love.

Familiarity has developed in Austina's choir culture through the time members spend together investing effort, energy and artistry into co-creating music. Numerous hours shared over several consecutive years (which are developmentally significant due to their maturing through adolescence) make it inevitable that students experience various versions of one another and ride the undulating waves of emotions and moods. Clashes are unavoidable, and conflict resolution deepens bonds. Connections among the students also ebb and flow as they grow alongside one another. Austina prioritises providing unstructured time – often around a meal – for students simply to exist together and experience community organically. Although these occasions may cause some to feel socially awkward, embracing uncomfortable moments and learning to be together inspires creativity in DIY/DIWO connection. These “choir family dinners” often result in students originating DIY/DIWO activities independently of their teacher – playing games, dancing, sharing stories, crafting and cherishing fellowship. As one student wrote, “we are like a big family” (anonymous student note). Austina highlights to students the relationships they are building, discussing these so students might more easily identify and nurture such DIY/DIWO familial experiences throughout their lives.

It is not uncommon for collaborating musicians to be intimately connected in the music they make, through “defining characteristics of family” or “a brotherhood” (Sole & Cali, 2022, p. 15), where people's “musical collaboration, their interactions and the emotional commitment to each other and the musical vision shared together added a layer of affective commitment” to the musical processes and outcomes (Sole & Cali, 2022, p. 14). Our findings provide evidence of familiarity among the *Heart Radar* musicians and the alternative choral culture nurtured by Austina. Familiarity provides a vital locus of meaningfulness in both of these DIY/DIWO musicking contexts.

### ***Finally***

For the *Heart Radar* recording, fun, fulfilment, friendship and familiarity were central to the musicians' intentions going into the project, while in Austina's high school choir context, such phenomena are generally construed as potential results of or rewards for hard work and excellence, so that the community's DIY/DIWO proclivities had to be nurtured, even reignited. There is a poster in a school hallway reading “it is fun to be great”, exemplifying the school's culture of a measurable music education prioritising pitch and rhythmic accuracy over meaningful musical ends. As another example, for her professional evaluation Austina must provide quantitative evidence of students' growth based upon sight-singing assessments. Although skill mastery is essential to musicking, as discussed by the *Heart Radar* participants, it is ultimately a vehicle to meaningfulness and human connection. A student in Austina's choir captured this essence when they wrote to their teacher, “as much as I have loved the music we have made over the years, it has never been about that... this choir community has taught me how to love others” (anonymous student note) – surely among the highest of DIY/DIWO aspirations.

### **Conclusions**

A concise answer to our first research question (“How did four musicians make meaning from preparing for and recording the DIY/DIWO rock album, *Heart Radar?*”) is that they did this by establishing and maintaining authentic connections with one another in their DIY/DIWO dispositions, through friendship and making music. Dividends from the musicians’ relational investments were evident in the interviews wherein the participants reflected on their experience, describing meaningfulness with gentleness, vulnerability and authenticity. These musicians exemplified the kind of DIY music-making disposition identified by de Waaal (2019), inasmuch as they were “knowledgeable, responsible, independent, empowered and empathically connected to the product, the making process and other like-minded individuals” (p. 4). A short answer to our second research question (“How did a high school choir teacher affirm and develop DIY/DIWO in her pedagogical practice in response to understandings garnered from the experiences for musicians in the *Heart Radar* project?”) is that Austina nurtured an alternative culture of authentic connection with her students – DIY/DIWO practices being counter-hegemonic to normative music education approaches locally and in a majority of US public schools (Smith & Moir 2022). Articulating a growing conviction among music education scholars and practitioners (Hendricks, 2021; Jordan, 1999; Mantie, 2023), Smith (2023b) notes how “it’s ultimately all about *people*” (p. 83, emphasis in original). Austina likewise demonstrates that “people are [her] vocation” (de los Santos, 2023, p. 216), evidenced by her DIY/DIWO disposition to curate an alternative music education culture and the ebullience with which her students expressed themselves and their appreciation.

Austina found that adopting a DIY/DIWO approach to curating an alternative culture in her choral classroom, focused on authentic connection, resulted in traditional aspects of chorus class – learning music from staff notation and performing in concerts – being more robust and fulfilling. The increased connection among the students and with the music correlated with increased motivation to invest the effort necessary to create music at a high level and demonstrate vulnerable expression, engendering experiences of meaningfulness. Perhaps as important as providing opportunities for students to experience fun, fulfilment, friendship and familiarity through music is encouraging self-reflection to identify how they experience these facets. Meaningfulness is necessarily subjective, therefore requiring self-awareness so individuals can pursue experiences through which they find meaning and connection. Connection happens in various ways. Some students connect profoundly through music but otherwise never spend time together. Others are close friends but do not make music together as intimately. This exploration of connection at a young age exposes students to the value of intentionally pursuing connections and relationships that feel right, understanding that feeling happens faster than cognition and that common interests and passions bring people together. In music education settings, there can be tremendous value in providing students access to ways to engage with music, then facilitating reflection upon students’ experiences to encourage them to pursue DIY/DIWO musicking rich in authentic human connection (Lee & Smith, 2023).

Authentic connection through collaborative, meaningful musicking can help people experience healthy, close interpersonal relationships (Hendricks, 2018, 2021). Music making requires vulnerability and creativity, so settings in which students can be playful and have fun offer low-risk opportunities to grow as musicians and people. We were struck by the prominence of play

and fun arising in *Heart Radar* and among the choir students. Fun was fundamental to the *Heart Radar* recording process and integral to the meaningfulness participants derived from it. By contrast, US music education seems often to eschew fun, beholden to neoliberal ideology that perpetuates testing, competition and a teleology of employment-readiness (Lee, 2023; Powell, 2023). If studies such as this can highlight the profound value and meaningfulness residing in DIY/DIWO music-making for fun, fulfilment, friendship and familiarity (instead of focusing on market-driven teleologies), perhaps music educators might encourage more musicians to more readily embrace this ethos and establish alternative cultures centred on authentic connection, enabling and empowering students to pursue their passions in inspired, meaningful lives.

This study is necessarily limited in its focus and scope, and we acknowledge that not all music making is characterised by such positive emotions and experiences as the *Heart Radar* project or the choir culture developed by Austina and her students. It is entirely possible to create music that may achieve considerable acclaim and/or commercial success in the absence of fun, fulfilment, friendship or familiarity. Literature pertaining to the entertainment industry is replete with examples of tumult, conflict and drama (Leaf, 1978; Morrow, 2012; Robertson, 1996; True, 2005; Williams, 2007). No doubt, part of the reason for the overall positive experience of making *Heart Radar* was that it was a one-off; working together on making music day-in and day-out provides many more opportunities for tension and discord, among the gamut of human emotions, to arise. Ward and Watson (2017) studied, for instance, the emotional labor exerted in recording studios, where producers negotiate complex emotional states and relationships among musicians.

Our thesis is not groundbreaking, inasmuch as this paper joins a plethora of publications that point to a panoply of people and places that prioritise the humanising experience and meaningfulness residing in musicking focused on fun, fulfilment, friendship and familiarity. We have highlighted how meaningfulness can reside in DIY/DIWO practices of music making and learning – which feels especially important to remember in a deepeningly neoliberal era in which local, state and national governments increasingly prioritise standardised assessment performance and workplace readiness in lieu of encouraging expression, agency, collaboration and humanity (Lee, 2023; Smith & Moir, 2021). We hope that this article might help bolster and energise our peers in music and music education professions as they pursue meaningfulness in DIY/DIWO projects of their own. We hope also that this study serves as a welcome reminder of the humanising potential of making music as powerful, persistent and as irreplaceable as ever.

### ***Towards Intimate Connection***

In this article we presented and discussed examples of how meaningfulness resides in DIY/DIWO music making practices and derives from fun, fulfilment, friendship and familiarity, rooted in establishing, feeling and maintaining authentic connection in making and learning music (Hendricks, 2018, 2021; Hendricks & Boyce-Tillman, 2021). Among the musicians who created *Heart Radar*, we saw evidence of an even deeper bond – *intimate connection*. Ellen Dissanayake (2000) describes intimacy as providing “ways to instil a sense of belonging,

meaning, and competence in people” (p. 13) and she equates intimacy with love, characterising artistic intimacy in particular as “mutuality and elaboration (love and art)” (p. 13). Such intimacy is clear among the musicians, especially between Stephen, Rob and Gareth, whose friendship evinces intimate connection. For instance, Gareth noted in his interview how “I realised, oh my god, this is about Stephen’s mum and I got really choked up sitting there in the studio [as Stephen recorded vocals]. There was pathos in his voice and I could tell this was a cathartic experience for him”.

We are excited herein to have also highlighted some of the vigour and vitality experienced through nurturing an alternative culture in music education, wherein honest, vulnerable, sustained relationships are encouraged not for utility or economic reasons, but for the potential of authentic, intimate connection shared through mutually meaningful DIY/DIWO music making and learning. For us as authors and collaborating scholars, undertaking this DIY/DIWO, duoethnographic project has also been an immersive experience by turns fun, fulfilling and founded in familial friendship. Through exploring meaningfulness in music making and learning, we found further meaningfulness for ourselves in our mutual scholarly process. We encourage our peers, where possible and desirable, to embrace pursuit of meaningfulness through intimate, collaborative DIY/DIWO practice.

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