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Creating collective effervescence through musicking at Burning Man: a Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study

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Dissertation

CREATING COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE THROUGH MUSICKING AT BURNING MAN: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

DAVID F. BLINK

B.M., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2001
M.M., Central Washington University, 2003

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Approved by

First Reader _____

James S. Imhoff, D.M.A.
Lecturer in Music Education

Second Reader _____

Tawnya D. Smith, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Music, Music Education

Third Reader _____

Andrew M. Goodrich, D.M.A.
Associate Professor of Music, Music Education
Director of Graduate Studies, School of Music

The characteristics of communitas show it to be almost beyond strict definition, with almost endless variations. Communitas often appears unexpectedly. It has to do with a sense felt by a group of people when their life together takes on full meaning .... Communitas can only be conveyed through stories.

– *Edith Turner*

Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to Galloping MacGyver. You have guided me on so many chapters of my life. When I invited you to share Burning Man with me, that chapter became the time I was able to guide you, but to also witness playa magic transform you as well. Thank you for being there for every turn through the hermeneutic spiral with me. I hope to continue to share many more turns in the dust with you, because the playa truly does provide.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was inspired to pursue this as a field of study by the community music groups and events at Burning Man, including the Ambient Drummers, Black Rock Philharmonic, Burning Band, Jazz Café, March Off, Playa Choir, Playa Pops, and Procession Band. Camp *Want It* and *Snowflake Village* have been my second homes in the dust of the playa. I also want to thank the Fire Conclave for gifting me the opportunity to direct the Ambient Drummers and the Procession Band for 6 years. The Playa Census team's dedication to data at Black Rock City has been an invaluable resource, and they are an amazing team to have volunteered with.

I want to thank the five participants (Maestro, Baby Giraffe, Lorax, Sharkie, and Bassoon), who gave their time, support, and self-revelation to make this study possible. Their stories of playa magic and musicking at Burning Man in this dissertation can inspire future generations of burners and community ensemble members to be life-long musicians.

I also want to thank my past community ensembles at Yakima Valley Community College, College of the Siskiyous, and North Idaho College. My ensembles have been the test beds of these ideas and applying the knowledge from this study. To all my professors at Boston University, especially Dr. Tawnya Smith, Dr. James Imhoff, and Dr. Andrew Goodrich, thank you for getting me over the finish line. Finally, thank you to my family who have continuously supported me throughout my doctoral studies.

CREATING COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE

THROUGH MUSICKING AT BURNING MAN:

A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

DAVID F. BLINK

Boston University College of Fine Arts, 2025

Major Professor: James S. Imhoff, D.M.A., Lecturer, Boston University

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study was to explore the lived experience of five Black Rock Philharmonic orchestra members during the creation of collective effervescence in a group of more than 3,000 people at their 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* art installation at Burning Man. According to Collins (2004), collective effervescence can result from a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood, with feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment building the shared mood. If collective effervescence is achieved, the group experiences solidarity, the individuals experience emotional energy, and social relationship symbols are created. Those outcomes can enhance subsequent interaction rituals, creating interaction ritual chains.

I conducted three interviews with each of the five participants, using three focus areas: the 2019 *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, the 2020 virtual encore performance, and the culture of Burning Man along with the persistence of the performances' effects over the next three years. From the general narratives of each set of interviews, eight themes emerged. I used the data from the eight themes to create a

general description of the phenomenon of creating collective effervescence through musicking at Burning Man, using the structures of ritual theory (V. Turner, 1969/2007) and interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2014). The emotional energy from the *Folly* performance carried over to the Temple performance the next day, the virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* during the pandemic, and live performances of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at Burning Man 2022 and 2023, as part of a multi-year interaction ritual chain.

The interaction ritual chains experienced by the study participants were influenced by Burning Man's 10 Principles which St John (2020) called the DNA of the Burning Man culture. Examining the five participants' lived experiences for aspects of Burning Man's culture that could be extended to community college music education and community ensembles, I identified five potential subject areas: hospitality, group solidarity and communitas, symbols of social relationship, playfulness, and planned and spontaneous moments. For each subject area, I provided examples of techniques music education ensemble directors could use to bring elements of Burning Man culture, along with *playa magic*, into their programs.

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Chapter One: Introduction

One of the things that I have always loved about my job as a community college music director is how musicking can create a community of lifelong learners. I love having students in my ensembles with ages ranging from 12 to 90. Joy and art are manifested when multiple generations share their knowledge, and that process leads to a community that is bigger than the individual musicians.

The parents of a friend were staying at my house, and the father, George (a pseudonym), had played trumpet in high school, but had not touched a trumpet for 50 years. Studies have shown that many people struggle with continuing music after formal education due to career or family obligations (Evans et al., 2013; Mantie & Tucker, 2008). I remember *setting the stage*[1] for my secret plan to convert George from a *former musician* to a *hesitant musician* and finally to a *lifelong learner*, a member of a musicking community. During a community college concert band rehearsal, I was talking with other members of the ensemble, being my playful self and joking with them but always keeping an eye on the new guest. I watched George share stories with a middle school aged student ensemble member, and finally got the courage to break the 50-year silence from their former trumpet playing lips. After George's first notes, I jumped up on the podium and stopped the informal warm up process, introducing the guest. I told the band that these were the first trumpet notes after 50 years of silence. The band members cheered, applauded, and surrounded the hesitant musician, congratulating and making

[1] Throughout the dissertation, I use italics to emphasize words or phrases to which I would like to draw the reader's attention.

George feel welcome. With the slight embarrassment minimized by the overwhelming community support, George found a new home, a place of welcome no matter the playing ability. A new musicking identity has been added to George's retired lifestyle. In the following years, I received messages from them, updating me on their new musical experiences. George purchased a new instrument and joined a community ensemble on the East Coast. George is now a *lifelong musician* which includes musicians who have steadily musicked throughout their life as well as those who have had a gap period.

I realized that it was not just how I *set the stag*e that facilitated George's active participation, it was also the community ensemble members themselves who made George feel welcome in so many ways. Their open, playful attitude to musicking was partially due to how I conducted the ensemble. This was my third year at this community college, and I had been very deliberate in learning the cultural traditions and rituals that were part of this strong musicking community, even as I incorporated my own personality into the program. Part of my musical identity was heavily influenced by my participation in Burning Man and its culture. Burning Man, an annual week-long festival held on a playa (dry lakebed) in the Nevada desert in late August, created a temporary city of 80,000 people (*burners*) called Black Rock City (Burning Man Project, 2017). Appendix A is a map of Black Rock City.[2] At the beginning of each school year, I returned from Burning Man filled with stories of transformations caused by musicking, being playful in what I wear to work, and sharing the *playa magic*[3] by being playful and

[2] Appendix A also describes the naming and layout of city streets.
[3] *Playa magic* is a term that burners use for serendipitous moments that produce joy or awe.

radical with my traditional and lifelong learner students. Perhaps my plan was not using *magic*; indeed, it was using specific techniques that can facilitate lifelong learning. I believe it was not one thing that led George on a journey to again become a musicker; rather, it was a chain of interactions that facilitated transformation. It was interesting to explore the ingredients that lead to this type of personal transformation and the influence of the ensemble members and the culture of the lifelong music community in the small towns and rural area that my college served.

Just as individuals can transform, groups can also transform, thereby creating group solidarity. Were the techniques that transformed George also applicable to transforming a group? In preparing for a holiday concert, I applied some of these same techniques in a different way, to decide what the ensemble should wear for an upcoming concert. The program was filled with songs that evoke the beauty and the nature of the Old West. I said that the ensemble could wear cowboy shirts, but having recently helped with the college's celebration of *National Coming Out Day*, I told the ensemble that I wanted the term to be gender neutral. This led to a spirited band discussion on how to find a name for flannel shirts with snap buttons. The ensemble members identified that the snap buttons were an important feature to a playful gender-neutral term the ensemble was seeking. The new name for the shirts became *Lip Smackin' Snappies* which turned into a social relationship symbol for the ensemble. The ensemble shared the concert with the community choir who were dressed in traditional concert black, which resulted in their questioning looks at the ensemble members' attire on concert day. Their looks changed as they heard the ensemble's beautiful music. That ensemble, that night, had a

deep emotional connection that elevated their performance. The participation of the ensemble members in the concert planning led to a powerful concert moment. Other music educators in the audience were amazed at how well the ensemble blended and balanced the music.

Key Terms

The language of Ritual Theory and Interaction Ritual Chains is used throughout this document. In this section, I introduce the terminology by using a short description of *Ritual Theory* and of the theory of *Interaction Ritual Chains*. The key terms are listed in alphabetical order in Table 1 at the end of the section.

Much of Burning Man's framework mimics the tripartite structure of the ritual theory developed by Durkheim (1895/2014), E. Turner (2012), V. Turner (1969/2007), and Van Gennep (1909/1960). A ritual has three sequential phases:

1. *Separation* is the detachment of the individual from the existing social structure, cultural conditions, or both (V. Turner, 1969/2007) and includes preparations for the liminal phase of the ritual process. In the context of the week of Burning Man being a ritual, this is preparation prior to arriving at the playa.
2. *Liminality* (Thomassen, 2009, 2014; V. Turner, 1974) is a transformational limbo in which one can be statusless, try things they normally have not done, and have a strong sense of *communitas*, which is the sense of community and community solidarity found in persons who share a liminal state together (E. Turner, 2012; V. Turner, 1969/2007; V. Turner, 1974). Liminality is sometimes referred to as *betwixt and between*, and it can result in temporary or lasting transformations.

During the Burning Man event week, when Burning Man participants are in a state of liminality, they actively engage in activities that they normally would not do in the default world[4] (Bowditch, 2010).

3. *Reaggregation* (V. Turner, 1969/2007) is the follow-on phase to liminality in which one applies the lessons learned in liminality to their new (transformational) persona in everyday life. In the context of Burning Man, this happens after the weeklong event.

Collective effervescence (Figure 1, reproduced from Collins, 2004, Fig. 2.1) extends the individual experience of liminality to a group. According to Collins (2004), a group that experiences collective effervescence increases its group solidarity, the individuals within the group experience emotional energy (EE), the group's identity can be strengthened by the creation of social relationship symbols representing the group's lived experience, and a standard of morality may be established pertaining to elements of the experience. Collective effervescence can result from a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood, with feedback intensification through rhythmic *entrainment* building the group's mood (Collins, 2004). Entrainment is a synchronization of musical rhythms or a group's activities (Bispham, 2006; Clayton et al., 2004). The study of community musicking and collective effervescence at Burning Man may yield insights that could be used to develop strategies for engaging community ensemble members, resulting in enhanced lifelong participation.

[4] Burners call the world outside Black Rock City the *default world*.

The diagram of collective effervescence in Figure 1 applies to a single interaction ritual (IR). Collins (2014) developed the concept of *Interaction Ritual Chains*, which are a series of IRs, with each IR feeding into the next ritual with emotional energy (EE) and solidarity from the previous interaction rituals. In that context, the Burning Man week can be thought of as a chain of smaller interaction rituals, each having the three phases of separation, liminality, and reaggregation.

Figure 1. Factors That Can Lead to Collective Effervescence and the Potential Outcomes

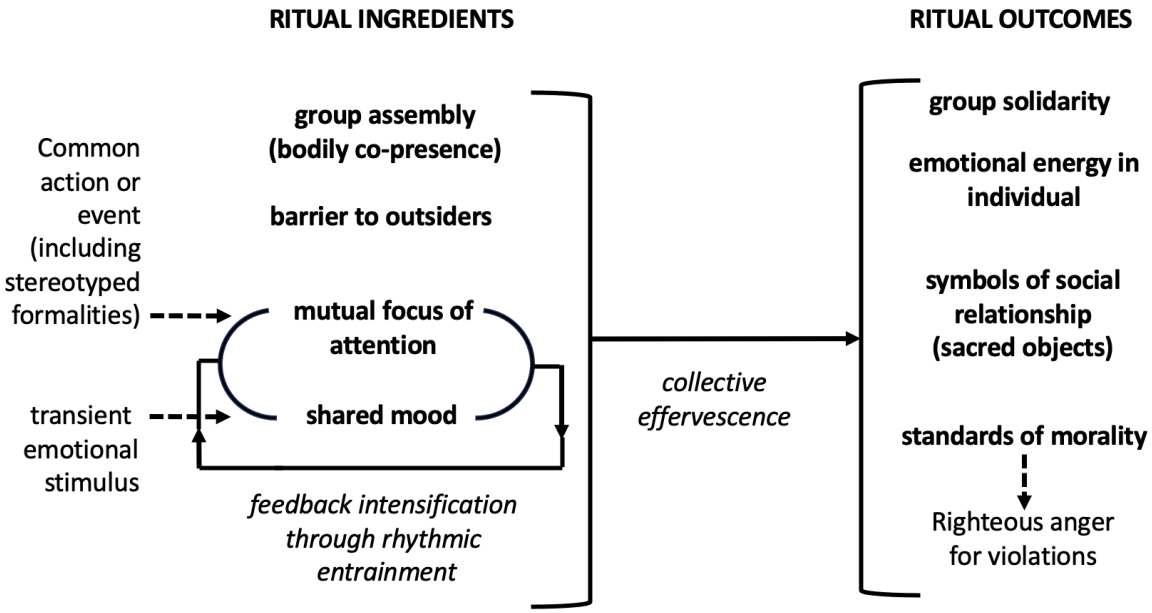


Table 1. ***Key Terms***

Term	Definition
Collective Effervescence	A positive exciting feeling shared by a group of people during the liminal phase of an interaction ritual. The group will be more likely to attain this feeling if they have a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood, with feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment building the group's mood. If collective effervescence is achieved, the group experiences solidarity, the individuals experience emotional energy (EE), and social relationship symbols are created (Collins, 2004).
Communitas	The sense of belonging to a community that can be found in persons who share a liminal state together. It is the feeling of community solidarity (E. Turner, 2012; V. Turner, 1969/2007; V. Turner, 1974).
Dasein	The researcher's own lived experience in the phenomenon being studied (Smith et al., 2009/2012). Heidegger (1962) referred to it as foresight or preconceived knowledge.
Emotional Energy (EE)	The feeling of elation and energy experienced by an individual as a result of being part of a group experiencing collective effervescence. Emotional energy activates or reactivates solidarity commitments and feelings of morality (Collins, 2014).
Entrainment	Synchronization of musical rhythms or a group's activities (Bispham, 2006; Clayton et al., 2004).
Interaction Ritual (IR)	A mechanism in which variations in mutual focus of attention and rhythmic entrainment create a shared mood that can become collective effervescence (Collins, 2014).
Interaction Ritual Chains (IRC)	A series of IRs, with each IR feeding into the next ritual with emotional energy (EE) and solidarity from the previous interaction rituals (Collins, 2014).
Liminality	A transformational limbo in which one can be statusless, have a strong sense of communitas, and try things they normally have not done. It is sometimes referred to as betwixt and between. Liminality can result in temporary or lasting transformations (Thomassen, 2009, 2014; V. Turner, 1974).
Musicking	Active and passive participation in music which can take many forms: singing along to a recording, dancing to music, tapping your foot to music, meditating, performing music with friends, performing music solo (with and without audience), and performing in an ensemble (Small, 1998).

Reaggregation	The third stage of the *Ritual Process,* in which lessons learned in the preceding phase of liminality can be applied to one's new (transformational) persona in everyday life (V. Turner, 1969/2007).
Separation	The first stage of the *Ritual Process,* in which the individual becomes detached from the existing social structure, cultural conditions, or both (V. Turner, 1969/2007). This stage also includes the preparations for the liminal phase of the ritual process.
Symbols of Social Relationship	Artifacts that represent belonging to a group, such as patches, stickers, or clothing containing the group identifier.
Solidarity	A feeling of belonging together with shared elements of a common identity.
Transformation	A breakthrough from a specific event that causes a change in personal identity.

Community Musicking at Burning Man

When I chose my dissertation topic, I realized I could use the lens of ritual theory to combine my passions for community music with lifelong learners and the culture of Burning Man. For six years, I was the Music Director for the Fire Conclave[5] at Burning Man, which allowed me to have a unique perspective of community musicians at Burning Man. In this dissertation, I studied how music facilitates community and transformation at Burning Man, with a subsequent goal of applying some of those techniques in the default world of community college music teaching.

Burning Man is known as a transformational festival (Bowditch, 2010; Gilmore, 2005a) partially due to its reframing of cultural norms. Burning Man's cofounder, Larry

[5] The Fire Conclave was a group within the Burning Man Organization. They ignited the ceremonial fire at *Center Camp* using a magnifying glass and the setting sun on the first day of Burn Week. On the seventh day, just prior to the Man Burn, they brought the ceremonial fire to the *Great Circle* surrounding the Man in a Procession from *Center Camp,* and then their dozen fire troops performed around the entire *Great Circle*. When the fire troop performances ended, the Man erupted in fireworks and then burned.

Harvey, documented the 10 Principles shown in Table 2 that "were crafted not as a dictate of how people should be and act, but as a reflection of the community's ethos and culture as it had organically developed since the event's inception" (Burning Man Project, 2020a, para. 1). The application of the 10 Principles to my Burning Man experiences is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Music is often part of rituals and of transformation, and that music can be reflected in the pieces or chains of the memories that led to transformation. At Burning Man, music is saturated throughout the city with the never-ending soundscape of art cars, theme camps, and live music.

Musicians and participants (citizens of Black Rock City) can have unique memories of music with which they interacted through listening, dancing, and clapping that they experienced throughout the week. These experiences can be thought of as branches of a tree that represent each person's unique experiences that were triggered by musical encounters at Burning Man. People may share some of the same musical events and share similar acts of collective effervescence, but for each individual they may be slightly different and thus are unique. These experiences can be linked up as a *chain* that collectively can lead to transformation for individuals and groups using the lens of interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004)

Applying V. Turner's (1969/2007) ritual process to Burning Man, there is extensive preparation to survive and play on a dry lakebed in the Black Rock Desert (separation), the week *on-playa* (liminality), and then the return to what burners call the *default world* bringing their personal growth experienced through liminality

(reaggregation). Liminality, during the ritual event, is a transformation (a breakthrough from a specific event that causes a change in personal identity) in which an individual can be *statusless* (not bound to their default world role), have a strong sense of *communitas* (belonging to the community of ritual participants), and can try things they normally would not do. Musicking is embedded in many Burning Man cultural rituals and is a constant component of everyday life at Black Rock City. Much of the liminality at Burning Man can be viewed through the lens of musicking. Musicking includes both active and passive participation in music (Small, 1998) which can take many forms: singing along to a recording, dancing to music, tapping your foot to music, meditating, performing music with friends, performing music solo (with and without audience), and performing in an ensemble.

Some Burning Man musicians are professional and community-based musicians in the default world, and they use their continuing musical skills to provide guidance and leadership to those who only perform at Burning Man. In participating in and directing music ensembles at Burning Man, I have observed that combinations of skilled and infrequent musicians can result in the phenomenon of *collective effervescence* (Collins, 2004).

During my years at Burning Man, I believe I witnessed a version of the phenomenon of collective effervescence during musicking many times. To me, the phenomenon of collective effervescence starts with a tipping point or boiling over of emotional energy. Viewed through the lens of interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004), transformation can be linked to many smaller interaction rituals that, when added up, lead

to an emotional tipping point or breakthrough moment in which a person's body can even have a physical reaction, e.g., goose bumps on the arms. These breakthrough moments may occur at different points in the interaction ritual chain for each individual, but entrainment (see Figure 1) pulls the transformations together for the group.

Table 2. The 10 Principles of Burning Man

Principle	Description
Radical Inclusion	Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community.
Gifting	Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value.
Decommodification	In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience.
Radical Self-reliance	Burning Man encourages the individual to discover, exercise and rely on his or her inner resources.
Radical Self-expression	Radical Self-expression arises from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient.
Communal Effort	Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction.
Civic Responsibility	We value civil society. Community members who organize events should assume responsibility for public welfare and endeavor to communicate civic responsibilities to participants. They must also assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with local, state and federal laws.
Leaving No Trace	Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather. We clean up after ourselves and endeavor, whenever possible, to leave such places in a better state than when we found them.
Participation	Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play. We make the world real through actions that open the heart.
Immediacy	Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most important touchstone of value in our culture. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, the reality of those around us, participation in society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers. No idea can substitute for this experience.

Note: These descriptions were taken directly from Burning Man Project (2020a).

A recent example of collective effervescence during musicking at Burning Man was the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* by the Black Rock Philharmonic (BRP) at the *Folly*[6] art installation. That song (Black Rock Philharmonic, 2019) was a powerful experience for not only the ensemble members but for the audience as well, as demonstrated by their leaping to their feet, dancing, and singing along with the instrumental performance (Halleck, 2019). By examining lived experiences of the participants before, during, and after the 2019 performance, I seek to understand the collective effervescence of musicians and audience members that can be created during musicking at Burning Man.

Theoretical Framework

During community musicking at Burning Man, I witnessed collective effervescence among lifelong learners and saw them overcome personal issues that had previously led some to stop musicking in the default world. How these lifelong learners come back to musicking in this unique environment is what I wanted to study. I sought the shared lived experiences of members and organizers of community-based ensembles at Burning Man using the lenses of Musicking, Ritual Theory, Interaction Ritual Chains, Play, Music Education, and Lifelong Learning.

"Phenomenological researchers pause and look at a phenomenon as the lived experience of some activity and illuminate its specific characteristic as experience rather

[6] The *Folly* art installation "represents an imaginary shantytown of funky climbable towers and old western storefronts, cobbled together from salvaged and reclaimed lumber from original San Francisco Victorians to be reborn in the desert, affording shelter, entertainment and perspective to the community" (Burning Man Project, 2024e, The Folly section).

than trying to turn it into an abstract structure and comparing it to other structures" (Peoples, 2020, p. 5). According to van Manen (1997), phenomenology systematically attempts to describe and understand the essence of lived experience. Rather than focusing on the factual description of a lived experience, a phenomenology researcher seeks to understand the nature, essence, lived-quality, or significance of that experience. Thoughtfulness, according to van Manen (1997), is the single word that most aptly characterizes phenomenology; noting that Heidegger (1962) described thoughtfulness as "a minding, a heeding, or a caring instrument" and that thoughtfulness is "a heedful, mindful wondering about the project of life, of living, of what it means to live a life" (p. 12). Max van Manen (1997) suggested that a description of the nature of an experience is adequate if it shows the lived quality and meaning of the experience in a full and rich manner.

There are two major types of phenomenological research: transcendental or descriptive (Husserl, 2004) vs. hermeneutic or interpretive (Heidegger, 1962). According to Smith et al. (2009/2012), transcendental inquiry focuses on experiences in the consciousness of the individual, with Husserl invoking the term intentionality to relate the conscious process to the object being subjected to the process. In contrast, Smith et al. (2009/2012) described hermeneutic research as studying the ontological question of existence and how lived experiences are made meaningful.

A major difference between the two approaches is the role of the researcher. In transcendental research, the researcher must set aside their beliefs about a phenomenon while focusing on studying that phenomenon, called bracketing or epoché by Husserl

(2004). According to van Manen (1997), Husserl, a mathematician and the father of phenomenology, borrowed the term bracketing from mathematics. Conversely, in hermeneutic research, the researcher is a part of the research, called "dasein" or literally *being there* by Heidegger (1962). According to Smith et al. (2009/2012), Heidegger described the researcher's dasein as being an integral part of the lived experience which cannot be meaningfully separated from it. Heidegger (1962) referred to the researcher's dasein as preconceived knowledge or foresight. As a researcher begins to understand and interpret something, their foresight (biases or understandings or judgements) is revised.

In this study of community musicking and collective effervescence at Burning Man, I began with my extensive experience with the phenomenon over many years, as well as my personal relationships with many of the people who provided data within the study. Because hermeneutic phenomenological research focuses on *lived experiences in which the researcher is a participant,* it is an appropriate philosophical and theoretical framework for this study.

Statement of the Problem

Active or passive participation in musicking can create, explore, and celebrate relationships (Small, 1999). Relationships, including those experienced through lifelong musicking, can enhance wellbeing (DeNora, 2000, 2013a, 2013b) and health, with "personal, skill, and social/cultural benefits" (Jutras, 2006, p. 103; 2011, p. 65). Music students and adult amateur musicians have long struggled to stay involved in musicking in their years after learning an instrument (Mantie & Tucker, 2008). For some, musicking ceases after high school when jobs, families, and college take priority to music

participation (Evans et al., 2013). What can educators and facilitators do to encourage lifelong participation in the arts?

Collective effervescence extends the individual experience of liminality to a group. According to Collins (2004), collective effervescence can result from a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood, with feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment building the group's mood. If collective effervescence is achieved, the group experiences solidarity, the individuals experience emotional energy, and social relationship symbols are created.

The study of community musicking and collective effervescence at Burning Man may yield insights that could be used to devise strategies for engaging community ensemble members as a group. Perceptions of the Black Rock Philharmonic obtained from interviews could provide insights into the three outcomes of collective effervescence resulting from interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2014). These outcomes (group solidarity, emotional energy in the individual, and symbols of the social relationships) from musicking-caused collective effervescence can pave the path to lifelong music participation. Strategies used by the Black Rock Philharmonic to promote collective effervescence at Burning Man, if adapted to community music ensembles, could improve both retention and recruitment. Collective effervescence in community music ensembles could promote retention of existing members because participants in collective effervescence seek more such experiences. Recruitment of new members can result when potential members share the collective effervescence moment in the audience or when they learn about the experience via personal contacts with members.

Therefore, *the purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine collective effervescence such as that created through musicking at Burning Man.* In this study, I began with the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* by the Black Rock Philharmonic at the *Folly* art installation at Burning Man. Lived experiences of the ensemble director and musicians in the separation, liminal, and reaggregation phases (Durkheim, 1895/2014; E. Turner, 2012; V. Turner, 1969/2007; Van Gennep, 1909/1960) of their Burning Man musical performance provided insight into how to create collective effervescence in community music ensembles.

The *research questions* for this study were the following:

1. To what extent does the culture of Burning Man facilitate collective effervescence?
2. To what extent does musicking at Burning Man facilitate collective effervescence?
3. What do Burning Man ensemble directors and members do before and during the performance that could be applicable and useful to music educators in the default world?

I conducted individual interviews with the director and selected ensemble members of the Black Rock Philharmonic. By gaining a better understanding of the lived experiences of collective effervescence through musicking at Burning Man, I sought to identify techniques that could be aspects of Burning Man's culture that could be extended to music education in the default world.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this study, I focused on the phenomenon of collective effervescence created through musicking at Burning Man. In this chapter, which establishes the study basis, I discuss the lenses from my literature review. In Chapter Three, I discuss foresight from my personal experiences at Burning Man. Pertinent literature helped to develop insights that span multiple disciplines. Consequently, I adopted a syncretic approach drawing from multiple lenses which included music education, lifelong learning, musicking, ritual theory and its applications, and Burning Man. Communitas (V. Turner, 1969/2007), discussed in the ritual theory section, is woven throughout music education, musicking (Small, 1998), ritual theory, and Burning Man.

I begin this chapter with the lens of music education and lifelong learning because that is the setting for any insights I developed in this study. Then, I review the literature on musicking, which is the activity central to both music education and this study of collective effervescence. The rich literature on ritual theory (Durkheim, 1912/2001; V. Turner, 1969/2007) is the source of the concept of collective effervescence (Collins, 2014), which was the result of the phenomenon I studied. The ritual theory literature discussion includes its application to wellness (DeNora, 2013a) and play (Huizinga, 1950; Piaget, 1962), both of which contain insights applicable to this study of musicking. Finally, I review the scholarly literature on Burning Man (St John, 2008b) and the transformations experienced there; the phenomenon I studied was manifested repeatedly at Burning Man, and that literature was useful in interpreting those lived experiences.

Music Education and Lifelong Learning

Music education philosophies were succinctly categorized by Boler (2020) as being utilitarian, aesthetic, or praxial. Boler stated that utilitarian music education, dating from 1838 to improve singing in church congregations, serves a non-musical outcome; for example, music education can improve student performance in other subjects such as math or reading. Pioneered by Bennett Reimer (2003), aesthetic music education studies music for its own intrinsic value; Reimer's aesthetic philosophical position is that music expresses emotion and is a feelings-based experience. The aesthetic philosophy seeks self-knowledge and deeper access to an individual's emotional life. The praxial philosophy regards music as both artistic and social, and as both a process and a product. Proposed by David Elliott (1995), a former student of Bennett Reimer, the philosophy is based on music being the actualization (praxis) of a person's belief systems and motivations. A musical note is envisioned, then played, and then reflected upon (a process). Another way of thinking about the process is thinking, planning, making, and reflecting on music holistically. Boler (2020) summarized praxial music philosophy as synthesizing the value of human experience, the process of learning, and the context of art. This study, seeking to understand how to produce collective effervescence with musicking, was clearly process-oriented and thus fell into the praxial philosophy.

Music educators seek to inspire communitas in their school programs and ensembles (Boyce-Tillman, 2009). For example, Countryman (2014) documented the mechanics of using musicking to create emotional bonding and a sense of community in elementary school children who developed short musicking rituals to set the stage and

choose participant roles for playground games. Emotional bonding and a sense of community are related to liminality.

Another example of using the phenomenon of communitas in a music education setting was the *Empowering Song* approach developed by de Quadros (2018) for use in a two-week training course for conductors of children's choruses. The training course used the Empowering Song technique, which emphasized improvisation and bodywork. The group playfully sang a member's name with the person in the center of the group, empowering their ensemble member through playful improvisation of their name. The researcher found that participants became more adventurous, exploring their own vulnerability, which can lead to more effective engagement and communitas.

In *The Lakewood Project*, an after-school rock orchestra program for high school students, alumni were offered an opportunity to reflect on their lived experience 10 years after the project began (Koops et al., 2014). About half of the 99 alumni responded, and many described the project as a transformational experience that led to their participation in musicking after graduation. Their appreciation of classical music increased, and they developed a deeper appreciation of all forms and genres of music. This result continued for years after participation. According to the alumni surveyed, the informal learning practices helped lead 71% of the respondents to professional or non-professional participation in music after graduation. Students broadened their various musical interests to help create musical opportunities later in life. Through informal learning practices and musical agency, the authors suggested this could be incorporated in music classrooms to facilitate similar results.

Community Music

According to the Community Music Activity Commission, "community music activities do more than involve participants in music-making; they provide opportunities to construct personal and communal expressions of artistic, social, political and cultural concerns" (International Society for Music Education, 2021, CMA Vision Statement). The Commission stated that participants are empowered to be "agents for extending and developing music in their communities," and thereby "complement, interact with and extend formal music education" (CMA Vision Statement).

According to Kertz-Welzel (2016), "community music is inclusive, politically engaged, and seeks to transform communities through everyone's artistic activities" (p. 118). Higgins (2012) said that community music is "redressing the balance between musician/non-musician, product/process, individual/community, formal music education/informal music education, and consumption/participation" (p. 40). Veblen (2013) said that community music includes informal music making with both "teaching and learning dimensions. … [It] weave[s] … through amateur and professional, formal and informal, institutional and non-institutional contexts" (p. 1).

The word *community* in *community music* is the group of musicians (and perhaps their families and friends), rather than the community at large, according to Higgins (2007, 2012). New musicians are *welcomed* with *conditional hospitality*, with the conditions including revealing information about themselves (such as instrument and skill level) and agreeing to participate by attending and practicing. That *welcoming* then progresses to *unconditional hospitality* as the person becomes part of the musical

community. Combined, these principles help facilitate Higgins's concept of the community music ensemble being better described by hospitality than by community.

A framework that maps out the key *ingredients* of successful programs was developed by Schippers and Bartleet (2013). They noted that definitions of community music tend to be either too specific or too general. Their framework was based on the Sound Links ethnographic study (Bartleet et al., 2009) of 400 participants in six diverse community music practices in Australia including multicultural suburbs, largely monocultural country towns, rural networks, and Indigenous communities. An additional 200 people participated in a nationwide survey, which served as verification of findings from the ethnographic case studies. The study identified three major areas: structures and practicalities, people and personnel, and practice and pedagogy. Within each major area, three domains were identified, with four to eight factors influencing each domain. The dozens of factors identified was a large list; however, an organizer of a new community music activity or a leader of an existing music program can use the hierarchical organization of factors within the domains which are in turn within major areas to simplify the task of locating the factors for a particular need. In reflecting on this wealth of information, I selected the following seven factors (numbered within the bullet items) as being particularly pertinent to this study:

- In the relationship to place domain: (1) connection to cultural identity and cultural heritage, (2) balance between physical and virtual spaces
- In the dynamic music-making domain: (3) active involvement open to all, (4) flexible relationship between the audience and performers

- In the engaging pedagogy/facilitation domain: (5) nurturing a sense of group/individual identity, (6) commitment to inclusive pedagogies ranging from formal to informal
- In the links to school domain: (7) realizing activities as part of the curriculum

Use of the Ritual Process and Communitas in Music Education

Although the music educators cited above did not directly refer to V. Turner's Ritual Process (1969/2007), they indeed used elements of that process as they tried to create learning opportunities that were fun for the students, in other words, play. For music educators and community music facilitators, classes and rehearsals are a type of intervention that is focused on a musical product, typically for a specific performance. The difference between daily interventions and the active intervention in Higgins' (2012) definition of community music is that music education is typically led by a director while some community music activities use a facilitator who is focused on creating an equal voice for all (participants and the facilitator). Typically, a music education director is in charge of most musical choices. Higgins (2012) defined the word *community* in community music using the term *hospitality*, through which a facilitator or musical leader can generate communitas by using participatory music (listening, dancing, performing) to create a safe, friendly, welcomed, and engaged community. Communitas can be created through a leveling of status, as argued by V. Turner (1969/2007). Community music, through the use of a facilitator instead of a director, and through leveling of status by making all voices equal, is therefore capable of creating communitas.

Retention in Lifelong Learning Through Musicking

Retention of individuals in music was addressed by Evans et al. (2013) who studied 157 students (55% female, 45% male) aged 18–20 years (within a few years after graduating from high school). These students were participants in the prior *Child to Musician Project* that followed students beginning at primary school (8–10 years old in 1997), with data collected to determine whether they were continuing to play their instruments 1, 2, 3, and 5 years after they began. The students were just commencing learning in primary (elementary) school band programs from eight primary schools in Sydney, Australia, representing a range of socioeconomic populations. After 5 years, 41% of the total original sample was still participating in a school band program. Evans et al. (2013) found that over 80% of students who participated in high school music programs did not continue musical performance in their adulthood.

According to Meyers (2008), instead of focusing on polishing large ensemble performances, teachers need to facilitate partnerships between their programs and other forms of community music. Goodrich (2013) noted that to address the low lifelong music participation fraction, many have advocated connecting school music programs to music familiar to the current culture of the students. In addition to the theme of using music culturally connected to the students, *The Lakewood Project* by Koops et al. (2014) found a high lifelong participation rate of 71% in their sample of 48 respondents, as influenced by the informal, student-centered, learning practices. Musicians in community music settings also find social interactions with each other to be a highly important part of participation (Goodrich, 2019). Long (2018) found that participation in the Bellefonte

Community Band was motivated by both influences (family, self-initiated learning, ensembles, community band participation, ensemble dedication, camaraderie, and community band invitation) and emotions (passionate music making, emotional connections, musical expression, and emotion-induced reflection of music making). Without using the words collective effervescence, Long (2018) captured the result: "Participants described moments of music making that followed and influenced them for decades and generated emotions … and motivated … sustain[ed] participation as a result of the artistic experiences" (p. iii).

In a case study of a community orchestra partially composed of medical professionals, Goodrich (2013) addressed the effect that participating in the orchestra had on continued participation in music and community music therapy. The orchestra performed normal public concerts. They also sent ensembles to perform for medical patients, and they connected to underserved community elements with fund-raising concerts that both benefited and involved those community elements. Goodrich found that participants were motivated by community engagement and music is healing. Community engagement added a fourth motivation to the three found by Coffman and Adamek (2001): social, personal wellbeing, and musical reasons. Music is healing as well as health musicking contains multiple meanings here. In addition to the medical musicians and serviced patients potentially defining the term health musicking, the participants noted the healing effects on both the patients served and the musicians themselves. Health benefits to the musicians cited by the participants included emotional release from job stresses and improved cognitive abilities. These benefits could be

considered part of the Coffman and Adamek (2001) second motivation: personal wellbeing. Goodrich (2013) tied these findings to music education by noting that community engagement and music-is-healing can help educators and students connect with current societal needs. In turn, that connection "promotes the concept of lifelong learning and participation in music" (p. 59).

Lifelong musical mentoring in an adult amateur chamber ensemble in the Northeastern United States was also studied by Goodrich (2016). The case study participants were three adult amateur musicians. Data collection included interviews and observations of rehearsals and a performance that fell within one performance cycle. The two themes that emerged from participant interviews were musicianship and friendship. Participants revealed that they continued mentoring each other as peers for "personal enjoyment, improvement of their individual performance skills, opportunities for learning new musical knowledge, and social interactions" (p. 243). Those positive outcomes served as motivators to be lifelong musicians. Goodrich suggested that implementing peer mentoring in school music programs could influence students to become lifelong musicians.

Summary

I set this study within the broader context of music education and community music, which is the area in which insights from my Burning Man setting could potentially be applied. I focused on literature pertaining to community music. Several of the references I reviewed regarding communitas in music education and community music were consistent with ritual theory (V. Turner, 1969/2007), which are discussed in a later

section. Retention was shown above to be a major issue in lifelong musicking, and I explored several references pertaining to retention; I note that the ensembles at Burning Man are very successful at retention.

Understanding the mechanics of the creation of liminal space through musicking rituals, and the transformations that sometimes result, is important to developing rituals that could apply to music education and could increase retention and lifelong learning. Liminality within music education could liberate students to try new things that they would normally not attempt, similar to what Atkinson and Robson (2012) found in art therapy. Educators continually search for new ways to create community and open environments in which students feel safe to take risks. Using liminal space could be a new method of creating community within a music education setting, building upon its success in art therapy. In the next section, I continue this thought process in a review of the literature on musicking, including settings other than education.

Musicking

A fresh perspective on how people look at music was offered by Small (1998) who suggested that music is not an object (a noun) but instead is an activity (a verb) that humans create. Accordingly, the value or essence does not lay in the overall musical object; rather, it is made up of many different smaller interactions. Musical memories of audience members can heighten their emotional response which then feeds back to the performers, entraining them more deeply and influencing their activity of making music. Participants beyond the musicians and audience in musicking include support staff, website and social media coordinators, organizations and partnerships. The sonic

landscape of the performance venue can be a part of the action by the performers of making the music and the action of the audience in listening to the music. For example, at an outdoor concert, the wind picking up during a crescendo of the piece could add to the feel of the performance with nature entraining with the music to add its own unique voice to the experience. To understand the action of music making, one must look at the nature of the music, how it functions and how it relates to human life culturally and personally.

An interesting branch of the tree that represents the elements of musicking is the venue in which people hear the music, according to Small (1998). These elements affect the feedback loop between the audience and the performers, how much communication there is between the two, and how one should act. The communication with the performers and the actions of the audience members are partially pre-determined by the framework of the space, the cultural norms of the performance, the people in attendance, and other elements that are an integral part of the action of musicking. In addition to the physical attributes, how the event was organized could affect the feedback loop. Another feedback element could be the cultural practices or norms associated with that venue, band, or even music composition (some compositions are designed to invite interaction). Substances (alcohol, food, drugs) being consumed prior to or during the event can also influence how the musicking is being perceived by all involved.

The action of music making was divided by Small (1998) into two parts, passive and active participation. Passive participation most naturally comes to people who gather to listen to music in a formal venue or listen quietly in their own homes. Musicking can also become an active form of participation, with the most natural examples being the

conductor and the musicians performing together. Participation can be expanded to the audience in many ways. Musicking can become active through dancing, clapping, singing along, or even meditating. Musicking is an action that brings communities together, and if the audience participation is changed from passive to active, the performance can bring on new meanings, trigger stronger emotions, and create a feeling of solidarity through active participation in a joint lived experience. People musicking relate to one another "not only with the sound relationships that are created by the performers, not only with the participants' relationships to one another, but also with the participants' relationship to the world outside the performance space" (Small, 1998, pp. 47–48). With Small's adding the "complex spiral of relationships … are the meaning of the performance" (p. 48).

The relationship between the performers and audiences was addressed by Davidson and Emberly (2012). They noted that musical interactions, whether passive or active, can be an accompaniment in everyday life or "a companionship through the music-making" (p. 138). Their description is consistent with Small's (1998) word, musicking. They wrote that "musical arts participation offers important self-identity, group affiliation, and shared emotional experiences possibilities: factors crucial to feelings of wellbeing" (Davidson & Emberly, 2012, p. 138). Perhaps the best description of how music fits into the fabric of life is from Small (1998), that musicking is not knowing the physical world divorced from human experience but is "the experiential world of relationships in all its complexity — and in knowing it, we know how to live well in it" (p. 50).

Summary

This study was integrally connected to the broader subject of musicking. Small's introduction of the term *musicking* was a departure from the Western culture interpretation of music. Making the word musicking a verb included more ways of understanding all the aspects of what it takes to create music, from the musicians, to the audience, to the venue architecture, to support staff of the venue, to advertising of the event, and to the cultural norms associated with the song and genre of music. Small's definition included people participating in either an active or passive role. By incorporating the larger palette of musicking elements discussed in this section into traditional music education, music educators could enhance their connections to their students and the larger community. Those stronger connections could positively influence both retention and recruitment.

Ritual Theory

This study rested on the solid foundation of an extended theoretical framework that is often referred to as *ritual theory.* In this section, I briefly summarize the development of ritual theory and then continue into a ritual's three stages, interaction ritual chains, and *collective effervescence,* which was the subject of this study. Then, I describe Burning Man using both Ritual Theory and Interaction Ritual Chain terminology.

Development of Ritual Theory

A pioneer of the French school of sociology, Durkheim (1895/2014, 1912/2001) lived from 1858 until 1917. They developed the model of ritual as a process within

society and coined the term *collective effervescence.* "Durkheim noted that a successful social ritual makes the individual participant feel strong, confident, full of impulse to take the initiative" (Collins, 2004, p. xii). Van Gennep (1909/1960) was a Dutch-German-French ethnographer and folklorist who lived from 1873 until 1957. Their studies of *rites of passage* are regarded as the basis of ritual theory. V. Turner (1967/1970, 1969/2007, 1974, 1982, 1985, 1988, 1992) was a British cultural anthropologist who lived from 1920 until 1983. Their studies of isolated cultures developed ideas of symbols, rituals, and rites of passage. E. Turner (2012), their lifelong research partner who lived from 1921 until 2016, made important contributions to the development of the concept of *communitas*. Finally, Collins (2004, 2014) is an American sociologist born in 1941. Their work focuses on *interaction ritual chains* and *collective effervescence*.

The models of Durkheim and V. Turner were compared by Olaveson (2001), including "their emphasis on the alienating nature of social structure, and the necessity of a dialectical tension between it and collective effervescence/communitas" (p. 89). Olaveson also linked Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence to V. Turner's concept of communitas. Olaveson (2001) wrote, "Collective effervescence is thus characterized by intimacy, intensity, and immediacy, yet it involves will and intention, and symbolic focus" (p. 101).

The Three Stages of Ritual

The three stages of ritual were explored by Van Gennep and then by V. Turner. The three stages were first described by Van Gennep (1909/1960) as separation, transition, and reincorporation. Subsequently, V. Turner (1969/2007) referred to the three

stages of the ritual process as separation, liminality, and reaggregation. Liminality, which can be thought of as being in a state controlled by one's inner psyche rather than controlled by ego (Farris, 2012), is preceded by separation, the detachment of the individual from the existing social structure, cultural conditions, or both (V. Turner, 1969/2007). Liminality is followed by reaggregation, the return of the individual to everyday life, possibly with changes based on transformations attained during liminality (McCaffrey, 2012).

Communitas

Music ensembles can be an application of E. Turner's (2012) concept of communitas, with individuals letting go of their individual status to become part of a larger group through the loss of individual ego. Through communitas, the musicians can achieve fulfillment greater than their individual endeavors. The word communitas is said to be from the Latin feminine noun of community, which can also mean fellowship and community. V. Turner (1969/2007) used the term communitas as a way to define human relatedness, and he identified two modes: the structure or separation of individuals, and liminality or the space of betwixt and between. E. Turner (2012) further discussed communitas as not being a merging of identities but rather a collective experience in which individuals gifting[7] to the collective are alive to the fullest. Parker (2016) studied four choral music teachers in midwestern public schools, concluding that the creation of communitas in public school chorus programs is particularly clear about the gifts of each

[7] Burners used the verb to gift and its conjugations gift, gifting and gifted. Accordingly, this dissertation uses that terminology rather than the verb to give and its conjugations when appropriate.

person being “alive to the fullest” (p. 222) as part of a community rather than merging their identities into a community entity. Communitas as a concept has also been linked with belonging, relationships, and shared experiences by Veblen and Waldron (2012).

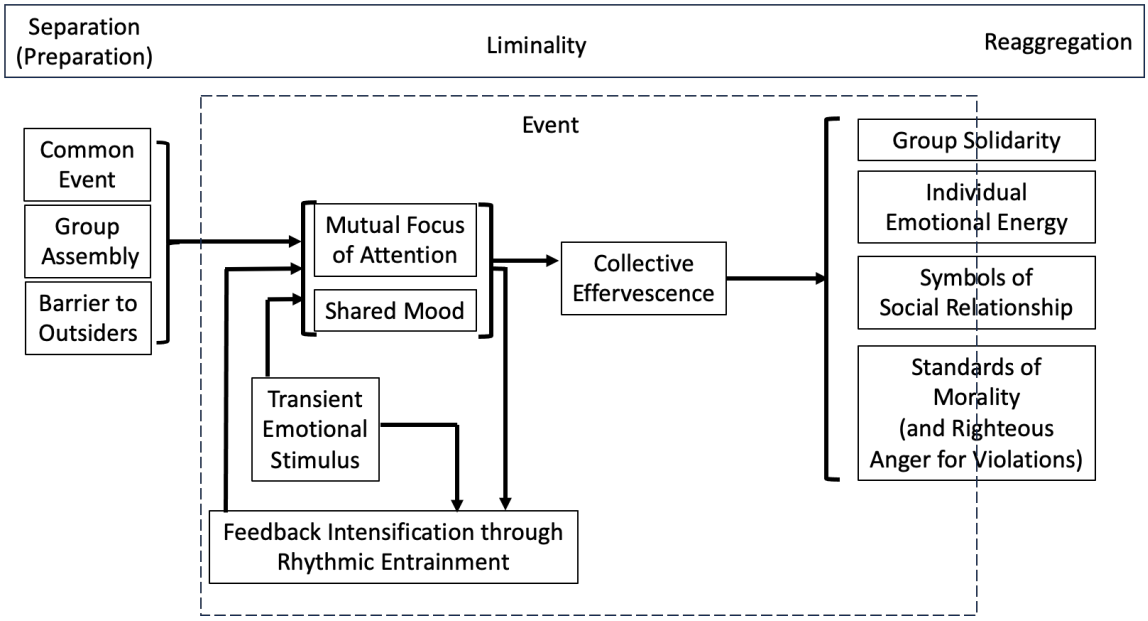
Interaction Rituals and Interaction Ritual Chains

Continuing to develop Goffman’s (1967/1982) concept of the *interaction ritual* (IR), Collins (2004) described the process of an IR. As shown in Figure 2, the elements of Collins’ diagram (which was reproduced as Figure 1 in Chapter One) can be thought of in terms of the three stages of ritual theory. *Collective effervescence* can result from a *mutual focus of attention* and a *shared mood*, with *feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment* building the group’s *shared mood*. That feedback process can be initiated or quickly amplified by a *transient emotional stimulus*. If *collective effervescence* is achieved, the group experiences *solidarity*, the individuals experience *emotional energy* (EE), *social relationship symbols* are created, and *standards of morality* are created (sometimes generating righteous anger for violation. An example of an IR is a church service in which the congregants become entrained as a group through the singing of hymnals and recitation of Bible passages.

An *interaction ritual* (IR) can be “an emotional transformer, taking some emotions as ingredients, and turning them into other emotions as outcomes” (Collins, 2004, p. xii). Because one IR can lead to another, Collins (2004) created the concept of an *interaction ritual chain* (IRC) with c*ollective effervescence* being an outcome of a single IR as well as from IRs within an IRC. An IRC is a series of IRs, with each IR feeding into the next ritual with emotional energy (EE) and solidarity from the previous

interaction ritual (Collins, 2014). Continuing the church example, when a congregation comes together every Sunday, each Sunday can be thought of as an IR, and the growing solidarity of the congregation is a result of the chain of related IRs, thus creating an Interaction Ritual Chain.

Figure 2. Interaction Rituals Can Be Divided into the Three Stages of Ritual Theory



According to Collins (2004), Durkheim approached ritual as a "global theory of moral integration of an entire society" (p. xi). Durkheim (1912/2001) wrote that during historical periods of great collective upheaval, "individuals seek each other out and assemble more often. The result is a general effervescence" in which "hyperactivity has the effect of generally stimulating individual energies. People live differently and more intensively than in normal times" (p. 158).

The Durkheim (1895/2014, 1912/2001) concepts of social membership, moral beliefs, and people's ideas were expanded by Collins (2004) who noted that "ideas are

symbols of group membership, and thus culture is generated by the moral — which is to say emotional — patterns of social interaction" (p. xi). Collins offered rules for "unraveling symbols by tracing them back to the interactional situations in which they acquire what emotional significance they have, and then through their recycling in conversational networks and solitary experience" (pp. xii).

Durkheim (1895/2014, 1912/2001) showed that ritual outcomes varied with social membership patterns and the emotions linked to those patterns. Collins (2004) realized that the symbols of social membership through ritual create a mutual focus in which a group of people collectively focusing can become emotionally entrained. These emotions are what Collins called emotional energy (EE), which can be stored in symbols of group membership causing a feeling of solidarity. For example, sports fans wear their favorite jerseys on game day even when they watch the game on television or in a sports bar; the symbol of their jerseys maintains the EE from past games they have watched in person or on television. Each time an interaction ritual takes place between individuals or a group, their EE can be recharged and again fed into feelings of solidarity and powering the symbols that represent membership. "Durkheim noted that a successful social ritual makes the individual participant feel strong, confident, full of impulses to take the initiative" (Collins, 2004, p. xii). In this feedback loop, successful social rituals fill a person's wellbeing, creating emotional energy through entrainment and giving that person the motivation to seek more social interaction rituals to continue the flow of EE. IRs can be enhanced by use of symbols, and successful IRs can lead to the creation of symbols that represent the interaction, whether it is a piece of swag or a phrase being

used amongst friends. *Entrainment*, which is a synchronization of musical rhythms or a group's activities (Bispham, 2006; Clayton et al., 2004), can increase participation within a group. Clayton et al. (2004) suggested that "through exploring the phenomena of entrainment, ethnomusicologists may be able to better understand how musical sound serves as an interface that connects selves — viscerally and cognitively — to society" (p. 22).

Thus, Collins (2004) showed that IRs can be a feedback loop of emotional energy and solidarity. When the EE is positive, the participants' wellbeing increases, and they have the confidence to seek out more IRs. But the flipside is also possible in that a failed IR can poison the wellbeing, with people not returning to a place or a group if they experience negativity that depletes their emotional energy. Positive IRs become a way of not just enhancing but transforming emotions. As an analogy, when one cooks by adding different ingredients, a new food can be created (e.g., flour plus water and salt can make bread).

Based on Collins' (2004) work, social structure can be viewed as a way that individuals relate to the group through their EE. Negative emotional energy (EE) or a failed interaction ritual (IR) can lead to a negative power dynamic in which some people's EE can overpower or cause other people to become more passive or less confident in their interactions with the group. This could be one explanation of why some people stop musicking in their lives; the joy and EE from musicking was lost because other personalities caused the IR to fail. Collins (2004) wrote that privilege and power can affect the flow of emotional energy to make some individuals more dominant and put

others in their shadow, “narrowing their sources of EE to the alternatives of participating as followers or being relegated passively to the sidelines” (Collins, 2004, p. xiii).

Collins (2004) applied the concept of market theory in which consumers show what they want and desire through buying items. If they do not like a product, they stop buying it. The same concept governs IRs and social membership. If people have negative encounters, they stop buying the products of solidarity and symbols of membership, and they redirect their EE to other areas in their lives. Collins (2004) extended the concept by stating that *interaction ritual chains* are a “model of motivation that pulls and pushes individuals from situation to situation” (p. xiv). The resultants of the IR chain accumulate and mesh or entrain with those of other individuals they encounter in the IRs. “The market for EE in IRs thus is an overarching mechanism motivating individuals as they move through the IR chains that make up their lives” (p. xiv).

Pedroza (2010) described music as a liminoid genre that “served as cultural mechanisms through which this [utopian] quest found various forms of fulfillment” (p. 302). Musical gatherings were places where “participants sought to scramble and invert elements of daily life and yearned to experience a ‘transcendent’ emotional merging — a *communitas* experience — before returning to the status quo” (p. 303). They quoted Franz Liszt as claiming that large musical celebrations unite all classes of society in a “communality of enjoyment” (p. 307) which in Pedroza’s words is “a classic example of *communitas*” (p. 307). According to Pedroza (2010), “Liszt embraced the exhilarating power of the emotional and communal energy of the merging moment, and perhaps hoped that ‘emotional infinity’ could somehow engender social order and justice” (p.

307).

The research of Interaction Rituals and Interaction Ritual Chains described in this section pertains to many ritual types. The ideas described by Durkheim and Collins could be directly applied to music learning and participation. Pedroza (2010) and the linkage to Liszt directly addressed musicking using alternative wording such as *transcendent emotional merging* and *communality of enjoyment* (communitas), and *emotional infinity* (collective effervescence and emotional energy).

Ritual Theory Description of Burning Man

Rituals (V. Turner, 1969/2007) have three phases: separation, liminality, and reaggregation. *Liminality* (Thomassen, 2009, 2014; V. Turner, 1974) is a transformational limbo in which you can be statusless, have a strong sense of communitas, and try things you normally would not do. It is sometimes referred to as *betwixt and between*. Liminality can be thought of as being in a state controlled by one's inner psyche rather than controlled by ego (Farris, 2012). *Separation* precedes liminality, preparing the individual to detach from the existing social structure, cultural conditions, or both (V. Turner, 1969/2007). Liminality can result in temporary or lasting transformations, and the *reaggregation* phase that returns the individual to everyday life is an opportunity to integrate those transformations into their persona (McCaffrey, 2012). The separation phase for different people can have both common and individually unique elements. Similarly, the reaggregation phase can have different results for each individual.

At Burning Man, examples of *separation* (before arriving on-playa) include

working on a community art piece, creating costumes, gifting, decorating bicycles, planning with campmates, interacting on social media, and the extended travel to the remote location of the event. The *liminality* phase at Burning Man begins when participants step over the threshold to exit the default world and enter the dry lakebed of the Black Rock Desert. Liminality is bound by the time of the event and ends when the participant reaches the pavement of the highway and returns to the default world. Within the liminality phase at Burning Man, burners interact with each other in various activities, including actively engaging in pre-planned and spontaneous events. These interactions include participatory art installations, dancing at camps, riding on and dancing around art cars at various locations, interacting at *Center Camp*,[8] and various Burning Man volunteer organizations, some of which are described later in this dissertation. After Burning Man, during *Reaggregation*, a burner integrates the experiences of the week of liminality; this is the time that transformations may become incorporated into their persona. The loss of the emotional energy found during liminality is sometimes called *playa blues*. Burning Man Regional Network events in the few months after Burning Man, called *decompression,* are an opportunity to experience reaggregation in a group setting (Burning Man Project, 2023b).

[8] *Center Camp* was the cultural center of Black Rock City, a "gathering space … ; an interactive, playful, social, communal, welcoming place; a vibrant hub of engagement and participation with performance and art." It "holds: art, a performance stage, a spoken word stage, and all things that make it a world unto itself" (Mango, 2022, Love Letter to the Center Camp Coffee Shop).

Interaction Ritual Chain Description of Burning Man

Interaction Rituals (Collins, 2004) can be thought of in the three phases of *separation*, *liminality*, and *reaggregation* as shown at the top of Figure 2 which also shows which of Collin's factors occur during the event itself. The four outcomes begin during the event and continue afterwards. Burning Man, in the three phases of the ritual process (*separation, liminality, reaggregation*), incorporates Interaction rituals (Collins, 2004). In the *separation* (or preparation) phase, the interaction ritual (IR) process begins with pre-Burning Man events, community art building, camp design and preparation, fundraisers, costume design. and online groups. The IRs continue during packing and the pilgrimage (traveling) to Black Rock City. Even in the gate line on the Black Rock desert, waiting to reach the ticketing gates (which can last over 8 hours), burners continue to have IR rituals with nearby burners. Burning Man has multiple *liminality* phase interaction rituals, beginning upon entering the gate and continuing to the ritualized exodus from the playa to return to the default world. During the entire week on-playa, each participant experiences a chain of rituals, with the chains sometimes intersecting in large gatherings, such as the Black Rock Philharmonic's performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* art installation in 2019. Emotional energy and group solidarity can peak during such a gathering, sometimes with a strong expression of the collective effervescence phenomenon. When they return from Burning Man, burners continue with IRs in the *reaggregation* phase by reconnecting with the new burners they met in the default world through online sources. The emotional energy of Burning Man can also get re-energized through IRs such as participation in Burning Man Regional Network events.

Summary

The foundation of ritual theory as a process within society began over a century ago with the work by Durkheim, who as part of that work coined the term *collective effervescence*. The subsequent studies of *rites of passage* by van Gennep are regarded as the basis of ritual theory. V. Turner studied isolated cultures to develop ideas of symbols, rituals, and rites of passage. E. Turner made important contributions to the concept of *communitas*. Finally, expanding on Goffman's (1967/1982) *interactional ritual*, Collin's (2004) studied *interaction ritual chains* and *collective effervescence*.

The three stages of ritual (separation, liminality, and reaggregation) are a process that in an interaction ritual (IR) can lead to collective effervescence, with the event preparation creating a mutual focus of attention and shared mood, and with rhythmic entrainment creating a feedback intensification of that attention and mood in the liminal stage. The results of collective effervescence can be seen in the liminal and reaggregation phases as group solidarity, individual emotional energy, and social relationship symbols. Interaction ritual chains are a series of IRs that can build the shared mood and the strength of the group solidarity, EE, and symbols. By using Ritual Theory, music educators can better understand how to create moments of collective effervescence along with its outcomes of individual emotional energy, group solidarity and communitas, and symbols of social relationship within their programs. In Chapter Seven, I provide some specific ideas of how to create those moments in the music education setting.

Applications of Ritual Theory

Subsequent generations of scholars continued the development of ritual theory and its multiple applications. Scholars addressed anthropology (Schechner, 1993), cultural criticism (Ashley, 1990), literature, language, media and the arts (Grimes, 2006), ritual theory and practice (Bell, 1992, 1997), sacred space (Moore, 2001), symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991), intentional community (Brown, 2001), education and democracy (Conroy, 2004), politics (Kertzer, 1988), personal transformation (Driver, 2006), masculine and feminine initiation (Mahdi et al., 1987), boundaries and thresholds (Broadhurst, 1999), and the concept of living in the in-between (Thomassen, 2014). Ritual theory has been applied in the study of performance (Bowditch, 2010; Kershaw, 1999; MacAloon, 1984; Omasta & Chappell, 2015; Schechner & Appel, 1990), threshold concepts, and transformative experiences (Paul, 2014; St John, 2008a). This section provides more detail about some of those applications.

Liminality is an aspect of ritual theory according to Broadhurst (1999) which focused on liminal spaces and liminal music. Consideration of case studies such as digital sampling in the techno music scene and digital performances in *acid raves* led Broadhurst to suggest that liminality can blur the boundaries of music, art, performance, and installation. That blur can undermine accepted definitions, "granting autonomy to the aesthetic as a way of limiting or 'framing' it" (p. 175).

How ritualized action diversifies in response to varying cultural, political and physical contexts was explored by Hughes-Freeland and Crain (1998). The contributors used case studies drawn from the Pacific, Indonesia, the Mediterranean, West Africa,

Scandinavia and Latin America to consider how issues such as globalization and technology affect ritual performance and how minorities often utilize performances to affirm their own social identities while also speaking to outsiders. This volume explored ritualized action, but in doing so also addressed changes in foundational anthropological paradigms for the explanation of behavior and society. They noted an important difference between ritual and the experience of events mediated by television or print. Unlike a ritual event in a shared physical space, the media event is decontextualized, disconnected, diffused, re-used.

The potential for theater performances to address the modern crisis of community was explored by Kershaw (1999). One topic was to look at ways to break the audience/stage barrier by creating a new community through full participation with the audience during the performance, contrasting the approaches of forcing total audience participation vs. a less coercive approach. In some sense, the Burning Man's 10 Principles (Burning Man Project, 2020a) move participants from being typical passive observers of an event, transforming them into active roles by embodying *Radical Inclusion*, *Participation*, and *Immediacy*.

Liminality as part of ritual theory has been applied in theatrical settings and transformative festivals (Tramacchi, 2000) including Burning Man (Bowditch, 2010; Kettering, 2015; Sawyer, 2003). The discussions of *Music Education and Lifelong Learning* and *Musicking* earlier in this chapter include their application of ritual theory. In the following subsections, I discuss applications of ritual theory in wellbeing, play, and at Burning Man.

Ritual Theory in Wellbeing

The process of achieving wellbeing can include personal transformation, like that which is found through the lens of ritual theory. Play, music education, and lifelong learning (each discussed elsewhere in this chapter) all seek to improve wellbeing. DeNora and Ansdell collaborated to publish a three-book series on the ecological perspectives of music and change. The three books were inspired by an earlier book, DeNora (2000), which considered the power of music in structures of personal and social life that are found in everyday experiences. Music also can function as a technology of self that can influence wellbeing. In the first book of the series, DeNora (2013a) developed an interdisciplinary approach for music, health, and wellbeing by adopting a holistic, interactionist, focus which reconnects music as an active ingredient of action, identity, capacity, and consciousness. DeNora considered the question of how music offers forms of asylum. Music asylums may offer respite from pain or distress, but they can also facilitate collaborative transformations of social worlds.

The concept of informal musical learning was applied to healing by Batt-Rawden and DeNora (2005). Musicking can contribute to "social worlds, identities, bodies [e.g., affecting strength during aerobics] and situations" (p. 289). Informal learning includes attaining the "complex skill of how to *use* music — what music does, what it can do and how it can be tapped for social purposes" (p. 289). They studied 22 people with chronic illnesses and either a musicking background or strong interest in music; the study purpose was to explore links between musicking and wellbeing and health. An interesting aspect of the interview process was to encourage "participants to tell their life stories and stories

of being well and being ill through musical narratives and metaphors" (p. 293). The researcher provided the participants with a customized music CD as a gift, with the selected music reflecting the researcher's childhood memories and self-care. Each participant repeated the process of curating CDs about aspects of their own lives four times, stimulating discussions of "past and present states of health/well-being" (p. 293). This music tool exchange moved participant musicking from *operational* (essentially backgrounds in their lives) to *action* or *activity* (oriented to specific and consciously adopted goals). The authors concluded that participants "create … pointers and tips on how to use music so as to promote health and wellbeing, connection to others and self-empowerment, and also how to activate music such that it might 'work' in health-promoting or otherwise beneficial ways" (p. 300).

Transformations that can result from liminal space could also be viewed as interventions for wellbeing. The discussions of *Music Education and Lifelong Learning* and *Musicking* earlier in this chapter include discussions of transformations related to liminality in music education settings. For example, Countryman (2014) discussed elementary school children developing rituals, de Quadros (2018) used the *Empowering Song* approach to train conductors of children's choruses, and *The Lakewood Project* (Koops et al., 2014) used an after-school program of rock orchestra that was shown to lead to lifelong participation in musicking. In addition to transformations that are intentionally facilitated by wellness programs and interventions, transformations are often created from the liminal experiences at Burning Man (Yudkin, 2016). Research about ritual theory at Burning Man is discussed later in this chapter.

Ritual Theory in Play

In ritual theory, the liminal space is a state of statuslessness in which one is no longer their former self. Similarly, in play one becomes an actor. The concept of play has been studied from multiple perspectives by scholars in several disciplines. Coming from a developmental psychology perspective, Piaget (1962) viewed play as an activity in which children can create unique and personal frameworks for interacting with the world. Piaget categorized play into two types, reproductive and symbolic. In reproductive play, actions from the personal framework are practiced and repeated for the "sheer pleasure of mastery" (Henricks, 2006, p. 187). In this manner, play becomes a practice, exercise, or a ritual. In symbolic play, children use their imaginations to take the world into their minds, and then they enact control through "symbol-making processes" and by subordinating the world to "egocentric demands" (Henricks, 2006, p. 187). From Piaget's (1962) perspective, play can create a transformative impulse (which is conceptually like collective effervescence). Hendricks added, "To transform is not only to stop the world and make it submit to one's demands but also to de-form or alter those processes" (2006, p. 187).

From a sociological perspective, Huizinga (1950) diverged from Piaget's (1962) biological reasons for play within culture. Huizinga (1950) stated, "Nature … gave us play, with its tension, its mirth, and its fun" (p. 3). Huizinga continued that "play is free, is not ordinary or real-life, is distinct from ordinary life in both locality and duration, creates order, and demands order that is absolute and supreme" (pp. 9–10). Huizinga's alternative viewpoint from that of Piaget has inspired other scholars (Henricks, 2006) to

ask three questions: “What are the cultural forms that seem to facilitate playful interaction? What are the various kinds of experiences that people have in these settings? What curiosities, propensities, and motives bring them to the playground?” (p. 183). Sicart (2014) considered seven types of play: contextual, carnivalesque, appropriative, disruptive, autotelic, creative, and personal. Some of these types of play (e.g., carnivalesque, disruptive, and creative) are conducive to relaxation of inhibitions, thereby promoting the attainment of collective effervescence; these types of play are evident in my Burning Man experiences described in Chapter Three.

Instead of trying to define play, Lieberman (1977) sought an understanding of the relationship of playfulness to imagination and creativity, exploring how playfulness is an element in play for both adults and children. Lieberman then moved to how playfulness is found in developmental studies ranging from kindergarten to adults, followed by an examination of playfulness in a theoretical framework through cognitive linkage, affective states, social expectations, and in aesthetics among play, imagination, and creativity.

Play in Education. Play can be a valuable tool in community music and music education. Play is also a field in its own right. Education facilitators can develop musicking interventions using Sicart’s (2014) seven types of play.

“Play symbolizes our deep connection to other creatures at the same time that it illustrates distinctively human traits” (Henricks, 2006, p. 7). DeNora (2013a) described “play as a way of negotiating social worlds, a realm in which possibilities of difference and change may be broached in safe ways, but which are simultaneously more than mere

rehearsal" (p. 42). Henricks (2006) asked, "If play represents a project in opposition and control, in what ways are these transformative desires expressed?" (p. 185). Their definition of play was based on four types of control: "control of access to the play sphere itself, ability to initiate action sequences, ability to control the activity once begun, and ability to interrupt action sequences" (pp. 185–197).

Henricks argued that play should be not only transformative in external/objective ways but also in internal/emotional ways. In this, Henricks proposed to study *play* with its contrasting counterparts of *work*, *ritual*, and *communitas*. Facilitators who use play as a tool in community music and music education can benefit from considering how to integrate the four activities of play, work, ritual, and communitas into their activities. For example, general music teachers could use *play* by having the students sing in angry, happy, sad, whisper, and underwater voices to show different ways of interpreting a musical passage in a fun way. This type of play can relax students in their work of learning, using a ritual of interpretive singing to open them up to new interpretations, and thereby developing communitas in their class group.

Ritual Theory at Burning Man

Burning Man is a unique study site, with its culture that includes play, ritual, and musicking, and it can even act as a therapeutic device. Burners treat their time away from the default world as points of reflection to set goals for their regular life. In this section, I summarize the Burning Man literature pertaining to the three stages of ritual, liminality and transformation, and play. Then, the interplay of radical ritual, set and setting, and Burning Man's 10 Principles is discussed. Social relationship symbols and play are

discussed, reaching back to the work by Collins and the Play subsection above. Insights about Burning Man from social media are discussed, and finally, I relate the Burning Man literature to this study.

The Three Stages of Ritual at Burning Man. Scholars (Bowditch, 2010; Clupper, 2007a, 2007b; Gilmore, 2005a, 2005b; Heller, 2013; McCaffrey, 2012; St John, 2008b; Yudkin, 2016) have shown that Burning Man participants experience V. Turner's (1969/2007) three stages of ritual, and that burners have intensive interpersonal interactions and display a lack of inhibition. Bowditch (2010) observed that V. Turner's (1969/2007) first stage of segregation, which is the transition from the default world (Burner term for normal life) to liminality, occurs during preparation and the journey to Black Rock City. The threshold from segregation to liminality is crossed during the process of entering the city (itself a ritual). The intensity of liminality (Thomassen, 2009), that is, the degree of free-spiritedness and interpersonal interactivity, varies during the week-long festival, typically increasing during rituals within the festival. Reaggregation occurs upon return to the default world, with *liminality-induced transformations* persisting for many burners, and being reinforced by after-burn events, Burning Man Regional Network events, the Burning Man Journal (Burning Man Project, 2020b), and communications with other burners. Extending reaggregation from event week, the Burning Man Organization's mission is "to facilitate and extend the culture that has issued from the Burning Man event into the larger world, … [and its vision is to] "bring experiences to people in grand, awe-inspiring and joyful ways that lift the human spirit, address social problems, and inspire a sense of culture, community, and civic

engagement" (Burning Man Project, 2023a, About Us section). The Burning Man Regional Network events extend reaggregation from the main event and keep up burner enthusiasm year-round, by direct participation or by seeing reports of the events on-line.

Liminality and Transformation at Burning Man. Burning Man mimics the statuslessness of being betwixt and between (V. Turner, 1967/1970), occupying liminal space in which actors are outside of society as they go through rituals and experiences. Liminal brains leave the default mode network and as shown by magnetoencephalography, "thousands of new connections form, linking far-flung brain regions that during normal waking consciousness don't exchange much information" (Pollan, 2018, p. 393). Some authors (Boyce-Tillman, 2009; Tramacchi, 2000) refer to liminality as an altered state of consciousness. Pollan wrote, "the brain appears to become less specialized and more globally interconnected, with considerably more … cross talk" (p. 393).

The Burning Man Census Team (Yudkin, 2016) documented burners' perceptions of having *transformative experiences* at Burning Man, with 20% and 75% saying that they *absolutely had* and *somewhat had*, respectively, a transformative experience. Furthermore, over 85% of burners said the change they experienced was "still persisting" during the days and weeks after leaving the playa. When Burning Man participants are in a state of liminality, they actively engage in activities that they normally would not do in the default world (Bowditch, 2010). During liminality, relationships between individuals are often egalitarian rather than hierarchical, engendering a state of communitas (Gilmore, 2005a). Atkinson and Robson (2012) suggested "the elements involved in

liminality facilitate the spaces of wellbeing [personal growth] as a complex process of mutually constituting interactions" (p. 1354). The entire playa week is itself a liminal experience, beginning with the entrance ceremony of ringing a gong and rolling in the dust at the gate, which separates the burners from their everyday lives. The annual theme for Burning Man helps participants to focus their art and activities in a common direction. Burning Man organizers Larry Harvey and Stuart Mangrum directly applied ritual theory to the event by choosing the 2017 theme of *Radical Ritual* (Burning Man Project, 2017).

Play at Burning Man. According to St John (2008b), leisure play became more serious in the twentieth century, inheriting some of religion's ritual framework from prior centuries. V. Turner (1988) stated that the ways people play can be a window into their culture that reveals how they work and what they value. St John (2008b) expanded that concept to societies regulating ludic (play) behavior in a way that reveals the values of the culture itself. Burning Man is its own culture, defined by its isolation in time and space and its 10 Principles. Andrews (2016) wrote, "Do not underestimate the value of play. For many people in attendance, the opportunity to play and engage with people very different from themselves can often lead to an enhanced view of that 'other' group" (Simple Human Contact and Play section).

St John (2008b) stated that the *vibe* of Burning Man is for the participants to shed the symbols of their default culture and enter into playful relations with other burners. At first sight, Burning Man can be seen as an adult playground, with mobile art cars (mutant vehicles) including a giant mechanical flaming octopus, a Spanish galleon, and a string of

giant teacups. Some burners wear wild, bright, LED-lit costumes, and their bikes are playfully decorated. Art is placed around the playa with the sole purpose of interaction.

Burners replace their default world names with unique playa names. The setting is festooned with props that actors (burners) can appropriate for play and to explore or change their personal identities. As DeNora (2013a) suggested, “toys are objects that enable the imaginative continuation of envisioned scenarios between people, made present, drawn into and mobilized within worlds” (p. 43). For example, a burner’s personal identity can include the playful dynamic of “making fun of oneself, or being made fun of, [and] can serve to reinforce one's self-image, but this teasing can also (and at the same time) provide an impetus to change, and suggest directions for desirable self-transformation” (Lewis, 2008, p. 48).

Summary

In this study, I took a syncretic approach that considers multiple scholarly approaches to study the achievement of liminality, collective effervescence, and/or communitas. I used the lenses of Music Education and Lifelong Learning, Musicking, Ritual Theory (and particularly Interaction Ritual Chains), along with the Applications of Ritual Theory (including Wellbeing, Play, and Burning Man) to apply insights from research in those areas to this study, and in turn, I applied those insights to music education in Chapter Seven.

Music education is the field in which insights from this study could be useful; hence it is appropriate to keep the lens of music education in mind. Music education philosophy has been categorized as being utilitarian, aesthetic, or praxial (Boler, 2020).

Utilitarian music education serves a non-musical outcome, for example, Boler stated that music education can improve student performance in other subjects such as math or reading. Aesthetic music education studies music for its own intrinsic value; music is a product (Reimer, 2003). The praxial philosophy regards music as both artistic and social, and as both a process and a product (Elliott, 1995). In this study, I sought to understand how to produce collective effervescence with musicking, which was process-oriented and in the praxial philosophy category.

According to Small (1998), musicking includes both the performers and the audience. At Burning Man, musicking is omnipresent, and some of those planned and impromptu musicking activities result in the phenomenon of collective effervescence for the musicians and for audience members. Clearly, the lens of musicking was important to this study. Ritual theory provides insight into the processes that can result in liminality and communitas. Van Gennep (1909/1960) outlined The Rites of Passage as having three stages: separation, transition, and reincorporation. Subsequently, V. Turner (1969/2007) referred to the three stages of the ritual process as separation, liminality, and reaggregation. Liminality, which can be thought of as being in a state controlled by one's inner psyche rather than controlled by ego (Farris, 2012), is preceded by separation, the detachment of the individual from the existing social structure, cultural conditions, or both (V. Turner, 1969/2007). Liminality is followed by reaggregation, the return of the individual to everyday life, possibly with changes based on transformations attained during liminality (McCaffrey, 2012). The three stages of ritual guided the process that leads to collective effervescence in musicking at Burning Man.

An interaction ritual (IR) is a mechanism in which variations in mutual focus of attention and rhythmic entrainment create a shared mood that can become collective effervescence (Collins, 2014). Collective effervescence was the phenomenon studied in this dissertation. Collective effervescence inputs (rhythmic entrainment and mutual focus of attention) and outputs (group solidarity, individual emotional energy, symbols of social relationship, and community standards) are features that were revealed in the data collection from Burning Man participants. Interaction ritual chains are a series of IRs, with each IR feeding into the next IR with emotional energy (EE) and solidarity from the previous interaction rituals (Collins, 2014).

From a larger list of Applications of Ritual Theory, I chose Wellbeing, Play, and Burning Man as areas for literature review. Achieving wellbeing can include personal transformation. Play, music education, and lifelong learning all seek to improve wellbeing. Batt-Rawden and DeNora (2005) used music to promote health and wellbeing, and they studied how to activate music to promote health. DeNora (2013a) developed an interdisciplinary approach for music, health, and wellbeing by adopting a holistic, interactionist, focus which reconnects music as an active ingredient of action, identity, capacity, and consciousness. Wellbeing literature lent some insights to this study, but was not a major lens.

In the context of ritual theory, play can create a transformative impulse (Piaget, 1962), which is similar to collective effervescence (Collins, 2004). Three of Sicart's (2014) seven types of play (carnivalesque, disruptive, and creative) are conducive to relaxation of inhibitions, thereby promoting the attainment of collective effervescence, as

in my Burning Man experiences described in Chapter Three. Play, in addition to being a field in its own right, can be a valuable tool in community music and music education, where leaders can benefit from considering how to integrate the four activities of play, work, ritual, and communitas into their activities. Play repeatedly was discussed by the participants in this study, and thus play was important to this study.

Ritual Theory literature, in the context of Burning Man, showed that the three stages of ritual are present, according to scholars (Bowditch, 2010; Clupper, 2007a, 2007b; Gilmore, 2005a, 2005b; Heller, 2013; McCaffrey, 2012; St John, 2008b; Yudkin, 2016). Bowditch (2010) stated that when in liminality, burners actively engage in activities that they normally would not do in the default world. Liminality can lead to transformation, and the Burning Man Census Team (Yudkin, 2016) found that most burners have had a transformative experience at Burning Man that still persists after leaving the playa. St John (2008b) stated that the vibe of Burning Man is for the participants to shed the symbols of their default culture and enter into playful relations with other burners and that how people play reveals the values of the culture itself. The Burning Man research literature informed the methods and analysis of this study.

Chapter Three: Foresight

In this chapter, I document my pertinent lived experience prior to beginning this study, which Heidegger (1962) called foresight, fore-conception, or dasein (literally *being there*). According to Peoples (2020), Heidegger believed that there is no way for researchers to completely separate themselves from the world because they are always a part of that world; they are literally *being there* (dasein). Further describing Heidegger's work, Peoples (2020) wrote that during hermeneutic phenomenological research, the researcher's foresight (biases or understandings or judgements) is revised as they begin to understand and interpret the phenomenon. In this chapter, I describe my personal lived musical experiences at 16 consecutive Burning Man festivals. My experiences as an individual performer, an ensemble member, and an ensemble director have given me a strong sense of *dasein* regarding community music and collective effervescence.

At Burning Man, I have experienced liminality and communitas while musicking in multiple types of ensembles (see Table 3), including marching bands, rock bands, jazz combos, orchestras as well as accompanying Electronic Dance Music DJs. I also performed as an individual on trumpet, handpan, ukulele, and percussion. This chapter presents my Burning Man Origin Story and then my individual, ensemble, and directing experiences, which include Deep Playa Wonderings, the Burning Band, the Ambient Drummers, and the Black Rock Philharmonic.

Table 3. Burning Man Ensembles

Ensemble	Description
Ambient Drummers	This ensemble is part of the Fire Conclave (see Footnote 5 in Chapter One). Now called the Ambient Musicians, it splits into more than a dozen pods, each accompanying a fire troop that performs just prior to the Saturday Man Burn[9] within the *Great Circle* surrounding the Man. Instrumentation is primarily percussion. They help "create atmosphere at the foot of the Man on the night of the Burn" (Burning Man Project, 2024g). The Ambient Musicians rehearse and perform in drum circles during the week.
Processional Band	This ensemble is part of the Fire Conclave. The Processional Band is made up of members of the Ambient Drummers along with horn players. They perform in *The Procession of the Ceremonial Flame* which brings the ceremonial fire from *Center Camp* to the fire troops just before the Man Burn. The ceremonial fire was lit at *Center Camp* using a magnifying glass and the setting sun on the first night of Burning Man. The procession "is made up of Luminists" (torchbearers on stilts), "Lamplighters who [pull] the Luminferrous" (the art piece that holds the ceremonial fire), and the "Processional Band who generates energy for the procession" (Burning Man Project, 2024g).
Burning Band	This band is the oldest band on the playa, "bringing the same ten songs to Burning Man for over 20 years." They are known as "the drinking band with a marching problem" (Burning Band, 2024). Each song includes the band singing a verse. In addition to parades, the band does "random gigs" in which they wander the streets of Black Rock City, stopping to play at burner camps.
Black Rock Philharmonic	The Black Rock Philharmonic, founded in 2018, is a large group of amateur and professional musicians from different camps who perform classical music in a full symphony orchestra (Black Rock Philharmonic, 2024). During burn week, they play one concert at a camp in the city, one at a major art piece on the open playa, and one at the Temple.
Playa Pops	This ensemble is a group of musicians from different camps around Black Rock City that does four or five performances of popular music at multiple venues during burn week. They are a "fun musical group in a not-too-serious, no-pressure way" (Playa Pops, 2024).

[9] The Man Burn was the signature ritual on Saturday, the seventh day of the event, with the Temple Burn occurring the next day. The Man, up to 10 stories tall, was surrounded by fire-spinning troops and 70,000 burners. After the fire spinning, fireworks erupted from the Man, which then burned to the ground, with the burners rushing the embers soon after, and then celebrating the ritual the next morning by cooking in the embers.

Burning Man Origin Story

I first attended Burning Man in 2005. I was aware of Burning Man as early as 1995 during my years attending UNLV in Las Vegas. I had attended a couple of one-night *raves* in the desert in the Las Vegas area, but I could not imagine that being in the desert for a full week would be inspirational.

I moved away from Las Vegas in 2001 to Washington state. There, I had a group of friends who were also burners. Due to my outgoing playful personality and my passion for music, they kept encouraging me to go to Burning Man. I finally surrendered when a friend, a newspaper reporter, invited me to camp with them. One hindrance to attend the festival was that it was scheduled during the second week of school; taking the time off would have been a nightmare regarding setting up class procedures and discipline. But luckily, I changed jobs, and it allowed me to go, along with having a week after the event to *decompress*[10] and resume my default world routine.

The rituals of Burning Man captured me instantly, beginning with the gate line, where you are funneled from a two-lane paved Nevada highway onto the multiple-lane entry-line on the dry lakebed of the Black Rock Desert. When the line movement paused, people jumped out of their cars and began interacting playfully with each other. This gate line ritual was my first experience of Burning Man in which I noticed that people were in a different state of mind. People who were not even through the gates were already acting more playfully and were connecting deeply with random strangers. I was inspired and

[10] Decompression was the individual or collective process by which a burner reaggregated back into the default word. The term was also used to describe single-day Burning Man Regional Events that happen soon after the actual Burn event in different areas around the world.

played my cornet, improvising musical *gifts*[11] while walking around. People were dancing, hugging, and greeting each other with a phrase common with burners, *Welcome Home.* I was moved by how the simple act of gifting music could bring people together and inspire playful communitas, in other words, the feeling of community (E. Turner, 2012).

Several miles later, at the actual gate, another ritual unfolded. One greeter asked if there were any *virgins* (first time burners) in the car, and I cautiously raised my hand. Immediately both greeters invited me out of the vehicle to perform the welcoming ritual and officially cross into *liminality*, the transformational space of betwixt and between (V. Turner, 1969/2007). I rang the giant bell (a modified metal canister), screamed my welcome to the city, and rolled around in the playa dust to create a *playa angel* (like a snow angel); this ritual initiates every virgin into their new dusty liminal home.

Upon arrival at camp (*Want It!*[12]), I was introduced to my campmates, a group of about 30 close friends, mostly from the western United States. There I learned of another ritual, *playa names*, which symbolize that your burner persona is not that of the default world. Playa names are not created by each person but are instead given to the burner by the community. My friend, the reporter, introduced me by my nickname in the default world, *Mister Blink*, which was a playful way to tease me about my job as a college

[11] Gifting is one of the 10 Principles, which are listed in Table 2 of Chapter One.
[12] *Want It!* was a camp whose main activity (gift to the community) was a Sushi Party. They used naked volunteers as sushi plates which were referred to as "Sushi Sluts." The camp also was home to a group of San Francisco area DJs called the "Ambient Mafia" who performed during the event. The camp symbol was the "Passion Fist" which I later printed as a logo on patches for gifts in the following years.

music instructor. However, to the burners in the camp, that sounded like a playa name, and that name has stuck to me for 16 years of burning.

Deep Playa Wonderings

A transformational moment for me came one night exploring the *deep playa,* which is in the unpopulated part of the five square mile city between the Man and the outer perimeter trash fence. Art pieces are seemingly randomly placed in the deep playa; there are stark contrasts between the backdrop of the empty dry lakebed and the mountains of the Black Rock Desert during a moonlit starry night in one direction, and the lasers, lights, and music emanating from the populated part of the city in the other direction. As became my ritual, I always carried my cornet with me so I could gift the power of music to my fellow night pilgrims. I remember coming upon a couple having an intimate moment embracing each other while sitting on the playa in front of a beautiful art sculpture. I cautiously approached them and asked if they would like to be *gifted* a love song. They eagerly agreed, and I slowly circled them while improvising a love ballad with my cornet. I saw how music created *collective effervescence*. After the song, we embraced, sat together, shared our stories and dreams, and generally enjoyed the bliss of communitas together. This experience led me to the realization that I could take my acts of gifting music a step further by recording some of these moments and then gifting them so burners could recall these transformational moments. These recordings were my version of a *playa artifact* which were memorabilia of the burn week that can bring back memories and emotions later in the default world, that is, during the reaggregation phase (V. Turner, 1969/2007). Popular *gifts* (playa artifacts) include necklaces, patches, and

stickers; even the Burning Man guidebook comes with a couple of gift stickers from the Burning Man Census Team. Playa artifacts are examples of what Collins (2004, Figure 2.1) termed *social relationship symbols.*

The idea of a playa artifact evolved in my mind and manifested into my ongoing remote-recording musical-gifting project titled *Deep Playa Wonderings* (the appropriateness and similarity of "wandering" and "wondering" resulted in this catchy name). During the separation phase that year, I prepared to create a playa artifact for the next year's burn in two ways. First, I experimented with mobile recording equipment that could be easily carried and survive the rough conditions of the harsh desert. Second, I devised a way to easily *gift* this music to those present in the exact moment of the playa recording and to the larger burner community, using a sticker with my Soundcloud address (Blink, 2013) to stream recordings. I distributed these stickers to those experiencing the moment, and later to burners I encountered during my travels at Black Rock City during burn week, and to people I encountered in the default world after the burn (during the reaggregation phase).

For the project, I used a new instrument called a *handpan.* Its natural reverberation pulls the player and the listeners into a meditative, reflective state, which can evoke a *deep playa* experience of exploring the stark desert alone on a pilgrimage (like the experiences of the Islamic *Hajj*, the Catholic *Camino de Santiago* pilgrimage, and the secular *Pacific Crest Trail* hike). I was performing a sound meditation just

outside of the Temple[13] when a burner asked if they could sit by me as I performed. I non-verbally acknowledged the invitation and welcomed the burner into my musical space. Within moments that person was sobbing, releasing the pain of losing a loved one. Another burner approached and asked to dance. I welcomed the second burner into the musical space, and that burner incorporated into a form of spiritual interpretive dance the pain from the first burner as well as the music I was channeling through the powerful emotions of all those around me. The power of this moment brought me to tears as I continued to play, feeling that my music was aiding others to achieve liminality and transformation. I was providing them with a vehicle to heal their pains of loss. I was deeply touched by the power of music and how it can unite us, center us, and to move us into a state of *collective effervescence* (Collins, 2004).

My Deep Playa Wonderings project continued for 8 years, and I am amazed how the simple act of gifting music can impact people and create community. In the default world (reaggregation phase), I receive messages from people who encounter my sound meditations, and they describe how it transformed them, how listening to them in the default world helps them recall the magic of the playa, and how this playa artifact can bring them right back to a powerful liminal moment (V. Turner, 1969/2007) of their burn experience.

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[13] The Temple was a community shared space that was an important part of Black Rock City. It was a neutral, non-denominational spiritual space where everyone could gather to remember the past and those they had lost. Burners attached remembrances to the Temple walls during the week. On Sunday, the day after the exuberant Man Burn, the Temple was burned in a solemn, quiet ceremony (Burning Man Project, 2024d, Meaning of the Temple to the Burning Man Community section).

Burning Band

In my first year at Burning Man, I heard about a community ensemble called the Burning Band which is made up of lifelong learner musickers of all ages coming together on-playa to perform random gigs throughout the week. They dress in sailor hats and white shirts with Navy-style epaulets (imagine the stark contrast of new white shirts with those worn by repeated burners with the dust of the playa from many years stained into them).

One morning in my tent, I heard a marching band off in the distance. I quickly grabbed my cornet to try to find this infamous band that I read about in the online *ePlaya* messaging board (in my separation phase). Now, in my liminal phase, I found them marching to play a wake-up performance for a Texas camp. I joined them, improvising a Dixieland accompaniment because I did not know their song book. With most of the city asleep, the camp's kiosk was not functioning in the normal camp-intended way. Instead, it was appropriated by a couple involved in the act of love making on top of the roof so they could watch the colors of the sunrise. Showing another aspect of the playfulness of musicking at Burning Man and how it can lead to *collective effervescence* (in an entirely new way), the band recognized what was really going on during this moment and segued into a raunchy dirty blues tune, and I improvised a plunger-mute-inspired blues solo on top of the band accompaniment. The band finished the song, and the couple put on their bathrobes. The band, the couple, and the crowd then were served Bloody Mary drinks and spiked coffee as a gift for waking the camp (and for providing the soundtrack for the love making). In my reaggregation phase, I realized that this experience was another

example of musicking facilitating communitas and collective effervescence for the citizens of Black Rock City.

The band invited me to join them for gigs throughout the week and gifted me a Burning Band Medallion. As recent as 2023, I still performed and camped with the Burning Band. I gifted my father a ticket for Burning Man in 2014 as a 65th birthday present. We built a washboard together for my father to use in the Burning Band. My father became a lifelong learner musicker by resuming performing that had ceased after elementary school.

In another year, one of my best friends was struggling with the concept of Burning Man during their first burn. My friend had been trying to attend events listed in the guidebook only to find out they were late or were not happening. So, my friend's expectation of participating in a transformational event had not come to fruition. During a gig on a pirate ship art car, the Burning Band started playing as they entered the ship, spreading out across the deck. The band members playfully interacted with the pedestrians and bicycles that were passing by (because a Spanish galleon sailing on a dry lakebed with a band playing on deck is something to be in *awe* of). The band started using pirate sayings (*argh*) while belting out tunes on their instruments. I witnessed my friend letting go of the default world cultural norms as they slipped into the spontaneous moment and felt the experience fully; it was their *awe* moment. My friend was dancing, talking happily with the camp that the band invaded, making continuous pirate jokes, and of course playing music to fuel this positive transformation fueled by *gifting*. My friend's moment of *awe* (liminality) and the *collective effervescence* experienced by everyone was

in a sense achieved by changing the pirate *argh* to the *awe* of life.

The Burning Band had gigs of performing for other camps (arranged before or during burn week) as well as at community events for the city, but the magic also happened when the band marched around the city with no preconceived plans (called *random gigs*). Sometimes these gigs, serendipitously, were the glue of transformation. On a random gig, the band was marching (with the shape of the formation constantly shifting like a jellyfish moving in the ocean), and it encountered a camp hosting a morning yoga class in which people were trying to achieve a sense of *collective effervescence* in a meditative way. Yoga and meditation are used in other festivals like *Beloved* in Oregon which "presents ritual experiences to explore what sacred art, music, and movement can do to cultivate vulnerability, belonging, and liberation" (Beloved Presents, 2021, History). The Burning Band invaded the tranquil yoga setting and proceeded to change the atmosphere to one of a playful party. Soon, the yoga participants were off their mats and the yoga session turned into a conga and limbo line. Drinks and food were *gifted* to the band which stayed there for a while enjoying each other's company and enjoying the collective transformational moment that randomness, playfulness, openness, and musicking facilitated. I surely experienced collective effervescence that day, and based on the emotional energy and group bonding displayed by many others, I think they also might have experienced *collective effervescence*.

Ambient Drummers and Processional Band

The Ambient Drummers first came to my attention in Burning Man's official newsletter, *The Jackrabbit Speaks* (Burning Man Project, 2021). Their role is to support

the Fire Conclave Burn Night ritual which culminates with the burning of the Man that is the eponymous symbol of the city and the festival and that celebrates the week of liminality and transformation. Ambient Drummers provide background (ambient) sound for the dancers and fire spinners in as many as 25 fire troops. The Fire Conclave ritual begins with a procession from *Center Camp* to the *Great Circle* around the Man, lighting the fires for the fire troops positioned around the *Great Circle*. All the fire troops and Ambient Drummers perform simultaneously for about a half-hour, surrounded by 70,000 cheering burners. At the end of the fire spinning, the Man's arms slowly rise, and fireworks launch from the Man's hands, body, and surrounding support structure (the Man may be over 100 feet tall).

Being a musician and music educator in the default world, I was instantly curious about how I could be a part of this group. Participation in the ensemble also gets you the best seats in the house, between the 70,000 burners and the burning Man. I registered with the Fire Conclave early in the week and attended the rehearsal on Thursday, along with another friend who happened to be a *Deadhead*[14] and *Phishhead*[15] which meant they understood festival culture. As a music educator, I had instigated my friend to jam in camp with instruments I brought to the playa. Based on that minimal musicking background, I invited my friend to join me in the Ambient Drummer group. Since my friend was not a traditionally trained musician, I offered to provide guidance during the process of playing and accompanying the fire dancers. I *gifted* my friend a shaker in the

[14] A *Deadhead* was a fan and follower of the rock group The Grateful Dead.
[15] A Phishhead was a fan and follower of the rock band Phish.

form of a cabbage, and suddenly a person who had never been in a band joined a group of over 100 drummers performing with hundreds of fire dancers in front of 70,000 people playing a plastic cabbage shaker. (What kind of magical place is this?) My friend and I shared a moment of *collective effervescence* during the Ambient Drummer performance which became the highlight of the burn for my friend, who still thanks me for the gift of encouragement to join the group.

Several years later, based on my long participation with the Ambient Drummers and the Fire Conclave, I was asked to take over the leadership of the ensemble. The current director had to step down because of cancer, and my default world profession as a music educator was an asset. I was in *awe* of this honor but also overwhelmed; it shocked me each year how the ensemble came together through all the chaos. During the only rehearsal on Thursday, the drummers were instructed to self-select into pods[16] of drummers. Despite the chaos of people sampling the pods, I was amazed that within 20 minutes, all the pods were filled, evenly balanced and *grooving*! How can such chaos become a musical organization in such little time? I had taught elementary school, middle school, high school, and college music, and could not imagine that this could happen (especially with such a range of musical skills, from the strong pod leaders all the way to lifelong learner musickers like my cabbage-shaker friend. When I took leadership of this ensemble, I wanted to keep that *playa magic* of serendipity, immediacy, unconditional welcome, and playfulness.

[16] A pod was a subgroup of drummers within the Ambient Drummer ensemble. They were assigned to a fire troop of 10 to 50 people to provide the rhythmic accompaniment to their choreographed performance during the Man Burn ceremony on Saturday night of Burning Man.

One year, I realized that the procession music was another chance to have music be the soundtrack of transformational change. Trying to select the music was an interesting challenge, and I remembered talking with another *Phishhead* who suggested I listen to their version of the theme from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (*Thus Spake Zarathustra* by Richard Strauss) which was set to a funk slow groove. Another song that I chose that year was for us to improvise a blues song using that year's Burning Man theme, I-Robot. I remember the ensemble gathered around me in a circle as I playfully pretended to be a mean band director, angrily cutting them off and saying "NOOOOO" it needs to be more like this. Then I proceeded into a robot dance to mimic the theme. Throughout the short rehearsal to create a spontaneous composition (in line with the Burning Man principle of *Immediacy*), I repeatedly encouraged the musicians to push past their normal limits and to be playful along with being more robotic. Imagine trying to get a high school jazz band to do this 20 minutes before a performance in front of 70,000 people, like at a football bowl game halftime show. I knew that communication was going to be difficult, so I instituted a process of the musicians echoing my song commands down the line of 100 musicians, bringing them into the solution process rather than the natural human dynamic of blaming the leader for the difficulties. The group gelled into a successful performance with only a short organizational rehearsal. Upon reflection, these magical moments can happen when individuals are off balance and then recover as a team.

On Burn Night, the group gathered into the processional line and proceeded to start the liminal phase of the signature ritual of Burning Man, during a white-out dust storm and playing a funk version of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Latecomers walking to the

show cheered us as the group marched from *Center Camp* to the Man. They danced alongside the group's formation, and the group members' contagious smiles and joy spread to those fellow burners. The group turned into the *Great Circle*, with the chaos of 70,000 screaming people on one side and the fire troops on the other. The procession paused four times for a short pre-choreographed performance by the fire-spinning Luminist stilt walkers to accompany the passing of fire from the Luminferrous to the nearby fire troops. This is where the I-Robot blues came out. The crowd went wild each time the group paused for the flame transfer. As the band director in front, I decided that since I was dressed in white shiny, sparkly pants, I might as well dance like a robot as I did in rehearsal. This further energized the crowd, which rose and danced along with the improvised robot blues. Again, spontaneity, immediacy, playfulness, and music led to a feeling of communitas for all 70,000 burners and to collective effervescence.

Black Rock Philharmonic

I have personal history with the Black Rock Philharmonic orchestra (BRP). The director has been my friend for many years. Many of the members of the Burning Band that I camp with also perform in Burning Man community ensembles such as the Playa Pops, the Playa Choir, and the BRP. Those people encouraged me to participate with BRP, which became a reality in 2019. Imagine playing classical music on the playa with wooden instruments (bassoons, cellos) in such a dry, inhospitable environment. Since I was in the role of performer at Burning Man, I allowed myself to put on a different face than my default world director persona; I was the annoying loud trumpet player who challenges the director's authority with playful jokes. It is Burning Man, and I had found

that being out of character can inspire others to do the same, to let go and be more playful, while at the same time becoming more connected to the group (communitas) through these interaction rituals. Luckily, this loud trumpet player had some latitude because I was a friend of the director, who was also in my Processional Band.

The ensemble rehearsed with the *Frozen Oasis*[17] camp. Since this was classical music including the *1812 Overture* and *Bohemian Rhapsody*, they needed two rehearsals (*Robot Blues* as in the short Processional Band rehearsal was not going to be adequate). During the first rehearsal, every band member was gifted a Black Rock Philharmonic insulated mug, which was highly valued because another playa tradition is that burners receive free (gifted) drinks at the various camp bars, but only if you have your own cup. Playful rehearsals progressed, and the ensemble prepared for two gigs: a performance at the *Folly* art installation and a performance at the Temple for the mourners of the city. (Footnote 6 in Chapter One describes the *Folly*, and Footnote 13 in this chapter describes the Temple.) During the *Folly* performance (liminal phase), the crowd went crazy during *Bohemian Rhapsody*, followed by the fire from the fire-trumpet and an art car during the *1812 Overture*, and ending with the crowd clamoring to get the 2000 kazoos the musicians were throwing to use during *Ode to Joy*. The 3,000-plus crowd was energized more than I had ever seen for a classical music concert.

In 2020, I participated in Black Rock Philharmonic virtual get togethers that the

[17] The Frozen Oasis camp was a group of burners who had an art car called Elektra White Dragon (which could shoot a 45-foot-long stream of fire out of its mouth). They also had their own camp activities, including frozen slushies and misters in their public area. They hosted the Black Rock Philharmonic on-playa public rehearsals for several years.

ensemble director hosted as a way of keeping the community strong during lockdown. I recorded two trumpet parts for the virtual encore of *Bohemian Rhapsody.* I also posted regularly to their Facebook page, gifting them my handpan sound meditations. During the pandemic, several BRP ensemble members also participated in my *Multiverse Bubble Skipping* virtual composition (Blink, 2020) during the COVID pandemic year.

The Bohemian Rhapsody Song

The selection of Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* was especially potent because the movie of the same name had been recently released. The performance became a sing-along, with the audience singing so powerfully that they were louder than the orchestra which was being amplified by the *Mayan Warrior*[18] art car. One of my favorite memories of this performance was a tutu-clad woman playing cymbals for the first time stealing the show with dramatic cymbal crashes. In another movie, *Wayne's World*, the characters head-banged to the music in one part of *Bohemian Rhapsody*. At that point, one person in the audience jumped up, as in the movie song, and proceeded to head-bang. Within 10 seconds, that spontaneous action infected the whole audience which was dancing and head-banging to the music in such a joyous way that my arms literally were filled with goose bumps. This effect still lingers as I remember this moment (in the reaggregation phase). As the tune slowed down for its final ending lyric, the audience was so energetic

[18] The *Mayan Warrior* art car had a huge following and history at Burning Man. It had one of the most expensive sound and light systems for an art car on the playa. According to Bain (2022, para. 2), "the behemoth art car" was one of the "premiere sound stages on wheels, over the years expanding in spectacle and volume as it fuses the ancient cultures that influence it with the cutting-edge tech that makes it visible from a mile away." Pictures of the *Mayan Warrior* can be found at their website (Mayan Warrior, 2024).

with their singing that they pushed through the normal timing of the song. In true burner fashion, the conductor forcefully turned around and induced the new members of the ensemble (the audience) to follow the conductor's time. At that moment, I truly saw how music created collective effervescence and communitas; I was in awe of the transformational power of musicking at Burning Man and how passive audiences can become active participants in musicking. To this day, when people ask me about Burning Man, I will pull up the YouTube videos of Black Rock Philharmonic's *Bohemian Rhapsody from the* 2019 *Folly* performance along with the 2020 virtual encore project. This is the best way I can explain the *magic* of Burning Man. My arms still get goosebumps from the memories of *collective effervescence* when watching the videos and explaining Burning Man to new people. In this study, I focused on the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* art installation.

Chapter Four: Method

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework of this study. I describe my hermeneutic spiral which studies the ritual process at Burning Man. Each turn of the spiral built on the understanding obtained in the previous turns of the spiral. I also explain my role as the researcher using dasein (being there) within the hermeneutic phenomenological study tradition. I explain the selection of participants and instrumentation along with research procedures. This study of the lived experiences of the director and musicians of Burning Man's Black Rock Philharmonic was based on the tripartite structure of ritual theory (Durkheim, 1895/2014; E. Turner, 2012; V. Turner, 1969/2007; Van Gennep, 1909/1960) and on the work of Collins (2004) on interaction ritual chains that can result in collective effervescence. In this study, I studied a single Black Rock Philharmonic musical performance as an example of how to create collective effervescence in community music ensembles.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine collective effervescence such as that created through musicking at Burning Man. In this study, I focused on the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* by the Black Rock Philharmonic at the *Folly* art installation at Burning Man. Lived experiences of the ensemble director and musicians in the separation, liminal, and reaggregation phases (Durkheim, 1895/2014; E. Turner, 2012; V. Turner, 1969/2007; Van Gennep, 1909/1960) of their Burning Man musical performance provided insight into how to create collective effervescence in community music ensembles.

My research questions were the following:

1. To what extent does the culture of Burning Man facilitate collective effervescence?
2. To what extent does musicking at Burning Man facilitate collective effervescence?
3. What do Burning Man ensemble directors and members do before and during the performance that could be applicable and useful to music educators in the default world?

Chapter Two discussed the basis of this study's theoretical lenses in the literature, and Chapter Three described my prior experiences at Burning Man, which were pertinent to this study of a Burning Man musical performance. During data collection and analysis in this study, I was cognizant of the research literature and my dasein. This study was based on the theoretical lenses and literature discussed in Chapter Two. I used the lenses of *Music Education and Lifelong Learning*, *Musicking, Ritual Theory, Interaction Rituals and Interaction Ritual Chains* to apply insights from research in those areas to this study. Additional insights for this study were from *Applications of Ritual Theory* in the areas of *Wellbeing*, *Play* and *Burning Man* in Chapter Two. This chapter continues with a summary of the hermeneutic phenomenological research method. Then, I describe the study design.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research Method

Phenomenological research starts with the world people live in and their experiences within it (van Manen, 1997). Peoples (2020) wrote, "Phenomenological

researchers pause and look at a phenomenon as the lived experience of some activity and illuminate its specific characteristic as experience rather than trying to turn it into an abstract structure and comparing it to other structures" (p. 5). For this study, I chose a phenomenological methodology because it allowed me to illuminate the personal meanings of lived experiences related to the phenomenon of *collective effervescence* which had been achieved through *musicking* at Burning Man and because of my extensive personal experience with this subject.

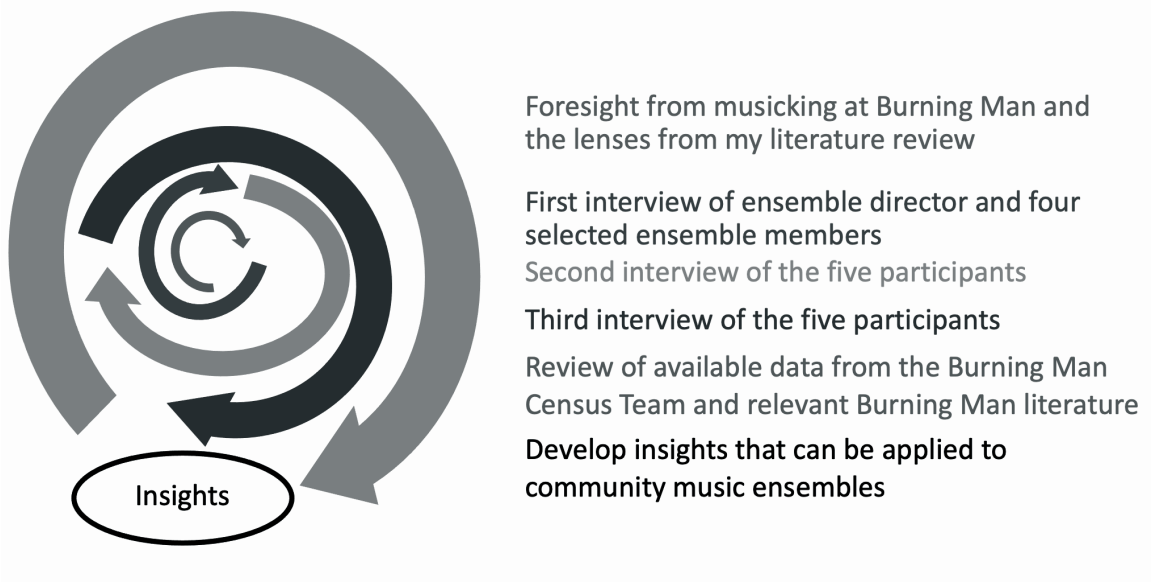
The role of the researcher is a key difference between the two major types of phenomenological research: transcendental or descriptive (Husserl, 2004) vs. hermeneutic or interpretive (Heidegger, 1962). In transcendental research, the researcher must set aside their judgments while focusing on the phenomenon being studied, which is called bracketing or epoché (Peoples, 2020). Conversely, in hermeneutic research, the researcher is a part of the research, which is called *dasein* or *being there* (Creswell, 2007; Heidegger, 1962; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1997). Hermeneutic research employs the hermeneutic circle or spiral (Peoples, 2020). The first revolution around the spiral is the researcher's preconceived knowledge (foresight). Because of my extensive experience with the phenomenon over many years, as well as my personal relationships with people who provided data within the study, a hermeneutic study was appropriate for my situation.

Study Design

The design of this study is best described by a visualization of my hermeneutic spiral (Figure 3). Heidegger (1962) developed the hermeneutic circle (or spiral), using the

method to interpret Bible verses, circling from the text to the context, then back to the text, etc. Gadamer (2013) reconceptualized the hermeneutic circle as an iterative process through which a new understanding of a whole reality is developed by means of exploring the details of existence. Gadamer viewed understanding as linguistically mediated, through conversations with others in which reality is explored and an agreement is reached that represents a new understanding. Osborne (2006) viewed hermeneutics as a spiral from text to context. The researcher moves between the text and the overall context perceived by the researcher. That movement spirals toward the actual meaning of the text and its significance.

Figure 3. The Hermeneutic Spiral for This Study



The key to the hermeneutic spiral is the opportunity in each turn around the spiral to adjust the remaining data collection and analysis. Data collection elicited the ideas and lived experiences from the interviewees without influencing them by the dasein or foresight of the interviewer.

The first (innermost) turn (in Figure 3) of this study's hermeneutic spiral (prior knowledge) included my foresight from musicking at Burning Man. It also included insights from the lenses of the broad set of literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The results of that first turn of the hermeneutic spiral are documented in Chapters One, Two, and Three.

In the second turn of this study's hermeneutic spiral, I interviewed the director of the Black Rock Philharmonic and four selected members of the BRP (five separate interviews) about their lived experiences at the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* art installation. Peoples (2020) stated "the parts inform the whole and the whole informs the parts" (p. 57). Accordingly, I reread the five interview transcripts to ensure that my evolving understanding was consistent with those interviews, as well as my prior knowledge documented in Chapters One, Two, and Three. In the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenological research, my evolving understanding of the phenomenon affected data collection plans for the next set of interviews.

The third turn of this study's hermeneutic spiral was the second set of interviews of the five participants. Those interviews included follow-up questions about the 2019 performances discussed in the initial interviews as well as questions about the following year which culminated in the 2020 virtual encore performance. Based on my increased understanding, I modified interview questions for the next turn of the spiral.

The fourth turn of this study's hermeneutic spiral was the third set of interviews of the five participants. Those interviews included follow-up questions about the 2019 and 2020 performances discussed in the previous two sets of interviews as well as

questions about the time between the 2020 virtual encore performance and the present. Following the fourth turn of my hermeneutic spiral, I created three *general narratives of the data* (one for each interview set). Using coding and repeated reading of the transcripts, I identified eight themes that captured the data, and documented those themes in Chapter Five. At this point, I provided each participant with the transcripts of their three interviews, for their review, and I incorporated their comments into the development of Chapter Five.

I then created a *general description of the phenomenon* (in Chapter Six) based on the three general narratives and my rereading of all the interview transcripts. The analysis in Chapter Six is organized using the theoretical frameworks of ritual theory (V. Turner, 1969/2007) and interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2014).

The fifth turn of this study's hermeneutic spiral was a review of data made available to me by the Burning Man Census Team as well as reviewing additional research articles by Burning Man scholars. Those data from many participants helped me place the data I collected into the context of the much larger set of Burning Man participants. After the fifth turn of this study's hermeneutic spiral, I modified Chapter Six. The hermeneutic spiral culminated in the insights documented in Chapter Seven, which summarizes this study and its implications for music education.

Data Acquisition Methods and Procedures

This study began with my first interview with the Black Rock Philharmonic director, who directed the 2019 live and 2020 virtual encore performances of *Bohemian Rhapsody*. In addition to capturing impressions of the director's rich lived experience, I

also obtained recommendations of potential interviewees from within the ensemble who also participated in those performances. I performed purposive sampling using my judgment obtained from the director interview to identify potential ensemble members to interview. I formally invited those members to participate and obtained consent letters from each of them. I then proceeded with an initial interview of each selected ensemble member. All interviews were documented, with transcripts reviewed by the interviewee and with my notes discussing non-verbal communication and interviewer impressions.

Once the initial set of interviews was completed, I modified my interview questions for the second round of interviews based on the data collected in the first interviews. Similarly, I modified my questions for the third round of interviews based on data collected in the first two sets of interviews. Once I completed the three sets of interviews with all five participants, I used coding and the three general narratives to elucidate eight themes of the individual and collective experiences. During the interviews, I also reviewed artifacts obtained from the interviewees and the internet. Finally, with the data, coding and eight themes in mind, I created a general description of the phenomenon. Then, I reviewed the data pertaining to transformation from the 2019 Burning Man Census Field Books. I also reviewed the various videos of the performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* during Burning Man 2019 found online (YouTube, Facebook) along with public comments associated with the videos.

Researcher Role

Musicking is ubiquitous at Burning Man, ranging from recorded and live music being played in over a thousand individual camps, large electronic dance music camps,

and live performance ensembles. In developing the plan for this study, the first step was to choose which of these manifestations of musicking to study. I wanted to achieve an understanding that could be useful in future efforts to improve music education. I also realized that studying dozens of manifestations could dilute my efforts. I decided to study a single performance of a single community ensemble that has some structural similarity to a traditional orchestra found in high schools and higher education in the United States. To facilitate data acquisition, I chose an ensemble in which I have had the roles of observer and musician but did not have the role of director. Data collection focused on the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* by the Black Rock Philharmonic at the *Folly* art installation along with the 2020 virtual encore performance. I was an ensemble member, playing trumpet, in both of those performances. The 2019 performance is thought by many to have had an exceptional level of *collective effervescence*.

Selection of Participants

Because a phenomenological study is not concerned with generalizing the findings, but more of a deep exploration of the research phenomenon, Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) discussed seeking intensity and diversity of participants, rather than a large number of participants. Moustakas (1994) suggested the number of participants to be interviewed in a phenomenological study should be between 1 and 20 participants, depending on the time frame of the study. Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022), quoting from their earlier work, stated that purposive sampling is appropriate for phenomenological studies if one wants "to discover, understand, and gain insight … from which the most can be learned" (p. 8). They also noted that because the aim is to develop insights into the

phenomenon and not to generalize findings to a population, the focus of interviews should be on the intensity of participation rather than the number of participants. The participants in this study included a range of demographic characteristics (age, gender, and home geographical location) due to the wide range of attendees at Burning Man. Sampling to identify participants used a combination of criterion and purposive methods (Peoples, 2020).

Criterion sampling (Peoples, 2020), in other words, the leadership position, was used to select the Black Rock Philharmonic Director as the initial interviewee. Within the ensemble, I identified potential candidates for ensemble members during my interview with the ensemble director. Ensemble membership was used as the first criterion to identify eligible musicians as participants. All participants met the criterion that they had performed as a member of the Black Rock Philharmonic ensemble in 2019 and 2020. I then used purposive sampling (Peoples, 2020) to identify specific ensemble members to interview, based on their involvement with the ensemble, the director's recommendations, and the rich ensemble experiences that I have witnessed throughout the years. The study's sample size was four ensemble members along with the director of the ensemble. I chose this number in an effort to create a balance between having too few participants to gain a good view of the phenomenon and too many to be able to handle the data.

All interviews were conducted with single individuals rather than groups to allow each interview to probe more deeply into areas revealed by the participant. Recruitment of the ensemble director was done through email, based on my personal knowledge. For

ensemble members, recruitment was done through email based on my personal knowledge and on referrals by the ensemble director.

Recruitment and Description of the Participants. I developed an *invitation letter* (Appendix C) to describe this study to potential participants. The letter also provided information about their anonymity, their capability of reviewing the interview transcripts, and their option to remove themselves from the research at any time. Each participant then provided an *informed consent letter* (Appendix D) to become a participant. The Chapter Five section titled "Participant Backgrounds" describes each participant's musical background in the default world and at Burning Man.

Data Collection

In this study of *Creating Collective Effervescence by Musicking at Burning Man*, I used multiple forms of data which began with artifacts of the various videos of the Black Rock Philharmonic (BRP) performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* during Burning Man 2019 found online (YouTube and Facebook). Then, I interviewed the director and four selected members of the 2019 and 2020 BRP, three times each. Each interview was documented in a transcript that was reviewed by the interviewee in which the interviewer described observed nonverbal communication and interviewer impressions during the interview. I also used artifacts obtained from the interviewees, such as *gifted* items from Burning Man, photos, videos, and social media postings. In addition to the online videos of the 2019 BRP *Folly* performance at Burning Man, I reviewed other 2019 BRP performances, the 2020 Black Rock Philharmonic virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and social media postings (Facebook) about Burning Man and the

Black Rock Philharmonic.

I reviewed the results from 2019 Burning Man Census Field Books to extend the data from the interviews. “The Census is one of the primary ways the Burning Man organization tracks changes in population, behavior, and attitudes of event participants” (Burning Man Project, 2024f). The annual Black Rock City Census is conducted by a volunteer team of social scientist researchers. It provides data for scholarly research using survey data from random participants on-playa as well as an on-line survey open to all burners.

Research Site and Interview Instrument

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the cancellation of the 2020 and 2021 Burning Man events, in-person interviews on-playa were not feasible. Online interviews in 2024 were chosen as the best viable option. The study involved the director and four ensemble members of the Black Rock Philharmonic who participated in the 2019 *Folly* and the 2020 virtual encore performances of *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews, consisting of three interviews for each of the five participants. The interviews were conducted and recorded using Zoom Video Conferencing over a 23-day period beginning on January 10, 2024. Interview durations ranged from 43 minutes to 2 hours and 14 minutes. For each participant, the interviews were approximately a week apart when schedules permitted.

The first interview began with the participant describing their Burning Man origin story and how they received their playa name. Then the interview focused on the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic (BRP) performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* art

installation, as well as other orchestra performances, activities, and musicking in 2019. Interview durations ranged from 43 minutes to 1 hours and 23 minutes.

The second interview began with a discussion of playa artifacts from their past burns. These included pictures, videos, stickers, necklaces, and other *gifted* and found items from past burns that had emotional memories. Some of these items were kept year-long near their computer. Then the interview moved to the 2020 Black Rock Philharmonic virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* during the pandemic. Interview durations ranged from 55 minutes to 1 hour and 26 minutes.

During the third interview, each participant and I dressed as if we were on-playa. I engaged with each participant's *playa persona* as if we just met at Burning Man, having the participant talk about being a musician on-playa and how they explained Burning Man to friends in the default world. Then the interview focused on the orchestra's continued participation on-playa in 2022 and 2023. Participants reflected on Burning Man culture and the 10 Principles, how those principles manifested during their Burning Man history, and how they incorporated the principles in their daily lives in the default world.

Some of the first two interviews included unplanned discussion of the contrast between Burning Man in general and the Temple. In the third set of interviews, I included that contrast in questions for all five participants. Each interviewee and I discussed both sides of the contrast. On the one side, there was the exuberance of the Man Burn as well as the entire Burn Week. On the other side, there were the reflections and inner emotions inspired by the Temple Burn on the last day of Burn Week as well as the entire week,

particularly during the Black Rock Philharmonic performance there on Friday. Interview durations ranged from 1 hour and 11 minutes to 2 hours and 14 minutes.

Interview Process

According to van Manen (1997), the interview serves two specific purposes for hermeneutic phenomenological research. First, it can be used to explore and gather "experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon" (p. 66). Second, the interview can be "a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience" (p. 66). In this study, I primarily used sequential sets of interviews to collect data from participants, allowing for adaptation to understanding gained in early interviews. Participants in the interviews were given the opportunity to provide data in the forms of videos, audio recordings, pictures, journals or other artifacts related to their own collective effervescence experiences. Other data were taken from an existing Burning Man Census data collection, online journals and YouTube as examples of collective effervescence.

To elicit an interviewee's lived experience, each of the interviews began with open-ended questions (Appendix B), seeking to understand their physical and emotional states during the event. I avoided using words from my theoretical lenses, and I avoided discussing my own lived experiences in a way that would influence their descriptions of their lived experience. Once the interviewee described their own experience during the event, I extended the questions to elicit their observation of the physical and emotional states of other participants during the event. Then, I moved my questioning to elicit their

understanding of what they or others did prior to the event, during the *separation* phase (V. Turner, 1969/2007), that could have affected their experience during the event. Finally, I moved the questions to the post-event phase that V. Turner (1969/2007) called *reaggregation*. The post-event experiences of the interviewees shed light on whether the collective effervescence during the event (such as an orchestra's performance) led to ongoing changes in how the orchestra functions. During any interview, if the interviewee discussed experiences or feelings that could relate to items in my research questions (specifically, items in my Figures 3 adapted from Collins, 2004), whether in the Collins' vocabulary or alternative words, I used follow-up questions to elicit more descriptive information about that aspect of their lived experience.

During the interviews, I avoided using terminology that would prompt the participant into confirming with short answers the elements of Collins' (2004) analysis of Interaction Ritual Chains. Nevertheless, I was mindful of Collins' analysis when listening to the participant's description of their lived experiences. When they were describing their experience prior to arriving on-playa, I was mindful that Collins (2004) began the analysis of the *separation* phase with both *group assembly* and *barrier to outsiders* and then extended to a *common action or event* and *transient emotional stimulus* (which one could think of as a triggering or initiation of the event itself). During the questions about the participants' experience after leaving the playa, I was mindful that Collins organized the *reaggregation* phase of *interaction rituals* into four categories: *group solidarity, individual emotional energy, symbols of social relationship,* and *standards of morality.*

Data Analysis

Just as the data collection followed the study's hermeneutic spiral, adjusting after each turn of the spiral, the data analysis process also followed the hermeneutic spiral. I analyzed the three rounds of semi-structured interviews of the Black Rock Philharmonic Director and four ensemble members by coding and creating three general narratives. I was guided by Saldaña (2016) in my coding approach. I used provisional coding because the literature lenses and my Burning Man experience suggested potential codes that could emerge. My initial list of provisional codes corresponded to aspects of the lenses described in Chapter Two as well as potential codes from Burning Man's culture and 10 Principles. I included high-level codes (such as SB, Social Bonding) as well as more detailed codes (such as SB-EC, Social Bonding, Extreme Conditions), acknowledging that insight could come at different levels of a hierarchical understanding.

The three general narratives documented their lived experiences during the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* and how that lived experience persisted into the 2020 virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* and into the present. I used a nine-step process to explicate thick and rich descriptions of those lived experiences. The result of the general narratives identified eight emerging themes that were the basis of the development of a general description of the collective lived experience of the five participants in Chapter Six.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research (Smith et al., 2009/2012) has a structured six step analysis: 1) reading and re-reading, 2) initial noting, 3) developing emergent themes, 4) searching for connections across emerging

themes, 5) moving to the next case (interview), and 6) looking for patterns across cases. I applied the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis steps to each of the three sets of interviews separately, rather than to each individual interview. Once the six steps were applied to each interview set, I followed three steps from Peoples (2020) to develop my general description of the phenomenon. The overall result, shown in Table 4, is a nine-step process, with Smith's six steps repeated three times prior to the last three steps from Peoples.

The data analysis of the second, third, and fourth turns of the study's hermeneutic spiral applied the six Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis steps to develop three general narratives. Those general narratives represent my evolving understanding during the data collection process. The data analysis concluded with three additional steps. In the first of the three final steps, I used the general narratives to identify eight emerging themes which are documented in Chapter Five. In the second final step, I used the fifth turn of my hermeneutic spiral to bring in data from the Burning Man Census and from online videos (and their comments) of the performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* during Burning Man 2019 (and the virtual encore performance in 2020). That step also included rereading of all interviews as well as the general narratives and eight themes. The result was a general description of the phenomenon using the language of ritual theory and interaction ritual chains. In the final step of data analysis, I asked the five interviewees to review the general description, and modified it based on their comments.

Table 4. Data Analysis Steps

The Six Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Steps
Read and re-read the five interview transcripts for a given set of interviews
Initial noting
Develop emergent themes from that interview set (preliminary meaning units)
Search for connections across emerging themes (final meaning units). This step adds thickness and richness to the data.
Construct a situated narrative (Peoples' term) for the interview set. This step is analogous to the structural and thematic description in Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022).
Look for patterns across a set of interviews. Construct a *general narrative* (Peoples' term) for the set of interviews. Repeat these steps for each set of interviews.
The Final Three Steps
When all three sets of interviews are analyzed, reread all interviews, and compare them to the *general narratives*. Just as was done with the transcripts in step 3 above, identify emerging themes for the combined data from all three sets of interviews.
Construct a *general description* of the phenomenon, based on the themes that emerged from the three general narratives. Use the lenses of ritual theory and interaction ritual chains in the general description. Review the Burning Man Census results on music transformation, along with artifacts of the various videos of the performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* during Burning Man 2019 found online (YouTube, Facebook). The review of the videos includes the comments attached to them, a review of all interview transcripts, my census notes, and online videos of the performance. Reread all 15 transcripts. Modify the general description as appropriate.
Provide the general description to the five participants for review. Make changes accordingly.

Validity and Reliability

The three methods to address threats to validity and reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2020) that I used were explanations of researcher bias, member checks, and rich descriptions. I addressed researcher bias in Chapter Three which reveals my

personal experiences and my understanding of the phenomenon prior to beginning my data collection. Member checks were addressed by asking the participants to review their interview transcripts and a near-final draft of the dissertation. Feedback was received on both the transcripts and draft dissertation. That feedback included correction of participant ages and names of camps, art installations, and art cars, along with further clarifying details about events.

Peoples (2020) addressed rich descriptions as "providing a detailed account of participants' experiences where pattern and themes are put into context. Context is key in rich descriptions, showing the complexity of the lived world of participants" (p. 70). Data analysis steps 3, 4, and 5 (develop emergent themes, search for connections across emerging themes, and construct a situated narrative) are steps that authors such as Peoples (2020) and Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) recommend as methods to add thickness and richness to the data.

Ethics

As shown in Appendix E, the Boston University Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined on December 23, 2020, that the research documented in this dissertation does not meet the regulatory definition of human subjects' research under 45 CFR 46.102(l). As a best practice, I followed IRB guidelines. Participants were formally recruited via an invitation letter, and each participant signed an informed consent letter. To ensure anonymity, a code name was assigned to each participant, to be used throughout the dissertation. The list of designations is located in a file only accessible to the author, the editor, and (upon request) the supervising committee from Boston University. As

discussed in the invitation letter to the participants, the use of code designators provided a degree of anonymity, with that anonymity potentially reduced by information obtained in the interviews (e.g., if the interviewee identified their role in the ensemble, that narrowed the potential list of names that a reader familiar with the ensemble could associate with the interviewee code).

Summary

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine collective effervescence such as that created through musicking at Burning Man. The resulting understanding could be used to increase lifelong music participation in the default world. In this study, I used three rounds of semi-structured interviews of the Black Rock Philharmonic (BRP) Director and four ensemble members to learn about their lived experience during the 2019 BRP performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* art installation and how that lived experience persisted into the 2020 virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* and into the present. I used a nine-step process to explicate thick and rich descriptions of those lived experiences. As data were collected, I made some adjustments to the data collection and analysis process described in this chapter, and those adjustments are discussed in Chapter Five. The result of the data collection and analysis was a general description of the collective lived experience of the five participants. The general description provided insight into how to create collective effervescence in community music ensembles.

Chapter Five: Data

In this chapter, I present the data collected in the three sets of five interviews. Each interview set was documented as a *general narrative*. During their development, I created a set of thematic codes as a tool to analyze the data. Finally, I used the three general narratives to identify eight emerging themes. The chapter begins with a description of the interviews and participants, continues with discussion of the codes that emerged, and concludes with the eight themes. In Chapter Six, the themes are used to create a *general description of the phenomenon* within the framework of ritual theory, interaction rituals, and interaction ritual chains.

Participant Backgrounds

The participants were five members of the Black Rock Philharmonic with a range of ages, roles, genders, home locations, and years participating in Burning Man.[19] The Burning Man musical groups mentioned in the participant descriptions are shown in Table 3 in Chapter Three.

Maestro

Maestro was the orchestra conductor who had also played a flaming tuba at Burning Man. Maestro was a neuroscientist who lived in the Midwest, aged in the late 30s. Maestro had participated in over 50 Burning Man Regional Network events, with a first playa burn in 2012 and participation in every Burning Man since then. Maestro had been conducting playa orchestras (Playa Pops and then the Black Rock Philharmonic,

[19] The sequence of participant backgrounds (Maestro, Baby Giraffe, Lorax, Sharkie, and Bassoon) is used in most of this chapter's subsections. Ages are as of 2019 and were inferred from information in the interviews.

BRP) since the first time an orchestra happened at Burning Man in 2014. In the default world, Maestro was a double major in music and neuroscience, conducted the college pep band in graduate school, and played in community ensembles. Burning Man is a continuation of Maestro's strong commitment to musicking as an adult. Maestro's interview durations were, respectively, 1:04, 0:59, and 2:14 on January 10, 18, and 30, 2024.

Performing music at Burning Man has come about in several ways for the participants interviewed. Some of them came to music through immediacy, and others through calls to participate. Maestro's background in performing at Burning Man stems from participation in Burning Man Regional Network events, an art grant, and a general call for orchestra musicians to participate on-playa. As part of a three-person team, Maestro received a grant from a Burning Man Regional Network event to build a fire-tuba that "shoots a 20-foot flame out of the bell." After performing music with the fire tuba at Burning Man Regional Network events for 2 years Maestro read in *Jackrabbit Speaks*, an informal newsletter for the burner community, a call for people to volunteer for Playa Pops. Maestro responded about a conducting background and playing a fire tuba. Maestro was already integrated into the culture of Burning Man through the Burning Man Regional Network events, and was able to participate in Burning Man musicking on-playa that year. Maestro performed with the flaming tuba and also conducted the Playa Pops there.

Because of growing pains within Playa Pops, Maestro formed another orchestra, Black Rock Philharmonic, in 2018. The splitting of Playa Pops into two groups stemmed

from the new group wanting to play a more difficult repertoire. Maestro said, “There are a whole lot of repertoires that you cannot play if you have only been at your instrument for 2 or 3 years, which is not a judgment call, good or bad,” giving an example that beginners do not have the skill to “play the original *Finlandia”* that BRP performed in 2023. The newly created BRP began with more of a focus on standard literature for the orchestra vs. the still running Playa Pops that focused on popular music and community music.

Baby Giraffe

Baby Giraffe was a flute player in the Black Rock Philharmonic (BRP) and a member of the orchestra’s leadership group. One leadership contribution was to improve the orchestra’s communication during the 51 weeks of the year that they are not co-located, using social media and mail. Baby Giraffe, aged in the 40s, lived in the central valley of California and was a military veteran who was a caretaker for a disabled veteran husband. Baby Giraffe’s first participation in Burning Man was in 2010, skipping 2011–2014, and participating in every Burning Man since. Baby Giraffe began performing music in an orchestra on-playa in 2016. In the default world, Baby Giraffe was musicking heavily through high school and then was burnt-out for about 5 years. Baby Giraffe was in a community orchestra for 3 years in their mid-20s, and then had a longer hiatus from musicking until they began performing on-playa. Baby Giraffe’s BRP leadership position in the orchestra was a year-round involvement, even though the orchestra performs only one week a year. Baby Giraffe’s interview durations were, respectively, 1:23, 0:59, and 1:41 on January 13, 20, and 27, 2024.

Baby Giraffe's introduction to musicking on the playa arose from two of the 10 Principles: *Immediacy* and *Participation*. On their second burn in 2015 (4 years after their difficult initial burn), Baby Giraffe was ready to go to Burning Man in a different spirit, "That is it! I am going back. I must try this again. I must see what this is all about." On-playa, Baby Giraffe wandered through *Center Camp* to see what was happening. They heard "an orchestra, I know that is orchestra music." As a passive musicker in the Playa Pops audience, Baby Giraffe had a moment of collective effervescence. "It was this full orchestra performing in *Center Camp*. It was just beautiful, amazing, and the whole place was filled." At that moment, Baby Giraffe thought, "I must get this. This is what my Burning Man is going to be about. This is what it is going to be." Baby Giraffe found Maestro immediately after the concert, and said "How can I get involved?" Maestro looked at Baby Giraffe, chuckled, and replied, "We have a website, contact me in October." Baby Giraffe said during the interview, "The rest is history."

After failed attempts in the default world to get back into musicking through local symphonies (which were difficult to get into), Burning Man and the Playa Pops performance serendipitously became the catalyst that reawakened Baby Giraffe's passion for musicking. In 2016, Baby Giraffe contacted one of the people in the leadership team for the Playa Pops, and that led to involvement in music-organizing and other behind the scenes activities. With this extra involvement, Baby Giraffe "had found my Burning Man people, and so I just wanted to help out as much as I could."

Baby Giraffe was a bit overwhelmed by the playa environment, with the heat and the dust, along with the public rehearsals. "Naked people sitting in the front row listening

to you rehearse. I am like, this is Burning Man." The orchestra performed at the *La Victrola*[20] art piece in deep playa,[21] a giant-scale vintage record player in which the record was the performance stage. Baby Giraffe said, "That was amazing, and I thought that was the be-all. I had never performed for that many people, and the art piece was so beautiful." A dust storm started after the concert, and the musicians had to return to Black Rock City in the dark to do another show. The storm cleared up right as they were going back to their camps after the second concert. "There were so many people out on the road." After reflecting on the difficulties of performing two consecutive shows in the desert environment along with the logistics of traveling at night through a dust storm, Baby Giraffe said, "It was such a successful night of two concerts. And I remember going away from that, feeling really exhausted but fulfilled. And wow! That was amazing."

Lorax

Lorax was a cello player in the Black Rock Philharmonic and was an informal leader who posted frequently on the orchestra's social media pages. Lorax was a retired geologist who lived in New Mexico, aged in the 60s. Lorax's first participation in Burning Man was in 2015, with participation in every Burning Man since. In the default world, Lorax played the cello from fourth grade through undergraduate college graduation, participating in school and community ensembles. But in graduate school,

[20] The *La Victrola* art piece was a 35-foot-tall sculpture of an antique record player with a record turntable (which served as a performance stage) and a giant horn (like a tuba bell) to project the sound.

[21] The open playa was the space between the arc of BRC streets and the perimeter (trash) fence surrounding the five-square-mile area reserved for Burning Man. See Appendix A for more details about the layout of the city streets. The deep playa was the portion of the open playa that was beyond the Man, farther from the city streets.

Lorax was consumed by studies, and later by work and family. For about 30 years, Lorax only played alone, never performing in public. Musicking at Burning Man led to playing in ensembles in the default world. Lorax's interview durations were, respectively, 1:14, 0:55, and 1:30 on January 13, 18, and 24, 2024.

Lorax's story was a combination of *Immediacy* and answering a call for *Participation*. Like Maestro, Lorax answered a call from *The Jackrabbit Speaks* (Burning Man's Official Newsletter) for musicians to volunteer to perform at *Center Camp* which has a performance stage upon which many of the ensembles at Burning Man perform. (*Center Camp* is described in Footnote 8 in Chapter Two.) Lorax was not expecting a 30-minute time slot, "which was, you know, a long time for someone who has not played in front of anybody in a while." So, as at home, Lorax practiced on-playa, this time outside of the tent at camp. While practicing, a burner walking by stopped and asked, "Hey, would you like to play with the Playa Pops? We have rehearsal in 30 minutes." That chance encounter led to Lorax becoming a member of Playa Pops and of the Black Rock Philharmonic when Playa Pops divided into two complementary ensembles.

Sharkie

Sharkie was a clarinet player in the Black Rock Philharmonic who also performed on-playa with the Playa Pops symphony, the Burning Band, the Processional Band, and the Ambient Drummers.[22] Sharkie worked as a mortgage broker, lived in Arizona, with age in the 70s. Sharkie's first participation in Burning Man was in 2010, skipping 2011–2015, and participating in every Burning Man since. In the default world, Sharkie's

[22] Table 3 in Chapter 3 describes four of those ensembles.

musicking for 20 years after college was limited to playing in the Alumni Band at the annual homecoming game. Then, Sharkie played in a clarinet choir for another 15 or 20 years before musicking at Burning Man. Since then, Sharkie had increased default world musicking, adding membership in a Klezmer band to the clarinet choir and Alumni Band participation. During the pandemic, Sharkie played for neighbors on the street in front of the family home. During Interview 2, Sharkie showed a video of playing the clarinet in the desert, "I am in my Burning Man outfit. My wife is filming this, and I am trying to encourage the cactus. You see, I am not playing anything specific, but I am just [improvising]." Sharkie's interview durations were, respectively, 0:43, 1:02, 1:11, on January 13, 16, and 25, 2024.

Sharkie did not perform during the first year at Burning Man in 2010. After skipping several years, at the second burn in 2016, Sharkie started playing with the Burning Band, which is an all-welcoming marching band. Sharkie said, "it is a fun, quirky kind of group that just enjoys playing for other people and making them laugh and dance, and you know, clap their hands, that kind of thing." In that first playa musicking year, Sharkie heard about the Playa Pops while performing with Burning Band. Sharkie went out to the Temple on Friday morning to see the group perform and remembers being "blown away by the performance." Standing behind the musicians, looking over the shoulder of a clarinetist, Sharkie thought, "I have to play in this [ensemble] next year."

Bassoon

Bassoon was a bassoon player in the Black Rock Philharmonic and had performed with the Playa Pops symphony. Bassoon worked in live theater in Seattle, with age in the

40s. Bassoon had participated in Burning Man every year from 2004 through 2010, on and off from 2011–2016, and in every burn since. In the default world, Bassoon was musicking from toddler age all the way through high school, first on clarinet and then on bassoon. A few years after high school, Bassoon ceased musicking. Bassoon brought a bassoon to the playa to perform in Playa Pops 18 years later, which was 13 years after their first burn. Burning Man musicking rekindled Bassoon's default world musicking. Bassoon resumed practicing and was in the process of joining an ensemble when the pandemic shut everything down. Bassoon played music with neighbors in support of first responders during the pandemic and was again seeking membership in a default world ensemble. Bassoon's interview durations were, respectively, 1:09, 1:26, 1:31 on January 4, January 27, and February 1, 2024.

Bassoon has had an interesting journey to performing again after a long hiatus. Bassoon had always played school instruments and had no personal instrument. Bassoon's journey back to musicking started with finding a used bassoon online around 1999, and later finding someone to repair it. However, Bassoon never played it. Then, in 2017, 13 years after their first burn, Bassoon was on the fence about going to Burning Man after finding a group of default world friends who belong to a theme camp. One of the theme camp members was gifted a ticket associated with an on-playa art project and could not go, and the camp members decided to gift Bassoon the ticket. A camp member said, "They gave it to me to give to somebody in the camp. Here is your ticket. Shut up. You are on the *Transport Team* with me." Later, Bassoon discovered that the gifter was a member of the Playa Pops symphony, and that inspired pulling the trigger to perform

music again. Before that, Bassoon did not have a musical project to play the bassoon. “I never just really found a way to become engaged with it, and it has been sitting in the back of my closet.” Bassoon thought, “Why not just bring it out to the desert and join this orchestra. Because this is why I got this ticket. It will be a good way to honor this person who could not be there that year.” Having been to Burning Man many times already, Bassoon knew the harsh desert environment would be a challenge for a double reed instrument, and they rose to that challenge. When the Black Rock Philharmonic split off from the Playa Pops, Bassoon went with BRP because “I like orchestra music” better than pops, and the “more orchestra the better,” giving some pop examples that are fun, “*Star Wars Medley* and *Christmas in July.*” But Bassoon also wanted orchestra music such as “*The Planets*, *New World* [*Symphony*] and *A Night on Bald Mountain*.”

Interview Questions

Using the hermeneutic spiral, my interview approach evolved after each session, and after each group of interviews. I captured that evolution in my planned questions for subsequent interviews.

First Round of Interviews

During the first set of five interviews that focused on the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic performance, I included performances in Playa Pops, Burning Band, the Processional Band, and Ambient Drummers, as well as any individual musicking performances the interviewee did at Burning Man. An important area that arose during the interviews was the participant’s musical background in the default world after they completed their formal education, “Did they play privately or in organized ensembles

before Burning Man participation began?" The responses included no musicking during the years between student-musicking at school and Burning Man, private personal musicking, and performing in community ensembles. I realized quickly that some participants had a long gap between performing as a student and performing at Burning Man. That led to discussion about the duration of their break from musicking and what brought them back to music. If Burning Man was a factor in their return to default world musicking, the interview probed into that return (or increase) in default world musicking.

I found that telling my own stories about the interview questions helped the participants to be more open; the participants appeared to feel like it was two *burners* just telling stories rather than a formal interview. I wore some of my Burning Man clothes and playa-gift necklaces to the interviews, and I encouraged the participants to do the same and to share the stories behind those items and why they were wearing those specific artifacts.

An additional question group that emerged was the relationship of the Burning Man Temple with the emotions and musicking of the participants. The Black Rock Philharmonic performed at the Temple once each year. Some of the participants did additional personal musicking at the Temple, in addition to non-musicking visits to it. The serenity of the Temple evoked emotions much differently than the loud extroverted atmosphere of Burning Man itself, and the participants and I explored that contrast and the role of musicking in it.

Another question group that emerged in the first interview was the practice of *gifting* an opportunity to conduct the orchestra to an audience member. The director

selected an audience member with a recent birthday to conduct the *Happy Birthday* song. The interviewees told stories about the origin and inspiration of this Black Rock Philharmonic tradition.

Some participants described therapeutic healing by their Burning Man musicking experiences. They resumed or increased musicking in the default world after a long break and attributed that change to the therapeutic and transformative effects of musicking at Burning Man. Those initial discussions were seeds for a deeper elicitation of participants' lived experiences in the second and third rounds of interviews.

Each first-round interview ended with sharing stories about playa artifacts and the energy and memories they held. The participants were already sharing stories about items that were always kept close by them, and ending with that question group was a good transition for their preparation for the second round of interviews. These stories were a good way to begin to delve into the culture of Burning Man and the depth of the participants' experiences. Before the second round of interviews, I listened to the audio files of the initial interviews. I perceived connections between the experiences of the five participants as well as an affirmation of the lenses used in the literature review.

Second Round of Interviews

I started with the sharing of playa artifacts, their histories, and what the artifacts meant to the participant at the time of the interview. Each artifact was presented over Zoom, and I learned more about the history of the artifact and why it was still important to them. The artifact sharing led naturally to the 2020 virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* during the height of the pandemic. This was a difficult time for the

world, and the isolation was a strain for everyone. But this was also the first time in Burning Man's history that the event was canceled, causing the deep friendships and sense of family that burners have developed to also not be renewed by the event. I realized that this part of the interview would bring up traumatic experiences for some of the interviewees. Consequently, the interviews delved into how life was for them personally, how their musicking was taking place in isolation, and how they each in their own way tried to recharge and keep the sense of community with their Burning Man family and friends.

During the second interview of each participant, I tried to elicit their Burning Man identity, or *playa persona.* It was common for people to take new names at Burning Man and even be a different personality (more outgoing, artful, saying yes). I was also seeing how their burner identity could possibly be aiding in healing traumas, resulting in some cases in a default world transformation that led them to perform music again.

Third Round of Interviews

To better enable elicitation of their lived experiences at Burning Man, I wanted to move the participants into their *burner mind frame*. They shared playa artifacts in the second interview, and for the third interview, I asked them to unpack and wear some of their Burning Man clothes. I also joined them in playa wear. To delve deeper into their *burner identity*, the first part of the third interview consisted of me playing the role of a random (stranger) burner meeting the participant on the playa when they have their musical instrument with them. This approach allowed me to probe how they interacted as a musician on-playa and to ask questions about how they explained Burning Man culture

in the default world. This exchange became an animated back and forth, with the participant revealing a deeper insight to their persona on-playa. The interview moved into an exploration of Burning Man culture and musicking, and in transformations on and off the playa. Then each participant and I explored the 10 Principles and particularly how they personally interpreted and implemented those principles on-playa and possibly in the default world as well. The interview ended with a new question group that emerged in the first round of interviews, the inward-looking Burning Man Temple and how it contrasted with the vibrant Burn Week (a *Yin and Yang* contrast).

Coding and the General Narratives

Interviews were first transcribed by the Zoom software, which captured most of the words but restarted new lines frequently if the speakers paused. The automatic transcript sometimes got confused by who was speaking. An outside editor, who is a Ph.D. with Burning Man musicking, technical writing, and editing experience, edited the Zoom transcript while watching the Zoom video, resulting in a *verbatim-transcript* file that also included notes on visual actions and visible emotions. Those file names began with "Transcript-Edit." Then, the outside editor created an *intelligent transcript* in which verbal pauses and repeated words were changed into text with reasonable sentence structure, and contractions were changed into complete words. Those file names began with "Transcript-Intelligent Edit." I rewatched each interview while reading the Intelligent Edit transcript.

Guided by Saldaña (2016) in my coding approach, I used provisional coding based on the literature lenses and my Burning Man experience. I included high-level

codes (such as SB, Social Bonding) as well as more detailed codes (such as SB-EC, Social Bonding, Extreme Conditions), acknowledging that insight could come at different levels of a hierarchical understanding. Cognizant of Saldaña's (2016) caution to "be careful: If you go looking for something, you'll find it" (p. 169), I modified and added to the list of codes as I worked with the transcripts. Table 5 (two pages long) shows the final list of codes. Of the initial list of provisional codes, 16 codes, such as the sub-level play codes, did not emerge from coding the data. The codes with the most occurrences in the data were Musicking and Radical Self-expression.

I created a *general narrative* file for each set of interviews. Each general narrative file was organized into sections, which corresponded to *categories* in Saldaña's (2016) Fig. 1.1. The sections began with the interview question groups, but evolved based on the interview data. I copied sections of all five interview transcripts in the set into the appropriate category sections of the general narrative. Then, I annotated the sections and subsections with codes from Table 5, and I also underlined important quotations that I wanted to consider for inclusion in the dissertation. In some cases, I added to the initial code list as I reviewed the information. When developing the general narrative files for the second and third interview sets, I at times modified the general narrative file for a prior interview set.

Table 5. Codes Used for Interview Transcript Information (2 pages)

Category	Subcategory	Code	Description
Research Questions		RQ-1	To what extent does the culture of Burning Man facilitate collective effervescence?
		RQ-2	To what extent does musicking at Burning Man facilitate collective effervescence?
		RQ-3	What do Burning Man ensemble directors and members do before and during the performance that could be applicable and useful to music educators in the default world?
Burning Man		BM	
	10 Principles	BM-10	
	10 Principles	BM-10-RI	Radical Inclusion
	10 Principles	BM-10-G	Gifting
	10 Principles	BM-10-D	Decommodification
	10 Principles	BM-10-RSR	Radical Self-reliance
	10 Principles	BM-10-RSE	Radical Self-expression
	10 Principles	BM-10-CE	Communal Effort
	10 Principles	BM-10-CR	Civic Responsibility
	10 Principles	BM-10-LNT	Leaving No Trace
	10 Principles	BM-10-P	Participation
	10 Principles	BM-10-I	Immediacy
		BM-T	Temple
		BM-C	Culture
		BM-PM	Playa Magic / The Playa Provides
		BM-DW	Default World
		BM-RB	Regional Burn
		BM-PA	Playa Artifact
		BM-Camp	Camp
		BM-Art	Art
		BM-FR	Fundraisers (for Camps or Art)
		BM-CC	*Center Camp*
Interaction Ritual Chains		IRC-CE	Collective Effervescence
		IRC-SSR	Symbols of Social Relationships
		IRC-Entr	Entrainment / Mutual Focus / Flow
Music Education		ME	
Musical Identity		MI	
Musicking		M	

Category	Subcategory	Code	Description
Music Therapy		MT	
Play		P	
	Piaget	P-P	
	Piaget	P-P-R	Reproductive Play (practiced for mastery)
	Piaget	P-P-S	Symbolic Play (using your imagination)
	Sicart	P-S-Co	Contextual Play (e.g., sports)
	Sicart	P-S-Ca	Carnivalesque Play (mocking and trivializing normality to laugh at it, equilibrium between creation and destruction in the embodied laughter)
	Sicart	P-S-Ap	Appropriative Play (takes over its context)
	Sicart	P-S-D	Disruptive Play (e.g., topple Lego structure)
	Sicart	P-S-Cr	Creative Play (e.g., build Legos)
	Sicart	P-S-P	Personal play (even when playing with others, the effects of play are individual, attached to our own sentimental, moral, and political memories)
	Sicart	P-S-Au	Autotelic Play (has its own goals, purposes, duration, spaces, and ending conditions)
Ritual		R-P	Ritual Preparation
		R-L	Ritual Liminality
		R-R	Ritual Reaggregation
		R-C	Communitas
Social Bonding		SB	
		SB-EC	Shared Extreme Conditions
Set and Setting		SS	
		SS-Set	Set (physical environment)
		SS-Setting	Setting (participant's prepared mental state)

Because the interviews were open-ended and able to probe interesting groups of questions, additional interview question groups emerged. In compiling the interviews into general narratives, I found myself re-thinking the organization of the interview question groups within each set of interviews (both the addition of emerging question groups and their sequencing in the general narrative file created for that set of five interviews). I also

brought the interviewer's conversation prompts into the three general narratives when those prompts helped frame a participant's discussion of their lived experience. In some cases, those prompts related my own lived experience, which can appear like a sixth participant in the study; however, I took care to not let my own experiences overly influence the participant's discussion of their experiences.

The categories for each general narrative file were as follows:

- General Narrative of Interview 1 for all five participants: *The 2019 Folly performance of Bohemian Rhapsody*
    - Burning Man origin and playa name stories
    - When each participant began performing at Burning Man
    - The 2019 *Folly* performance
    - Temple performances
    - The *Happy Birthday* conducting gift
    - Other musicking by the participants at Burning Man
    - Preplanned interactions (BRP leadership participants)
    - BRP communication with its musicians (BRP leadership participants)
- General Narrative of Interview 2 for all five participants: *The 2020 virtual encore performance of Bohemian Rhapsody*
    - Playa artifacts
    - Burning Man persona
    - Music therapy: a path to musicking again
    - Playa magic

    - Sharing and gifting music
    - Video playthrough of the 2020 virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody*
    - Post video reactions to the 2020 virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody*
    - The pandemic and re-creating playa energy
    - The pandemic and the playa community
    - Temple experiences
- General Narrative of Interview 3 for all five participants: *Burning Man culture and the persistence of the emotions generated in the 2019 and 2020 performances*
    - Playa persona, the random burner encounter
    - Explaining Burning Man in the default world
    - Default world ensembles vs. Burning Man ensembles
    - The 10 Principles and the culture of Burning Man
    - The Temple within Burning Man culture
    - Transformation of burners by the culture of Burning Man
    - Does musicking at Burning Man facilitate collective effervescence?

I created high-level sections of the general narratives, corresponding to *categories* in Saldaña (2016, Fig. 1.1), and I annotated the sections with codes. When I subdivided those sections into more detailed subsections, I distributed the codes appropriately and reconsidered them. In some cases, the detailed subsections were further divided into lower-level subsections for each participant, and I annotated codes at that level as well.

My data reduction process began with the general focus area of each set of interview questions, as described in Chapter Four, subdivided into sections corresponding to the question groups. I annotated codes at the general level as well as the participant level (including the interviewer as a participant). Then, I reread the section to highlight quotations to be considered for inclusion in the dissertation text. I subdivided and repeated the process for each section. Finally, I composed a general overview of each section. The interview codes for each section were also placed in a spreadsheet to visually see the pattern of codes and the possible emergence of themes. The quotations were copied into a second tab of the spreadsheet, with cross-linkages between the quotations and the codes in the two tabs. I used the codes, quotations, and overview documents to construct three general narratives, one for each interview set. The three general narratives comprised about 250 total pages. The eight themes that emerged from the three general narratives are listed below and are described in the remainder of this chapter:

- Theme 1: *Folly* performance
- Theme 2: Virtual encore during the pandemic
- Theme 3: The Temple
- Theme 4: Music ensembles at Burning Man
- Theme 5: Burner Identity
- Theme 6: Culture of Burning Man
- Theme 7: Transformation of Burners by the Culture of Burning Man
- Theme 8: Does Musicking at Burning Man Facilitate Collective Effervescence?

Theme 1: Folly Performance

During Interview 1, I put each interviewee into their burner mind frame to try to recapture the moment in time of the Black Rock Philharmonic *Folly* Performance. To help facilitate the establishment of the burner mind frame, I showed them some of my playa artifacts and wore clothes and costumes previously worn at Burning Man. In a playful way, I joked about how the playa dust is still coating these items, and I invited the interviewee to also grab playa artifacts and playa outfits. All interviewees quickly agreed to this suggestion and held artifacts up to the camera that they already had within arm's length. Some were already wearing clothing items from their Burning Man wardrobe. When I saw their facial expressions (in all five initial interviews), I knew that my strategy of establishing their burner mind frames was working.

I introduced the video of the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* art installation. I talked about different elements of the video and invited the interviewees to continue to have a dialog with me while the video played. During the interview video, two inset windows showed the participant and me on the screen, and I could observe body language. In contrast, the transcript video recordings only had one inset window, showing whoever had spoken last. I tried to not speak much during the concert video portion of the interview so that I could focus on the participant's body language while they were reliving the experience. Observation of participant body language was included in the written (edited) transcripts.

Body Language

Maestro smiled the entire time of the video playback. During the video, Baby Giraffe was smiling widely throughout, with some giggling as it progressed. As the video played, Lorax was listening intently, then began to shake their head left and right gently to the music, and then a smile grew. As the song continued to build, Lorax's smile grew, and leaning back in the chair began to do the head bobbing. During strong moments in the video, Lorax had a large smile, commenting "Yeah!" Sharkie's first reaction to the video was "the head banging" and how it feels cool. Watching the video, Sharkie showed joy and enthusiasm by smiling broadly and making up and down hand gestures from desktop to head height. Bassoon intently watched the screen as the video began to play, nodding to the rhythm of the music and then (showing how intentionally they were watching), touching chin and cheek with fingers while tilting their head.

Preparation

Black Rock Philharmonic has a tradition of partnering with a big art piece for a performance out on the playa, and the *Folly* concert was the 2019 partnership. The *Folly* art piece was massive and one of the largest to date at Burning Man. That venue placed the audience on all four sides of the orchestra, with some people looking down on the musicians from above on the multi-story art piece. The front row of the audience was close enough to reach out and touch the musicians. It was as if the musicians and audience were a single entity.

A new element from the planning side was the partnership with the *Mayan Warrior* art car which had a huge following and history at Burning Man. It had one of the

most expensive sound and light systems for an art car on the playa. It was "a collaborative project that has united artists, craftsmen, photographers, designers, technologists, architects and musicians from Mexico City and Northern California" (Mayan Warrior, 2024, About section). Seeing *Mayan Warrior* during the video playback, Bassoon said in a sullen, lost voice, "*Mayan Warrior*, it is no more." The *Mayan Warrior* was destroyed in a traffic accident in April 2023.

The leadership of Black Rock Philharmonic knew that *Bohemian Rhapsody* could be great on-playa, especially after the theatrical release of the movie. Baby Giraffe commented, "But nobody anticipated the magic that [the song] would create." Baby Giraffe discussed other factors, noting, "The *Folly* was such a beautiful, interactive, built town that was just so complete," adding that the venue was complemented by the addition of the *Elektra White Dragon*[23] art car and the famous *Mayan Warrior* art car. Like Maestro, Baby Giraffe was amazed at how many more people showed up to the concert.

Maestro reflected that *Bohemian Rhapsody* was programmed to be played before the anticipated highlight of the concert, the *1812 Overture*, in which a flaming trumpet would shoot fire over the musicians and the *Elektra White Dragon* art car would shoot a 45-foot-long stream of fire over the audience on the timpani and bass drum hits that would simulate artillery. Lorax recalled that during the *1812 Overture*, when the flaming

[23] The *Elektra White Dragon* art car was a mutant vehicle built in 2019 for Burning Man. It was "a dynamic and anatomically realistic vehicular dragon sculpture complete with proportional wings capable of rotational and bilateral flight motion, and programmable LED lights visible throughout its physique" (Engineered Artworks, 2024, para. 1). It shot fire out of its mouth.

trumpet was shooting off flames during the cannon firing, feeling "the heat coming off their trumpet over my head. What the heck is going on here? Oh, this just got surreal." These moments really added to the energy of the performance, hence the placement of that piece in the most prominent part of the program. The *1812 Overture* also stood out to Sharkie, "with the *Mayan Warrior* [and *Elektra White Dragon*] art cars synching [their] fire cannon[s] along with the music [and the flaming trumpet player from the orchestra]." Maestro said that Bohemian Rhapsody turned out to be the focal point, "but the other pieces, too, really created some energy."

The encore of the program was *Ode to Joy* during which the orchestra threw out 2,000 kazoos to the audience so they could play along. Lorax and I recalled that throwing the kazoos up to all the terraces was such an entertaining thing to be a part of, with the orchestra members holding boxes of kazoos, trying to get them to the frenzied audience. Lorax said that in past years and performances of *Ode to Joy*, "the audience would get excited and have a high energy thing with everyone on their feet." Yet, in 2019, the lead-in song of *Bohemian Rhapsody* became the peak of audience excitement. Lorax said during *Ode to Joy*, the audience was "happy, but nothing like [*Bohemian Rhapsody* in] this particular concert." Sharkie said it was a memorable moment in the concert when the audience had fun using the kazoos in a playful manner to be a part of the orchestra during *Ode to Joy* with kazoos.

Maestro said, "The energy buildup began even before the show started. The *Mayan Warrior* art car was known for doing electronic music and DJs, and it brought people who swelled our audience." Maestro said it was even more important that those

"people were not steeped in the traditions of classical music." Even at Burning Man, musical rules from the default world were remembered. At past concerts, Maestro had insinuated, or people in the audience had made it abundantly clear, that the audience was not supposed to sing along. Instead, they were supposed to "let the orchestra [play, and they were to] listen to the beauty of the tones rather than the beauty of the lyrics." The *Mayan Warrior* contingent was not steeped in that rule.

The Bohemian Rhapsody Song

Baby Giraffe said that within the first couple of measures of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, the audience recognized the song and began singing along. "You could tell right from the beginning that it was just going to be something that we have never experienced before." Baby Giraffe continued, "I felt like we were in a bubble, and it was like the energy was something you could grab from the air. As it progressed in the song, it just got more and more electric."

Lorax remembered focusing on Maestro's reaction to how this song was unfolding and becoming a powerful event. While the musical energy and the audience reactions were building, Lorax had to remember to look at the music and play. Lorax became overwhelmed with the urge to watch what the audience was doing. The *Folly* was a large structure with balconies at different heights that towered over the orchestra, and every vantage point was filled with audience members. Lorax told of watching another video from that balcony perspective, in which you see the entire orchestra from above and behind, and you saw the large audience filling all the spaces in front and to the sides of the musicians, with the surrounding art cars circled around the audience, and with even

more people hanging from the art cars. Lorax said, “It was something completely unexpected that was just totally joyous to everyone there. [Everyone] knew that this was something they [would] probably never [experience again]. It happened spontaneously, and everybody was like, ‘Wow, this is really cool.’” Lorax said that everybody was realizing this was “really a special moment.”

After the video ended, Sharkie told me about the energy that was created from the performance, and now used *Bohemian Rhapsody* as a wakeup alarm because of it. Sharkie added, “it was packed,” including the *Folly’s* second story terraces that were only accessible by ladder. “People were everywhere with no open space between the orchestra and audience.” They were all there to listen to the orchestra, which impressed Sharkie.

Sitting in the orchestra, Bassoon could not see the audience and sometimes could not even see Maestro very well. So, upon seeing the video, Bassoon exclaimed that it “just blew my mind.” Wiping away tears with a towel, Bassoon described the video as “looking like AI, it does not look real.”

In the video, you can hear the audience’s singing volume overpowering the orchestra, which is quite amazing since the orchestra was being amplified by the *Mayan Warrior* art car for sound reinforcement. Lorax commented, “We were all shocked; I think we were not expecting it.” Maestro said, “There was already a ton of energy and a very different type of show,” adding that this concert was their largest, but that they had played for large groups before. Maestro said that when they played *Bohemian Rhapsody “*other times earlier that week in different places, the people who sang along were comparatively muted.” Maestro concluded that “the *Mayan Warrior* and the people who

followed along [with the] *Mayan Warrior*" were an influence toward the audience's energy. "There was already plenty of singing-along, plenty of energy."

For the 2019 concerts, Maestro pre-planned to "inspire the audience to interact and participate, by referencing a popular movie, *Wayne's World,*" turning around and "head-banging because that is what was done in *Wayne's World*" at that point in the song. Maestro said, "I felt the energy, [and] I almost fell off my [conducting] podium because I was going at it too hard."

Krash

For Maestro, another memory that came up while watching the video was a "walk-on" cymbal player. Maestro said the player intensely got into the cymbal crash at the *Bohemian Rhapsody's* big build-up, and that led the player "to take on the burner name of [name redacted] Krash." The intense cymbal crash was a pivotal moment. "The whole audience had got into it and were cheering with the build-up, and when [the cymbal crash] finally hit, there was still another minute of music left." Maestro exclaimed, "I mean, already, just the energy." Maestro concluded that "if Krash was not just totally into it, [it] still would have been great, I am sure. Yeah, those small little playa coincidences."

While watching the video clip part of the interview, Baby Giraffe commented on Krash's energy of jumping up and down in a bouncing tutu while performing. This energy was displayed during the music rests, with more intense bouncing before the impending cymbal crash hits. At that point, Baby Giraffe wiped away a tear. As the video ended, Baby Giraffe filled in more of the back story of Krash finding the orchestra.

During the second rehearsal on-playa, Krash walked up to Maestro and asked, “Do you need somebody in the percussion section? I heard you and I was drawn in.” Maestro responded, “All right. Well. Sure, let me see what we can do.” Reflecting on all the years playing in ensembles, Baby Giraffe had “never seen anybody bring such a life, energy, and spark!” Baby Giraffe felt that Krash was a “playa dream, wandering in from the dust” with the energy that the orchestra needed. The leadership’s only regret for this magical playa moment was that the orchestra had better cymbals that could have been used. Baby Giraffe said that despite the instrument condition, “the sound that came out of them during that performance made them just sound so big and so amazing.”

The Guy-in-White

Maestro and I reflected on the Guy-in-White, a person in the audience several rows back from the conductor's podium and laterally near the center. They were the first person to stand and begin dancing, and that appeared to be a trigger for other audience members to push themselves over the edge and become part of the performance by singing and dancing. After inspiring the audience with headbanging, Maestro turned back toward the musicians before the Guy-in-White activated the entire crowd onto their feet. Maestro described surprise that when the song ended, “I saw everyone standing, which is kind of wild.” Later, viewing the video, Maestro “got a sense of what all [went] on. The energy was huge; the orchestra clearly was feeling it.” Baby Giraffe said, “The earth, it is ground, it is solid. But when people started dancing, you could feel the energy and the excitement and [the vibrations] were traveling through the playa.” Seeing on the video the Guy-in-White standing up, Lorax exclaimed, “it is party time!”

Back in the default world, Maestro posted a screenshot of the Guy-in-White on Facebook burner groups and found them. Maestro also spoke about research on social experiments, concluding that a single trendsetter can be a trigger, “That one person does it and shows everyone that it is okay. So, three more people do it, and then it just exponentially [grows], just in a matter of 30 seconds, everybody is standing up and dancing.” Maestro did not think that the Guy-in-White was intentionally trying to trigger the audience, “He was just getting up to dance and may not have been fully aware of the pivotal role. That moment would have been cool regardless, but the Guy-in-White standing up is the reason why *Bohemian Rhapsody* is our new encore.” Maestro continued that the Guy-in-White is “why the attendance for our shows has doubled.” Maestro was told that the 2023 Black Rock Philharmonic show was the largest crowd of people for any Burning Man event other than the Temple Burn and Man Burn. When I told Lorax that Maestro had tracked the Guy-in-White down, Lorax responded in excitement, “Oh really!”

In the video, as the Guy-in-White stood up and ignited the crowd, Baby Giraffe repeatedly wiped tears with a towel. I said, “it is okay. That is what this is about.” After the video finished, Baby Giraffe and I discussed the Guy-in-White in more depth. I said, “*Boom! Boom!* And within 10 seconds, it was just a blaze of flash fire.” Baby Giraffe added, “It was like everybody was just waiting for the *OK*, and he gave everybody the *OK* to feel it, to be in the moment, in the same moment that everybody was all having together.” Baby Giraffe continued, “It is kind of cliche, but it was magic. It was not anticipated, totally random and magical.” When Sharkie, seeing the Guy-in-White stand

up during the video playback, said, “Yeah, I am getting goosebumps right now. That Guy-in-White is jumping around, he started, and then other people started. And you know it is a movement, so to speak.” Bassoon and I both revealed that we were having goosebumps on our arms as we watched the moment in the video when the Guy-in-White triggered the flash of standing head-banging.

Reaction to the Bohemian Rhapsody Song

Baby Giraffe struggled to put the experience into words as more tears were flowing during the interview. “I am clearly a crier, and music affects me, it gets into me really hard, really fast.” Baby Giraffe did not remember playing the “last four or five measures of the song. I could not see the music [through my tears]. It was just so powerful.” Baby Giraffe also remembered crying during other parts in that song because it was such an experience, “Being in that moment with myself, but also seeing other people in the orchestra having that exact same experience, crying, [with] tears streaming down while they are trying to play.” Baby Giraffe said that “it did not matter if the notes were out of tune, or if I was half a beat behind. It did not matter because it was just this personal experience and collective experience.” As the video ended, I reflected that “there are a lot of people glowing right there,” and Lorax said, “Yeah, there are a lot of people who remember that day, I am sure.” Bassoon said, “I could definitely feel the collective energy of the moment. And it is such a crazy thing to be [in a] liminal space [during] the moment of a performance.”

Sharkie recalled that, in a year after 2019, suggesting to Maestro that they play *Bohemian Rhapsody* again “because it is such a moving piece for the audience. When the

audience hears *Bohemian Rhapsody*, they just go nuts. [In 2019,] 3,000 people [were] singing and dancing and clapping and spinning around." Sharkie continued, "It is the energy that is created out of that [audience participation] that makes [*Bohemian Rhapsody*] so much more of a piece than just the music itself." After the *Folly* performance, the leadership team decided to make *Bohemian Rhapsody* the planned encore piece, replacing *Ode to Joy* with the kazoos, because of the energy the performance created within the playa community. The next performance that week, at the Temple, had a larger-than-usual audience. And, in 2022 and 2023 (the next on-playa Black Rock Philharmonic performance years), Maestro said, "People just come out to be a part of that moment and [to] try to rekindle it." Maestro said that in 2023, the BRP's large-art-piece performance had double the crowd size of 2019, "so, there is something to that as well." However, Maestro noted that "it has never been as magical. It is different and wonderful in its own way." Maestro compared seeing the original and later BRP performances to seeing The Rolling Stones in the 60s after a new album release versus seeing them in recent years, "It is still great, but it is maybe not the same spirit of magic as it was before."

After the show, Maestro said, "There was just this incredible euphoria." Maestro remembered plenty of people from the audience interacting with the orchestra, and everyone was in a daze from what they all just experienced. Maestro talked with the principal cellist after the performance, and they started laughing as the cellist said, "Well that just happened." Maestro was moved by the energy to seek some time to wind down, and after much of the crowd had dispersed, "got on my bike and [pedaled] maybe a fifth

of a mile away from the *Folly*. I absorbed the moment, lying on the playa, for maybe 20 minutes." Then, Maestro thought, "I am exhausted and nothing I am going to do the rest of the night is going to be as cool as this." Maestro went back to camp, said "Hey" to a couple of people, and then went into the tent "and just passed out."

In 2019, Baby Giraffe's husband played bass drum in the orchestra. The experience was unique because Baby Giraffe's husband had only performed in rock bands previously. As they both were "coming off that performance high," he said, "What do we do now?" Baby Giraffe told me that "he was overwhelmed with the whole experience, in a good way." They found an art car that had a salon and climbed up to the platform on the roof to look out over the scene of the concert at sunset. Baby Giraffe watched and listened to their husband's reaction. "To have been a part of that was super special for him." They went back to *Center Camp* where they volunteered and camped. Some camp members had gone out to the concert, and they were "just speechless." Baby Giraffe's friends and other burners were talking right after that show, "trying to internalize what just happened, trying to process the whole experience." Two *Center Camp* friends were positioned on the side of the orchestra, and they both had the exact same experience. "They got emotional, and then they just could not talk about it because it was just this amazing experience." After the show, one campmate, who was "edgy but also kind of an introvert," told Baby Giraffe that they never wanted to miss another Black Rock Philharmonic show. "He wanted to go experience it," and it became a priority for future burns for the campmate. It had never occurred to Baby Giraffe that the orchestra might be "somebody's thing, that they would spend all this money and time and go to

Burning Man to see the orchestra."

Lorax talked to me about the performance and the connection with the audience. After the concert, people were coming up to orchestra members to thank them, and "everybody wants to hug everybody." Overall, the orchestra and the audience were all "stunned." Lorax remembered the principal cellist of the orchestra who was also the lead at the *Frozen Oasis* camp at which the orchestra rehearsed that year. (The *Frozen Oasis* camp is described in Footnote 17 in Chapter Three.) The principal cellist "turned around, and we were all crying, and we were all just looking at each other with our mouths open." They were saying, "Holy shit. What was that? How did that happen?" Lorax continued, "We were all stunned and did not know it was going to happen that way. It was definitely a synergy between the performers and the musicians. I do not know how you recreate that."

Bassoon said, "It was all such a blur." Bassoon struggled with the usual routine of swabbing out the instrument and getting it packed up. But, along with their stand mate, Bassoon felt "joy" and that they were both "in a state of shock." Bassoon further commented that "it felt like floating" and still being in "liminal space." After packing up the instrument, Bassoon looked for "some people to hang out with" and found one of the art cars designed to look like an old front porch of a southern cabin. It usually drove around the playa with a live group playing bluegrass. But even after finding people to interact with, Bassoon still could not recall any specific reactions "because I was sort of still [in] that space, had not really come down." Later in the week, people were reacting to the *Folly* concert; it was "sort of the buzz, the talk of the town, and it was exciting."

Bassoon's final reflection on returning to camp was "I just felt sort of immersed, like [it] was a really good year for embodying the spirit of the *Merry Prankster*."

Reflection on the Experience

Reflecting on all the planning, gear movement, and braving the harsh playa elements, Maestro said, "With almost every [Black Rock Philharmonic] show, we pull it off yet again. It is stupid and ridiculous and absurd to have an orchestra out there, and yet it keeps working." Baby Giraffe noted that the *1812 Overture* was high energy, with the *Mayan Warrior* and *Elektra White Dragon* art cars, along with the orchestra's trumpet player, shooting fire during the cannon hits in the song. It created an "amazing experience that nobody anticipated." But, Baby Giraffe said that the preceding *Bohemian Rhapsody* turned out to be even higher energy. In 2019, along with the years following the pandemic, Baby Giraffe said the *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* is the song that people remember. "It is still an experience people are talking about. I have had strangers message me. People came up to me on the playa in 2022 and 2023, and they are still saying that *Bohemian Rhapsody* was such a life-altering experience." Baby Giraffe said that people say that "the orchestra is why they go back to Burning Man, to experience that."

Trying to focus on the causes of the energy created by that performance, Baby Giraffe said, "It was music and an orchestra concert. It was at Burning Man, at the *Folly* art installation, and surrounded by the *Mayan Warrior* and many other art cars. It is not like an experience anywhere else on-playa," and the fact that people are still talking about it in 2024 "is mind blowing." Baby Giraffe expanded on magical moments that often

serendipitously happen on-playa, commonly referred to as *playa magic* at Burning Man. "It gets inside of you, playa magic or music in general, it just gets inside you. I think [that is] because it is just a singularly unique experience, plus all the other things like the people and the energy."

Wiping tears at the end of the video, Lorax offered that this moment is something that you probably cannot recreate. The orchestra has tried by reprogramming the song in future years as an encore, "but I do not think it has ever come across the way it did that particular day." Lorax did not know if you could "recreate that environment or experience again, but that whole year was pretty special for me. To this day, if *Bohemian Rhapsody* comes on the radio and someone does not sing, I do not want to be around them." Lorax continued, "If you are kind of a weird person, if you do not sing [in] the car with that song when it comes on the radio, I mean, who are you?" This performance was something that still has impacted Lorax's life. Summarizing the performance and this unique collective musical experience, Lorax said, "It was just magic. It really was magical. I do not know how else to describe it. But if I keep going to Burning Man and playing, maybe it will happen again sometime."

Sharkie described the *Bohemian Rhapsody* performance as "really impressive. It is one of those life-changing events." Sharkie said that there are 14 or 15 different videos of Black Rock Philharmonic playing *Bohemian Rhapsody* at one or another time. Sharkie described the audience participation demonstrating how much they appreciated that music as "just amazing." Every time Sharkie watches it, it is like they just played it. "It brings you right back to the excitement and the thrill of playing that music. I can see why

professional musicians and rock stars can really get into it, because of the reaction they get from their audiences." During the interview, Sharkie acted out the body actions while animatedly describing sections of the piece. Thinking about the song more, Sharkie remembered asking *Alexa* (AI assistant) ,"What was the best song ever written?" *Alexa* responded, "*Bohemian Rhapsody.*"

Sharkie said, "The fact that we play it gives us an opportunity to get embroiled in the emotion of it, just by playing it, and then also get the reaction of the audience." Sharkie noted that the musicians get to feel how the audience feels as well. "To me, those two things go together, making for an incredible experience. It did not matter if you were a performer or an audience member, you were getting the energy from everyone, and it carried on afterwards." Then Sharkie offered an analogy to the experience, "Quantum mechanics says that if you can modify 1% of the cells in an organism, you will affect the entire organism," and added that is what happened that day. "We moved that 1%; we had enough impact to really get that group charged. We affected more than 1% of 3,000 people, and 3,000 people were impacted by that performance."

Sharkie reflected not knowing all the words, but the audience did. This gave Sharkie a different perspective because they knew the piece from rehearsing it and hearing it throughout the years, but "I never got into it." Those people in the audience had listened to it enough to know many of the words. That song was "meaningful" to them, and the Black Rock Philharmonic performance "struck a chord with them."

Sharkie noted that the audience assembling in the deep playa says something. "They wanted to be there, to hear an orchestra in a place where you would never expect

to find an orchestra." Sharkie continued, "You know, people had to trek out there, ride their bikes or walk. They had to get that mile away from *Center Camp*. So, they must decide to go. They are not going to casually come across it" as they wander around the deep playa, either. They must decide to go out there at the scheduled time. Sharkie concluded, "And to me, that is important."

Bassoon offered a comparison between a mosaic artist and a musician. The mosaic artist plans and plans and "fusses around," and then the mosaic becomes "a fixed thing." In contrast, the live performance of music is just happening in the moment, "You cannot fix it in post. You cannot break it out and reset it." Bassoon felt the need to identify the welled up emotions, to help "somatically, in my emotional response to music once I start thinking about it." Bassoon continued to talk about the specific emotions that can get attached to music that each person uniquely has. "A shared experience of music transforms the individual … and it makes us a collective." Bassoon said that each person is coming from a "*you* place" within themself that only they reside in, and they are sharing that with everyone else who is coming from their own "*you* place." Bassoon continued, "We are all feeling together. I can take the hidden parts of myself and show them to the world through music." Bassoon needed to be understood and seen and recognized as, "Oh, that is me, too. I feel that, too."

As the video ended in the interview, Bassoon was full of emotions. I invited Bassoon to tell me what is going through their body and mind right now and here. Bassoon responded, "It was so hard to play that piece during the pandemic," while wiping tears away with a towel. "One of my neighbors committed [suicide]. We lost her;

she decided to not be here anymore." That neighbor was always a positive and encouraging voice to Bassoon during the pandemic lockdown, "she was the one who kept our little group, the collective, going every night, going out and making music." At a time during the lockdown of the pandemic, when people wanted to support the first responders, they as a group would make noise by playing instruments, screaming, and banging on pots and pans. The neighbor was a person who had stopped musicking in her life, yet she was a constantly encouraging Bassoon to start practicing and performing music again. The neighbor even pulled out a trumpet a couple of times to support the first responders. Sharing that memory, Bassoon was still crying and wiping tears with a towel, "but just playing that song, what it is about, it was tough. It touched on a lot, just the timeliness of everything we had gone through. Just the toll it takes, just how isolated we all were."

For Bassoon, one of the biggest challenges as a musician was to stay emotionally regulated while playing, and struggling with regulating emotions in daily life. When some songs come on the radio, Bassoon will hear them and a "harmonic will hit my brain, and just waterworks. But that is my response just to passively hearing music." When performing, sometimes Bassoon "gets caught up in the feeling" and gets "overwhelmed. You cannot cry and play bassoon" at the same time. "It is not unlike that *gasp* thing," when you cannot catch your breath. Bassoon would sometimes get to that point, and recalled a *New World Symphony* dress rehearsal in which "I was just a disaster, because I was sobbing."

Summary

Each participant vividly remembered the experience of collective effervescence by the musicians and the audience during the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* art installation. They were able to recall aspects of the planning for the concert. They identified factors that may have generated the audience's energy. They reflected on the experience when their emotions were still high and afterwards more analytically.

Theme 2: Virtual Encore During the Pandemic

The year of the *Folly* performance, 2019, was a powerful Burning Man year for the five participants as well as for me. Then, when each participant would have started the 2020 *Pre-Burning Man Ritual*, the world began to lock down for the COVID-19 pandemic. Musicians who usually strive for connection were unable to perform music in person. Their long-standing sense of community was forced into isolation. On March 28, 2020, the Black Rock Philharmonic decided to create a virtual encore of their 2019 *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* to help reconnect burners and their musical family during lockdown. The virtual encore project became even more important because two weeks later, the Burning Man Project "made the difficult decision not to build Black Rock City in 2020" (Burning Man Project, 2020c, para. 1).

Baby Giraffe recalled that the initial idea of creating the video during the first part of the Pandemic lockdown came from Maestro. They were not sure who could be involved or how it could be edited all together and how long it would take. They felt it was "a heavy idea." Baby Giraffe was also worried because of not playing since 2019

during Burning Man, and overall, was “really sad” because they could not perform together. Baby Giraffe then stepped back out of the equation and felt, “even if it reached [only] one person, that would be reaching one person.” Baby Giraffe felt none of those technical issues ultimately mattered because the idea of the project was being able to create together in a time when people could not be together physically. Baby Giraffe let go of the worries of sounding out of tune, because “we are creating something in a time when we cannot be together to create it.”

When it came to selecting the piece for the virtual encore project, Maestro considered a few pieces from the *Folly* performance but settled on *Bohemian Rhapsody*. “It was a big pivotal piece for us, but it was sort of more thinking about what would engage and stir up memories for people who would be watching it outside of the group, certainly inside as well.” It was a “crowd favorite,” and the selection became a “no-brainer” from the leadership team.

Amid all the emotions and isolation that were happening in the world, the virtual encore project forced the Black Rock Philharmonic musicians to use an unfamiliar method of creating music. Each musician performed as an individual, in isolation. Someone else, also in isolation, assembled those performances into a combined audio-visual product to be shared among themselves and with the world online. The musicians had to find the feelings of connection and flow while performing to a backing track and watching a conducting video, rather than being able to feed off each other’s skill and emotion. For many of the musicians, especially non-professionals, this was a skill they had never practiced. In a live performance, many musicians struggle with performance

anxiety. The individual recording situation amplified that anxiety because they could hear all their mistakes. For some, trying to recapture the energy of collective performance could turn into a self-defeating emotional spiral.

Reliving the Bohemian Rhapsody Virtual Encore Performance

During Interview 2, each of the five participants watched a video playback of the finished product of the virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody*. During the time in 2020 when the participants made the recordings, they were each struggling with mental wellbeing. When each participant and I watched the playback, I wanted them to remember their personal struggles during COVID, how they prepared to make the recording, and what they felt while recording it. “We need to get back into the things that we were missing during the pandemic and connect to the powerful *Folly* performance. We were trying to connect with our burner families, and for us, that is the Black Rock Philharmonic.”

When I introduced the video and explained how I wanted them to travel back and remember their mind frame in 2020, Lorax was visibly emotional, and I felt that same energy. I said, “Already tearing up? I know what you mean.” Lorax responded after wiping away a tear, “That is rough here,” referring to pandemic emotional memories.

Both Maestro and Lorax intently watched the video playback without a word, being fully in the moment. Maestro broke into a big smile during the video, and then started head-bobbing at the same time the musicians broke out into headbanging during the song. Lorax occasionally smiled slightly, but also occasionally wiped away a tear. Lorax started lightly head-bobbing at the same time in the song that Maestro did.

After watching the video, Lorax said, “It was interesting to see a lot of the people in that recording. I did not even know [some of them] played in the Black Rock Philharmonic because they are in a different section of the orchestra.” At that point in the pandemic, “I did not know if I was ever going to see those people again. I did not know if we were ever going to play together again. I did not know if Burning Man was ever going to happen again.” Lorax concluded, “The music gave us all hope that we would be back together again, and that this was going to happen again.”

Bassoon started with a hand on the side of their head, making exclamatory noises, including when they first appeared in a pane. During the initial third of the song, Bassoon said, “Oh, these are all the people I am unaware of,” referring to some of the members of the Black Rock Philharmonic that they did not know personally. Bassoon continued, “Even though we were so disconnected, I saw people in their home environments. It felt like a new lens, you know.” As the music built toward the middle of the song, Bassoon was tapping their heart and nodding their head. When the song reached the “Mama Mia” section, Bassoon was mimicking conducting the orchestra with horizontal and vertical head movements. Although not doing the head banging with the musicians in the playback, they chuckled shortly thereafter.

Sharkie was more interactive while watching the video. Early in the song, Sharkie commented on the double bass player, “He really was good. I remember seeing him at Burning Man a couple of times. I was just blown away by his skill.” Then Sharkie intently responded to the oboe player who was wearing a purple dragon mask, “Her face.” As the video reached the time when I was playing the trumpet in Burning Man

clothing, Sharkie commented, “Hello, man, there you are!” I responded that I wore two different outfits in the video because I recorded multiple parts for the project, and that I kept one of the costumes on the back of the door in my office as a reminder of the experience. I also noticed that the electric bass player, who was performing in a playful manner like an upright bass, was wearing the same outfit as during performances at Burning Man (including a tux shirt). I spoke about how I recognized the playa outfits of other orchestra members in the video. Then Sharkie came up in one of the video panes, and said "I am in that picture with the black top hat. That is what I wear out there. That is my COVID beard, it got really long." I noticed that in the video, Sharkie was wearing the same 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic necklace as I was in the video. Finally, Sharkie waved arms and clarinet like a conductor as the music faded out, just as during the actual performance. Sharkie concluded, “It really brings back that emotion.”

Baby Giraffe was the most emotional participant while intently watching the video with a big smile. Baby Giraffe chuckled when one of the musician panes showed Maestro playing the euphonium, and made several happy sounds when other musicians they knew well were shown in the small panes. But as the tempo picked up, Baby Giraffe began to cry and wipe away tears. As the song intensity picked up further, Baby Giraffe alternated between a big smile with happy sounds and tears, sometimes with both tears and a big smile simultaneously. After the video was over, Baby Giraffe reflected on the virtual encore performance being like Burning Man, “this beautiful, weird experience, like a dream experience where you are doing all these amazing, weird things.”

Recording Difficulties

Maestro pointed out that many musicians have never had to learn multiple track recording because they only practice and perform in ensembles that do not require recording or sound reinforcement. Bassoon commented on how recording only to a backing track and a conducting video was a "very nerve racking" process along with recording "so many takes." Maestro also heard from some players who "wanted to be part of it" but were "uncomfortable" figuring out how to record the sound and video for the project.

There were positive things that came from the recording process though. Maestro recalled that the recording needed more voices on cello, and how Lorax the cellist played two parts in separate videos. Lorax recreated the Burning Man playful spirit by wearing multiple outfits and a wig. Bassoon said it was "such a fun project" and the first time "doing something like that. You are playing a part that you cannot feel because the whole puzzle is not there. It made it very exposed and felt like throwing something into the void at the time." Ultimately, Bassoon was glad about participating "because the result was exactly what we needed as a group."

Lorax's journey of recording for the project was more intense because their mother went into the ICU in February 2020. Upon reflection now, Lorax's family thinks she had an early case of COVID. The doctor said that there is "not a very good chance she is going to make it out." Lorax and partner flew to Oklahoma City to be with Lorax's mother, "but after the first few weeks, I am going stark, raving mad because I did not have my cello." Lorax and partner flew home to New Mexico to get the cello. Lorax was

aware of the virtual encore performance and “went upstairs and recorded my part for that piece.” Like other orchestra members, Lorax struggled with the recording aspects of participating, and of course was under all the stress associated with a sick mother. “I was determined to be part of it. It was not easy. I was not really set up with the right mic. I do not think a lot of people were, and you could not go buy a new mic.” Luckily, Lorax had a desktop computer with a camera, which was used to record the first cello part during the short time at the house in New Mexico. “I had not played in a while, so I had to do it a bunch of times. Truthfully, I do not think I ever got it quite the way I wanted it, but it worked.”

After making the first recording in New Mexico, Lorax packed the cello and bicycle “because that was the only way you could exercise during the pandemic,” and drove back to Oklahoma City. At mother’s house, Lorax used a cell phone to record a second cello part because the project needed more string recordings. “We only have two cellos. That is not right, you know, and we need to have more cellos.”

Maestro reflected that the virtual project, like physical art, added the permanence of a recording to how musicians practice and perform. “As a musician, when you play a note, it disappears.” Most community musicians only rehearse and practice for a live performance and they can “very easily and without stress move on to the next note and the next piece.” Plenty of orchestra members had “a good bit of anxiety” about recording themselves, including Maestro. One of the reasons is that when there was a mistake, they could re-record it, which never happens in a live performance. Maestro remembered more than five takes trying to record a euphonium part.

Performance Difficulties

Maestro reflected on how difficult it was to play and conduct on a recording; *Bohemian Rhapsody* was not "a walk in the park" because of all the time changes (5/4, 2/4, 3/4, 4/4). But beyond the mechanical and recording aspects of virtual performance, there was a musical difficulty. Maestro heard about how difficult it was to play on a recording. There was the difference that you can go back and get a second try. Maestro further related frustrations playing the euphonium in the song and how that was different then performing live. "It was annoying. I played the euphonium as well as conducted. It took me a long time to get a take on the euphonium that I liked. I flubbed some notes on most of the other takes." Maestro continued, "Whether it is a gift or a curse, when we perform live, we do not have" retakes. "This project makes you realize just how different and special live performance is. We might not like making mistakes, but it happens and you are onto the next bar, you are onto the next part, you are onto the next piece."

Baby Giraffe, also struggling with the performance, became worried when hitting "record," not "knowing who is going to see this. I do not know if it is going to be good. Maybe I will not be playing it in tempo, and I will be edited out. I do not know." Those thoughts came to mind while trying to perform.

Lorax felt "out of place" because of hearing others "playing so well" during the video replay. Not playing "as well as I ought to" bothered Lorax initially, until being able to express the experience from a different viewpoint that "it did not really matter." Because "seeing all those people, it just brought joy to me." Lorax continued "Nobody really knew what we were in and what was going to happen in the future. Everything was

a shit storm." Lorax felt it was "really cool" to see all the orchestra members who wanted to be together but could not."

During the pandemic, Bassoon began to worry about the fine arts in general, and "not knowing when it would come back. This is the time when society really falls apart." Bassoon was "staring unabashedly unblinking into the void." When the virtual project was announced, it became a lifeline. But it was also "nerve wracking" because Bassoon still was not confident about musical ability, especially when compared to the skill level of other musicians within the ensemble. The project was "a real gift" for Bassoon.

Baby Giraffe admitted to not playing parts of the song because of "crying," but it did not matter because "we were playing together" and "it turned out amazing. It was amazing." Baby Giraffe also felt a connection with the ensemble because of loving to be a flute player standing in front of the brass section and hearing them, "so I enjoyed that as well."

Playa Community During the Pandemic

During the pandemic, Maestro and the Black Rock Philharmonic leadership group tried to keep the community together. They had Zoom meetings, and the BRP Facebook Group "is quite active, and that was always good to communicate." The Organizational Team sent out a holiday card that read, "Let's make some magic happen on the playa last year." Baby Giraffe created a YouTube page to share musicians' recordings. Maestro also had personal communication with individuals, "checking in with them, or just conversations that were already ongoing. This was a time of flux and uneasiness."

They came up with the idea of the virtual encore performance "to engage the community." It was an opportunity to do more and to connect with each other. With the Pandemic lockdown, orchestra members were missing their community and performing music together. The video purposely ended with "From our family to yours … See you all again in the dust!" Maestro was "thinking of all the friends and all the connections" with the people in the ensemble when watching the video with me. Maestro did not "associate it with the COVID-19 Pandemic lockdown," but rather that the video became "a chance to play, a chance to connect both within our group and out to anyone who wants to listen." Maestro thought of the "people who are doing it and the connection" because "each one shows up and has a funny story." Some past members who were not part of the 2019 Folly performance reached out to Maestro wanting to be part of the virtual encore performance connection and community again during the pandemic. Maestro responded to them, "Absolutely. It is sad you were not there, but [we are] happy to have you now or anytime."

I asked Bassoon if participating in the 2020 online pandemic reprise of Bohemian Rhapsody or preparing for Burning Man in subsequent years had helped to move forward. Bassoon thought preparing for Burning Man was significant, but the 2021 burn was not going to happen "musically." I asked Bassoon if the energy of the 2019 Folly performance gave momentum to go into the default world to find a musical group again. Bassoon responded, "Yes. yes, that 2019 [performance]." At the time of the interview, Bassoon felt that if people do not like Bohemian Rhapsody or do not sing along with it in a car, "It is a red flag!" Before the 2019 performance at the Folly, Bassoon did not like

the song and was not excited about playing it, commenting that, as a musician, playing songs that they do not enjoy can "have the most to teach me." Practicing it pre-Burning Man, Bassoon thought they would dislike the song even more because it would become "this ear worm that I am never going to get away from." But after the Folly performance, Bassoon changed "180 degrees" on the song, and now loves Bohemian Rhapsody and even sings along to it in grocery stores, "What a delightful, just effervescent moment that was! [It] did carry me through."

Reflecting on the 2020 project, Bassoon thought, "It was so nice to have something goal-oriented to focus on, and not just finding things to put on my stand to practice for who knows what." Bassoon felt connected to the Black Rock Philharmonic through music during the pandemic. "Even though it does not look like it did before, we can still find a way to use human ingenuity to persevere and overcome." Bassoon continued, "It was that weird time. Some of my friends were unaffected, but my husband and I, we really took it [hard]. Our pod was just two people because we could not figure out how to [handle] the risk."

Bassoon wanted to not limit this feeling about musicking to only Burning Man, "I need to find a default [world music] group to join." Bassoon joined one when things started reopening after the pandemic. They struggled with the questions of masking up and how to deal with the ineffective personal protective equipment (PPE) for musical instruments. Bassoon felt it was "such a joke. It took me a few years to find a group. But it was definitely based on the momentum [and] the joy that kept building and building every year with the Philharmonic."

Burning Man culture influenced Sharkie's musicking during the pandemic. Sharkie had put on Burning Man clothes and went out to play the clarinet to a cactus. "I am trying to encourage the cactus. I am not playing anything specific, just [improvising]." Sharkie and neighbors also did this type of burner-inspired musicking, gathering in the street, socially distanced, to connect as a community during the pandemic lockdown. Sharkie had one more interesting performance during the pandemic. "I dressed up like [a burner] and went to a little area in town that has a bunch of cattle, and I just started playing." The cows "started walking up to me while I was playing. You know, just wacky stuff like that."

Baby Giraffe felt that the orchestra was like a family but had not watched the video after the project was finished because it was "too difficult to watch." Baby Giraffe felt it "came out beautifully, even though it was created in a hard time." It was difficult to watch because of the emotions wrapped up in losing the community. Baby Giraffe started crying while watching themself cry on the video, and it became "a little on the ridiculous side." But the project "is amazing to see, like how many people have come and gone. Like how many people I missed." Baby Giraffe continued to talk about specific people in the orchestra and the outfits and actions they did in the videos along with the memories of them and the love for them.

Sharkie found a sense of community with the Black Rock Philharmonic and Burning Man in general through the virtual video project "because we were performing Bohemian Rhapsody at Burning Man." When Sharkie heard the piece in the default world, "it takes me right back there" to the playa. When Sharkie played the video or the

recording “It gave me chills, and I think those chills are from the Burning Man experience.” Sharkie also played another BRP piece, Hallelujah, in the klezmer band in the default world. “Every time we play that, I think of our performance of Hallelujah [at] Burning Man.”

During the pandemic, Lorax hosted “two of our friends from Burning Man sleeping on the living room couch for a month. It was such a time of uncertainty about everything.” They were still there when Lorax’s mother passed away, so the virtual encore performance “brings back a lot of those memories that I put away, because they were difficult memories.” Lorax felt it was a very tough year for everybody, “but that little recording, I cannot tell you how many times I pulled that up and watched it that year.” When Lorax was down, watching it gave “hope” to return to the playa “with my friends again.”

In 2021, Burning Man was again canceled. During this time, a large group of burners decided to still go to the Black Rock Desert and gathered without any of the organizational support or permits; that gathering was unofficially called the Renegade Burn. Many other people also chose to gather in various places to celebrate Burning Man in their own ways. Similarly, Lorax said. “Some of my friends and I got together with a couple of burners who live near me in Pecos. We built a Man, we stood it up, and we burned it.” Lorax continued, “I played my cello, just like I would if I was at the Burn. One of my friends who is an architect made a little Temple, and we burned the Temple too. And so, we carried on with it.” Bassoon’s husband took DJ gear up to the roof for burn night and did a live music streaming. The author and about a dozen Burning Band

musicians met at Summer Lake Hot Springs in Paisley, Oregon for burn week, re-creating some of their playa activities, including toppling a small Man while they all played naked in the hot spring pool.

Re-Creating Playa Energy during the Pandemic

During the pandemic, burners were confronted with isolation. Their annual Burning Man week in the Black Rock Desert was canceled for the first time ever. With the *Bohemian Rhapsody* virtual encore performance, burners were finding new ways to connect with their community and to recharge their burner spirit.

Each day in 2020, Baby Giraffe picked a "favorite memory, and would either post pictures or create something and share it" on-line. Baby Giraffe took one project much further by creating a replica of the *Folly* where the 2019 *Bohemian Rhapsody* performance took place. "I wanted to create [the replica] because the Black Rock Philharmonic [playing *Bohemian Rhapsody*] at the *Folly* in 2019 changed me. It was one of the most amazing experiences I have ever had at Burning Man." Baby Giraffe continued, "I wanted to create something that could represent that amazing memory. I started building a *Folly* model out of popsicle sticks in the middle of July, and it took me about a month to complete." The tallest tower was 3 feet tall, and the whole model was about two and a half feet wide. After it was built and flags were put on it, Baby Giraffe thought, "I cannot burn this. There is no way, it is too big. I figured out it was probably about 8,000 popsicle sticks." Baby Giraffe posted it on Facebook along with a clickable window of the 2019 recording. "So, the orchestra was [depicted] playing *Bohemian Rhapsody* over this picture" of the *Folly* model. Baby Giraffe tagged every orchestra

member on their Facebook friend list. After the pandemic abated, Baby Giraffe sent a message to Burning Man Organization headquarters in San Francisco, offering to donate the *Folly* replica. They accepted, "Absolutely, we want it. Come down to headquarters and we will take it." Baby Giraffe "got to hang out at headquarters for a day to set it up." They assured Baby Giraffe that they never throw away any art that they receive. "So now this popsicle stick *Folly* will live forever at Burning Man headquarters, with a tag that says, 'To commemorate Black Rock Philharmonic's 2019 performance at the *Folly*.'"

During this time, musicians were also trying to find different ways to recreate the energy that they typically felt in person at Burning Man. This became evident with how the orchestra members dressed and acted during the recording of the virtual project. Maestro found some "burnery clothes" and the Black Rock Philharmonic pendant necklace from 2019. Maestro observed that the overall mindset for getting into burner character was "just figuring out which clothes I wanted to wear." Maestro saw that everyone was doing the same types of things (dancing and wearing playa outfits and necklaces) as if they were on-playa, as if filling a role. Baby Giraffe saw how many people in the video wore different costumes and how they did "different fun things just to add a little bit more lightness to it." Baby Giraffe wore the Burning Man bowler hat previously worn on the playa, a couple of BRP pendants, and a *Center Camp* hoodie. During the recording of the second cello part, Lorax threw on different clothes and changed persona, wearing their dying mother's wig and robe. "The thing that I remember from that is it really instilled a feeling of hope that we are going to, damn it, we are going to do [Burning Man] again." Maestro remembered differences and similarities between

the musician's behavior in the two performances. Maestro felt “a lot of happiness and a bit of welling up” seeing how the musicians put “their own spin on things,” especially capturing the 2019 experience in which everyone did the exact same dance.

Sharkie felt that the virtual project brought back the energy of the crowd of the 2019 *Folly* performance. It created a connection to the Philharmonic and to playing music at Burning Man. It also connected Sharkie to the crowd “because it was the first time that I have ever experienced a crowd just going nuts.” Sharkie noted that the orchestra continued to play the song on-playa in 2022 and 2023, and “they still go nuts when you play it, and it still feels the same to me.”

Bassoon also felt transported back to the emotions from *Folly* performance with the virtual project, recognizing the faces in the video, “but I had never seen them without dust.” Bassoon thought that everybody was in their Burning Man character, and it was “hard to remember that default versions of these people exist. It brought me back to being on-playa with them.”

Theme 3: The Temple

The Temple theme emerged from Interviews 1 and 2. I added a new question group to Interview 3 to elicit more focused data on that area of their lived experiences. I felt it was important to delve deeper into the meaning of the Temple within the overall culture of Burning Man and what it means to individuals through their personal experiences. The first Temple (*Temple of the Mind*) was built at Burning Man in 2000 by David Best and Jack Haye (Burning Man Project, 2024d). The meaning of the Temple for the Burning Man community has evolved over the years, and the organization described

it as follows:

> The Temple is a community shared space that is an important part of Black Rock City. It is not a Temple in recognition of any religion; it's a neutral, non-denominational spiritual space where everyone can gather to share in the experience of remembering the past, honoring or cursing the present, and pondering the future to come. The Temple is not fixed around one concept, belief or theme. It is an inclusive safe space for all Burners. Some will gather in pairs or groups; others will sit alone in silence. And yet, in the Temple, no one is ever alone.
>
> Building the Temple is not simply about building a large art project at Burning Man. It is about community. It is about finding that place inside us where we can take the time to be introspective, to grieve and to honor those who have been lost to us. It is a safe space where Burners are invited to find and feel love, joy, sadness, anger, fear and any emotion that rises to the surface. The Temple is a place where we all allow each other to do what we need to do and to truly be ourselves.
>
> When the Temple opens, it's a clean slate. By the end of the event, every inch is covered with photos, inscriptions, art, and small mementos left by participants. The Temple is one of the most important places on the playa for Burners and many find catharsis there. …
>
> There is only one official ritual in the Temple, and that is to burn it. On Sunday night of the event, with thousands of participants as witnesses, the Temple

is burned in silence. (Burning Man Project, 2024d, Meaning of the Temple to the Burning Man Community section)

The Temple Space

Maestro began with, "Temple, *oof*, it is a heavy place. It is not a religious place, [but it] is arguably one of the most spiritual places that many people have ever experienced, in part because it lacks the specific definitions." Maestro used a musical analogy to explain the meaning of the Temple if it were a piece of art. It is "experienced by many, and that sensation itself is the same for everyone. But the perception and the integration of that experience is all going to be individualized. It can create a lot of strong connections and meaning." Maestro believed that the Temple is "one of the things that separates Burning Man from most festivals, and that some festivals have attempted to capture."

Maestro also believed that the Temple "transcends time" in relation with how people write on it and leave objects in and around the structure. "Someone has written some secret, some pain, some joy, on the wall there. You walk by and you are there, but not with them." Maestro commented that people give each other space in the Temple. But after people have left their items, Maestro felt one must "approach at my own risk" because the "one-way conversation" that they left was not "meant for you." By reading it, "you have now become part of it. It raises your awareness of all sorts of things." Maestro found that the experience can be "kind of wild, a little vulnerable, a little safe, because that person will not necessarily ever know or meet you."

Baby Giraffe remarked that each year, the Temple has "many spots to sit and

process. It is just beautiful and very peaceful." The Temple designers "always create a space that is really beautiful" and that creates a "calm experience." Baby Giraffe also believed other things play into the energy of the Temple and the Temple Burn, including the harsh conditions. "Your emotions and your feelings are already heightened because of everything you are going through during the week, the elements outside, all the things that you are seeing, all the things you are hearing, and people. And it is just all the emotions."

Bassoon believed that the Temple is "integral," and Burning Man "would not mean as much without those spaces, the open, the introspective part." Because many burners feel it is important to participate in the Temple Burn on the last day of the event, Bassoon hates leaving Burning Man before the Temple Burn. "I try not to do that ever, because it feels incomplete, like the reintegration has not [finished]. So much happens. You need a space to reflect and take it all in." Maestro, however, said that many burners do not attend the Man Burn or the Temple Burn and leave early. "I want to stay around because I just like being there, but if I only had four days to go," they would not include "Saturday and Sunday of Burn Week. None of the 10 Principles require, or even suggest, effigy burn or Temple Burn."

Yin and Yang of the Temple

Baby Giraffe liked the comparison of the Man Burn and the Temple Burn to *Yin and Yang* because the Man Burn "is high energy and high all the things, like in your face, and then the Temple [Burn] is really soft and beautiful and quiet." Baby Giraffe said, "Even though it is burning, it is still quiet and hits you in a different way." Through

orchestra performances, along with personal solo gifting performances at the Temple, Lorax found that "the energy, feeling, and culture in the Temple are different from what is found around the base of the Man and during the Man Burn." Lorax said, "There is something about the Temple, it is 180 degrees different from the Man. And the Temple Burn is different from the Man Burn, and I was not expecting that." Lorax said that at the Temple Burn, "there are all these people sitting around the Temple, and it is quiet. If you listen carefully, you are hearing people crying and people grieving. That is what it is there for. It is a healing thing. It helps." Continuing to use the *Yin and Yang* concept, Lorax said, "One thing that reflects the populace of Black Rock City is the appreciation of the introverted energy as well as the extroverted energy, or the happy, ecstatic, manic side." Elaborating on the introverted energy, Lorax said, "It is critical" to have the Temple because "the sum of all these deep, deep hurts comprises what it means to be a human."

Bassoon noted the sonic contrast of the Temple being "so silent," while everything else about Burning Man is "just this cacophony, like a Mulligatawny Soup of different elements and different beats all coming together into this sonic miasma, this assault of sounds that you come to live with for the week." In contrast, the "absence of that [noise] at the Temple is stark. It feels stark, but not desolate, if that makes sense. So much is held in that silence."

Temples at Burning Man Regional Events

Maestro discussed how Burning Man Regional Network events do their own version of the Temple. These have been a recent addition, and Maestro believes "they are

an afterthought." Maestro found that some burners "do not quite understand what the Temple can be," or "what regionals are" when comparing them to Burning Man, saying that "maybe their version of the Temple of the regional event is just not big enough." Maestro explained that Burning Man Regional Network events and other large festivals try to incorporate their own version of a healing space, sometimes called altars. From Burning Man experience, Maestro said "The Temple is a deeper part of the everyday culture of Burning Man compared to an altar set up at another festival." Maestro concluded that if "it is just three people writing their whatnots on it, or pictures, or visiting it, it does not invalidate those three people's experiences, but it may not hold as much transformative power for the community at large if it does not engage the community at large."

Black Rock Philharmonic Performances at the Temple

Maestro said that the Temple Performance for the Black Rock Philharmonic is purposely scheduled late in the burn week, usually the day before the Man Burn and 2 days before the Temple Burn. All five participants talked about how the programming of the music is different compared to the other concerts during the week. Maestro said this is "to fit the feel of the venue, which is far more subdued." Maestro also pointed out that "there are going to be many people who are coming out to see us, but there will be some people at the Temple that we could be disturbing, or at least they did not plan for it." Sharkie said that the Temple is more "solemn" so the music programming also reflects that. "There is a lot of sorrow. And so, you are going to play in respect to the people that are at the Temple."

Maestro remembered a good friend coincidentally being at the Temple when the orchestra played. The orchestra serendipitously opened the concert up with the favorite song of the friend's father, as the family was paying tribute to their father. Maestro added that the music selection was conducive to grieving. They had cut high-energy songs such as the *1812 Overture* from the program, and they had changed the encore to "substituting out the audience kazoos for la-la-las" in *Ode to Joy*, which was an invitation for the audience to "sing along" in a less raucous manner. The Temple concert also did not have the *Mayan Warrior* art car providing sound amplification. Other than speakers for a piano, it was an entirely acoustic show. Maestro concluded, "It is a much different type of energy." Baby Giraffe believed that the Temple performance is "more somber and reverent for those who may be in mourning." Baby Giraffe commented that other musicians perform at the Temple as well, but the impact with a full-size orchestra creates "a wholly unique experience" that is also "cleansing and calming."

Sharkie felt that the orchestra selects songs that are more fitting for the Temple occasion. However, they programmed the high-energy *Bohemian Rhapsody* in 2019 because of the huge crowd that came after the word spread about the *Folly* performance. During that same show, Maestro programmed a brass ensemble piece, Grieg's *Funeral March,* to pay tribute to one of the original trumpet players in the ensemble who had passed on recently. Maestro reflected that this was the only member of the "orchestra that we have ever lost" and the only time that the ensemble had "played a special dedication during a show." Lorax remembered that during that same 2019 Temple concert, one of the orchestra members got married. Lorax felt that to be there and to watch, "was a

beautiful experience." Lorax said, "The orchestra dedication piece for the musician who had passed away, combined with the marriage ceremony of another orchestra member, made it a very strong emotional, spiritual concert."

Orchestra members also explained that emotions at the Temple are different from other parts of Burning Man. Sharkie said, "There is a lot of emotion, a lot of crying that is going on, a lot of anger that people are expressing to somebody who may have hurt them in their life." Sharkie felt that music enhances the emotion found at the Temple and acts as an "emotional stimulus." Sharkie said, "We are out there playing respectfully to the people who are at the Temple, we are giving a gift to them and helping them experience their emotions, but we are also feeling the emotion of playing as a gift to them." Baby Giraffe noted there are "hundreds and hundreds of people" who come to the BRC Temple performance. "They are looking for a different sort of energy." Baby Giraffe said that "listening to beautiful thoughtful music at the Temple" can be "cleansing" and a "beautiful reverent experience."

During the performance, Baby Giraffe scanned faces and saw many people deeply feeling the music and crying. Baby Giraffe also cried during the music itself because of the combination of the music and the Temple setting. Baby Giraffe believed the people at the Temple and the audience members were mourning and there for different reasons. "If we can help people move through certain things that they are going through, that is what music is about, emotions and helping people move through emotions or realize certain things." Baby Giraffe believed that is part of what the orchestra accomplishes by performing at the Temple. Sharkie described it another way, "They were at that Temple

for a reason, and you struck a chord with them." Sharkie also shared that the audience will routinely walk up to the musicians and tell them that they really appreciate the music. "They are saying it from their heart, more so than from their mind." Sharkie believed that there is an "emotional connection" that the audience "can appreciate." Lorax also said that the orchestra and the audience "realize that it is a place of reverence, a spiritual place."

Other Musicking at the Temple

Performing music at the Temple with the orchestra has inspired some to continue gifting music to help process emotions at the Temple. Lorax first played at the Temple with an orchestra in 2015. It "had such an impact on me" that every year, Lorax "goes back to the Temple again to gift my music as an individual." Lorax continued, "People seem to always appreciate that I play music. Usually, I will play respectful music appropriate for a place like the Temple. People always come up, and I get a lot of hugs, and a lot of thanks." Lorax talked about how playing music at the Temple has helped people. "I think it helped me. Music helps me. It has healed me, and I think it helps other people heal as well, even people who are not musicians."

After performing at the Temple with the orchestra the first time, Lorax realized that another Burning Man tradition is to leave items and pictures, and to write and post on the walls of the Temple. Lorax's wife was part of a group of women that raised over a million dollars through Susan G. Komen for breast cancer research and they always wore pink tutus. "So, I brought the pink tutu to the playa, and I wore it on Tutu Tuesday." Lorax also brought a picture of their wife in a tutu to attach to the Temple wall. "Leonard

Nimoy (Spock) had died that year, and I am a big Star Trek fan, so I nailed the tutu picture up next to Leonard Nimoy's memories on the Temple Wall." Then, Lorax took out the cello and started playing. "Suddenly, this woman comes up to me" and said, "We just heard you playing," and Lorax asked, "Oh, I am sorry. Am I bothering you?" The woman answered, "No, I am getting married. Would you play for my ceremony." So, Lorax played Bach's *Suite* and a couple of other pieces for the wedding. "That is when I started understanding what the Temple is about."

Because of seeing how the Temple affected others and because of personal experiences with grieving at the Temple for their wife, Lorax purposely spent several days of burn week going to the Temple to perform for others who are going through their own grieving processes. "I play there every year. I think people always really appreciate it. When I play there, I am not necessarily playing for them. I am playing for my wife and for all these people that I have lost." But those people, at the same time "they appreciate it as well." Which is something unique about the Temple, Lorax said.

Lorax had another musicking encounter while biking to the Temple to play music as an individual. "A Playa Pops violinist was there improvising, playing music. I pulled my cello out, we smiled at each other, and I started playing. We improvised and it was pretty cool music we were playing." To add to that random musicking encounter, Maestro from the Black Rock Philharmonic was sitting nearby and gave them a thumbs up after their Temple duet. Bassoon was trying to be more mobile with the fragile and large instrument to perform at the Temple and other side projects, adding that even without yet playing the instrument there, "I go just to bring the letters, things for other

people, mementos, my own grief."

Sharkie had also brought a clarinet a couple of times to perform at the Temple as an individual, trying to create emotion by improvising long notes, drones, and "vibration kind of notes." Sharkie further described the musical improvisations, "It does not have substance to what I was playing. There is nothing you can hum. It is just notes. It is just low, low volume [and] low, low notes" because Sharkie did not want to interfere with people's emotional moments at the Temple. "I will put in dynamics, you know, louder or softer. Or I may slur some of the notes into the next note or something." Sometimes Sharkie chose to play a song but was very mindful of what song would be appropriate for the space and emotions found at the Temple, such as *Amazing Grace*. "No matter what religion they are, they can relate to that song, and it is a moving piece spiritually." Sharkie did not choose "hard playing" songs "because it seems inappropriate to be out there."

Emotional Release and Healing at the Temple

As Bassoon said, the Temple was a place to process grief. Lorax believed that it was a "special place for people who had lost loved ones to come to." Maestro felt that the Temple facilitated healing just as music can be transformational, and added that there was emotional energy in the structure that "sometimes burners are not prepared for, and they cannot enter unless they are in the right mental state." Maestro also believed that more people visit the Temple throughout the week than visit the base of the Man and that "plenty of people would argue that [the Temple] was substantively more important than the Man Burn."

Baby Giraffe found that there was so much emotion that one can feel when visiting the Temple that many burners cannot enter it some years due to the extreme emotions being triggered in ourselves. It was also hard for some to watch the Temple Burn on Sunday night, the last day of the event: One year, Baby Giraffe could not watch the structure burn. “It was such a beautiful Temple. I did not put anything there, but I felt a connection to it, because it was a flower, and it was just beautiful. It was just such a place full of emotion.” Baby Giraffe believed the Burning Man culture is why there is a Temple. “People put things [in it], and then they burn it so that they can send [those things and what they represent] off, so they can maybe release whatever it is they need to release.”

In 2016, during another Temple visit, Lorax left a picture and a vial of their wife’s ashes in the Temple to help process and release the loss. Lorax noted that you are not supposed to leave ashes in the Temple anymore because of *Leave No Trace*, one of the Burning Man 10 Principles. That request by the Burning Man Organization is also out of respect for the Native Americans who live nearby. David Bowie had died that year, and the orchestra performed a medley of their songs during the concerts at the large art installation and the Temple. On the last day of Burn Week, Lorax watched the Temple Burn, which “created unusually extreme fire tornados dancing around the Temple.” Lorax was able to process emotions along with releasing the ashes in the ceremony. Later, Lorax found out that David Bowie’s niece had brought their ashes too. “David Blowie’s ashes, they were in the Temple with my wife. That was kind of cool. She would have liked that.”

For Bassoon, the Temple was not a place you can “casually go in. It is palpable and overwhelming. I feel like what I bring is so minuscule compared to what I leave with. It is hard for me to not become awash in other people's emotions when I go there.” When Bassoon’s husband asked to go in and look at the Temple, Bassoon instead biked one lap around it and then said, “I cannot. I cannot right now. I am not in the space to cry." Bassoon felt that the Temple “wants to draw out of me things that I am not ready to release or aware that are there to be tugged on.” Bassoon released other traumas at the Temple, “I grieve things there that are not people.” During the pandemic, Bassoon unpacked a lot of traumas. “I stared unabashedly into the void and addressed things that had not been addressed in my whole life.” Bassoon said things “out loud that in my almost 49 years of being on this Earth, I have never said out loud. And I let that go.” But Bassoon had not really healed past musical trauma “that is still very touchy for me. Maybe if we had not had a two-year [pandemic] pause, I might be there. But I have definitely thought about it. Yeah, that is a hard one, like the deepest one.” After the two cancellations of Burning Man in 2020 and 2021, Bassoon returned to the Temple in 2022, and knew it was going to be “rough.” After missing those years, “Everyone had just lost so much. There seemed to be so much put in that Temple. It was sort of unbelievable.” Bassoon continued about the emotional load that “everybody was carrying” in 2022. “I lost my grandpa. He would have hated Burning Man. He hated that I went. So, it was a weird dichotomy to sort of bring him there.” Bassoon concluded that because of those emotions, including the stored-up ones during the pandemic, along with the emotions of others at the Temple, performing Friday’s Black Rock Philharmonic Temple Concert

"was really hard."

Since the first year of healing at the Temple, Lorax had brought friends to Burning Man for the first time and led them to the Temple as well. Lorax saw that "they get it," they understand that people are quiet and respectful. Lorax had a friend who also volunteered for Burning Man's Department of Public Works. In the default world, the friend was an architect who had lost both parents that year. At the Temple, the friend realized that the Temple was "an outlet to grieve."

For Lorax, the Burning Man Temple was a special place that they were not expecting when first encountering it. Every year a new architect designed it. "They are always different. They are always beautiful." The impact of Lorax's Temple experiences also inspired creating a Temple on personal land adjacent to the Santa Fe National Forest. "I have 28 acres, my own little national park. It is a beautiful piece of land that is a spiritual place. I play my cello out there when I need to be by myself. It is a special place."

Theme 4: Music Ensembles at Burning Man

A Burning Man ensemble is quite different from an ensemble in the default world. This theme explores those differences and then discusses aspects of orchestra management that are unique to the Burning Man situation. The participants discussed their Burning Man ensembles in all three interviews.

Default World Ensembles vs. Burning Man Ensembles

One question group in Interview 3 compared music ensembles in the default world with ensembles at Burning Man. Maestro noted that one difference between the

Black Rock Philharmonic and the default world is the "rapidity" of how quickly they have to produce a show. Maestro pointed out that default world (semi-professional) ensembles would have about 50% more rehearsal time before any show. This translates to seven hours of rehearsal in the default world compared to a single rehearsal for BRP. When comparing BRP to an academic group, there may be dozens of hours of rehearsal time for a similar length show.

Maestro said that the people and culture found at Burning Man were different from default world ensembles. "The clothing and fashion found at Burning Man add to the playfulness and become an invitation to interact with each other. People [on-playa] are scantily clad, or in bright colors, or funny sunglasses or hats." Black Rock Philharmonic musicians were also more playful at Burning Man than in the default world, expressing themselves in a very open, anything-goes, type of atmosphere on-playa.

Maestro said that if musicians are not paid (on-playa or in the default world), they are volunteering their music as a gift to the community, as well as the joy of performing and creating connections. To aid in the social experience, Maestro included space in the rehearsal schedule for people in a section to catch up with each other. Maestro would "randomly drop in an icebreaker" such as "What have you done since last year?" or "Hey, do you remember this story?" or "Hey, random stranger, I want to come talk to you." Maestro concluded, "That is normal at Burning Man but not as normal otherwise."

Maestro discussed the *Folly* performance in which some "people did not know the rules of an orchestra and did not have preconceived notions." That freed them to interact more authentically and hence more enthusiastically. Maestro said, "If you must deal with

all the rules and preconceptions, some people do not necessarily want to appreciate this music that has existed for centuries and centuries. So maybe there is something to" stripping away these rules. People may discover or "rediscover" classical music.

When asked to compare Burning Man ensemble experiences with default world music ensembles, Baby Giraffe discussed the auditioning process differences. "I was a little worried about signing up for my first time" at Burning Man. Baby Giraffe asked the same question that many people have asked since Baby Giraffe joined Black Rock Philharmonic leadership, "Do I have to audition?" Typically, in the default world, membership in an orchestra requires an audition. Even in community orchestras, auditions may be required because there are a limited number of parts per instrument. Baby Giraffe said, "At that time, I had not played for a decade or more, and I was worried" that I would not qualify. In a classically trained orchestra, "you must audition. That is what we are taught, right? You are classically trained. You must audition for these things." When Baby Giraffe contacted the Black Rock Philharmonic leadership team about the process of joining the group, they assigned *second flute*, "which was totally fine, and that was taken care of, and that was it. And I printed out my music, and I went, and I played the thing."

I asked Lorax about musicking in the default world. Lorax plays with the Santa Fe Community orchestra. "There are a lot of other local people here. We play together, and we have three or four different conductors." They have regular rehearsals and perform mostly classical music, in contrast to Black Rock Philharmonic that plays many kinds of music, and "there are people from all over the world who show up." Lorax noted that

BRP musicians receive the music a couple of months before Burning Man. “They have one optional rehearsal on-playa and then their first concert. You never really know how it is going to happen. But somehow, it always manages to come together.” The membership was a mix of professional musicians and “people like me who are just amateurs who like to play and make noise.” It was pretty laid back compared to the Sante Fe Community Orchestra. “People do not really care what chair you sit in, or even if you show up.” Lorax also noted that there was a big fluctuation of who showed up for the various Burning Man performances, and each one was a different mix of people. “We may have 15 cellists that sign up and only four or five show up for each concert.” Lorax remembered that the whole trumpet section missed one of the concerts one year, and Maestro played their part on kazoo; “it somehow worked just fine.” BRP opened Lorax up to the world music community. “I now have a whole new set of friends from all over the world. I keep in touch with them throughout the year, not just at Burning Man.” Lorax continued, “I have people in Australia and Europe and South America that I play music with on the playa, and they are now very close friends to me.”

I asked Sharkie about the *vibe* or atmosphere found in the Black Rock Philharmonic and how it is different from the default world. Sharkie has found that there is a certain amount of reservation that you have with engaging with people in the default world. “Being out in the real world, you do not get the closeness and the connection, necessarily.” Sharkie commented that you may not even know the names of some of the other people in that orchestra in the default world. In contrast, “with the groups on the playa, you do not always know everybody, but they all feel like they are a friend.” You

could walk up to anybody and say, “Would you get me a cup of water” or “I need a hug.” Sharkie said, “There is no pretense” on-playa, and “there is no reservation about engaging with somebody. It is just a different mindset that allows you the freedom to be whoever you are and not have reservations about asking for something or offering some help.” Sharkie noted that it is harder to be as “carefree and as open in the default world,” and it is a different sense of “reward” that you get by playing in the default world than when you play on the playa.

Bassoon talked about performance mind frame when comparing performances in the default world and Burning Man. “You must just be in a super flow state and be ready to roll with anything [on-playa]. Everything can and will happen. And it is all OK. The show still goes on.” Bassoon thinks about “shifting expectations” rather than lowering them. “It is freeing. It is more free.” Bassoon talked about how the bonds are different with fellow musicians in the Black Rock Philharmonic. “It is interesting because you would think that we are all sharing these amazing indescribable experiences together. I mean, that does form a bond.” But Bassoon found that it was harder to “hang out” outside of the orchestra rehearsal and performances because there was no central camp for BRP, and everyone was “scattered to the winds on-playa” after performances. So outside of seeing them at rehearsals and performances, Black Rock Philharmonic had about the same level of contact time as in the default world.

Song Selection and Pre-planned Audience Interactions

During Interview 1, in their leadership roles, Maestro and Baby Giraffe discussed Black Rock Philharmonic concert planning. Each year, Maestro had been programming

more challenging work and pushing the envelope in terms of musicality, along with the skill and length of the pieces. Maestro noted they did not push "too hard" in 2022 after the Pandemic because "we did lose some people due to contracting COVID during Burn Week, but we played, [and] the music was still fantastic." Then, "the 2023 BRP program was" the most difficult show we had done, and I do not know that we will push the envelope quite like that again." But in doing so, "it also opened doors." Some of these things were original pieces and collaboration with the Playa Choir "which opened all sorts of opportunities." Maestro continued that much of the repertoire spoke for itself, with the caveat of, "We are never going to do a piece that no one has heard of. We are not doing a Bartok symphony, as great as that music can be."

The Black Rock Philharmonic typically programmed a traditional classical music repertoire along with one popular music selection. Maestro discussed the programming of their "pop" piece each year. "We want to do a piece that people will know … and that fits within an aesthetic." Along with Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*, they have also programmed music by Lady Gaga, *Space Oddity* by David Bowie, and *Creep* from Radiohead. Maestro said that the group still looks for audience connections, and that is particularly shown by the selection of the ensemble's encore, which typically has been *Ode to Joy* with kazoos. That encore "is an opportunity to hit as many of the 10 Principles as possible," with orchestra members gifting kazoos by throwing them into the audience right before the song. Baby Giraffe commented that distributing kazoos "can be a chaotic intense process all by itself while the conductor is introducing the song." Maestro noted that *Bohemian Rhapsody* now fills the role of the encore on some shows

because of the success at the 2019 *Folly* show. When programming *Bohemian Rhapsody*, Maestro "honestly was sort of dissuading, or planning on dissuading, people from singing, but did not really. It was obvious that I should not even bother, at the *Folly* show." Maestro then found it could work and wanted to see how much was driven by atypical attendance (due to the Art Car contingent)**.** They also programmed, in 2022, the *1812 Overture* with the fire trumpet and fire effects from art cars like they did at the 2019 *Folly* show. And they did the *Can-can*, "turning around and clapping." Maestro added that if there is a possibility for that, "We embrace it," concluding that programming is "thinking what will make for good music and be approachable. Sometimes it is more nuanced." Maestro gave an example from 2023 when BRP performed *Finlandia* because Finland was, historically in 1939, invaded by Russia just like Ukraine is currently. Maestro commented, "This is an opportunity to build bridges." Baby Giraffe commented that some elements just magically happen in the moment on the playa (*playa magic*). "Whatever else anybody can do, they just [do] if they are not getting in the way of the music. So those elements are all unplanned." Baby Giraffe said BRP is "basically bare bones. Get the orchestra together and practice the music. So, anything else that happened at that show was pure people just feeling it, and putting out what they were feeling." Baby Giraffe said that "one of those unplanned moments of *playa magic* was when a pair of military jets buzzed Black Rock City during the concert."

Communication

During Interview 1, the Black Rock Philharmonic leadership team discussed how they communicated with the ensemble members throughout the year. It was a challenge

to put together a large orchestra program without any in-person interaction with the musicians prior to the dress rehearsal. In addition, building community within the orchestra could benefit from communication that goes beyond simple logistics and scheduling. Baby Giraffe noted that along with song selection, there was a lot of work to develop the performance schedule and venues as well as to coordinate with the host rehearsal camp and the Burning Man Organization to publish the schedule. This external communication had to be integrated with the internal communications with the musicians to coordinate the rehearsal and performances within their other performance schedules on-playa. Maestro and Baby Giraffe, members of the orchestra's leadership team, discussed how the orchestra has addressed the communication area.

The Black Rock Philharmonic connected with its members off-playa almost exclusively through Facebook and emails. One of the drawbacks was that not all members use Facebook. Zoom meetings were convened once or twice during Burning Man prep in the summer. Baby Giraffe also created and managed the group's website along with a YouTube page that collected videos from past performances along with clips of individual orchestra members' music. Baby Giraffe joked about how the page looks like the Sacramento Symphony or the Boston Pops but admitted "liking that it looks like we are a professional orchestra."

Baby Giraffe struggled with staying connected with the musicians. The general culture of Burning Man was that things were spontaneous, and accountability was tenuous. Burners used the words *playa time* to avoid being held to a schedule. Musicians got on the Black Rock Philharmonic contact email list through Facebook, *The Jackrabbit*

Speaks, or the website. They were told, "You print the music, you play it, and then you come." The group accepted walk-ins on-playa, and another difficulty was collecting contact information for post and pre-playa communication. There were no section lists or sign-in sheets for rehearsals or performances. "Keeping track of who performs [was difficult]. You could sign up to play, practice all the music, maybe go to one rehearsal, and then never show up again, and nobody would know." Leadership did not "have time to go around and memorize everyone's face and name. There was just not enough time together to learn a hundred individuals."

Theme 5: Burner Identity

On-playa, burners may intensify their default world personas or adopt totally new personas. This theme explores the playa personas of the five participants, including their Burning Man origin stories and playa names.[24] Because playa artifacts and playa wear are integral to a burner's persona, those subjects are included as separate subsections.

Playa Persona

A burner's playa persona included their origin story, what led them to Burning Man, and their playa name. Those aspects of their playa persona were explored in Interview 1. I began Interview 3 by role playing as a random burner meeting the participant for the first time at the porta-potty and commenting on their musical instrument, which they were carrying from the rehearsal that I had observed. Role playing was meant to open a window into their on-playa persona and how they interacted

[24] Playa names were "originally spawned by the need for unique names on the staff's 2-way radios" (Burning Man Project, 2024h, Glossary). A playa name can be part of a burner's playa persona, and was traditionally given to a person, rather than selected by that person.

with fellow burners. This section summarizes the Burning Man and playa name origin stories for the five participants in Interview 1, along with discussions from Interviews 2 and 3 that illuminated their playa personas.

Maestro. Attending Burning Man Regional Network events was Maestro's introduction to Burning Man. As a graduate student, Maestro was in a juggling club. A fellow juggler, who was "weird and wonderful in his own way," said, "Hey, you should come out to this thing." That led Maestro to Interfuse Burn, which at the time was the third largest Burning Man Regional Network event. After six Burning Man Regional Network events, Maestro "made the big, long trek to the desert" for Burning Man itself in 2012. Maestro remembered seeing the "Welcome Home" sign while entering the playa and thinking of it as "cute, whatever." By mid-week, Maestro had changed and thought, "I have been looking for this community since I was a middle or high schooler."

Maestro's first playa name was Dr. Fire Tuba, received from others due to a brass instrument that shot flames out of the bell. Later, because of the conductor role in the playa orchestras, other burners started using "Maestro," and that has stuck. Maestro spoke about how some burners adopt a playa persona along with their playa name while others just intensify their default world persona. Maestro said that many burners "see Burning Man as an opportunity to have their second life." Conversely, "I am *this person* in the default world and I am *this* [*same*] *person* [on-playa]. Either it is a person who I created or it is finally an opportunity to be the person who I would rather be."

In the third interview, I was a burner stranger meeting Maestro at the porta-potty, and we both coughed to simulate the playa dust in the air. I was role-playing a very

animated burner who told Maestro about my adventure during the night ending with stumbling upon the rehearsal. Maestro talked about the *Frozen Oasis* camp where the orchestra was rehearsing. “The orchestra is not a camp. In some years, *Frozen Oasis* graciously hosts us. They are people from all walks of life and all parts of the playa.” Maestro talked about the process of getting the orchestra ready on-playa, having “about five hours to get this all together to make some awesome music. And yeah, we are out here to have a really good time.” Maestro continued that the “shocking thing is that it has not gone south yet. We've always had a great concert, and you know, it is kind of fun.” Maestro said some people like me “randomly stumble in, while others prefer to come to the rehearsals so that they can see how the *sausage* is made. I do appreciate the people who like to see the process and not just the show.” Maestro said, “It is a really magical experience that there are enough like-minded people here that come together and support it.” Maestro considered some audience members to almost be “members of the orchestra because they have been coming to one show, if not every show, every year.”

More was revealed about Maestro’s persona from the description of the conductor role in the orchestra. “It is the music that we all make. The orchestra is a large part of my life, but that does not make the orchestra me.” Before the first “big burn,” Maestro was “sadly afraid that I would not be able to hack it in the dust and the difficult camping. Now having been out there, I have seen people who show up with just a tutu and a smile, and they do OK.” Maestro was cautious, thinking “I must bring enough water. I must bring enough food and be all prepared.” The first time Maestro arrived at Burning Man was in a car loaded up with supplies for the week, including “two gallons of water per

day for my partner and myself." They were pulled over on-playa for a minor auto safety violation. The cop was very gracious, but Maestro said the funny thing was that the cop looked at us and said, "First time, eh?" We asked how the cop knew, and got the reply, "I know." It took Maestro 2 years to realize that the back seat was empty except for water. "There were no costumes strewn all over the place, and there was much more water than we needed. Yeah, it was very much of a virgin car."

Stepping outside role-playing for a while, Maestro and I compared Maestro's Burning Man identity to the off-playa identity at Burning Man Regional Network events or in the default world. Maestro said that as just another burner, it was easy to break the ice by saying something like, "Hey, I like your hat." Just being at a burn made it easier, "I am socially anxious. My social range is so much easier if I put on this jacket or these boxers, because then someone else can initiate the conversation about my clothes." If nothing else, we could talk about music. When I wore the red hat, they have seen the Guy In The Red Hat play [flaming] tuba. "I am drastically terrible with names, so that is why I wear it." People will say, "Oh, hey, Red Hat Guy, do you remember when this happened?" Maestro said, "I do not have to remember their names, because they remember mine; I am literally Red Hat. So that is another crutch."

Maestro compared Burning Man Regional Network events and Burning Man on-playa to burners meeting in the default world. Maestro said that at a recent burner meetup in the default world, there were not enough crutches to help initiate interactions. "If I see a bunch of people wearing wackadoodle outfits at a burn, I am much more prone to go over and start a conversation with a stranger than with people who are dressed more

default world style." Maestro continued, "Them looking ridiculous for having cool glasses or whatever shows less risk."

Continuing the break from role-play, Maestro commented on enjoying the "homework of dressing up" for the third interview. "It was a sort of ritual and ceremony [even though] nothing was sacred about it." Maestro did not usually look at burner clothes until "three minutes in the tent, just sort of going through it. Doing it out of time and out of place, that was pretty cool." Maestro said the clothes "hold some type of power. They might say, 'Oh, this is a show day,' or 'I am going out and having a chill night,' or 'I am going out and having a not-chill night.' Oh, the clothes hold that."

Baby Giraffe. A friend in the Sacramento area was in an improv troupe and also went to Burning Man. Baby Giraffe said, "After picking the friend's brain, it just sounded like this fascinating, vibrant, weird kind of community. And it just sounded cool to me." Baby Giraffe's friend said, "I can talk to you about Burning Man for hours, but you will never fully understand what [it] is until you go." Life got in the way of Baby Giraffe becoming a burner; however. Then out of nowhere, the friends reached out, "We'd really like to gift you a ticket to Burning Man." Baby Giraffe made time to attend Burning Man but did not really prepare for it. "I was completely overwhelmed and not prepared. Admittedly, I was probably one of the worst burners [who] ever existed." Baby Giraffe left the playa on Friday morning (day six) because it was "too overwhelming," so did not see the Man Burn (on Saturday). After skipping several years, Baby Giraffe decided to go back and try it again, and "the rest is history."

Baby Giraffe's husband suggested a playa name based on love of the San

Francisco Giants. One of their players, Brandon Belt, was nick-named Baby Giraffe after the team took a trip to the zoo and the giraffes loved the player. Baby Giraffe loved that the nickname became a whole fun persona for the baseball player, and that led to the playa name. Additionally, Baby Giraffe noted that the name fits because "I am short and clumsy, like a baby giraffe."

In the third interview, I role-played a random burner seeing Baby Giraffe after a Black Rock Philharmonic performance, saying, "Wow, there is an orchestra on the playa. What is going on here? What is that in your hands?" Baby Giraffe replied, "This is my flute. We are an orchestra from around the world. We rehearse at home for a couple of months, come together on-playa, do two rehearsals, and then perform together as a group." After describing how open the orchestra is to new players, Baby Giraffe said, "Here, have some swag. I have BRP stickers. I have BRP patches." Baby Giraffe created the swag mostly for the musicians, but also liked to pass out swag to random burners to spread the word about the orchestra, and to "have something that I personally designed that I can gift."

As the random burner, I energetically asked Baby Giraffe to play the flute for me, but reluctance followed. I persisted commenting, "Gosh, you look like a rock star with that pink flute color." Baby Giraffe replied, "This color speaks to me. So, I have the pink flute." Baby Giraffe said a couple of other people in the orchestra had colorful instruments, a blue flute, a red clarinet. "There is a guy who plays trumpet who has one of those clear ones." I commented on the similarity of Baby Giraffe's flute color to the dyed-hair color. The enthusiastic response was, "When I got out of the military, I dyed

my hair and the color just really spoke to me." As Baby Giraffe began to play the flute, I jokingly commented, "I think I saw playa dust flying out of it, too, as you played."

I asked Baby Giraffe to tell me more about themself and how long they have been coming to the burn. Baby Giraffe replied, "This is my eighth burn in thirteen years. I found out about the orchestra being at *Center Camp* and knew I had to get involved." Baby Giraffe had been playing music nearly life-long, saying "The orchestra is not something typical that you hear at Burning Man. That is one of the reasons I gravitated towards it." Then Baby Giraffe tried to recruit me to join the orchestra, "If you have ever shook castanets, or you know any sort of percussion, you can come play with us." Baby Giraffe said the only requirement is to "come to one of our two rehearsals."

I then asked, "What else do you do on the playa? What do giraffes do when they are not playing their flutes?" Baby Giraffe answered, "Well, giraffes are volunteering as a *Center Camp* Guardian. I get here a week early and help the people who are building and decorating *Center Camp*, because that is a big job." Discussing volunteering, I told Baby Giraffe how I enjoy walking around the city with a bucket picking up MOOP[25] and helping my camp out with their public bar. Baby Giraffe commented, "It seems like you really enjoy doing the MOOP. Check out Earth Guardians. I still have their *leave no trace* bandana from my second burn."

Discussing the camp,[26] Baby Giraffe said, "I enjoy staying at our camp village.

[25] MOOP is an acronym for "Matter Out Of Place. Litter, debris, rubbish" (Burning Man Project, 2024h, Glossary).
[26] Baby Giraffe camped in Center Camp Village which was a camp of burners who volunteer at Center Camp throughout burn week.

You can have your own space but still be with your people. I do not really see a lot of [other] people during the week because I am going to rehearsals and concerts." Ending the random burner encounter, I told Baby Giraffe, "You are just this amazing person. What do you do in the default world?" Baby Giraffe answered, "I am a veteran, and the wife of a combat-wounded veteran. I am paid through the VA to take care of him. I paint, and I sew clothes. I take care of my plants and my husband."

Lorax. A retired geoscientist, Lorax had traveled to every continent except for Antarctica. Lorax's wife of 26 years passed away in early 2015 after fighting breast cancer for 13 years, and Lorax was "lost." Some lifelong Peace Corps friends had been going to Burning Man, and they invited Lorax to join them that August to reunite the group. They built an art car together for that year's *Carnival of Mirrors* theme. It was half-man and half-octopus built around a golf cart. Lorax's participation in an art project that gave back to the burner community felt important, and Lorax found a home in the camp.

Lorax originally had the playa name of Watermelon Man. During the pandemic, Lorax taught high school environmental science to music students and artists, playing the cello during exams to create a calm mood. The students began to call their teacher the Lorax, after the Dr. Seuss character who was an environmental activist. Lorax then adopted it as a new playa name.

An example of playa persona for Lorax involved a group picture of the orchestra in the middle of *Center Camp* in the second burn year. When lining up for this picture, the two cellists behind Lorax started taking off their clothes. "They stripped down, and

they are just holding their cellos and their bows." Lorax was a little too shy to take everything off at that time, taking only the shirt off, and looking naked behind the cello. "Yeah, there is a picture of me out there [that] looks like I am naked with my cello. The whole cello section looks like they are naked. Actually, it is pretty cool."

Our random burner encounter in the third interview began with me seeing Lorax riding by on a tricycle with a large cello case strapped to it. I called out "What is your name? What is your story?" Lorax replied, "I play with the Black Rock Philharmonic. And then I just kind of wander around and play wherever anybody will listen."

Soon, Lorax was talking enthusiastically about the goal of living "off grid" in the default world and bringing sustainability passion to Burning Man. "We have converted the camp to solar. We have our own shower where we recycled the gray water, and that is pretty cool." Answering my question about where the sustainability projects started, Lorax said the start was in the default world because "there is not a lot of the sustainability movement when people are blowing off huge amounts of propane out on the playa."

Lorax discussed Burning Man's *Participation* in the Land Art Generator Initiative, also known as LAGI (Fly Ranch, 2024). "The Burning Man Organization owns Fly Ranch several miles west of the playa. Its hot springs are old wells drilled for geothermal energy that are still spewing hot water out of the ground." In the LAGI international competition, Lorax was part of a group that "proposed a way to develop Fly Ranch sustainably and environmentally. Our vision was a school of art and environmental science to teach people how to live off grid sustainably, as well as having

a place to do art." Their proposal was not the winning bid, but Lorax said the idea of the Fly Ranch LAGI competition "was to try to get people thinking on the playa how to live sustainably off-grid, how to use solar power, and then take that home and share it with their friends." Lorax concluded, "That is why I am the Lorax. I like doing that sort of thing and really believe that is where we have all got to go. We must all be sustainable, and we must be living more environmentally friendly."

I changed the subject to music, the Black Rock Philharmonic, and what Lorax was doing with a cello on-playa. Lorax explained, "The cello is my heart and soul. It is the way I express my feelings to people. The way I share my love for humanity is to share music." When somebody saw Lorax riding a tricycle with the cello in the back, they said, "What is that in the back of your tricycle?" Lorax answered, "Well, that is my cello. Would you like me to play something?"

Lorax then pulled out two different cellos (in the default world home) and began to describe them. "This one, which does not have a name, was bought by my parents when I was about 12." Turning to the other cello, Lorax said, "This is one I take to Burning Man, my mid-life crisis cello, it is a carbon fiber cello." Lorax had gone to Boston to see U2 in concert and found "a guy from the Boston Philharmonic who builds carbon fiber cellos." Lorax played a few of them and bought this cello. I invited Lorax to play a song. Lorax responded, "I will play a piece that I wrote. Songwriting is a new thing for me, but writing music is just kind of doing it and seeing if it works. I wrote this for a special woman who I live with now."

Sharkie. Lewdwig (Lewd Wig) was Sharkie's first playa name, a combination of being bald and wearing "this god-awful wig, with a Beethoven musical twist." Eventually, Sharkie's current playa name began to be used by everyone. It is a combination of "loan shark" alluding to default world business and a childhood nickname that ended in "ie."

Sharkie's grown-up "boys want to go" now. Sharkie thought it was "cool" how I shared Burning Man with my father, especially with Sharkie being the same age. "I would like to see my kids go, but I do not know how many more years I have." After the previous year's difficulty with the rainstorm and flooding on the playa, Sharkie thought that 7 years of attending "was enough" and did not "need to go anymore." A week later, Sharkie found himself talking and making plans for the next Burning Man. "It is hard to not go. The camaraderie" is important for me, along "with that music."

I asked Sharkie, "if Burning Man was a second home." Sharkie considers themself to be a burner, "but it is kind of weird, I still live in the default world, being in business. To live in the burner world 24/7 is just not practical." When people in the default world found out that Sharkie had been to the playa, they were "blown away because I really do not fit that mold, the hippie druggie image that many people have of burners." Their surprise grew when they found out how many times Sharkie had attended. "Most people think it is the 20-year-olds going out for a rave."

I asked what Sharkie's default world musical persona would be without having had these Burning Man experiences. In the clarinet group, would Sharkie feel the "spontaneity and immediacy, that playfulness that you have being a burner now?"

Sharkie responded, “I was a pretty mainstream kind of guy, and I do not think I would have gone out and played to encourage a cactus to grow. That is from the burner psyche, so to speak.”

In the third interview, my role-playing random burner encounter was meeting Sharkie just after performing with the Burning Band at their annual serenade of a row of porta-potties. The band typically played “dirty blues” there. Sharkie, immediately in character, asked me, “So how did everything come out [in the porta-potty]?” I responded with some bad experiences burners usually have with the dirty, sandy, porta-potties found at Burning Man. I complimented Sharkie on the music. Sharkie responded, “What we want is to entertain you. When you are taking a dump at the porta-potty, it is important to make sure that you are well entertained for the whole process.” Sharkie continued, “You read messages on the walls when you go poop, and then you come out and hear us playing. What could be better?”

Introducing themself, “I am Sharkie, and I have been coming here for several years. I enjoy playing music on the playa, and everybody appreciates the entertainment value of live music.” Sharkie had created some business cards showing the schedules of the three ensembles of which they are a member, Burning Band, Black Rock Philharmonic, and Playa Pops. “We like playing wherever we can play to whomever we can play for. You could go to any of their concerts. They are really fun. Great music. There are plenty of opportunities to go listen to live music.”

I asked if Sharkie was a part of the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic *Folly* performance, “Something happened there, and people kept on talking about it. Were you

there?" Sharkie responded, **"**Yeah, it was a great event. We played some really fun pieces. One of them was *Bohemian Rhapsody*, which is recognized to be one of the best pieces ever written." Sharkie continued, "It was amazing for both the audience and the performers. Chills run up and down my spine every time I think about it. The energy, the excitement, the participation." Sharkie realized that the performance could be associated with the Burning Man principle of *Participation*, "That [principle] was definitely embodied. Everybody was jumping around and singing and dancing. It was a great environment. And that carried forward into other pieces that we played and other locations that we played. It was an amazing event."

An interesting aspect of Sharkie's discussion of the years at Burning Man pertained to the years Sharkie did *not* participate on-playa, "Even in the years that I did not come, between 2011 and 2015, I was listening to [the] BMIR[27] [radio station] during Burning Man. I tuned in to get that feel, that emotion, of being on the playa." Sharkie added, "There are also videos and live streaming so you could see what is going on." That information was indicative of the strength of Sharkie's Burning Man persona and the draw to continue participation, even from afar.

Sharkie's instrument was part of the Burning Man persona. "The mainstream for clarinet players is a black clarinet. But this one is silver metal." Putting the difference in clarinet types into perspective, Sharkie said, "Black clarinets are the default world of clarinet. I wanted to bring something different, like this silver metal clarinet. It fits so

[27] BMIR is an acronym for "Burning Man Information Radio, 94.5 FM, serving the greater Black Rock City area" (Burning Man Project, 2024h, Glossary). BMIR broadcasts live at Burning Man during the event. Its slogan is "The Voice of the Man."

well, being on the playa." Sharkie sometimes also brings a red plastic clarinet, noting, "The dust does not sit well with clarinets, with the holes in the action that you must push the keys down. But it works well enough that I can get a note out. So, it is fun to play."

I asked Sharkie, "What do you love about Burning Man? What else are you doing when you are not playing?" Sharkie answered, "It is an interesting thing. Music takes up a lot of time, and there are only Monday through Friday to practice, rehearse, and perform." Continuing, "I do not get around to see the city as much as I would like. It is a trade-off between seeing the city, engaging with other camps, and going to different opportunities around the community, versus playing music." Sharkie concluded, "I have defaulted to these three music groups. But I have also questioned that I am missing a lot by not giving myself more free time to see and do other things."

Bassoon. In 1994, a friend who followed a boyfriend "to a thing in the desert where he built robots that fought other robots with fire." Bassoon's friend came back from the desert completely covered in white playa dust and exclaimed, "Oh, my gosh! This crazy experience! But I am going back next year, and you are coming with me." Bassoon responded, "Sounds intriguing, I will go." But finances and job situations did not fit in with going. Bassoon's life led to Seattle, where Bassoon discovered that there is a healthy burner population "and actually, it is what helped me find community." After attending many Burner parties and fundraisers for art and camps in Seattle, Bassoon found a job that had vacation time, and decided to use it to go to Burning Man. A community friend who had founded a major theme camp back in the early years invited Bassoon, who finally made the journey in 2004 after 10 years of flowing in and out of the

burner communities in the Bay Area and Seattle. Bassoon thought at the time, “I have found my people. I know exactly who I am going to be camping with and what I am going to be doing to be *rad*.”

Playa names can be self-selected or suggested by other burners. One year on-playa, there was an altercation with a clown-costumed burner stalking Bassoon, who reacted by sweeping a camp chair in the clown’s direction, unintentionally breaking their glasses. The other burners nearby defused the situation and gave Bassoon a playa gift for being playful, and they suggested the playa name *Clown Killer.* That name did not stick because the violent connotation is not consistent with Bassoon’s usual playa behavior. Bassoon was a very direct and positive person, and other burners suggested the playa name of *Rhino* because Bassoon charged into things. However, that name had also not stuck during many years on-playa.

I set the random encounter scene in the third interview with me riding up when Bassoon was parking a bike at a porta-potty asking, “What the heck is that on your bike? Is that a bazooka?” Bassoon responded, “It is a bassoon, I mean, a banana.” This made more sense when I saw that Bassoon was holding up to the camera a fake banana with the word “scale” written on it. “This is for scale, not for eating. It is to keep things in perspective.” Returning to role-playing, Bassoon said, “I brought my bassoon out here to play in the Philharmonic. There are three orchestras, and I am in one of them. It is why I keep coming out here. You should check it out.” I asked, “Why would you bring an orchestra out here? That is crazy.” Bassoon replied, “Because I am a dumb-dumb.” Bassoon continued to talk about how the playa environment is hard on a bassoon.

I asked, “What was one of the coolest pieces that you played on the playa?" Bassoon replied that one of “the most magical moments *for me* was when we were playing *Bacchanale*.[28] Art cars came to our concerts in deep playa. People sat on them and listened.” Bassoon said that in *Bacchanale*, “the music is mysterious and perfectly rascally in a scuttley kind of erratic moment,” and the *El Pulpo Magnifico*[29] art car “was doing its little detel-detel-detel dancing in place and into the crowd. A mini sandstorm was happening, and the sunset was on the clouds and the mountains all around us. That moment was just magical.” Bassoon continued, “I feel like the biggest moment *for the crowd* was definitely *Bohemian Rhapsody*” at the *Folly* in 2019. “It turned into a big sing and dance along, like a joyous happy mosh pit. That was amazing.” Bassoon said that sometimes “we hook up to a giant sound system. *Mayan Warrior* amplified our sound” at the *Folly* in 2019. “Big art cars help us project the sound so everybody can hear. Thousands and thousands of people come and just sing along and share in this moment. It was amazing during *Bohemian Rhapsody*.”

Summary. The five participants had vivid memories of their Burning Man histories and how they participated in multiple years of musicking at Burning Man. Most of the participants strongly identified with their playa name and each remembered the history of how they received their name. Musicking was also a key part of their playa personas, and they have taken aspects of those personas back to the default world.

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[28] *Bacchanale* is a song from the opera “Samson and Delilah” by Camille Saint-Saëns.
[29] The *El Pulpo Magnifico* (The Magnificent Octopus) art car is 28-ft tall and is “wrought from the remnants of discarded metal and aluminum. [Its] eight sinuous tentacles undulate in a hypnotic rhythm … and its fiery breath [sends] … flames soaring 30 feet” (Flatmo, 2024, El Pulpo Magnifico).

Playa Artifacts

For each participant, Interview 1 ended with me showing playa artifacts that held memories and emotional energy from Burning Man. There were gifted necklaces, some from groups I have performed with. Others were clothing items (hats, vests) that I wore every year and that held the stories (and dust) from many transformative adventures. There were gifted items from close friends and from random strangers. After sharing those stories at the end of the Interview 1, I asked the participants to prepare for their Interview 2 by gathering artifacts that had strong meanings to them. My goal was to get into some of the memories that are associated with their objects and the emotional energy that they contain. It turned out that some of their artifacts were stored in places that made them visible every day.

One of the artifacts that Maestro shared was a fake traffic ticket received while walking around in a dust storm (white out). A person doing "random traffic stops" stopped Maestro, and when asked why, the person responded, "I do not know, your boxers are too cool." Maestro was instructed to pay the ticket at the camp's bar by getting a gifted drink. The bartender asked, "Let me see the boxers," and then just started bawling. The bartender ran from behind the bar to give Maestro a hug, recognizing the fuzzy heart boxers from a recent orchestra performance, being "just so moved and so touched by it." Maestro responded, "Yeah, we enjoy it thoroughly as well, and part of the reason why we put in so much work is as a gift."

Maestro also brought out three favorite necklaces and added that necklaces were "the end-all be-all of artifacts out there." The 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic necklace

held memories of the *Folly* concert. It also held a memory of the trumpet player from the ensemble who made them. Maestro said, “I love the ensemble, and so I do not think it was an accident that the [2019 BRP necklace] art was 2 eighth notes tied together, but it was [also] two people holding hands.” Maestro added that the group usually gives out other types of swag each year, including stickers, cups, shirts, pencils, and luggage tags; however, it was “really cool” that these necklaces were initiated by someone within the ensemble.

Baby Giraffe’s artifacts are discussed in the Playa Wear section below. Baby Giraffe said that it would be very different meeting people if Burning Man were just a festival, rather than a gifting community, and “whatever it is that you are gifting, you are gifting it really to that person.” Baby Giraffe felt “like the whole ethos is [that] it does not have to be something tangible. It does not have to be a pendant or a patch.”

Baby Giraffe shared an adventure about searching for a person on the playa whose name was “Rockhound” because Baby Giraffe loves rocks and gems. After searching many streets, and talking with people during a “brownout,” the skies cleared for a moment, and Baby Giraffe saw a person at a table 20 feet away. The telltale signs of buckets filled with rocks were recognizable. Baby Giraffe asked who the person was, getting the response, “I am Rockhound. Take a look at my rocks.” Baby Giraffe saw all these amazing stones, and Rockhound had little nylon bags, saying “fill a bag with as many stones as you can.” Baby Giraffe found Rockhound in a dust storm in the middle of all these people, saying “I randomly found this guy when I did not know exactly where he was. I did not even know who he was. Like a dream, right? That is what makes

[Burning Man] a weird dream."

When asked about playa artifacts, Lorax showed me a fist-size blue-background medallion of the Man, a necklace medallion shaped like an eyeball, a necklace from a Black Rock Ranger, and the 2023 Black Rock Philharmonic necklace, saying that one was particularly nice. Summarizing, Lorax said, "Basically these are the gifts that people are giving me" and that there were "a bunch" from every year of Burning Man participation.

When asked about artifacts, Sharkie reached up next to the computer and showed me a yellow rectangular medallion. It was the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic necklace that Maestro described above. Then Sharkie held up the 2019 Ambient Drummer and Processional Band medallion along with the pass to march in the Processional to the *Great Circle* on burn night as part of the Man Burn ritual. Sharkie said, "I have these things hanging on my wall right behind my computer." At that location, every time Sharkie used the computer, there was a reminder of 2019 Burning Man musical experiences with the Black Rock Philharmonic and the Ambient Drummers/Processional Band.

Sharkie also showed me a little cartoon printed on a sticker that was gifted by the flaming sousaphone player who performs with the Burning Band and the Processional Band. In the default world, this burner is a talented cartoonist who was the director of *The Simpsons* movie and still works with the show. Sharkie shared other items from the Black Rock Philharmonic, the Burning Band, and the *Frozen Oasis* camp which was the rehearsal home of Black Rock Philharmonic. (The *Frozen Oasis* camp is described in

Footnote 17 in Chapter Three.) Those items included stickers, pins, kazoos, magnets, and pendants. Sharkie added, "A lot of those things are memorable for me." Sharkie also shared stories about the vest discussed in the Playa Wear section below.

The first item Bassoon showed me was a 2018 Black Rock Philharmonic I-Robot shirt. Bassoon described another artifact, using a voice imitating Gollum from *The Lord of the Rings*, as "my precious." It was a small epoxy heart with a shamrock in the middle. Bassoon found it in 2014 doing a final MOOP sweep. It represented a return to coming back to Burning Man after a several-year break. The memory of 2014 was attached to the friends that Bassoon went with that year, as well as the emotional journey of becoming a more authentic self. Bassoon thought it "just seemed apropos of that year to find that little lucky shamrock."

Bassoon also shared a colorful fan which had the words "Rolling Balls" on it. Bassoon found this artifact as MOOP on-playa, and it had a very entertaining memory attached to it involving an encounter with several *Sparkle Ponies*[30] (burners who dress like Instagram influencers) who chose not to pick up the MOOP. When they realized how cool the fan was, one Instagram girl said, "Oh, actually, that is mine. I dropped it." And Bassoon answered, "No, you did not. Pick it up next time." They all laughed, and Bassoon rode off. According to Bassoon, it was a funny moment that brought a bunch of strangers together.

[30] *Sparkle Ponies* was a "derogatory term for a burner who fails to embrace the principle of radical self-reliance and is overly reliant on the resources of friends, campmates, and the community at large to enable their Burning Man experience. [They were] often fashionably attired, since they packed nothing but costumes" (Burning Man Project, 2024h, Glossary).

Bassoon showed me some Black Rock Philharmonic pencils. Bassoon gifted them to children in the default world who were just getting into the "music world." Bassoon gave them out as rewards for practicing, and usually told a little story about Burning Man. Two other artifact gifts were a stick of homemade lip balm and a butterfly pin. Bassoon received them when volunteering as a bartender at the *Golden Guy Alley*.[31] Bassoon's last artifact was a medallion with a raccoon face on it. It was gifted as a funny award after the scary encounter with a clown stalker, which was described above in the Playa Persona section.

Playa Wear

An example of Maestro's playa wear was a pair of "fuzzy heart boxers" that their mother gave to them during college. The boxers were so large with the elastic worn out that Maestro will soon need to add suspenders to wear them like shorts. Maestro wore them for the first burn and the first Playa Pops concert they conducted. Maestro also had a tux jacket that their father was married in, with added metal studs to make it more of a punk tuxedo, which Maestro wore with the heart boxers for most of the orchestra concerts they directed. "It looked bad ass. That is sort of a juxtaposition of spikes on a fancy tux. But then the tux with my pants off is kind of funny." Maestro also wore a red hat when conducting the orchestra, having worn it to "well over 50" Burning Man Regional Network events as well.

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[31] The *Golden Guy Alley* was a camp which consisted of "a neighborhood of micro bars, fostering community and conversation. … [It was] an alleyway straight out of Tokyo that's full of tiny bars, each able to serve just a few patrons, each with its own unique theme" (Golden Guy Alley, 2024, What is Golden Guy?).

Baby Giraffe wore a bowler hat from the second burn. “I like the look of it.” Baby Giraffe had added lace and gifted swag pins from Burning Man. It was one of the items that Baby Giraffe brought every year to Burning Man, along with Black Rock Philharmonic pendants, *Center Camp* hoodie, and a denim vest covered in gifted Burning Man patches.

Lorax’s playa wear for the third interview consisted of a purple tie-dyed shirt and a leather top-hat with studs circling around it. Lorax also had other hats worn at Burning Man. Lorax has worn other clothes to change persona, like mother’s wig and robe worn on the second cello track in the virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* (Theme 2).

Sharkie said that “people dress in any way that they want to dress. They can dress in jeans and a t-shirt, or they can dress like you or I dressed today, in some outfit that expresses how they feel.” Sharkie wore a cargo vest covered in gifted patches and pins. “You can see all of the different related stuff on it.” One side represented the swag from different musical groups Sharkie had performed with at Burning Man. “For me, those are very important and relevant to my identity at Burning Man.” Sharkie further explained, “I am representing or appreciating my ability and my opportunity to play music there.” The other side was “more swag that I have been gifted over the years. These are just things I have appreciated about [Burning Man].” Each item had a unique playa memory associated with it, and Sharkie enjoyed recalling the moments and the people associated with them. Sharkie also regularly wore a tall black top hat during performances at Burning Man and around the playa.

Bassoon had regularly worn shirts from Black Rock Philharmonic at Burning Man and in the default world. The BRP 2018 I-Robot shirt represented a powerful memory of things that "really started to gel" as Bassoon came back to playing the bassoon after a long period of not musicking. That year, Bassoon felt that "things started to click," making "some inroads [to befriend] the people involved." During the third interview, Bassoon was dressed in a black formal jacket over the 2018 BRP I-Robot shirt, along with fingerless gloves and a furry hat with earmuffs.

Theme 6: Culture of Burning Man

Playa magic was a common term at Burning Man, and the stories told by the interviewees illuminated the concept. *Gifting* music was another key part of Burning Man, and the participants described several instances outside their Black Rock Philharmonic performances. The 10 Principles scaffolded Burning Man culture, and in Interview 3, the participants described personal examples for each principle. Finally, this theme relates how the participants themselves explained Burning Man culture to people in the default world.

Playa Magic

Lorax reflected on random serendipitous events that have happened at Burning Man, commonly referred to as "playa magic" by burners. These events were a major motivation for Lorax to continue to return to Burning Man, noting that it is different than in the default world. "The reason I go back is [to use] music to connect with people. When you are giving them the gift of music, you have a different connection than if [you were] sitting there talking about sports or something. It is different."

One of Lorax's "playa magic" moments was in 2019 at a deep playa art piece that was a series of LED-illuminated "big hula hoops that you could ride your bike through." There was a person dancing under the illuminated hoops while Lorax's friend was performing one of Bach's *Cello Suites.* As the performance ended, the dancer collapsed during the applause. Initially, they thought it was part of the act, but then, Lorax said to another friend who was watching (and who was a retired family practice physician), "He is not getting up, something is wrong." The friend ran over to the dancer along with the cellist (who was also an anesthesiologist). "They both go down [next] to him and realize he has had a heart attack, and he is dying." Lorax said they did 20 minutes of CPR until an ambulance came and the dancer was care-flighted off the playa. "He lived after 20 minutes of no heartbeat. He apparently had a stent in his heart. He came back [later in the week] and thanked everybody." Lorax coupled that incident to a personal connection to Bach's *Cello Suites.* "It could have been a very sad event, but it was a happy event because he survived while my friend was playing one of my favorite pieces. Watching, dancing, [it was] one of my favorite performances."

Lorax remembered another instance of performing and gifting music "out in deep playa," away from the city streets. Encountering an art piece that had a rain stick that anyone could move to control the lights, Lorax sat down to play another cello piece. "I saw this group of people coming over, and I recognized that they were speaking French. So, I started playing a French piece that I [knew]. They walked in and walked over to my partner." They asked, "Is he part of the art piece?" Lorax's partner replied, "Well, I guess you could say that." I personally related to that story and shared that when I performed at

an art piece or an art car, I loved to hear people ask each other, "Is he a *walk-up*, or is he a part of the thing?" They were whispering to each other, trying to figure out if it was planned or if it was *playa magic*. Lorax added, "I think that *playa magic* happens out there a lot."

Bassoon described the "playa magic" of setting an intention, and then it manifested somehow on the playa. Bassoon further explained that *playa magic* was "a thing that you would call a coincidence, we were just talking about that! Boom! Fall out of your shoes!" Bassoon said that moments of *playa magic* were created through synchronicities.

Gifting Music and Other Musicking at Burning Man

Baby Giraffe had played a couple times away from the orchestra. In 2016, after an orchestra concert at the Temple, Baby Giraffe played duets with another flute player. In 2018, Baby Giraffe played at the edge of their camp. In 2019, Baby Giraffe decided to be part of a children's concert at Burning Man. A member of the orchestra had organized those concerts for several years, creating a whole program for a children-friendly camp called *Kidsville*.[32] "It was such a beautiful experience." Baby Giraffe found that the kids were very transparent, "especially at Burning Man." From the leadership point of view, Baby Giraffe thought "Why did we not do this sooner" and noted that "Burning Man is for everybody, and music is 100% for everybody. To create a program specifically for

[32] The *Kidsville* camp consisted of "more than 150 families of Burners and Burner kids; a quiet, centrally-located, family-focused community. … Adult supervision is required at all times in Kidsville; this is not a place to drop off your kids and wander about the playa" (Burning Man Project, 2024i, Welcome to Kidsville!).

children, you could not be more Burning Man than that." Lorax showed me a picture (a playa artifact) of a tiny girl with a large cello at *Kidsville*, "She is looking up at me with this look of almost awe as I am trying to teach her how to play the cello. That was really cool." Lorax related that little girl to their own childhood, "Something like that got me to play the cello. This guy who played in the Oklahoma City Symphony came to our Fifth Grade Class and played all the instruments, and I said I want to play the cello."

After the orchestra's performance at *Center Camp* one year, Lorax was "hoofing it back" carrying a cello case in the heat of the high desert sun. As Lorax walked by the Black Rock Radio Station, BMIR, a burner called out for Lorax to perform on the radio. Lorax performed a couple of pieces including one written for their late wife. When Lorax returned to camp, all the campmates were standing and looking, and said Lorax was just on the radio. "I was still kind of a newbie at Burning Man, but I started venturing out and realized that playing music was a gift I could give people." That was when Lorax started to go around to people's camps and play music "everywhere I could." During another *Center Camp* performance, a stranger asked to dance while Lorax played, and the stranger turned out to be a trained ballerina who danced while Lorax played a suite from Bach.

Lorax was riding by a Black Rock Ranger[33] Station. Rangers use those camps as jump-off places to help connect with participants and keep an eye out for situations that

[33] Black Rock Rangers are veteran burners who volunteer to assist other burners. They are trained to defuse confrontations, are knowledgeable about emergency resources on-playa, and have radios to reach those resources. They are Burning Man's "'first response' team. [They] are out in the city, connecting with participants and keeping an eye out for situations that need attention" (Burning Man Project, 2024a, Black Rock Rangers, What Do Black Rock Rangers Do?).

need attention. The rangers were hanging out, and Lorax decided to sit down and play for them. After the performance, they connected more deeply, and Lorax was gifted a pin from one of the rangers. Lorax also remembered being gifted a massage after playing the cello at another camp. Gifts from burners could be a "drink, or dinner or whatever." Lorax was playing at a nice camp that had a lot of cushy tents when a person asked if they could come and play at another camp. Lorax happily agreed and ended up sitting among 30 people, "just playing music for them, and that was kind of cool."

Sharkie had played in five ensembles on-playa: Burning Band, Playa Pops, Black Rock Philharmonic, the Ambient Drummers, and the Processional Band. Sharkie reflected on performing with the Processional Band and the Ambient Drummers. "It is significant to play during the Procession and be an Ambient Drummer for the fire dancers [between] the audience and the Man. It is really impressive. You feel the significance of the Man Burn because you are close." Sharkie remarked, "The Procession was really fun and a high energy level." With that many people surrounding the Man for the burn, "You could feel everybody's excitement building." During the fire dancer performance, "I am playing a clarinet next to drummers, without any music, so I play something that seems to fit the energy of the fire dancers. I go with the flow. I could not tell you what I was playing."

Sharkie also has had a really good time performing with the Burning Band, noting that it is easy "kind of goofy mood music," and it is "just fun to play." Compared to the Black Rock Philharmonic, you "do not have to be [a] high quality musician." Burning Band was generally more interactive because people recognized the songs. "People will

know the words, and they will just start to sing or dance or spin around; they will engage with you." Discussing the Burning Band performances, Sharkie said, "It does not make goosebumps go through me when [the audience is] dancing around. But we are performing for them, and there is just that element of it that makes it fun." Sharkie continued, "We play at the porta-potties. We will play *Walk Right In* at the porta-potties, just goofy stuff like that. But it is fun to do, and that is what I like about it." Another favorite thing that Sharkie enjoys with the Burning Band is when the group decides to walk around the city, playing at a random camp or bar, and then continuing to perform "bar to bar. The crowd loves us, and they get up and start to sing along. Of course, everybody buys you drinks, even though there is no money. There is a high level of appreciation for the Burning Band." The audience "may recognize that it is not a high-level musical skill, but it is adequate. You [must] be able to play your instrument, but you do not have to have credentials behind your name to play in that band."

The 10 Principles and the Culture of Burning Man

One can think of the 10 Principles (Table 2 in Chapter One) as an outline of Burning Man culture. Burning Man founder Larry Harvey wrote them in 2004 (Burning Man Project, 2020a), about 18 years after the initial burn in 1986 on Baker Beach in San Francisco. The population of Black Rock City in 2004 was about half of the current population (Wikipedia, 2024). The principles were intended to be "guidelines for the newly formed Regional Network." Further, "They were crafted not as a dictate of how people should be and act, but as a *reflection of the community's ethos and culture* [emphasis added] as it had organically developed since the event's inception" (Burning

Man Project, 2020a). The 10 principles were beneficial to not only the establishment of Burning Man Regional Network events, but also for informing new burners as the population slowly doubled. Maestro said that the 10 Burning Man Principles create a unique mental atmosphere and mindset in burners. “It creates a safe place for people to be themselves. If you are encouraged to express however you want to be, and those around you are encouraged to accept (not necessarily approve) [that] expression, that creates a safe space.”

In a recent Burning Man Journal article, Caveat Magister, Burning Man’s “Philosopher Laureate,” wrote,

> The 10 Principles are not things we do because they achieve something, and if that thing is achieved then we will stop doing it. The 10 Principles represent “unconditional goods,” things that we want to do for their own sake, without conditions. And *when you put* [*the 10 Principles*] *together, you get … a culture* [emphasis added] and set of cultural practices that we engage in for their own sake, because they are worth doing whether the world is a happy place or on fire or fully automated by robot overlords. (Burning Man Project, 2024c)

Radical Inclusion. “Anyone may be a part of Burning Man. We welcome and respect the stranger. No prerequisites exist for participation in our community” (Burning Man Project, 2020a, “10 Principles” section). This was one of Maestro’s favorite principles. “It is the most important principle for the community to exist.” Maestro added that you can be inclusive without having to approve of those who you include.

Baby Giraffe thought *Radical Inclusion* was “really important” and then related

that principle to the experience of playing with orchestras at Burning Man. Baby Giraffe spoke about the varied levels of skill among the musicians. Baby Giraffe said the orchestra includes professionals, even one from the London Symphony, mixed with others from widely differing levels of musicianship. “It is for everybody. If you can play, it literally is for everybody.”

Lorax believed *Radical Inclusion* was one of the things that Black Rock Philharmonic has done since the first year playing with them. For example, the orchestra handed out hundreds of kazoos to the audience so that they could feel like they were part of the ensemble. “They are standing up, and they are playing along.” Lorax thinks that the orchestra helps people to do things that may not be their forte. “*Radical Inclusion* is important at Burning Man, as part of the culture. There are all kinds of things that happen on the playa, and everybody is welcome.”

Sharkie believed that *Radical Inclusion* was “self-defining” and that “everybody can come,” giving an example of parents who played in the ensembles and brought their kid to Burning Man. “They are persons who, for me, embody the idea that anybody can participate, because you [can] bring in your kid.” Sharkie concluded that “the fact that kids are allowed to be there tells you a lot about that idea of participation” and inclusion.

For Bassoon, *Radical Inclusion* was like the difference between “welcoming people to a place” and “making people feel welcome in a place,” which were wise words learned from a friend. “I feel like I have really tried to embrace that as a person, because you never know who is going to show up in your life.” Bassoon then switched to a lens of “radical acceptance” which “accepts everybody as they are.” Bassoon continued, “I want

to be appreciative of anybody who shows up in my space to celebrate stuff with me. I try to be more open, accepting, and welcoming. [Otherwise], you do not know what you are shutting yourself out of."

Gifting. "Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving. The value of a gift is unconditional. Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value" (Burning Man Project, 2020a, "10 Principles" section). For Maestro, *Gifting* was something that did not need to be reciprocated back to the original giver. It can come in many forms. This was the hardest principle for virgin burners. For example, the recipient could strive to return the favor, such as, "Can I come help you strike camp; how can I reciprocate?" A veteran burner would reply, "No, just enjoy the gift." Maestro noted that this principle "hurts the [default world conditioned] brain so much. A humongous gift can be a hug, a kind conversation, a kind compliment, or going over and helping a stranger put up a tent or take down a kitchen." It does not have to be a "commercial physical thing that you hold in your hand."

Baby Giraffe believed that *Gifting* "is super important," saying that some people miss the concept of it, but most people get it at Burning Man. Baby Giraffe felt that performing music at Burning Man with the Black Rock Philharmonic was also a gift. "We bring our orchestra, and that is our gift to the playa. It is just wholly different, it is unique to Burning Man." Baby Giraffe also noted that no money is exchanged at Burning Man, except for purchasing ice to keep participants' food at a safe temperature.

Lorax believed *Gifting* was important to the culture of Burning Man, talking about not knowing about it before going to the playa. Lorax reflected on *Gifting*, realizing

that “people bring what they are good at to the playa.” Lorax noted that some “come out and teach people how to give massages,” and the orchestra brings “musical instruments to the playa.” Lorax shared how there was a musical outreach afternoon for children of the playa to try all the different instruments and to let them play, remembering that this type of outreach was the same way they started playing cello as a child. Lorax added that individually performing music at the Temple was another form of *Gifting*. Lorax gave another example of *Gifting* of music at Burning Man in response to a spontaneous request, “A woman came up and asked me if I would consider playing music for her wedding. She was getting married right behind me.”

Sharkie talked about *Gifting* by pointing out that there was “a lot of swag given at Burning Man. These things that I am wearing right here were gifted to me.” Sharkie gifts several things to other burners and makes a point to bring things every year to gift. “It is just fun to give to people. They appreciate it. There is no expectation on my part to get anything back.” Sharkie enjoyed the idea of giving to others, whether it be giving music, which is a gift that you are performing, or whether it be something tangible like a pendant or shots of moonshine. “The act of giving is really very enjoyable for the giver.” That joy of both the giver and the receiver was an integral part of Burning Man culture.

Bassoon, when asked about *Gifting*, recalled how a friend received many gifts at Burning Man. “Everything is a gift. Everything is without expectation. Everything is just given without keeping score or expectations.” Bassoon felt that “if you let go of expectations and you do not project, you will be much happier moment to moment.”

Decommodification. "In order to preserve the spirit of gifting, our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising. We stand ready to protect our culture from such exploitation. We resist the substitution of consumption for participatory experience" (Burning Man Project, 2020a, "10 Principles" section). Maestro felt that most, if not all, of the 10 Principles have a partner. *Radical Inclusion* with *Radical Expression*, *Gifting* with *Decommodification*. Maestro said that although the *Decommodification* principle sets Burning Man apart from other festivals, "There is not a whole lot of depth to it," pointing out an example of the *Folly* art piece, "Oh, yeah, art, great." But "art does not happen for free." The principle was great, in general, but things still cost money. Maestro pointed out that there sometimes was this weird rift to the point of dissociation, of saying, "I want great art at my burn, but I am not going to support it" financially. Maestro said the struggles to keep within that principle, "can be a bit tricky," also noting that having that conversation about *Decommodification* with concerned burners was worthwhile as part of Burning Man culture.

Baby Giraffe thought *Decommodification* was an interesting principle because burners along with people outside of Burning Man do not "realize how much commodification we are involved in. Or maybe we do." Baby Giraffe personally took a "good look at the things that I am bringing" to make sure to not unintentionally wear commodification advertisements. Another issue with this principle was that people tend to "police other people and how they are burning." Baby Giraffe said that the only issue with the principle was that "unintentional commodification may be necessary to attend,"

such as renting a vehicle that displays the company's name.

To Lorax, Burning Man was really "to not be commercial," saying there should not be a commercial event on-playa. "This is not an opportunity for people to make money during Burning Man. It is an opportunity to learn how to share." Lorax would like to see the whole world that way, "where everything is not done from the concept of making the almighty dollar." Lorax hoped that the playa can stay away from commercialism and believes it is a good time for people to learn.

Sharkie began the discussion about the *Decommodification* principle by saying that this principle really had to do with money, and that there was no advertising and no money exchanged at Burning Man. Sharkie pointed out that some people would cover rented van logos with tape. Sharkie also shared an experience of trying to mail a postcard at Burning Man's post office but had forgotten to bring any stamps. The Black Rock City Post Office had its own *Black Rock City postage stamp*, but the postmaster said, "We do not sell stamps here. What I need is a hug." So, Sharkie gave a hug, and the postmaster mailed the postcard.

Bassoon talked about how the "water has been muddied" by "all the Instagram influencers and how the outside world sees what is happening." Some people now have full-time careers managing a large Burning Man camp. "The flip side of that is [that] artists are getting paid to do what they love. So, it is like, 'Really, Burning Man?' Sure," adding, *"Decommodification* can be a *Catch 22*."

Radical Self-reliance. "Burning Man encourages the individual to discover, exercise and rely on their inner resources" (Burning Man Project, 2020a, "10 Principles"

section). Maestro believed that the Radical Self-reliance principle was embodied in the "struggle of being in a difficult location." Baby Giraffe thought "it is definitely mandatory at Burning Man." Lorax told me, "I am kind of a Boy Scout, so I am used to going out living in the wilds on my own." Sharkie felt "it is being responsible for yourself."

Bassoon shared preparing for the first year at Burning Man. "You really had to pack it in, pack it out. You had to bring all the gas for the week, all the food, and figure out how to keep it." They even stripped all the packaging, so they were not bringing anything "excessive." The group was confronted with their impact on the environment. "This is the impact that we had. Just one week, no one to take it away. Here it is. Here is your gray water." Sharkie added that you must be ready for "experiences that you are going to have when something does not fit the way you are used to seeing things in the default world."

Lorax commented that many people came to the playa without *Radical Self-reliance* or having those skills in their life. They learned either the hard way or they learned from people helping them to understand how to do things more easily. Sharkie related *Radical Self-reliance* to not living in an environment that has "default world luxuries," adding that you "either need to bring everything you need to live out there, or you need to be able to rely on somebody else."

Baby Giraffe noted, "There is a community of 80,000 people, and if you did not have a thing, you could probably find somebody who had the thing that you need." Baby Giraffe was an "over-planner" and added, "what if I cannot, sometimes you cannot."

Lorax brought up the same point, “Sometimes, no matter how much you prepare, nature gives you a surprise.” In 2023, 24 hours of rain made the playa into a mud lake upon which people could not walk and vehicles could not drive. Lorax said, “Everybody knows what happens on the playa when it rains.” Out of all the times participating in Burning Man, that was a new experience, finding a way to live through it.

Radical Self-expression. “Radical Self-expression arises from the unique gifts of the individual. No one other than the individual or a collaborating group can determine its content. It is offered as a gift to others. In this spirit, the giver should respect the rights and liberties of the recipient” (Burning Man Project, 2020a, “10 Principles” section). Maestro felt that the language of *Radical Self-expression* was more about “inclusion than about expression, how to interpret that expression.” Baby Giraffe said that “everywhere you turn, somebody is radically self-expressing” and it can be “beautiful” and “weird.” Baby Giraffe said that you can radically self-express yourself in a default world in which people can conform or not conform, but people may tell you, “You cannot do that.”

Lorax related *Radical Self-expression* to the art of Burning Man. “I think the art of Burning Man is a lot of those people. There are not really any restrictions per se that I am aware of, that restrict you from your creativity.” Lorax continued to talk about people being “inspired by the creativity of people who are out there.” Lorax noted creativity can come in a lot of ways, including as an engineer, a writer, a scientist, or a musician.

Baby Giraffe did not know what they were getting into when first attending Burning Man, and found that they did not know how to express themself “radically” with clothing. At the time of the interview, Baby Giraffe had let go of the idea of “what does a

burner look like?" and had expanded the definition of self-expression to go beyond thoughts about clothing, "I think *Radical Self-expression* is also like art." Sharkie felt that Burning Man gave people the "opportunity" to go out of their norm and wear things that they like or "want other people to see you in and appreciate." Sharkie noted that the word "costume" implied that clothing was not your "normal thing," but on the playa it was "expression" and did not need a connection to an event or a role. "It just means that that is the picture I want to paint of myself." Bassoon also felt people confused *Radical Self-expression* with "costuming." In the beginning, Bassoon felt compelled to wear a costume and to "come up with an alter ego, [an] alternate persona" which felt like being "something I am not." Bassoon had come to believe that what was magical about Burning Man was "coming as yourself, not as a persona, not thinking of it as costumes. It is just you, with permission."

Communal Effort. "Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration. We strive to produce, promote, and protect social networks, public spaces, works of art, and methods of communication that support such interaction" (Burning Man Project, 2020a, "10 Principles" section). Maestro compared *Communal Effort* to being "self-reliant" but also to be part of a self-reliant community. Sharkie shared an experience that demonstrated *Communal Effort*, in which someone had a flat tire, and "people just jumped out of their vehicles to help." Lorax felt the community helped each other, even when people were not used to doing that in the default world where sometimes people needed a specific invitation.

Sharkie related offering "your energy" to help other burners to get "comfortable

in being on the playa" with their camp setups. Both the offers and the helping are aspects of *Communal Effort.* "Once I get my camp situation set up, I will walk over to other camps within *Snowflake Village* and ask them if there is anything I can do to help them set up their camp." Bassoon recalled early burns in which Burning Man did not have *Build Week*.[34] "We would all come in and we would see the city get built together. It used to be nice to see it happen, to see the *Communal Effort*."

Baby Giraffe thought that *Communal Effort* was another important principle because Burning Man was "worldwide." Baby Giraffe talked about a community organization, Burners Without Borders, that was created in 2005 as a response to Hurricane Katrina (Burners Without Borders, 2016). That organization shared Burning Man practices through community volunteer projects and did "serious work outside of Burning Man, and I love that." Lorax hoped that burners took those experiences "back into their own community and teach others to be the same way. It is important."

Civic Responsibility. "We value civil society. Community members who organize events should assume responsibility for public welfare and endeavor to communicate civic responsibilities to participants. They must also assume responsibility for conducting events in accordance with local, state, and federal laws" (Burning Man Project, 2020a, "10 Principles" section). Maestro believed that *Civic Responsibility* was "volunteering," and believed that, along with *Decommodification*, this principle was what

[34] *Build Week* was the week before the actual Burning Man event began. Camps, art projects, and city infrastructure groups were allotted a limited number of early entry passes to aid in building camps and installing art during *Build Week*. When the gates opened at the beginning of *Burn Week*, the city was fully functional and ready for interaction.

separated Burning Man from your "typical festival." But Maestro believed some may take *Civic Responsibility* for granted. Baby Giraffe also thought *Civic Responsibility* was important, especially because "we say the desert is trying to kill you." Baby Giraffe believed that "We are creating a society in a place that is literally trying to kill us, that is out in the middle of nowhere. As a community, it is our job to literally help when we can." Baby Giraffe added that many burners were already scanning the playa for MOOP and "you can also scan for people who might need help."

Lorax related *Civic Responsibility* to meaning "everybody should obey laws because they usually have a reason, not always, but sometimes." Lorax noted that there were the Bureau of Land Management Rangers (BLM Rangers[35]) out there "making sure people are not doing anything stupid." But as a community "we are all taking care of each other; we are governing our own selves."

Sharkie did not think about *Civic Responsibility* on the playa because Burning Man was not an organized civic entity. It did not have a city council or mayor, although it did have civil elements including a post office, medical, Black Rock Rangers, and BLM Rangers. "It is harder for me to see *Civic Responsibility* out on the playa." Upon hearing the definition of *Civic Responsibility*, Bassoon replied, "Bummer, dude," because it sounded like legal language to limit liability. Bassoon believed people are taking responsibility by having the foresight to build something safe. "It is going to be wacky and fun. It is going to mess with people's brains. But it is not going to puncture skin, or

[35] BLM Rangers are federal law enforcement personnel. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), part of the U.S. Department of the Interior, is responsible for the land upon which Black Rock City is built.

[cause] trips to the Medical Tent." Bassoon concluded that Burning Man was like a "different world," but it also has "gravity and physics, and you cannot hand-wave those away. So, you must plan."

Leaving No Trace. "Our community respects the environment. We are committed to leaving no physical trace of our activities wherever we gather. We clean up after ourselves and endeavor, whenever possible, to leave such places in a better state than when we found them" (Burning Man Project, 2020a, "10 Principles" section). Maestro again paired *Leaving No Trace* with *Civic Responsibility*. "If you are responsible for your civil space, you are also not leaving stuff behind, and [that is a] *Civic Responsibility*." Engaging the *Leaving No Trace* principle, Baby Giraffe MOOPs at Burning Man, as part of volunteering at *Center Camp* and at the camp village. Baby Giraffe noted that the campers MOOPed in *Center Camp* when it was being built, after it was built, before it opened, during the week on every shift, and at their camp village. They were required to MOOP their area for two hours before they could leave at the end of the week, which was a "pain in the butt, but necessary and I am willing to do it." Baby Giraffe also shared how the Burning Man Organization's Playa Restoration Team tracks where MOOP is found after the event (Burning Man Project, 2024b). "It was a great way they do it, and you know they had every camp mapped out. They knew where everyone was staying, and if your camp was red, they would not ask you back." Baby Giraffe not only MOOPs for personal responsibility, "but I am really doing and trying to do my part so that other people can come back too."

Lorax felt that *Leaving No Trace* was natural. Seeing "something on the ground

that was out of place," Lorax picks it up. "We take a lot of effort to make sure that we leave it better than we found it." Lorax learned this same principle when as a boy scout. Lorax added that if Burning Man did not meet the guidelines set up by the Bureau of Land Management, "then we would not be allowed to come back the following year." To Lorax, *Leaving No Trace* was "important."

Sharkie believed that *Leaving No Trace* was one of the primary principles for most people who attend Burning Man. "You know the 10 Principles are there, but I think this is the one that is probably most in your face." Sharkie added that people at Burning Man pick up after others "more so than they would in the default world." Personally, Sharkie said, "This is one of the principles that I brought back to the default world to some degree, more so than I would have any other principle." To Sharkie, *Leaving No Trace* "has the biggest single impact in day-to-day life, both on the playa and off the playa."

Bassoon was familiar with *Leaving No Trace* from growing up backpacking with the family. Bassoon was always in "that frame of mind whenever I enter a space. But it is a huge environmental impact to have Burning Man., so we do what we can and hope that it is enough."

Participation. "Our community is committed to a radically participatory ethic. We believe that transformative change, whether in the individual or in society, can occur only through the medium of deeply personal participation. We achieve being through doing. Everyone is invited to work. Everyone is invited to play. We make the world real through actions that open the heart" (Burning Man Project, 2020a, "10 Principles"

section). Maestro said to make sure you volunteer "because the event will not happen without you." People "need to participate and volunteer." Maestro said that "volunteering can be helping set up somebody's camp, volunteering your story (whether funny or full of grief), volunteering your laughter, volunteering your body as part of a crowd, or volunteering your vulnerability or funny outfit." Maestro noted that a funny outfit can itself be either a defensive mechanism or a vulnerability, and concluded, "In doing so, you are participating in that community rather than everyone being an island. And that is critical." Maestro said that *Civic Responsibility* along with *Participation* were "really about community building rather than just a responsibility to the community."

For Baby Giraffe, *Participation* was related to experiences volunteering at *Center Camp*. Baby Giraffe felt that volunteering at Burning Man was "rewarding" and "fulfilling," saying, "For me, working for an infrastructure camp really feels satisfying." Baby Giraffe's volunteering in the leadership of the Black Rock Philharmonic was also *Participation* by putting together the orchestra and all the logistics to get it to the playa. Baby Giraffe continued to reflect on what it was like being a musician on the playa in an orchestra. "It is hot, hard, and dusty. It is not easy playing orchestra music on-playa. The fact that people are doing that and sounding amazing and contributing their own personal gift is really where it is at." Baby Giraffe said it was "not just in the orchestra, but it feels like I am a part of [something] deeper, I am a part of Burning Man." Baby Giraffe also noted a new push at Burning Man for participants to be a part of a camp (rather than camping as individuals), so they can increase their *Participation* in camps and the city. "Whether your camp has five people or a hundred people, you are still contributing

something to Burning Man, which I think is really beautiful." Lorax also related *Participation* to volunteering, believing that Burning Man would not happen without volunteers. Some camps had grown into year-long burner volunteer organizations like Burners Without Borders (discussed in the *Communal Effort* principle subsection above) which did volunteer work all over the world.

Sharkie believed "Radical *Participation* is one of the key components of the experience," commenting that there were many different opportunities for people at Burning Man. "Camps give you opportunities to come and have a drink, show off your costume, listen to a lecture, or listen to music." Sharkie brought *Participation* to a personal level, saying, "It is fun to do things that you would have never thought to do in the real world. I do not dress like this or play my silver clarinet in the real world." But "I do things out on the playa that I would not normally do in the real world." Sharkie concluded, "Radical *Participation* to me is really a key component to the values and the experiences of being at Burning Man."

Bassoon's first response about *Participation* was, "It takes a village, and if nobody in the village does anything, then there you are. Empty box." Bassoon felt that *Participation* made them really embrace "every moment," concluding, "You do not have to wait for that Man to burn. Every time you are standing in line, it is an opportunity to participate with what you are given."

Immediacy. "Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most important touchstone of value in our culture. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, the reality of those around us, participation in

society, and contact with a natural world exceeding human powers. No idea can substitute for this experience" (Burning Man Project, 2020a, "10 Principles" section). Maestro believed *Immediacy* paired very strongly with *Participation* "because you are in the here and the now." Maestro continued that *Immediacy* "is the most obviously closest link to establishing a liminal state because the other contexts no longer exist if you are immediate in the here and now. It can also be one of the hardest because of that." Maestro said, "Everyone normally waits until the end of the song to applaud. *Immediacy* challenges us to consider what rules and contexts we bring with us moment by moment, and to possibly eschew many if not all of them." Maestro concluded that the *Immediacy* principle can be the hardest one to fully embody individually, because of personal social issues.

Baby Giraffe said, "I think this is the one that I have the biggest problem with, even more than *Radical Self-expression*. I think *Immediacy* is being there, being in the moment, experiencing it." A friend said, "Do not worry about taking pictures or taking video, because there are going to be people out there who are better at picture-taking and video-taking than you." Which made Baby Giraffe think, "Do I want to remember this? Yes, but if I want to remember it, I can take one photo and then go on the internet and find a professional photographer who took videos or" photos. Baby Giraffe then brought up the 2019 *Folly* performance by the Black Rock Philharmonic. In the videos on YouTube, there were other people taking videos. There were also people dancing, crying, singing, and swaying to the music. "They are experiencing an orchestra in that moment and letting whatever emotions and joy and happiness and sorrow and sadness, and all the

things just happen to them." Baby Giraffe said, "If you have your phone in front of your face, can you experience that? You are more into it by just being there, being surrounded by 3,000 people all experiencing the same thing in different ways." Baby Giraffe has struggled with being fully in the moment but wanting to remember the beautiful moment, agreeing with the saying, "Just Say Yes." Baby Giraffe added, "I think Burning Man as a community is really set up for that," noting that you may not say yes to everything (and you do not have to), "as long as you are open to all the weird experiences and the new things."

For Lorax, *Immediacy* was "one thing you can say about Burning Man." Lorrax talked about class, culture, and religion at Burning Man. "There is no class separation or division amongst classes or cultures or religions." Lorax continued, "People are just people, and they are all sharing, and they are all living together. There are no cultural or economic divisions on the playa. And I think that that is important." Lorax continued that when you separate yourself with status, you lose out on *Immediacy* at Burning Man.

Sharkie felt *Immediacy* came from "experiencing the community, the city itself." Sharkie was conflicted by not getting enough *Immediacy* at Burning Man because of musical commitments on-playa. "I do not get the Immediacy of other opportunities. If you walk around the city and you see a camp, you just pull into the camp. You start talking to people, you engage with them." Sharkie continued, "You may go to the next camp and do it again. You are immediately involved with an effort towards an experience. You are putting out an effort to have an experience. And that to me is an immediate experience." Immediacy "is just coming across something and engaging with

it."

For Bassoon, *Immediacy*, was a connection to the surrounding "ancestral" mountains and the morning sun along with the surrounding nature found in the Black Rock Desert. "You know, you must be there, you must see it to understand it really. When you are there, it is immediate. It is undeniable."

Explaining Burning Man in the Default World

Maestro believed Burning Man was an experiment in community and art in a place that was designed to kill you. It was also full of academics, lawyers, musicians, and artists. Maestro said that most artists were not full-time, even if "they may invest hundreds of hours and tens of thousands of dollars into that art. For them, it is an opportunity for expression and community and experiment." Maestro found that the "majority of people out there are introverts" even though in the default world people think of Burning Man as "festival sex, drugs, rock and roll, or electronic dance music (EDM)." Maestro noted that "party people" out there get noticed more because "they are the loudest, not because they are the most representative." Another important influence of Burning Man was the location of the event. "Deserts themselves are just magical and sacred spaces, and that is why, in any tradition, deserts have always held a lot of power."

When Baby Giraffe explained Burning Man to people in the default world, they automatically thought "naked, running around, doing all the drugs, and being drunk." Baby Giraffe then told them "I play in the orchestra," and they became "super curious." They could not believe that there was an orchestra out there. "They do not really understand, like it does not compute, because most people know what an orchestra is."

Baby Giraffe then shared videos or pictures, and usually started with the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly*, explaining that “Burning Man is for everybody, and it can be anything you want it to be. It is going to be different for you. It is going to be different for me."

In the default world, Lorax also shared photos or videos, like the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly*. Lorax also pointed out that people often confuse Burning Man as “another sort of festival like Coachella,” explaining that the difference being Burning Man was more about “art and music” and “absolutely community.” Lorax also noted that “everybody goes out there and helps each other.” For example, there were people who can “help with your taxes, fix your broken bicycle, and give massages if you have a bad back. It kind of makes you wish that life was like the playa all the time” because the “*playa provides*,” as many burners say. For many, it changed them in ways they were not expecting, “which is interesting. It definitely changed me.” Lorax concluded, “I have a different experience each time I go. Every year is different.”

For Sharkie, it was difficult to explain Burning Man to somebody who has never been there or has never heard of it before. Sharkie explained it from an “experience” perspective rather than a musical perspective, sharing performances in three different ensembles (Black Rock Philharmonic, Playa Pops, and the Burning Band). When people in the default world noticed the water bottle covered with Burning Man stickers, they asked what all the stickers meant. Sharkie said that “gives me an opportunity to explain a little bit about Burning Man.” Sharkie has told them there was a lot of music, art,

workshops, lectures, engagement, and creativity. There was also "drinking and drugging, if you wanted. A lot of sex, if you wanted." Sharkie noted that there were opportunities to participate at any level that you want, and that you can be as "active and vibrant as you want to be, or as isolated and as solitary as you want to be." Sharkie concluded, "there is this esoteric feel to it, or experience to it, that is not definable in any other kind of experience that you may have had."

Sharkie also related another way to think about the event. "Burning Man is kind of a combination of *Disneyland*, *Woodstock*, and *Alice in Wonderland*." The *Disneyland* aspect was "it is not a default world experience, you are just in a different world, and you can find different themed areas like Fantasy Land and Adventure Land." The second aspect was *Woodstock*, which "is obviously the musical component." Sharkie noted that there was a lot of music involved. You can find camps performing live or with DJs, "all sorts of different types of music including heavy metal, jazz, orchestras, rap, and hip hop. Music is part of the soundscape 24/7." An example of the *Woodstock* aspect that Sharkie shared with people was the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic *Folly* performance. "That experience of playing in front of 3,000 people is chilling, it sends chills up your back. It is [like] Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock, that is the way it feels. Yup, not 500,000, but 3,000." The third aspect was *Alice in Wonderland* and "going down the rabbit hole." Just by saying "*Alice in Wonderland*, people understand what that means. "It is just weird, a surreal environment. It feels like it came from outer space and does not feel like a regular normal society. *Alice in Wonderland* means that you [Dorothy] are not in Kansas anymore. It is something different."

Bassoon explained Burning Man by saying, “It is an opportunity to be your most authentic self. You can go and bring whatever it is you want into this week with the people in that space, and you will absolutely meet it staring back at you.” Bassoon also added that the stark dry lakebed is “an agent in alchemy.”

Theme 7: Transformation of Burners by the Culture of Burning Man

Each of the five participants felt that they had had transformative experiences at Burning Man and had observed transformation in others. There were some aspects of their descriptions in common, and this theme is organized by those aspects. Interview 3 explored this category, but the participants also discussed it in Interviews 1 and 2.

Transformations

Maestro “absolutely” agreed that Burning Man can facilitate a transformational experience. Becoming *caring* was Baby Giraffe’s personal transformation description. Bassoon’s personal transformation from Burning Man was summarized as “giving myself more permission.” Bassoon said, “I have a little quote on a ribbon hanging in front of my vanity that says, “Permission,” explaining, “I just have permission. I do not need to ask. If I ask permission a lot, I limit myself a lot in life. So, when I go to Burning Man, I try not to ask.”

Baby Giraffe talked about how the Black Rock Philharmonic performances have helped with their own personal change. “These musical experiences at Burning Man are crucial because we are reaching people in a way that they may need.” Baby Giraffe concluded that “the fact that people are saying it has changed their life, like that is *their gift to me*.”

Lorax believed that Burning Man has changed people and that they have had transformational experiences there. Lorax said, “I think it brings out the best in people, it breaks down barriers, it breaks down inhibitions.” Lorax continued, “You can go out there, and you can be anybody you want to be. You do not have to be that person you are every day sitting in your [workplace].” Lorax noted that the transformation was not instantaneous. “I think some of the people who come for the first time may be a little bit hesitant to open themselves up to other people. It takes a while for some people to break down their inhibitions.” For Lorax, performing individually and in the orchestra at the Temple was a way to continue to heal and to help others heal; those performances were part of Lorax’s personal transformation that happened at Burning Man.

When reminded of the often-repeated statement, “Once you go to Burning Man, you are changed forever,” Sharkie acknowledged that personal transformation but also limited its extent. Sharkie agreed “to some degree,” but also “I am not as embroiled in it as others would be.” But then the very next words were, “It has changed my life.” Sharkie understood that some people say it has changed their lives, but for Sharkie, it is the draw of the playa, “I just want us to be there.”

Environmental Struggle

Maestro said that the playa was “a mile high with fine dust that will burn your skin. So, you must really want to be there, and you must have some responsibility to yourself and others.” Maestro said, “You have this space in the middle of a desert designed to kill you with 50 mile per hour winds, where chaos rules supreme.” The environmental struggle with the “elements of the alpine desert” coupled with the culture

and 10 Principles of Burning Man "opens you up to interactions with others. You might not necessarily be open" to such an interaction in the default world "or to reaching out to others."

I asked Maestro if the place and the struggle to survive there helped open people up more, like other ritual treks such as the *Camino de Santiago, Appalachian Trail,* and the *Pacific Crest Trail.* Maestro replied, "Yup, trauma bonding is 100% a thing. The difficult environment [first] serves as a bit of a filter to ensure that people want to be there, that they are not necessarily there accidentally, what burners might call Sparkle Ponies." Maestro continued, "More importantly, there is the [second] aspect [that] depends on the given year. Shared struggle, which is the much more junior form of trauma bonding, is very real." Maestro gave an example of how the 2023 major rainstorm shut down the city for multiple days due to the mud and water on the dry lakebed, making vehicle traffic impossible. "We had a whole lot of moisture. In the end, [it] was not a big deal, in part because the community relied upon each other, and helped support each other in the plethora of ways that it required." Maestro said there was "terrible heat the year prior." Maestro continued, "Just being out there is a form of mutual struggle that automatically strips away pretense and boundaries that might otherwise" limit the participant. It exposed "their humanity." Maestro concluded that trauma bonding can come in the "worst form," but at Burning Man "shared struggle" was found more positively, and it also built community. "It is a team building exercise in the worst form."

Baby Giraffe explained that Burning Man was mainstream now, but not so mainstream that you just remark, "Oh, there are all these burners." Baby Giraffe thought

that sharing the harsh physical environment "is what makes it special. The desert is trying to kill you. You are all dirty. You are all experiencing this harsh thing. But you are also experiencing all these beautiful things and beautiful sounds and beautiful lights."

Halfway to the playa from New Mexico, as Lorax's partner was coming to Burning Man for the first time, they said, "I am really looking forward to this. I have never been camping before." Lorax thought, "Oh, my God! What have I done? I am taking this woman I really care about to the most inhospitable place on the planet." Lorax continued, "That summer was a particularly hot year, it was like 120 something in the shade. I showed her how to wash her hair with a 5-gallon bucket of water." Lorax's partner went "from a high-rise apartment-living woman wearing high heels to someone who walks around in the mud at Burning Man." Lorax joked, "She still has her high heels, but she does not wear them on the playa."

Lorax added that "what you learn being a burner is you go out to this very inhospitable environment, and you must be ready for 130-degree temperature or dust storms, or whatever." Lorax recalled another burn in which it rained on the playa for a couple of weeks before burn week. "There was a whole bunch of standing water on the playa, and people were kayaking around in boats." A few days later, it dried up. "And then a huge flock of green bugs showed up all over the playa. And then a big flock of birds came in and ate all the bugs. The next day it was fine."

Sharkie talked about the struggle of surviving in such an inhospitable environment. Part of the experience was "surviving that heat, that wilderness that you are in," and you must "adapt to its circumstances." Sharkie said the playa "does not cater to

your needs, it is for you to adapt to it." Sharkie thought the rawness of being out there and not having the luxuries of the default world made it an experience in and of itself, "you are living kind of raw." Putting the harsh environment and time struggles in perspective, Sharkie said it had a rewarding payoff because it contrasted and enhanced your experiences. "It is so overwhelmingly rewarding to be there that the difficulties become less significant. It was not the nicest environment to be in, but you just deal with it. It is the rest that makes it worth it."

Sharkie speculated about how the environment can affect how much time to spend at Burning Man, from the viewpoint of the effectiveness of being in a transformational environment. Initially, Sharkie thought, "It is *not long enough*. It should be two or three weeks; it should be longer." But after more burns, Sharkie thought, "*Maybe it is too long* because it is hard to live in that environment for too long of a period of time." Sharkie added a caveat, "You need to be there the whole time. For me, it would be almost an empty effort to just come in for 2 or 3 days. It just would not feel like the same experience." Sharkie concluded the discussion of the harsh environment aspect of Burning Man by noting that the "struggle enhances the experience in some ways," adding that it was almost like, "*I survived, you survived, here it is!"*

Bassoon focused on the harsh environment affecting the musical instrument more than personal comfort. Having been to Burning Man many times already, Bassoon knew the harsh desert environment would be a challenge for a double reed instrument. Bassoon rose to that challenge.

The Culture of Burning Man

Maestro said that Burning Man "makes every kindness and every interaction that much more special, because you are in need, because it is weird, and because it is different." Maestro explained that "we have created these opportunities that are begging for connection, sometimes through funny hats and costumes, or through a camp that gives out water or super tasty cocktails, or an orchestra." Maestro continued that these opportunities could become experiences that are "liminal in the sense that they are, unfortunately, oftentimes so very different from our default world experiences." Maestro concluded that through those experiences, "transitions are made possible, because it forces us (or sometimes gives us the chance) to expose those avenues along which we may transition either outwardly or inwardly through ourselves."

Baby Giraffe's transformation could easily be titled *caring*, which has become part of their persona on-playa and in the default world. Baby Giraffe said that the "persona at Burning Man is wanting to emulate caring. Accepting." Baby Giraffe tells people who are under stress running *Center Camp*, "You are doing a great job. You are nailing it." This caring was a gift to them. Baby Giraffe applies that in the default world as well. "I want to lift people up. I want to be positive to other people who may be stressed out or struggling."

Baby Giraffe thought that people want to be "part of a community," saying that Burning Man was "a city. It is not just this little festival. It is literally a community, and everybody wants to feel like they are involved." Baby Giraffe said that the Burning Man community was "beautiful, rich, and vibrant" because there are so many things you could

do at Burning Man. “Think about the fact that when it is built, it is literally the third largest city in Nevada.”

Lorax commented on how people are instantly closer at Burning Man. “You see somebody, and you come up and hug them like they are your brother or sister, and that automatically breaks down barriers when you do that.” Like Baby Giraffe, Lorax talked about the community you feel at Burning Man. “If you see someone having trouble setting up a tent, for example, you help them.”

The culture of Burning Man helped Bassoon have “aha moments.” Bassoon said, “We have all had them” at Burning Man. With personal transformation, Bassoon said, “I am allowed to just ask what I want… Like aha, like ding. But also, gradual seismic shifts in what people believe is possible for humanity, like little kids.” Bassoon continued that Burning Man can also “open our minds in a way that most other things do not.” Continuing to explore the experience, Bassoon said, “It is the way the space itself [feels], something about the way the light filters through the dust, how electrically charged that lakebed is, somehow has something to do with something.” With some difficulty trying to pinpoint it, Bassoon said, “I [cannot] really granular-describe it to somebody. It is the people. It is the place. It is, yeah!”

Bassoon thought of transformative experiences at the Temple as a ceremony, in which people can engage with experiences that “have a lot of space and intentionality.” For example, transformative experiences at Burning Man can later be “dismantled and reintegrated” into one’s persona, which Bassoon referred to as an “introspective part, a counterweight.” Conversely, in a party scene, “there is not a space made” for that.

Bassoon said that a ceremony does not need drugs. “You can go out and have a sober mind-altering experience where you are just vibrating with the energy and the experiences that have happened to you.” Bassoon talked about a transformative experience at the outer edge of the deep playa, talking with a friend all night. Returning to camp after sunrise, Bassoon encountered some people who said, “Talk to us. You have a big smile on your face. Do you want to connect?” Bassoon told them about the experience, and they exclaimed, “Wow, are you sober?” Bassoon answered, “Yeah, totally. I am sleep deprived, but I am good.” Instead of interacting with them, Bassoon wanted to go to camp and reflect on the experience. Bassoon felt like it “would be empty gestures if we did not have that introspective part, the counterweight.”

Sharing Talent and Expertise

Lorax said that the playa provided an opportunity for people to get into *flow* in their areas of expertise, to elevate their impact by sharing that expertise with burners who may be transformed by it. Lorax summed up the idea of “flow” at Burning Man, “We can just let go and be that person for a few days out of the year,” and share expertise or talent freely. Lorax gave examples of musicians playing their instruments. Going deeper, Lorax said, “There is a violinist in the Playa Pops [who is] an exceptional electrical engineer. That violinist does a lot of the electronic lighting for the sculptures and things on the playa.” And Lorax himself has brought “environmental science to the playa to share with people, how they can do solar and live sustainably.” Lorax concluded that “You never know who you are going to meet on the playa,” or what expertise they can offer you.

Manifesting the Transformation in the Default World

Baby Giraffe talked about searching for a community music ensemble to join in the default world after being transformed by musicking at Burning Man. Baby Giraffe reached out to a local symphonic band, but "they have their number set, and the only way you can get a spot in those orchestras or symphonic bands is if somebody leaves." They said, "Thank you for your interest. We hope to see you at a concert, but we have our max for flutes." Baby Giraffe said, "There are a lot of flute players out there, and it is pretty competitive as far as getting a spot."

Baby Giraffe spoke of "trying to understand how I can use the 10 principles in my own life." Baby Giraffe has found herself looking down at the ground in the default world now, *Leaving No Trace*, because "it is a good thing to do" and "it helps the environment." Baby Giraffe has also applied the *Gifting* economy of Burning Man to the default world. "It feels good to give something that I either created or I saw." Baby Giraffe could say to the recipient, "I was thinking of you. I saw this thing and I wanted you to have it." Baby Giraffe concluded, "It makes me feel good, and if I can put a smile on somebody else's face, I want to do that."

Lorax "had not played my cello with a group in 30 years. I came out" to the playa "to play with an orchestra one time, and suddenly I am addicted to music again." Lorax continued, "If I had not gone to Burning Man, there is no telling if I would ever have played with a musical group again. Definitely, Burning Man was the stimulus that caused me to" bring "music back into my life." Lorax also talked about wanting to get a busking license in Santa Fe. Lorax would use the Burning Man tricycle along with the *playa-wear*

top hat and “play my cello to see how people react, if they enjoy it or not.” Lorax has not done it yet, but experiences at Burning Man riding around and randomly gifting music have inspired doing the same in the default world.

Sharkie’s musical sound improvisations have been transformed by performing at the Temple and as an Ambient Drummer. Sharkie applied this new musical language on a camping trip. “I climbed up to the top of a box canyon, started playing, and it echoed. When I would play a long note, the long note carried forward and then I played the next note on top of that echo.” Sharkie said that even though there was not an emotional reason for being there, “I just wanted to play in this canyon. It changed how it sounded, and it really sounded neat to hear that.” Other people on the camping trip said the same thing, “It was really neat to hear that.” Sharkie said, “That is the expression I am trying to get when I play at the Temple. I am trying to get that kind of connection to people. It is a gift” to them.

Bassoon said that performing with the Black Rock Philharmonic has been musically transforming. Paying in the orchestra has allowed Bassoon to be more open. “I feel like, as a musician, it has been really freeing.” Bassoon continued that “it is a hard thing to find freedom in a very technical instrument. Usually, you must have a group to keep playing. It has been engaging for me to be able to find that freedom within [the BRP] community.” Bassoon playfully added, “It has definitely prepared me to play in Europe in those old churches with no air conditioning.”

Theme 8: Does Musicking at Burning Man Facilitate Collective Effervescence?

The five participants described many examples of transformation, including some through the collective effervescence at the 2019 *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* and others within the overall culture of Burning Man. The *Bohemian Rhapsody* section of "Theme 1: *Folly* Performance" earlier in this chapter described the collective effervescence produced in more than 60 musicians and 3000 audience members by musicking, specifically by the performance of that song within a program designed to engage the audience's emotions. I return here to the main idea of musicking at Burning Man facilitating collective effervescence, which the participants explored as part of Interview 3.

Creation of Collective Effervescence by Musicking

Maestro "absolutely" believed that playing music at Burning Man can help facilitate collective effervescence moments. Maestro explained how the shared individual experiences became a collective experience, "Everyone has a shared experience, and the beauty behind much of the particular music that we are doing is [that] there are not any words." Maestro said, "If the lyrics of a song are talking about how your girlfriend ran away with your dog and your truck, then that has a fair amount of explicit context, [but] you can still have some subjective experience." In contrast, "The fact that our music does not have words means that although the sensory experience is all the same, in large part [it] will be shared."

Maestro recited a popular quotation, "Music says the things about emotions that words cannot." Maestro continued talking about classical music, "That phenomenon may

not even be able to be encapsulated by words, and yet we are all experiencing the sound together and experiencing these bits." Maestro's personal experience with multiple types of music indicates that "the breadth and depth of human experience may be best captured there." Maestro noted that, "Live performance can really exacerbate the potential, such that everyone is experiencing the same sensory stimulants." However, everyone will process that same sensory stimulus in their own way. Maestro concluded by extending the collective experience to other musical genres, "And so that is an incredible universal unlock key, that electronic dance music (EDM) and blues music and dozens of other types of music can and do use a lot."

Baby Giraffe believed musicking at Burning Man, whether it is dancing, listening, or performing, facilitates collective effervescence, "that collective goosebump experience." Baby Giraffe said that the Burning Man organization did a podcast (Burning Man Project, 2023c) that featured two of the orchestras that have performed at Burning Man, and they used a picture from the 2023 Black Rock Philharmonic performance at the *Chapel of Babel*[36] art piece. After a week, many people had commented on the post. When reading the comments, one can recognize collective effervescence memories as well as, in some cases, transformations that resulted from that collective effervescence. One comment read, "This performance changed my life. I go to the Black Rock Philharmonic performances every year and have since the beginning." Baby Giraffe said that it is just comment after comment. New people who have not been to Burning Man

[36] The 2023 *Chapel of Babel* art installation was a "60-foot tower clad in" … "whimsical photography" and "filled with shadow boxes and fussily crafted tchotchkes" (Rosato, 2023, para. 2).

posted things like, “I have to see this, I have to go.” Another comment said, “Like life changing, it changed my life.”

Baby Giraffe said, thinking back to the *Folly* performance, “I never thought in my wildest Burning Man dreams that we would play for 3,000 people at this beautiful deep playa art installation in 2019. I never thought it was going to be that.” Baby Giraffe continued to talk about the orchestra and people’s comments about the group and its performances. “We had done concerts, and they had been kind of big, but” the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* “was the turning point.” Baby Giraffe noted that people saw that Burning Man is not just one thing of burning an effigy after a week-long party, there was room for many things including an orchestra on the playa. Baby Giraffe wondered about “how many of the people going to our concerts on-playa have never been to an orchestra concert before. Literally time and time again,” people said these concerts were “life changing. I go to this every year. This is the reason why I go to Burning Man.” Baby Giraffe believed the orchestra provided a different kind of musical experience at Burning Man and “is really affecting people in ways that they are not expecting.” Baby Giraffe strongly believed that the construct of Burning Man opened people up to have a deeper experience. “The fact that on-playa you can go to that concert and also be experiencing Burning Man, it is hard to explain. You are experiencing Burning Man in its bigger realm, and then you are experiencing orchestra performance in a smaller realm” within that large realm. “It is kind of like a galaxy, or like a star forming with energy around it.”

At the start of the video playback of the 2019 performance of *Bohemian*

Rhapsody, Lorax exclaimed, “One of the top 10 moments of my life was that concert at the *Folly*.” Lorax said that “all of us thought the same way. We were all crying as we were playing, because none of us were expecting that to happen that way.”

Sharkie felt that “there is no question about it,” music helps facilitate collective effervescence, transformation, and bonding of people at Burning Man. Sharkie said that while performing music at Burning Man, “the audience shares that experience of listening.” Sharkie went back to the *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody.* “All 3,000 people felt the energy, felt goosebumps. The musicians playing it had the shared experience of playing that music, experiencing the chills that run down your spine when you play it, and seeing the audience reaction.” Sharkie said that both of us had our own feelings while we played and watched the audience react, and that we can relate to that experience “because we both shared it.” Sharkie further explained this concept as it would be explained to someone in the default world. “I was talking about *Bohemian Rhapsody*” and the musicking that led to collective effervescence. My friend said, “Where can I see it?” Sharkie gave the friend the link and said, “If you Google ‘Burning Man, *Bohemian Rhapsody*,’ you are going to find us. It is that easy to see the 2019 *Folly* event or the 2023 *Chapel of Babel* event.” Sharkie continued to tell the friend, “You can see that activity; you can watch it for yourself.”

Bassoon believed “more than anything” that musicking at Burning Man can create collective effervescence, that aha moment that sends chills up your back, that sense of community. Bassoon said, “Music is getting a group of people to care about the same thing for a moment of time,” explaining, “It is absolutely transformative to have a group

of people who are willing to step into these experiences and be open to whatever presents itself to them in that moment." Bassoon concluded, "I really feel like it takes the isolation and breaks it into something that can hold us all."

Creation of Collective Effervescence by Other Means

Maestro said that creation of collective effervescence "is not unique to the Black Rock Philharmonic or orchestral music and also not unique to Burning Man." Sharkie noted that musicking and collective effervescence also occur together in the default world. "People go to a concert, and they all have that shared experience when they leave of what that music was like, the sounds and the feelings and the sights, all those things. They had this shared experience."

Sharkie said collective emotional reactions can also happen from shared events other than music, giving an example of watching a movie or reading a book in a group. They "had that same experience that they can now share together, and they can talk about it together." Sharkie said they may all get the same emotional reaction, or different reactions for different people, "but they have an emotional reaction that really bonds everybody together."

The Influence of Burning Man Culture on Collective Effervescence

Baby Giraffe explained that the combination of Burning Man and the orchestra facilitates collective effervescence. "People are gravitating towards" the orchestra "because it is different and not anything they have experienced. It is like you are already fully encompassed in Burning Man, and then you are having this amazing musical experience with all these people at this beautiful art [installation]." Baby Giraffe said,

"When you really break it down, it is like the total Burning Man experience package." That is, "you are at art, you have art cars, you are with thousands of people, you are listening to music, and you are just letting all that kind of affect you and get into you and work all the synapses that are already happening with Burning Man." Baby Giraffe concluded, "That is what makes it complete and total magic. We could be playing out of tune, but playing a song that everybody loves, and it does not matter, because people know they are relating to each other." Then Baby Giraffe added, "They are having a collective experience."

Baby Giraffe finished the discussion of the deeper experience at Burning Man by noting that "the culture of Burning Man is one of the reasons why our music affects people." Baby Giraffe said, "It can be any kind of music, such as folk music or performances at the Temple, but it needs to be contrasting from the electronic dance music (EDM) that is in the city music-noise background." Baby Giraffe concluded that Burning Man culture "makes it a wholly unique experience that is special."

Sharkie spoke of the experience of meeting people who were very curious about Burning Man "and they want to dip their toe into the water, but they are a little bit fearful of it." Sharkie said that sharing the videos of the Black Rock Philharmonic was a great way to illuminate the musicking aspect of Burning Man, and sometimes collective effervescence. Sharkie compared the *Folly* performance to performances that happened in the default world, saying, "There is no doubt that [both venues] have that common connection of playing." Sharkie continued that at Burning Man, after playing a "significant piece where the emotions are high, when you are done playing it everyone is

hugging everybody. It is that you got to experience the same thing I did. Was that great? We should just hug." Sharkie said the performance creates a stronger shared emotion at Burning Man. "When it is done, it is still not done. It is still not over. That emotion still hangs. It still lingers for some period. You are still reveling in that feeling." At Burning Man, it could "be playing music, or it could be something else" that produced that strong shared emotion. Sharkie concluded, "It is an amazing, amazing, culture that goes on there."

Bassoon said that "whatever music evokes for you personally from your myriad of experiences, that merges with the individual myriad experiences that are stirred up in the other listeners who are also engaging in the moment of being there together." Bassoon continued, "It is beyond language. It is beyond movement. It feels like it takes the deeply [feeling] individuals and transforms [them] into a shared community."

Summary

I conducted three interviews with each of the five members of the Black Rock Philharmonic, using three focus areas: the 2019 *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody,* the 2020 virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and the culture of Burning Man along with the persistence of the effects of those performances over the next three years. I used coding to elicit ideas from the transcripts, and built three general narratives, one for each set of interviews. From the general narratives and coding, the eight themes documented in this chapter emerged. In Chapter Six, I used the data from the eight themes to create a general description of the phenomenon of *creating collective effervescence through musicking at Burning Man*; that description uses the structures of ritual theory (V. Turner, 1969/2007) and interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2014).

Chapter Six: Analysis

In Chapter Five, I presented the lived experiences of the five participants, who were members of the Black Rock Philharmonic, through the description of eight themes that emerged from the *general narratives*. The scope of the interviews was broad, beyond the *Folly* performance in 2019, to subsequent performances, and extended to their overall Burning Man experiences as well as how those experiences had affected their lives in the default world. Some of those broader experiences were pertinent to the *general description of the phenomenon* that I describe in this chapter. The event in which the phenomenon of *collective effervescence* occurred was the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* by the Black Rock Philharmonic at the *Folly* art installation at Burning Man.

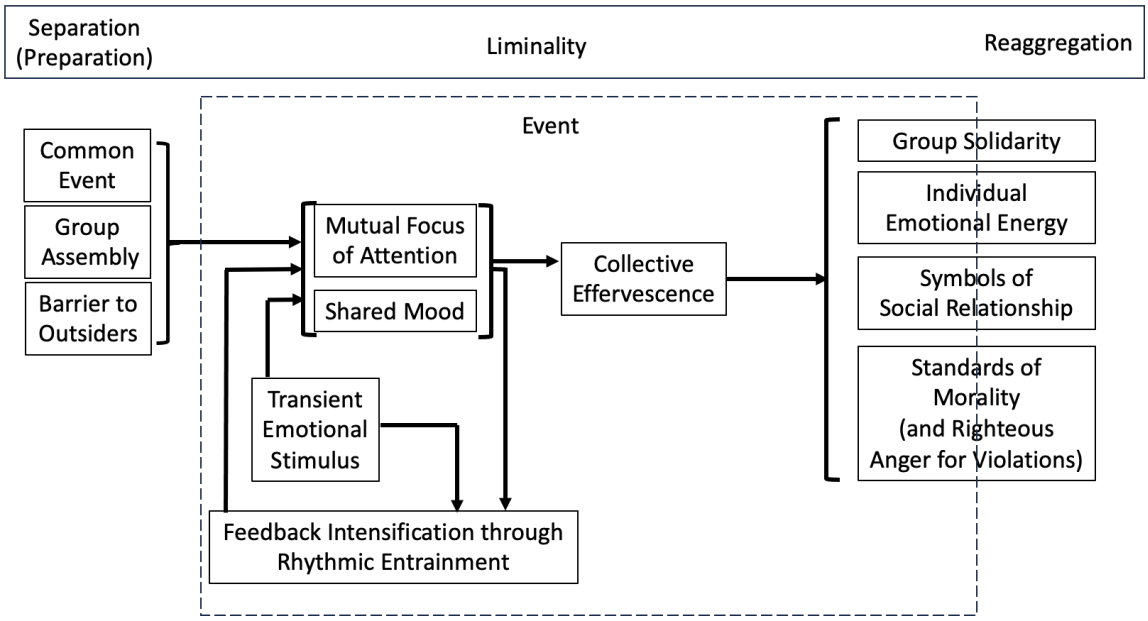
This chapter begins with the general description of the phenomenon (an interaction ritual), followed by descriptions of short-term and long-term interaction ritual chains in which the interaction was embedded. In the third section, I discuss transformations, which can result from successful interaction rituals. Then, in Chapter 7, I link the combined lived experiences of the five participants to my theoretical lenses of ritual theory and interaction ritual chains, offer ideas on how my findings could be applied to music education ensembles, and discuss limitations and suggestions for future research.

The Interaction Ritual of the Bohemian Rhapsody at the Folly

In this discussion of the phenomenon of collective effervescence which occurred during the 2019 Folly performance of Bohemian Rhapsody by the Black Rock Philharmonic, I use the language of interaction rituals as defined by Collins (2004) and

shown in Figure 4 (which is repeated from Chapter Two).

Figure 4. Interaction Rituals and the Three Stages of Ritual Theory



Barrier to Outsiders, Group Assembly, and Common Event

Being a *barrier to outsiders* was accomplished within the construct of the Burning Man Event, which is surrounded by 12 miles of perimeter fence, with no nearby cities or support infrastructure, and with no commercial activities. It is a ticketed event with a maximum attendance of 78,850 participants, establishing the *group assembly*. Obtaining a ticket makes an attendee a burner, a member of the group being assembled. One of the 10 Principles is *Radical Inclusion*, ensuring the group being assembled isn't based on race, religion, or any other demographic; nevertheless, once a person obtains a ticket, they are a member of the group being assembled.

The *common event* was the Black Rock Philharmonic concert at the *Folly* art installation on Thursday of Burn Week at 6 p.m. This concert was scheduled and

promoted on Facebook, the BRP website, and Burning Man's *WhatWhereWhen* guide provided to every burner as they enter the playa on Burn Week.

Black Rock Philharmonic has a tradition of partnering with a big art piece for a performance in deep playa (away from the city streets). The 2019 partnership was with the *Folly* art installation, which "represents an imaginary shantytown of funky climbable towers and old western storefronts, cobbled together from salvaged and reclaimed lumber from original San Francisco Victorians to be reborn in the desert, affording shelter, entertainment and perspective to the community" (Burning Man Project, 2024e, The Folly section). That venue placed the audience on all four sides of the orchestra, with some people looking down on the musicians from above on the multi-story art piece. The front row of the audience was close enough to reach out and touch the musicians. It was as if the musicians and audience were a single entity. Baby Giraffe said, "The *Folly* was such a beautiful, interactive, built town that was just so complete."

A new element from the Black Rock Philharmonic planning side was the partnership with the *Mayan Warrior* art car to amplify the orchestra's sound. It has a huge following and history at Burning Man, along with its impressive sound and light systems. *Mayan Warrior* is "a collaborative project that has united artists, craftsmen, photographers, designers, technologists, architects and musicians from Mexico City and Northern California" (Mayan Warrior, 2024, About section). Several other large art cars surrounded the audience on three sides.

Of the nearly 80,000 burners on-playa, the *Bohemian Rhapsody* performance involved two subgroups. One was about 60 musicians, most of whom were assembled

before burn week through social media and other means, but also with some who joined the orchestra on-playa, participating in one or both on-playa rehearsals on Monday and Tuesday. The second subgroup of participants was the approximately 3,000 people who chose to join the musicians at the *Folly* for the concert. Maestro and Baby Giraffe were amazed at how many more people showed up to the concert compared to past performances with the Black Rock Philharmonic. Sharkie elaborated, "They wanted to be there, to hear an orchestra in a place where you would never expect to find an orchestra." Sharkie continued, "You know, people had to trek out there, ride their bikes or walk. They had to get that mile away from *Center Camp*. So, they must decide to go." Maestro noted that the *Mayan Warrior* art car was known for doing electronic music and DJs, and "it brought people who swelled our audience."

Mutual Focus of Attention and Shared Mood

The *mutual focus of attention* for the musicians was aided by the concert attendance being the largest that the orchestra had experienced. Maestro commented that "the energy buildup began even before the show started." Early on, the audience was singing with the orchestra, *sharing the mood*. Sharkie reflected that the song was "meaningful" to the audience because they knew many of the words. The Black Rock Philharmonic performance of the song "struck a chord with them."

From some vantage points, the audience was louder than the amplified orchestra. Maestro said that "other times earlier that week in different places, the people who sang along were comparatively muted." Lorax was amazed at the audience volume, "We were all shocked; I think we were not expecting it." Baby Giraffe noted that within the first

couple of measures of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, the audience recognized the song and began singing along. “You could tell right from the beginning that it was just going to be something that we have never experienced before.” Baby Giraffe continued, “I felt like we were in a bubble, and it was like the energy was something you could grab from the air. As it progressed in the song, it just got more and more electric.” Sharkie noted, “People were everywhere with no open space between the orchestra and audience.” Becoming overwhelmed with the urge to watch what the audience was doing, Lorax found himself having to increase focus.

Transient Emotional Stimulus and Feedback Intensification Through Rhythmic Entrainment

Entrainment (Clayton et al., 2004) is a process by which people come together, usually through the act of musicking, but also in other activities such as play. Entrainment joins individuals into groups, increases the size of small groups, and can lead to flow. According to Csikszentmihalyi et al. (2014), “Flow is a subjective state that people report when they are completely involved in something to the point of forgetting time, fatigue, and everything else but the activity itself” (p. 230). Clayton’s description of entrainment is consistent with the description of communitas by E. Turner, 2012), “Communitas may be found when people engage in a collective task with full attention … . They may find themselves ‘in flow.’ That is, the experience, the full merging of actions and awareness, a crucial component of enjoyment” (p. 3). Turner added that communitas is “present in music” (p. 5).

Maestro pre-planned a *transient emotional stimulus* “referencing a popular movie,

Wayne's World, by "turning around [to face the audience] and *head-banging*, because that is what was done in *Wayne's World* at that point during *Bohemian Rhapsody*." While doing so, Maestro experienced *feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment* from the audience, "I felt the energy [and] almost fell off my [conducting] stand because I was going at it too hard." There were two more spontaneous *transient emotional stimuli* during the performance, *Krash* the cymbal player's enthusiastic cymbal crashes, and the *Guy-in-White* standing up and starting to dance and sing.

Lorax experienced *rhythmic entrainment* when focusing on Maestro's reaction to how this song was unfolding and becoming a powerful event. Lorax noted the musical energy and audience reactions were building, and had to remind himself to remember to look at the music and play. Baby Giraffe experienced *feedback intensification* by "being in that moment with myself, but also seeing other people in the orchestra having that exact same experience, crying, [with] tears streaming down while they are trying to play." Baby Giraffe was having both a "personal" and a "collective experience."

A "walk-on" cymbal player intensely performed cymbal crashes during *Bohemian Rhapsody's* big build-up, and that led the player "to take on the burner name of [name redacted] *Krash*," according to Maestro. The intense cymbal crash was a pivotal moment, a transient emotional stimulus. "The whole audience had got into it and were cheering with the build-up, and when [the cymbal crash] finally hit, there was still another minute of music left." Maestro exclaimed, "I mean, already, just the energy."

Even between the times the cymbals were being played, *Krash* was displaying energy and jumping up and down in a bouncing tutu. Baby Giraffe reflected that in all the

years playing in bands, has “never seen anybody bring such a life, energy, a spark!” Baby Giraffe felt that *Krash* was a “playa dream, wandering in from the dust” with the energy that the orchestra needed. Baby Giraffe said that despite the substandard condition of the cymbals loaned to *Krash*, “the sound that came out of them during that performance made them sound big and so amazing.”

The *Guy-in-White* was seated in the audience several rows back from the conductor's stand and laterally near the center. The *Guy-in-White* was the first person to stand and begin dancing, and that appeared to be a trigger, a transient emotional stimulus, for other audience members to push themselves over the edge and become part of the performance by singing and dancing. During the video playback, seeing the *Guy-in-White* stand up, Lorax exclaimed, “It is party time!” Maestro spoke about research on social experiments concluding that a single trendsetter can be a trigger, “That one person does it and shows everyone that it is okay. So, three more people do it, and then it just exponentially [grows]. In just a matter of 30 seconds, everybody was standing up and dancing.”

Maestro does not think that the *Guy-in-White* was intentionally trying to trigger the audience, “He was just getting up to dance and may not have been fully aware of the pivotal role.” Baby Giraffe added, “It was like everybody was just waiting for the OK, and the *Guy-in-White* gave everybody the OK to feel it, to be in the moment, in the same moment that everybody was all having together.” Baby Giraffe continued, “It is kind of cliche, but it was magic. It was not anticipated, and it was totally random and magical.” Seeing the *Guy-in-White* stand up during the video playback, Sharkie said, “Yeah, I am

getting goosebumps right now." Sharkie continued, "That *Guy-in-White* is jumping around; he started, and then other people started. And you know it is a movement, so to speak." Bassoon and I both revealed that we were having goosebumps on our arms as we watched the moment in the video when the *Guy-in-White* triggered the flash of standing headbanging.

During the performance, Maestro was not aware of the *Guy-in-White* triggering the feedback intensification through entrainment in the audience. Maestro had faced the audience and inspired them with *headbanging* but had turned back toward the musicians before the *Guy-in-White* activated the entire crowd onto their feet. Maestro described surprise that when the song ended, "I saw everyone standing, which is kind of wild." Later, watching the video, Maestro "got a sense of what [went] on. The energy was huge; the orchestra clearly was feeling it." Baby Giraffe said, "The earth, it is ground, it is solid. But when people started dancing, you could feel the energy and the excitement and [the vibrations] were traveling through the playa."

Collective Effervescence

Collective effervescence is *a positive exciting feeling shared by a group of people during the liminal phase of an interaction ritual*. The group will be more likely to attain this feeling if they have a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood, with feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment building the group's mood as discussed in the preceding three sections. In this section, I describe the *collective effervescence* experienced during the performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

In the video, you can hear the audience's singing volume overpowering the

orchestra, which is quite amazing because the orchestra was being amplified by the *Mayan Warrior* art car for sound reinforcement. Lorax commented, “We were all shocked; I think we were not expecting it.” Maestro said, “There was already a ton of energy and a very different type of show. There was already plenty of singing-along, plenty of energy.” Bassoon said, “I could definitely feel the collective energy of the moment. And it is such a crazy thing to be [in a] liminal space [during] the moment of a performance.”

Sharkie said, **“**3,000 people [were] singing and dancing and clapping and spinning around. It is the energy that is created out of that [audience participation] that makes [*Bohemian Rhapsody*] so much more of a piece than just the music itself.” Sharkie concluded that “it is one of those life-changing events.” Lorax said, “It was something completely unexpected that was just totally joyous to everyone there. It happened spontaneously,” and everybody was “realizing this was really a special moment; this is really cool.” Lorax concluded that this unique collective musical experience “was just magic. It really was magical.” Maestro said that the Guy-in-White standing up “is the reason why *Bohemian Rhapsody* is our new encore,” and is “why the attendance for our shows has doubled.”

The four participants' lived experiences described above were *a positive exciting feeling shared by a group of people during the liminal phase of an interaction ritual,* in other words, collective effervescence. Baby Giraffe addressed the energy that was created by the performance, “It was music and an orchestra concert. It was at Burning Man, at the *Folly* art installation, and surrounded by the *Mayan Warrior* and many other art cars. It is

not like an experience anywhere else on-playa." Baby Giraffe concluded that the fact that people are still talking about it in 2024 "is mind blowing."

The outcomes of collective effervescence are individual emotional energy, group solidarity, and symbols of social relationship Collins (2004). In the next section, I examine the emotional energy that was produced on an individual level. In the section following that, I examine the feelings of group solidarity and the symbols of social relationship that were charged during the event.

Individual Emotional Energy

The participants described the individual emotional energy that they felt. They also described the emotional energy of fellow musicians and audience members. Finally, some of the participants were so excited at the end of the performance that they needed to find ways to internalize their intense individual emotional energy.

Individual Emotional Energy of the Interviewees. Maestro said, "There was just this incredible euphoria." According to Bassoon, "It was all such a blur." The power of the *individual emotional energy* that Lorax experienced led to hope to experience it again, "I keep going to Burning Man and playing; maybe it will happen again sometime." Watching the video of the performance, Sharkie said, "It brings you right back to the excitement and the thrill of playing that music. I can see why professional musicians and rock stars can really get into it, because of the reaction they get from their audiences."

Individual Emotional Energy of Other Orchestra Members. Baby Giraffe's husband played bass drum for this concert, and he had only performed in rock bands previously. Baby Giraffe said "He was overwhelmed with the whole experience, in a

good way. To have been a part of that was super special for him." Bassoon, along with their stand mate, felt "joy" and they both were "in a state of shock. It felt like floating and being in liminal space." The principal cellist said to Lorax, "Holy shit. What was that? How did that happen?" Lorax continued, "It was definitely a synergy" between the orchestra and the audience.

Individual Emotional Energy of Audience Members. Sharkie noted that the musicians get to feel how the audience feels as well. "To me, those two things go together, and it makes for an incredible experience. It did not matter if you were a performer or an audience member, you were getting the [*individual emotional*] *energy* from everyone, and it carried on afterwards." Sharkie continued, "It gives us an opportunity to get embroiled" emotionally "by playing it, and then also get the reaction of the audience." Lorax said that after the concert, people were coming up to orchestra members to thank them, and "everybody wanted to hug everybody." Overall, the orchestra and the audience were all "stunned. We were all crying and looking at each other with our mouths open."

Baby Giraffe said camp members who had gone out to the concert were "just speechless." Right after the show people in camp were "trying to internalize what just happened, trying to process the whole experience." Two friends were positioned on the side of the orchestra, and they both had the exact same experience. "They got emotional, and then they just could not talk about it because it was just this amazing experience." Baby Giraffe continued, "It is still an experience people are talking about. I have had strangers message me. People came up to me on the playa in 2022 and 2023, and they

were still saying that *Bohemian Rhapsody* was such a life-altering experience."

Internalizing the Individual Emotional Energy. The emotional energy was so intense for the musicians that some of them needed to spend some time to internalize the energy. After the performance, Maestro found a place on the playa away from people, lying down for 20 minutes to absorb the moment. Maestro thought, "I am exhausted and nothing I am going to do the rest of the night is going to be as cool as this," and went back to camp to sleep. Baby Giraffe and their husband found an art car and climbed up to the roof platform to look out over the scene of the concert at sunset. After the performance, Bassoon was in a daze when interacting with the audience "because I was sort of still [in] that space." Looking for "some people to hang out with," Bassoon found an art car designed to look like an old front porch of a southern cabin. But Bassoon could not recall any specific reactions with those people on the art car "because I was sort of still [in] that space, had not really come down."

Group Solidarity, Symbols of Social Relationship, and Standard of Morality

There was *group solidarity* in the experiences of the orchestra members and audience. In Bassoon's words, "A shared experience of music transforms the individual. It is what separates us and makes us a collective." Bassoon said that each person comes from a "*you* place" within themself that only they reside in, and that they are sharing it with everyone else who is coming from their own "*you* place." Bassoon continued, "We are all feeling together. I can take the hidden parts of myself and show them to the world through music." Later in the burn week, Bassoon found that people were reacting to the *Folly* concert, noting that it was "sort of the buzz, the talk of the town, and it was

exciting." Sharkie found group solidarity from how moving the piece was personally and for the audience, and noted "they just go nuts" when reflecting on the *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody*. One of Baby Giraffe's campmates found group solidarity with Black Rock Philharmonic performances and told Baby Giraffe that they never wanted to miss another BRP show. "He wanted to experience it. It became the thing" that he prioritized, and BRP concerts became "his thing." It had never occurred to Baby Giraffe that the orchestra might be "somebody's thing, that they would spend all this money and time and go to Burning Man to see the orchestra."

The orchestra members interviewed experienced *symbols of social relationship* through the emotional energy and memories found in gifted swag items from the Black Rock Philharmonic. Maestro showed two favorite necklaces, and "the end-all be-all of artifacts out there" was the 2019 BRP necklace because it held memories of the *Folly* concert. The 2019 BRP necklace was one of the items that Baby Giraffe brings every year along with the denim vest with BRP patches. Lorax also still wore necklaces, shirts and hats from the Black Rock Philharmonic. Sharkie kept the yellow 2019 BRP necklace next to the computer and was reminded of the experience frequently. Sharkie also had multiple pins from the orchestra on the "musician" side of the Burning Man vest worn every year on playa. Bassoon regularly wore shirts from BRP at Burning Man and in the default world. The BRP 2018 I-Robot shirt represents a powerful memory of things "really started to gel" as Bassoon came back to playing the bassoon after a long period of not musicking. Bassoon also has brought BRP pencils back from the playa to *gift* to children in the default world who are just getting into the "music world." Bassoon used

them as a reward and usually told a little story about Burning Man.

The song itself has become a *symbol of social relationship* for the musicians and many audience members. Lorax said, “To this day, if *Bohemian Rhapsody* comes on the radio and someone does not sing, I do not want to be around them.” Lorax’s attitude was consistent with Collins (2004) as a *standard of morality and righteous anger for violations*. Sharkie used *Bohemian Rhapsody* as a wakeup alarm because of it. During practice at home before Burning Man, Bassoon disliked the song because it would become “this ear worm that I am never going to get away from.” The *Folly* performance changed Bassoon “180 degrees” on the song, beginning to love *Bohemian Rhapsody* and even singing along to it in grocery stores.

G*roup solidarity* was experienced by the orchestra members and by the thousands of burners who participated in the concert. with the orchestra along with the audience after the performance. Black Rock Philharmonic artifacts, including on-line videos of the performance served as *symbols of social relationship* that contained emotional energy from the collective effervescence experience. The song *Bohemian Rhapsody* itself became a *symbol of social relationship* and *standard of morality* for some of the interviewees, with *righteous anger for violations* being manifested when random people in the default world don’t sing along with the song.

Figure 4, above, shows the inputs and outputs for a single interaction ritual (IR) that produces collective effervescence. An *Interaction Ritual Chain* (IRC) is a series of IRs, with each IR feeding into the next ritual with emotional energy (EE) and group solidarity from the previous interaction ritual (Collins, 2014). The *shared mood* of the

next interaction ritual in the chain can be facilitated by the *EE* and *solidarity* from the preceding IR. In the following section, I explore the actions taken by the Black Rock Philharmonic and its individual members to continue the interaction ritual chain, building on the collective effervescence of the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* art installation.

Emotional Energy Recharge and Future Interaction Rituals

"Mutual focus of attention and rhythmic entrainment" in a successful ritual "transmutes any shared emotions into a new emotion: the collective effervescence of solidarity. … IRs are emotion transformers. They create new, higher-order social emotions out of more primitive [first order] emotions" (Collins, 2014, p. 3). After the intense interaction ritual of the *Bohemian Rhapsody* performance at the *Folly* in 2019, Black Rock Philharmonic members were, using Collin's (2014) words, "pumped up with confidence and enthusiasm" (p. 3). In this section, I examine how the BRP and its members recharged *emotional energy* through the next-day performance at the Temple, 2020 pandemic interaction rituals, and live encore performances in 2022 and 2023.

2019 Temple Performance. The day after the *Folly* performance, the Black Rock Philharmonic held their annual Temple performance, another interaction ritual. Maestro said that the Temple Performance for the BRP was purposefully scheduled late in the burn week, and the programming of the music was different compared to the earlier concerts "to fit the feel of the venue, which is far more subdued." Sharkie said that the Temple was more "solemn," so the music programming also reflected that. "The orchestra "plays in respect to the people who are at the Temple." Reflecting transient

emotional stimuli and shared mood, Baby Giraffe said, “listening to beautiful thoughtful music at the Temple” can be “cleansing.” It could be a “beautiful reverent experience,” which could be a more solemn form of collective effervescence. Lorax also said that the orchestra and the audience “realize that it is a place of reverence, a spiritual place.” Baby Giraffe believed that the Temple performance is “more somber and reverent for those who may be in mourning,” demonstrating a shared mood.

The audience was much larger than in previous years, and the audience sang enthusiastically throughout the *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Baby Giraffe scanned faces during the performance and saw many people deeply feeling the music and crying. Baby Giraffe also cried during the music itself because of the combination of the music and the Temple location. “That is what music is about, emotions and helping people move through emotions or realize certain things.” and that is part of what the orchestra accomplishes by performing at the Temple. During the 2019 Temple concert, feedback intensification and a shared mood of the orchestra members occurred again. Lorax noted “The orchestra dedication piece for the musician who had passed away, combined with the marriage ceremony of another orchestra member, made it a very strong emotional, spiritual concert.”

Sharkie believed that there is an “emotional connection” that the audience “can appreciate.” The audience will walk up and thank the musicians, “They are saying it from their heart, more so than from their mind.” Sharkie experienced feedback intensification along with transient mood stimuli at the Temple performance, “There is a lot of emotion, a lot of crying that is going on, a lot of anger that people are expressing to somebody who

may have hurt them in their life." Sharkie felt that music enhances the emotions found at the Temple and acts as an "emotional stimulus." The orchestra was giving a gift to "help" people "experience their emotions, but we were also feeling the emotion of playing as a gift to them."

2020 Pandemic Interaction Rituals. Before the pandemic, burners reinforced positive interaction rituals with annual attendance at Burning Man. As Collins (2014, p. 3) stated, emotional energy "is the prime motivator of social life; successful rituals attract people to particular kinds of events where they have felt collective effervescence in the past." When burners faced the pandemic and the cancellation of the event, they were in a situation where their emotional energy and group solidarity could not be recharged through collective effervescence. When emotional energy falls, people feel depressed, unmotivated, and alienated (Collins, 2014).

The Virtual Encore Project. The virtual encore of *Bohemian Rhapsody* was a new interaction ritual to recharge the emotional energy of the ensemble members during the tough beginning of the pandemic. Maestro felt, "It was a big pivotal piece for us, but it was sort of more thinking about what would engage and stir up memories for people who would be watching it outside of the group, certainly inside as well." Within two weeks of the virtual encore project being announced, Burning Man 2020 was canceled, and the project became more important for the musicians and burners in general. The project tapped into a symbol of social relationship, the song that had produced collective effervescence at its live performances in 2019, particularly the *Folly* performance. The virtual encore was a gift to the orchestra members and to the broader burner community;

that gift reinforced the group solidarity of the orchestra members.

Many of the musicians were not familiar with the technology and techniques of recording at home. Additionally, they could not use rhythmic entrainment from each other, along with the audience energy, to enhance their performances. Bassoon reflected that even though there were major challenges to recording in isolation, the project "was exactly what we needed as a group." Lorax was "determined to be part of it. It was not easy. I was not really set up with the right mic. I do not think a lot of people were, and you could not go buy a new mic" due to the pandemic. The recording also gave a new perspective to the members of the ensemble, separating them from the normal vantage of where they sit in orchestra. Bassoon commented, "Even though we were so disconnected, I saw people in their home environments. It felt like a new lens, you know." When watching the finished encore, Bassoon noted, some of "these are people I am unaware of." Lorax said, "It was interesting to see a lot of the people in that recording." Lorax did not know some of them "because they are in a different section of the orchestra."

Sharkie commented that many musicians wore the same playa clothes and necklaces as they wore for the 2019 live performance. Those symbols of social relationship were a means to access the emotional energy from the 2019 *Folly* performance to establish the virtual encore project's group assembly and shared mood. Baby Giraffe talked about specific people in the orchestra and the outfits and actions they did in the video along with the memories of them and the love for them.

The musicians experienced emotional energy while they were recording their tracks in 2020 and remembering the 2019 performance that inspired the project. Baby

Giraffe admitted not playing parts of the 2020 song because of “crying,” but it did not matter because “we were playing together” even though it was virtual and asynchronous. “It turned out amazing. It was amazing.” Maestro remembered differences and similarities between the musician's behavior in the two performances. Maestro felt “a lot of happiness and a bit of welling up” seeing how the musicians put “their own spin on things.” Maestro felt they especially captured the 2019 experience in which everyone did the exact same dance. Lorax said that seeing the orchestra members who wanted to be together but could not was “really cool” and “brought joy to me.”

Each of the five participants watched the virtual encore recording with me during their second interview. Although they had watched it before, their emotional energy was apparent. Lorax was visibly emotional before watching the video, wiping away a tear and saying that the virtual encore performance “brings back a lot of those memories that I put away, because they were difficult memories.” Lorax felt it was a very tough year for everybody, “but that little recording, I cannot tell you how many times I pulled that up and watched it that year.” When Lorax was down, watching it gave “hope” of returning to the playa “with my friends again.” During the playback, Bassoon was tapping their heart and nodding their head. When the song reached the “Mama Mia” section, Bassoon mimicked conducting the orchestra with horizontal and vertical head movements. Sharkie imitated in the interview what they did at the end of the video recording, waving their arms and clarinet like a conductor as the music faded out. As the tempo picked up, Baby Giraffe began to cry and wipe away tears. As the song intensity picked up further, Baby Giraffe alternated between a big smile with happy sounds and tears, sometimes with both

tears and a big smile simultaneously. Baby Giraffe cried while watching themself cry on the video, and it became "a little on the ridiculous side."

Reflecting on the viewing of the virtual encore, Baby Giraffe said it was like a live Burning Man performance, "this beautiful, weird experience, like a dream experience where you are doing all these amazing, weird things." But the project "is amazing to see, like how many people have come and gone. Like how many people I missed." Sharkie reflected, "It really brings back that emotion" and a sense of community with the Philharmonic and Burning Man in general through the virtual video project "because we were performing *Bohemian Rhapsody* at Burning Man." Hearing the piece in the default world, "it takes me right back there to the playa. It gives me chills, and I think those chills are from the Burning Man experience." Lorax said, "The music gave us all hope that we would be back together again, and that this was going to happen again." Maestro reflected that the virtual project, like physical art, added the permanence of a recording to how musicians practice and perform. Sharkie felt the virtual project brought back the energy of the crowd of the 2019 *Folly* performance. It created a connection to the Philharmonic and to playing music at Burning Man. It also connected Sharkie to the crowd because the 2019 *Folly* performance "was the first time that I have ever experienced a crowd just going nuts." The virtual project also transported Bassoon back to the emotions from the *Folly* performance. Bassoon recognized the faces in the video, "but I had never seen them without dust." Bassoon thought that everybody was in their Burning Man character, and it was "hard to remember that default versions of these people exist. It brought me back to being on-playa with them."

Some of the people viewing the 2020 virtual encore performance on the internet left comments (Black Rock Philharmonic, 2020):

- "Yes! Takes me to last year and being in the dust. Fantastic to see all your beauty once again. Many thanks and play on."
- "Genuinely impressive! Not just for what this is, but for what it represents!"
- "You just made me remember a fantastic day. Thank you all for helping give life to this art yet again."
- "One of my great pleasures at Burning Man each and every year was seeing [Maestro] conduct and hearing the fine performance."
- "Makes me so happy … and heart crying. Love you guys! xox."

The Folly Model Project. During the pandemic, Baby Giraffe built an 8-foot-tall model of the 2019 *Folly* out of 8,000 popsicle sticks, which became a symbol of social relationship containing the emotional energy from the performance. "I wanted to create something that could represent that amazing memory." Baby Giraffe posted a picture of the replica on Facebook with one of the recordings of *Bohemian Rhapsody*. After the pandemic abated, Baby Giraffe donated the model to the Burning Man Organization headquarters in San Francisco. "This popsicle stick *Folly* will live forever at Burning Man headquarters, with a tag that says, 'To commemorate Black Rock Philharmonic's 2019 performance at the *Folly*.'"

2020 Summary. The 2020 *Bohemian Rhapsody* virtual encore resulted in the recharge of individual emotional energy, group solidarity, and a strengthening of the song as a symbol of social relationship. The success of the project was due to the existing

strength of the group and its symbols, coupled with the encore's group assembly and shared mood during recording. Baby Giraffe's *Folly* Model Project was an example of creating an IR which in turn, became another *symbol of social relationship* containing the emotional energy from the performance and reinforcing the previous *symbol of social relationship* of the song *Bohemian Rhapsody.*

Burning Man 2022 and 2023 Live Performances of Bohemian Rhapsody. After the *Folly* performance, the leadership team decided to make *Bohemian Rhapsody* the planned encore piece, replacing *Ode to Joy* with the kazoos, because of the energy the performance created within the playa community and the orchestra members. In 2022 and 2023 (the next on-playa Black Rock Philharmonic performance years), Maestro said, "People just come out to be a part of that moment and [to] try to rekindle it." Sharkie said, "They still go nuts when you play it, and it still feels the same to me." Maestro said that in 2023, the BRP's large-art-piece performance had double the crowd size of 2019, and was the largest crowd of people for a Burning Man event other than the Temple Burn and Man Burn.

However, Maestro noted that "it has never been as magical. It is different and wonderful in its own way." Maestro compared seeing the original and later Black Rock Philharmonic performances to seeing The Rolling Stones in the 60s after a new album release versus seeing them in recent years, "It is still great, but it is maybe not the same spirit of magic as it was before."

Baby Giraffe said that the Burning Man organization did a podcast (Burning Man Project, 2023c) that featured two of the orchestras that perform at Burning Man, and they

used a picture from the 2023 Black Rock Philharmonic performance at the *Chapel of Babel* art piece. After a week, many people had commented on the post. When reading the comments, one can recognize collective effervescence memories; in some cases, the comments indicate that transformations resulted from that collective effervescence. One comment read, “This performance changed my life. I go to the Black Rock Philharmonic performances every year and have since the beginning.” Baby Giraffe said that theme is repeated in comment after comment. New people who have not been to Burning Man posted things like, “I have to see this, I have to go.” Another comment said, “Like life changing, it changed my life.”

Summary

The phenomenon of collective effervescence during the 2019 *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* by the Black Rock Philharmonic was a quintessential example of an interaction ritual as defined by Collins (2004) and shown in Figure 4 in Chapter 6. There was a common event with a group assembly of musicians and an audience of over 3,000. The Burning Man paradigm included those who wanted to be there and was a barrier to others. The setting and prior songs established a shared mood and mutual focus of attention. During the song, there were at least three transient emotional stimuli (the *Guy-in-White* standing up, *Krash* crashing the cymbals, and Maestro head banging to the audience). The entire crowd “went nuts,” creating feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment that resulted in an intense state of collective effervescence for over 3,000 people.

After the performance, there was group solidarity among the musicians along with

the audience members. Baby Giraffe created a symbol of social relationship during the pandemic, an 8-foot-tall model of the *Folly*, which was displayed at the Burning Man Organization Headquarters. Many of the 2019 *Folly* performance audience members followed the orchestra to the 2019 Temple performance, the 2020 virtual encore, and the 2022 and 2023 live performances at Burning Man (using the internet when they couldn't participate in person).

At the 2019 *Folly* performance, the individual emotional energy was so intense that some participants sought relative solitude afterward to internalize their experience. The song itself became another symbol of social relationship, and the participants added appreciation of the song by others to their standards of morality. The 2020 virtual encore invoked memories of the 2019 experience and recharged the emotional energy. The encore performances in 2022 and 2023 began with a shared mood from the memory of 2019 and reached a level of collective effervescence that was significant while not fully replicating the intense experience of 2019.

Burning Man Interaction Ritual Chains

In this section, I delve into the phenomenon described in the previous section, the single interaction ritual of collective effervescence at the 2019 *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* by the Black Rock Philharmonic, using the concept of interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004). The single interaction ritual was part of interaction ritual chains of several time scales: the concert, burn week, the annual Burning Man cycle, and the succession of burn years for each individual burner. These chains varied for each individual, but there were commonalities that applied to many individuals.

The interaction ritual chain that encompassed the *Folly* concert began with musicians setting up their performance area, audience members arriving to get a place in their desired location, and art cars staging around the outside of the audience area. This pre-concert ritual had the elements of Figure 4 including a common event, group assembly, and shared mood. Excitement built among the audience members as things came together. The next ritual in the chain was the introduction of the orchestra to the audience by Maestro, which ramped up the audience energy. Each song was another ritual, with more and more of the audience moving towards active participation other than clapping after the song. In 2019 at the *Folly*, the song planned to be the concert highlight, during which the audience "goes nuts" according to Sharkie, was the *1812 Overture*. In that song, a flaming trumpet shot fire over the musicians and the *Elektra White Dragon* art car shot a 45-foot-long stream of fire over the audience when the timpani and bass drum simulated artillery. (The *Elektra White Dragon* art car is described in Footnote 23 in Chapter Five.) However, the audience reacted to an earlier song, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and made it their focal point. Then, the *1812 Overture* extended the period of emotional energy. The applause at the scheduled end of the concert was another ritual, followed by the encore in which the Black Rock Philharmonic prolonged the audience participation and emotional energy by having musicians throw out 2,000 kazoos to the frenzied audience, so they could play along. The final ritual in the concert chain was the aftermath, during which orchestra members packed their instruments and discussed the concert with each other, and in which audience members also discussed the concert with each other and began to disperse. However, at Burning Man, there was a twist, with

audience members mingling with the musicians in the performance area, exchanging hugs and excited comments about the music.

The burn week interaction ritual chain included hours of waiting in line to approach the gate. Burners turned the wait into a ritual by getting out of their cars, mingling, exchanging gifts, and doing some individual musicking. Then, there was the ritual of showing your ticket and getting your vehicle searched for stowaways and contraband, and a mile further, meeting the greeter, getting the *WhatWhereWhen* guidebook and perhaps making a sand-angel in the dust. The greeter rang a bell for any first-time participants, called burner-virgins or *burgins*. The rituals continued with camp setup, meeting old friends, meals, camp visits, many free drinks, and attending planned events, along with unexpected moments of playa magic. There was the Man Burn and there was the Temple Burn. Finally, there was the multi-hour exodus line; burners turned the endless line into a ritual because it moved every half-hour and was stationary in between.

For some burners, the annual Burning Man interaction ritual chain included attending a Burning Man Regional Network event in their local areas. There were rituals of preparing for next year by obtaining tickets, planning camp logistics and activities, organizing playa gear including playa wear and playa artifacts, and interacting with other burners in those rituals. The ritual chain may have included explaining Burning Man to non-burners when the opportunity arose.

Finally, the multi-year interaction ritual chain was built year upon year, deepening relationships with campmates and with improvements to the interactivity that burners

bring to their camps, their art, their art cars, and their music. Each of these time scales recharged emotional energy and reinforced group solidarity and symbols of social relationship, making the next interaction ritual in the chain easier to create the focus of attention and shared mood. In the remainder of this section, I explore elements of Burning Man that facilitate the interaction ritual chains, including the *Culture of Burning Man* and *Burner Identity*.

The Culture of Burning Man

The culture of Burning Man influenced every interaction ritual at the event. Each thread of the interwoven fabric of the 10 Principles contributed to a set of cultural practices that St John (2020) called the DNA of the culture of Burning Man. For participants in this study, the Temple was also an important part of Burning Man culture. Another part of the culture was reflected in how interviewees explained Burning Man to people in the default world. Finally, musicking was woven into Burning Man culture for the participants as they performed with other music ensembles and as individuals at the Temple and camps around Black Rock City.

10 Principles. Burning Man founder, Larry Harvey, said the 10 Principles reflect "the community's ethos and culture" (Burning Man Project, 2020a, 10 Principles section). For Maestro, the 10 Principles created a unique mental atmosphere and mindset in burners. "It creates a safe place for people to be themselves. If you are encouraged to express however you want to be, and those around you are encouraged to accept (not necessarily approve) [that] expression, that creates a safe space." These principles are the fabric of "unconditional goods," that when combined create a "culture" and a "set of

cultural practices" (Burning Man Project, 2024c, "What Does Burning Man Do"). As a set of cultural practices, the 10 Principles represented Collins' (2004) standard of morality; they also supported the Figure 4 categories of common event, shared mood, group solidarity, symbol of social relationship, and righteous anger for violations.

Maestro's favorite principle was *Radical Inclusion*, believing that "it is the most important principle for the community to exist." Baby Giraffe added, "It literally is for everybody." Bassoon extended the concept to "welcoming people to a place" and "making people feel welcome in a place," along with "radical acceptance" which "accepts everybody as they are." Lorax and Baby Giraffe agreed that the Black Rock Philharmonic embodied this principle by accepting musicians of all skill levels and backgrounds and by bringing the audience into the performance as active participants.

Maestro felt that *Gifting* is something that does not need to be reciprocated back to the original giver. Bassoon emphasized, "Everything is a gift. Everything is without expectation," which Baby Giraffe felt is "unique to Burning Man." Baby Giraffe also believed the Black Rock Philharmonic is "our gift to the playa." Lorax added "people bring what they are good at to the playa," which for Lorax is musical outreach with the orchestra and individual performances, in addition to teaching people about living sustainably. Sharkie found that "the act of giving is really very enjoyable for the giver" and that the joy of both the giver and the receiver is an integral part of Burning Man culture.

For Maestro, the *Decommodification* principle was what sets Burning Man apart from other festivals. Lorax added that it should "not be commercial," and Baby Giraffe

pointed out that burners, along with society as a whole, “realize how much commodification we are involved in.” Lorax found that this principle was “not an opportunity for people to make money during Burning Man. It is an opportunity to learn how to share.”

Maestro believed that the *Radical Self-reliance* principle is embodied in the “struggle of being in a difficult location,” and Baby Giraffe added that “it is definitely mandatory at Burning Man.” Bassoon said, “You really have to pack it in, pack it out.” Sharkie added that you must be ready for “experiences that you are going to have when something does not fit the way you are used to seeing things in the default world.”

Baby Giraffe saw *Radical Self-expression* as “everywhere you turn, somebody is radically self-expressing,” and it can be “beautiful” and “weird.” Maestro found *Radical Self-expression* was more about “inclusion than about expression, how to interpret that expression.” Lorax said that there were no restrictions “from your creativity,” with creativity coming in many forms including as an engineer, writer, scientist, or a musician like himself. Baby Giraffe added that it is like “art,” and Sharkie noted that playa wear is an “expression” and a “picture I want to paint of myself.” For Bassoon, the magic of *Radical Self-expression* was “coming as yourself, not as a persona, not thinking of it as costumes. It is just you, with permission” to act anyway you want.

Maestro compared *Communal Effort* to being part of a self-reliant community. Lorax added that the community helps each other even when people are not used to doing that in the default world. Sharkie related that you offer “your energy” to help other burners to get “comfortable in being on the playa.” Baby Giraffe also found that this

principle applied to the default world, with the organization Burners Without Borders and their community volunteer projects. Lorax hoped that burners take these experiences of *Communal Effort* "back into their own community and teach others to be the same way. It is important."

Maestro linked *Civic Responsibility* to "volunteering" which separates Burning Man from a "typical festival." Sharkie commented that volunteering can be found in the civil elements including a post office, medical, and Black Rock Rangers (Burning Man Project, 2024a). Lorax summarized it as "we are all taking care of each other; we are governing our own selves," and Bassoon added that people were taking responsibility by having the foresight to build something safe. Baby Giraffe noted that "we are creating a society in a place that is literally trying to kill us, that is out in the middle of nowhere. As a community, it is our job to help when we can."

For Sharkie, *Leaving No Trace* "has the biggest single impact in day-to-day life, both on the playa and off the playa." Lorax found that burners "take a lot of effort to make sure that we leave it better than we found it." Bassoon added that Burning Man can have a huge environmental impact, "so we do what we can and hope that it is enough." Baby Giraffe shared how the Burning Man Organization's Playa Restoration Team tracked where MOOP is found after the event (Burning Man Project, 2024b). Maestro contrasted Burning Man with other festivals like Bonnaroo or Coachella where there are "piles and piles of garbage everywhere" and "underpaid workers cleaning up most of what was brought in." In contrast, Maestro said, "There are people at the end of Burning Man who go through and do a good scrub of the land; the reclamation crew is fantastic.

But their lift arguably is not nearly that of a post-Bonnaroo crew." Baby Giraffe not only MOOPs for personal responsibility, "but I am really doing and trying to do my part so that other people can come back too.

Participation, for Maestro, was related to volunteering, adding, "Because the event would not happen without you," people "need to participate and volunteer." Baby Giraffe also related *Participation* to volunteering at *Center Camp* and on the Black Rock Philharmonic leadership team. Baby Giraffe found that volunteering at Burning Man is "rewarding" and "fulfilling." It is "not just in the orchestra, but it feels like I am a part of [something] deeper, I am a part of Burning Man." Lorax also related *Participation* to volunteering, believing that Burning Man would not happen without volunteers. Sharkie referred to the principle as "Radical *Participation*" that is "really a key component to the values and the experiences of being at Burning Man." Bassoon added, "It takes a village, and if nobody in the village does anything, then there you are. Empty box." Bassoon said that if you really embrace "every moment, it is an opportunity to participate with what you are given."

Maestro noted that *Immediacy* is the "closest link to establishing a liminal state because the other contexts no longer exist if you are immediate in the here and now. It can also be one of the hardest because of that." Baby Giraffe summarized *Immediacy* as "Just say yes," and be "open to all the weird experiences and the new things." For Sharkie, *Immediacy* was "coming across something and engaging with it" and "experiencing the community, the city itself." Lorax related *Immediacy* to "people are just people, and they are all sharing, and they are all living together." Maestro, Baby

Giraffe, and Sharkie have had a hard time embracing this principle fully due to personal social issues, wanting to document the moment instead of experiencing it, and having too many musical commitments to engage fully, respectfully.

From the discussions with the participants about the 10 Principles, a categorization emerged that goes beyond the list of 10 principles. Four of the principles were experienced directly by Individuals: *Immediacy*, *Participation, Radical Self-expression*, and *Radical Self-reliance.* Two of the principles were facilitated by the Burning Man Organization: *Radical Inclusion* and *Decommodification.* Four principles were collective, enabled by the community of burners: *Gifting*, Communal Effort*, Civic Responsibility*, and *Leaving No Trace*.

The Temple. An emerging theme in this study was the importance of the Temple to burners and the role of musicking at the Temple. The Burning Man Organization described the Temple as a "neutral, non-denominational spiritual space where everyone can gather to share in the experience of remembering the past, honoring or cursing the present, and pondering the future to come." In the "inclusive safe space for all burners, … no one is ever alone" (Burning Man Project, 2024d, Meaning of the Temple to the Burning Man Community section). The Temple could be viewed through DeNora's (2013a) Music Asylums lens, with the Temple space and musicking offering respite from pain or distress which could also facilitate collaborative transformations.

The accumulation of interaction ritual experiences can lead, for some individuals, to healing of their default world psychological issues and transformation of their default world persona. Batt-Rawden and DeNora (2005) applied informal musical learning to

promoting health and wellbeing which contributed to participants' social worlds and identities. In this study, Lorax described how musicking at the Temple helped resolve grief over losing their wife to cancer. Bassoon also healed some past musical trauma by musicking with the Black Rock Philharmonic.

Maestro used a musical analogy about the Temple: it is "experienced by many, and that sensation itself is the same for everyone. But the perception and the integration of that experience is individualized" and "can create strong connections and meaning." Baby Giraffe described the Temple as "beautiful and very peaceful, creating a calm experience." Baby Giraffe said, "Your emotions and feelings are already heightened because of everything you are going through during the week, the elements outside, all the things that you are seeing, all the things you are hearing, and people. And it is just all the emotions." In the interviews with some of the participants, the Man Burn and Temple Burn evoked the concept of *Yin and Yang* (complementary opposites), and Baby Giraffe liked that analogy because the Man Burn "is high energy and in your face, and then the Temple [Burn] is really soft and beautiful and quiet." Lorax found that "the energy, feeling, and culture in the Temple are different from what is found" at "the Man and during the Man Burn. There are all these people sitting around the Temple, and it is quiet. If you listen carefully, you are hearing people crying and people grieving. That is what it is there for. It is a healing thing." Using the *Yin and Yang* concept, Lorax said that burners "appreciate the Temple's introverted energy as well as the Man's extroverted energy." Lorax said that the Temple addresses "the sum of all these deep, deep hurts that comprise what it means to be a human." Bassoon believed that the Temple is "integral,"

and Burning Man "would not mean as much without those spaces, the open, the introspective part. You need a space to reflect and take it all in." Bassoon noted the contrast of the Temple being "so silent" while everything else about Burning Man is an "assault of sounds that you come to live with for the week." The "absence of [noise] at the Temple is stark but not desolate. So much is held in that silence."

Explaining the Culture of Burning Man in the Default World. Sharkie summarized the culture of Burning Man as "a combination of Disneyland, Woodstock, and *Alice in Wonderland*." The Disneyland aspect is "*you are* in a different world," separate from your everyday life. The Woodstock aspect is the musical component, across a broad range of genres. Sharkie said, "Music is part of the soundscape 24/7." The Black Rock Philharmonic 2019 *Folly* performance was like "Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock." The *Alice in Wonderland* aspect is "going down the rabbit hole. It is a surreal environment." The three aspects combine to facilitate groups of people being open to new experiences and to expressing their emotions without the cultural restraints of the default world.

Maestro believed Burning Man is an experiment in community and art in a place that is designed to kill you, adding, "It is an opportunity for expression and community and experiment." Bassoon explained Burning Man by saying, "It is an opportunity to be your most authentic self." You can go and bring whatever it is you want out into this week with the people in that space, and you will absolutely meet it staring back at you." Maestro and Bassoon both commented on how the location is important. Maestro said, "Deserts themselves are just magical and sacred spaces, and that is why, in any tradition,

deserts have always held a lot of power." Bassoon added that the stark dry lakebed is "an agent in alchemy."

When Baby Giraffe explained Burning Man to people in the default world, they automatically thought "naked, running around, doing all the drugs, and being drunk." Baby Giraffe then told them "I play in the orchestra," and they became "super curious." Baby Giraffe explained to them that "Burning Man is for everybody, and it can be anything you want it to be. It is going to be different for you. It is going to be different for me." Baby Giraffe and Lorax both showed people videos or pictures, usually starting with the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly*. Lorax also pointed out that people often confuse Burning Man as "another sort of festival like Coachella." Lorax explained that Burning Man is more about "art and music" and "absolutely community," making you "wish that life was like the playa all the time. I have a different experience each time I go. Every year is different."

Other Musicking at Burning Man. For the participants, their musicking at Burning Man was different than in the default world because it was done through the lens of *Gifting*; it was their gift to the community. The lived experiences of three of the participants included performing in music ensembles, by playing in their home camps, and by doing individual performances at the Temple and at random camps in Black Rock City.

Baby Giraffe has performed at the Temple with another flute player as well as playing as an individual at *Center Camp Village*. Baby Giraffe and Lorax have been part of children's outreach concerts and workshops for a children-friendly camp called

Kidsville. Baby Giraffe explained, “To create a program specifically for children, you could not be more Burning Man than that.” Lorax said the children’s program was like a default world program that was the start of playing cello as a youngster. Lorax shared a picture (a playa artifact) of a tiny girl with a large cello at *Kidsville*, “She is looking up at me with this look of awe as I am trying to teach her how to play the cello.”

Lorax, in impromptu personal musicking adventures of playing music “everywhere I could,” has embraced *Gifting*, *Immediacy*, and *Participation*. “I was still kind of a newbie at Burning Man, but I started venturing out and realized that playing music was a gift I could give people.” Lorax performed on the Black Rock radio station, BMIR, through an invitation received while riding by, from someone at the door. The campmates were amazed when they heard Lorax playing live on the radio. During a *Center Camp* performance, Lorax played with a stranger who was a trained ballerina, who danced while Lorax played a suite from Bach. Lorax also performed at a Black Rock Ranger Station, connecting deeply with the rangers, and was gifted a pin. Lorax also remembered being gifted a massage after playing the cello at another camp.

Sharkie has played in five ensembles on-playa: Burning Band, Playa Pops, Black Rock Philharmonic, the Ambient Drummers, and the Processional Band. “It is significant to play during the Procession and be an Ambient Drummer for the fire dancers [located between] the audience and the Man. It is really impressive, and you feel the significance of the Man Burn because you are close.” Sharkie enjoyed performing with the Burning Band, noting that it is “kind of goofy mood music” that is “just fun to play.” Compared to the Black Rock Philharmonic, you “do not have to be [a] high quality musician.” Sharkie

enjoyed the Burning Band's "random gigs," walking around the city, playing at random camps or bars. "The crowd will love us, and they will get up and start to sing along. Of course, everybody is buying you drinks, even though there is no money. There is a high level of appreciation for the Burning Band."

Burner Identity

In this study, I found that important aspects of a burner's identity include their *playa persona*, the *playa artifacts* they keep, and their *playa wear* clothing. Those elements of their identity were part of their group solidarity and were symbols of social relationship. Their burner identities facilitated group assembly and a shared mood for potential interaction rituals on-playa and, in some cases, in the default world. The 10 Principles discussed above are a symbol of social relationship and group solidarity that are part of each burner's identity. Musical Asylums, an interdisciplinary approach of DeNora (2013a), included music as an active ingredient of action and identity. The five participants had vivid memories of their Burning Man histories and how they have participated in multiple years of musicking at Burning Man. For each of them, musicking was a key part of their playa persona, and they have taken aspects of that persona back to the default world.

Playa Persona. In this subsection I discuss each interviewee's playa persona by exploring their Burning Man origin story and how they received their playa name. All five of the participants were introduced to Burning Man through friends. Maestro's playa name reflected the role in the orchestra. Maestro said that by mid-week in the first on-playa burn, the cynicism about the "Welcome Home" sign changed, thinking, "I have

been looking for this community since I was a middle or high schooler." Maestro spoke about how some burners adopt a playa persona along with their playa name while others just intensify their default world persona. Maestro said that many burners "see Burning Man as an opportunity to have their second life." Conversely, Maestro said, "I am *this person* in the default world and I am *this [same] person* [on-playa]. Either it is a person who I created or it is finally an opportunity to be the person who I would rather be." Maestro's persona was revealed more by describing the role in the orchestra. "It is the music that we all make. The orchestra is a large part of my life, but that does not make the orchestra me."

Baby Giraffe's husband suggested a playa name based on love of the San Francisco Giants. One of their players was nick-named Baby Giraffe after the team took a trip to the zoo and the giraffes loved the player. Baby Giraffe loved that the nickname became a whole fun persona for the baseball player, and that led to the playa name. Baby Giraffe's playa persona revolved around leadership and performer roles in the Black Rock Symphony and in being a support volunteer at *Center Camp*. "I get here a week early and help the people who are building and decorating *Center Camp*, because that is a big job."

Lorax's introduction to Burning Man was a way to resolve grief after their wife of 26 years passed away. Lorax's playa name was given by high school students, after the Dr. Seuss character who was an environmental activist, like the science Lorax was teaching them. An example of playa persona for Lorax involved a big group picture in the second burn year. As they lined up for the picture, the two cellists behind Lorax started

taking off their clothes. Lorax was a little shy, so only took the shirt off. “There is a picture of me out there [that] looks like I am naked with my cello. The whole cello section looks like they are naked. Actually, it is pretty cool." Lorax’s playa persona included wandering around and playing the cello “wherever anybody will listen. The cello is my heart and soul. It is the way I express my feelings to people. The way I share my love for humanity is to share music.” Lorax also brought sustainability passion to Burning Man, “That is why I am the Lorax. We must all be sustainable, and we have to be living more environmentally friendly.”

Sharkie’s playa name was a combination of financial occupation and a childhood nickname that ended in “ie.” Sharkie was more laid back on-playa than in the default world. Sharkie’s instrument was part of the Burning Man persona. “Black clarinets are the default world clarinet. I wanted to bring something different, like this silver metal clarinet. It fits so well, being on the playa.” For Sharkie, “Music takes up a lot of time, and there are only Monday through Friday to practice, rehearse, and perform” in three ensembles. “I do not get around to see the city as much as I would like. It is a trade-off between seeing the city, engaging with other camps, and going to different opportunities around the community, versus playing music.”

Bassoon’s Burning Man journey started after 10 years of flowing in and out of the burner communities in the Bay Area and Seattle. Bassoon thought at the time, “I have found my people. I know exactly who I am going to be camping with and what I am going to be doing to be *rad*.” One year on-playa, there was an altercation with a clown-costumed burner stalking Bassoon, who reacted by sweeping a camp chair in the clown’s

direction, unintentionally breaking their glasses. The camp gave Bassoon a playa gift, a raccoon medallion, for being playful, and they suggested the playa name *Clown Killer*, but the name did not stick. Bassoon was a very direct and positive person, and other burners suggested the playa name of *Rhino* because Bassoon charged into things, but that name also did not stick. Bassoon's playa persona is a combination of playful and sarcastic. For example, when asked about the instrument case on the playa bike, Bassoon responded "It is a bassoon, I mean, a banana." Another example is when I asked why Bassoon would bring that instrument to the playa, the response was, "Because I am a dumb-dumb."

Playa Artifacts. Memories and emotional energy from Burning Man were held by playa artifacts. Many were items gifted to the participants on-playa by close friends or complete strangers. Necklaces, pendants, patches, pins, and stickers were common playa artifacts, and were commonly referred to as *swag*. Some artifacts were clothing items that are worn year after year; these artifacts held the stories (and dust) from multiple transformative adventures. Some pins and necklaces were purposely brought back to Burning Man every year to be worn and to recharge their emotional energy through new interaction rituals, adding new playa memories to those favorite artifacts. These items were also worn, shown, or visible in the default world as *symbols of social relationship* and *group solidarity*.

One of Maestro's artifacts was a fake traffic ticket received during a dust storm (white out). It held the memory of the traffic stop as well as the fine, hugging the camp bartender. Maestro's fuzzy heart boxers from a recent orchestra performance were

recognized by the bartender who was “so moved and so touched” by the Black Rock Philharmonic performance. Maestro had three favorite swag necklaces brought every year to the playa, including the 2019 BRP necklace that held memories of the *Folly* concert and the 2020 virtual encore performance.

Baby Giraffe had an artifact of geologic stones from a playa adventure searching the city for a person named “Rockhound.” Baby Giraffe loved rocks and gems and fortuitously found Rockhound in the middle of a dust storm. “I did not know exactly where Rockhound was. I did not even know who Rockhound was. That is what makes [Burning Man] a weird dream.”

Some of Lorax’s playa artifacts were gifted necklaces, pendants, and medallions. Two favorites were the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic necklace, a reminder of the *Folly* performance, and a necklace from a Black Rock Ranger that was gifted after Lorax spontaneously wandered into their camp and played the cello. Each of Lorax’s necklaces held a specific playa memory along with who gifted it. Some of them were also visible during the 2020 *Bohemian Rhapsody* virtual encore performance.

Sharkie kept Burning Man artifacts next to the computer, including the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic necklace (also worn during the 2020 *Bohemian Rhapsody* virtual encore performance), the 2019 Ambient Drummer and Processional Band medallion, and the pass to march in the Processional to the *Great Circle* on burn night. Another of Sharkie’s favorite artifacts was a little cartoon printed on a sticker that was gifted by the fire-shooting sousaphone player who performed with the Burning Band and the Processional Band; in the default world, that musician was a cartoonist and director of

a Simpsons movie. Sharkie shared other items from the Black Rock Philharmonic, the Burning Band, and the *Frozen Oasis* camp, including stickers, pins, kazoos, magnets, and pendants. Sharkie added, "A lot of those things are memorable for me."

One of Bassoon's favorite artifacts was a small epoxy heart with a shamrock. Bassoon found it while MOOPing, and it held memories of friends from that year, the return to Burning Man after several years, and the emotional journey of becoming a more authentic self. Bassoon shared a colorful fan with the words "Rolling Balls" on it; that artifact held another MOOPing memory and a playful encounter with "Sparkle Ponies" (who are similar to Instagram influencers). Bassoon had Black Rock Philharmonic pencils to give to children in the default world who were just getting into the "music world." Another artifact that held an important memory for Bassoon was the raccoon medallion gifted as a funny award after the scary encounter with a clown stalker, described above in the Playa Persona section.

Playa Wear. Many burners have applied the principle of *Radical Self-expression* by choosing playa wear. Emotional energy was stored in many of the outfits because they held memories of past playa experiences. Playa Wear became a recognizable feature of Burning Man and thus a symbol of social relationships and an enabler of group solidarity. Playa Wear also included playa artifacts, such as pins, as accessories.

Maestro said playa clothes "hold some type of power. They might say, 'Oh, this is a show day,' or 'I am going out and having a chill night,' or 'I am going out and having a not-chill night.'" Maestro's conducting outfit for the Black Rock Philharmonic consisted of "fuzzy heart boxers" that their mother gave to them during college, their father's

marriage tux (with the addition of spike studs), and a red hat worn to "well over 50" Burning Man Regional Network events (Burning Man Project, 2023b). This outfit made Maestro recognizable at non-BRP functions at Burning Man, such as the traffic ticket encounter discussed in the Playa Artifacts section. On-playa, Baby Giraffe wore a bowler hat from the second burn; with added lace and gifted swag pins from Burning Man. It was one of the items that Baby Giraffe brought every year to Burning Man, along with BRP pendants, *Center Camp* hoodie, and a denim vest covered in gifted Burning Man patches. Lorax's playa wear included a purple tie-dyed shirt and a leather top-hat with studs circling around it. Lorax wore other hats and clothes to change persona, like wearing mother's wig and robe on the second cello track in the virtual encore of *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Sharkie said that "people dress any way that they want to dress, in some outfit that expresses how they feel." On-playa, Sharkie wore a cargo vest covered in gifted patches and pins. One side of the vest had the swag from different musical groups Sharkie has performed with at Burning Man, and the other side had swag received elsewhere on the playa. Each item had a unique playa memory, and Sharkie enjoyed recalling the moments and the people associated with them. Sharkie wore a tall black top hat at Burning Man, particularly during music performances. Bassoon regularly wore shirts from Black Rock Philharmonic at Burning Man and in the default world. The BRP 2018 I-Robot shirt represented a powerful memory of things "really started to gel" as Bassoon came back to playing the bassoon after a long period of not musicking. That year, Bassoon felt that "things started to click," making "some inroads [to befriend] the people involved."

Bassoon also wore the shirt during the virtual encore of *Bohemian Rhapsody.*

Summary

The single interactive ritual of collective effervescence at the 2019 *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* by the Black Rock Philharmonic was included in longer interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004) of several time scales: the concert, burn week, the annual Burning Man cycle, and the succession of burn years for each individual burner. These chains varied for each individual, but there were commonalities that applied to many individuals.

Interaction ritual chains were enabled by the culture of Burning Man, including the 10 Principles, the Temple, the mindset of burners which was illustrated in their explanations of Burning Man in the default world, and other musicking experiences of the interviewees at Burning Man. Burner identity, including playa persona, playa wear, and playa artifacts, was also an important ingredient of the Burning Man interaction ritual chains.

Transformation and Healing

Although the scope of this study did not extend to transformation from collective effervescence, the lived experiences of the participants included both. Paul (2014) wrote that transformative experiences are those that substantially change one's point of view, that is, one's preferences and experience of self. In this section, I briefly look at academic studies of transformation at Burning Man as well as the Burning Man Census 2019 field data on transformation. Then, the transformations elicited in the interviews are discussed.

Transformation Studies and Burning Man Census Results

V. Turner's (1974) concept of liminoid can be viewed as interaction ritual chains which can lead to transformation. Clupper (2007b) classified Burning Man as a liminoidal transformational space, with participants transcending themselves through their lived experiences as performers. Clupper developed a six phase "burner process" (p. 231). The first two phases (enticed to attend, initiated as a participant) were found in my examination of Burner Identity using the participants' origin stories and playa names. These two phases correspond to Collins (2004) interaction ritual (IR) steps of group assembly, barrier to outsiders, and common event. Clupper's third phase (engaged in the festival space) corresponds to Collins' IR steps of mutual focus of attention, shared mood, transient emotional stimulus, and feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment. Clupper's fourth phase (moved emotionally) corresponds to Collins' collective effervescence and E. Turner's (2012) communitas. Collins concludes the IR steps with four outcomes (group solidarity, individual emotional energy, symbols of social relationship, and standards of morality and righteous anger for violations). Clupper's final two phases (inspired to new ways of thinking about themselves, and transformed in a permanent or temporary way) are higher-level outcomes which may or may not result from Collins' four outcomes. Additionally, Clupper's final two phases are consistent with V. Turner's (1974) reaggregation phase that returns the individual to everyday life by integrating their transformations into their personas (McCaffrey, 2012). The participants in this study all reported that they had been transformed, with the contributions of the overall event and the musicking component not being clearly

differentiated.

Zager (2023) studied mechanisms of transformation at Burning Man, organizing the mechanisms into categories and subcategories as shown in Table 6. Yudkin et al. (2022) studied transformative experiences in participants at six events across five field sites, including Burning Man. They summarized Burning Man transformation into three categories, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Mechanisms of Transformation

Author	Category	Subcategory
Yudkin, et al. (2022)	Feeling more socially connected to the community	
	Perceiving something new in others or in myself	
	Better expressing my true self	
Zager (2023)	Psychological influences	Becoming flexible
		Emotions
		Coping with challenges
	Social influences	Community
		Feelings towards relationships
	Cultural influences	Burning Man expectations
		Burning Man lived experiences
		Default world experiences

Yudkin et al. (2022) found that self-reported transformative experience increased over time during the event and persisted at least 6 months after attendance. Their work

"suggested that increased reports of transformative experiences over time could be partially attributed to the formation of new social relationships, gift exchange, and dancing" (p. 4). Their analysis suggested that the non-psychedelic-substance-affected transformative experiences were socially oriented "toward others and the community" (p. 4), and that "both expecting … and desiring … a transformative experience positively predicted … actually having one" (p. 5). However, about half of those who did not expect to be transformed reported being transformed, and half of those who did not desire to be transformed reported being transformed, "supporting the possibility that anticipation is not a necessary condition" (p. 5). They also found that "participants of gift economies felt more socially connected to something larger than themselves" (p. 5).

The Burning Man Census Team (DeVaul et al., 2017) had gathered data annually on-playa and in post-event surveys. Some years later, those data became the basis of a comprehensive report as well as multiple academic publications. The comprehensive report for 2019, the year of the *Folly* performance, had not yet been published at the time of this study. As part of this study, I was granted access to unpublished field note data gathered in 2019 (Burning Man Census Team, 2019), and I reviewed that dataset, looking for descriptions of transformation and the influence of musicking.

The census field notes were documented in a spreadsheet file that included 12 subject-area sheets. The three subject area sheets that were appropriate to review for this study were A-Transformation, C-Emotions, and E-Dance & Sing. These sheets had responses from 185, 188, and 173 burners, respectively (not all burners being surveyed responded to each subject area). The Transformations Sheet showed 79% of the

respondents reported that they had been changed or transformed by participating in Burning Man; the most common elaborations were that they became more open and more tolerant of others. Unfortunately, the music-related Dance and Sing Sheet did not address collective musicking specifically. Finally, the Emotions Sheet asked about laughing, crying, and a sense of wonder. Only one entry mentioned collective musicking, with the participant having a sense of wonder about "BRC orchestra, playa artwork, LED fireworks" (row 113). These Burning Man Census data support the hypothesis of transformation at Burning Man in general; however, musicking was not addressed in depth by the census questions and responses.

Transformation of Burners by the Culture of Burning Man

Each of the five participants felt that they had transformative experiences at Burning Man and had observed transformation in others. The factors that influenced them to transform included the harsh *environmental setting* leading to group solidarity, the open and welcoming *community and connections* with others reducing risk of expressing themselves, *looking inward* at themselves in the open environment, *healing*, and *breaking down inhibitions*. The words used by the five participants in this study fit well into the categories defined by Zager (2023) and Yudkin et al. (2022). In addition to describing their transformative experiences, the participants also discussed the *degree and time of transformation*, and *manifesting transformation in the default world*.

Environmental Setting. Maestro said that the environmental struggle with the "elements of the alpine desert" leads to "trauma bonding." Baby Giraffe said, "The desert is trying to kill you, but you are also experiencing beautiful things, sounds, and lights."

Lorax said, “you go out to this very inhospitable environment, and you must be ready.” Sharkie said the harsh environment and struggles have “a rewarding payoff by contrasting and enhancing your experiences. Bassoon said the environment was challenging not only personally but additionally to the double-reed instrument. Bassoon also pointed out the beauty of the environment, “the way the light filters through the dust, how electrically charged that lakebed is.” The words used by the five participants were consistent with Zager’s *psychological influence* subcategory of *coping with challenges*.

Community and Connections. Maestro said, “Because we have created these opportunities [at Burning Man] that are begging for connection, transitions are made possible. It gives us the chance to expose those avenues along which we may transition.” The culture “opens you up to interactions with others.” The opportunities for connection included the 10 Principles along with the culture that included costumes, gifts of food and drinks, and “an orchestra.” Baby Giraffe said that people want to be “part of a community; everybody wants to feel involved. Musical experiences at Burning Man are crucial because we are reaching people in a way that they may need. People saying it has changed their life, that is *their gift to me*.” Baby Giraffe said the Burning Man community is “beautiful, rich, and vibrant.” Lorax said people are instantly close at Burning Man, with everyone hugging each other which “breaks down barriers.” The words used by the participants were consistent with Zager’s *social influences* category and Yudkin’s *transformation* category of *social connection with the community*.

Looking Inward. Burners were surrounded by outward-going interactions, in part influenced through the *radical* word in some of the 10 Principles. But the participants

also found introspection to be influential on their transformations. Maestro noted that a person "may transition either outwardly or inwardly through ourselves." Bassoon felt that Burning Man transformative experiences can later be "dismantled and reintegrated" into one's persona, as an "introspective, a counterweight" aspect of the experiences." The words used by the participants were consistent with Zager's *psychological influence* subcategories of *flexibility* and *emotions*, and with Yudkin's *transformation* category of *perceiving something new in others or myself*.

Healing. Some transformations of the participants were associated with healing. The Temple setting had a strong influence on healing. Bassoon said that the Temple is a place to process grief, and Lorax believed the Temple is a "special place for people who had lost loved ones to come to." Bassoon said that in 2022, performing Friday's Black Rock Philharmonic Temple Concert "was really hard" because of the emotions, including the stored-up ones during the pandemic, along with the emotions of others at the Temple. Maestro felt that the Temple facilitates healing just as music can be transformational, adding that there is emotional energy in the structure that "sometimes burners are not prepared for, and they cannot enter unless they are in the right mental state." Maestro also believed that more people visit the Temple throughout the week than visit the base of the Man and that "plenty of people would argue that [the Temple] is substantively more important than the Man Burn."

Baby Giraffe said, "People put things [in the Temple], and then they burn it so that they can send [those things and what they represent] off, so they can maybe release whatever it is they need to release." During a Temple visit, Lorax placed a picture and a

vial of their wife's ashes in the Temple to help process and release loss. Later, Lorax found out that David Bowie's niece had brought ashes there too. For Bassoon, the Temple was not a place you can "casually go in. It is palpable and overwhelming. I feel like what I bring is so minuscule compared to what I leave with. It is hard for me to not become awash in other people's emotions when I go there." Bassoon felt that the Temple "wants to draw out of me things that I am not ready to release or aware that are there to be tugged on."

Lorax's first orchestra concert at the Temple "had such an impact" that they "go back to the Temple" multiple times each burn "to gift my music as an individual. People always come up, and I get a lot of hugs and thanks." Lorax said, "I play for my wife and for all the people I have lost," but those people at the Temple "appreciate it as well. That is when I started understanding what the Temple is about." Sharkie, during individual performances at the Temple, created emotion with improvisation of long notes, drones, and "vibration kind of notes." Lorax found that musicking at the Temple, particularly individual and Black Rock Philharmonic performances, helped healing from the grief of their wife dying. "Music has healed me, and I think it helps other people heal as well, even people who are not musicians." The participants felt that the Temple was a place of healing. The words of the participants addressed the healing aspect of the Temple as a setting, the Black Rock Philharmonic's performance there, and two of the individual participants performing as individuals there. Their words are consistent with Zagar's *psychological influence* subcategory of *emotions*.

Breaking Down Inhibitions. Other transformations involved breaking down inhibitions. Maestro has, on-playa, become more open and social. The inhibition to speak to someone because you do not know, or forgot, their name was weakened by the openness of burners to each other on-playa. Lorax said Burning Man "brings out the best in people, it breaks down barriers, it breaks down inhibitions. Lorax felt that the playa also provides an opportunity for people to get into flow in their areas of expertise, to elevate their impact by sharing that expertise with burners who may be transformed by it. "We can just let go and be that person for a few days out of the year," and share expertise or talent freely. The words of the two participants are consistent with Zager's *psychological influence* subcategory of *flexibility* as well as Yudkin's *transformation* category of *expression of true self*.

Degree and Time of Transformation. Lorax found that transformation is not instantaneous. "Some of the people who come for the first time may be hesitant to open themselves up to other people. It takes a while for some people to break down their inhibitions." Sharkie acknowledged being personally transformed but also limited its extent. "I am not as embroiled in it as others would be." Then the very next words were, "It has changed my life." Bassoon experienced "aha moments" at Burning Man and commented "We have all had them." Bassoon's transformation gave permission to be themself, and that transformation is still evolving. Bassoon described the ongoing transformation as "gradual seismic shifts in what people believe is possible for humanity, like little kids."

Manifesting Transformation in the Default World. Baby Giraffe searched for a community music ensemble to join in the default world after being transformed by musicking at Burning Man. Baby Giraffe was also "trying to understand how I can use the 10 principles in my own life," particularly, *Leaving No Trace* and *Gifting.* Baby Giraffe's transformation could easily be titled *caring*, which became part of the persona on-playa and in the default world. "I want to lift people up. I want to be positive to other people who may be stressed out or struggling."

Lorax had not played the cello "with a group in 30 years." Lorax said that after going to Burning Man "to play with an orchestra one time, suddenly I am addicted to music again. Definitely, Burning Man was the stimulus that caused me to" bring "music back into my life." Lorax's experiences at Burning Man randomly gifting music while biking around the city inspired the same behavior in the default world, where Lorax is planning to busk in the city plaza.

Sharkie carried the musical sound improvisations at the Temple and as an Ambient Drummer into the default world. Sharkie improvised in an echoing canyon on a recent camping trip as well as in pandemic playing. "That is the expression I am trying to get when I play at the Temple. I am trying to get that kind of connection to people. It is a gift" to them.

Bassoon said that performing with the Black Rock Philharmonic was musically transforming, allowing more personal openness. "It has been really freeing. It is hard to find freedom in a very technical instrument. Usually, you must have a group to keep playing. It has been engaging for me to find that freedom within [the BRP] community"

and to find a group to perform with in the default world.

Summary

Zager (2023) and Yudkin et al. (2022) studied transformation at Burning Man. Their factors and language are consistent with the lived experiences of the five participants in this study. All five participants felt that they had transformative experiences at Burning Man, with the following factors:

- The *Environmental Setting* subsection is an example of Zager's *psychological influence* subcategory of *coping with challenges*.
- The *Community and Connections* subsection is an example of Zager's *social influences* category and Yudkin's *transformation* category of *social connection with the community*.
- The *Looking Inward* subsection is consistent with Zager's *psychological influence* subcategories of *flexibility* and *emotions*, and with Yudkin's *transformation* category of *perceiving something new in others or myself*.
- The *Healing* subsection can be thought of as Zagar's *psychological influence* subcategory of *emotions*.
- The *Breaking Down Inhibitions* subsection is an example of Zager's *psychological influence* subcategory of *flexibility* as well as Yudkin's *transformation* category of *expression of true self*.

Three of the participants (Lorax, Sharkie, and Bassoon) discussed the timing of their transformations as being gradual and still evolving. Baby Giraffe, Lorax, Sharkie, and Bassoon reported that they had manifested these transformations in the default world

in various ways. For some of them, their musicking in the default world increased or added a new dimension to their performance. For others, their persona transformed, with elements of the 10 Principles being incorporated into their daily lives.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In this chapter, I summarize collective effervescence at Burning Man, particularly by musicking, in terms of the interaction ritual terminology of Collins (2004). Then, I revisit the phenomenon through the lens of music education, seeking elements of Burning Man culture that could facilitate collective effervescence in music education. Finally, I discuss the limitations of this study and ideas for future research.

Creation of Collective Effervescence by Musicking and Burning Man Culture

The phenomenon of collective effervescence during the 2019 *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* by the Black Rock Philharmonic was a quintessential example of an interaction ritual as defined by Collins (2004) and shown in Figure 4 in Chapter 6. The organization of the Burning Man event created a *group assembly* with a *barrier to outsiders*. The Black Rock Philharmonic leadership created a *common event* that was open to anyone at Burning Man.

Exhibiting three of Burning Man's 10 Principles, *Immediacy, Participation,* and *Radical Self-expression,* the audience changed from passive to active musicking participants, with passionate singing that overpowered the amplified orchestra, along with joyous and exuberant dancing that intensified the *shared mood* and *mutual focus of attention*. The audience behavior amplified the orchestra's *feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment*. *Collective effervescence* was triggered by at least three *transient emotional stimuli*: the cymbal crashes of *Krash*, the *Guy-in-White* spontaneously dancing, and the conductor's *head-banging* toward the audience.

The resulting *collective effervescence* was physically felt as *individual emotional*

energy by the orchestra musicians and the audience members, which was manifested during the performance by crying, goosebumps, and chills that ran down the spine, and afterwards by hugging. These created a strong sense of *group solidarity*, consistent with E. Turner's (2012) *communitas*, with audience and orchestra members having a strong memory of the experience. The *emotional energy* of those memories became stored in gifted items from the orchestra (pendants, shirts, patches, hats, pencils, pictures, videos, and Facebook posts) as forms of *symbols of social relationships*. The song became an iconic memory, similar to a *standard of morality*, with *righteous anger for violations* when some participants see people not singing along with the song when it plays as background music in the default world.

Combined with an active musicking audience, collective effervescence moments during live music performances became life changing and transformational for some participants. Adding to the group solidarity and communitas discussion, the emotional energy experienced by the individuals bonded people into a deep community present in the culture of Burning Man. The transformational musicking moment found in the *Bohemian Rhapsody* performance can also be found in other live and DJ performances in music theme camps, *Center Camp*, temporary venues in deep playa, and at the Temple and the Man, along with moving venues of sound-focused art cars. For each individual, musicking and other interaction rituals at Burning Man were a conglomeration of experiences that could merge with their identities and potentially transform them in V. Turner's (1969/2007) reaggregation that occurs after the liminality of the Burning Man event week.

Burning Man's culture was a strong ingredient interwoven through a succession of interaction rituals found on-playa. The construct of Burning Man, including the 10 Principles, opened people up to have deep experiences. Interaction rituals found on-playa included thousands of people seeking playful interactive experiences, art cars, and interactive art installations. The combined interaction ritual chains of burners throughout the Burning Man event week created magical collective experiences at multiple times and locations, culminating in the community-wide rituals of the Man Burn and Temple Burn. Reflecting on this description of Burning Man, the 10 Principles are apt, with individuals experiencing *Immediacy, Participation, Radical Self-expression,* and *Radical Self-reliance*; the Burning Man organization facilitating *Radical Inclusion* and *Decommodification*; and the collective group's culture encouraging *Gifting, Communal Effort, Civic Responsibility,* and *Leaving No Trace*.

Extension to Community College Music Education and Community Ensembles

According to St John (2020), "Burning Man is animated by the Ten Principles, the replicable and mutable DNA of Burning Man" (p. 294). There are many similarities of Burning Man ensembles to default world ensembles. The major differences of Black Rock Philharmonic performances at Burning Man to music education ensembles are because the culture of Burning Man changes the normal relationships among the musicians, director and the audience. In this section, I explore those differences and consider how music education ensembles could embrace aspects of the Burning Man culture that have created collective effervescence moments during Black Rock Philharmonic performances.

The Burning Man connection to the interaction ritual theory of Collins (2014) is consistent with the study by Schippers and Bartleet (2013) of community music in Australia, discussed in Chapter Two. Specifically, of the seven factors from Schippers and Bartleet study that I identified in the Community Music subsection of Chapter Two as applicable to this study, Burning Man culture is pertinent to four:

- Active involvement open to all
- Flexible relationship between the audience and performers
- Nurturing a sense of group/individual identity
- Commitment to inclusive pedagogies ranging from formal to informal

Although the physical setting in Burning Man cannot be duplicated in music education ensembles, many of the elements of Burning Man culture, which are pertinent to the four Schippers and Bartleet factors, address the mental frame of mind of the participants. Those Burning Man culture elements are options for music educators to consider as ways of creating a shared mood and mutual focus of attention. In turn, those conditions can facilitate transient emotional stimuli and feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment, which can result in collective effervescence.

To facilitate the discussion of the applicability of this study's findings to music education, I considered the eight themes in Chapter Five, the four factors of Schippers and Bartleet (2013) that are applicable to this study, and Collins' (2014) factors for interaction rituals. I chose five subject areas to encompass those aspects of the participants' lived experiences. Those subject areas are:

- Hospitality

- Group Solidarity and Communitas
- Symbols of Social Relationship
- Playfulness
- Planned and Spontaneous Moments

Hospitality

In live performances, on-playa or in music education, everyone is experiencing the same sensory stimulants, with each individual processing the sensory stimulus in their own way. That concept of collective experience is used in multiple genres of music. Gabriel et al. (2019) said that the sense of collective effervescence is a way that connections are felt in large groups. Páez et al. (2015) found that collective gatherings strengthened individual and group identity along with increasing self-esteem, efficacy, and positive social beliefs.

Auditioning and part assignments at Burning Man can differ from those in the default world. For the Black Rock Philharmonic, auditions were not required, musicians often chose their part assignment, and their performance and rehearsal attendance could vary with no adverse consequences. In the words of Higgins (2007, 2012), the Black Rock Philharmonic welcomed new members with conditional hospitality, with the condition of attending one of the two rehearsals being less demanding than for most default world ensembles.

Conditional hospitality could be applied more widely in a community college music education and community ensemble setting to create an atmosphere more conducive to collective effervescence. For example, ensemble members could provide

more input on which parts they are assigned. Another aspect of conditional hospitality could be allowing community members to join ensembles with a looser commitment (concert cycle instead of semesters or quarters). Community members could be held to a less stringent attendance policy than degree-students, allowing more flexibility for community members work and home lives. Even missing a concert could be allowed, prioritizing their continued participation in the ensemble over concert performances. This unconventional prioritization is an example of two Burning Man principles: *Radical Inclusion* and *Participation.*

All the participants interviewed felt that their individual and Black Rock Philharmonic performances were a form of *Gifting* (another Burning Man principle), consistent with Yudkin et al. (2022) concluding that gift economies are more connected to the community than commodified economies. Reframing musical performances as a gift to the community increases the connections to others and is a form of hospitality. Higgins (2007) said that a community music ensemble is better described by hospitality than by community.

Group Solidarity and Communitas

Some aspects of Burning Man culture have facilitated connections among musicians and also among the larger group that includes audience members. These connections can result in group solidarity and communitas. If these aspects of Burning Man culture could be applied in music education ensembles, collective effervescence might be more easily attained. Musicians and audience members are more open at Burning Man than in most default world ensembles. Interactions are easier to initiate, and

friendships are formed more quickly and deeply. The bonds formed with fellow musicians in the Black Rock Philharmonic are strong because they shared powerful collective effervescence experiences. The result was a state of communitas, in which a sense of community and community solidarity were found in persons who shared a liminal state together (E. Turner, 2012; V. Turner, 1969/2007; V. Turner, 1974). Communitas is an outcome of group solidarity after an interaction ritual that reaches collective effervescence (Collins, 2014). Black Rock Philharmonic performances, along with individual musicking, were consistent with the findings of Goodrich (2013), who found that participants were motivated by community engagement.

Applying Burning Man's *Gifting* principle to the community college or community ensemble settings could be implemented by performing outside of traditional concerts, facilitating a deeper connection to their community. Volunteering their music for events with area non-profit organizations is one way to achieve the deeper sense of community that is found with communitas. Festivals and events that are not focused on music also offer great opportunities to gift music to organizations.

Three other Burning Man principles are also implemented by group culture, which feeds back and forth with group solidarity and communitas. These principles are *Communal Effort, Civic Responsibility,* and *Leaving No Trace*. Ensembles could apply these principles to their rehearsal rooms, schools, and places they perform thus creating a tradition of service by MOOPing their areas after each rehearsal and performances. They could further apply this by volunteering as an ensemble for clean-up events at their school or community. Having different groups of ensemble members being in charge of

set up, tear down, promotion, and decoration could be other ways of involvement that can create a deeper sense of *group solidarity* within the ensemble.

Symbols of Social Relationship

Playa artifacts are *social relationship symbols* which are important because they are infused with *emotional energy* and the *group solidarity* that came from interaction rituals (Collins, 2014). When brought into the default world, playa artifacts and playa wear become an opportunity for burners to explain their experiences at Burning Man. The default world conversation could stem from something as small as a sticker on a water bottle, which reminds the burner of the emotional energy that is stored in it. Donning playa wear in the default world can bring back memories and emotional energy along with being an invitation to interact with others. Collins (2014) said that "how these symbols are used after the event determines if [the emotional energy] is kept alive within them or not" (Collins, 2014, p. 302).

Music education ensemble directors could use stickers, clothing, water bottles, and other artifacts to commemorate a successful performance, event, ensemble or academic year. These *social relationship symbols* can preserve individual emotional energy from the experiences. Unified clothing, costuming, and accessories could encourage playfulness and can become an invitation to interact. Those *symbols of social relationship* facilitate creating positive conditions for the next interaction ritual in the chain, which could be the next concert or the next school year. Artifacts provided by the organization to the members implement the Burning Man principle of *radical inclusion*.

Playfulness

For V. Turner (1988), play can be a window into people's culture that reveals how they work and what they value. DeNora (2013a) viewed play as a way to negotiate social worlds. Henricks (2006) suggested that play can symbolize deep connection to other people. St John (2008b) stated that the *vibe* of Burning Man is for the participants to shed the symbols of their default culture and enter into playful relations with other burners. Play can be ludic (spontaneous) due to the openness of Burning Man culture, and Black Rock Philharmonic musicians are more playful at Burning Man than in the default world, expressing themselves in the very open, anything-goes, type of atmosphere.

Music education ensemble directors can encourage playfulness within the constraints of school norms. The openness, freedom to express oneself, and playfulness of Burning Man could be applied in a limited fashion in music education ensembles. It would be a balance of increased potential for collective effervescence with maintaining discipline and social acceptability in the ensemble's setting. For example, a holiday concert attire could be themed with members wearing *ugly Christmas sweaters* or over the top clothing accessories which could include antlers or LED lights. I applied this concept to my community college Wind Symphony where one student asked during an ominous part of a song selection, could "Darth Vader walk out on stage" as a musical joke, and I responded "Absolutely." Choreography, ensemble vocal call backs, and vocal percussion by the ensemble members or the audience members are other elements that could be added to making a typical concert more playful, like a choreographed, Vegas showroom show. The goal is to create the elements of an Interaction Ritual, potentially

culminating in moments of collective effervescence. Three of Burning Man's principles categorized in this dissertation as oriented to the individual apply to these ideas, namely, *Immediacy*, *Participation*, and *Radical Self-expression.*

Planned and Spontaneous Moments

In Stige's (2016) study of a cultural festival, participation was integrated in rituals of interaction, creating room for adventurous participation and eccentric participation in settings that normally would be limited to the typical conventional participation. Bowditch (2010) said that Burning Man participants, in their state of liminality, actively engage in activities that they normally would not do in the default world. Embracing unplanned elements is consistent with Small's (1998) concept of musicking, in which the value is not with the musical object but is made up of the various smaller interactions. According to Clupper (2007b), "Liberating performance of the kind that is practiced at Burning Man permits participants to transgress, play and thereby explore themselves and the culture more fully" (p. 238). At Burning Man, performers are encouraged to be carefree and open. Their behavioral expectations are less rigid which can result in flow (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 2014).

Black Rock Philharmonic performances are consistent with findings of those authors, influenced by the principles of *Immediacy*, *Participation*, and *Radical Self-expression*. Their performances include planned adventurous participation (such as Maestro's headbanging as while conducting) and spontaneous moments (such as the cymbal crash energy and the Guy-in-White). During the 2019 *Folly* performance, the *Mayan Warrior* contingent in the audience was not familiar with the normal cultural

behavior patterns of a classical music concert audience. Their spontaneous uninhibited behavior, including singing and dancing, was a transient stimulus that resulted in rhythmic entrainment and contributed to collective effervescence.

The Black Rock Philharmonic further changed their planned moments in 2024 by combining electronic dance music (EDM) with the orchestra. Embracing planned eccentric moments and spontaneous moments in musical performances at Burning Man, along with *Immediacy*, *Participation*, and *Radical Self-expression*, have the potential to create collective effervescence moments, which are sometimes called "playa magic."

In community college and community ensembles, planning to take music performances to places outside the usual ensemble-performance cultural norms could possibly set the stage for more spontaneous elements, such as the audience shifting from passive to active participation. When a default world ensemble director relaxes rules and preconceived notions, (such as by adding playfulness, *Immediacy*, *Participation, and Radical Self-expression*), they can create an opportunity for people to rediscover classical music. For example, the ensemble could organize and produce a Flash Mob. Using ensemble members as actors to create a Flash Mob could inspire them to think about what else they could encounter in an uncontrolled setting and potentially use them as inspiration, similar to improvisational theater. Ingredients that could become invitations for people to actively participate with the ensemble include choreography, clapping, and props such as egg shakers, kazoos, and singing.

Summary

This study ties together Burning Man's 10 principles, the community music factors taken from Schippers and Bartleet (2013), and the five subject areas that emerged in this study. These three lists can inform potential opportunities to create interaction ritual chains in community college music education and community ensembles. Burning Man's 10 principles, as applied to music ensembles, are categorized into three groups. The first group would be implemented by the ensemble management (*Radical Inclusion* and *Decommodification*), the second group would be enabled by the collective culture of the ensemble (*Gifting, Communal Effort, Civic Responsibility,* and *Leaving No Trace*), and the third group would be experienced by individual ensemble and audience members (*Immediacy, Participation, Radical Self-expression,* and *Radical Self-reliance*). The four community music factors (Schippers and Bartleet, 2013) that were identified in Chapter Two as being pertinent to this study are active involvement open to all, flexible relationship between the audience and performers, nurturing a sense of group/individual identity, and commitment to inclusive pedagogies ranging from formal to informal. From these two lists and the data collected and analyzed in this study, five subject areas emerged (hospitality, group solidarity and communitas, symbols of social relationships, playfulness, and planned and spontaneous moments). This section provided concrete examples in each of the five subject areas. Those ideas have the potential to facilitate interaction ritual chains in community college music education and community ensembles.

Conclusion

I conducted three interviews with each of the five participants, using three focus areas: the 2019 *Folly* performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody,* the 2020 virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, and the culture of Burning Man along with the persistence of the effects of those performances over the next three years. The interviews addressed my first two research questions about Burning Man culture and musicking facilitating collective effervescence. My third research question about preparation by the director and musicians was addressed by the interaction ritual chain lens in which outcomes of successful interaction rituals are the basis of the preparation of subsequent rituals.

From the three general narratives of the three (five-participant) sets of interviews, eight themes emerged. I used the data from the eight themes to create a general description of the phenomenon of *creating collective effervescence through musicking at Burning Man*, using the structures of ritual theory (V. Turner, 1969/2007) and interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2014). The emotional energy from the *Folly* performance carried over to the Temple performance the next day, the virtual encore performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* during the pandemic, and live encore performances at Burning Man in 2022 and 2023, as part of a multi-year interaction ritual chain. The interaction rituals were influenced by Burning Man's 10 Principles which St John (2020) called the DNA of the culture of Burning Man. Examining the five participants' lived experiences for aspects of Burning Man's culture that could be extended to music education, I identified five potential subject areas: hospitality, group solidarity and communitas, symbols of

social relationship, playfulness, and planned and spontaneous moments.

Limitations

The unique setting of Burning Man for this study limits the applicability of the findings. Data collection was limited to the lived experiences of five members of a single community ensemble and focused on the collective effervescence phenomenon for one song at a single performance. The data collection extended to performances of the ensemble in three subsequent years and the persistence of the collective effervescence outcomes over that time. Further research investigating collective effervescence by musicking would be needed to generalize this study to a larger population of musicians at Burning Man or in community ensembles.

Future Research

The lived experiences of the five members of the Black Rock Ensemble and their experiences of musicking and collective effervescence show that the community ensembles are thriving at Burning Man and offer a fruitful area of research for community college music education and community ensembles. Current festival research focuses on transformation and electronic dance music (EDM) music culture. In this study, I showed that one community ensemble at Burning Man, the Black Rock Philharmonic, was thriving, with a full week of musicking, communitas, and instances of collective effervescence of both the ensemble members and the ever-growing audiences. Therefore, that ensemble, as well as other playa community ensembles, such as the Playa Pops, Playa Choir, Burning Band, and the Processional Band, are potential settings for additional study of how Burning Man ensemble practices can inspire communitas and

collective effervescence in community college music education and community ensembles. For example, a case study of these ensembles contrasting the similarities and differences with traditional music education ensembles could bring new insights about how Burning Man community music ensembles can create playfulness, communitas, and playa magic into default world community-based music ensembles.

In this study, I focused on extension to community college and community ensembles. The constraints of K–12 music education would limit some of the examples identified for community college and community ensembles. Additional research could identify ideas from this study that would be appropriate for K–12 music education.

I described in this study how musicking at Burning Man changed the musical identities of three ensemble members (Lorax, Baby Giraffe, and Bassoon) in the default world, resulting in them to come back to musicking later in life. A case study of Burning Man music ensemble members could explore musical identities further to find elements from Burning Man culture that aided in facilitating their transformations of musical identities. Insights from such a study could provide community music ensemble leaders with ideas to aid in recruiting new ensemble members along with retention of current members.

Playa Magic

Playa magic is interwoven within the fabric of the culture of Burning Man, and it can occur when the participants have a mind frame of *Immediacy*, *Participation*, *Radical Self-expression*, and *Gifting*. Playa magic allows musicians to engage with the community around them and to reach deeper into their artistic identities, which often

cannot be fully expressed in community college music education and community ensembles due to family and work obligations as well as cultural norms. When people actively seek to connect with their community, framed in acts of service, they may be able to express their authentic artistic identities more deeply and more passionately. In turn, that artistic expression can facilitate a collective experience, potentially even collective effervescence, charging themselves and the community around them with energy. Once a music education ensemble gets a taste of these collective moments, they may seek more of them, which could deepen their sense of community and cause them to more deeply embrace their artistic identities.

I applied *playa magic* in the default world by creating a “pop up” roaming ukulele ensemble in the community of Mt. Shasta, CA. The ensemble members rewrote the lyrics to jazz standards to reflect new-age spirituality as parodies that reflected the town's unique history. Those lyrics were printed in a “crystalline hymnal” so passers-by could sing them as the ensemble played the familiar melodies on their ukuleles. Armed with kazoos and purple and silver sparkly caps, the ensemble transformed into 5th-dimensional beings as they performed. The ensemble members enjoyed being playful and engaging, as did the passers-by. *Playa magic* was happening on the city streets along with a deeper sense of community through communitas.

Burning Man is fully integrated in my personal music identity through many transformative moments of collective effervescence by musicking in Black Rock City. My personality is more playful now, and I encourage my students and ensemble members to think outside of the box, to be more playful, and to connect more deeply with each

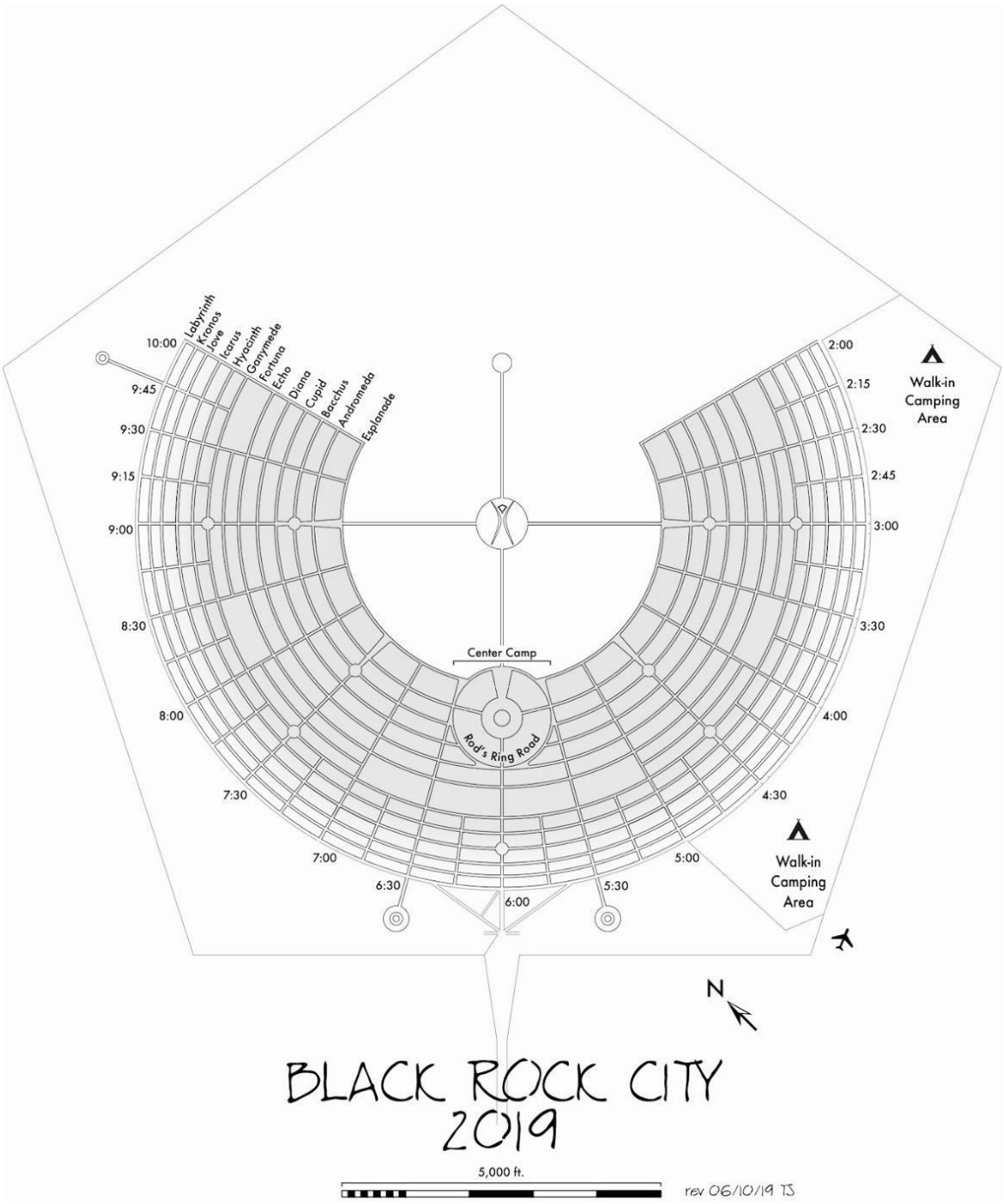
other. My business card is an imaginative and creative sticker with my title being *Magical Musical Sherpa Shaman*. These cards, along with kazoos and playful clothing (from the playa), mimic the playa artifacts that I collected at Burning Man. Just as my collection of playa artifacts rekindles my emotional energy and Burning Man group solidarity, these default world artifacts have the potential for my students and the larger community to rekindle emotional energy and group solidarity from their experiences in my ensembles and concerts. Creating that same playful energy has bound me tighter to my default world community of musicians and students. That bond encourages me to share more *playa magic* moments and inspires me to create more collective effervescence moments with my default world ensembles.

Appendix A: 2019 Black Rock City Plan

The layout of Black Rock City is similar each year. Figure 5 shows the layout in 2019 (Burning Man Project, 2024j). The pentagonal shape of the figure was the trash fence that separated the general access Black Rock Desert from the region reserved for Burning Man by government permit. Black Rock City was laid out like a clock face with the Man at the center, the Temple at 12 o'clock (about a half-mile from the Man), and Center Camp at 6 o'clock. The open region not allocated to streets was called the open playa, and the part of the open playa beyond the Man was called deep playa.

The main street of the city, the Esplanade, stretched in an arc from 2 o'clock to 10 o'clock. The city was 13 streets deep (outward from the Esplanade, with the streets named differently each year, but in alphabetical order). The arc-streets were connected by radial streets, named for their clock position). Thus, giving someone an address like 3:30 and Echo was enough for them to find the block the camp is on without resorting to a map.

Figure 5. 2019 Black Rock City Plan



Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview 1: Burning Man Origin Story and 2019 Experience

- I began Interview 1 by eliciting the interviewee's Burning Man origin story, how they began participating in Burning Man:
    - How long have you been going to Burning Man?
    - What brought you to Burning Man?
    - When did you start performing music at Burning Man?
    - What led you to join the Black Rock Philharmonic?
- Next, the interviewer and interviewee watched, together, a YouTube video of the 2019 Black Rock Philharmonic performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the *Folly* art installation. Then, I asked the interviewee:
    - Please describe your own personal experience of the performance.
    - Did you observe anything about the physical and emotional states of other ensemble members during the event?
    - Did you feel a connection with the other ensemble members during the event? If so, please elaborate.
    - Did you observe anything about the physical and emotional states of audience members during the event?
    - Did you feel a connection with the audience during the event? If so, please elaborate.
    - Expand on any other songs from the same performance that were impactful with you and why.

    - Were there other BRP performances at Burning Man 2019 that were impactful for you and why?
- During Interview 1, I asked the ensemble director additional questions pertaining to planning and communication with ensemble members:
    - What elements did you pre-plan for interaction with other Burners during the 2019 Burning Man week and specifically for the *Folly* performance? Depending on the interviewee's answer, follow-up questions could have involved programming, props, playfulness, and interaction.
    - How do you keep connected with ensemble members involved and connected pre and post Burning Man?
    - I plan to interview four ensemble members who participated in the 2019 Folly performance and (preferably) also participated in the 2020 virtual performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody.* Do you have any recommendations of who might be good interview candidates?
- I ended Interview 1 with the following request for the interviewee to prepare for Interview 2:
    - Before the next interview, I would like you to gather any playa gifts, pictures or videos (personal or online) that you look at to remember past musical experiences on playa or to get you excited for your following year of musicking at Burning Man. I would also like you to think back to your past memorable Burning Man experiences in which music was involved. Our second interview will begin with you describing the story behind those

musicking playa gifts and memories.

Interview 2: Burning Man Musicking Artifacts (Playa Gifts) and 2020 Virtual Performance

- The second interview began by asking the interviewee about the artifacts and memories that they gathered after the first interview. I asked them to describe the artifact and how it was gifted to them, or to describe the memory. Questions like the following elicited their lived experiences associated with the artifacts and memories.
    - Where were you?
    - What were you doing?
    - Who else was there?
    - What happened?
    - How did you feel?
    - Why is it important to you?
- The interviewee and the interviewer then watched, together, a recording of the 2020 Black Rock Philharmonic virtual performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody.* Questions like the following elicited their lived experience of this encore performance in which there was no live audience and in which the ensemble members were not co-located and were creating tracks to be mixed together for the final performance recording:
    - Does watching this performance bring you back to the 2019 performances of the piece? If yes, how?

    - Describe what it was like creating this performance during the COVID pandemic.
    - How did you prepare for this performance? Was it the same or different than your usual Burning Man preparation?
    - Did you do any other activities during the pandemic year to try to fill the gap of not being able to go to Black Rock City in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic? If so, please elaborate.
- I asked the ensemble director additional questions pertaining to the origin of the virtual performance and preparation for it:
    - Why was it important to reprise the 2019 performance of *Bohemian Rhapsody* during the COVID pandemic?
    - How was this preparation different? What elements were meant to create community for the orchestra? What elements were for the audience/burners?
- I concluded Interview 2 with the following request for the participant to prepare for Interview 3:
    - Our final interview will focus on the time between the 2019 and 2020 performances and the present time. Please wear clothes from the playa because we will begin with me role-playing a random burner meeting you on playa.

Interview 3: Has Musicking at Burning Man Changed the Interviewee as a Musician on and off the Playa?

- As in the previous interviews, I had preplanned questions for Interview 3 that related to the interview focus:
    - Is the Black Rock Philharmonic different from a default world community orchestra? If yes, please elaborate.
    - Has performing music at Burning Man changed your identity as a musician on and off the playa? If yes, please elaborate. If so, was there a specific experience or performance that facilitated that change?
- I asked the ensemble director additional questions to contrast planning for post-pandemic performances with the 2019 live and 2020 virtual performances:
    - Please contrast your preparation for the 2022 and 2023 Black Rock Symphony performances at Burning Man compared to your preparations for the 2019 performances and the 2020 virtual performance.
    - Do you separately plan for connectedness for the orchestra and the audience or do you think of them as a whole?
    - When you are planning now for your performances, is the sense of community in your mind for the orchestra and the audience? Are these separated in your mind?
- I continued preplanned questions for all five participants. These questions addressed Burning Man culture and the depth of their feelings about musicking and Burning Man:

- Do you ever share your stories of performing at Burning Man with others? If yes, how does it make you feel when you recall them and tell others about the memories?
- Does the culture of Burning Man facilitate transformational experiences (or other descriptive words the interviewee uses)? If yes, in what way and to what extent?
- Does musicking at Burning Man facilitate collective effervescence (or other descriptive words the interviewee uses)? If yes, in what way and to what extent?

Preplanned Follow-up Questions

- The interviews were structured to explore, in more depth, the pertinent experiences of the participants. The use of three sequential interviews allowed both the researcher and the participants to react to information revealed in an earlier interview. The time duration of each interview was able to extend if appropriate to explore emerging information. Nevertheless, I had prepared three generic follow-up questions:
  - What made the experience impactful?
  - Does the interviewee feel that others were also sharing the experience and the feelings about it?
  - Does the experience still live within the interviewee in the present?

**Appendix C: Letter of Invitation to Participate (Email) **

Dear _____:

You are being invited to participate in a research study that will be conducted as part of my doctoral studies in Music Education at Boston University. The purpose of my research study is to understand collective effervescence created through musicking at Burning Man. I am asking you to take part in this study because you have lived experience musicking at Burning Man.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed about your lived experiences musicking at Burning Man, as well as experiences in preparation for Burning Man and decompressing after Burning Man. I will conceal your identity in my dissertation by using pseudonyms (fake names), but I note that the description of your lived experiences could possibly be enough for other Burners to recognize your identity.

If you are in agreement to participate, I am asking that you check the appropriate boxes and then sign the attached letter. You may return the signed letter to me by snail mail, or by text or email with attached picture of the signed letter. If you decline to participate, I request you notify me of that decision by text or email.

Thank you for consideration of the opportunity to participate in this research study.

Best regards,

David F. Blink
Doctoral Candidate, Boston University
236 [redacted]
3371

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Protocol Title: Creating Collective Effervescence Through Musicking at Burning Man: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: David F. Blink
Description of Study Population: Burning Man musicking participants
Version Date: November 7, 2023

To: _____

Re: Informed Consent Form for Research Study

Invitation to Participate

You are being invited to participate in a research study that will be conducted as part of my doctoral studies in Music Education at Boston University. The purpose of my research study is to understand collective effervescence created through musicking at Burning Man. I am asking you to take part in this study because you have lived experience musicking at Burning Man.

Participants who take part in this research study will be asked to participate in an individual or small-group interview about their lived experience in musicking at Burning Man. The interview will be conducted in person or remotely using Zoom or similar applications. The interview is nominally an hour long although it could last longer if appropriate. Some participants may be asked to participate in one or more follow-up interviews. If appropriate, I may also ask you to provide letters, videos, or other artifacts that you identify in the interview and that could aid the research study.

There are no risks involved when taking part in this research study.

Introduction

Please read this form carefully. The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about taking part in a research study. If you have any questions about the research or any portion of this form, please ask me. Taking part in this research study is up to you. If you decide to take part in this research study and accept the conditions

outlined, I ask you to check the relevant boxes and sign page 3 of this form. You may keep a copy of the signed form.

What should I know about a research study?

Participation in research is voluntary, which means that it is something for which you volunteer. It is your choice to participate in the study, or not to participate. If you choose to participate now, you may change your mind and stop participating later.

How long will I take part in this research study?

I expect that you will be in this research study for one or more short periods during an approximate three-month time frame. During this time, I will ask you to participate in an individual or small-group interview that will be conducted in person or remotely using Zoom or similar applications. The interview is nominally one-hour long although it could last longer if appropriate. Some participants may be asked to participate in one or more follow-up interviews. Each interview will be recorded and transcribed, and I will ask you to review the transcript of your interview for accuracy and to provide you an opportunity to provide additional information that your review may bring to mind.

If you do not wish to be audio or video recorded during the interview, I will take notes by hand. Recordings are solely for the purpose of this study and will not be made public.

Loss of Confidentiality

I will protect your privacy by using pseudonyms (fake names), and your information will not be shared with anyone other than my editor and the Boston University professors supervising my dissertation. Your information will be stored in a password-protected computer. I note that the information you provide could reveal clues about your identity such that you would be recognized by others familiar with your role at Burning Man.

Will I get paid for taking part in this research study?

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

What will it cost me to take part in this research study?

There are no costs to you for taking part in this research study.

Sincerely,

David F. Blink
Doctoral Candidate, *Boston University*
[redacted]

CONSENT FORM

I consent to the use of unidentified quotes obtained during the study in the dissemination of this research.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to let the researcher make copies of any documents or artifacts I provide him. If used in his dissertation, the researcher will redact any information directly identifying you or others by name.

☐ YES ☐ NO

I agree to participate in the following.

☐ INTERVIEWS

I agree to be (check all that apply).

☐ Video-Recorded ☐ Audio-Recorded ☐ Neither audio nor video-recorded

Statement of Consent

I have read the information in this consent form and have had the nature of the study explained to me. I have been given the chance to ask questions, my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in the study.

SIGNATURE

_____

Name of Study Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Study Participant Date

I have explained the research to the research participant and answered all their questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the participant.

_____

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix E: Research With Human Subjects Determination Form

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Protocol #: 5857X

RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS DETERMINATION FORM

Instructions: Please complete and submit this form via email to IRB@bu.edu along with any supporting documentation, such as a grant or contract supporting the project,

Date: 12/7/2020

Project Title: Creating Collective Effervescence through Musicking at Burning Man: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological study.

Principal Investigator: PI - David Blink, Faculty Supervisor - Tawnya Smith, Co-Faculty Supervisor - Michael Christopher Palmer

PI Email: [redacted] **PI Phone #:** [redacted]

Department/School: Boston University College of Fine Arts - Music

Project Funding Source: Principal Investigator

2. **Please provide a brief description of the project**: *Please be sure to include how you will be collecting data, how many participants you will enroll, and the location of the research.*

Active or passive participation in musicking can create, explore, and celebrate relationships (Small, 1999). Relationships, including those experienced through lifelong musicking, can enhance wellbeing (DeNora, 2000, 2013a, 2013b) and health, with "personal, skill, and social/cultural benefits" (Jutras, 2006, 2011). Music students and adult amateur musicians have long struggled to stay involved in musicking in their years after learning an instrument (Mantie & Tucker, 2008). For some, this happens after high school when jobs, families, and college take priority to music participation (Evans et al., 2013). What can we do as educators and facilitators to encourage lifelong participation in the arts?

Burning Man (BM) is an annual week-long festival held on a dry lake bed (playa) in the Nevada desert. This festival creates a temporary city of 80,000 people called Black Rock City (Burning Man Project, 2017). Musicking is embedded in many BM cultural rituals and is a constant component of everyday life at Black Rock City, (i.e., much of the liminality at BM can be viewed through the lens of musicking). In participating in and directing music ensembles at BM, I have observed that these combinations of skilled and infrequent musicians often result in the phenomenon of collective effervescence (Collins, 2004). Collective effervescence extends the individual experience of liminality to a group. According to Collins (2004), collective effervescence can result from a mutual focus of attention and a shared mood, with feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment building the group's mood. If collective effervescence is achieved, the group experiences solidarity, the individuals experience emotional energy, and social relationship symbols are created. The study of community musicking and collective effervescence at BM may yield insights that could be used to devise strategies for engaging community ensemble members, resulting in enhanced recruitment and retention.

The purpose of this study is to use a hermeneutic phenomenological method (Heidegger, 1962) to understand collective effervescence in five community musical ensembles at BM. Lived experiences of the ensemble directors and musicians in the preparation, liminal, and reaggregation phases (Turner, 1969; Turner, 2012; Van Gennep, 1960) of their BM musical performances could provide insight into how to create collective effervescence in community music ensembles. My research questions are the following:

- How does musicking at Burning Man facilitate collective effervescence?
- How does the culture of Burning Man facilitate collective effervescence?
- How do ensemble directors create the framework for collective effervescence?

By collection and analysis of sequential sets of data (Peoples, 2020), I will use the hermeneutic circle (or spiral) to sequentially build understanding of lived experiences of collective effervescence through musicking at BM. I will conduct online, semi-structured, individual and focus group interviews with BM organizers, leaders of five music ensembles, and selected ensemble members. The study will also use extant data in the form of historical Burning Man Census Data, personal journals, and participant artifacts from the 2019 Burning Man event. Permission to use the Census Data has been granted because I am a census volunteer and have completed their data-use waiver form. Written permission will be obtained from the individuals owning the personal journals and participant artifacts through consent forms.

Three sequential sets of interview data will be collected. Set 1 will be interviews of co-researchers who are a convenience sample from the PI's past lived experience at BM. Set 1 interviews will engage 12 leaders of the BM organization and musical ensembles or activities. Set 2 will be interviews of a snowball sample of members of the five BM ensembles (with members identified by, and questions influenced by, the Set 1 interviews). Set 3 will be follow-up interviews with a selection of the Set 1 co-researchers to obtain their reactions to the data collected in Set 1.

2. The project is a systematic investigation ☒ Yes ☐ No

Check if 'Yes'

X	The project will attempt to answer research questions (e.g. includes a hypothesis, research methods such as randomization, comparison of techniques/groups)
X	The project is methodologically driven (information collected is organized/consistent, guided by data, actual experiences or clinical results)
X	Conclusions will be drawn from the results

3. The project is designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge☐ Yes ☒ No

Check if 'Yes'

☐	Results will contribute to a theoretical framework of established knowledge
☐	Results are expected to be generalized to a larger population beyond the site of data collection and in some circumstances, the population being studied
☐	Results are intended to be replicated in other settings

4. The project involves 'human subjects' X Yes☐ No

Check if 'Yes'

X	The subjects of the research are currently alive

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

Protocol #: 5857X

X	The information to be collected is about the subjects (e.g. personal information about the individuals, not about products, organizations, systems, etc.)
☐	Information/biospecimens will be collected by an intervention or interaction with the subjects AND the Investigator will use, study or analyze the info/biospecimens
☐	The Investigator obtains, uses, studies, analyzes or generates identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens.

If you have answered 'Yes' to all of the questions in 2, 3 & 4, you likely need IRB review/approval.

IRB USE ONLY:

× Does not meet the definition of 'research' under 45 CFR 46.102(l)

☐ Does not meet the definition of 'human subjects' under 45 CFR 46.102(e)

☐ Requires more information to make a determination.
If yes, describe here: Click or tap here to enter text.

☐ Requires IRB Review. Investigator should complete the following IRB Application:
☐ Exemption Application ☐ Expedited and Full Board Review Application

12/23/2020

Analyst/Reviewer Signature — **Date of Determination** (Date)

45 CFR 45.102(l)*
(l) *Research* means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities that meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program that is considered research for other purposes. For example, some demonstration and service programs may include research activities. For purposes of this part, the following activities are deemed **not** to be research:

(1) Scholarly and journalistic activities (*e.g.,* oral history, journalism, biography, literary criticism, legal research, and historical scholarship), including the collection and use of information, that focus directly on the specific individuals about whom the information is collected.
(2) Public health surveillance activities, including the collection and testing of information or biospecimens, conducted, supported, requested, ordered, required, or authorized by a public health authority. Such activities are limited to those necessary to allow a public health authority to identify, monitor, assess, or investigate potential public health signals, onsets of disease outbreaks, or conditions of public health importance (including trends, signals, risk factors, patterns in diseases, or increases in injuries from using consumer products). Such activities include those associated with providing timely situational awareness and priority setting during the course of an event or crisis that threatens public health (including natural or man-made disasters).
(3) Collection and analysis of information, biospecimens, or records by or for a criminal justice agency for activities authorized by law or court order solely for criminal justice or criminal investigative purposes.
(4) Authorized operational activities (as determined by each agency) in support of intelligence, homeland security, defense, or other national security missions.

45 CFR 46.102(e)**
(e)(1) *Human subject* means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research:

(i) Obtains information or biospecimens through intervention or interaction with the individual, and uses, studies, or analyzes the information or biospecimens; or
(ii) Obtains, uses, studies, analyzes, or generates identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens.

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