“It Is More Than Just about Music”: Lifelong Learning, Social Interaction and Connection

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Abstract
For older people, participating in leisure activities enhances their sense of social, emotional, mental, spiritual and psychological wellbeing. This article reports on a case study that situated itself across two southern hemisphere countries – Australia and South Africa – and with two ensembles, namely: an instrumental ensemble in Melbourne (all musical readers); and a vocal ensemble in Clarens (all non-readers of music). The authors drew on Seligman’s elements of positive emotion, engagement, relationships and meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA) to explore the ensemble members’ engagement as “serious leisure and the wider community”. Using qualitative case study methodology, they employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as an organising tool to analyse and code their questionnaires and interview data. The findings are presented under three overarching themes, namely: meeting for serious leisure; music learning; and connecting with the wider community. While music engagement for older adults is an achievement in itself, sharing it with the wider community is considered most significant for the participants. Discussing two ensembles is a limitation in itself, therefore generalisations to other ensembles cannot be made. The case study data was written in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown period in both countries. Further research is planned across both countries to explore any implications the lockdown has had on the two groups once they are permitted to recommence rehearsals.

Keywords: community music; positive emotion, engagement, relationships and meaning, and accomplishment; music learning; serious leisure; wellbeing

Introduction

Australia and South Africa are considered "neighbours in the South" (Mersham 2000); both countries have a long colonial past, influenced by Western thought, and classical music, privileging a select few (North, Hargreaves and Hargreaves 2004). Over the years, in both countries, music styles and genres have changed, making music more accessible and advantageous to be performed "in community and for community" (Howell, Higgins and Bartleet 2017). In these countries, like many others around the globe, community music embraces a range of genres, catering for people with a range of music abilities and taking the form of recreational, cultural or religious activities in both formal and informal music settings (Music Australia 2020; Veblen 2007). Research has shown the need for people to make music and share music for music's sake in community (Bartleet and Higgins 2018; Lee, Davidson and Krause 2016; Page-Shipp, Joseph and Van Niekerk 2018).

Through social engagement, a "cultural synergy" is developed over a period of time in communal music making settings (Veblen 2007, 6). In this way, a "sense of belonging" emerges that offers participants feelings of satisfaction and achievement (Amit 2002; Kokotsaki and Hallam 2007), and a sense of belonging and identity (Bartolome 2018; Creech et al. 2014; Veblen 2016). Many older adults, moving from mid-life to retirement, participate in community activities such as music (Mao et al. 2016). Through singing and/or playing instruments in a social context, positive feelings are fostered which contribute to their wellbeing (Lamont Murray and Wright-Bevans 2018).

The positive psychologist Seligman (2012) identified five key wellbeing elements, namely, positive emotion, engagement, relationships and meaning, and accomplishment, and used the mnemonic PERMA to explain how long-term wellbeing may be achieved. "Positive emotions" are subjective; they refer to a person's feelings of happiness and contentment. "Engagement" signifies a person's association of being immersed and engaged in the activities and is measured subjectively. "Positive relationships" include a person being content with their social interaction, integration and connection. "Meaning" suggests a person's life is valued by self and others. "Accomplishment" offers fulfilment and achievement (Goodman et al. 2018; Kern et al. 2015; Lee, Krause and Davidson 2017; Seligman 2012).

The study asked two research questions:

1. Why do older people (50+) come together to share in music making and practice?

2. How does music contribute to wellbeing?

Author 1 (Dawn) works in Australia and Author 2 (René) in South Africa. Our phenomenological qualitative case study explored the lived experience of two groups, each comprising six members, namely: "The Potted Palms" instrumental ensemble in Melbourne and "The Clarens Vintage" vocal ensemble in Clarens. To answer the research questions we employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) as an organising framework to analyse and code questionnaire and interview data. Whilst we did not focus on measuring PERMA and subjective wellbeing, like Goodman et al. (2017), we drew on some elements of Seligman's PERMA model of wellbeing to explore the participants' personal and group fulfilment (Lasiello et al. 2017; SAHMRI 2020; Seligman 2012). Their research adds to the wider body of knowledge that contributes to wellbeing support where older people undertake musical activities as leisure.

Theoretical Perspectives

In the article, the third age is referred to as older adults between the ages of 50–75 (Schuller and Watson 2009). Several studies point out that good health and wellbeing, found in active living, contributes to quality of life. Through active participation in music making, social, intellectual, emotional and health benefits are attained (Creech et al. 2013; Creech et al. 2014; Hays and Minichiello 2005; Taylor and Hallam 2008). A recent study by Williams et al. (2019) found participation in arts-based groups offered positive outcomes for adults with chronic mental illness. The study also identified a notable improvement in the wellbeing of older adults. Whilst it was beyond the scope of the current study to explore these aspects, we agree that participating in serious leisure activities promotes a sense of group identity and a balanced lifestyle (Hunt 2004; Stebbins 1992).

Leisure

Communal music making as leisure for older adults can be understood as a musical and social act, one that considers self-development and achievement where meaning is derived from communal music making (Hallam 2012, 36; Williams et al. 2019, 6). As early as 1982, Stebbins coined the terms "serious leisure" and "casual leisure". According to Stebbins (1997, 18), casual leisure "can be defined as immediately, intrinsically rewarding, [a] relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it". He later argued, it is "too fleeting, mundane, and commonplace to form a distinctive identity" (Stebbins 2009, 627).

Casual leisure does not require the same obligation and persistence as serious leisure does (Cheng, Stebbins and Packer 2017). Serious leisure is a regular pastime that is "substantial, interesting and fulfilling in nature" (Stebbins 2017, xii).

Serious leisure is "the systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist, or volunteer core activity" that people find stimulating (Stebbins 2011, 239). The leisure activity centres on "acquiring and expressing a combination of its special skills, knowledge, and experience" (Stebbins 2011, 239). Serious leisure pursuits require perseverance where feelings of accomplishment and belonging generate positive feelings and enjoyment (Stebbins 2011). Adams, Leibbrandt and Moon (2011, 683–684) found many studies that examined "associations between social or leisure activity participation and aspects of wellbeing". They identified many older adults who reported feelings of positive wellbeing when they had "high participation in social and leisure activities".

Wellbeing

The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of illness" (WHO cited in MacDonald, Kreutz and Mitchell 2012, 6). While there is no standard definition as to what constitutes wellbeing, it is accepted that wellbeing contributes positively to "self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-determination, resilience, quality of life, mood enhancement, positive mental health, life satisfaction, and worthwhileness" (Mansfield, Daykin and Kay 2020, 1). The term "wellbeing" has been considered in relation to the "objective conditions that allow individuals to thrive" (Daykin et al. 2017, x). It is synonymously associated with "'happiness,' 'quality of life,' or 'life satisfaction'" (Forgeard et al. 2011, 81). Therefore, feeling happy and feeling valued contribute to personal growth and fulfilment (Mansfield, Daykin and Kay 2020). The experiences, feelings and attitudes of what people do, and how they think, impact on their sense of wellbeing.

As the study related to older adults, the element of happiness contributes positively to their sense of wellbeing as outlined in Seligman's PERMA model of wellbeing (see SAHMRI 2020). The PERMA model integrates components of hedonia and eudaimonia, where experience of positive and negative emotions can occur concurrently (Watson and Tellegen 1985). Although Seligman (2102) emphasises engagement, which is an important component of successful aging, Butler and Kern (2016) point out that more work is needed to measure engagement with

older people beyond activity participation. They argue that through participation, relationships are forged, contributing to social and emotional wellbeing. Connecting with something other than oneself creates meaning and a sense of belonging (Seligman 2011). Therefore, meeting with like-minded people offers a sense of purpose, leaving one feeling valued and satisfied – all of which are influential determinants of wellbeing (Forgeard et al. 2011). We agree with Lee, Krause and Davidson (2017) that while some elements of the model can function on their own to engender wellbeing, they often work in combination which may produce wellbeing.

Wellbeing, a multi-dimensional construct like music, relates to the social determinants of both physical and mental health (Hallam and MacDonald 2008). For older adults, participating in active music making offers them a sense of purpose, independence and control in their lives, and impacts positively on their sense of wellbeing. The social affirmation for individuals and groups is valued and celebrated by members within the group and in the wider community (Creech et al. 2013). Converging research shows that for senior adults, group participation and group identification are founded on group-based psychological resources that bind people together to improve their overall health and wellbeing (Dingle et al. 2013; Williams et al. 2019). Social identification develops the "possible musical selves" of older adults through a "sense of belonging", whereas group identity and group experience through music participation entail "(1) a sense of purpose in life, (2) a sense of autonomy in goal pursuit, and (3) a sense of social affirmation, i.e. validation as a valued and worthwhile member of a social network" (Creech et al. 2013, 2). Therefore, any communal music activity has the "potential to enhance wellbeing and quality of life, as well as through promoting enjoyment, personal development, empowerment, autonomy and competence" (Dingle et al. 2019, 1).

Music Learning

Community music programmes often place emphasis on lifelong learning. The "social and personal wellbeing of all participants is as important as their musical learning (if not more important)" (Veblen 2016, 2). In a collaborative musical activity, the learning experience includes different levels of learning which may include learning new skills and developing new knowledge. While older people may take longer to learn according to Boulton-Lewis and Tam (2018), Delahaye and Ehrich (2008) found that their wealth of experience supports their learning compared to younger people. The authors further point out that older people are able to manage their learning as they have "time to think and reflect on the learning activity" (Delahaye and Ehrich 2008, 2). Therefore, working collaboratively as learners and musicians,

they may develop valuable social skills as teamwork is key. For the older learners, sharing musical ideas or knowledge with the group, and offering "mutual support and encouragement" serve a common goal (Kokotsaki and Hallam 2007, 99). They are motivated to aim towards higher performance standards as a group. This in turn creates improved levels of understanding, learning and accomplishment for members within the group.

The learning experience in older adults is mostly problem centred; they experience satisfaction in their learning through perseverance (Gardiner et al. 1996; Selph and Bugos 2014). Developing new knowledge, learning new skills and improving in music making as a creative art, are seen as positive and motivating experiences for older adults (Coffman 2002). Through interactive learning, members of the group co-learn, and may compare themselves to performance levels of the rest of the group. In this way group satisfaction is enhanced where the interactive learning process provides unique learning and performing experiences for the group. Their self-esteem is improved and they develop a sense of self-confidence and responsibility towards the group (Kokotsaki and Hallam 2007, 99 and 102).

Research Sites

The Instrumental Ensemble in Australia

"The Potted Palms" instrumental ensemble was formed in September 2008 in Melbourne as a group of semi-professional and amateur musicians (Bartleet and Higgins 2018). At the time of the interview (2018), six of the three players were original members of the ensemble (three retired and three working). As "salon instrumental players", all members are skilled musicians from different professions (music specialist, dentist, engineer, website developer, language teacher and primary school teacher). Over the years, the ensemble has included strings, wind, voice and piano. They meet once a month at the home of a member to rehearse for about two hours, scheduling more rehearsals when they perform at various events (garden parties, tea dances, fundraising summer and winter concerts). Members of the ensemble play for enjoyment, and also to maintain their performance standard. With no official choral conductor, the pianist, a retired music specialist, arranges and teaches the pieces and acts as director/leader. They sight read many pieces that cover a range of genres and styles. The ensemble consists of one male and five females. As community musicians, the ensemble can be classified as non-paid musicians (Higgins 2012).

The Vocal Ensemble in South Africa

"The Clarens Vintage" vocal ensemble was established by René (the choral conductor) in 2013 in Clarens. The ensemble consists of six males with well-balanced blended voices, all auditioned by the choral conductor. They perform frequently at church services, Christmas events, old age homes, and for communal fundraising at functions. Three of the six vocalists are original members of the ensemble, four are retired. The group are amateur singers and non-music readers. Their occupations included architect, retail manager, financial manager, professor, bank manager and dry cleaner owner. Rehearsals take place once a week for three hours on Tuesday evenings, with members travelling from neighbouring towns to participate. The choral conductor prepares the schedules and arranges music over a wide range of styles and genres. Voice coaching and development of technical skills forms an integrated part of each rehearsal. As non-readers, alternative methods of learning and teaching notation have been introduced in order to attain a high standard of performance and understanding of the music performed. The ensemble are non-paid community musicians (Derrida 2000; Garofalo, Allen and Snyder 2020).

Methodology

We employed a qualitative case study as the approach to understand and illuminate reasons why older people across two sites come together to play and sing as community musicians (Creswell and Poth 2016). Case study research is exploratory in nature (Yin 2014). It provides data that is factual and interpretative (Mariano 2001), covering a wide range of topics and objectives (Flyvbjerg 2006; Harrison et al. 2017).

Data Collection

With ethical approval granted for the projects at our respective universities, Dawn invited the instrumental ensemble in Melbourne to participate in her wider study, "Promoting relationships through sound in formal and informal settings", by emailing them the Plain Language Statement which explained the study. René invited the vocal ensemble in Clarens to participate in her wider study, "Towards wellbeing and quality of life", where she explored how singing in a small ensemble contributes to regional life. Participation in the separate projects was voluntary.

Members of both ensembles consented to the questionnaire and interview process. Questionnaires were employed as a cost-effective way to collect data (Strange, Forest and

Oakey 2003). Both researchers included closed-ended questions focused on age group, gender and profession (see tables 1 and 2). They also used open-ended questions, in order for the participants to offer "an honest personal comment" using their own words (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000, 255). Although the data collection was conducted independently across the two sites, the five elements of the PERMA model of wellbeing (Seligman 2012; 2018) influenced how the questions were structured. The questionnaire was emailed to the instrumental group in April 2018. Open-ended questions by Dawn included:

- Why did you join the ensemble?
- What do you gain from the group?
- Has playing in a group affected your quality of life and sense of wellbeing?

These questions resonated with notions of positive emotion, engagement, relationships and meaning and accomplishment. Similarly, René included questions that advanced elements of PERMA. These included:

- Why do you come together to make music?
- Do you enjoy taking part in group activities?
- As non-music readers, what have you learnt?

The vocal group completed their questionnaire via email and participated in the interviews through Zoom in March 2020 as required by the level five lockdown rules imposed in South Africa by the COVID-19 pandemic.

After observing a rehearsal in May 2018, Dawn interviewed the instrumental ensemble as a focus group. The interview was conversational in nature, lasting approximately one hour. It was audio-recorded for transcription purposes with the permission of the interviewees. The interview questions were an extension of the PERMA based elements of the questionnaire and included:

- What does it mean for you to perform as musicians?
- What does it mean for you to play as older musicians?
- What opportunities does playing together offer the community?

René, as conductor of the ensemble, distanced herself as researcher when undertaking the vocalists' interviews which took place in March 2020 through Zoom.

Similar to Dawn, the interviews were conversational. Questions posed considered the PERMA model and included:

- You have been part of the vocal ensemble for many years – why?
- How has your participation in the group impacted on your quality of life?
- As a non-reader of music, how were you able to read and understand music notation?
- What impact did performing for the community have on you as an individual, and as a group?

Each interview took approximately one hour.

Data Analysis

IPA was employed as an organising framework to analyse and code the data (Smith 2017; Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009). IPA focuses on phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiographic studies as a way to explore the participants' lived experiences (Kirkham, Smith and Havsteen-Franklin 2015). We agree that "[p]eople are physical and psychological entities. They do things in the world, they reflect on what they do, and those actions have meaningful, existential consequences" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009, 34). While IPA is commonly used in analysing interview data, questionnaires have recently been implemented to provide an elaborated account of the phenomena (Joseph, Nethsinge and Cabedo-Mas 2019).

The data was discussed and analysed through email, telephone and Skype meetings (Joseph, Nethsinghe and Cabedo-Mas 2019). By reflecting on the participants' lived experiences, we examined and checked for shared meaning (Heath, Greenfield and Redwood 2015; Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009). The identified themes were translated into a narrative account moving from a "low-level interpretation of data to a highly detailed, interpretative and theoretical level" (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014, 13). While we considered our own as well as the respondents' views (Smith 2004), new insights were generated (Pietkiewicz and Smith 2014). We discuss three overarching themes that emerged from our respective sites (meeting for serious leisure, music learning, connecting with the wider community) using pseudonyms and direct quotations from our data (McLeod and Francis 2007). Some of the findings resonated strongly with aspects of the elements of PERMA.

Findings

The instrumental ensemble identified as semi-professional and amateur musicians. Three of the six members returned the questionnaire (Sue, Lyn, Rose), whereas all the members of the vocal ensemble responded to the questionnaire (Chris, George, Leon, Sampie, Dons, Bertus). All the instrumentalists were interviewed as a focus group (see Table 1 for their data).

Table 1: Instrumentalists' name, age group, gender and instrument

Name	**Age group (years)**	**Gender**	**Instrument**
Cheryl	Unknown	Female	Flute
Gavin	Unknown	Male	Violin 2
Lyn	60–69	Female	Cello 2
Marg	Unknown	Female	Violin 1
Rose	70–80	Female	Piano
Sue	50–59	Female	Cello 1

All the vocalists were interviewed individually (see Table 2 for their data).

Table 2: Vocalists' name, age group, gender and voice part

Name	**Age group (years)**	**Gender**	**Voice Part**
Bertus	80–85	Male	Baritone
Chris	50–59	Male	Tenor 2
Dons	70–79	Male	Tenor 1
George	60–69	Male	Bass
Leon	60–69	Male	Bass-baritone
Sampie	60–69	Male	Countertenor

Meeting for Serious Leisure

Both ensembles meet as serious musicians in that they persevere to overcome challenges, forming a group identity and enjoying group experience (Creech et al. 2013). The instrumental ensemble players meet to have a "connection" with like-minded people. They said that playing in the ensemble was through "invitation" and by "word of mouth". Sue, Rose and Marg were

original members, and Marg proudly pointed out that members "were head hunted" to join the group as proficient performers. This was different to the vocal ensemble as its members auditioned to join the group. George found the ensemble to be "an anchor in [his] life"; he felt "safe and accepted" in the group as it formed "an anchor for one's [his] identity" (Yair 1992, 259). The vocalists wanted to develop their "skills and ideas about singing" and wanted to feel a sense of accomplishment as non-readers of music.

Leon felt that he had "a responsibility towards the group" and singing together contributed to the ensemble working together – and Sampie agreed: "We rely on one another's voices." Commitment and creating a sense of belonging was central to the vocalists and instrumentalists. Practising at home before coming together for rehearsals was essential. Playing in the ensemble Lyn felt that she "developed self-confidence through performance with the support of the group"; it helped her solo cello sections. Gavin felt that "you learn a lot more and you hear more in a small intimate group". He also felt that his "timing improved on the violin". The participants were all committed to improving their skills and felt a sense of self-gratification that was enriching and rewarding (Lamont, Kennelly and Moyle 2014; Stebbins 1992). Marg, one of the original players in the instrumental ensemble, shared:

> Playing with the ensemble is a whole different level of music and going back to playing the classical music that I had trained in and where playing something that was actually challenging for me was to develop my skills again and then also to have opportunities to perform it makes me go back and practise and refine my skills again that I had lost.

Participating in the ensembles as a core activity promoted positive emotions and engagement for the participants (SAHMRI 2020). Sue the cellist said that while her "level of playing was manageable", she "enjoyed playing and performing with the group". Cheryl found that playing in the group meant she has a "lot to learn on the flute", while Gavin felt that in a small ensemble, "you also have solo parts, so you have to concentrate a lot more. You can hide in an orchestra". Overall, Marg believed the group "have gotten much braver with having a go at pieces" as they played a range of repertoire which the members selected. Likewise in the vocal ensemble, Leon felt "you do your part", while Dons confirmed that they "relied on one another's voice" as "the guys love good blending". Bertus felt that "the feedback from the community was rewarding". Chris in particular said "the choral conductor believed in our potential to become the best in ourselves, and that we were capable of more". This was similar to Rose, the unofficial

conductor, who was known to be “the gel that keeps the group together” as pianist accompanying the other instrumentalists.

As older musicians performing together, the members were given a sense of purpose; it added meaning to their lives (SAHMRI 2020). George felt that “working together for something that is greater than oneself is very satisfying”. Similarly, Rose found that “blossoming with other musicians” most rewarding as did Lyn, who felt that “getting along and being accepted” impacted on her “sense of achievement”. Feeling valued by the group creates a sense of belonging and gives meaning to the membership (Seligman 2012). Leon stressed having “enough respect and a sense of responsibility towards the guys is to recognise the importance of each one’s contribution”. The ensembles work well because the members respect the work ethic involved in planning, preparing and performing. They adopt a shared responsibility and commitment to their ensembles as a serious pursuit (Stebbins 1992; Veblen 2007). Meeting for serious leisure had positive implications for the members’ sense of health and wellbeing (Lamont, Murray and Wright-Bevans 2018). Common words used across the ensembles included “self-enrichment”, “joy”, happiness” and “pure fun”. Bertus, the oldest vocalist at 81, found that singing in the ensemble “takes away stress and energises me”, whereas Rose, the oldest instrumentalist (early 70s), felt that she “gets a buzz out of playing, it is just so satisfying and enjoyable”.

Music Learning

While the learning experiences across the two ensembles were very different, they both worked “towards their goals and achieved mastery over an endeavour and had the self-motivation to complete what we set out to do” (SAHMRI 2020, 10). Rose, a former specialist music teacher, led the instrumentalists. She cued in members, interpreted some of the technical intricacies of the pieces and fine-tuned their performance. The vocalists were led by the choral conductor who taught them how to read music and interpret the score. Heeding the teaching and learning directions from Rose and the choral conductor provided opportunities for the ensembles to enhance their musicianship and improve their intrinsic goals. The members “felt safe to learn and make mistakes” where learning took place “in a kind, safe and friendly place” which clearly promoted a sense of achievement and accomplishment.

Ongoing learning in adult life is a strong internal motivator to become involved in community music (Selph and Bugos 2014). The members of the instrumental ensemble reported that they

had enriched their performance ability. Cheryl found that her “sight-reading improved”; Gavin thought that his “timing improved”; and Sue said “my cello playing habits improved, I spent about 30 years not playing my cello at all”. In the vocal ensemble, the score was provided but the members learnt by rote from voice-recordings made by the choral conductor and shared through cellular phones. The members learnt how to make sense of the score. Sampie, for example, developed a unique visual presentation when learning songs. He wrote:

> The only way I am able to learn, is rewriting the words in wide spacing, and with the help of arrows pointing upwards or downwards indicating the melody line, as well as colouring the words and using dots and lines with which to specify the note values, I was able to understand and remember the melody and words

In this instance, his own interpretation of “lyric paper acts not only as a reminder of music, but also functions as a temporal cue, documenting repeats, pauses, and turn-taking between voice parts” (Mao et al. 2016, 2889). Chris felt that “learning in this way lifted you out of mediocrity”.

Through music learning and performance, the ensemble members formed positive relations with one another which impacted on their sense of wellbeing (SAHMRI 2020; Seligman 2012). Marg felt that “we are striving to make good music to improve the level of what we are playing and that element of striving is for better progress. But in a non-pressured way”. As vocalists, Chris and Dons felt that they are able to “appreciate and evaluate other choirs and ensembles and learn about blending the weight of each voice”. As community musicians across both ensembles, learning included “a rich mixture of oral, notational, experimental, conservative, experiential, spiritual, and/or analytical elements” (Veblen 2016, 3). Overall, the participants across both ensembles found that coming together as a group of older learners gave them a sense of fulfilment and achievement. It also created tension when ensemble members became “frustrated” about not getting something right. For example, in the vocal ensemble, learning music notation was a challenge and Dons was “irritated with continuous repetitions to improve word and notation errors”. When learning new pieces, members of the instrumental ensemble found some rhythms tricky. Rose said, “I have got an absolute fixation with rhythm” and helped when things were incorrect. Marg found that “in the last few years a number of us don’t have much time to practise but in the last few years we have felt like giving anything a go”. This mindset of “giving it a go” is typically Australian, and is similar to the South African equivalent

of "'n Boer maak 'n plan" (a farmer makes a plan), which develops positive feelings of wellbeing within the group to "keep going" in the words of Rose.

Connecting with the Wider Community

Members of both the instrumental and vocal ensembles felt the spirit of being together contributed much to their membership and shared love of making music. The notion of playing or singing together was central to both ensembles. Playing or singing on one's own can be isolating and lonely: performing and sharing music may be seen as a way to foster positive emotions, through engagement with the wider community (SAHMRI 2020). Lyn found that there was a special "synergy amongst the players" when playing "as a community of musicians". The vocalists all felt that singing for the community was "a service to the community". Bertus talked of connecting with the community through sound as a "very positive" experience and Dons pointed out that the local community was "proud of us as their own". This was similar to the instrumentalists where members commented that they are asked to "play at social functions and community things". Marg said, "most of our playing is community based, it is often through various churches or aged care places". Rose confirmed the ensemble also plays for other occasions including "a garden party and for charity". This was similar for the vocalists who sang at "Christmas and fundraiser events".

As serious musicians, the ensembles want to give of their best. Lyn felt it is "important to give back to the community"; playing to wider audiences "hopefully is an enriching experience for example for people in aged care places". Marg felt performing at such care places "is often entertainment for the elderly residents" This was similar to the vocal group as Sampie pointed out that they "make a very strong contribution towards the community" performing in old age homes. Dons felt that as a vocal group the ensemble "found a niche in the market" performing at community venues. Bertus felt "they [the community] love and appreciate us as a group"; as George confirmed, "we add a festive atmosphere to any event!". Singing is an important part of life in South Africa (Barrett 2007), and all members felt that singing provided "a service to the community". Sampie felt "an appreciation from the community for the many hours of hard work we put into a performance". This recognition positively contributes to performers' sense of wellbeing.

Performing in and for community offered the ensemble a sense of fulfilment and accomplishment. Bertus said, "feedback from the community, gave us a feeling of

achievement". Sue said, "the joy and response from people's faces is tremendous and this is my primary driving reason to perform for others". She added "people sing along … and some sway and move with the music without necessarily vocalising". Cheryl felt that including audience participation is central where they "sing along to favourite songs, they love it!" Marg found that "it makes a connection with what we perform". George felt that "performing in the indigenous African languages, whether in black or white communities, was accepted with great appreciation and compassion. Sharing our rich cultural heritage especially in our churches as part of our worship, is very special". As performers the ensembles felt a sense of belonging to and connecting with their wider socio-cultural context which shaped their communal identity as community musicians (Bartleet and Higgins 2018; Bartolome 2018; Hallam 2012).

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study explored two ensembles, and asked two research questions: (1) "Why do older people (50+) come together to share in music making and practice?"; and (2) "How does music contribute to their wellbeing?" In answering these questions, and understanding the phenomena, we identified that the participants meet for serious leisure in pursuit of lifelong learning; they need social interaction and engagement; and they connect with the wider community through performance. The findings resonate with the PERMA model of wellbeing (see Table 3) in relation to what it means to "flourish" in life (Lee Davidson and Krause 2016). The study did not explore ill-being (depression, sadness, anxiety).

In both ensembles, the members sought music activities that contribute to quality of life (Creech et al. 2014; Hunt 2004; Taylor and Hallam 2008). By engaging actively in community ensembles, studies have shown that members have an improved sense of wellbeing that is uplifting (Hays and Minichiello 2005; Stebbins 2015). The participants had a sense of purpose which fostered a feeling of belonging as community musicians and they formed friendships over time as they spent hours learning, practising and performing together (Creech et al. 2013; Veblen 2007). René as choral conductor, and Rose as pianist, provided teaching strategies in a non-threatening environment that helped the members thrive (Delahaye and Ehrich 2008; Hallam et al. 2016). Further, the members felt that working through their pieces gave them a sense of achievement (SAHMRI 2020; Seligman 2012).

Table 3: The relationship between the PERMA model and the research findings

Findings – Motivation for music making in older adults	PERMA				
	Positive emotion (P)	Engagement (E)	Relation-ships (R)	Meaning (M)	Accomplish-ment (A)
1. Meeting for serious leisure (overcoming challenges, group identity, sense of belonging)	•	•	•	•	
2. Music learning (achieving mastery and knowledge, enrichment, upliftment)	•			•	•
3. Connecting with the wider community (shared love of making music, serving the community, appreciation)	•	•	•	•	

(Lee, Davidson and Krause 2016, 23)

The instrument ensemble met once a month, and rehearsed more frequently closer to concerts. They worked equally hard out of rehearsal time. As non-music readers, learning to read and interpret the music was a challenge. Nonetheless, they developed a wide repertoire including "vintage songs". Their determination to push forward, and to pursue new skills of music interpretation and repertoire as older adults was testing, yet a highlight (Coffman 2006). When performing at local community events they sang, for example, Sibelius's *Finlandia*, Mozart's *Laudate Dominum* (Praise the Lord), Molefe's *Mashiti Amen* (Let us say Amen), Newton's *Amazing Grace*, and the Neapolitan song *Santa Lucia*. The members felt that the audience enjoyed the Afrikaans song by Du Plessis, *Somerkersfees* (Christmas in summer), the most. Living in South Africa also meant the choir extended its repertoire to well-loved African songs such as Bokwe's Plea from Africa. In Australia, the instrumentalists found that the audience recognised and appreciated their playing which positively impacted on their and the audience's reactions. Dawn did not ask members whether they played indigenous Australian music (a

controversial area of discussion that is beyond the scope of the study). Rather, members proudly spoke of performing western music. Their repertoire included Handel's Water Music, Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake, Debussy's Golliwoggs Cakewalk, The Sound of Music Moon River, La Mer (the sea), and so forth. These pieces were recognised as "old favourites" by the audience.

The participants met for serious leisure as they transitioned from late midlife and older age (Mao et al. 2016). They met to broaden their music learning and felt validated performing for the wider community. The instrumental ensemble learnt new repertoire which did not necessarily culminate in a concert as they were generally invited to perform for community events. They mainly met to play "for fun" with "like-minded" people for "personal growth" as amateur and semi-professional community musicians. The vocal ensemble met as amateurs to "learn to sing" and "to share their love of music". Over time, they established their music identity and experienced "validation as [a] valued and worthwhile members" of the Eastern Free State choral community (Creech et al. 2013, 2). Both the instrumentalists and vocalists found that participative music making "enhance[s] older people's social, emotional and cognitive well-being" (Creech et al. 2013).

Finally, the study findings align with the growing body of literature demonstrating the benefits of maintaining positive relationships within the ensemble and the wider community (Taylor 2011). The findings also revealed that continued and active engagement with music as older adults have myriad benefits (Bartleet and Higgins 2018; MacDonald 2013). As all data are self-reported, future longitudinal research would need to include feedback from the audience to tease apart PERMA metrics which measure satisfaction with life-scale (Kern et al. 2015). Nevertheless, what emerged from our research was that perfection in performance was not the only driver of the ensembles. Rather, "satisfaction, achievement and commitment" were central to members (individually and collectively). Our sample was small; therefore, generalisations to other ensembles cannot be made.

The article was written in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown period when both ensembles stopped rehearsals and performances due to lockdown rules in Australia and South Africa. Once restrictions are lifted, members will once again meet for rehearsals in a shared space. This is something we will explore as a consequence of COVID-19 impacting on the members' music and social engagement. Virtual music communities certainly existed before COVID-19

(French 2017; Prior et al. 2017; Rofe, Murray and Parker 2017; Waldron 2009). They have played a significant role during the pandemic for many people across the globe (Kelsey-Sugg and Mackenzie 2020). Certainly, as musicians, researchers and authors during the pandemic, we found that music has contributed positively to our wellbeing, and we hope it will continue to connect, comfort and distract us during these uncertain times.

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