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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Dear readers,

It is a great pleasure and honour to present the new issue of the international scientific journal "Problems in Music Pedagogy".

The study by Mauro Karboni (Music Conservatory of Perugia, Italy) contributes to the understanding and enhance the individual characteristics of students with specific music learning disorders (SLD). Focusing on the specifics of musical thinking in SLD and various emerging cognitive conflicts, the author offers interesting insights into pedagogical reflection and the development of new learning approaches to music education practice with the aim of promoting the potential of personal growth of students with SLD.

A study by Kagari Shibazaki and Nigel Marshall from United Kingdom aimed to investigate how carers understand and interpret the responses of people to a range of musical activities. The results of the study suggested that informal musical experiences could potentially offer a range of benefits to care staff, as well as those experienced by residents, and that observation increased the level of observation skills and carers' confidence in making assessments of the relative level of well-being in individual residents.

The aim of the study by Kristina Blockytė-Naujokė from Klaipeda University (Lithuania) is to investigate the musical tradition of the Christmas period in Lithuania Minor, revealing its origins, structure, functions, and its relationship with the cultural and confessional context of the region. The author emphasized that modern music education offers sustainable ways to introduce the Christmas musical heritage of Little Lithuania [Minor] into modern practice by integrating the regional heritage into general educational programs. In this way, the musical tradition acquires an educational value, becoming a tool for learning experiences, building identity and understanding cultural diversity.

On behalf of editor-in-chief of the journal, I express my appreciation to the authors, Editorial Board, Editorial Staff and Council of Science of Daugavpils University for successful teamwork, perseverance and valuable support to the continuation of this periodical.

Editor-in-chief
Professor Jeļena Davidova

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MUSICAL THINKING IN SPECIFIC LEARNING DISORDERS: THE POTENTIAL BEFORE AND BEYOND DIFFICULTIES

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Abstract

Students with Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) face a range of complex challenges throughout their education, particularly in the context of music learning. In order to understand these difficulties, it is essential to develop a new awareness of what thinking in music entails. There are several conflicting aspects to resolve. For example, regarding the fluidity of musical thought during a performance, which is significantly faster when learned motor patterns, habits that do not require control or analysis, are involved. This study first addresses the issue of temporal organization in SLD. Musical memory as a form of cognitive anticipation is then addressed, also from a neuroscientific point of view. The primary focus of this critical overview concerns the specificity of musical thinking in SLD and the various emerging cognitive conflicts.

Keywords*: cognitive conflicts, dyslexia, musical thinking, special education, specific learning disorders*

Aims and Scope

This study does not propose a meta-analysis of the literature, but indeed a critical overview of it. The functioning of our mind has been the subject of extensive studies in the field of neuroscience particularly with regard to the musical experience in its cognitive aspects (Peretz, 2002; Peretz & Coltheart, 2003; Zatorre et al., 2007; Levitin & Tirovolas, 2009; Honing et al., 2015). The same attention has not been paid to the expressive and aesthetic aspects of musical communication (Schiavio, 2012; Malloch & Trevarthen, 2018; Gutierrez, 2019). Nonetheless, research conducted in the field of specific musical learning disorders offers interesting insights into pedagogical reflection and the development of new teaching approaches (Faßhauer et al., 2015; Elliot et al., 2015; Concina, 2019; Chęćka, 2023).

In this study we wish to highlight the learning and personal growth potential *inherent in music education practice*. In particular, we believe it is important to understand the specific challenges that people with SLD face in studying music, both at an amateur and academic level. We address the topic of thinking in music precisely in situations where linguistic processing seems to be particularly difficult. Finally, we seek to translate into methodological perspectives the various learning alternatives that research has confirmed to be not only possible but usefully practicable.

Theoretical Background

In traditional music pedagogy, aligned with the cognitive approach, the challenges that students with SLD present in their daily musical practice or reading are addressed primarily in terms of difficulties in organization and internal processing.

The theoretical paradigm is essentially mechanistic, with some nostalgia for behaviorism,

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and the conception of music is a question of language, grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. The problem, whatever it may be, is a student's issue, not intrinsic to the discipline and its musicological conception. This description, unfortunately, has been shared by most special music education methodologies of recent decades. Among these are those that integrate musical activities through the implementation of expressive corporeality, symbolic and figurative mediation, and, more generally, nonverbal communication.

Music education for students with SLD falls within a fundamentally rehabilitative framework, which seeks to correct learning gaps and defects. The activation techniques and stimuli employed correspond to inductive practices for organizing musical behaviors, adopting training programs based on the reiteration of pre-established sequences and patterns.

The various forms of expressive mediation, as facilitation tools related to musical learning difficulties, most often represent simplified models, temporary transpositions of meanings and more complex experiences.

When students with dyslexia or specific learning disabilities begin their musical education, whether within a curriculum or in any other learning environment, they first need to *develop a sense of time and the organization of the unfolding experience of sound*. In essence, it's necessary to *assimilate time*. Make it part of themselves and be part of its musical flow.

The continuous adaptation of our actions to the multiple changes required by a musical performance produces an integration of sensory information which, therefore, must be modulated in terms of cognitive and motor strategies. This is an essential condition for maintaining a sufficiently stable perceptual continuity of our awareness in the physical world and over time.

Even so, the implementation of music teaching with sensorimotor, tactile, auditory, and figurative activities implies a *diversified neurocognitive organization of temporal experiences*. This does not necessarily imply a specific functional hierarchy in the processing and organization of durations, in the perception of the experiential flow, and therefore of elapsed or expected time.

Although it is possible that a specific sensory input can influence the accuracy in defining and scanning durations, the organization of a temporal framework as a tool to support and encode our musical experiences does not essentially depend on a particular or single sensory modality (Grondin, 2003).

In a broader view of the *construction and organization of our experiences* in terms of judgment and processing of temporal intervals, active control involves the cerebellum and the basal ganglia in a widespread and differently specialized system that includes the prefrontal cortex and the supplementary motor area (Marinho et al., 2019).

The basal ganglia, in particular, are essential in circuits that are part of a neuronal system that includes the thalamus, cerebellum, and frontal lobes and consequently *regulate motor control together with cognitive functions* and, in general, in adaptive functions.

The fact remains that proposing an analysis of SLD in terms of organizational deficits and linguistic and lexical dysfunctions means once again describing musical learning disorders from a cognitive and functional perspective that does not convey the complexity of the problem in terms of personal growth and change.

Students with SLD actually exhibit a wide range of temporal dysfunctions: difficulties estimating time, tapping, identifying complex temporal patterns, and rapid and automatic naming. Broadly, they exhibit problems within processing speed, auditory temporal sensitivity, and visual motion detection (Overy et al., 2003; Stewart, 2006; Rogerio & Carrer, 2015).

Adequate time perception and accurate execution of a rhythm require effective motor timing and rapid processing. These are challenging activities and skills for people with dyslexia and/or ADHD, also due to imprecise visual processing and slow decoding processes in the occipital regions of the brain.

A study investigating music reading literacy and the fundamentals of piano performance in adult beginners revealed the development of learning-related neural changes over a three-month period. This is consistent with the acquisition of processes related to the *selection of spatial and structural properties*. Therefore, attention to SLD issues in music is beginning to consider the various problems as the result of disorders in the identified brain areas (superior parietal cortex and fusiform gyrus) (Stewart, 2006).

In a complementary sense, it is widely proven that literacy and musical learning are a fundamental support and stimulus in enhancing temporal processing and phonological awareness skills in both children and young adults with dyslexia (Flaugnacco et al., 2014; Flaugnacco et al., 2015).

More generally, educational and therapeutic support proposals would have a greater chance of success by focusing on increasing the information processed by the various brain areas involved. This cognitive integration, precisely, can be achieved through the implementation of musical learning processes (performance practice, reading, and creative processing) (Habib et al., 2016).

Playing a musical instrument stimulates the passage of information between the motor areas and the areas responsible for fine motor control. These areas are essential for the fluidity and precision of execution, and crucial for learning and performing sequential and complex tasks.

It is no coincidence that in individuals with dyslexia, both in childhood and adulthood, structural abnormalities in the neural connection between the motor cortical regions of the right and left hand have been detected. This suggests that dyslexia may also result from a form of inability to communicate between hemispheres (Welcome & Joanisse, 2014).

Several studies (Bonacina et al., 2015) conducted on readers with dyslexia demonstrate that by isolating the temporal component in tests and experimental trials, the difficulty disappears, and SLD subjects perform better than the control group. This leads us to consider the *involvement of temporal processing* as a foundation for dyslexia and, more generally, for the perception of linguistic structures, including in music.

Musical activity, furthermore, transmits visual, auditory, and motor information to a brain network that overlaps with the mirror neuron system. This calls for sharing and active, personal participation in musical experiences, which effectively involves the limbic system. In this sense, *producing meaningful emotional responses* increases the willingness to communicate and interact, also through increasing and maintaining motivation (Wan & Schlaug, 2010).

Shaping time is an essential step for cognitive development in general and, in particular, for a rewarding musical learning experience. This awareness is especially important for those who struggle with learning in everyday life. At this point, we believe it is evident that shaping temporal experience is less about the organization of cognitive structures and more about the result of an aesthetic perception of one's being in music.

In fact, temporal experience focuses on essential aspects of human activity: *existing in time* (as consciousness/self-awareness); *acting in time* (making choices and decisions); *anticipating time* (planning events and outcomes, defining goals); *remembering time* (memory as the construction and orientation between past, present, and future); *imagining and narrating time* (considering alternative scenarios and possibilities).

It's no coincidence that current research has broadened its scope to include

chronoesthesia, that is, the awareness of subjective time, as opposed to autonoetic consciousness and noetic consciousness. We refer, respectively, to *awareness of oneself in time* and *awareness of the world* in the broader sense. Added to this are studies on prospective memory, understood as the ability to plan activities or programs over time, maintaining attention on them until their actual execution or realization (Grondin, 2010).

Core Experiences in Music Cognition

The purpose of scientific research is not always to provide definitive and unequivocal answers. Often, its purpose is instead to open the door to new hypotheses and questions. In studies on the various challenges facing music education for individuals with SLD, some *essential preconditions* have gradually emerged. These should not be interpreted as operational solutions, but indeed as opportunities for pedagogical reflection and, therefore, foundations for inclusive planning.

A. *Taking Time to Know Music*

Our perception of the world is the *product of a continuous interaction* between intrinsic interpretative processes and extrinsic physical stimuli. The structuring of rhythmic forms organizes our understanding of time, while the perception of meter is in turn the product of an interpretation of rhythm, where the perception of a regular pulse stabilizes the sense of time and determines the possibility of organizing other events.

The connection between linguistic and non-linguistic rhythmic patterns relates to rhythmic production and timing rather than the sensorial or structural perception of groupings. Essentially, learning the rhythms of one's native language induces the tracking of rhythmic patterns and the *acquisition of implicit knowledge*. It is hypothesized that this may influence the creation of non-linguistic rhythmic patterns, such as in music (Iversen et al., 2008). This leads us to reflect on the role played by intrinsic interpretation in shaping the perceptual experience of rhythms and how cognitive processes mediate the influence of interpretation on perception.

In the metric interpretation of a rhythm, the most important fact is that the beat's position can be subjectively located at different points. A thorough study of this intentional and elective control could help establish a systemic model of musical perception as a flexible cognitive organization (Iversen et al., 2009).

When we play, alone or with others, it is essential to be in time, but so is taking the time to understand what is happening as it is happening. It may seem like a play on words, but time needs time to be fully experienced and understood. This is because time, long before being recognized as a physical and mathematical structure, is and remains for all of us the time of experience.

B. *Imagine and Organize Events Over Time*

The perceptual experience of rhythm as such refers to the organization of events in time, whereas the perception of meter involves feeling the beat of a rhythm, the regular pulsation that represents a temporal connection around which other events coordinate and take shape. In reality, it's an intrinsic interpretation of rhythm by the listener, who therefore interacts with the perception itself, decoding and transcoding the perceived event, also influencing it functionally and semantically.

In music, the position of the beat is generally induced by the presence of converging physical cues (accent, grouping, phrasing, melodic progression). In fact, the idea of pulsation is the result of a cognitive interpretation process that overlaps with sensory input (Iversen et al., 2009). It follows that a fundamental issue in the development of musical learning for individuals with SLD is precisely the ability to imagine and

organize sound events over time. This ability requires drawing on all the resources of our cognitive and sensory system.

C. *Goal Selection and Planning*

Creating and executing music in SLD situations can involve distinct difficulties precisely in anticipating schemes of ideation, production, and notational decoding, correlated with the expected form. This is because these are cross-functional executive functions in musical cognition. They are systemic mental processes that participate in the self-regulation and metacognition of behavior. These include goal selection, planning, monitoring, and the sequential production of any executive action and/or response present in common musical practices. In the learning context of a person with SLD, this is equivalent to asking them to see the forest as a whole when they already struggle to focus on the tree in front of them. From this perspective, studies on temporal organization and motor encoding and decoding processes can be essential and crucial.

D. *Discovering the Pulse and Rhythm*

In developmental dyslexia, a deficit in rhythm perception is a constant that persists into adulthood, highlighting problems in rhythmic synchronization with the syllabic patterns of speech. Specific learning disorders generally involve difficulties in interactive skills (reading, writing, arithmetic), and even in specific cases of dysgraphia or dyscalculia, deficits in the understanding and execution of rhythmic structures are similarly found.

Meter perception is considered a good predictor of text reading accuracy and word reading speed, while rhythm reproduction is more effective in predicting performance on phonological processing accuracy. Musical perception ability, however, involves more complex and specific sensory and cognitive mechanisms.

In fact, among the various problems present in educational practices in the curricular field, we find the difficulty in synchronising the beats with respect to a variable tempo, or in the instantaneous replication of a rhythm, as well as in perceiving and discriminating similarities and differences in rhythm and in general in the discrimination of time (Hande & Hegde, 2021).

The sense of pulse, the figurative construction of meter, and the articulation of rhythmic structures must therefore correspond to a discovery that is renewed and evolves with musical learning itself. It is a sensorial conquest that places the learner at the center of their own musical experience in terms of bodily and mental awareness.

E. *If Music Could Talk*

Children with speech and language disorders are significantly less sensitive to auditory controls for rhythmic timing, which is the rate at which the amplitude of a sound wave increases after its onset (amplitude envelope rise time), thus also affecting its duration. The time it takes for a sound's envelope to reach its maximum amplitude after an attack helps us perceive the onset of syllables and is essential for rhythmic articulation and speech intelligibility, not forgetting that timing problems also involve the learning of rhythm in terms of bodily, sensory, and motor experience.

In rhythmic tapping tests with respect to an external rhythm, synchronization is compromised in children with linguistic and verbal SLD, whereas the problem does not arise if the control condition requires an internally generated rhythm (Corriveau & Goswami, 2009).

In a well-known, frequently referenced educational program for dyslexic children (Overy, 2003), particular attention is given to rhythmic and temporal skills. Musical play activities offered over 15 weeks gradually helped advance phonological processing and spelling (but not specifically reading skills) from a basic to an advanced level.

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Understanding and identifying which specific neurocognitive variables converge in determining improvements in reading skills remains difficult, however it is clear that rhythm represents the experiential constant in synchronization processes and, in general in the interaction between musical and verbal dimensions (Bonacina et al., 2015).

F. *When Memory Becomes Anticipation*

According to philosopher Ernst Bloch (1985), different timelines can coexist in the social and intersubjective dimension, connecting the present with the past and the future, as perceived and conscious.

Things aren't much different in the interaction between the perception and cognition of sounds and music. What our auditory system can perceive, select, and organize, and then transfer to specific areas of the brain, is socially shared and inter-subjectively shared only in its potential state.

We may perceive the same sound material, but musical processing and cognitive organization vary greatly from individual to individual based on multiple factors. Experience and learning play an important role, but if neurocognitive issues are present, these will certainly have an even greater impact, and this is precisely what happens in SLD.

The fact that within a given population, there are individuals who demonstrate greater musical ability, at least compared to the average, is considered an established and indisputable fact. The problem is that it's far from easy to unambiguously define the specific brain functions associated with musical ability, especially when the term typically describes a particular sensitivity to music, both in terms of comprehension and production.

What research can do, concretely, is measure and compare the accuracy with which a subject, in an experimental setting, perceives sound stimuli, often in terms of minimal variations in pitch, intensity, rhythm and so on. Even when, for example, the processing latencies of a sound stimulus are objectively quantified, the effective speed of cognitive processing and the internal functions of short-term memory actually provide a qualitative measure of a subject's cognitive processing, and this only in some respects.

Several studies (Schiavio, 2012; Gallagher, 2023 etc.) attempt to provide an implicit explanation for this ambivalence between quantitative and qualitative data. They highlight the presence of differences in musicians' brain structures, suggesting practice-induced brain plasticity and thus a functional as well as structural distinction.

Professional musicians effectively exhibit increased gray matter volume in certain brain regions, such as the motor, visuospatial, and especially auditory regions. Visual memory is also better in those who practice music, due to the processes of musical literacy and reading, together with primary visual perception and somatosensory cognitive processing (Faßhauer et al., 2015).

Therefore, to the extent that remembering is not a simple retrieval of a previous experience brought back to the present, but rather a reconstruction of the timeline of events and the complex assembly of specific neural information, the difficulty of organizing personal experiences of pitch, intensity, rhythm, duration, timbre, and tonal memory in a coherent and "exact" way becomes even more evident for subjects with SLD.

G. *Musical Training and Cortical Synchronization*

The scientific community, contrary to popular belief, has widely accepted the improvement in cognitive function resulting from regular musical practice. Furthermore, a music education program also contributes to a substantial improvement in verbal learning and

memory performance, obviously compared to those who have not had the opportunity to benefit from such education.

Experimental evidence of the neural correlates implicated in improved memory performance emerges from an EEG study. The aim of this study was to investigate the interaction between musical preparation and brain activity during the encoding phase of verbal memory. In various tests, the experimental group showed a significant increase in EEG coherence in the Theta frequency band, positively associated with subsequent verbal memory performance (Cheung et al., 2017).

These results highlight, once again, how the cortical synchronization of the neural networks involved in the formation of verbal memory can be modulated and redefined through a structured program of musical teaching and learning.

It's clear that people with SLD, particularly those with language impairments, may exhibit problems with cortical synchronization, both in verbal and musical learning and memorization. However, it's equally clear that appropriately designed musical training can successfully enhance the cognitive development of each individual's learning potential.

H. *Auditory Working Memory*

Musicians demonstrate faster updating of working memory, i.e., shorter latency, and greater neural resources for auditory stimuli. They also demonstrate greater sensitivity in auditory discrimination and less demanding updating of auditory working memory. On the other hand, research on musical and linguistic processing has identified the existence of both separate and shared brain structures. In this sense, inconsistencies between musical and linguistic deficits have emerged in the analysis of individual cases. Moreover, amusia and aphasia often coexist.

A psycholinguistic and structural approach was instead considered in another study to analyse and verify the combined use of verisimilitude and simplicity as characteristics of linguistic and musical organization (Bod, 2002).

The studies (Gallagher, 2013, 2023; Elliot, 2015; Concina, 2019) demonstrate that when listening, people memorize language and music primarily through chunks of information. This involves identifying lexical elements, entire sentences, idiomatic expressions, and high-frequency regular phrases. This leads to a processing model, both linguistic and musical, based primarily on the recurrent use of previously perceived patterns. This opens the door to a multitude of questions and reflections, especially in terms of cognitive relevance.

Sometimes the difficulty in learning to speak is linked to a similar problem in processing the correct temporal order of sounds. This suggests the presence of a deficit in a brain system shared by musical and linguistic processes, such that it also affects working memory in sequencing the order of tones in a melody (Levitin, 1999).

Working from this perspective, Cognitive Musical Training (CMT) was developed, a multimodal program that simultaneously engages visual, auditory, and sensorimotor processing. This is designed to stimulate working memory capacity while enhancing auditory attention.

Musical activities and exercises encompass the various dimensions and components of music-making: pitch, duration, tempo, pulse, and rhythm. The range of objectives includes the development of perception and production processes, through sensory (visual and auditory) and motor components. Furthermore, an effort is made to activate transcoding processes from one modality to another (tapping time in sync with a musical sequence, percussively following the articulation of rhythmic notation, playing short melodies, error correction through peer tutoring, etc.). A piano keyboard is used for reinforcement given the sequential nature of the musical piece.

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Expected Forms and Anticipated Schemes

The perceptual experience of rhythm as such refers to the organization of events in time, whereas the perception of meter involves feeling the beat of a rhythm, the regular pulsation that represents a temporal connection around which other events coordinate and take shape. In reality, it's an intrinsic interpretation of rhythm by the listener, who therefore interacts with the perception itself, decoding and transcoding the perceived event, also influencing it functionally and semantically.

In music, the position of the beat generally seems to be induced by the presence of converging physical cues (accent, grouping, phrasing, melodic progression). In fact, the idea of pulsation is the conclusion of a cognitive interpretation process that overlaps with sensory input (Iversen et al., 2009).

It's clear that in musical experience, at any level, processes of musical expectation come into play that anticipate and define the objective quality of the event perceived, produced, or simply imagined. Musical expectation, however, can remain a generic and uncertain concept, in the absence of components that can define it more precisely.

The general concept of expectation is introduced in melody recognition in terms of attitude and mental organization that uses perceptual temporal reference systems as cognitive anchors (Jones, 1981, 1982).

The process occurs within musical patterns based on symmetry and regularity which, recalling prototypical forms of experience as models, influence the activation of expectations. In this sense, two distinct generative hypotheses are proposed:

- The first implies a *time-based attentional trajectory* in which the mental framework corresponds to a model of expectation understood in terms of *prototypical musical schematization*.
- In the second hypothesis, *expectations and related schemas* allow us, during the listening phase, to anticipate the notes that are functional to the *unfolding melodic flow*.

Notational references are focused on as elements of cognitive anchoring, that is, reference systems that prepare the processing of novelty or the unexpected.

People most often perceive a periodicity in musical rhythms, a pulse or beat, along with structured patterns of accentuation between the pulses, essentially a metrical structure.

The *sensation of pulse* actually consists of a series of regularly recurring and equivalent psychological events that arise as an *endogenous periodicity* in interaction with a musical rhythm (Large & Snyder, 2009).

Anticipation is a cognitive regulation process. Its effectiveness depends on the analysis and selection of information from memory, the predictive implementation of previous experience, and, ultimately, the ability to connect past, present, and future events in a continuous flow of experience. Its essential characteristic is to create a temporal advancement effect, eliminate uncertainty in the decision-making process, and thus determine the most complete and accurate forecast possible (Akhmetzyanova, 2016).

Predictive abilities contribute significantly to cognitive functioning across a diverse range of domains (motor control, perception, attention, language). Impaired predictive processing mechanisms in individuals with SLD may be associated with atypical development of the skills involved in various tasks, with specific deficits such as developmental dyslexia.

Error recognition in musical production therefore occurs at the motor and praxical, lexical and stylistic levels, thus in terms of cognitive analysis and analogical processing, all executive processes that in any case depend on memory resources. *Error identification*

involves a reflexive loop that focuses on the articulation and segmentation of musical phrasing and implements modifications and corrections *useful for the continuity of the musical flow*. This is similarly observed in the verbal linguistic field (de Jesus et al., 2020).

Thinking in Music and Cognitive Conflicts in SLD

It's clear that, to understand the variety and complexity of the difficulties individuals with SLD encounter in their curriculum of study and, more broadly, in learning music, it's essential to develop a different understanding of what thinking in music entails.

A first, seemingly conflicting, element intrinsic to thinking in music concerns the *fluidity of performance*, which is significantly faster when learned motor patterns, habits that don't require control or analysis, are involved. These processes are governed by long-term non-declarative (implicit) memory, including elements of motor procedural memory and priming effects, i.e., increases in the ease and speed of recognition by proceeding from one sound stimulus to the next. In short, a range of memory retrieval processes that manifest themselves in musical performances regardless of actual awareness on the part of the performer. Therefore, since analytical thinking is not predisposed to the retrieval of experiences encoded in long-term non-declarative memory, in the context of musical performance practices, excessive control and analysis can interfere and consequently disturb the fluidity of musical action and thought.

Essentially, in the *interaction between musical thought and performance* and/or creative action, analytical thought cannot keep pace with the complex flow of experiential data involved in musical thinking and which flows from the body in its creative and vital relationship with sound and music. Indeed, during musical performance, an *obsessive presence of verbal thought* can lead to memory lapses and interruptions, which are common situations and sensations for a music student with SLD and musical dyslexia (Chęćka, 2023).

Assuming the existence of a variety of processes inherent in thinking in music, the one just considered identifies an aspect with characteristics very different from music understood as *narrative thought*. Music, in this case, coincides with the action that prompts, develops, and guides sonic events (Levinson, 2015).

Being in music, instead, implies a profound engagement, simultaneously active and contemplative, a unique way of *focusing our consciousness on a flow of sounds*. Let's think of a sense-making embodied in music, a doing that also involves broader reflective thought processes such as questioning, concluding, researching, and much more.

Over the years, the *focus of cognitive and educational research on musical thought* has branched into two distinct directions, without reaching a true polarization:

- On the one hand, we *have embodied thinking in music*, which seeks confirmation in experimental data from the neurophysiology of music;
- On the other, a revival of the *phenomenological approach to musical experience*, integrated with the development of *narrative thought processes* as a model for understanding music production and listening.

What emerges, once again, is an ambivalent model, in which two tendencies already encountered in musicology are explicit: two different and complementary visions of the perceptual and cognitive reality implied by music-making. The first is a procedural, mechanistic, and structural perspective. The second expresses a more nuanced approach to studies that considers the emotional dimension of the various figurative, lexical, logical, and semantic components.

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The most interesting and relatively innovative scientific approach interprets musical thought through the paradigm and operational models of narrative thought. It draws on two complementary models, one empirical and experiential, and the other theoretical, derived from a philosophical analysis of neuroscientific research.

The first model is based on a *receptive-active conception* of musical listening, which experiences and elaborates forms of emotional and affective tension and resolution, between curious anticipation and surprise, which stimulate the production of meaning in a global bodily engagement (Meelberg, 2021).

The second model conceives *musical thought as the product of a socially extended mind*, a cultural consequence of socially distributed cognition. A musical cognition in which the individual's processes, routines, and cognitive styles implicitly involve rituals and traditions, consolidated communicative practices that generate actions, preserve memories, and solve problems (Gallagher, 2013, 2017).

In this sense, cognition, including musical cognition, is embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive. This is because musical behaviors are situated:

- That is, placed in and interacting with the environment (contexts and situations);
- They are temporally connoted (activation, memory, anticipation);
- Consequently, they are cognitively cultural (epistemic as well as neurobiological heritage).

Finally, they are undoubtedly active cognitive modalities (ideational, executive, and productive) that, as such, always imply bodily mediation (exploration, manipulation, elaboration, creation) (Gallagher, 2023).

Methodological Perspectives

When a music education system contributes to the development of creative and active thinking processes in each individual and in the social context, then music education can be considered inclusive and welcoming, attentive and responsive to diverse cognitive needs, if it adopts the aspects of musical cognition identified by Gallagher as its methodological perspectives.

Such an educational approach could concretely address the educational needs of students with SLD and, indeed, any other learner involved.

An educational system that is not limited to generalized methods, even if empirically validated over time, but adopts *educational tools that interact with the educational needs* of individual students through personalized or individualized development of musical learning.

A. *Musical Thinking*

Thus, we outline an approach that concretely envisions and implements musical thinking within the curriculum as an opportunity for transformation and change, growth and development of skills, for active personal and collective participation.

Broadly speaking, ***the goal is*** to enhance the musical identity implied by working through musical discovery and learning tools, stimulating cognitive focus in terms of memory and anticipation.

Maintaining a focus on musical thinking within curricular and institutional contexts is critically important, as this requires deliberate, sustained, and targeted stimulation of critical and creative thinking.

When thinking in musical terms, even when common and shared cognitive processes

come into play, the fact remains that the procedures for performing and expressively realizing music in people with SLD, can be profoundly different, both in terms of the subjective quality of thinking in music and in relation to objective reasoning difficulties.

B. *Space, Time and Intersubjectivity*

Special music education requires organizing multiple educational practices in a focused and purposeful setting that considers the variables of space and time as distinct characteristics of the teaching and learning processes. An educational environment that fosters the development of interpersonal and social communication dynamics, role-taking, and perspective-taking.

Learning experiences that, for example, engage with the prosodic and paralinguistic aspects of vocality along with the qualities of kinesthetic, postural, and proxemic interaction (Carboni, 2013). The result is an organization of teaching modules that allows for dynamics of personal and intersubjective appropriation within educational and training programs that situate musical creation and performance in playful contexts as potential areas of development, but also as zones of proximal development, without forgetting the lessons of Winnicott and Vygotsky. This implies a profound requalification of music education practices and the objectives to which they typically refer, implementing bodily mediation and mirroring processes in the shared development of different musical learning proposals (Carboni, 2012).

C. *Bodily Mediation in Musical Learning*

In summary, we believe it is now clear that all forms of learning disorders in the musical field must and can benefit extremely positively from bodily mediation as a playful and cognitive framework and backdrop, through active motor skills, expressive and impressive motor dynamics (Bonange, 1988). Active motor skills allow for engagement with reality, seeking and discovering effective adaptive solutions. Expressive motor dynamics assimilate reality into one's corporeality through imagination and playful simulation.

In impressive experiences, the body is a sensitive mediator, where it becomes important to seek out and listen to emotional and sensorial sensations, to progressively organize the path of personal growth in terms of awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses (Carboni, 2012).

It must be recognized that a multisensory teaching strategy that emphasizes kinesthetic experiences, if and when used within a systemic educational framework, can help to overshadow the primary and usual focus on music reading, focusing instead on performance practices and singing. Whatever the educational approach or teaching strategy implemented, however, it must involve adopting a teaching style that considers the use of diverse resources and bodily mediation, both imaginative and sensory, as a constant formative element, in order to allow students to develop self-awareness as a tool for metacognition.

D. *Focus on the Expressive Qualities of Playing*

Playing a musical instrument, regardless of skill level and experience, involves a variety of motor and sensory skills. In particular, timing, sequencing, and the spatial organization of movement is a fundamental function for controlling and planning motor action. The study of music requires constant integration of these systems, which, as such, must be considered and analyzed in an integrated manner.

While the precision of movements in terms of temporal articulation is closely linked to the organization of musical rhythm, the spatial aspects of movement and their sequentiality are essential in the performance of single notes on a musical instrument. The separate study of the neural systems involved in individual functions has not clarified

how they interact in the complexity of a musical performance. Scientific hypotheses still follow different lines of research in attempting to define the interdependence of various motor parameters and therefore the specific contribution of distinct brain regions in managing their control. (Zatorre et al., 2007).

Paradoxically, during their musical learning journey, students with SLD are most often required to improve and enhance their ability to read music. It is precisely in these learning situations that the difficulties faced by students with dyslexia emerge, when they objectively fail to read music at the required and expected speed, failing to keep pace with their learning development.

Students with dyslexia and those with SLD in general are now recognized as having the right to remedial measures, compensatory devices, and technological aids, but things quickly become difficult when teachers are asked to revise their teaching methods and implement a special training program.

Reading musical notation is a challenging activity that requires the integration of perceptual, cognitive, and motor processes. The symbolic and functional understanding and the performance decoding of musical notation, along with the temporal articulation of different durations, has always been a fundamental challenge for all students and music enthusiasts.

Research has shown that, in learning to read and play musical symbols, children with reading difficulties do not differ substantially from their peers without reading difficulties or from peers with a corresponding reading level. This is a complex skill that requires the internalized activation of perceptual and cognitive processes along with motor coordination and synchronization skills. In this regard, some research also shows that dyslexic children potentially do not differ from their peers in their ability to learn to read and play written music (Benson, Lovett & Kroeber, 1997).

What must change significantly and clearly is the approach to the problem and the strategies for compensating for the difficulties. Unfortunately, most of the time, the solution is limited to adopting a holistic and personalized approach to the individual and specific musical pieces being studied. In any case, it is essential that executive decoding employ synesthetic integrations to support reading, performance, and interpretation. References can be sensory perceptions, tactile or kinesthetic information, chromatic images, metonymic or metaphorical conceptual structures, with or without emotional or affective connotations (Ganschow et al., 1994).

F. *Playing Through Language and Verbalization Techniques*

In Patel's (2011) studies, the interaction between musical learning and the development of linguistic skills is particularly emphasised. Musical practice, carried out with regular assiduity and in an environment of strong emotional significance and intense attentional involvement, stimulates neural plasticity and the contingent connective tissue structuring of the brain areas functionally active in linguistic production and communication, with possible long-term effects.

The search for appropriate strategies for dyslexic students has led to the inclusion, with varying degrees of effectiveness, of lecture recording and the adoption of digital technology in the design of reminders. The use of acrostics and other mnemonics, the creation of mind maps, verbalization techniques, broad frameworks, and simplified concepts is also encouraged. Not to mention the opportunity to occasionally take a break and enjoy a moment of relaxation (Orton-Gillingham Institute for Multi-Sensory Education, 2024).

Some widely used educational practice manuals (Oglethorpe, 2002; Aloba & Wong, 2022) systematically adopt the integration of analogical and multisensory modalities. Although they are presented as methods, they are more easily classified as personalized teaching

practices, interesting and effective, but still in search of a methodological identity.

In these approaches, for example, the recognition of intervals on the staff is mediated kinesthetically and through fingering patterns, as well as by integrating various objects and materials (scales, steps, etc.) for the same purpose. Rhythmic learning occurs through motor activities, such as breathing exercises, hand clapping games, jumping, and structured movements. Added to this is the association of phonemes with rhythmic structures and the subsequent breakdown into syllables, along with movement and multisensory activities.

Conclusions

1. Music education practices designed for specific learning disorders often replicate or transfer teaching models and practices typically used for dyslexia into the literacy process. We are referring to modular and structured learning activities, multisensory supports, and the systematic use of repetition, which, in reality, simply consolidates what has already been learned.
2. The challenge is to develop music teaching as a personalized support tool to understand and enhance the individual characteristics of specific music learning disorders.
3. The presence of SLD should not deter teachers from enhancing individual learning potential. Musical practice, of any type and intensity, is now unanimously recognized as a valuable tool for cognitive integration in dyslexia and many other learning disorders. Therefore, it is unclear why the same approach to enriching cognitive and expressive skills should not also be applied to those who are experiencing significant personal growth through music study.
4. The difficulties encountered in music teaching with learning disorders are indeed problems that need to be resolved, but above all they are people to be considered and involved. Educational research on musical thought processes has significant historical precedents. Regardless of its merits, it is perhaps currently insufficient. We believe that a new paradigm for educational research and planning is needed.
5. Perplexity and doubts still linger among teachers in music academies. When it comes to disorders that impact the development of musical knowledge, questions remain about whether properly designed music education programs can truly work. We are firmly convinced of this, along with a large part of the scientific community.

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Declaration of Interest

The author reports no conflict of interest.

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MUSICAL TRADITIONS OF THE CHRISTMAS SEASON IN LITHUANIA MINOR: SOCIAL AND RITUAL FUNCTIONS

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Abstract

The article examines the musical traditions of the Christmas season in Lithuania Minor by analysing their historical origins, structure and social–ritual functions. The study focuses on written sources from the 17th–20th centuries, ethnographic field material, song collections and contemporary community practices. Using comparative historical and ethnomusicological methods, the research reconstructs the role of singing in both domestic and communal settings, highlighting its connection to Lutheran piety, intergenerational continuity and festive identity-building. The study reveals that Christmas musical practices in Lithuania Minor served as a central element of communal life, mediating sacrality, social cohesion and cultural belonging. The concluding section discusses the continuity of these traditions and their potential applications in present-day cultural and educational contexts.

Keywords: *Lithuania Minor, Christmas traditions, singing, ritual music, ethnographic heritage*

Introduction

The Christmas season in Lithuania Minor is characterized by a distinctive interplay of rituals and musical culture, in which archaic pagan practices, Christian (especially Evangelical Lutheran) hymn-singing traditions, and European (German) Advent – Christmas customs intersect. In this region, shaped over long periods by the interaction of diverse cultural influences – Lithuanian, Prussian, and German – a unique model of winter festivities emerged, in which music fulfilled not only aesthetic but also social, ritual, and communal functions.

Ethnographic evidence shows that in Lithuania Minor the Christmas cycle was perceived as a sequence of actions encompassing the waiting period of Advent, Christmas Eve (*Kūčios*), Christmas Day, house-visiting, and the exchange of gifts or festive foods. The festive culture of the region is distinguished by the continuity of an "archaic ritual complex": house-visiting,in some localities masquerade processions, symbolic gifts, and ritual visits often accompanied by singing and musical actions. In such contexts music becomes a marker of both community communication and ritual transition, helping to sacralise the festive moment.

The structure of the Christmas cycle and its accompanying musical practices indicate that the festive tradition formed in this region is characterized not only by a diversity of customs but also by a clearly articulated musical component that functions as a ritual, communicative, and community-binding element. Such a multi-layered festive model requires a precise analytical approach that makes it possible to distinguish specific musical phenomena from the broader cultural background. Therefore, in order to reveal the role of music in the Christmas cycle and reconstruct its main functions, it is necessary to clearly define the object of the study. The object of this research is the musical traditions of the Christmas period in Lithuania Minor: hymn-singing, folk singing, house-visiting practices, and their cultural – social functions.

The aim of the study is to investigate the musical tradition of the Christmas period in Lithuania Minor, revealing its origins, structure, functions, and its relationship with the cultural

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and confessional context of the region.

In order to achieve the stated aim, the research is structured into several interrelated objectives that enable a systematic analysis of historical, ethnographic, and musical sources. **The objectives** of the study are as follows:

1. To analyse studies about the musical traditions of the Christmas holidays in Lithuania Minor in the 17th-20th centuries in order to reconstruct the musical content and social context of Christmas cycle rituals;
2. To analyse 19th – 20th century ethnographic material, memoirs, and folklore collections that document singing and hymn-singing traditions during the Christmas season;
3. To identify the functions of musical actions during the Christmas period, including ritual, communicative, identity-forming, and community-strengthening aspects;
4. To provide insights into the continuity of these traditions and their potential application in contemporary cultural and educational contexts.

Previous Studies

Before analysing the Christmas-time musical tradition itself, it is necessary to review existing studies on the musical culture of Lithuania Minor and to assess both their contributions and the thematic limitations they present. Musical traditions of the Christmas period in Lithuania Minor have so far remained relatively underexplored, although organically integrated, aspect of the region's cultural heritage. While the musical culture of Lithuania Minor has received substantial scholarly attention, previous research has predominantly examined it within frame of the historical development of regional music, focusing on the interaction between professional, ecclesiastical, and folk music rather than on the musical rituality of individual calendar-cycle festivals. It is therefore essential to clarify to what extent earlier scholars analysed the singing traditions of the *lietuvininkai* and to identify the research gaps that highlight the relevance of this article.

The musical culture of Lithuania Minor has been comprehensively examined in the works of Kšanienė (2003). In her monograph "Muzika Mažojoje Lietuvoje. Lietuvių ir vokiečių kultūrų sąveika (XVI a.–XX a. 4 dešimtmetis)" (Music in Lithuania Minor: The interaction of Lithuanian and German cultures, 16th–1930s), she discusses various aspects of the musical environment of the *lietuvininkai*, including folk songs, professional music, church music, organists' activities, choral movements, and the interaction between Lithuanian and German musical traditions. This work provides a fundamental theoretical basis for understanding the historical context of musical life in Lithuania Minor.

In her article *"Mažosios Lietuvos lietuvių muzikinė kultūra: tradicijos ir jų tąsos galimybės šiandien"* ("The musical culture of Lithuanians in Lithuania Minor: Traditions and their prospects for continuity today"), Kšanienė examines musical traditions of the *lietuvininkai* and the possibilities for their continuation in contemporary culture. She discusses the transformations of musical practices, the impact of political and cultural shifts, and the potential for preserving and revitalising the region's musical heritage (Kšanienė, 2006). Another study by the same author is focused on Martynas Jankus's contribution to the musical culture of Lithuania Minor and reveals the cultural networks of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in which music functioned as an important medium of national revival and the preservation of Lithuanian identity (Kšanienė, 2015). Although these works provide a broad overview of musical life in Lithuania Minor, the musical rites of the Christmas period – particularly house-visiting practices and youth music-making with wind instruments – remain largely in the background of broader discussions, mentioned only fragmentarily and without detailed analysis.

Petrošienė is one of the most consistent researchers of the singing tradition in Lithuania Mi-

nor. In her article (Petrošienė 2012), author analyses the reasons for the decline of traditional *lietuvininkai* vocal folklore and highlights the social and cultural factors that encouraged or hindered its continuity (Petrošienė, 2003).

In the later study, *"XX a. Šilutės apylinkių lietuvininkų dainos: objekto ir konteksto sąveika"* ("20th-century *Lietuvininkai* songs of the *Šilutė* region: interaction between the object and the context"), she explores the repertoire and performance contexts of a specific subregion, demonstrating how shifts in social context influence the functions and vitality of songs. In her article *"Lietuvininkų dainavimo tradicija XX a. antrojoje pusėje"* ("The Singing tradition of Lietuvininkai in the second half of the 20th century"), author examines changes in the singing tradition from the mid-20th century to the early 21st century, discussing the roles of folklore ensembles, cultural institutions, individual tradition-bearers, and the participation of *lietuvininkai* in these processes (Petrošienė, 2021). In another study devoted to *lietuvininkai* vocal folklore, Petrošienė (2003, 2021) offers a broader overview of previous research and emphasises that the songs of Lithuania Minor were long regarded as an "endangered" tradition requiring targeted protection and (re)construction.

Although Petrošienė's works thoroughly address the singing tradition, its transformations, and the activity of folklore ensembles, the musical rites of the Christmas cycle (Christmas Eve/ Christmas hymns, house-visiting practices, maskers' music-making) are typically mentioned only within the general context of the repertoire or calendar songs and are not examined as an independent object of study.

The repertoire of Christmas-season songs and hymns is more extensively presented in anthological and practical publications. The book *Atvažiuoja Kalėdos. Advento–Kalėdų papročiai ir tautosaka* (Christmas Is Coming: Advent–Christmas customs and folklore, first edition 2000, compiled by Valiulytė; later a second, expanded edition prepared by Marcinkevičienė, Šemetaitė, and Vakarinienė) is dedicated to Advent and Christmas customs, beliefs, divination practices, vocal and choreographic folklore, and includes accompanying audio recordings. Although the collection contains material from Lithuania Minor, the Christmas songs and hymns from this region are presented only fragmentarily, without an extensive commentary system or dedicated examples of the region's musical tradition.

Other publications – such as the *Gyvoji tradicija* ("Living Tradition") series or materials prepared by the Lithuanian National Culture Centre – also include Advent - Christmas repertoire and customs, but their aim is primarily practical: dissemination, education, and repertoire provision.

In summary, although the musical culture of Lithuania Minor has been widely and multifacetedly researched (Gizevijus, 1970; Glagau, 1970; Kapeleris, 1970; Donelaitis, 1983; Vyšniauskaitė, 1993; Vėlius et al., 1995a, 1995b; Lepneris, 2011), the musical rites of the Christmas period have not yet been treated as an independent, systematically analysed subject.

This research gap determines the relevance of the present study and the need for a more detailed examination of Christmas-cycle musical practices, drawing on both written sources and ethnographic material. For the first time, the musical traditions of the Christmas season in Lithuania Minor are approached in this article as a distinct object of study, combining ethnological perspectives on calendar-cycle festivities with an ethnomusicological analysis of singing traditions.

The article is based on printed historical sources, ethnographic materials (narratives of tradition-bearers), and periodical publications describing Christmas Eve and Christmas-season music-making practices. This material not only illustrates earlier scholarly findings but also supplements them with new data on the interaction between the Lutheran tradition and local singing practices. The analysis focuses on the social and ritual functions of musical activity, examining how singing and music-making shaped the sacrality of the holiday, strengthened community bonds, functioned as forms of gift-exchange and the transmission of Christmas

messages, and helped maintain *lietuvininkai* identity in a multicultural borderland.

Ethnographic Sources and the Musical Traditions of Christmas in Lithuania Minor

The ritual practices of the Christmas season in Lithuania Minor are closely connected to the long-standing development of calendar festivities, ceremonial customs, and musical folklore. The origins and transformations of these traditions can be traced through ethnographic and literary sources from various periods, which reflect both the everyday life of *lietuvininkai* and their festive culture. Although early seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents contain few direct musical details, they clearly attest to the continuous presence of singing and verbal ritual practices in the life of the local population. By the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ethnographic collections already record specific forms of Christmas-time singing, house-visiting, and the musical practices of masked performers.

The aim of this section is to provide a systematic survey of the principal written sources that enable the reconstruction of the musical ritual structure of the Christmas season in Lithuania Minor. The analysis begins with early ethnographic accounts (Donelaitis, 1983; Lepneris, 2011), which reveal archaic singing traditions and ritual verbal formulas, and proceeds to nineteenth- and twentieth-century collections (Lietuvininkai, 1970; Lietuvininkų žodis, 1995; Lietuvininkų kraštas, 1995 etc.), where Christmas carols, melodised greetings, and traditions of congregational and domestic hymn-singing are recorded in detail. These materials make it possible not only to reconstruct the musical soundscape of the festive cycle, but also to reveal the social, pedagogical, and cultural significance of Christmas music within the communities of Lithuania Minor.

The Christmas musical traditions of Lithuania Minor cannot be understood in isolation from the broader cultural history of the region; therefore, ethnographic sources are essential for reconstructing both everyday singing practices and the musical forms of festive rituals. Early seventeenth- and eighteenth-century testimonies demonstrate that musical behaviour was deeply embedded in daily life, and that singing accompanied both work and communal customs related to the cycle of the year. These early accounts contain references to archaic melodised formulas, ceremonial greetings, and ritual texts that later formed the basis of Christmas hymns and house-visiting traditions. The analysis begins with "*The Prussian Lithuanian"* by Lepneris (2011), the first comprehensive description of *lietuvininkai* life containing evidence of early singing practices, and then turns to Donelaitis' poem *The Seasons* and nineteenth- to twentieth-century ethnographic collections, which already document specific musical practices associated with Christmas.

Teodor Lepner (1633–1691) wrote his ethnographic treatise *The Prussian Lithuanian* in 1690, in which he described Lithuanian clothing, food, beverages, dwellings, farming practices, folk medicine, festivals, and other aspects of daily life. He also noted that women would sing at hand mills "from the second cockcrow until dawn." The author provided information about traditional games – swinging, egg-tapping, egg-rolling – and recorded examples of Lithuanian festive greetings such as *"Sveiks Naują metą sulaukęs"* ("Be well on reaching the New Year") and *"Sveiks Šventą Kalėdą sulaukęs"* ("Be well on reaching Holy Christmas") (Lepner, 1744).

Lepner's descriptions allow the reconstruction of early singing practices among the *lietuvininkai* as an everyday phenomenon closely associated with the domestic sphere and the early-morning work rhythm. Singing at the hand mill "from the second cockcrow until dawn" reveals an archaic practical function – providing rhythmic accompaniment to labour – one of the oldest forms of musical folklore in Prussian Lithuania. As this tradition was transmitted primarily by women, it formed a natural foundation for later festive and ritual songs, including those performed during the Christmas.

The festive greetings recorded by Lepner ("Sveiks Šventą Kalėdą sulaukęs") show that by the seventeenth century ritual verbal culture already contained formal, ceremonial elements that may well have been performed in a melodised form. This evidence suggests that the musical practices of the Christmas period developed organically from everyday singing, social festivities, and household-based traditions.

The Seasons by Donelaitis (1765) is another key source for reconstructing the calendar cycle in Lithuania Minor. In the poem, Christmas appears as one of the four fundamental annual festivals deeply embedded in the life of the *lietuvininkai*.

Although the poem does not provide explicit musical details, the significance of the festival within the Lutheran community implicitly presupposes the singing of Christmas hymns, house visits, and various forms of communal ritual activity. Donelaitis thus confirms that Christmas functioned not only as a religious but also as a cultural and communal celebration – conditions that naturally fostered musical practices later recorded in nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographic collections. For this reason, Donelaitis' testimony serves as an important contextual source for understanding the origins of Christmas-related musical ritual in Lithuania Minor.

Although Christmas in Donelaitis' *The Seasons"* is presented more as a component of the cultural cycle than as a detailed festive practice, the imagery in the poem nonetheless suggests that by the eighteenth century the *lietuvininkai* community already possessed a well-established structure for the Christmas period. Its core consisted of religiosity, communal cohesion, and a ritualised domestic space. Donelaitis confirms that festivals were understood as special times that encouraged people to gather, visit one another, share food, and – implicitly – sing hymns.

However, the detailed musical content of the celebrations becomes visible only in nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographic materials. It is in the memories, descriptions, and collections recorded by various authors that specific forms of Christmas singing, house-visiting, masqueraders' songs, and melodised greetings begin to be documented systematically. These later sources allow us to see how the festive structure reflected in Donelaitis' era developed into clearly defined musical ritual traditions that became a distinctive marker of the cultural identity of Lithuania Minor.

Later nineteenth- and twentieth-century ethnographic sources (Lietuvininkai, 1970; Lietuvininkų žodis, 1995; Lietuvininkų kraštas, 1995; Gaigalaitis Atsiminimai, 1998; the Almonaičiai's Šiaurės Skalva, 2003) demonstrate convincingly that Christmas-season customs in Lithuania Minor possessed pronounced musical elements. They describe house-visiting, singing by groups of masqueraders, children's and youths' sung greetings, as well as parish-based and domestic hymn-singing traditions. Unlike the older seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents, these sources provide direct evidence that the celebration of Christmas was inseparable from singing.

Ethnographic sources from nineteenth- and twentieth-century Lithuania Minor are particularly significant for reconstructing the musical traditions of the Christmas season, as it is precisely in this period that the living, every day, and ritual musical practices of the *lietuvininkai* were recorded. The most important material appears in the collection *Lietuvininkai* (1970), where the works by Gizevius (1970), Kapeleris (1970), Glagau (1970) and Marcinkevičienė (2000) reveal a broad picture of festivals, customs, and singing practices.

Gizevijus (1970) emphasises the strong singing tradition among the *lietuvininkai*, noting that song was an inseparable element of festive periods: *"Lithuanians enjoy singing, and during festivals their voices resound both indoors and outside"* (p. 42). He observes that in winter, when families gather for long evening sittings, singing becomes the primary form of social interaction: *"During the evening gatherings, songs pass from lip to lip, from the young to the older members of the household"* (p. 45). Although Gizevius does not explicitly mention Christmas

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hymns, his descriptions clearly indicate that music-making intensified during festive times.

Direct evidence of Christmas singing appears in Kapeleris' ethnographic account (1970). He states unequivocally that Christmas customs were linked to the musical practices of masqueraders and carollers: *"During Christmas, masqueraders would appear in the villages, going from house to house, greeting the hosts and chanting their songs"* (*Lietuvininkai*, 1970, p. 118). Kapeleris (1970) also highlights children's singing, which he identifies as one of the central elements of the Christmas cycle: *"Children would line up near the windows and softly sing Christmas hymns"* (p. 119).

Glagau (1970), in turn, recorded the particularly musical atmosphere associated with the winter festive period: *"During the great winter celebrations, the villages resonate with shouts, songs, and stories"* (p. 163). Since Christmas was the most important winter celebration, his testimony can be considered indirect evidence of the musical nature of the Christmas period.

Significant material is also found in the collections *Lietuvininkų žodis* (1995) and *Lietuvininkų kraštas* (1995). One of the accounts recorded in *Lietuvininkų žodis* states: "*At Christmas we would walk around the village singing 'Gimė Jėzus Betliejuj' ('Jesus Was Born in Bethlehem'), and people would treat us kindly"* (*Lietuvininkų žodis*, 1995, p. 74). Elsewhere it is emphasised that music also held a ritual function on Christmas Eve: *"On Christmas Eve we would begin singing little hymns so that God would grant us a good year"* (*Lietuvininkų žodis*, 1995, p. 74). These testimonies clearly confirm the tradition of melodised greetings and the practice of singing within the household.

In *Lietuvininkų kraštas* (1995), additional information is found about women's domestic music-making: *"Christmas morning began with a hymn; the women, still moving about in the kitchen, would hum the holy Christmas songs"* (*Lietuvininkų kraštas*, 1995, p. 132). The volume also records the ritual behaviour of Christmas carollers: *"The carollers went from house to house, singing their greetings"* (*Lietuvininkų kraštas*, 1995, p. 135).

Another important source is Gaigalaitis' memoir "Atsiminimai" (1998), in which the pastor and ethnographer provides particularly valuable insights: *"On Christmas Eve, hymns from the hymnbook resounded in every home"* (p. 56). Equally significant is a pedagogical–ritual detail*: "Before Christmas, children learned hymns at school and sang them to their parents"* (Gaigalaitis, 1998, p. 57).

This is clear evidence that Christmas musical traditions in Lithuania Minor possessed an organised structure characteristic of the parish school system.

Rich material is also offered by V. and J. Almonaitis in *Šiaurės Skalva* (2003). The authors note: *"In the Skalvian lands, Christmas visiting was closely connected with hymn singing and shouted blessings"* (p. 214). They also mention a mechanism of cultural exchange: *"At Christmas, welcomed guests would bring news and songs"* (ibid, p. 216). This indicates that the sharing and dissemination of songs was one of the purposes of festive visits.

The volume *Lietuvininkų žemė* (1994), prepared by A. Juška, V. Pupšys & J. Mališauskas (1994). provides some of the most vivid data: *"At Christmas the children would go singing from house to house: 'Gimė Kristus mūsų vaduotojas' ('Christ, our Redeemer, is born'), and the householders would give them small gifts"* (p. 89). It is also noted that *"On Christmas morning the villages resounded with singing; people sang at home and on their way to church"* (p. 90). This confirms the dual musical layer of Christmas: both parish-based and domestic.

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century sources show that the Christmas period in Lithuania Minor was highly musical. The testimonies of Gizevijus (1970), Kapeleris (1970), Glagau (1970) and other authors, together with later recorded accounts and Gaigalaitis' memoirs (1998), demonstrate that Christmas was inseparable from home and parish singing, children's and youth's carolling, the songs of masquerading groups, melodised greetings, and the humming of women in the household.

A review of seventeenth-twentieth-century ethnographic and literary sources makes it clear that the musical traditions of the Christmas season in Lithuania Minor emerged from a synthesis of archaic everyday singing, ritual verbal formulas, and the Lutheran hymn-singing tradition.

The early references to singing and festive moods in the writings of Lepneris (2011) and Donelaitis (1983) appear in nineteenth–twentieth-century sources as fully developed musical practices: domestic hymn singing, children's and youth carolling, the songs of masqueraders, melodised greetings, and parish hymns performed both in churches and in the home environment.

This rich and varied material reveals that the musical rituality of the Christmas period was not accidental or fragmentary, but rather the result of a long cultural evolution, transmitted consistently from generation to generation. On the basis of these sources, it is possible to reconstruct the specific Christmas musical heritage of Lithuania Minor, which reflects both the community's identity and the vitality of its musical tradition.

In the following section of the article, this material will be used to analyse specific forms of Christmas rituals and their musical content.

Social and Ritual Functions of Musical Practices in the Christmas Cycle

The musical tradition of the Christmas period in Lithuania Minor is not a random collection of singing or vocal practices; rather, it forms a coherent ritual complex in which music functions as one of the central markers of the festive season. The regional Christmas cycle integrates elements of archaic Baltic ritual, Lutheran hymn-singing, and German cultural influences, thus granting musical actions a multilayered significance – sacral, communicative, social, and identity-forming.

Christmas musical practices include not only liturgical hymn singing in church, but also hymns performed in the home, children's musical recitations for the Christmas Elder, youth singing during neighbour-visiting or evening gatherings, as well as melodised greetings and ritual house-visiting performances. All these practices operate within a shared symbolic field in which music:

- Reinforces the sacredness of the festival,
- Structures modes of community interaction,
- Defines the sequence and character of festive actions,
- Operates as a form of gift, blessing, or good-will expression,
- Sustains Lithuanian-Minority (*lietuvininkai*) identity in a multi-confessional and multicultural environment.

For this reason, the music of the Christmas season should be analysed not merely as a repertoire, but through its functional dynamics – examining the social and ritual tasks it fulfils in different festive contexts.

These functions become most clearly visible only when the broader historical and religious context of Lithuania Minor is taken into account – an environment shaped by the interaction of several cultural strata, confessional traditions, and historical epochs. It is therefore essential first to outline these structural preconditions that formed the milieu in which the musical traditions of the Christmas period emerged.

The analysis of calendar festivities within the historical and religious framework of Lithuania Minor shows that local traditions developed under the influence of several major factors: long-lasting political and cultural ties with Prussia and Germany, close connections with Greater Lithuania, and the dominant Lutheran confessional environment. Lutheran faith

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profoundly affected *lietuvininkai* worldview and everyday life: on Sundays they *"hurried to church to hear the sermon, to pray, to sing hymns",* while at home – especially during Advent – *"all would sit with their books",* praying and singing together (Juška et al., 1994, pp. 55-57).

The influence of Pietism curtailed secular entertainment, fortune-telling, and theatrical ritual practices, yet simultaneously strengthened singing as the principal form of religious expression. The influence of Western – particularly German – culture became increasingly evident in the first half of the twentieth century through school-based and community activities: during festive occasions, German songs learned at school were sung, gradually replacing the traditional Lithuanian repertoire and shaping the musical habits of the younger generation (Merkienė, 1997, pp. 355-358).

At the same time, the most important calendar festivals of the *lietuvininkai* – Christmas, Shrovetide, Easter, Pentecost, and Midsummer – retained their basic structure, although the system of customs became more restrained: divination, magic practices, and prohibitions were far less prominent than in Greater Lithuania, while hymn singing and participation in religious services increasingly assumed the central role in festive observance. This historical and confessional situation provides grounds for viewing the musical tradition of the Christmas period in Lithuania Minor as an intermediate form – standing between archaic calendrical ritual and Lutheran hymn-singing culture – where music becomes a primary means of expressing the feast and articulating communal identity.

As ethnographic research on Lithuania Minor demonstrates, the calendar festivals of the *lietuvininkai* fit well within the broader Baltic cultural context and *"are in no way less ancient than those of other regions"* (Mažosios Lietuvos etnografija, 1992, p. 74).

Even in the first half of the twentieth century, elements of archaic rites of transition and seasonal renewal persisted, and the "essential part of the customs" remained nearly unchanged. Due to the Lutheran confessional environment, Christmas celebrations in this region were more reserved and less theatrical, yet they were marked by a distinctive tradition of hymn singing and domestic piety. The decline of magic and superstition – typical of Protestant communities –further strengthened the sacral and social functions of musical practices, with hymn singing becoming the principal expressive form of Christmas period rituals.

This cultural and confessional environment provided the foundation for Christmas period musical practices to acquire clearly defined social and ritual functions, expressed in different forms at both the family and wider community levels. Therefore, it is first necessary to examine these functions separately, together with the mechanisms that shaped their operation.

A. The Family Sphere: Hymn singing and the Christmas tree ritual as the creation of sacred space

Musical activity during the Christmas cycle in Lithuania Minor is expressed first and foremost within the domestic sphere, where music forms an integral part of the festive scenario. Although in the Klaipėda Region the Christmas Eve supper (*Kūčios*) was not associated with fasting or the twelve-dish tradition characteristic of Greater Lithuania (Kudirka, 1993, pp. 283-285), the evening was nevertheless structured by clear and ritually significant actions. A narrative recorded by Petrošienė testifies to a typical Lutheran family celebration: *"The Christmas festivities began on Christmas Eve. Returning from the service, the parents would light candles and sing German Christmas hymns. Later, at the table laden with food, the festive supper began. They enjoyed everything they had, for Evangelicals are not obliged to fast"* (Petrošienė, 2007, p. 222).

This account clearly shows that music (the hymn) functions as an intermediate act between the liturgical space of the church and the domestic celebration: upon returning from worship, the first actions are the lighting of candles and singing. The lighting of small candles on

the Christmas tree, together with hymn singing, sacralises the home, turning it into a kind of "miniature church." Fieldwork conducted by the author of this article captured a similar testimony from a woman in *Aukštumala*, who emphasized that the lighting of the candles was the most striking moment of the evening: *"The most beautiful moment was when they lit the candles on the Christmas tree, set into little metal holders"* (Miklovaitė-Bakutienė, born 1927, Aukštumala. KUTRF 22).

In order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the research object, all available sources were used, including both printed materials and archival collections: the sound archive of the Folklore and Ethnography Manuscript Repository of Klaipėda University (KUTRF), the Folklore Manuscript Archive of the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (LTR), the sound archive of this repository (LTRF), as well as ethnographic fieldwork materials preserved in the Department of Ethnology of the Lithuanian Institute of History (LII).

Although the deeper magical meaning of the Christmas tree is no longer clearly articulated by contemporary informants, written sources preserve the traditional understanding that the candles placed on the tree were attributed supernatural power – the ability to protect the home and family from misfortune (Dundulienė, 1994, 84). Thus, the musical act – the singing of hymns beside the candle-lit tree – performs a ritual protective function and becomes integrated into the broader magical field of the Christmas night, even if this symbolic discourse is no longer fully recognized by informants of the late twentieth century.

Moreover, Christmas hymns within the family function as markers of identity and continuity. The singing of German Christmas hymns signifies not only confessional but also cultural belonging to a particular tradition: these hymns connect the Lithuanian-Minority community with the wider German Lutheran cultural sphere, while their performance in Lithuanian homes gives them a localized, "family-owned" character.

This family-based model of celebration-centred on singing, on rituals of light and stillness – reveals the inner structure of the Christmas period, in which music becomes a central element in the creation of sacredness. Yet musical practices in Lithuania Minor were not confined to the intimate domestic space; they also regulated social relationships, especially those linking different generations.

For this reason, the following subsection turns to situations in which music becomes a condition of communication and a prerequisite for the exchange of gifts – most clearly expressed in the interaction between the Christmas Visitor (*Kalėdų senelis*) and children.

B. Santa Claus and Children: Music as a condition of offering and gift exchange

An important social function of musical activity becomes apparent when examining the visit of Santa Claus in Lithuanian Minor households. Narratives from the region emphasize that children do not receive gifts passively – they must actively participate in a musical rite: *"When the old man came, you had to know a prayer, you had to be able to sing a little song; he would ask whether you had obeyed your grandmother, grandfather, mother, or father – these were short little rituals"* (Valteris Šėferis, born in 1924 in the village of Žigaičiai, KUTRF 28).

Here music (a song, hymn, or prayer) becomes a symbolic offering – the child's contribution to the ritual of gift exchange. Socially, this functions as a disciplinary, pedagogical, and communicative act: the child must demonstrate the ability to sing or recite in order to receive a gift. In this way, the musical act serves as a semantic "bridge" between effort and reward – the gift is not arbitrary but is earned through a symbolic action that helps integrate the child into the cultural traditions of the family and community. Music also fulfils a communicative function: through a hymn or prayer the child addresses not only the Santa Claus figure but also the broader system of community values, where obedience, respect for elders, and the

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ability to internalize religious or moral texts are of central importance.

Vaicekauskas' (1995) interpretation that *Senis Kalėda* is functionally related to the traditional masked-walkers' processions allow us to view this figure as an individualized form of the collective house-visiting tradition that transformed in the early twentieth century. In these traditional masked-walkers' processions, music also played an essential role – from rhythmic noise-making to melodic greetings. The visit of Santa Claus preserves this structure but transfers the musical activity to the children's repertoire, simplifying and "Christianizing" it. Accounts suggest that Santa often arrived dressed in a turned-out fur coat, with a beard and head covering – a sign of continuity with older agrarian rituals in which the disguised visitor embodied a messenger from the otherworld.

Thus, within this tradition, music fulfils several interconnected functions:

- **Ritual** – as a required element of the gift-giving rite;
- **Communicative** – as a means of interacting with the persona and the community's value system;
- **Pedagogical** – cultivating children's memory, language skills, and basic musical repertoire;
- S**ocial control** – since the song or prayer reveals whether the child has "behaved properly."

All of this demonstrates that in the interaction between Santa Claus and children, music functions as a kind of initiation into the festive world – without it, the gift-giving ritual does not truly take place. Although the exchange between Santa Claus and children reveals an individualized form of musical ritual, within the broader structure of the Christmas period music also operated as an instrument of collective sociality, linking not only family members but the entire village community. Therefore, the following subsection shifts the focus to house-visiting, youth festivities, and masked processions, where musical actions acquire the character of a *public, community-binding ritual.*

C. House-visiting, Youth Festivities, and Masked Walkers: Music as a strengthener of community bonds

Another significant dimension of musical functions emerges in the communal customs of the Christmas season – house-visiting (*kieminėjimas*), youth festivities, and the walking of masked figures. Although field data from the second half of the twentieth century indicate that these traditions had largely faded in the *Klaipėda* region, earlier written sources and nineteenth-century ethnographic material show that before the period of modernization these practices constituted a particularly important part of the Christmas cycle. In these customs, music served as the primary marker of social participation, community cohesion, and ritual transition.

Written sources attest that in Lithuanian Minor the youth gathered for various forms of entertainment during the festive season: *"In the mid-19th century, young Lietuvininkai amused themselves in many ways – dancing, singing, playing games, although at evening gatherings there was neither instrumental music nor drinking"* (Mažosios Lietuvos enciklopedija, 2000, p. 698). This description reflects a restrained festal culture shaped by the pietistic environment, in which music did not function as a hedonistic element but as a structured and socially – and morally – acceptable set of practices.

House-visiting as a practice of music and community. On the second day of Christmas, *Lietuvininkai* traditionally visited relatives and neighbours, shared food, and exchanged greetings. This practice was accompanied by various verbal and musical forms, especially melodized greetings intended to "enchant" good fortune for the coming year.

Historical sources emphasize that wishes for health and abundant harvests were central during house-visiting and were often delivered rhythmically or with melodic intonation. Such

Christmas greetings are situated between speaking and singing – they possess a clear performative and magical intention.

Masked processions and musical sound. Ethnographic descriptions reveal that masked walkers in Lithuanian Minor appeared in various forms and typically incorporated elements of noise, rhythm, and sound. In the *Tilžė* (Tilsit) and *Ragainė* (Ragnit) areas it was recorded that *"young men, mounted on decorated horses, would ride from village to village, visiting relatives and wishing everyone good health and a plentiful grain harvest"* (Mažosios Lietuvos enciklopedija, 2000, p. 698).

Their appearances were often accompanied by symbolic sounds – whip cracking, bell ringing, or the rhythmic stamping of hooves. Although these elements are not melodic in the strict sense, their rhythmic quality is, in anthropological terms, closely related to musical activity: they signal tension, mark the moment of arrival, and announce the beginning of the ritual.

In the broader Lithuanian tradition, extensively studied by Vyšniauskaitė (1990), Kudirka (1993) and Šaknys (2001), masked walking customs frequently include melodic components – sung greetings, short song insertions, and improvised verses. In South Samogitia, the *berneliai* jingled bells and rattles, while in Eastern *Aukštaitija* the practice of *čigonaudavimas* often incorporated melodized greetings or short hymns. Although such forms had nearly vanished in the region under discussion by the late twentieth century, their earlier descriptions allow us to conclude that Lithuanian Minor likewise possessed musical elements within these rituals.

The "stallion jumping" (*šyvio šokdinimas*) and musical noise. A particularly interesting case is the so-called *šyvio šokdinimas*, also recorded in the territory of Lithuanian Minor. The performer embodying the horse character was typically accompanied by rhythmic noise: jumping over benches or tables, he provoked laughter and amusement, while simultaneously producing noise endowed with an apotropaic (evil-averting) function. A description written down in 1905 in Pakalviai notes that Christmas was a *"festival of masks"*; masked figures, riding into the room, performed clearly performative actions (Kerbelytė, Stundžienė, 1996). In these performances, musical activity is replaced or supplemented by rhythmic noise corresponding to old agrarian symbolic systems – noise was believed to drive away evil forces and awaken the vitality of the crops.

Music as a marker of social cohesion. Taken together, this material shows that communal musical activity – whether melodic or rhythmic – functioned as a form of social cohesion.

House-visiting, greeting rituals, youth dances, and singing served as means of reinforcing ties among relatives and neighbours. Even twentieth-century accounts, recorded at a time when the practice of house-visiting had largely disappeared, preserve fragments indicating that this custom had once been a central axis of family and community life.

Thus, the data analysed in this subsection allow us to conclude that musical activity in the communal Christmas customs of Lithuanian Minor fulfilled a dual function:

- **Ritual–magical** – accompanying rites of passage, reinforcing the efficacy of blessings, and sustaining the cosmological logic of the turning year;
- S**ocial** – fostering community solidarity, ensuring intergenerational and interfamily connections, and enabling the collective experience of identity.

In summary, house-visiting, youth festivities, and masked walking in Lithuanian Minor constituted a distinct stratum of Christmas-period musical culture, whose essential elements – singing, rhythmic noise-making, melodized greetings, and sonic markers – served not merely as entertainment but as clearly ritual actions. These practices structured the inter-holiday period as a time of communal interaction and helped maintain social order by reaffirming kinship, neighbourhood, and generational ties. Even as more theatrical customs declined, their musical components (dances, songs, rhythmic sounds, melodized greetings) persisted as

part of cultural memory, attesting to the older ritual structure of the Christmas cycle.

Although communal festivities and masked walking formed one of the most prominent spheres of musical activity during the Christmas period, an equally important question concerns the role of music in sustaining the sacrality of the feast – especially in a context where many archaic spells and behavioural prohibitions were waning or transformed under the influence of the Lutheran confessional environment. This milieu shaped a different understanding of sacrality: less associated with magical rites and more oriented toward inner spiritual discipline, devotion, and the creation of a festive atmosphere through singing. The next subsection therefore examines how singing and other musical actions became a kind of substitute – a "gentler" equivalent – for traditional prohibitions or fasting, marking sacred time and expressing its distinctiveness.

D. Singing as a "Gentle" Substitute for Fasting and Work Prohibitions

The sacrality of the Christmas period in Lithuanian Minor was shaped not only through traditional rituals but also through musical activity, which in this confessional environment acquired a distinctive compensatory function.

Because Lutheran doctrine viewed magical practices, theatrical rituals, and Catholic-style fasting with scepticism, the structure of Christmas customs among the *Lietuvininkai* gradually shifted toward inner spiritual discipline and singing rituals. In this sense, music became an alternative means of expressing the solemnity of the feast, restricting everyday routines, and creating sacred time without strict physical prohibitions.

The weakening of fasting traditions and the search for spiritual restraint. As ethnographic materials show, fasting on Christmas Eve was scarcely practised in Lithuanian Minor (Kudirka, 1993, pp. 283-285). Yet certain restrictions remained on the first day of Christmas: *"there was no meat, not even black bread"* (Cyrulys, born 1932 m. in Kintai; KUTR 33). This restriction is not a continuation of ascetic fasting but rather a symbolic gesture marking the festive exception to the usual rhythm of life.

Since the Protestant milieu did not require complex rituals or magical actions, the task of spiritual preparation for the feast shifted to home-based singing practices. The hymn thus became the main alternative to fasting: it "filled" the space formerly occupied by ritual prohibitions and endowed Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with sacrality – not through bodily discipline but through an inner, spiritual mode of being.

Singing as a means of halting everyday life and "locating" the feast. Both written sources and field data indicate that on the first days of Christmas work was forbidden in Lithuanian Minor: *"from Christmas until New Year's no heavy work is done"* (Balys, 1937, p. 37). In Lutheran culture, such prohibitions are not rooted in magical fears; rather, they carry an ethical and spiritual meaning. The feast is understood as a time devoted to prayer, contemplation, and family fellowship. Within this context, singing acquires a special status – becoming an active act of halting ordinary time.

The hymn replaces bodily restraint: when magical prohibitions have faded, fasting is not obligatory, and theatrical rituals diminish, music begins to function as the primary instrument of sacralisation. Singing means entering into the rhythm of the feast; it is a ritual act through which a person "switches" their day from the ordinary mode of activity to a sacred one. This is particularly evident in the Lutheran tradition of household devotion: candles on the Christmas tree are lit, the whole family gathers, and the first moments of the celebration begin with a hymn (Petrošienė, 2007). Singing thus functions as the activation of the feast – its ritual opening.

Musical practice as inner spiritual discipline. Whereas in Greater Lithuania holiday prohibitions often had magical motivations (e.g., stacking firewood was forbidden "so that summer storms would not be summoned"), in Lithuanian Minor such symbolism is much weaker.

Instead, *Lietuvininkai* structured their festive behaviour around silence, solemnity, and hymn singing. This may be understood as a pietist-influenced culture of spiritual self-discipline in which musical practice became central:

- Singing structures time,
- Strengthens the moral centre of the family,
- Establishes inner discipline,
- Encourages attentiveness, contemplation, and solemnity.

The hymn becomes a form of spiritual asceticism – a gentle but effective substitute for fasting, in which not food but language, mood, and behaviour are moderated.

Music as a unifying sacred zone between church and home. After returning from church, the family continues singing at home. This dual nature of hymn singing highlights an important function: music connects liturgical and domestic spaces, turning the home into an extension of sacred experience.

This is especially significant in Lithuanian Minor, where the Lutheran community had relatively few theatrical rituals. Thus, the hymn thus became a marker of the beginning of the festival, which has several functions: a) expression of family and communal unity, b) a continuation of sacrality after the liturgy, c) an act of "transforming" everyday space. In this way, music became the primary mechanism through which *Lietuvininkai* experienced the feast as spiritual time.

The functions discussed here show that, in Lithuanian Minor, music not only replaced declining magical and ascetic customs, but also became a central marker of the festive period – it created sacrality, regulated social behaviour, and united members of the community. Therefore, the concluding subsection will provide a systematic summary of all musical functions within the Christmas cycle, distinguishing their ritual, social, and identity-related roles.

E. Summary of the Functions of Musical Activity

An analysis of the Christmas-cycle materials from Lithuanian Minor reveals that music in this region is not merely an additional festive element – it is one of the central semantic and structural cores of the celebration. Due to the Lutheran confessional environment, the influence of Pietism, and the presence of German cultural layers, musical practices assumed functions that in other regions of Lithuania were fulfilled by magical prohibitions, ritual taboos, symbolic actions, or strict fasting. Summarizing the available material, several essential functions of musical activity within the Christmas cycle in Lithuanian Minor can be distinguished:

- **Ritual function**

  Hymns and singing in the home, especially after returning from church services, become the primary means of creating the sacred quality of the feast. Lighting candles on the Christmas tree accompanied by hymn singing not only establishes a "domestic church" atmosphere, but also assumes protective and festive roles formerly associated with magical practices (Dundulienė, 1994). Singing structures time and ritually ushers individuals into the festive state.

- **Communicative function**

  Music – particularly the songs or prayers performed by children for the Christmas Elder – acts as a symbolic form of communication. It becomes part of an exchange ritual, in which a gift is reciprocated with a musical offering (Valteris Šėferis, born in 1924 in the village of Žigaičiai; KUTR 28). Through musical performance, community values are transmitted, moral and social ties are reinforced, and social roles are affirmed.

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- **Identity and belonging function**

  German Christmas hymns sung by *Lietuvininkai* in the domestic environment link the community of Lithuanian Minor with the wider Lutheran world, while simultaneously acquiring a distinctly local, *Lietuvininkai* character. Music becomes a vehicle of identity continuity, enabling the structuring of cultural self-perception in a multilingual and multicultural borderland. This is particularly significant for a community whose cultural identity has historically been subject to external pressures.

- **Function of strengthening community bonds**

  In youth festivities and the earlier practice of visiting households (*kieminėjimas*), dance, rhythmic noise, and singing intertwined. Even though these customs disappeared during the second half of the twentieth century, their descriptions indicate that music acted as a catalyst for social cohesion – it encouraged interpersonal interaction, maintained kinship networks, and reinforced the collective dimension of the seasonal festivity. The sounds of the Christmas period (ringing, rattling, singing) functioned both as "markers of entry" and as an integral part of community interactions.

- **Pedagogical function**

  Music – especially Christmas hymns taught in schools and performed during Christmas gatherings – became an important tool of socialization and religious education. Children were encouraged to sing, recite, or chant, thereby strengthening their connection to the traditions and norms of the community. This function is particularly prominent in the Lutheran context, where domestic devotion and musical literacy were perceived as essential family and communal practices.

The analysis of musical activity during the Christmas period demonstrates that the Christmas traditions of Lithuanian Minor developed within a complex cultural environment in which archaic Baltic ritual elements, Lutheran religious practice, and German musical culture intertwined. Within this environment, music assumed an exceptional role – it not only accompanied the festive rites but became the primary carrier of the celebration's semantic content, compensating for customs that were diminishing or losing significance.

Unlike in Greater Lithuania, where Christmas Eve and Christmas Day were structured by fasting, divination, and theatrical ritual practices, in Lithuanian Minor these functions were often assumed by music. Hymns, songs, rhythmic noise, and singing rituals became the principal bearers of sacrality, community cohesion, identity, and communication. Therefore, the Christmas cycle in Lithuanian Minor should be understood as a musical ritual model in which musical actions are inseparable from social structures, family practices, and communal life. It is precisely the continuity of this musical tradition – preserved even as certain older customs faded – that attests to the significance of the hymn as the central element of the celebration. Here, music does not merely accompany the feast – it creates it.

Continuity of Traditions and Possibilities for Their evitalisation Today

The musical traditions of the Christmas period in Lithuanian Minor today exist within a multilayered cultural environment in which historical memory, confessional heritage, and contemporary forms of cultural expression intersect. Although many ritual practices were interrupted or significantly weakened during the second half of the twentieth century (particularly *kieminėjimas*, masquerader traditions, and magical customs), the musical component of the Christmas cycle proved far more resilient and has remained an important part of both religious and secular celebrations.

Continuity is first and foremost evident in the Lutheran hymn-singing tradition, which at the beginning of the twenty-first century is still alive in the parishes of Lithuanian Minor. Many

informants born during the interwar or occupation periods emphasise that Christmas singing was – and continues to be – a central element of the feast: *"We always sang on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day – we were used to that from childhood"* (Valteris Šėferis, born in 1924 in the village of Žigaičiai, KUTR 28). In contemporary communities this tradition persists, although its content has changed: Lithuanian Lutheran hymns are sung alongside classical German chorales, and parish choirs prepare concert programmes during Advent. In this way, hymn-singing today fulfils an identity-affirming and community-building role similar to the one it held in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A certain degree of continuity may also be observed in musical practices within the home, although these often take modernised forms. Lighting candles on the Christmas tree –mentioned by informants as *"the most beautiful moment of Christmas Eve"* – has largely been replaced by electric lights, yet the act of ritual illumination of the home has remained a symbolic marker of the beginning of the celebration. Singing by the Christmas tree, though less frequent in contemporary practice, is still recalled in the memories of families from Lithuanian Minor and persists in the traditions of some households, especially in rural communities or among more religious families.

The figure of the Christmas Elder (*Kalėdų senelis*) has likewise survived, although his function has changed considerably: whereas in the past children were expected to sing a song or recite a prayer, nowadays this requirement has a more playful than ritual character. Nevertheless, the role of music has not disappeared – songs, hymns, or short poems continue to serve as symbolic elements of exchange, preserving a link with earlier Christmas scenarios.

Among the discontinued traditions, perhaps the most striking is the musical component of *kieminėjimas* and youth festivities. Today these practices are almost entirely absent, yet the forms described by earlier researchers – horse-riding visits, masquerader rounds, and melodised greetings – may be revitalised as reconstructions of cultural heritage. One of the most promising contemporary avenues is the activity of folklore ensembles. Groups such as *Kuršių ainiai*, *Senoliai*, *Verdainė*, and others frequently include Christmas hymns from Lithuanian Minor in their repertoire, and in some communities' theatrical elements of older customs are being revived. Such practices not only preserve heritage, but also restore the structures of musical communal life characteristic of the culture of the *lietuvininkai*.

Contemporary education offers sustainable ways to bring the Christmas musical heritage of Lithuanian Minor into present-day practice. During Advent and the Christmas season, schools organise celebrations that increasingly incorporate regional material: *lietuvininkai* Christmas hymns, stories, house-visiting traditions. This is particularly evident in the *Klaipėda* and *Šilutė* districts, but also on a national scale, where regional heritage is being integrated into general education programmes. In this way, musical tradition acquires educational value, becoming a tool for experiential learning, identity formation, and the understanding of cultural diversity.

It is important to emphasise that contemporary communities are not passive inheritors of tradition. Many cultural centres and Evangelical Lutheran parishes organise Advent evenings, hymn-singing gatherings, and Christmas concerts that perform functions similar to those once fulfilled by household singing or youth festivities: they foster community cohesion, create a sacral sense of time, and renew shared social experience. Thus, although the form of tradition is changing, its functions often remain: hymn-singing today retains its ritual, communicative, and identity-building dimensions.

In summary, the Christmas-season musical tradition of Lithuanian Minor today continues along three main lines:

- Continuity of confessional tradition – the living and consistent practice of hymn-singing within Lutheran communities;
- Cultural reconstruction and folklorization – folklore ensembles and cultural institu-

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tions revive older forms (carolling, Christmas-tree rituals, regional hymns);

- Educational integration – schools and children's educational institutions adapt traditions as tools for cultural heritage learning.
- These trajectories indicate that, despite historical ruptures, the musical traditions of the Christmas cycle in Lithuanian Minor have real potential not only to be preserved but also to be practised as living heritage, responding to contemporary social needs and contributing to cultural identity building.

Conclusions

1. The Christmas-season musical tradition of Lithuanian Minor took shape within an intercultural and interconfessional context, where elements of archaic Baltic calendrical rites intertwined with Lutheran hymn-singing practices and German cultural influences. Long-term incorporation into Prussia and a strong Protestant worldview resulted in a more restrained and less theatrical festive culture; however, this also strengthened the central role of hymn-singing as a key religious and social form of expression.
2. The musical activity of the Christmas cycle in Lithuanian Minor fulfilled clear social and ritual functions. Within the family space, hymn-singing and the lighting of candles on the Christmas tree created a sacralised domestic atmosphere that symbolically extended the liturgical experience into the home. Musical actions mediated intergenerational relations, reinforced family identity, and preserved the religious character of the festive season. During the visit of the Christmas Elder, music operated as a medium of offering and exchange, strengthening children's socialisation and moral education.
3. In community customs, music functioned as a means of social bonding, well-wishing, and ritual protection. Youth visits (*kieminėjimas*), melodised greetings, groups of masqueraders, dances, and songs served as crucial factors of communal solidarity. Although most of these customs declined in the mid-20th century, their structural model reveals the significance of music as a marker of collective communication and sacrality.
4. The continuity of tradition today manifests in three spheres: confessional, cultural, and educational. Lutheran hymn-singing remains alive in parishes; folklore ensembles and cultural centres reconstruct Christmas-cycle music and customs; schools integrate regional material into Advent and Christmas educational programmes. These practices enable not only the preservation, but also the revitalisation of *lietuvininkai* heritage within contemporary cultural life.
5. The Christmas-season musical tradition of Lithuanian Minor possesses genuine potential for present-day application, particularly in community events, children's and youth education, and heritage communication. Musical forms – hymn-singing, melodised greetings, Christmas-tree rituals – may serve as tools for strengthening cultural identity, fostering intergenerational dialogue, and creating a living connection with the region's historical memory.
6. Overall, music in the Christmas cycle of Lithuanian Minor is not an incidental but a structural element of the festive system, uniting archaic ritual models, Lutheran devotional culture, and contemporary modes of tradition-continuity. Through musical practice, the key functions of these festivities – ritual, communicative, social, and identity-related – are revealed, and these remain no less relevant today than they were in the historical *lietuvininkai* community.

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MUSIC AS A GIFT FOR LIFE? USING MUSIC IN DEMENTIA CARE

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Abstract

The objectives of the study were to better understand how the responses of people with dementia towards a series of musical activities were understood and interpreted by their care givers. The research explored the extent to which caregiver observations could serve as a proxy language for those with limited memory and verbal capacity. 33 care staff and trained volunteers based in five full time care facilities in UK and Japan carried out a series of open observations on pre-selected residents with mid – to final-stage dementia, during a series of informal musical experiences. Subsequently, interviews were held with each of the participants in order to better understand what they had observed and how they had interpreted the responses which residents had made during the event.

Our results suggested that informal musical experiences can potentially offer a range of benefits to care staff, alongside those experienced by residents, and the act of carrying out the observations increased the level of observational skills and the confidence which care givers have in making assessments about the relative levels of well-being in individual residents. The study concluded that in addition to being a pleasant interlude, or a simple form of entertainment, musical experiences can actually become an important and sensitive tool for assessing physical and cognitive health, along with providing a unique context in which disability and stigma are removed.

Keywords: *dementia, music,* ***c****are* ***s****taff,* ***s****tigma, normality*

Introduction and Background

Dementia is increasingly becoming a global health challenge currently affecting almost one million people in the UK (Alzheimer's Research UK, 2025) and almost five million individuals in Japan (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, 2017). The impact of dementia on the individual people who live with dementia, their families who are required to cope with it, and on the communities, institutions, agencies and societies which are required to manage it, have all been extremely well documented (Giebel & Sutcliffe, 2017; Cho, 2018). In particular the loss of language, memory and the ability to reason and behave according to established and accepted cultural norms which can accompany dementia, can often make it one of the most difficult conditions for care givers and nurses to cope with (Quinn & Toms, 2018). The personality changes and behavioural difficulties which can range from an inability to communicate, converse with and recognise family members through to increased levels of aggressive and negative or anti-social behaviours have been adequately covered elsewhere (Clement, et al., 2012; Brancatisano & Thompson, 2019; Barradas et al., 2021). However, the fact remains that such behavioural issues can often lead to a significant reduction in the number of social activities and personal interactions in which people with dementia can engage (Gulliver

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et al., 2019). For example, Sabat (2001) noted how the 'social self-remaining in a person with dementia, can suffer significantly due to their reliance on the attitudes and behaviours of 'others' arising from the fact that the process of communicating with a person with dementia requires increased levels of effort (Kitwood,1997; Hubbard et al., 2002).

Participation in the arts and cultural activities, has been shown to be an important activity for promoting levels of well-being, communication and engagement, even amongst those with severe dementia (Cohen et al., 2006; Camic, Tischler & Pearman, 2014; Seifert, Spottke & Fliessbach, 2017; Pigliautile et al., 2018). Certainly, previous work has continued to highlight many of the positive benefits, including mood changes (Kinney & Rentz, 2005; Tyack et al., 2017), and increased levels of cognitive activity (Young et al., 2015), which may be gained from engagement with the arts for individuals living with dementia.

More specifically, the idea that music can heal us physically and mentally, has a long history. Montinari et al. (2018) suggest: *"Music always has been perceived to have particular healing powers, and the entire history of civilization contains aspects that link music to physical and mental healing"* (p. 98). The beneficial effects, which music appears to have on the well-being of individuals with dementia, has been extremely well documented (Ferreri, et al., 2019; Gouk, 2000).

Subsequently, numerous studies have continued to report on the wide range of benefits which experiencing music can bring to those who live with dementia, including increased levels of memory (Toritsuka et al., 2014; Cuddy et al., 2015; Sarkamo, 2018) and of well-being (Zumansen et al., 2017), along with reduced levels of agitation and anxiety (Sung et al. 2012; Sakamoto et al., 2013), depression and anti-social behaviour (McCabe et al., 2013; Gulliver et al., 2019).

This study was designed to contribute to the current body of literature in two significant ways. First, we directed our focus towards people living with final stage dementia, a group that is often underrepresented in the research literature due to the complexities of engagement and the ethical challenges of participation. Second, we decided to privilege the perspectives of care givers rather than those of the individuals with dementia themselves.

Previous studies have predominantly involved working with individuals with early or mid-stage dementia where interviews, focus groups and other similar data collection techniques can be both feasible and appropriate. However, as dementia advances, sustaining verbal engagement becomes increasingly difficult, and traditional research methods such as interviews or focus groups are no longer viable and the use of physiological measures such as brain imaging or salivary biomarkers can be invasive, distressing and therefore ethically problematic (Kuot et al., 2021). A further challenge lies in the fact that many existing musical interventions (e.g., Music Mirrors) have been designed primarily for individuals with early to mid-stage dementia and their relevance and appropriateness for individuals with advanced dementia remains underexplored.

Hence, the decision to include people living with late-stage dementia was therefore motivated by two key factors. In addition to the fact that we wished to address a gap in the literature, our choice of research approach also allowed for a greater focus on methodological innovation, particularly in considering data collection "by proxy" through care givers. Our choice to gather data in this way was supported by previous research which clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of using family members and care/nursing staff as proxies to give voice to people living with advanced dementia (Camerlynck & Sedgwick, 2021; Hammar et al., 2022). Given that musical engagement has been shown to increase interaction and social connection, the insights of care givers can provide valuable perspectives on how such musical activities are being experienced by those who cannot communicate verbally (Ekra & Dale, 2020).

One further important, but often neglected issue is that responses to music can be negative as well as positive, yet the person with dementia frequently has limited ways to express which emotion they are feeling (Camerlynck & Sedgewick, 2021). Care givers, by virtue of their sustained relationships and daily interactions, are well placed to observe, interpret, and reflect on the subtle behavioural changes that emerge during musical experiences (Ekra & Dale, 2020).

Therefore, given the negative impacts which dementia can have on the remaining social self, and the significant reduction in the artistic and recreational activities which they attend unaided, we aimed to explore how care givers and volunteer staff members perceived and interpreted the unique behaviours which individuals exhibited when engaging with informal music activities.

The research questions in this study are:

- *To what extent are care givers aware of the distinctive behaviours generated when people with final stage dementia experience a musical event?*
- *How do care givers tend to interpret and represent such behaviours?*

Procedure and Sample

The study was carried out in a total of five care facilities: three were located in the south of England, UK, and two in the south-east of Japan. A total of 33 interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of care staff. All participants were selected due to their long-standing associations with their respective facilities and their in-depth knowledge of the residents in their care. A series of informal music concerts were arranged within each facility. All concerts involved professional musicians with significant experience of performing in care contexts and specific expertise in working with people living with dementia. Each performance lasted between 50 and 70 minutes and featured two professional or semi-professional musicians. Although it was not possible to control the precise repertoire, instrumentation, or combination of instruments across concerts, all performances incorporated a range of musical styles. Performers also followed similar patterns of behaviour, including some degree of individual engagement, such as performing short sections of songs directly to specific residents.

The individual residents chosen for observation (n = 33) were pre-selected according to set criteria. First, all were living with moderate to final stage dementia, as determined by their most recent Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) results, which ranged from 23 to 11 (mean MMSE = 16).

Second, all were considered physically healthy and had regularly attended musical and other events, ensuring they were comfortable in the setting. Each participating member of the care/nursing staff undertook open observations of an individual resident during two musical events, along with one observation during an alternative non-musical activity. Given their previous extensive knowledge of the people with dementia participants were asked to focus on specific types of behaviour including behaviours that were typical, unusual or unique.

For this research, we chose to follow Cammett's (2013) 'Co-Pro' approach to data collection by proxy. Specifically, this approach argues for the involvement of trusted and trained intermediaries/insiders with some form of natural access to, or allegiance with the vulnerable or underrepresented group. Hence, in our study all participating care staff were well known to their residents, their families and to one member of the research team. All had undergone prior training consisting of workshops, engaged with

reading materials and previously acted as participant researchers. As a result of the range and breadth of the training, all participating care staff had been awarded a university professional certificate in music and dementia. Participating staff members were asked to make field notes throughout their observations, followed by post-data collection interviews with one member of the research team conducted within each facility. These post data collection interviews enabled an additional reflective dialogue between researchers and intermediaries, specifically designed to encourage participating care staff to reflect on the impact of the musical events on residents who were well known to them, their perceptions of the value of such events, and their observations of the same residents' behaviours during other activities e.g., arts and crafts, armchair exercise, or reminiscence activities (Cammett, 2013). Post collection interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes.

Collecting data by proxy can offer important advantages, particularly when working with populations who are unable to provide responses themselves due to advanced illness, cognitive decline, or communication barriers. In such situations, data collection by proxy can enable the inclusion of underrepresented groups and offer additional contextual insights. However, it is also the case that their data can be shaped by perceptions, stress, or emotional involvement, that can reduce accuracy in subjective measures like pain or mood. Ethically, speaking, the fact remains that although data collection by proxy can reach out to vulnerable of underrepresented populations, it always replaces the individual's voice. Therefore, additional care was taken throughout to ensure our proxy data was interpreted cautiously and transparently (Bhattacherjee, 2012).

Ethical approval for the project was obtained from one university. Permission to conduct the study was granted by senior staff of the participating care facilities and by individual care staff members.

All participation in this study was voluntary, and participating care staff were free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason. All residents with dementia were cognitively impaired at the time of this research. However, research had been taking place within each facility for a minimum of seven years prior to this study and all residents involved in this study had previously given their informed consent and expressed their wish for consent to cover future participation in research. This understanding had been communicated to, and acknowledged by their families. Family members were therefore not only aware of the ongoing consent arrangement but also fully informed about the residents' preferences for involvement in subsequent studies.

Following recommendations by Dewing (2007), process consent was also applied throughout data collection, ensuring that assent and willingness to participate were continuously checked. In addition, written consent was obtained from family members acting as proxies, consistent with ethical practice in dementia research (Hellström et al., 2007). In cases where residents were unwell or unwilling to attend, their wishes were respected, regardless of other consents having been provided. All procedures were also consistent with guidelines from the British Psychological Society (2021) and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan (2017), both of which emphasise the importance of minimising potential harm and maximising well-being in research involving vulnerable groups.

In total, 146 observations were carried out, including those involved in reliability checks. Observations focussed on what participating care staff perceived as being:

- Behaviours they felt were either typical or non-typical of the resident,
- Responses they felt were either positive (e.g., expressions of joy/clapping) or negative (e.g., attention drifting/wishing to leave), and
- Those behaviours they regarded as being unique to the musical event.

Analysis

Our data analysis followed standard qualitative procedures for thematic analysis based on the model suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2014; Clarke & Braun, 2017). Hence, an inductive, 'bottom up' approach was utilised in which an initial basic, descriptive level of coding was systematically built up towards a more theoretical and interpretive level of understanding (Langdridge, 2004). Data from interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and an initial familiarisation with the total data set was carried out independently by both authors.

A series of preliminary discussions then allowed some initial codes to be generated. Following an iterative, and flexible process, all initials' themes were reviewed until four final themes emerged into which all data could be set. Themes were then named (horizontal analysis).

In adopting both horizontal and vertical approaches to analysis, we sought to balance breadth and depth in our interpretation of the data. Horizontal analysis allowed us to identify themes across participants and cases, capturing commonalities and differences in the ways that participating care staff described the impact of music on people living with dementia (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2014; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). By contrast, vertical analysis enabled us to revisit these themes through a more interpretative lens, drawing on theoretical frameworks to interrogate the data within its social and cultural context (Langdridge, 2004; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Combining these two orientations of analysis has previously been shown to strengthen qualitative research by providing both cross-case thematic patterns and within-case theoretical insights. This dual approach was therefore particularly appropriate for a study concerned with identity, stigma, and normality, where attention to both shared experiences and individual expressions of behaviour was essential.

Subsequently, the horizontal themes were subjected to further reflection and a number of theoretical perspectives (Goffman, 1990, 1991) were applied producing a hierarchy of analysis (Vertical analysis). In this vertical stage, three further overarching themes emerged which provided a theoretical lens through which our initial thematic material could be viewed at a more interpretative level.

Results and Analysis

Theme 1: Unique, Independent Actions

The first theme centred on the wide range of not only unique, but independent behaviours that many residents exhibited without any external prompting. Such actions continued to surprise many of the participating care staff, as they frequently contradicted the everyday expectations of dependence. For example:

> *"(name)…cannot do anything by herself…always just sitting*
> *and if you saw her, you would think she was very much out of it…,*
> *but she conducted... she sang ... she clapped…no help*
> *or prompting required…so no different to anybody else."* (UK-2)

Interviewees repeatedly contrasted these moments with other activities within care facilities, which although unintentional, tended to highlight and draw attention to a disability. Activities such as decorating cards or baking biscuits necessitated almost total caregiver intervention, and although this support was well-intentioned, in that selfsame act, it also emphasised the level of incapacity. As one participant described of another activity:

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"…and the last time we did it – I did more exercise than (name) did – they had no idea what was going on." (UK-7)

In contrast, musical events appeared to offer a distinctive space where individuals could act independently and demonstrate their agency, often in subtle but powerful ways. This finding resonates strongly with Kitwood's (1997) emphasis on maintaining personhood in dementia care, and Sabat's (2001) argument that identity is preserved and expressed through acts of agency, however small. Rather than being cast as 'patients' in need of constant assistance, individuals were free to act as independent musical participants motivated by their own interests and emotions; put succinctly, to act in the same way as every other audience member. Moreover, the observed behaviours were not seen as simple rote responses, but as unique, idiosyncratic creations that demonstrated individual creativity and knowledge. Gestures in actions such as 'conducting' included sometimes responding to the rhythm and at other times to the beat of the music, or word painting, for example, fluttering fingers in response to a song about a bird represented not only spontaneous expressions but also evidence of having a significant level of musical understanding and emotional sensitivity. In a number of cases, these unique responses also depicted elements in the music that the others have been unaware of, and as such generated a high level of respect for their ability. As one carer commented:

"…he amazed me! – every single – individual tune – had different set of hand gestures… sometimes several with one tune... I don't know how he made them up…I couldn't do it!" (UK-21)

Such findings align with Kontos' (2004) work on embodied selfhood, which argues that creativity and individuality continue to emerge through bodily expression even when verbal communication is impaired. Put simply, music allowed individuals to demonstrate un-aided, spontaneous and independent behaviours that exceeded the stereotypical notions of what can be expected from a person with final stage dementia, broadening how independence and agency can be recognised in practice.

Theme 2: Crossing the Relational Bridge

Dementia is often associated with isolation and detachment. As Hayes (2011) has suggested, music may act as a 'relational bridge', offering an essential medium through which individuals can reconnect with others: *"A most necessary vehicle for the self, isolated by forgotten language, to step back in contact with life"* (p. 32). Our findings resonate with this concept, but extend it by distinguishing between two categories of interaction often conflated in the literature: interpersonal and intrapersonal. In the interpersonal category, individuals engaged with others in ways that were largely responsive to external prompts. For instance, caregivers noted increased eye contact, hand-holding, and shared movements:

"... he was watching the musicians, he held my hands, we swayed from side to side, watched the musicians and he was happy to join me in the clapping – you never see him do that." (UK-19)

These activities reflected a relational connection, and mirrored previous findings on the often-observed enhanced interactions that occur during musical contexts (Farrer et al., 2016; Jao et al., 2018). However, such interactions often originate with the caregiver or musician initiating a response, with the resident joining in rather than instigating.

By contrast, the intrapersonal category encompassed interactions initiated by the individual themselves, even when involving others. For example:

"…(name) had no idea who he was because he was new …
but she just held her hand out to him
and they sat holding hands… made me cry." (UK-12)

Here, the motivation to act was resident-driven, rather than being externally prompted. Also observed, were residents engaging in musical 'worlds of their own', responding to rhythm, tempo, or melody in ways that were self-contained yet profoundly expressive. Such behaviours could illustrate Csikszentmihalyi's (1975, 1990) concept of flow - a state of deep absorption, energy, and spontaneity. Similarly, and Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory underscores the importance of autonomy and intrinsic motivation, both clearly evidenced in these intrapersonal responses. Distinguishing interpersonal from intrapersonal activity is not simply semantic.

It highlights different dimensions of well-being: relational connectedness versus personal agency and self-expression. Caregivers interpreting these behaviours can therefore gain far richer insights into the cognitive activity, emotional states, and the persistence of selfhood in each resident (Sabat & Harre, 1992; Kontos, 2004).

Theme 3: Evoking Voice

This third theme highlighted how musical events gave individuals with dementia a voice; not only literally through singing, but also metaphorically, through embodied gestures, unwitting testimonies, and aesthetic expressions. The resident's singing voice was the most obvious expression, with many participants describing residents who were usually silent suddenly becoming vocal:

"…(name) is usually silent, never speaks but told me,
'It was wonderful today' – I never heard him speak before!" (JP3)

This observation chimes well with previous work by authors such as Baird and Thompson (2018), who argued that when language skills deteriorate, the musical functions and memories that appear to persist, can provide a vital tool for identifying the person with severe dementia as a significant other, and providing caregivers with *"an informal and personalised manner to maintain interpersonal identity and social connectedness"* (p. 462). Such responses also echo a number of additional studies that have identified music's capacity to unlock language and memory (Brotons & Koger, 2000; Okabe & Kobayashi, 2006; Toritsuka et al., 2014). Care givers in our study also noted expanded vocabulary, emotional articulation, and more complex ideas expressed during and after music sessions. Unwitting testimony emerged when individuals revealed their physical and mental capacities unintentionally. As one caregiver observed:

"…If you ask Mrs (name) to drink something – there is no response… but I saw her clapping in time to different pieces of music – even quite fast tunes." (UK-9)

Such examples illustrate DeNora's (2015) argument that music provides a cultural and embodied context through which health and wellbeing can be revealed, sometimes more accurately than clinical assessment. The pleasure of music motivated individuals to exert themselves physically and cognitively, demonstrating stamina and coordination that might otherwise remain hidden. This not only aided immediate care planning but also allowed caregivers to share positive and meaningful observations with families. Finally, we observed the emergence of aesthetic voice. Beyond functional expression,

individuals communicated tastes, preferences, and artistic sensibilities, often surprising caregivers:

> *"…last time, she loved traditional songs but this time, she was bored, but I would never have thought I would see (name) responding like that to 'Stairway to Heaven' – at her age."* (JP-5)

These aesthetic responses, sometimes embodied through gestures or emotional displays, affirmed that people with dementia remain capable of discernment, taste, and critical judgment - echoing notion of being *"open eared and open hearted"* by Kreitler & Kreitler (1972). LeBlanc (1991) and Penhune (2011) similarly emphasise the lifelong variability of musical preference, which appears to persist even as social influences recede. Taken together, these findings underscore the argument advanced by Yamaguchi et al. (2006) and Bartlett & O'Connor (2010) that recognising voice - in all its forms - is central to respecting the rights, dignity, and personhood of people with dementia. Musical events thus move beyond 'entertainment', offering both an expanded repertoire of communication and novel opportunities for assessment and care.

Vertical Analysis: Stigma, normality and actual social identity

"Society establishes the means of categorising persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for members of each of these categories" (Goffman, 1990, p. 11).

In the dictionary, the word 'ordinary' is reported to mean the absence of any special or distinctive features or norms. Yet, in many respects, 'norms', or what is considered to be 'ordinary' are somewhat arbitrary ideas, and are frequently socially and culturally specific. Appearances, behaviours, language codes or attitudes that are both accepted, expected and viewed as normal in one particular social and/or cultural setting, are regarded as abnormal in others. When we enter a particular social or cultural setting, we do so with clear expectations of how we should dress, speak and behave, and we expect others to do the same. As Goffman (1991), argued specific, social or cultural settings establish the categories of persons likely to be encountered within that setting.

'Stigma' arises when an individual either fails to displays one or more 'ordinary' and 'arbitrary' attributes, or conversely displays attributes which are not expected, and are far from being accepted as 'ordinary'. Goffman (1991) stated: '*An attribute that stigmatises one type of possessor can confirm the usualness of another'* (p. 13). Certainly, an individual with mid to final stage dementia, frequently displays attributes that are often considered to be outside of the category classed as 'ordinary' (Mitchell et al., 2019). In reality, the impact of displaying out of the ordinary attributes occurs because, as Goffman further argued, *"social settings establish the categories of persons likely to be encountered"* (p.11). In other words, we all expect our fellow humans to behave according to the arbitrary, yet accepted norms which are common within our own social and cultural setting, i.e., we expect others to be 'normal'. Those who possess different attributes, with an appropriate label attached (i.e., dementia) are placed within a separate social setting, often for the best possible reasons, and yet we all carry a set, or library of distinct expectations about the '*category of persons likely to be found there'*; and this, in Goffman's terminology, is the individuals 'virtual social identity'. That is, the identity we expect them to have, as opposed to the 'actual social identity' which in reality they still possess.

Hence, when the individual with dementia fails to carry out our culturally and socially expected behaviours, their un-real 'virtual social identity' which we assign to them,

or that identity which we expect of them, in our eyes becomes their 'actual social identity', and which is continuously fed by the extent to which they are able, or not, to abide by the regulations and expectations which their immediate context places on them. They become, what we expect.

What musical events appear to do, is to allow individuals living with dementia to show that in many respects, within some contexts, they are actually 'normal'. To be clear, their behaviour and their attributes demonstrate those attributes which we regard as 'ordinary'. They tap, clap, hold hands, sway, beat time, smile and sing in tune; exactly as we ourselves do and precisely as we expect others to do. In short, musical events challenge and disrupt the process by which people with dementia continue to feed our expectations. They become 'normal' and shed the 'stigma' and as a consequence, their *actual social identity*, as we see them, demands to be changed.

When acts of care continue, or facilitate an identity of 'that which an individual cannot do', regardless of the good intentions that exist behind them, in that self-same act they contribute to an increased identity of stigma and abnormality. An inevitable accompaniment to this, is an *expectation* of how that 'abnormal' individual should be treated. Perhaps the most concrete example of this effect, as frequently protested by numerous wheelchair users, relates to the number of good natured, and well-intended people who ignore their existence, and ask their care-giver how the individual in their care is progressing. The invalid cannot walk (abnormality), and therefore the *expectation* is they are also incapable of talking.

Certainly, our data revealed an increase in attention to, and an awareness and understanding of the resident voice gained from their non-verbal behaviours. This in turn appeared to lead to an increased level of interest in individual residents, along with an increased respect for their individuality and personality and the contribution the resident was seen as making to the life of the care facility.

> *"The concerts allow us to see the individual in a new light!*
> *– we tend to only see them in terms of what they need us to do for them*
> *– how can we help or entertain them – but in the concerts,*
> ***'they'** make **'us'** laugh – they lead us and we see more of the person."* (JP7)

Such comments also seemed to engender an increased interest in the individual people generating questions as to their personal history, their musical training, had they played a musical instrument or sung in a choir.

Similarly, participants began to identify the positive contribution that individuals, even with severe dementia, could make to the facility:

> *"(name) is fantastic – he can whistle anything*
> *and he just joins in and cheers everybody up."* (UK23)

Other comments highlighted the respect for individuals who could still sing in tune, sing harmony, remember words, and conduct in a creative way. In one instance, the carer admitted:

> *"…I don't know music but watching her has taught me a lot, she can hear things and her conducting way sort of shows me bits I would not have noticed."* (UK14)

Therefore, we hereby argue that these are the precise attributes which challenge the stigma, and the expectations, and redefine the actual social identity of the individual.

Conclusions

1. Our research focus explored the extent to which care givers were aware of any unique behaviours generated when people with dementia experienced a musical event and how they intended to interpret such behaviours. The key focal points of the study were a) to explore the responses of a hard to reach, and under researched population of individuals living with final stage dementia; b) to work through the perspectives provided by care providers and the individuals living with dementia. As Hubbard et al. (2002) had argued, the level of effort required to engender and sustain any significant level of verbal engagement can increase dramatically as the dementia progresses, requiring an increased understanding of the way in which people with dementia use and interpret non-verbal behaviours. Similarly, collecting data through caregivers was guided by a number of previous studies which had previously demonstrated the effectiveness of working with care staff as a means of giving voice to those living with final stage dementia (Camerlynck & Sedgewick 2021; Hammar, et al., 2022). Through the often-increased levels of engagement and interaction which musical events can facilitate amongst people with dementia, this study sought to better understand, and contextualise (Ėkra & Dale, 2020) how people living with mid to final stage dementia engage with musical experiences as perceived by individuals who knew them well i.e., the staff who care for them. Thus, in conclusion, we argue four key points in relation to musical activities and those people who live with dementia.
2. Hubbard et al. (2002) argued for an increased understanding of the way in which people with dementia use and interpret non-verbal behaviours. Responses from our participants suggested that whilst they had previously been 'generally aware' of the type of behaviours exhibited by residents within a musical event, they had found the act of carrying out a detailed observation to be both challenging and rewarding. The observations were challenging in the sense that many initially felt they were not qualified to make assessments and interpretations of carrying out observations but also with an initial feeling of the value to be obtained from carrying such a prolonged and detailed observation of one, single resident. Music tended to be regarded as an enjoyable, and welcome interlude which whilst being enjoyable 'in the moment', was finished once the concert had concluded.
3. The rewards came through actually carrying out the observations, in that participants grew in confidence in their own abilities and began to identify some potential benefits arising out of such detailed observations. Benefits included additional, and often extremely positive information to pass on to family members, and an increasing understanding that the unique behaviours generated by partaking in musical experiences can offer provide additional, unique details and information about the physical, social, and cognitive abilities and these change over time. In short, in addition to being a pleasant interlude, or a simple entertainment, musical experiences can actual become an important and sensitive tool for assessing physical and cognitive health.
4. The observations challenged the expectations which care givers had of their residents. It was noted that their expectations had become more respectful with increased talk as to what individuals could do, as opposed to what they could not do, and similarly, participants became more interested in the residents as individuals and the level of social engagement with them increased, often in contexts beyond the actual musical experiences. For example, one participant

spoke about how she had begun to use snippets of a particular song when waking her residents every morning. By far the most common comment made within the context of our interviews was: "*They are so much easier to nurse after the musical events*". Our argument here is that when the expectations of the social category into which an individual is placed (or labelled) changes, our expectations of how we should behave towards them changes, and in return the response we receive will also change. Perhaps therefore, they are easier to nurse because they are perceived as being a different person.

5. Overall, we found that informal musical experiences were an appropriate environment in which to observe and explore, social interactions (D'Ausillio et al., 2015), yet initially, care givers felt far more comfortable in making assessments, and interpreting responses to resident's behaviours in other forms of activity, and less so in relation to musical activity. Individuals said they had initially felt that '*music was for musicians*' or for '*people who know about that kind of thing'*. Based on the overall responses of our participant care givers, we concur with Sarkamo (2018) in arguing that informal musical experiences, and interventions: *"...performed outside a formal music therapy context can have many potential benefits for cognitive, motor, emotional, and social functioning"* (p. 678). However, here we argue that these potential benefits also exist for care givers by increasing their levels of confidence, improving their observational skills and expanding their opportunities for assessing those they care for. In this sense, we agree with Morgan-Brown et al. (2018), in arguing that people with dementia have the human right, as *'full citizens, to engage in everyday occupations and social interactions'* (p. 406). Informal music listening is for most of us, an everyday occupation and engaging with such experiences carries potential benefits for carers and for the cared for.
6. The responses and behaviours exhibited by those with dementia during musical events were interpreted as being no different from the behaviours and attributes of others without dementia, or cognitive impairment. Residents responded naturally, through their own motivations and required no assistance. Therefore, momentarily, within the context of the musical event, they were seen as being the same as other people and as a consequence, they were perceived as being 'normal' without any form of 'stigma' attached, and their actual social identity was seen to have changed. In effect we can say that within the particular context of a musical event, they are without disability, because within the musical event, the issue of their cognitive disability. To summarise, the attributes created as a result of dementia are ecologically mediated. The impact and the power of musical experiences happens because the environment in which the people with dementia act, is changed; it becomes an environment in which their disability no longer exists. The fact that they are still able to understand and respond to musical stimulus in a 'normal' way, long after other cognitive skills have disappeared, is ultimately because of the music education they received. From this perspective, a music education is a gift for life.

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