

Music for itself

keynote-speech by **Lukas Pairon**

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Abstract

From 2012 to 2016 Lukas Pairon did field work in Kinshasa for his PhD-research on understanding how the experience of structured musical education and practice could have an influence on the lives of young people in the often difficult living socio-economic conditions of the city of Kinshasa (DR Congo).

Social music projects are being developed in urban contexts all over the world, and the role music can play in social work is now being studied more and more (see: www.simm-platform.eu).

The young musicians who have participated in Pairon's research in Kinshasa come out of complicated social backgrounds: young adult men who were members of violent gangs, and young adult men and women who were as so-called 'witch'-children living in the streets. They all believe that becoming musicians played an important role in helping them navigate towards better positions in their social lives, and they express this by saying that they were "saved by music" (see: www.lukas-pairon.eu/phd).

Pairon's narrative research studied and highlights what he conceives as 4 important building stones to succeed the social ambitions of such music projects: (1) a combination of artistic and psychosocial accompaniment, (2) the possible impact of mastering an instrument and music repertoire, (3) shared ownership and democratic organisation of the social music projects, and (4) the intrinsic interest of making music for itself.

During his keynote-speech in Ghent Lukas Pairon will focus on this last building stone - **music for itself** - and develop why young people in complex urban contexts can be so interested in making music, even if they cannot have much extrinsic benefits from it.

The research question of his research in Kinshasa was what the role of music could be in social and community work - and the impact of music-making on social change and inclusion - as

proposed in social music projects to young people in the poverty-stricken and often violent surroundings of Kinshasa. But in the course of his fieldwork the question became more and more what made these young people be so keen on making music even without them obtaining much social impact or other forms of extrinsic benefits from it.

Lukas Pairon has a long career in music. Before taking on this **PhD**-research for the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Ghent (Conflict Research Group), he has from 1994 to 2012 been working as the founding director of the now famous classical contemporary music ensemble **Ictus** (www.ictus.be). He has since 2004 been associated with the humanitarian organisation **Music Fund** (www.musicfund.eu), working with music schools and musicians in regions of conflict (Gaza, West Bank, Israel) and in developing countries (DR Congo, Haiti, Morocco, Mozambique). And since 2017 he is the founding director of the international research platform **SIMM** (Social Impact of Music Making, www.simm-platform.eu).

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This article is an extract from the PhD-thesis 'Music Saved Them They Say' which Lukas Pairon is preparing to defend in June 2019 for the University of Ghent (UGent, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Conflict Research Group - supervisor: Prof Koen Vlassenroot), following his field work from 2012 to 2016 in Kinshasa on possible social impacts of music making (SIMM) for youth in Kinshasa, DR Congo. Nothing of this article may be copied without the agreement of its writer.

BEYOND SURVIVAL – MUSIC FOR ITSELF

by Lukas Pairon

Introduction

1. In my research in **Kinshasa**, I have focussed on coming to a better understanding of the role music can play in social work which is aiming to help young people to establish new positions within their society, after having lived a life as members of violent gangs (or as so-called 'witch'-children in the streets of the city. They told me music 'saved' them and I have during a period of 3 1/2 years of on the spot fieldwork, interacted with them at length about their experiences in mastering music and becoming musicians.

2. In my 20 years as director of the soloist contemporary music ensemble **Ictus**¹, I had already been intrigued about the fact that there was no clear answer to the question why our musicians were doing what they were doing, as creating and performing newly composed music was - and still is - so far away from any form of logic of efficiency and productivity. In my research in Kinshasa, I came across very similar questions, but within a suprisingly different context: How can it at all be possible that music-making survives as an activity in a

¹ see: www.ictus.be

surrounding in which surviving is or should be a central day-to-day concern?

3. The former members of violent gangs who have become musicians of the percussion ensemble Beta Mbonda² were under the spell of music, even though this activity was not really yielding them money or much other capital, not enough at least to explain why they were spending so much time in music-making, while hardly surviving in the complicated surroundings of Kinshasa. Throughout the research period they complained to me about being poor and not having the time to make money, because too much time spent in rehearsals and music-making.

4. I called this article 'Beyond Survival' because I noted that in their investment in music they seemed to go beyond the standard survival modus most people in Kinshasa need to be in. This constitutes an exceptional contrast between at one end their need to live in a survival modus, and at the other end their activity of music-making which they see as an investment in a better future: The musicians of Beta Mbonda complained a lot about their financial difficulties, but at the same time indicated that they lost a lot of time in vagrancy, and decided to stay faithful in mastering music, because they see it as an investment in a possible better future for themselves.

5. External (extrinsic) reasons for making music, can be that thanks to music:

- one has found another position in society,
- it got some out of violence,
- it gave them respect from their neighbours,
- it brought them on television
- they are respected as artist-musicians,
- one is no longer seen as 'gangster' or 'witch'-child or 'street child',
- one has opportunities to earn some money here and there,
- one can hope to make a living with it in the future,
- maybe even succeeding in developing a career as musician,
- become well-known...

All these extrinsic reasons are for sure valid in explaining at least in part the motivation of these youngsters to continue to engage in the act of becoming musicians. But throughout my lengthy fieldwork in Kinshasa I more and more came to the understanding that what motivates them above all is that - somehow quite simply - they take great enjoyment in doing it: **They derive enjoyment from the activity itself of making music.** And - even though this was not an easy task to embark on - I wanted to come to an understanding of where this came from. The main reasons they gave us for wanting to continue making music anyway, were: (1) one day they will make

² Belgian artist Marie-Françoise Plissart made a film on Beta Mbonda - 'Beta Mbonda Kinshasa' - which will be presented on 4.5.19 at Museum M (Leuven) and on 13.5.19 at Bozar (Brussels).

money, (2) their new identity, (3) the respect they get and the potential this represents for being sponsored, and (4) but most important, their passion for making music.

6. Music-making can only in part be explained by means of its functionalities, its purpose, its aim, or its possible social impact, but - like with any form of play - it is at the end of the day also there just for itself (Huizinga 1938), interesting in itself, for the joy of performing it, for the joy of the 'flow' it offers (Csikszentmihalyi 1992-2002), and also for the control it gives. Music is being 'played'. **'Play' is at the heart of music.** Most musicians are known to be motivated by the quality of the experience which playing music offers in itself, not - at least not above all - by the expectation of its future utilities (Huizinga 1938; Caillois 1962; Rodriguez 2006; Sutton-Smith 1997). 'Play' was already many years ago described by Dutch historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizinga as an activity with no particular material interest and profit that could be gained by it. Play imposes rules to be followed though, and creates order. And music is a form of pure play (Huizinga 1938; Rodriguez 2006).

7. Still, it was striking to find that the importance these specific characteristics of 'playing' music - studied in very different contexts by scholars Johan Huizinga, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Roger Caillois and Brian Sutton-Smith - also appeared to have in the difficult circumstances of the participants in this research in Kinshasa: In my research in Kinshasa, all the possible - although real - benefits of playing music nevertheless did not explain conclusively why these musicians play music, considering their need - and the need of their surroundings - to have them on a day-to-day basis bring in money in order to simply feed themselves and help their families to survive.

8. Besides the concepts of 'enjoyment' (Haworth 2016 and Csikszentmihalyi 2002) and 'play' (Huizinga 1938, Caillois 1962, Rodriguez 2006; Sutton-Smith 1997), the other important concepts at the basis of this article, and their links to existing research and literature, are: 'mastery' (Sennett 2008), 'group dynamics' (Forsyth 2017), 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 2002) and 'positive fatalism' (Pairol 2016).

9. The musicians of Beta Mbonda came out of a previous life in which they were doing well materially, because they were terrorising people and then stealing their belongings. They discovered music and agreed to submit themselves to seriously work on mastering it. Their moms told us: *"We're glad our son came out of crime, but now after all these years, we have enough of them almost always being in music. They work a lot, but they hardly bring anything back to the family. They do*

some odd jobs at the side, but not much, because they work really hard on their music and have rehearsals almost every day."

The musicians of the percussion ensemble Beta Mbonda hope and even expect that they will one day make money and have an interesting and promising future thanks to their activity as musicians. But, in the meantime, many years are passing by³, during which nothing much came out of this activity in terms of financial or material gains.

10. But, even though they have moments and periods of discouragement, most of the time they continue to be incredibly motivated and engaged in this activity. It is amazing that the Beta Mbonda musicians continue to work on their music, despite the fact that they do not have that many concerts⁴, even though they are becoming fine musicians. If it were for the money, they should be performing other types of music, such as some of the more popular music of Kinshasa (Ndombolo or Coupé Décalé) which brings in a little more. They are therefore in financial need. The music does not pay at all in terms of money. But despite this, and despite periods of discouragement, they continue anyway.

11. What I found, is that music-making is an occupation which also gives meaning to their existence, beyond what they can earn financially with it, and I decided to try to come to a better understanding of this phenomenon by focussing on it during a series of focus group sessions and individual interviews. I invited them to look at what the experience of making music brought them in itself: not in terms of its external advantages (income, new identity...), but in terms of the activity in itself. I understood all the possible external reasons and advantages to also be good reasons for wanting to make music, and for helping them to be motivated to concentrate on this activity. But it was not satisfying and conclusive as an explanation for the enormous efforts they all put into this activity since many years⁵, without most of the extrinsic results they hoped could come out of it. This made us want to understand how the sheer enjoyment of the activity itself became an important motivation for them to cling to music.

12. We have during our research seen that it takes a lot of work to succeed in mastering music-making. This therefore also requires a considerable commitment, especially when the extrinsic benefits are limited. It is difficult to master the

³ when I started the research, more than 6 years had already passed since they joined Beta Mbonda

⁴ The reason why it is not so easy for them to get concerts seems to be due to the fact that traditional music is less appreciated than it was before.

⁵ at the expense of other activities which could help them make a living, because not much time left besides their music-making

instruments and the repertoire, so newcomers are confronted with important sacrifices. This is one of the reasons which confronted us in this research with the question why they kept on being so attached to this activity.

13. The question which imposed itself more and more within this research was especially in relation to the situation of the traditional percussionists of Beta Mbonda, because the brass band musicians of Espace Masolo have more chances in making a living with their music. Brass band musicians are sought in Kinshasa and in other parts of the country. After their basic training at Espace Masolo, several of these young musicians already succeed to earn enough money from their musical activities thanks to being engaged in different brass bands at ceremonies and funerals. They know that if their actual project does not work out, they will manage to find opportunities with other brass bands. Some already succeed earning enough money to take care of themselves as well as part of their family, thanks to more than 2 performances per week in different bands. This encourages others in the band to follow their friends' example and invest in mastering music.

14. Even though these young musicians in Kinshasa were attached to their musical activity, they nevertheless regularly felt discouraged and thought of getting involved in other activities. In comparison with some of their friends who make money with their business, they were (and still are) in a music ensemble and do not make much money at all. It could at times make them doubt about continuing or giving up, or it could at least seriously spoil their temper. What kept them from quitting is that they love making music so much, saying things such as "my music is my life", or "I love music beyond any consideration about my position in society".

1. Music itself gives enjoyment

If it were only for the money we sometimes get for the music we make, I would have given it up a long time ago. (musician EMI-MA of Espace Masolo, 08.07.15, ref-14057)

My pleasure is to be able to play. The sound that comes out is what gives me pleasure. And then, if there are people listening, it's even better. (Beta Mbonda musician BM-KU, 13.04.15, ref-09196)

The concept of 'enjoyment' is in this article used as it was and still is being studied by Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Haworth 2016⁶, Csikszentmihalyi 2002).

⁶ These are numbers referring to the data of the research, which will from May 2019 on be available online via DANS (Data Archiving and Networked Services; <https://dans.knaw.nl/en>).

⁷ A good overview of recent literature can be found in John Haworth's article on 'Enjoyment and wellbeing' (Haworth 2016).

The act of performing the sounds of the instrument and the melodies and rhythms of the songs gives enjoyment in itself. In other words: You do not play music to end the piece, but to play best the next note or next part of the piece. The music-making in itself can therefore be the reason and the aim of the activity, not only all the external advantages such as possible material gains or possible (and real) gain of 'symbolic capital' (respect, hope for a career as a well-known artist, being already recognised on the streets after television broadcasting...). Not only musicians, but 'players' in general "are typically motivated by the quality of experience that playing affords, not by the expectation of some future utility" (Rodriguez 2006).

I already have pleasure when listening to music, but when I can play music myself, the pleasure is much bigger still. Even when I am doing other things during the day, I will often think of my music. It is in my blood. I am doing other activities which allow me to make some money, but without much enthusiasm, because what really counts for me is music-making. When I make money otherwise, it is because I need it for now, immediately. But what really counts is to succeed in making music. (Beta Mbonda musician BM-CL, 30.04.15, ref-09406)

The musicians of Beta Mbonda at one point came back after a break of 2 months, not because the situation had so much changed in terms of the extrinsic gains they could get from making music, but simply because they missed the activity itself too much. Playing the music itself, is something they loved and something which made them come back to rehearse and work.

In music, what gives me most pleasure is the feeling I can have when I go out to play somewhere and have a song which carries me away. The spirit is in the song and then you play - and you dance at the same time. If it is a good song in which I can put all my mind, that gives me a lot of pleasure. (from interview on music-making with EMI-DO of Espace Masolo, 23.04.15, ref-12066)

Several musicians tell us that when playing music they feel as if another spirit inhabits them. They feel so strongly focused, and this concentration makes them feel enjoyment.

Their mentors do not tell them lies about their financial future as musicians, only that by working hard they might manage a decent life, like their teachers. They share with their students that the real enjoyment also for them comes from the music-making itself. This positioning of the trainers counts a lot, because besides the sheer enjoyment of making music, there is also the knowledge that they are not alone in this experience. They find out that their elders have lived and continue to go through similar experiences, and so they are as beginning musicians in contact with and belong to a long tradition. This belonging to the tradition and world of musicians has often been expressed by the participants in this research as an essential element in their motivation to hang on to this activity.

2. Playing music is addictive

I consider music as a drug. At school, we were told that music made the heart happy. When you have a problem that bothers you, there are songs. When you sing them, automatically, you forget these problems. Or, it relieves you. (Espace Masolo musician EMI-DO, 23.04.15, ref-12078)

The musicians in my research reported regularly about the mesmerizing effect music-making has on them. It is for them as if a spirit inhabits the music and has also entered them. They say they feel in connection with the music, not through their body, but in spirit.

Their expressions of dependence to music were often so strong that they came across as excessive.

Me apart from music it's hard to live. I do not know how I will live without music. Without music, I'm going to die. (Beta Mbonda musician BM-VA, 21.04.15, ref-11772)

I do not know how to express what I feel in music, because it is impossible for someone else to understand it if he does not enter in me. But that is impossible, only God can do it. It is as if on stage a spirit animates us to the point that when after a production we visualize the images, we do not realize that it is we who played this way. On stage I forget myself, because transported to higher spheres and only regain consciousness at the signal: stop! (from focus group with Beta Mbonda, 16.09.13, BM-GI, ref-00747)

When I play music, I feel like I'm no longer EMI-GL. I'm another person. I really get a little crazy. What interests me is the rhythm. It makes me go crazy. (from interview on music-making with EMI-GL of Espace Masolo, 17.04.15, ref-11106)

Music itself is comparable to drugs. (...) Even fetishers resort to music to make incantations. When we are on stage, it is no longer we who play but it is as if there is a spirit that goes into a trance. We forget our children, our women, our problems etc. (Mbonda Beta musician BM-GI, 07.12.14, ref-07708)

I asked them whether they could imagine stop playing music, when they would not need it to make a living, and without exception all participants in this research answered they would still not want to give it up. They all say they want to continue to make music, even if they will be involved in other activities. They in fact hope to be able to develop other professional activities allowing them to make ends meet, and also allowing them to continue their musical rehearsals and concerts besides that.

Many participants in the research compared music-making to taking drugs, in the sense that they felt addicted to it, not being able to live without it, claiming that even if they did not earn anything at all, they would still want to make music on a voluntary basis.

Comparing music-making to taking drugs, is faulty if one thinks of a form of loss of consciousness. Even though other types of consciousness are being reported during the act of

making music, one stays conscious, as one needs to be extremely focused in order to perform the music well.

3. Enjoyment of mastering / performing well

When you take drugs, you feel madness, and you see yourself as if you were the master of the world. Exactly like that, when playing music, I also feel that I am the one. (from individual interview with BM-IB on music-making, 04.05.15, ref-13483)

The pleasure I experience from mastering what I am doing is very strong and intense and I feel it coming from very deep inside myself and my heart. (Beta Mbonda musician BM-MW, 30.04.15, ref-09683)

It happens so often and surely not only within concerts, also during rehearsals. When I have had difficulties playing something and then succeed to master it, this gives an immense pleasure. I do not need the presence of an audience to experience this joy. (Beta Mbonda musician BM-MW, 30.04.15, ref-09685)

The enjoyment of making music is strongly related to the quality of the music they are making. As a result, the more they play and the better musician they become, the more enjoyment they experience.

The more they succeed in mastering their instruments and repertoire, the more they are astonished and happy that they are capable to play these instruments and to know the music they play. Realising this mastery gives them a lot of enjoyment. It is reported as another important reason for having pleasure in playing music. Also, when they did not master something they have to play well, the enjoyment will be absent, and instead stress comes in.

What counts as part of the pleasure is that I have suffered to learn it, to master something difficult. It can take weeks before one masters certain rhythms or songs. When you have then mastered it and you play, this as such gives you a lot of pleasure. Then when we play all together, and we all together share this pleasure of having mastered a certain piece of music, that gives then even more pleasure. Somehow it is more difficult to get lost, when everyone is in the same rhythm. The conscience of knowing that everyone is in tune and all of us mastered it, that gives a lot of pleasure. (Beta Mbonda musician BM-CL, 30.04.15, ref-09408)

Each instrument gives one different degrees of enjoyment, also because - as in relations between people - each person has stronger connections to the sound and feeling of performing certain instruments in comparison with others.

Too much control can nevertheless possibly cause a drop in enjoyment. Mastery is said to give enjoyment, but routine and automatism can be a nuisance. When one plays on autopilot, because one plays the same repertoire so often - such as the repertoire for brass band music for funerals - one can end up being bored and no longer motivated. That is why besides mastering instruments and repertoire it is also important to

also allow for creativity and inventiveness as an important part of music-making as an artistic activity.

fieldnote 02.08.15, Kinshasa - concert Beta Mbonda in Barumbu: They were never so good. They are making huge leaps forward. It was a surprising programme with many new elements, and incredible energy.

The fact that their performances went better and better, gave them a lot of enjoyment and encouragement to continue developing themselves as musicians. Pleasure has thereby also been reported as coming from things starting to come easily when making music. When one does not need to force, one is beginning to master.

4. Polyphony - the impact of group dynamics and of being 'rooted'

"Music-making is something you do together with others. You make a 'sound' together, and when certain instruments are missing, it becomes difficult to create the 'sound' you need." (from life story interview with EMI-RO of Espace Masolo, 16.04.15, ref-10587)

We can learn from the extensive experience of musicians who accompany singers, dancers, and other musicians. The musical accompanist must listen acutely to the unfolding song or melody or carefully watch the movements of the dancers. Usually the accompanist recedes from the limelight, taking a supportive role. He often plays in a lower pitch, and sometimes does not play in the final performance. He provides the background for more important parts, supplying harmony and rhythm to the melody. He is successful to the degree that he is in alignment with the unfolding music. One exception to this necessary subordination occurs in what is called dialogue accompaniment, where the accompanist engages in a call and response to the "lead," being silent or providing rhythm as the lead plays, and playing himself when the lead rests, but always playing in relationship to what has come before - not breaking free of the whole unfolding composition but working in concert with the featured musicians to articulate the evolving music. (Watkins 2015:11)

When hearing the young musician of the brassband of Espace Masolo, and reading Mary Watkins taking playing music together as a dreamt of example of how psycho-social accompaniment should work best, it comes close to the music-making I have been studying in my research: ensemble music. Most of these musicians are not performing as soloists, even though they can at certain moments be soloist during their performances. Their music very much starts to sound when performed **in 'resonance'**⁸ with each other.

For all musicians, the possibility to create combinations of sounds together with the other members of the ensemble represents a pleasure in itself. Although during rehearsals

⁸ 'resonance' in Collins Dictionary: if something has a resonance for someone, it has a special meaning or is particularly important to them / a resonance is the sound which is produced by an object when it vibrates at the same rate as the sound waves from another object / word origin of 'resonance': from Latin 'resonāre' to 'resound' / the quality or state of being resonant / reinforcement and prolongation of a sound or musical tone by reflection or by sympathetic vibration of other bodies / the quality of having an intensity of emotion or richness of expression that evokes or reinforces a sympathetic response

the sounds and melodies of the different instruments may not immediately come together well, when they finally succeed to play in tune, this is experienced as something 'magical' (a word Congolese people like to use!) and gives a lot of enjoyment. And when someone gets out of tune or out of pace, this spoils the flow of playing together. It is nevertheless somehow difficult to get lost when everyone is in tune with each other, and that also gives special enjoyment.

'Resonance' is central to the act of music-making. When what each musician is playing is resonating well and in tune within the ensemble, when their different contributions 'marry' well, this can result in the polyphonic⁹ sound and melody which is expected by the ensemble or by the composition.

The phenomenon of a group of musicians being 'in resonance' can also be experienced when a musician comes into an ensemble to replace someone last minute and needs to rehearse a piece of music s/he did not know. Mostly, this newcomer will need much less time to master the music, in comparison with the time the other musicians needed and took to master it. Somehow s/he profits from the work the others did before him, although it is unclear how this comes about.

The phenomenon of 'resonance' makes one of course first of all think of music and sound, but it has in this reality also a meaning in relation to the connections and interconnections which exist within these ensembles, as well as between these musicians and their surroundings (families, neighbourhoods, audiences...).

"If you only live for yourself, life becomes empty. Without roots in the earth, one can grow as high as you imagine, but you will fall down with one wind-blow. If you are deeply rooted, then you will be well and strongly positioned. (...) What people need most is to be able to feel connected." (from interview with Dennis Vanden Auweele in De Groene Amsterdammer, 04.05.17)

"Trees care for each other, because one tree is not a forest." (Suzanne Simard, in: TED-conference 'How trees talk to each other', June 2016)

The impact of the group dynamics within Beta Mbonda and Espace Masolo can also not be underestimated. It concerns mutual friendship which results in a feeling of security and respect within the group¹⁰.

Apart from making music together, just being together is - especially for the musicians of Beta Mbonda - clearly also of great interest to them. They are a closely knit group of young men, who were - apart from one - in their previous life

⁹ 'polyphonic' = many-voiced / in Merriam-Webster: since 'poly' means 'many', polyphonic music has 'many voices'. In polyphony, each part has its own melody, and they weave together in a web that may become very dense

¹⁰ research on group dynamics was recently brought together Donelson Forsyth (Forsyth 2017)

already together in the same 'kuluna'-gang¹¹ before becoming member of BM.

When they work on music, the direction is constantly moving from one person to another, according to the needs of a particular moment in the music-making. Some take a lead at certain moments, while others take over the lead at other times, related to their capabilities and know-how and knowledge of a certain repertoire or instrument. It is a form of organisation which can be effective in managing organisations. When making music in these (non-conducted) chamber music line-ups they are working as a collective in which certain members take charge of certain aspects of the work, because they are more capable for those particular parts of the work. Nobody is good in everything. Some might be better in accounting, others can be better negotiating, somebody else would be good in coordinating and communicating with the trainers, etcetera. In such an organization, their friendship is an asset. This format is contrasting with the hierarchical form of the organization, which is pyramidally structured. In a hierarchical structure, you have a Kabila or Mobutu or Assad. But the type of organization I saw here - at least during the act of making music - can be called 'heterarchic' ('hetero' means 'different', 'other'). It is very much a collective form of organization, in which the responsibilities are not fixed, but can move, according to the situation and the needs. During a certain period of time someone can have the responsibility over a specific task, and after some time, it is possible that someone else takes over, because the one who is in charge is needed for another position in the organization, or for other reasons. The collectivity is in service of the organization, its strategy and its needs.

The musicians in Beta Mbonda do their best to master all the instruments. Those who have more facilities with certain instruments or certain compositions are helping others to master these.

"Without roots in the earth you can grow as high as you want, but one gust of wind and you fall over. You have to be deeply rooted and then you are firmly in your shoes." (interview with philosopher Dennis Vanden Auweele in De Groene Amsterdammer, 4.5.17, p.38-41)

There is a strong solidarity and friendship among the young musicians, mostly within BM because they were already together in their previous activity of 'kuluna'-gangs. Their roots within the ensemble gives them a strong basis from which to flourish as persons.

¹¹ 'kuluna' = name given in Kinshasa to members of violent gangs

The musicians of Beta Mbonda touch each other physically and respect each other during conversations and focus groups. Their mentor agrees when I share this observation with him, and even complains about this, as they also tend to cover each other when things go wrong.

They are like an extended family. When one of them died in 2014, this was a drama as well as an opportunity to come out as a group:

BM-CL: "The disappearance of BM-YA was very painful. We were very affected and at the same time we were afraid to see that one of us, with whom we evolved, had left us. His disappearance meant that we even changed our attitude, that is, we now think twice before acting. We ourselves took care of his funeral, his biological family, who did not know us before, was surprised at our presence, at the way we were crying and at the way we had organized this morning. We told them that we spent almost fifteen years of friendship with BM-YA that he was for us like a brother and that it was only natural that we would cry him as we had done." (from focus group with Beta Mbonda, 07.12.14, ref-07651)

When we call BM our 'patrimoine', we do not mean with this that BM should only exist with and through us. We only say this because we started the group. We are the co-founders of BM. This does not mean that we would not appreciate other persons to become member of BM. We compare our situation with other groups like Werrason's group or others, where you can distinguish between those who founded the group, and are leaders of the group, and those who joined later on. Even though musicians who come in later can also benefit from the success and money which comes in at a certain point, we should be considered as the pillars of the ensemble, as we co-founded it and worked hard for years to build it up. (Beta Mbonda musician BM-MW, 20.04.15, ref-11354)

This musician of BM called BM 'our heritage', meaning that they feel a strong and proud ownership of the project and the ensemble, even though they are frustrated about not being enough in charge of it at the organizational level. As they were the ones who incited the mentors to found the ensemble, stayed with the project, and invested a lot of effort in it all those years, they feel intitled to call it their 'heritage' (Fr: 'notre patrimoine'). This appreciation also explains in part their engagement to not let go, even though it is so difficult to make things happen in terms of developing the career of the ensemble.

I once took one of my friends, a Congolese banker, to a concert of BM and we were both impressed about the talk we had with the ensemble after their performance. Even though the mentors of the ensemble were not there, the musicians were so well able to enthusiastically and clearly talk in group to an outside person about their ensemble and their projects. In that situation they also felt to be a strongly connected group of young men.

5. Enjoyment of performing for audiences

When you have pleasure playing, you also 'contaminate' the audience, who will also experience pleasure seeing and hearing you play. I have a pleasure in transmitting my pleasure and enthusiasm to the audience. (Beta Mbonda musician BM-DO, 30.04.14, ref-09577)

In concerts people in the audience often start to cry because they are so emotional in reaction to certain words or sounds

they hear, which relates to his or her own life. This is an example of how audiences may react, but musicians can themselves also be emotional and happy while playing.

When asking them whether they needed the presence of the audience to enjoy making music the musicians in this research stated they also experienced this enjoyment without the public being there, during rehearsals with the band, or when working on their own. But performing for an audience is for sure experienced as something special. Giving enjoyment to audiences is part of the enjoyment of music-making, and it is also related to the pleasure they experience being observed and appreciated and admired in their new identity as musicians (instead of being seen as 'gangsters' or 'street children' or 'witch'-children).

When there is stress related to not being well prepared, the pleasure of performing in front of an audience vanishes.

The young musicians in our research tell us they enjoy a lot when being on stage to be able to 'contaminate' the audience with their enthusiasm for making music. The determination to please the public drives the musicians to be highly focussed and concentrated.

The pleasure to play in front of an audience for sure also comes from feeling valorised - and recognized - as persons with specific qualities. Even when they do not earn much, or sometimes even nothing at all, to be able to perform for an audience which is looking at them, motivates them a lot. And when an audience is enthusiastic about the performance, even if they will not have made much money that day, it will still motivate them, because in terms of their work and recognition, they have made progress, and this is experienced as a form of pay.

To the question how they would react when they play well, and that the whole ensemble plays well, but they are in front of an audience which does not really seem captivated or interested by what they are performing, they answered that what counts most for them, was whether the musicians themselves were happy with the quality of their performance. In certain cases, when audiences did not seem enthusiastic about what they played, or even not interested at all, they could keep on having their pleasure and satisfaction in playing what they were playing, because they were happy about playing it well. Also, they found that often only the musicians themselves may hear when things go wrong. They noted that audiences often do not hear mistakes and the music continues to sound well for them.

Even though the presence of an audience may not be necessary in order to experience enjoyment in performing music, it is an additional enjoyment, and if the public reacts positively, it is even more appreciated. The interest of the audience is a plus, but most important is whether they are themselves happy with the quality of their performance. This defines their enjoyment more than anything else. So even when there is no audience and they play well, they will experience enjoyment.

It is really an enormous advantage of the performing arts that they allow them to come into contact with very different milieus, not only with celebrities, even though meeting celebrities can be impressive. Once the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France came to a concert of our children at the Halle de la Gomme, and after the performance he went to speak with them. They were so proud of having been able to speak with him. (from interview with Malvine Velo, co-founder of Espace Masolo, 23.07.15, ref-16384)

Another aspect of performing in public, is that it allows these young people to be in direct contact with an audience which is composed of many different layers of society. It is for example impossible for most common people to come into contact with a Minister of the Government. You need a series of contacts, appointments and references to succeed such a meeting. But when these musicians perform their concerts or theatre productions, often well-known and highly positioned people are present from the world of politics, society, economy, the arts.. They can then not only perform for them, but they will most of the time after the performance be able to talk with them on a one-to-one basis. This is something they often mention during the interviews as something they are particularly proud of. Pictures were shown of them together with such celebrities. And when they are on stage there is the audience which admires them. When they talk, sing or play an instrument, all these people listen carefully to them, and it makes them feel admired and respected. They then realise that they are at that moment being taken seriously. It helps a lot in helping them to build up trust in themselves.

The audience can nevertheless also be just one person. One person interested and enjoying their performance is enough. I remember when the musicians of Beta Mbonda performing outside of the supermarket which sponsors their rehearsal space. There was hardly anybody interested in what they were doing. Most people just passed by and did not show much interest, busy as they were going about doing their Christmas shopping. Still, the musicians did not seem to be less motivated and enthusiastic, and had a lot of energy and enjoyment in performing. There were one or two persons in the audience, my assistant and myself. We were their audience.

6. Music in troublesome periods – an alternative reality

Music can console those who play it and those who listen to it. You can have problems, as soon as you are in the music, you forget a little and it can calm you down. (from interview on music-making with BM-KU of Beta Mbonda, 13.04.15, ref-09211)

The phenomena encountered here correspond very much to the phenomena which Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and his international teams of scholars have studied at length. When in the 'flow', it is as if time stands still, and many things which are outside of the activity at play seem to fall away, disappear. Abraham Maslow studying man's 'peak experiences' encountered this phenomenon as well, and described it as the sensation of 'being lost in the present' (Maslow 1973:63-64).

Sigmund Freud already taught us that creative and artistic activities can be seen as forms of sublimation. When you have a problem that bothers you, singing or playing certain songs can help you forget it a bit, or at least, it can relieve your sorrow or worries.

When successfully mastering music – in rehearsals or on stage – the musicians in this research report it can feel as if there is a spirit taking possession of them, which brings them into a trance, making them – at least for the time they are performing the music – forget the many problems they had and still have in their lives.

In a series of occasions reported to us, even when they were ill – depending of course on the gravity of the illness – musicians could and would continue to work, and even perform in public. After the performance they got back into their 'skin' of ill person. This is surely at least in part caused by the impact of the thrill of a live performance¹². When on stage or in a captivating rehearsal, they forget and do not feel ill. The same goes with worries they may have. They will be concentrated on their music-making and forget about their worries. But immediately after leaving stage or the rehearsal these worries will come back to them.

Music is something complex, 'mystical'¹³, it really is. You can learn the news that somebody died, but when you're on stage, you'll forget that. It's only after you can cry. (from an interview on music-making with BM-CI of Beta Mbonda, 21.04.15, ref-11986)

¹² And this phenomenon is in the medical profession known and attributed to the effects of what is called 'performance adrenaline', a heightened level in the body of a mixture of chemicals such as endorphin, serotonin, dopamine and andadrenaline.

¹³ In the postcolonial 'Afrige fantôme' that Congo seems to have become, it is increasingly frequent to designate people and situations as 'mystique', difficult to place, interpret and attribute meaning to. (De Boeck & Honwana 2005, p.189)

What we are seeing here is not escape behaviour though. The chaos, misery and poverty of Kinshasa will certainly not disappear through making music, but these young men and women tell us that playing music brings something valuable into their lives: not extra financial resources (at the very most a tiny profit), but there is definitely a certain freedom. They declare themselves to be steadfast in their attempts not to be 'dispossessed' by the barriers which poverty impose on them. Within their physical 'bondage', they want to guard and preserve their precious psychological freedom. They have decided to live their lives at a deeper level than simply 'surviving'. And it is precisely the strength and energy they need for this which they gain from opting for a philosophy of life that accepts, at least to a certain extent, their fate and the limitations on their opportunities (Pairon 2016).

When I think of occasions that I can be ill, it depends on the gravity of the illness. If I have a fever, I can continue to work. But there are other illnesses which prevent me from working on my music-making. Sometimes I will also force myself to work anyway, even when I feel very ill, thinking that without me in the band it would be too difficult, as they would have difficulties replacing me. In such cases, I will take a medicine which will allow me to play, and after the performance I get back into my skin of ill person ('je retrouve ma peau de malade'). (Beta Mbonda musician BM-DO, 30.04.14, ref-09598)

The musicians in Kinshasa are very much used to the phenomenon of music taking them away from their day-to-day worries and problems, not being able to take care of their families, confronted with people suffering or dying. When finishing their musical activity this all comes back, as music is not that much changing their material lives for the better. It feels like music works as a drug does: One can be angry or nervous about something that happened to you at home or elsewhere, and music-making will make this irritation disappear. The moment the musician starts to play, all irritations and anger fall away. It will come back though after s/he stopped playing, but it will then not have the same extent. The musician will be immediately captivated by the music, by how s/he plays it, by his pleasure playing it... even more so when there is an audience. S/he will forget his worries even faster then.

Music makes me forget all the worries of my past life. When I play music, I forget the bad things I've lived. (Espace Masolo musician EM1-GL, 17.04.15, ref-11102)

The musicians in this research report finding in the activity of music-making a world which holds together, a world which feels more whole than the broken one they lived in.

7. Summary and conclusion

1. After studying (1) the extrinsic and some of the intrinsic benefits of making-music for the population of young musicians in my research, (2) the interest of bringing together both a social as well as an artistic-musical accompaniment, (3) the process and possible impact of the learning and act of mastering a music instrument and repertoire, and (4) the importance of allowing young musicians to also have their say in the ongoing development of the music programme and activities of the ensemble, I surprisingly arrived towards the end of my research in a domain which could be summarized as follows:

2. The possible social impact of music-making was for the participants in this research - at least to a certain extent - real, in relation for example to the new status they obtained in their society by becoming a musician, and possibly also some money and career opportunities which could come with this new identity sometime in the future. But, considering the very difficult living conditions in which these social music projects are proposed and developed in Kinshasa, the activity of music-making gives only limited benefits in terms of social and material improvements in the lives of the participants in such programmes.

3. I arrived at the unexpected finding that the main reason these musicians report for having continued working all these years hard and continuously on their music, was the enjoyment of making music in itself, not the other outcomes. The attraction of music-making in itself has been reported as the major reason for musicians to continue this activity, more than any social or financial benefit resulting from it, and I have throughout my research in Kinshasa focussed on coming to an understanding of this finding.

4. It has been a significant outcome of this research to find the intrinsic benefits of music-making to be most decisive in the context of the extremely difficult living circumstances of the reality of Kinshasa. I imagine them to possibly also be of major importance in other environments. The main reason why this contribution is important, is because it means that studying this further appears to be a priority¹⁴. I want to make sure that this finding will in the nearby future be studied in other contexts, and I will propose our qualitative descriptive methodology, its questioning as well as the

details of the transcribed interviews, to researchers interested in developing similar research on these questions.

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¹⁴ Although their book is not about the impact of making art, but about the impact of 'consuming' art, Eleonora Belfiore and Oliver Bennett come to a similar conclusion in their overview of the intellectual history of claims made over time for the value, function and impact of the arts in Western societies (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008:176-190).

