

Book Reviews

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Social Psychology of Musicianship by Robert Henley Woody, Sr. Florida, USA: Meredith Music Publications, 2013. xi+127pp., paperback. £18.99. ISBN 978-1-57463-198-2.

The underlying thrust in Robert Henley Woody Sr.'s *Social Psychology of Musicianship* is an encouraging invitation to reflect on the powerful benefits of nurturing one's musical potential and, more importantly, how this strengthens self-enrichment and improves social relationships. This is not restricted to the competent performer; Woody intends to engage with musicians of any level by embracing and discussing various kinds of musical involvement, from music listening to 'singing in the shower' (p. 1). The author defines the major purpose of the book as to 'help the reader understand how thoughts, communications, and contacts between people can influence and be influenced by music' (p. ix).

The book comprises a preface, ten chapters and a concluding 'coda'; the first half grounding discussions and topics in the musical domain, the second aiming to deepen an understanding of the psychological mechanisms behind various kinds and levels of social interaction. The first four chapters form an overview of widely discussed topics related to *musicianship*. Woody's employment of the term, at times referred to as 'generalised musicianship', is clarified in the preface: '... everyone can be a stakeholder in musicianship... In the realm of generalized musicianship, not everyone aspires nor is able to become a professional entertainer' (p. ix). Through recourse to both musical and

psychological literature, themes are introduced and elaborated through personal discussions on how one may gain social or personal benefit; ranging from the influence of nurture to the motivational aspects behind the pursuit of improving one's musicianship. Depending on the musical and/or educational experience of the reader, some of the themes mentioned in the initial chapters will already be familiar.

The fifth chapter outlines the core concept of the book: the *self-concept*. Some sociologists define the self as 'a product of social interaction or one's role in relationships with others' (p. 34). A positive self-concept can 'offer enhancing qualities to relationships' and 'social reinforcements help the individual advance his or her self-concept' (p. 37). This is not to be confused, however, with unrealistically high self-regard – a self-defeating condition (p. 74). Other faulty self-concepts, such as the inability to be comfortable in social relations, may lead to isolation and even depression. Sharing music can offer positive reinforcement and increase the motivation to achieve (p. 55). Therefore, it is argued that positive social interaction is a key incentive for healthy psychological development and self-enrichment. The way that music can enrich social relationships is of central concern in the following four chapters. Music affiliations can enrich social identity by forming 'groupiness' (bonding together), stimulate healthy comparisons with other members (self-improvement) and afford a flourishing musicianship. Although these chapters centre on psychological concepts and literature, the additional inclusion of empirical research involving music would have helped to bridge the music-social connection with an evidence-based link. For

instance, an experimental study by Kirschner and Tomasello (2009, 2010) has demonstrated improved cooperation and helpful behaviour in children through joint musical activities.

In the tenth and final chapter, the author asks whether a comprehensive musicianship is achieved through excellence in all components of musicianship (here listed by the author as 'the seven sectors': practising, learning, teaching, performing, composing and arranging) (p. 105); Woody answers that 'there can never be fully complete musicianship. But there should be a commitment to move toward excellence' (p. 108). Leading into the book's coda, the author has reserved the possible 'distinguishing quality of the master musician' until the end: *improvisation*, a skill involving technical skills, musical comprehension and emotional aspects. Sadly, the discussion on improvisation is used more as a gathering point for conclusions and does not explore the subject more deeply.

The book's chapters are themselves divided into smaller sections, each categorised by a particular topic or aspect, varying between music-centred contexts (such as *Music in Life*, *Instrumental Sonics*, *The Musical Culture*) and psychologically oriented themes (*People Who Need People*, *Inadequate Affiliations*, *Social Loafing*). The short length of each subsection, alongside the use of accessible language, might benefit an interested musician who has no prior knowledge on the subject. The large variety of topics introduced provides glimpses of arguments that have been widely treated in previous literature. On the other hand, the author's care to reach musician-readers of all levels – as opposed to experienced scholars and researchers – has significantly weakened the academic credentials of this book.

The first observation is one of breadth at the expense of depth. The author moves swiftly through a wide range of topics; yet, as a consequence these are often explored to a very limited extent, at times resulting in over-generalisation. It is obviously a challenge in such a book to balance material to suit both the amateur and the expert; nonetheless, a deeper exploration of selected, central topics would have enriched the work. Regardless of Woody's intention to include the inexperienced in the target readership, terminology and definitions still require careful attention to convey the appropriate meaning to the reader. Occasionally, this is also overlooked; one example being when Woody explains how Eysenck's research suggests that 'introverts (people who are reclusive) may have inherited a CNS [central nervous system] . . . that requires more arousal than is required by extroverts (people who are outgoing)' (p. 63). It is likely that Woody was referring to the social aspect embedded in Eysenck's definition of *introvert*. However, particularly in a book about social psychology, the term deserves a more adequate definition than a single word which, in isolation, may reinforce the negative stereotype of introverts as reclusive people. Even in older texts such as Kemp's (1997), we are already presented with a more nuanced approach to the subject: Eysenck's definition is contrasted by Jung's assertion that introverts' *minds* are 'inwardly directed' and focus much more on the 'inner world of ideas'. Although this is a peripheral example, a more critical approach in the employment and definition of key terminology would have been desirable. A similar case can be made for the author's use of 'musicianship'; Woody makes a generalised statement of his approach towards the term in the preface, but the reader is left in the dark as to what Woody's interpretation of musicianship

actually entails right until the final chapter ('the seven sectors'). Juxtaposition with other literature on the various uses of the word (Jorgensen, 2003) would have helped to elucidate the term. In fact, the entire book would have benefited from clarification of its position with respect to the musical and psychological literature, particularly more recent publications.

The need for a scholarly approach and conceptual clarity is not merely to satisfy an academic readership, which I acknowledge is not the primary aim of the book. Rather, additional care in the treatment of terminology, sources and discussion would have boosted the book's overall profile, helping to convey a more robust, critical awareness of the concepts and arguments through up-to-date literature on the subject. Most importantly, it could have encouraged further the aspiring musician by discovering the powerful benefits of music as evidenced through research findings.

The book's title could lead to a slight misconception as to its content, running the risk of disappointing an academic reader. Instead, a more prudent title such as **A Musician's Practical Guide to the Social Psychology of Musicianship** would anticipate the practical element of musicianship of central concern throughout the book. In this light, I recommend the book primarily for music practitioners in search of light-hearted, motivational reading. For those who wish to be introduced or invited to reflect on the psychological benefits associated with the cultivation of music, as well as how these can positively feed into social relations, the book is for you. Such readers are likely to enjoy the way the author often relates both personal arguments and socio-psychological principles to practical examples of life-based situations. This is mostly achieved through varied personal accounts of Woody's own rich, past musical

experience; an exploration of different musical genres, ranging from his childhood to his development as a professional musician. This enables the reader not only to gain a clearer practical sense of the arguments, but affords the opportunity to identify oneself in such situations. Regardless of your age, musical style and abilities, there is certainly food for thought.

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While the Music Lasts: on Music and

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Elderly people are no longer members of a small minority group and according to statisticians, more than 11 million people are currently aged over 65 years in the UK. The