CHAPTER 1

Social and Musical Responsiveness

The world is inevitably changing, but music and quality of life remain as "two of the most stable and everlasting human desires" (Fung & Lehmberg, 2016, p. 3). Advancements in many sectors that benefit humans have improved through the years. Global trends show that people are living longer and healthier and are enjoying an overall better quality of life. Older adults are increasingly a larger share of the population (United Nations, 2019). More people have increased opportunities to enjoy music throughout their lives, as music is a medium for all to pursue in an indefinite number of ways. Beyond enjoyment, music is essential in maintaining a social, psychological, physical, and an overall well-being. Music can also serve as a refuge and a safe haven in times of crisis, hardship, and even disaster. For some, music can be the best medium for deep, meaningful experiences. Music is an indestructible medium regardless of how life and the world change. Not only have the chances to take advantage of musical activities increased due to extended lifespans, perspectives of different disciplines have also broadened in recent decades. We are at a juncture where lifelong learning and community music, among other areas, have joined forces in opening up new spaces for reflection, investigation, and practice. These broadened views are not only results of disciplinal development but more importantly results of a heightened awareness of individuals and places long underplayed in literature and in practice.

In this book, we utilize a social psychological approach to explore the musical needs of diverse older adults who make use of places where such needs can be fulfilled – senior centers. Both older adults and senior centers normally fall outside the purview of fields not directly linked to older adults and their service providers, such as music and music education, yet musical activities found in senior centers could be essential and may even be life-changing to participants. We define music participation activities inclusively to encompass all forms of music-making and creating, music listening, and moving to music (Fung & Lehmberg, 2023). These

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activities show that at the minimum, everyone at any life stage is capable of engaging in music and thus improving their quality of life. To this end, we present our studies to illustrate how older adults, a culturally undervalued population, used senior centers across the United States to engage in music and to provide a glimpse of how such activities are adopting dramatic changes through a global pandemic, which has turned everyone's life into a new normal. We begin this chapter with a contemporary overview of the benefits of older adults' music participation and of the venues available for such activities. Subsequently, we delve into a rationale for carrying out our studies of senior centers presented in the remaining chapters of the book.

1.1 Benefits of Music Participation

A plethora of studies shows that music participation has numerous benefits throughout the lifespan (e.g., Rickard & McFerran, 2012). Although there maybe interpretive issues and inconsistencies across a group of studies finding that music participation improves children's academic achievement (e.g., Blackburn, 2017; Gordon, Fehd, & McCandliss, 2015; Guhn, Emerson, & Gouzouasis, 2020; Sala & Gobet, 2020), evidence of the benefits of music participation for adults is overabundant. Krause, Davidson, and North (2018) identified 562 distinct benefits in their review of 97 studies of predominantly adults and older adults. Since reviews of earlier studies of older adult music participation have been presented elsewhere (Fung & Lehmberg, 2016; Lehmberg & Fung, 2010; Noice, Noice, & Kramer, 2014), we focus here on an overview of studies published since 2016. The mainstays in the benefits of older adults' music participation are (a) social, such as networking, socializing, making friends, and having a sense of community; (b) psychological, such as emotional satisfaction, maintenance and improvement of cognition, and fulfillment through musical learning; (c) physical, such as improved breathing, posture, and health; and (d) overall well-being, including spiritual wellness, life satisfaction, and quality of life. These benefits are distinctive only to some degree; they overlap significantly.

Benefits of music participation are also reported across a wide spectrum of social strata and activities. For example, a sample of homeless adults with mental illness in the United States reported therapeutic and social–emotional benefits from listening to hip-hop pieces and reading their lyrics (Travis, Rodwin, & Allcorn, 2019). Our work with older adults in a predominantly middle-class retirement community revealed five contributors of music participation to lifelong engagement in music and quality of

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life (Fung & Lehmberg, 2016): (1) social and temporal connections; (2) variety of musical styles and musical activities; (3) meaningful participation to include commitment, socialization, and supportive context; (4) ownership and autonomous learning; and (5) flexibility to enter and re-enter at any time. These findings were so persuasive that they prompted us to take a grassroots approach, that is taking actions and responsibilities at a local, diverse community level, in exploring venues that offer musical opportunities for older adults.

While we do not intend to present a comprehensive literature review on the benefits of older adults' music participation, we see consistent findings in studies across various world regions. In Australia, Joseph and Southcott (2018) identified social connection, a sense of well-being, and musical engagement as the three overarching themes based on an interpretative phenomenological analysis of data from older chorus singers. In an analysis of a sample of 17- to 85-year-olds, Krause, North, and Davidson (2019) found that female music participants were more likely than males to perceive benefits that were associated with autonomous motivation and the social, cognitive, esteem, competency, and relatedness dimensions of well-being. In Canada, David and colleagues (2018) found that enhanced cognitive function, development of meaningful relationships, and improved psychosocial status (e.g., reduction of social isolation) were among the benefits of older adults participating in an intergenerational music program. Increased socialization and uplifted spirits were among the benefits reported by Millett and Fiocco (2021) based on long-term care residents between ages 63 and 95, who participated in a weekly singing and discussion session around a self-selected theme. In the United States, a short-term intense piano training was shown to benefit cognitive performance of 34 older adults with an average age of 70.79 years (Bugos & Kochar, 2017). Drawing from 35 instrumental ensemble participants in Canada and the United States, Barbeau and Mantie (2019) found that biological, psychological, and social benefits outweighed the stress related to performance anxiety. In China (Southcott & Li, 2018), 13 older adults between the ages of 54 and 78 years taking singing lessons at a university for retirees collectively recognized the benefits of emotional well-being, physical well-being, mental well-being, and "learning new things" (p. 283), musical preferences, and sharing music. A four-year study of a community choir in the United Kingdom with singers aged 55–78 (Lamont et al., 2018) highlighted many individual and interpersonal benefits, including musical achievements and the development of social relationships within a supportive community. Pitts and Robinson (2016) interviewed 18 adult

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current and past music participants, also in the United Kingdom, and concluded that "past experiences of learning music, and particularly of learning an instrument, were seen to have lifelong benefits even for those who no longer played" (p. 344). A large-scale survey ($N = 14{,}265$) of adults in Denmark suggested that music activities and music experiences contributed to general health (Ekholm, Juel, & Bonde, 2016). Findings as such across the globe seem to ascertain a high level of universality, in that benefits of music participation are widespread with potential deep impacts. However, differences across nations, societies, and cultures shape different organizations and avenues for older adults to participate in music. While it is hard to compare institutions across nations, we have chosen to explore venues within the local community and supported by the people and the government in the United States. Not to expect parallels worldwide, observations of music participation in such venues may generate global interests and understanding in their function, operation, and benefits.

1.2 Venues for Older Adult Music Participation

Older adults' musical activity occurs in a wide variety of venues, which may be characterized as formal or informal, private or public, government or nongovernment, for-profit or nonprofit, religious or secular, and small or large. These are neither clear-cut nor exclusive categories but ways of viewing their multidimensionality and integrality in the social fabric. For example, a subgroup from a church choir may meet at a singer's home for a weekend private gathering that includes friends, neighbors, and family members, and they may take turns singing along with a guitarist strumming chords; or a jazz instrumental group with a salaried leader and an executive board may rehearse in a government-funded community center for two hours every week and perform an average of ten times per year in schools, hospitals, community centers, churches, and at private parties. While it is impossible to account for all types of musical activities in which older adults engage, it is feasible to identify a study target that is open to the public, where all older adults feel welcome and can take ownership and be intimately connected among themselves and with the local community. This would be an environment open to all older adults to actively engage in music and to make contributions to their own quality of life. It should be a setting that is readily responsive to the social and musical needs of a wide range of older adults; we found it most readily observable in senior centers, which are distinctively different from other communal sites serving older adults, such as assisted living facilities, retirement communities,

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and nursing homes. While these other sites may offer music activities, they tend to have limited accessibility to the public due to specific qualifying conditions that are financially or health-related. Senior centers do not provide live-in services and are intended as public service hubs that serve mostly independent older adults.

1.3 Studying Music Participation in Senior Centers in the United States

Numerous writers have outlined the history, development, and variety of senior centers, especially those in the United States (e.g., Krout, 1989; National Institute of Senior Centers, 1975; Niles-Yokum & Wagner, 2011; Shollenberger, 1995). While we do not mean to be presumptuous to assume the nonexistence of senior centers outside of the United States, we have to rely on what is available in the literature, which is almost exclusively in and about the United States, and on rare occasions, Canada. Counterpart organizations in other nations are probably conceived, structured, and labeled differently. At appropriate moments throughout this text, we bring forward their global relevance while maintaining a focus on the case in the United States.

The earliest senior centers we could identify were located in New York City (1943) and San Francisco (1947) (Lowy & Doolin, 1990). The numbers of such centers grew exponentially across the country from hundreds in the 1960s to thousands in the 1970s. By the early 2010s, a nationwide network of 11,000 senior centers served over four million older adults annually (Pardasani & Goldkind, 2012). Dal Santo (2009) reported 15,000 centers serving close to 10 million older adults annually when she included large multipurpose senior centers as well as "small nutrition sites run by volunteers that provide only occasional programming" (p. 4). The case of increased support for older adults and the growth of senior centers in the United States shows how the people, the community, and the government have helped to address the global trend of an aging population within a nation. There is much to learn about the effectiveness of music in fulfilling the needs of older adults through senior centers.

While "senior center" seems to be a static term, its transformational development should be considered. The public image of senior centers has been evolving through the decades, from merely reaching out to those who retired and needed a venue to stay connected with others to serving as an "entry point for the aging service network" (Wick, 2012, p. 664). Various editions of *The Aging Networks* between 1999 and 2019 (Gelfand, 1999,

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2006; Niles-Yokum & Wagner, 2011, 2015, 2019) provided a context of how senior centers have become situated in the broader evolution of policies, programs, and services available for older adults. Given the changing needs of older adults, a variety of programs are offered through senior centers. Wick (2012, p. 665) outlined 18 types of programs that are frequently available:

- Arts and humanities entertainment
- Caregiver education
- Consumer protection information
- Continuing education
- Emergency and natural disaster refuge or relief
- Financial assistance
- Fitness and exercise
- Health and wellness
- Intergenerational awareness
- Leisure trips and travel
- Library services
- Nutrition and meals
- Service referral
- Social networking
- Tax assistance
- Training for lay leaders, students, and professionals
- Transportation
- Volunteer opportunities in the center or in the community

This list of programs suggests that (a) services offered at senior centers are catered to the needs of contemporary older adults in the United States, which could well be similar to needs in other nations, (b) senior centers carry a heavy and varied load of responsibilities, (c) there is an emphasis on the health and well-being of older adults, (d) music activities fit within the category of arts and humanities entertainment, and (e) music activities may reinforce the program categories of continuing education, fitness and exercise, health and wellness, intergenerational awareness, social networking, and volunteer opportunities in the center or in the community, as well as overall well-being and quality of life.

As senior centers are fluid entities, there is no lack of voices to demand change in specific areas of service through senior centers. Some have advocated for more responsiveness to local community needs (Dal Santo, 2009; Pardasani & Goldkind, 2012). Others have suggested increasing funding and administrative support (Pardasani & Goldkind, 2012).

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Furthermore, many writers have revealed the need for more attention to racial and ethnic diversity (Niles-Yokum & Wagner, 2019; Taylor-Harris, 2006), diverse age groups among older adults (Fitzpatrick & McCabe, 2008), and health and well-being (Niles-Yokum & Wagner, 2019; Wick, 2012). Musicians and music educators seem to be tacit in all of these advocacy voices despite the plethora of literature that supports the significant benefits of older adults' music participation. As a way of being socially and musically responsive, studies about music participation in senior centers from various perspectives are necessary, so policy makers and administrators of these centers can partner with the music and music education community and take full advantage of what music can offer to older adults in their neighborhoods to maximize their quality of life.

This book consists of three parts. The remainder of Part I contains a review of the state of music in senior centers (Chapter 2). Part II is an experiential view of music in senior centers across six different regions of the continental US (i.e., Northwest, Western, North Central, Southwestern, Eastern, and Southern) from the perspectives of the center management, the music activity leaders at the centers, and the older adults who may or may not be engaged in music activities in these centers. It is based on field studies of six senior centers in culturally and socioeconomically diverse cities of different sizes. Chapter 3 presents the settings, operations, and features of the six senior center cases, followed by a synthesis and cross-case comparison of musical opportunities in the six centers in Chapter 4. We focus on the older adults' perspectives on music in Chapter 5, followed by the impact of music participation on their quality of life in Chapter 6. Part III presents two chapters that lead into a new normal, containing the report of a survey study of 23 senior centers located in six cities across the six US regions examining mid-pandemic musical opportunities through senior centers in October 2021 in relation to the pre-pandemic period prior to March 2020 (Chapter 7). The final chapter draws on all findings from the six senior center case studies and the survey study for new considerations in music education and older adults' lifelong music participation.

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