SPIRALING TO REDEFINE (DIS)ABILITY: A CASE STUDY IN SUMMER MUSIC PROGRAMMING FOR CHILDREN

by Louise Wrazen

The sounds of percussion, guitar, singing, and clapping guide us from the heat of the summer pavement of the parking lot to the cool shade of the trees in the garden. Parents, staff, children, youth—we all gather here first thing in the morning. Some children immediately sit on the ground in front of the musicians, others navigate their canes or walkers to find a seat on a chair or bench or find a good spot for their wheelchairs. Some parents linger. The singing continues as everyone gathers and joins in with voices, clapping, and percussion to participate in the familiar "The boat goes down to the river, it takes me to my home …" This was our place of arrival at Spiral Garden.

Each year at the Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital in Toronto, Canada, children participate in an integrated summer programme, called Spiral Garden, built around creative play and performance in an outdoor setting. Through music, dance, theatre, and other media arts, the programme provides an intensive immersion into an environment that creates an alternative reality for children and youth (most are six to eighteen) with and without special needs. In this setting, staff and participants together build an inclusive community that contrasts with the social exclusion many experience elsewhere. In this paper, I introduce Spiral Garden and consider the role of music in a programme that normalizes difference. In so doing, I draw on the concept of disability as an unstable category, as presented by Lennard J. Davis, to suggest that this arts- and music-filled environment works towards his model of an inclusive "commonality of bodies" (2013:276). Furthermore, by exploring how both the ecology and metaphor of the garden are central to a larger process of co-creation, this discussion also contributes to the expanding field of ecomusicology (Allen and Dawe 2016). My primary entry point is as a parent, having spent ten summers (1997–2006) taking my two children to the programme and participating in many of the events. To this experience I add material from interviews and conversations with musicians and artists on staff as well as from some former participants. In the pages that follow, I position this paper in relation to research on music and disability, then introduce Spiral Garden and reflect on the significance of its setting before considering its programming philosophy and sonic world.

This paper builds on current research on disability and music, which is growing quickly following its relatively recent appearance. The 2006 volume *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music* by Neil Lerner and Joseph N. Straus stems from the introduction of disability studies to music scholarship at a 2004 joint meeting of the Society for Music Theory and the American Musicological Society. Both this

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

book and Straus's *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (2011) address the question of what disability is in music. These volumes were also influenced by the emerging field of cultural disability studies, which Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (in her Foreword to *Sounding Off*) defines as understanding and investigating "disability as a cultural product, as a way of interpreting bodily variation and a social concept that widely influences our collective thinking and practices" (2006:xiii–xiv). As she explains, disability is a category of analysis that emerged about ten years ago, and cultural disability studies now joins other concepts in contributing to studies of identity: "Disability, gender, race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality are now recognized as ideological and social formations that affect all cultural products and material spaces in the social order" (ibid.:xiv).

More recently, the *Oxford Handbook of Music and Disability Studies* offers a broad array of topics and approaches, including ethnomusicology (e.g., Bakan 2016a; Hogan 2016), and suggests that "as much as a cultural understanding of disability can teach us about music, music also has much to teach us about the culture of disability" (Howe et al. 2016:8). In his book *Music, Disability, and Society*, Alex Lubet (2011:5) is influenced by some ethnomusicologists (including Nettl, Kingsbury, Slobin) to explore disability and impairment as "socially contexted." By examining the intersection of music and disability, he considers transformations of identity and engages with disability studies' social model of disability, analogous to race or gender, where "the root of disability oppression lies far more in its socialization than in embodied impairment" (Lubet 2011:4). This is consistent with a central component of the underlying theoretical framework of this discussion, which identifies disability as a construct. This position is fundamental to disability studies, which, as argued by Tobin Siebers in *Disability Theory*, theorizes disability as a minority identity that "must be addressed not as personal misfortune or individual defect but as the product of a disabling social and built environment" (2008:3). As a socially imposed category, disability (like other marginalities) is contextual, and as A. J. Withers argues in his *Disability Politics and Theory*, it is "understood through models of thought and action" (2012:2–3). In this paper, I consider how music contributes to the action forming the social and built environment of Spiral Garden to undermine normative thought regarding disability.

This paper also considers an alternative, more inclusive, model of disability that is not built on oppression. In his comprehensive critique of postmodern identity politics in *The Disability Studies Reader*, Davis (2013:271) argues that the social model of disability still relies on a definition of impairment based on medical models for diagnosis. Instead, he proposes a new ethics of the body that begins with disability rather than ends with it. Arguing against a Foucauldian binary where the state is power and citizens are docile bodies, Davis proposes a new model of "dismodernism" that "replaces the binary of docility and power with another—impairment and normalcy. Impairment is the rule, and normalcy is the fantasy. Dependence is the reality, and independence grandiose thinking. Barrier-free access is the goal, and the right to pursue happiness the false consciousness that obscures it" (ibid.:276). This reversal replaces the idea of a complete, independent

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

subject with one who is disabled and only completed by technology and other interventions (ibid.:275). In this view, interdependence provides the opportunity for different notions of subjectivity and normalcy—ideas consistent with those of Spiral Garden. As this paper shows, the philosophy and practices of Spiral Garden are built around an ecologically centred concept of relationships, where everyone participates equally in a spirit of co-dependence and co-creation aimed at disrupting the division between ability and disability. Intended for children and youth identified with a broad range of medical diagnoses and physical (dis)abilities, Spiral Garden is designed to be deliberately outside the medical system and outside a music therapy paradigm.[1] Furthermore, it is not a standard day-programme for kids. Instead, it offers an arts-based process of holistic being—based on opportunities to choose and to do things together—that intercedes in the medically dominated lives of many there. The goal of nurturing relationships, promoting collaboration, and enjoying interdependence underlies a praxis consistent with the theoretical shift to "a new category of [identity] based on the partial, incomplete subject whose realization is not autonomy and independence, but dependency and interdependence" (ibid. 2013:275).[2]

While this essay complements some of the research in medical ethnomusicology,[3] it aligns most closely with Michael Bakan's influential work with children on the autism spectrum. Spiral Garden similarly focuses on a child's ability rather than disability and is "person- and ability-centred [rather] than pathology- and disability-centred" (Bakan et al. 2008:166). Bakan's recent research is especially relevant. Like the Artism Ensemble, Spiral Garden "serves as a social model in its own right" (2016a:20) and aims to cultivate a space for children to be themselves and to co-participate in making music and creating a cultural community (2016a:20–21). Significantly, however, this paper explores a programme that expands the focus beyond neurodiverse musical communities to a more fluid environment of children, youth, and adults with a wider range of medical diagnoses. While Bakan's work on the ethnomusicology of autism has evolved from his own carefully planned collaborative project, my discussion is based on a programme conceived and maintained by an independent group of artists and educators, begun over thirty years ago, and designed for this broader range of children around a natural setting.

1. Recent directions in music therapy, however, suggest a closer alliance with the aims and methods of Spiral Garden (see, for example, Aigen 2014).

2. Also quoted by Howe et al. (2016:2), this "new way of thinking" proposed by Davis contrasts with postmodernism, the politics of which, he argues, "have been directed toward making all identities equal under a model of the rights of the dominant, often white, male, 'normal' subject" (2013:275).

3. Categories of affiliation can be problematic. For example, *The Oxford Handbook of Medical Ethnomusicology* has no entry in its index for "disability" (as pointed out by Lubet 2011:9), but contains a chapter based on the research of Koen et al. (2008). In her article "The Second Wave of Applied Ethnomusicology," Harrison refers to a 2014 conference paper by Gregory Barz, when she writes that he "theorizes medical ethnomusicology, which includes disability and ability studies, as a sub-discipline of applied ethnomusicology" (Harrison 2014:23). Bakan (2016a:17; 2016b:281) identifies his more recent work with applied ethnomusicology rather than medical ethnomusicology.

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Orientation to the garden

Spiral Garden began in 1984 on the grounds of the Hugh MacMillan Rehabilitation Centre, in downtown Toronto, Canada.[4] In 1997 it inspired a similar programme called Cosmic Birdfeeder at the Centre's second, hospital, site. Following the amalgamation of the Centre's two locations, the two programmes merged into Spiral Garden in 2007 and now continue on a site modified to accommodate the newly built Centre, now renamed as Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. Identified on its website as "Canada's largest children's rehabilitation hospital focused on improving the lives of kids with disabilities," Holland Bloorview provides research and services for children with "cerebral palsy, acquired brain injury, muscular dystrophy, amputation, epilepsy, spina bifida, arthritis, cleft-lip and palate, autism and other developmental disabilities" (Holland Bloorview 2013). These are also the children of Spiral Garden. The centre includes a hospital and clinics, research and therapy services, recreational programmes, school (for children ages four to seven), and a year-round "Music and Arts" programme with activities for children and youth up to the age of twenty-one. "Spiral Garden summer day program" (as described in its brochure) operates within this umbrella.[5]

The programme used to run for three days per week (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday) in several two-week sessions over the summer. For the first time in 2015, it ran for five days per week in five two-week sessions. The staff consists of two main groups: the creative team (overseen by visual artist Shannon Crossman, who is also the Music and the Arts Creative Coordinator) and the care team (overseen by a special needs coordinator). There are about 100 people in Spiral Garden for each session: sixty participants, ages six to eighteen (thirty with special needs and thirty community members); about ten to twelve artists (including several musicians); ten to twelve in the care team; ten to fifteen volunteers; and as many as ten inpatients with their workers. One-to-one support is provided for some, and a limited number of spots are available for participants ages nineteen to twenty-one (Shannon Crossman, pers. comm., 25 June 2015). The programme promotes inclusion at all levels and, during the time when I was there, persons with disabilities contributed both as participants and staff members.

Spiral Garden is an outdoor space of about one-and-a half acres adjacent to the main building of Holland Bloorview, next to a parking lot on one side and wooded ravine on the other. It has several large meeting places, including a large covered pavilion, paved firepit, and a grass and stone spiral path area (figure 1 depicts this area in the garden today). It once included a Mongolian yurt and First Nations-inspired dreaming lodge, and continues to hold a teepee. Jan MacKie, artist and programme coordinator from 1986–2007, explained that the dreaming lodge was

4. The programme was established as a result of the inspiration of Paul Hogan and others (Crossman et al. 2002). For a brief history of its evolution, see King et al. (2016:212–13).
5. As part of Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, the programme is sponsored by both the government and private donations overseen by the Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation. There is also a fee for participants.

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press



Figure 1. The spiral path area, including handmade chimes suspended on the wooden entrance (photo: Louise Wrazen, 2016).

introduced following the advice of Shirley Bear, a First Nations artist and elder from New Brunswick who visited the garden and also gave them a song. As Jan MacKie remembers:

> She spent a few days there with the staff and kids and then suggested that she would like to build a dreaming lodge and do dream journeys with small groups of children. So she & I and a few kids went into the ravine and harvested some saplings and she taught the children about Native rituals of thanking the trees and the forest for their gift … [S]he taught us all how one should enter the lodge and, sitting in a circle with 5 or 6 kids, with the use of sage for burning, a rattle and her soothing voice, talked the kids through a visualization to find their "animal helper spirit". When it was time for her to leave, she honoured me with permission to continue doing dream journeys with the children. Shirley also gave us a song in her language, a song that gives thanks to mother earth—the staff sang it every morning in the circle that we started our day with. (Jan MacKie, email, 14 July 2015)

In addition to these gathering spaces, the garden contains several sheds and tables for creative activities (e.g., woodworking, pottery, weaving, costumes) and many active gardening sites where participants can plant, tend, and harvest at various heights to accommodate different forms of mobility. In a recent tour of the garden, Shannon described this as a "place-based programme" that positions participants strategically between the cultivated garden and natural ravine, so that they can respect both: when they don't tend, they can enjoy and respect; when they tend—weed, water—they see the results. Being outside makes a difference, she suggested,

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

since "a loud noise inside is not so loud outside" and being outside tends to help control a lot of behaviours (Shannon Crossman, pers. comm., 24 June 2015).

Both the ecology and the metaphor of the garden are central to the philosophy of the programme. As Shannon explained, this is a natural retreat in an urban setting, which allows intensive engagement with the garden in a way that addresses what Richard Louv (2005) has identified as "nature deficit disorder" among children with little exposure to the natural world. It also offers a rich site for inspiration and an explicit framework for the programme. The *Spiral Garden Resource Book*, which staff members have written, explains this important component:

> Through the metaphor of the garden, we celebrate our interdependence with the natural world as the context for healing our children, ourselves, and the Earth. Through gardening, the arts, and play we collectively explore and express ways to nurture all our relations. All aspects of the person—physical, emotional, spiritual, rational, and intuitive are integrated in the process. But at the heart of the process, at the centre of the seed, is the conscious intention to bring the poetic back into our lives. (Crossman et al. 2002:1)

While many of those participating in the programme undergo a lifetime of therapies and medical interventions, the use of the word "healing" here refers to a more broadly conceived holistic health of belonging and relationships through the arts. These can nurture three kinds of relationships, as identified by the staff in the introduction to their resource book: the relationship of the children with themselves; the relationships we have with each other (our social context); and that which we have to the earth. Through creative experiences in a natural context, children can discover their own talents and inspirations, find a communal expression that builds community, and experience a sense of interdependence with the natural world (Crossman et al. 2002:1). Spiral Garden does not fit the conventions of a typical day-camp for children. In contrast to skills-building camps based on directed, structured activities, the programme allows children to be self-directed, with a range of options offered simultaneously on any given day around the garden. As Jan MacKie explains, "It's about kids choosing." Further, it's "not about kids doing, but about doing together," where everyone is a teacher and learner in an environment of inclusive co-creation and relationship (Jan Mackie, pers. comm., 22 May 2015).

Spiral Garden's programme model is a constellation of garden, art, and play. As the *Resource Book* describes, the garden provides a source of inspiration and grounds everyone in the natural world; the arts act as vehicles to give form for expressions; and "play is the pervasive spirit of openness and intuition." In addition, stories are created throughout the summer with the children, and these are used to weave images and create songs and characters that merge into a narrative. Ceremonies are used to pull all the elements together in communal events (Crossman et al. 2002:1) during every session and then in the celebration that marks the end of every summer. Arts that include puppet-making, drama, weaving, "clay world," sand-painting, wood-working, and music combine in this natural environment to help participants "make connections between the inner life of their imagination and the world" (ibid.:1).

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This approach depends on committed staff, and these artists and musicians bring their experiences from around the world to the garden. When Chilean musician Rodrigo Chavez was at Spiral Garden, he made everyone their own flute, and these played an important part in the final performance and ceremony. Shirley Bear introduced the dreaming lodge and gave the staff a song of their own. For a time, a Javanese musician, Susiawan, was part of the programme; he set up a *gender* or *saron* (struck metallophones) and played throughout the day. Sometimes children came over to join him; at other times, he played and contributed to the overall sonic landscape of the site. One of years I was there, he arranged for a gamelan to be present for the closing performance. Jan recalls that one day at the staff meeting, Susiawan suggested that "tomorrow let's do nothing" (Jan MacKie, pers. comm., 22 May 2015)—quite a proposal if it had been made at any other staff meeting. Here, however, this was not an unreasonable suggestion but made as a way for the events and imagination to unfold spontaneously, as consistent with a programme and site that offers "a safe container for children and staff alike to enter the alternate worlds of the imagination" (Crossman et al. 2002:3).

Susan participated in Spiral Garden for thirteen years, first as a participant then as a staff member, and loves to talk about her time there. She explains one of her favourite memories, which is associated with the Earthing Place, one of the garden's special areas:

> The Earthing Place has blankets on the ground and you can put your bare feet in the earth. And often we have hand bells in the space. We would often lie on our backs and play bells and listen—playing notes, singing with the note, playing a rhythm, passing the sounds … You can't say "this is the point of the activity" but "this is the experience of the activity." You can choose to go or stay as long as you want. In the earthing space you can choose to just listen, or add to it, or just lie on the grass and be there together. (Susan, email, 25 April 2016)

The experience of being together within a natural environment rich with acoustic, tactile, and other sensory explorations guides the possibilities of the day.

The sonic world of the garden

In a setting where participants include both those verbally articulate and non-verbal, blind and seeing, hearing impaired and auditorily sensitive, differently mobile and variously bodied, sound is essential. Since Spiral Garden aims to provide participants with as many entry points as possible, the total soundscape is as significant as the visual environment. Participation is the most important component in making music in the garden, since all sounds contribute to the overall soundscape. Jan recalls that some kids were especially involved with music: "All they wanted to do was to make music," and some became rather like wandering minstrels following a musician around the grounds (Jan MacKie, pers. comm., 22 May 2015).

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

As an immersive, co-created, and evolving system grounded in this setting, the garden becomes a self-contained cultural world; it becomes a "village model" society, as former staff member Alex Glenfield described, with "kids and youth with disabilities feeling much more included" (Alex Glenfield, email, 10 June 2015). Alex is an ethnomusicologist whose fieldwork in Tuva influenced the vocal work and music he brought to the programme for ten years. In reflecting on the programme, he suggested that "perhaps music was the binding agent of the garden's social structure" (Alex Glenfield, email, 6 June 2015). I will here consider five ways that music and sound contribute to this space: (1) music everywhere; (2) percussion; (3) music circles; (4) songs; and (5) ceremonies, performances, and parades.

(1) Music everywhere

Music can be heard throughout the garden, with some sounds available to anyone anytime. The original version of Spiral Garden (pre–2006) included a large percussion sculpture comprised of rows of hanging idiophones (including very large and resonant cylinders) and (for a while) the inner workings of a piano's soundboard and strings suspended vertically. In designing Spiral Garden, former director Jan explained that she wanted this sculpture in one corner of the garden, since she regarded it as a place to go anytime to make sound: "There was nothing delicate about this, so we didn't want it in the centre as the focus of attention, but rather where they could be played and the sounds could permeate the garden" (Jan MacKie, pers. comm., 22 May 2015). As a participant, Anna remembers experimenting with different timbres and really enjoying the way that the sounds physically surrounded her (Anna, pers. comm., 12 July 2015). Teddy went there on his own and experimented when he was a young child in the programme. This was surprising since Teddy, who uses a wheelchair and is identified with cerebral palsy, a hearing impairment, and Asperger's on the autism spectrum, defiantly proclaims that he hates music. Yet he explains that he enjoyed these bells (as he calls them) made out of industrial materials. He liked the way they resonated; "their sound was slow and not so confusing, like a lot of music," and he could control them in a way that he couldn't control (other) music (Teddy, pers. comm., 20 December 2015).

Today three permanent sound areas in Spiral Garden articulate the garden space in a large triangle. These together constitute a Music Garden designed by Robert Vine, who served in various roles (arts animator, site coordinator, and programme coordinator) from 1987 to 2014. The "Treebone Gateway," designed to appear like a series of rib-like bones extending out of the ground and surrounded by plants, provides a sonic and visual entry into the garden. It includes some wind chimes at chair level and in the arch above the path; it was also planned to include some suspended pitched chimes that could produce maximum effect with minimum effort from levers at ground level (see figure 2). The "Drumlin Grove" contains a struck metal idiophone (a commercially bought whale drum, a large round slit drum designed for outdoor play) with a bench and space around it for wheelchair and walker access; it is placed next to a natural slope so that some children can

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

activate it if lying on the ground. The "Xylohome" consists of a commercially bought xylophone supported beneath a roof constructed as a giant rectangular plant box containing grasses and plants. According to Robert, music is "always in the air" and "sounds are always there." He drew the children's attention to this during many of the activities. For example, when digging in the garden he would comment on "the way the winds go flappety flap" (Robert Vine, pers. comm., 28 December 2015). Together these contribute to a vibrant acoustemology of the garden, a sonic way of knowing the world (Feld 1996).

Sensitizing children and youth to the sonic world and how sounds are made are integral components of Spiral Garden. Susan explains: "I love that sound can be made in so many verbal and non verbal ways in the garden. It's a part of communication and expression for many people there. I like all the sneaky ways sound finds its way into activities as well, and how it complements things" (Susan, email, 4 January 2016). (See figure 1, which shows various chimes made by participants and hung at chair level on the wooden gateway to the spiral path.) Participants also were able to make their own instruments, though Alex identifies this as the most infrequent of musical activities. This included "the making of frame drums, 'thumb pianos' (*mbiras* and *kalimbas*), plucked lutes made from large gourds, gongs, zithers, didgeridoos, and even electro-acoustic instruments—sound installations—using contact microphones coupled with acoustic sound sources" (Alex Glenfield, email, 6 June 2015). Ben Stein, who was the first musician in the programme in the 1980s, remembers placing children's hands over the soundbox of a guitar to feel the vibrations made by the instrument (Ben Stein, pers. comm.,



Figure 2. The Treebone Gateway, designed as a sonic and visual entry to Spiral Garden (photo: Louise Wrazen, 2016).

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

31 December 2015), facilitating an embodied engagement with sound production otherwise not accessible to some.

(2) Percussion

Percussion plays an important role in the programme. Percussive improvisations and drum circles either precede singing in music circles or occur spontaneously throughout the day. Alex explains how these could connect the children:

> We used percussion as a way to coordinate the sounds and gestures, and sometimes vocalizations, of smaller groups. These sounds and movements may have instilled a sense of connection with each other. In many instances, I recall observing children who were otherwise non-responsive to participating in the space—remaining silent, appearing distant, refusing to take part in any of the activities—find instances of connection in drumming and percussion outside the music circle time. (Alex Glenfield, email, 6 June 2015)

Looking back on her time at the garden, Jan recalls that it didn't matter if the kids were with the beat or not. Some joined in precisely and some did not: "They participated in the total soundscape." She continues, explaining that it was also important to have good musicians (on staff) who could maintain a beat and keep things going (Jan MacKie, pers. comm., 22 May 2015). Some children are especially drawn to the music. One summer when I was there, the same two young boys seemed always to be playing the *jembe* (African vase-shaped drum) during circle time, and also at other events, on their own, or with the musicians at other times. Others chose rattles or clapping sticks from the instrument basket for circle times. Some approached the drums more cautiously, like Teddy, who explains that initially he "did not like them as much as the bells [gongs] since they were not as resonant." He admits, however, that when he "learned how to beat them so they could be more resonant," he enjoyed them (Teddy, pers. comm., 20 December 2015). Drums require a higher level of motor coordination and physical strength to play, which may be challenging for some participants. With its emphasis on participation, however, Spiral Garden welcomes any efforts without judgment or pressure.

Other occasions for percussion include parades, with drums, rattles, gongs, and/or bells accompanying. In addition, Robert sometimes led "bell walks" around the garden. Hand bells were chosen or distributed among the children, who would then walk around Spiral Garden and ring the bells in different places to experiment with the sounds and sonically explore the space (Robert Vine, pers. comm., 28 December 2015).

(3) Music circles

Music circles provide opportunities to bring everyone together three times a day: in the morning, after lunch, and at the end of the day. They structure the day and create a way to enter the space and be present: "It gives everyone a chance to land and settle" (Shannon Crossman, pers. comm., 24 June 2015). These circles

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

often include musical activities, songs, and instruments. For example, when Alex (a vocalist and overtone singer) was at Cosmic Birdfeeder, he had everyone wake up their voices by intoning around the vowel triangle, slowly moving around the possible sounds of the vowels AA/OO/EE (Alex Glenfield, email, 10 June 2015). When I was there, morning arrival at Spiral Garden was always greeted with the song "The Boat Goes Down the River" at the circle. This has been part of the programme's repertoire since the late 1980s and is featured as the opening track on the first Spiral Garden CD (Hoskins and Simmons n.d.).[6] Shannon explains that at the end of the day, the circles have a celebratory tone. They provide a way to celebrate the day by including singing that invites anyone to finish the line "here's a toast to …" with something that was special for them (such as clay, the thing we found, the mud pit). This is a good conclusion to the day and also relates to the adult culture of toasting (Shannon Crossman, pers. comm., 24 June 2015).

Lynn Simmons led the circles when I was there, with other musicians and staff always participating as well. A classically trained singer with a recording and performance career who has been at Spiral Garden since 1993, Lynn has a deeply ingrained belief in the community aspect of music that comes from her own family background and from seeing Pete Seeger in concert; it was there that she was struck by how he was able to get everyone involved. She aims to do this as well and follows the programme's philosophy, explaining that "you have to bring yourself to it" by fully engaging with the singing and "getting it physically out there" to include everyone in the music (Lynn Simmons, pers. comm., 12 June 2015). This leads her to animate the singing with actions and an energy that bring the group together and allow the nonverbal children to respond in real time. Lynn is brilliant at "holding the entire group," observes Shannon (Shannon Crossman, pers. comm., 24 June 2015). Initially Lynn built up Spiral Garden's repertoire from libraries, recordings, and her experience with Ballet Creole,[7] wanting everyone in the garden to get a sense of different styles of music from around the world. She relies on call and response, and aims at "getting sounds out" regardless of language or voice—for "the magic of things to happen." For her, the nonverbal children give the most, since they're so open to interacting: "It's about accessing and reaching and their connection [to the music] not mine … They have voices together, do things together … Everyone's voice is perfect" (Lynn Simmons, pers. comm., 12 June 2015).

(4) Songs

Songs unique to Spiral Garden are essential to the sense of community as well as to the history of the programme, acting as a reminder of story themes, activities, and events; these can take on the names of important imaginary characters, such as the

6. Introduced by Ben Stein and still sung, "The Boat Goes Down the River" was composed by Jim and Jerry Brodey (1995).

7. Ballet Creole is a Toronto-based professional ensemble of dancers and drummers focusing on the fusions of traditional and contemporary Caribbean and African dance and music (see http://www.balletcreole.org/index.cfm?pagepath=HOME/About_Us/History&id=17207, accessed 30 May 2016).

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

summer of Heart Man, the invisible monkeys, the Zucchini Queen, or others. As Susan recalls from her time in the programme:

> The freedom of SG allows musicians to travel through the garden, and the spontaneous song creations or music sessions make a huge impact on the atmosphere of the garden. It makes it feel more alive, you feel connected to the culture, you have opportunities to make new songs that become part of the culture. The songs are about the people and the stories in that space, and connect you to the space and the people when you hear or sing them.[8] (Susan, email, 4 January 2016)

The programme has a repertoire of original songs composed collaboratively between participants and musicians in addition to those from other sources, such as "The Boat Goes Down to the River." Alex explains that lyrics could respond "to events and people in the space, such as characters, storylines, inanimate objects, creatures, and new structures in the garden, and even grumpy neighbors residing just outside the garden space" (Alex Glenfield, email, 6 June 2015). The children often provide lines or phrases of inspiration for the musicians to build on; as Ben recalls, it was about "writing things out of what they'd say" (Ben Stein, pers. comm., 31 December 2015). Robert explained the origin of the song "Heart Man, We Need You" with reference to one of the story themes of a particular summer: it was the year that the love canal (an imaginary body of water under a small wooden bridge) in the garden was polluted. The puppets Auntie Dodie (a play on "antidote") and Heart Man (or *hombre corazón*, a South American puppet with a heart painted on it) that Robert was animating, were having a conversation watched by many children. During an exchange about the love canal, a young boy (Theo, about five) turned to Heart Man and said:

> Heart Man we need you because no one has hearts
> Heart Man we need you, we'll die with no hearts
> Fly with your speedy wings

Robert quickly wrote down the words and took them to Colin and Bohdan (who, he recalled, was working with his accordion then). A day or two later they brought the song to circle, improvising some of their way through it, to see how it would work (Robert Vine, pers. comm., 28 December 2015). The song, with its complete text, is heard on the first of the two Spiral Garden CDs, with Lynn playing with sounds and meanings and occasionally replacing "speedy" with "steely" (Hoskins and Simmons n.d.: track 11).

Mark Brown, a musician with a background in theatre, was on staff at Spiral Garden for fourteen years and remembers that he "often wrote songs with kids in the garden." He explained one method in this process as "we'll bring something, throw it out and see how the children take it, then structure it" (Mark Brown, pers. comm., 25 June 2015). Mark also remembers writing songs with Teddy, who "hates music." When asked about this dislike, Teddy explained that "songs aren't

8. Many of these songs have been recorded by the musicians of Spiral Garden and Cosmic Birdfeeder on two CDs (Hoskins and Simmons n.d.; Hoskins 2008).

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

like music, since they have specific meanings and can communicate … they can be powerful" (Teddy, pers. comm., 12 June 2015). Spiral Garden allowed him to explore these feelings in his own way. Mark worked from a child's inspiration on "The Basement in the House of Shadows," which was created the year the garden lost two huge willow trees—the year it lost its shadows. This traumatic event for the garden is now commemorated in the song. Robert explains that he saw that Benny had filled his page solid with charcoal, making it black, and so he asked what it was. When Benny replied that it was a "staircase to the basement of the house of shadows," Robert passed on the line to Mark, who had been working with a steel guitar at the time (Robert Vine, pers. comm., 28 December 2015). Mark wrote the song, originally as a blues. When he sang it at Spiral Garden, he taught only the chorus for others to join in, but Lynn has now adapted it so that everyone participates throughout the song in call and response (Mark Brown, pers. comm., 12 December 2015).

> I'm going down that lonesome staircase to the basement of the house of shadows
> And I'll be searching for missing shadows that were long ago lost in the wind
>
> And when I find 'em, 'gonna carry 'em on home back up to the light of day
> I'm going down that lonesome staircase to the basement of the house of shadows
>
> Well there's two willows, two weeping willows, two weeping willows that weep no more
> 'Cause they have gone up to willow heaven to live again on that river shore
>
> Oh there's two shadows, two willow shadows, that are crying because they were left alone
> Down at the bottom of the lonesome staircase in the basement of the house of shadows
>
> I'm going down that lonesome staircase but please don't make me go down by myself
> I gotta ask you a little favour while I put my pride on a shelf
>
> Won't you come with me down that lonesome staircase
> and if you don't mind
> could you hold my hand as we go down that lonesome staircase
> to the basement of the house of shadows[9]

It is not surprising that this song has caught on at Spiral Garden. Not only does it recall an important event in the life of the garden and lends itself to singing together during circles, but it captures feelings of fear, loneliness, and abandonment that a child—or anyone—might feel.

(5) Ceremonies, performances, and parades

Creativity flows across the arts in an interactive and flexible environment at Spiral Garden. There also are many collaborative integrated performances throughout the

9. Used with permission from Mark Brown. The song is found as track 9 on the first Spiral Garden CD (Hoskins and Simmons n.d.).

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

summer. Some of these are quite spontaneous and incidental, such as the funeral for the Zucchini Queen, a large zucchini from the garden eaten by a raccoon and honoured with an elaborate funeral that included a procession to New Orleans-style music, eulogy, flowers, and cremation. Others require long-term story weaving and planning, as Alex describes: "Drama and story often became performances in the garden spaces, and musicians worked with children and youth to form small ensembles borrowing from the large collection of instruments. These ensembles provided background music for dances, plays, puppet shows, and parades. Here too, participants had a direct influence on the compositions of this incidental music" (Alex Glenfield, email, 6 June 2015).

The final performance of the summer is the most ambitious, weaving together a complex narrative with processions, dances, music, food (grown onsite or made there), and drama throughout the garden and engaging everyone present. It provides a final synthesis of the narratives unfolding over the summer. The *Resource Book* provides an example of how this can evolve:

> If you have made several of a certain kind of puppet or mask—birds, snakes, schnozzle-nosed—you can call them all together and invent a dance. Invite the musicians and maybe a song will emerge. The song or dance may become part of a story. They may contribute to a dramatic event, at which, say, the dance between the nozzles and the schnozzles is an essential requirement. Also, groups of children can be involved in ceremonies and celebrations by performing these dances and songs with their puppets or masks. (Crossman et al. 2002:66)

In one case at least, a story narrative developed from a song. As Robert tells this: one day a dragonfly sat on Jonathan's arm and they had a "deep quiet conversation." The next day, Jonathan (who was about nine) sat down with Ben (one of the musicians at the time) and they wrote the "Dragonfly Song" (Robert Vine, pers. comm., 28 December 2015). Although the song never became part of the Spiral Garden repertoire, it marked an event so noteworthy that the birth of the dragonfly became the central story narrative of the following summer. The *Resource Book* explains this and concludes: "The celebration delighted all, particularly Jonathan who heard the musicians revive his song from the previous year" (Crossman et al. 2002:28). The large dragonfly that emerged from its "egg" remains a major installation suspended from the trees in Spiral Garden.[10]

Creating alternate worlds in the garden

Through the cohesive and integrated artistic vision created by staff, children, and youth within this natural setting, Spiral Garden provides a world that subverts normative behaviours and redefines differently bodied participants. When everyone participates within the collaborative structure of this alternate world, medically

10. There are many good pictures of Spiral Garden available online by searching images related to "Holland Bloorview Spiral Garden."

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

defined "disabilities" become irrelevant, a fact that staff members and participants reinforce. Susan remembers one "magical moment" from a couple of summers ago:

> It was a final day of the session celebration and we were all gathered together. I had been working with a group of staff and youth during the session, and we had noticed that a couple of the youth made some very-particular-to-them kinds of sounds—these were particular to their way of communication, and the sounds expressed different things (like being happy). Together as a group, we came up with a way for the youth to lead an activity during the celebration. Each chose one particular sound. They began to make these sounds and then everyone else—kids, youth, staff, volunteers—was asked to think of their own particular sound and make it … this was part of the story that session and the purpose was to call to Saturn. Everyone was making sounds together, without words, and it was incredible. The sounds were all unique, and we were all doing it together. (Susan, email, 25 April 2016)

This emphasis on the individuality of each participant was highlighted in a 2006 article in *Bloom*, a publication by Holland Bloorview. It focused on the Spiral Garden experiences of Michael Zauder, who explained that he "has always felt most free to be himself at Spiral Garden" (Kinross 2006:4). The article quotes him directly as follows: "'It allowed me to create what I wanted—to be whatever I wanted to be,' says Michael, 24 … [who] was born with a broken back, has a curved spine and is legally blind. 'This place made me feel like I didn't have a disability. The staff who were animating the puppets would talk to me like I was a person, an equal'" (Kinross 2006:4).[11]

Staff members explore this inclusive space of freedom, where personhood is understood more broadly, in different ways. For example, Shannon describes this as a type of "third place for children," between home and school: it's non-competitive and everyone is welcome (cf. Oldenburg 2000). A recent study published in *Children's Health* (which includes Robert Vine and Shannon Crossman among its authors) has suggested that Spiral Garden functions as an "extraordinary place" that has the qualities of heterotopias (cf. Foucault and Rotenberg), which the authors identify as universality, identifiable functions, presence of artefacts with different symbolic meanings, heterochronicity (separation from time and place), entry through permission, and reimagined linkage with the real world (King et al. 2016:220).[12] Alex reflects on his own experience and references Victor Turner when he explains that staff wanted to create a liminal space: "We hoped that music-making made opportunities for children and adults to experience liminality. Formed as a counterbalance to the institutional setting of medical rehabilitation,

11. Since first writing this, I have learned, with great sadness, that Michael Zauder has passed away.

12. My point here is not to explore the relevance of this analogy, which is only given passing reference in the article, but to draw attention to this among different conceptualizations of an alternative space with respect to Spiral Garden. Foucault's (1986) "Of Other Spaces" offers detailed elaboration of his concept of heterotopia according to six principles, the details of which would warrant further individual consideration with respect to Spiral Garden.

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the gardens were intended to be zones-of-play existing outside the more formal and serious social structures: school, rehabilitation, therapy, and even [t]he more typical recreational activities" (Alex Glenfield, email, 6 June 2015).

Music and the total sonic world are integral to the creation of this space. Alex views music as contributing an essential component to the zone-of-play, and as helping children and their families: "The music was a vehicle for irrational silliness, humor, and wit. The playful attitude was intended to be a relief from a child's social stresses and also for the relief of their parents and siblings who experience all the medical stress of rehabilitation. Music, like the other arts in the garden, was thought to be an expressive medium for helping children move their feelings" (Alex Glenfield, email, 6 June 2015).

Shannon sees music as an important way into the garden. She suggests that through music, everyone can have a different entry point to the experience, either as transmitter or receiver—terms she used that more effectively suggest the embodied quality of knowing than the more common performer/audience dichotomy. Continuing, she also suggests that in this way "you can be part of something bigger than yourself" (Shannon Crossman, pers. comm., 24 June 2015). Alex agrees that the garden's most successful outcome is the creation of true social inclusion, which could never occur in a traditional institution, and that "outdoors, in the midst of a music circle, singing and gesturing, we reveal ourselves and become very vulnerable." He suggests that "kids seeing adults, and especially their medical professionals, engaging in [such] acts of play, come to know an equanimity that they might not experience" elsewhere (Alex Glenfield, email, 10 June 2015). An explicit distancing from any medically influenced model is crucial to Spiral Garden's vision of embodied experience through place-based arts and play, where music and art are simply among the activities of healthy living: "[R]ather than focus on music as therapy and hence yet another goal-based, outcome-driven intervention in a child's already therapy-laden schedule, we hoped to go straight for [the] act of just living: skip the formality of the process of improving a child's well-being and just start living life by creating for oneself and for others in one's community" (Alex Glenfield, email, 6 June 2015). Music helps life to happen at Spiral Garden in ways not available outside the boundaries of this imaginative space.

Concluding thoughts

This paper has introduced Spiral Garden and argued for the importance of music in creating this unique programme as part of a larger agenda of advocacy and change. Spiral Garden inspires a hope that once outside the garden, these memories, experiences, and songs can contribute to new models of thought and action to help transform continuing oppressive constructions of ability and disability. As suggested by disability and cultural theorist Tobin Siebers, this shift requires significant changes in both the social and built environments (2008:3). This

https://doi.org/10.5921/yeartradmusi.48.2016.0167 Published online by Cambridge University Press

discussion also contributes to the valuable research initiated by Michael Bakan and argues that such a musically rich project as Spiral Garden also "hold[s] the capacity to contribute productively and meaningfully to the causes of … self-advocacy and quality of life, modeling new horizons of possibility" (2016a:17). Furthermore, by creating a network of interdependence based on music and other collaborative arts, Spiral Garden aligns with Lennard J. Davis to destabilize the very concept of disability in favour of "a commonality of bodies within the notion of difference" (Davis 2013:276). The programme models a relational way of being together, and also of being part of the natural environment, that reinforces the normalcy of the incomplete subject. This discussion, therefore, participates not only in Davis's project of destabilizing the concept of (dis)ability but positions this goal within a larger agenda of sustainable ecological coexistence. Finally, this paper also reminds us of the questions that remain about the extent to which these Spiral Garden experiences can productively sustain lives still confined to the periphery of narrowly defined normative expectations; about the nature of embodied learning and knowing facilitated by the broad range of experiences made available in the programme (cf. Johnson 2007); and about the degree of meaningful interaction and integration achieved, and then remembered, by those community participants who walk away and can subsequently assist in changing the world once outside Spiral Garden.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Alex Glenfield for his assistance in writing this article. As an ethnomusicologist and former staff member at this programme, Alex's insightful comments and observations form an important part of this discussion. I also thank the other staff members who contributed to this article (Mark Brown, Shannon Crossman, Jan MacKie, Lynn Simmons, Ben Stein, Robert Vine); the former participants with whom I spoke (whose names have been changed to respect their wishes); and the many others who created Spiral Garden as I have experienced it. Finally, I wish to acknowledge the valuable feedback provided by my anonymous reviewers.

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