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**Review of June Boyce-Tillman's  
Experiencing Music – Restoring the Spiritual: Music as Well-being**

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### **Abstract**

Experiencing music – restoring the spiritual: Music as well-being, addresses the area of spirituality and music education. The book is organized in 10 chapters, framed by a prelude and a postlude, with two interludes in-between. Topics include the development of religionless spirituality; phenomenography of musical experiences; the environment; music and expression; values in musicking; extra-personal dimensions; musical liminality as a space for peace and justice making; and the ecclesiology of music. The disciplines of musicology, ethnomusicology, music education, performance studies, music theory, and music therapy are used to convey their inherent and integral connections towards the understanding of music and well-being.

June Boyce-Tillman is a recognized authority in the field of music and spirituality. In my role as the editor of the *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education*, identifying spirituality as a vital topic to conclude the Handbook's 13 sections, June was an obvious choice for the music chapter. Indeed, her chapter on music and spirituality (Boyce-Tillman, 2007) was a solid, rigorous work, everything I was hoping for as an editor and reader. It was years later, in March 2017, that I met June face to face in Kathmandu, Nepal, in the *Cultural Diversity in Music Education* conference (CDIME). I was struck by her active engagement and participation in the many sessions she attended, by her intellectual curiosity and openness to topics and approaches, by her astute and agile mind. I was also touched by her generosity of spirit in supporting upcoming researchers through her insightful comments, profound questions, invitations and the sharing of opportunities. This current book allowed me to perceive additional dimensions of June's scholarship and musicianship. The book testifies to her extensive and important work as a scholar, pedagogue, and creator, articulating her visions and aspirations for the field of music as well-being in its deepest sense.

In the spirit of sharing my subjectivity (Peshkin, 1988), the background and commitments that I bring to this reading, I have been interested in the topic of music experience and its connection to the spirit for many years, dating back to my student days in the Music Academy, before I knew that musical experiences and spirituality were legitimate topics of inquiry. Meaningful connections to music and the arts, I later realized, model and inspire a connection to qualitative research (and life!) in its intimacy, intensity and spaciousness (Bresler, 2005). This book has greatly expanded my horizons, allowing for a broader vista.

The complex wealth of ideas spanning multiple disciplines demands attentive reading. Aiming to attend to forest *and* trees generated an interplay of distances towards individual and big ideas, a back and forth movement. Getting acquainted with the individual trees presented an opportunity to discover new species and appreciate their qualities. With so many enticing trees, I had to remind myself not to lose the bigger picture. This review aims to juxtapose wide-angle with zooming in, seeking to appetize rather than exhaust.

In a world of material values, Boyce-Tillman comments in the opening (p. 7), that we search longingly for a heart and a soul. Many people find these aspects of themselves through experiencing music. Her larger question, framing the quest of the whole volume, is: How can we approach music in a way that will empower people to recover the spiritual aspect of musicking with integrity, and use music as a growing point and source of transformation in our lives. This profound question is followed by an extensive search for answers that draws on knowledge generated in many centuries, by diverse, sometimes opposing intellectual traditions. Still, the voice of the author as the composer of this oeuvre is clear in its message.

The book is organized in 10 chapters, framed by a prelude and a postlude, with two interludes in-between. This overall form of scholarly chapters with evocative, free-form “ludes” adds an aesthetic touch to the conventional style of scholarly writing. Returning at the end to themes introduced in the beginning augments a sense of the whole. Opening with a chapter on the development of religionless spirituality, foundation to the entire volume, the next chapters focus on Creativity; Phenomenography of musical experiences; the Environment; Music and expression; Musical construction; Values in musicking; Extra-personal dimensions; Musical liminality as a space for peace and justice making; and Ecclesiology of music.

Different disciplines typically associated with these themes (e.g., creativity with psychology; musicking with Sociology; ecclesiology with Theology) co-exist seamlessly in this volume. Indeed, the level of interdisciplinarity is remarkable overall and within each chapter. This is particularly impressive when we remember that the discipline of music education was characterized until very recently by “hard boundaries” (Detels, 1999). Here, the ways in which the disciplines of musicology, ethnomusicology, music education, performance studies, music theory, and music therapy are woven together to build a big picture of music and well-being, convey the inherent and integral connections among these sub-disciplines. Interdisciplinarity extends to non-music disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, psychology, linguistic, ecclesiology, theology, and education. Each of these disciplines manifests the same extensive span that we witnessed in music. Philosophy, an intellectual discipline going back, together with music, to the seven liberal arts as the oldest formal curricula, range from pre-Socratic, Plato, Aristoteles, and later Augustine, to diverse branches of contemporary philosophers, incorporating the perspectives of Dewey, Adorno, Gadamer, Sartre, Levinas, Suzanne Langer, Derrida, Shusterman, Martha Nussbaum, and Lydia Goehr, among many others. The same scope is apparent in newer disciplines like Psychology, Anthropology, and Sociology. Within each discipline and sub-discipline, “classic” figures are placed next to innovative new names. The wide array of female scholars whose work is highlighted is, in my experience, unparalleled, including many dozens of women researchers, composers and conductors. We learn about the vital ideas of composers like 12<sup>th</sup> century Hildegard von Bingen and 20<sup>th</sup> century Pauline Oliveros; musicologists Susan McClary and Rose Subotnik; ethnomusicologists Catherine Ellis, Monique Ingalls, and Carolyn Landau; music educators Rhoda Bernard, Lucy Green, Estelle Jorgenson, Kimberley Powell, and Heidi Westerlund; educators Donna Harraway and Nel Noddings; anthropologist Constance Classen; and theologians Ruth Illman, Catherine Keller, Tina Beattie, Fiorenza Elizabeth, Margaret MacDonald, and Iris Yob.

Interspersed in the comprehensive areas of scholarship within and across disciplines are gems in the form of myths and stories from African, Asian and Western traditions, as well as Boyce-Tillman’s own poems, compositions, and performances. While the book centers on

Western music, it habitually relates to other cultures as frames of reference: for example, the reference to Alan Cohen's story of African culture (Boyce-Tillman, 215), where each person has his/her music, starting from the mother's pregnancy and the communal process of tuning in, in search of this music, through important rites of passage, (and times when the person needs to be restored), to the end of life (Cohen, 2003). "When you really recognize your own song, you have no desire or need to do anything that would hurt another. A real friend is someone who knows your song and sings it to you when you have forgotten it." (Melanson, 2003), quotes Boyce-Tillman (215-216). This story provides a reminder of what the role of music in each individual identity can be, as well as the interplay between personal and societal. A global perspective is also manifested in the musics referred to, covering a broad spectrum of musics from diverse parts of the world.

An underlying issue across chapters is how difference can be given dignity. The earnest quest to understand concepts and worldviews of different, cross-cultural perspectives, is key to achieving dignity. Understanding the contextuality of the concepts in their historical, cultural, and disciplinary origins is consistent. The notion of soul presented in the prelude, for example, is traced to its origins and metamorphoses to current times. In Ancient Greece, we learn, the soul was referred to as breath, spirit, and mind, and associated with the butterfly, a symbol of transformation, an image that has continued to represent the soul even today. While the Greek Orphic philosophers associated the soul with deepest feelings and imagination, Plato regarded it as an eternal entity made of intellect (logos), passion, and desire. For Aristotle it was the totality of experience in which conscious and unconscious elements of the mind were manifested within the body, a vital force. (p. 8). Understanding of the past is always in the service of the present and future. If we could expand this ancient notion of soul in contemporary society, Boyce-Tillman argues, it would have huge implications for peace, understanding, and reconciliation between cultures.

Related to the concept of soul, spirituality as distinct from religion is presented in its sociological and philosophical contexts. As religion in Europe lost its power, Boyce-Tillman proposes, there was a loss of interest in the animating power of life: the arts became secularized and demoted to mere entertainment (even if the original meaning of entertainment, as I learned, was to nourish). Chapter 1 discusses in depth the confusion in secularization, including the peaceful existence of sacred and secular worldviews (compared to religions viewed as merely a remnant from an old- world order). Boyce-Tillman argues that the increasing marginalization of the sacred from the Enlightenment onwards, culminating with Nietzsche's assertion that God is dead, and the steady rise of secularization in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is being challenged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has contributed to the growing interest in spirituality. Indeed, spirituality can be seen as an attempt by Western culture to sort itself out after Nietzsche's dramatic assertion.

The story of spirituality is explored through the history of Church, continuing through 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the USA with such movements as transcendentalism, Swedenborgianism, Theosophy, Spiritualism, and Eastern religions. These movements are traced to their main ideas, broader intellectual contexts, and key characters. Spirituality, as the book title conveys, is a common thread across chapters. The complex relationships of spirituality and religion is foundational to this enterprise, from the first chapter centering on the development of “religionsless” spirituality to the last centering on the role of spirituality in ecclesiology. Spirituality is defined as the moment when all the other domains fuse, representing the reintegration of the body, intellect, expression, and culture. Additional themes refer to the place of narrative in spirituality; the re-emergence of spiritual intention; and the separation of animate and inanimate in an interconnected world.

Spirituality and music can be conceptualized as “ways of knowing.” Drawing on the work of psychologists and anthropologists working in the area of consciousness, we learn about music as altered states of consciousness and awareness. Alf Gabrielsson’s dimensions of the transcendental and existential in his descriptions of strong experiences in music provide an important link to the work of the human potential movement represented by psychologists Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers. Important questions address where the religious sits in the hierarchy of human needs, and how the spiritual becomes part of the process of self-actualization, including the notion of peak experiences. Ways of knowing are intimately connected to education. In particular, musicking supports the goal of re-imagining the global community and drawing on the arts as cultural intervention. Among the examples provided is the compelling work of theater practitioner, theorist, and political activist Augusto Boal, connecting music to the other arts in its mission and processes.

The essential role of the communal underlying the spiritual endeavor is exemplified in the above-mentioned African story of music and identity, and in an articulate discussion of values in musicking, the focus of Chapter 7. Assuming that musical metaphors propagate the world-views of their particular era, viewing and attitudes, Boyce-Tillman suggests we use ethnomusicological lenses on our “own musics.” Vivid examples of the importance of context and meaning in musical experience range from a film with a performance of conductor Kurt Furtwängler’s Beethoven’s 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony, broadcast with Nazis (including Goebbels) as audience and visible swastikas, to a carol performed in a school nativity play as compared with one in a High Mass in Westminster Cathedral. The notion of intention in musical performance, with examples of Paul Simon’s *Graceland* in Apartheid South Africa and Boyce-Tillman’s own *Call for the Ancestors* drive the point. Communal aspects are also highlighted in the last chapter centering on an ecclesiology of music, where she discusses the commonalities of the stage and the sanctuary, pointing out the common goals shared by arts

and religion. The use of humor, sometimes irreverence, playfully teases conventions, as in the story of a bishop observing mournfully how much larger were Handel's audiences than his own, to which Handel responded: "Yes, Sir. Because we are in earnest".

The aspiration of treating difference with dignity is dealt with in multiple ways throughout the volume. Providing a larger framework that encompasses seemingly dichotomous concepts is manifested, for example, in the discussion of Nietzsche's contrasting concepts of Apollonian (God of healing, law, and music) and Dionysian (God of theater, wine and ecstasy). These concepts have been used throughout the romantic and modern eras to frame opposite artistic styles. Boyce-Tillman argues that rethinking musical experience in its totality has the capacity to integrate Apollonian and Dionysian aspects -- the personal and the archetypal, mind and body, the mysterious and the rational. Another key concept battled by antagonistic camps and ideological value-systems is the term "aesthetics." Coined in the Enlightenment, it was interpreted, writes Boyce-Tillman, to mean subjective expression for its own sake. As Western classical traditions developed notions of being value-free, music lost its ancient Greek telos for fusing together the Good, the True and the Beautiful. The discussion of aesthetics in this book restores its richness of meaning, drawing on both ancient and contemporary insights with an understanding of the specific contexts of the romantic and modern movements.

The strength of this book, as can happen in such enormous endeavors, is also its occasional problem. Boyce-Tillman quotes (p. 100) from Tchaikovsky (1878) who lamented: ". . . Consequently, my seams showed and there was no organic union between my individual episodes." We note at times redundancies across chapters, and places where connections among ideas are not fully developed. Still, the *raison d'être* of the book, the vision for the present and future dimensions of music that highlights the spiritual and well-being is maintained throughout. The implications for education are succinctly introduced (p. 12) in the four characteristics that define the restoration of the psyche to our educational experience, as articulated by Guy Claxton (2002): 1. Strong sense of aliveness characterized by a heightened sense of vitality, clarity and strength of perception. 2. Belonging: A sense of being at home in the world, *anima mundi*, the world soul, a connectedness. 3. Affinity with mystery, relating to Turner's liminal state, open-mindedness and inquisitiveness. 4. An enhanced peace of mind. They support, explicitly and implicitly, Boyce-Tillman's work here.

The author acknowledges that it has taken at least 20 years to write this book, starting with her Ph.D. Indeed, this volume constitutes a true Opus Magnum. It is also a celebration of a pioneer in this field, one who has paved the way for many of us. The book builds on her extensive knowledge as well as on her dedicated and passionate work with a wide range of populations. The fresh encounters with familiar thinkers and ideas--as well as exposure to

new, exciting voices--and the timely vision makes this a veritable feast, a weighty contribution to the fields of music and arts education, with ramifications well beyond these fields. Just as important is an invitation for each of us to examine the role of music in our personal and communal well-being, and the way music can support who we are and aspire to be.

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### About the author

Liora Bresler is a Professor Emerita at the College of Education, University of Illinois, Champaign, the Hedda Anderson Emerita Chair in Lund University, Sweden and since 2007, a Professor II at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway. Bresler has published 150 book chapters and papers, and has edited 17 special issues in such journals as *Visual Art Research*, *Research Studies in Music Education* and *Arts Education Policy Review* where she was the editor for international issues. She has authored and edited books on the arts in education, including *Knowing Bodies, Moving Minds* (Kluwer, 2004); the *International*

*Handbook of Research in Arts Education* (2007, Springer), the co-edited *International Handbook of Creative Learning* (Routledge, 2011); and *The International Handbook of the Arts in Education* (Routledge, 2015). Bresler has given keynote speeches, invited talks, seminars and short courses in thirty some countries in Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa and the Americas. Her work was translated to German, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Finnish, Korean, and Chinese. Bresler is the editor of the book series “Landscapes: Aesthetics, the arts and education” (Springer) and the co-founder of the *International Journal of Education and the Arts*.

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