Light from Darkness: A Case Study of Conflict Transformation through Music-based Intervention during the Rape Crisis Protests at Rhodes University in 2016

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Abstract

The claim that music is a successful and effective tool for transforming situations of conflict has been strongly contested in the last decade. This article offers insight into a situation where poetry and music were used as a method of music-based conflict transformation using a contextualised 'voice' which had some degree of 'success', albeit for quite a small group of people. The context was the 'Light from Darkness' concert presented by the Rhodes University Chamber Choir in 2016 in the wake of, and in response to the rape crisis protests at the university. Using insights from critical pedagogy, the conductor of the choir allowed for a realignment of power dynamics so that the rehearsals and the concert itself were a product of the traumatised community, rather than an imposition from outside of it. Additionally, a power-sharing model ensured that the creative composition of a musical/ poetic piece by the choristers could address the concerns of the community directly. The article demonstrates that this type of conflict transformation occurs effectively in small groups with dynamic and flexible leadership teams.

Keywords: Group music therapy; choral music; critical pedagogy; gender-based violence; music-based intervention.

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Introduction

On 13 May 2016, the Rhodes University Chamber Choir (RUCC) performed a concert entitled 'Light from Darkness'. It was normal for the choir to present a concert at the end of the semester. However, the crisis surrounding gender-based violence (specifically rape), which had been emerging at the university in the months immediately preceding the concert, was not. The choir collectively decided that it was best not to ignore the situation nor the intense emotions which were associated with it. Instead it wanted to find a way of addressing the crisis in its scheduled concert. The result was a concert which, at its apex, included a specially compiled artistic piece comprising several poems in different languages, accompanied by two local vernacular songs. This article argues that the process of creating the special piece was an example of conflict transformation, because it diffused some of the tensions within the choir resulting from differing opinions regarding modes of protest. It also argues that the concert as a whole was a music-based intervention in response to the protests at the university, because it allowed for the recognition and processing of intense emotions by both choir members and audience.

Why is the study required? As the literature review below will show, the claim that music is a successful and effective tool for transforming situations of conflict has been strongly contested in the last decade. This article offers insight into a situation where poetry and music were used as a method of music-based conflict transformation using a deeply contextualised 'voice' (through poetry and musical choices) which had some degree of 'success', albeit for quite a small group of people. My aim is to show that effective conflict transformation is something that happens effectively in small groups with dynamic and flexible leadership teams.

Literature Review

Inquiry into how the arts can be a catalyst for creating or resolving conflict has become increasingly important for scholars in the past two decades[1]. More specifically, the potential of music as an avenue for resolving or transforming conflict is a growing sub-discipline in musicology. Beard and

[1] See, for example the entry 'Conflict (music and conflict)' in Beard and Gloag (2016).

Gloag (2016:44) attribute this growth 'to the rise of university peace study degree schemes'. While they provide a fleeting introduction to music in the context of conflict transformation (Beard & Gloag 2016:44), Bergh and Sloboda (2010) survey the field more comprehensively, giving researchers a taste of scholarly enquiry into this arena[2].

Bergh and Sloboda's survey shows that much energy has been spent on documenting and analyzing very specific geographical areas where conflict is extremely heated, or is only just subsiding. For example, they highlight the abounding array of research related to music within Palestinian - Israeli conflicts (Bergh & Sloboda 2010:6). They also identify work that has been conducted in relation to so-called peace concerts whose 'general purpose…is commonly defined as an endeavor to 'build bridges' between different groups who are perceived to be in conflict' (Bergh & Sloboda 2010:6). Al-Taee (2002) and Skyllstad (1997; and 2000) provide a basis for music in relation to interracial bridge building.

Sutton (2002) offers insights, through the lenses of the burgeoning field of music therapy, into music and trauma. Since many members of the RUCC, and the audience who attended their concert, were suffering from post-traumatic stress related to the protests and the rape culture they were protesting against, such research has been an essential component of my theoretical preparation. Music therapy and its impact on South African contexts is gradually being documented and disseminated, mainly through the study groups which are related to the music therapy programme at the University of Pretoria. Pavlicevic is a prolific local voice in this space. She and her students have written about the use of music in widely differing contexts to negotiate difficult local situations of conflict (Pavlicevic, Dos Santos & Oosthuizen 2010). Because their studies are all rooted in South Africa, their value to my research in this field is particularly useful. In particular, Torrance's chapter (2010: 25 - 36), on song-writing as a therapeutic tool in expressing deep seated pain, has helped to situate this study in a recognised space within the literature.

Music therapy is not confined to one-on-one patient - therapist contexts. There is a growing base of scholarship around group music therapy

[2] See *Journal of Music and Arts in Action*, vol. 2, no. 2 which includes articles about the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, music in the context of conflict in Bosnia, US peace activism and singing, and music within the Norther Ireland peace initiatives.

and its benefits. Ansdell and Pavlicevic (2004) provide an introduction to this particular field of therapy and study. They caution against trying to define what group music therapy actually is (Ansdell & Pavlicevic 2004: 20 - 21). They go so far as to include three chapters that debate the nature of practice under the subsection 'But is it Music Therapy?' (Ansdell & Pavlicevic 2004:167 - 232). This is helpful in the context of this study, because what happened at the 'Light in Darkness' concert is difficult to define in specifically therapeutic terms.

In a critique of recent literature on music in conflict and as a means of encouraging peace, O'Connell warns against the following tendency, namely 'the philosophical premise that considers a Western conception of empathy as a universal value' (O'Connell 2011:123). He adds two further cautions for scholars: accepting 'the musical assumption that views a Western conception of music therapy and music education as having cross-cultural application' too easily and displaying 'a limited knowledge of [international] musical scholarship' (O'Connell 2011:123). The contemporary South African milieu demands that scholars be aware of local knowledge systems *and* of traditionally marginalised voices. The research below attempts to balance the completing systems of artistic expression and their symbolic value as best as possible.

Bergh has already been mentioned in this literature review, but his work is so foundational to this sub-discipline that it is important to note a specific contribution of his which has been influential in my thinking and preparation. In 'I'd like to teach the world to sing: Music and conflict transformation' (Bergh 2007), he is exceptionally clear with his background narrative and methodological approach (particularly as it relates to the interaction of music and emotions). Bergh's conclusion to this article includes this finding:

> [Conflict transformation projects] should start from the perspective of the people who are the target for these projects and must situate the music in their everyday life. This needs to use tools from psychology, music therapy, peace studies and politics to understand the landscape that the music must be used inside, without exaggerating the effects of music for romantic or professional reasons. Only then can we start developing an understanding of musical affect for conflict transformation processes (Bergh 2007:152).

This article is a response to Bergh's plea, although it does not claim to have drawn on any of the disciplines he lists formally. Instead, through the students who comprised the RUCC at the time, many of these nuanced approaches emerged through the process as students put their academic knowledge into practice.

In relation to Rhodes University[3] and its creative approach to helping students process gender-based violence (GBV), there are a number of helpful articles. Padmanabhanunni and Edwards (2015) give an historical context for the university's annual day-long silent protest to address the psychological trauma of rape survivors. This annual protest was first introduced at Rhodes University in 2006 and has been a fairly regular occurrence since then in August each year. Padmanabhanunni and Edwards (2015:2) explore the public ritual format of the protest's activities and how this helps students process the psychological distress, likening it in some respects to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. They also make an important conclusion: 'On the other hand, the majority of participants reported triggering of trauma memories as a result of participation. For some, this did lead to their engaging in psychotherapy which enabled them to start processing the traumatic events. For others, however, the triggering appears to have been re-traumatizing and reinforced negative self-appraisals' (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards 2015:9 - 10). Indeed, for this reason, I have chosen not to interview choristers and audience members for this research article. Haith (2017:116), interestingly, argues that the annual protests were unsuccessful in terms of policy at higher levels of Rhodes University, which is why this additional protest broke out. Perhaps it is worthwhile to note that the silent protests did not necessarily exist to change official policies, but rather to help rape survivors express and process their emotions. The 'Light in Darkness' concert, in a sense, tried to fill this gap of addressing the raw emotions which had erupted in the university community. Macleod, Böhmke, Mavuso, Barker and Chiweshe (2018) give detailed context to the university-wide protests which took place in April 2016. They provide a commentary on the university's official response to the crisis from a policy perspective and also posit why the existing annual protest was abandoned in 2016.

Dlakavu (2016) is a commentating voice from a feminist participant

[3] Occasionally Rhodes University is referred to as the University Currently Known as Rhodes (UKCAR) in academic literature. I have retained the name most commonly used for the university.

in the larger context of protests against rape in universities, which the Rhodes protests sparked. She discusses the part digital media played in fostering solidarity among feminists and fellow sympathisers (Dlakavu 2016:102). She concludes by suggesting that the university rape protests of April 2016 were the most recent in a series of historical black female stands again patriarchy (Dlakavu 2016:107). Another such voice is Mazibuko (2018) who also examines rape and protest in South Africa's universities from a feminist perspective.

Johnson (2016) examines the experiences of men who participated in the Rhodes silent protests alongside women. She examines the motivations for participating, as well as the positive and negative experiences men had in the process of showing solidarity with female friends and family members. Admittedly, she gives the experience of men who were already against rape, so it shows only the effect on those who were already converted to the cause, as it were (Johnson 2016:85). Another study which looks at the role of men in the Silent Protest movement at universities is Dweba's (2017) examination of the 2015 protests at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her examination and findings resonate with Johnson's work.

In terms of rape in South Africa, the most visible study is Gqola's *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (2015). In this book, Gqola provides an extensive introduction to the current context, particularly from sociological, political and feminist views. She examines the pervading attitudes of patriarchy which infect South African society as a whole, and posits some of the possible reasons for these attitudes. She also discusses at length the rape trial of Jacob Zuma (former president of South Africa) and the victim of this incident known as Khwezi. In an equally harrowing study, Moffett (2006) tries to show how rape has been used as a narrative of maintaining patriarchal power. She links the apartheid use of power to the continuing use of violence to perpetuate societal control through rape.

Theoretical Underpinning

This research uses critical pedagogy as its theoretical basis. Originally critical pedagogy emerged as an educational critique in Brazil in the 1960s, where it was developed and promoted by Paulo Freire. Since then it has been applied to numerous spheres of educational endeavour. In the recent past choral scholars and practitioners have been experimenting with the twinning

of critical pedagogy (especially its questioning of power relationships in a choir) and Edwin Gordan's Music Learning Theory (Abrahams 2017; and Vodica 2017). The overall aim of these authors is twofold. The first is to empower students. The second is to create the potential for student and teacher transformation through reciprocity while using Music Learning Theory (Vodica 2017: 144 - 147). This article uses aspects of critical pedagogy, but does not approach the music through Gordan's theory.

Traditional models of classical music ensemble rehearsal and performance appear to rely heavily on a conductor assuming dictatorial power, leaving little room for the voices of ensemble performers in the building of musical repertoire and interpretation. Zander and Zander (2000) question this sense of dictatorial power from a practical and psychological perspective, showing that a more democratic sense of leadership leads to the possibility of more accurate and more powerful performances (hence the title of their book *The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life*). O'Toole (2005) is more specific with her critical approach to the choral ensemble *status quo*, suggesting that 'typical choir practices and discourses are fraught with power relations that serve specific interests and intentionally create silences and gaps'. The approach in this research article is to show, through practice based research[4], how subverting the traditional model of choral ensembles can lead to transformation within the choir and, as a consequence, transformation of localised societies. In this study critical pedagogy stretches beyond its normal educational ambit by addressing the way in which power dynamics within a choir can yield artistic material which serves as a therapeutic musical intervention for a community suffering from post-traumatic stress.

Methodology

The first section of the article provides a narrative of events which led to the 'Light from Darkness' concert, with specific reference to critical pedagogy and how this may have diffused conflict within the choir. It also seeks to show, through the narrative, that the diffusing of tension led to an outburst of creativity. As a model, I follow the narrative method of Vodica (2017). The second section is rooted in music intervention reporting procedure,

[4] The definition for practice-based research as used in this article is from Candy (2006).

which is outlined in Robb, Carpenter and Burns (2010). I use their model with slight adaptations to accommodate the fact that the concert was not a formal music therapy intervention, but that it displayed several marked similarities to such interventions, particularly those documented by Torrance (2010). For example, a theoretical underpinning is provided (see above), the content of the intervention is described, the actual moment when the specially-complied song was featured is outlined, I declare my own part in the process, and there is discussion of the outcomes.

Brief Introduction to the Rhodes University Chamber Choir

The Rhodes University Chamber Choir has existed for longer than six decades. Its founding conductor, Georg Gruber, was internationally famous as a choral conductor and he took the choir on numerous tours around the country and the world. He also established the strong western choral tradition which shaped the choir for many years. The custom of going on an annual tour continued until a few years ago, when financial constraints began to mitigate against it. The choir usually comprised thirty members and included undergraduates and graduates from all reaches of university life, representing many of South Africa's cultural groups. In the years I worked with the choir the following groups were represented: Afrikaans; English; Ghanaian; Sotho; Tswana; Shona; Xhosa; and Zulu. Throughout my tenure as conductor, I worked towards developing a strongly local repertoire, focusing on presenting music in each of South Africa's eleven languages[5]. The reaction to this musical diversity was favourable. When I began leading the choir in 2014, our audiences were a small core of older white people. By the end of my last year we were attracting audiences which included a rich demographic representing the whole university (including the university's leadership), local school children and people from the wider community. Significantly, this diverse audience continued to include the original core – the process of change sought to value those who had been avid choir supporters for many years. As a choir we had the privilege of introducing more transformed music to the university graduation ceremony. Here we worked together to create a song (*Halalele*) which would stand alongside the traditional *Gaudiamus*, keeping traditions alive, but adding a newer, local voice alongside it. The

[5] During the three years I worked with the choir we managed to perform songs in eight local languages.

poet who wrote the words for this song, Simthembile Xekatwana, was a former member of the choir. He provided a multilingual text which sought to root graduation ceremonies in the local traditions of wisdom and knowledge literature (see Appendix 2, no. 5). The musical style combined traditional Xhosa-like melodies and harmonies with sections of the old western graduation songs.

The choir met twice a week for evening rehearsals at the Rhodes University Music Department. In terms of leadership model, the university appointed a conductor on an annual basis, while the choir elected a committee, usually comprising five to eight members a year. The committee liaised with the conductor on matters of discipline and procedure, but the conductor, according to university contract, had sole authority over repertoire. However, I chose to try to create a sense of collaboration and empowerment, mainly to encourage the full buy-in of the choristers. Thus, the process of choosing music for the choir's concerts was what I would call 'provisionally collaborative'. This is when the choir leader opens the repertoire selection process up to the choir with the proviso that the conductor can accept or reject a piece on grounds of the group's technical ability to sing it or because it may take too long to learn within the time constraints of a particular semester. This process worked fairly well, particularly because it helped to introduce me to local and international music with which I was unfamiliar. Students also felt free to suggest songs which were not notated, and which required significant rehearsal for movement and actions. This was not my strength, so I often allowed specific students to lead these songs and choreograph them. The result was a group which, for the most part, trusted my leadership decisions and felt able to discuss issues with me. However, there were times when students felt that I was not encouraging the transformation of the choir's committee quickly enough. Thankfully they articulated this to me, and together we started working towards change which would be meaningful for them.

Compiling a Song in Response to the Rape Crisis Protests

In the April and May of 2016, not long after the first wave of South African 'fees must fall' protests[6], Rhodes University was wracked by a series of violent protests related to an alleged rape crisis in the Makhanda (Grahams-

[6] For more information about the 'fees must fall' protest movement, see Booysen *et al.* (2018).

town) community. The university has a history of addressing rape and sexual violence, having instituted an annual 'breaking the silence' protest well over a decade ago. These protests are held in August each year and are deeply symbolic including, for example, the act of taping one's mouth shut with thick black duct tape for an entire day and wearing a t-shirt with one of several slogans such as 'rape survivor'. The silencing effect which sexual violence has on peoples' lives is thus revealed through these symbolic gestures, but there is also a strong sense of solidarity among those who participate, as they are clearly visible by everyone in the community on the protest day. The protests are open to all students, staff and community members. Despite this important outlet for the deep emotional scarring which occurs as a result of rape and sexual violence, the continuing scourge of rape in Makhanda (Grahamstown) meant that there was an increasing sense of anger among women on campus. This anger emerged in a more spontaneous way in April and May of 2016. Again, the protests included symbolic gestures such as women removing their tops and exposing their breasts. As the protests gathered momentum, they became more and more violent, and some of those who started out protesting against violence began to use threats and emotionalism to intimidate those who did not participate, or who refused to stop attending lectures.

The protests left the university community deeply divided. In the opinions of some they also left the legitimate cause of the protesters compromised because of the violence and intimidation which was used. The scars of sexual violence remained, but further scars from the protests of resentment, mistrust and physical wounds were now added to a growing list of problems with which the community was dealing.

The RUCC found itself in the midst of these protests; its rehearsal routine was disrupted and a number of members were active participants[7]. They had been preparing for an end of term concert and a national competition called 'Varsity Sing' when the protests broke out. The RUCC leadership quickly found that the choir was deeply divided as to the appropriateness of the protest and its legitimacy. On one side some felt that the only appropriate way to show solidarity with those who had been raped was for the choir to sing at the protests. Their rationale seemed to be that

[7] The following section has been read by several participants in the events mentioned to verify its accuracy. For the purposes of anonymity, they are not named here.

active participation in the protest symbolised solidarity with rape survivors. In addition, they felt that if the choir sang at the protest, there would be a legitimate reason to continue rehearsing regularly; otherwise, rehearsals should stop in solidarity with the protest. On the other end of the spectrum, there were choristers who felt very strongly that they could not ally themselves with a protest which had become violent. While they sympathised wholeheartedly with students who had been raped, they felt that fighting violence with violence and intimidation was not the answer. They wanted the choir to find other means to show solidarity. There were those in the middle, who genuinely sympathised with the feelings of both extreme positions, but who also wanted to continue participating in the choral competition and preparing for the semester concert.

This sense of dividedness was having a clear impact on the choir and its wellbeing. One route to resolving this tension could have been to simply ignore the elephant in the room and continue as though nothing had happened. My own experiences of this type of approach were not positive, and I decided that it would be more constructive to use part of the choir's normal rehearsal time to have a group discussion where choristers could let off steam in a non-confrontational setting. The stakes were high. The choir was due to have a filming session as part of 'Varsity Sing' while the protests were in full swing, and they were running out of time to prepare for the scheduled semester concert.

I sent a WhatsApp message to the choir inviting them to a voluntary discussion in the first hour of their next rehearsal to address the protests and to formulate a possible way forward, given the circumstances. From my experience in group management and from having read Zander and Zander (2000), I realised that it was essential to create what is called a 'safe space' where people feel comfortable enough to share their opinions without being threatened or shut down. I set down some simple rules of engagement which included allowing anybody and everybody to have a chance to speak without interruption for a given amount of time. I also asked the students to agree to respect every view that was aired, even if they did not agree with it. I was aided very ably by one of my senior choristers, Megan van der Nest[8], who acted as a deputy chairperson of this discussion. And, it must be said, I was particularly grateful to have a group of students who respected these rules.

[8] Megan van der Nest has consented to having her name included in this article.

The safe-space appeared to be deeply healing and creative. Choristers were able to voice their frustrations and worries. As one chorister said in the press:

> Going to the protests with people screaming and shouting can be traumatic in and of itself. But being in a very healing space, having a discussion with AJ leading us, we were feeling much closer to one another …. There was so much hurt and anger and we managed to come through that much stronger as a result. The value of that cannot be underestimated (Bellairs-Lombard 2016).

In particular, one of the concerns raised during the discussion was that participating in the 'Varsity Sing' filming would seem to suggest that the choir was not in solidarity with victims of sexual violence and rape. Hearing this concern, I asked the choir if there was a creative solution which would see us continuing with our commitments but also honouring those affected by sexual violence. They formulated two ideas. The first was simple: every member would wear a purple ribbon on their right arm throughout the 'Varsity Sing' competition, and whenever interviewed by a journalist would mention the reason for this: as a stand in solidarity with those affected by rape. Purple was chosen as it is the university colour. The second was much braver: to corporately compile an artistic musical piece which would allow any listener to feel the pain and sadness which was gripping the community. This pain could be related directly to sexual violence, or to the pain of mistrust created by the protests. The piece would include poems written or chosen by choristers and would be backed by two symbolic songs: Senzenina (the South African struggle song which asks 'what have we done?' – in this context relating to rape and the protests) and Ukuthula (a Zulu hymn whose first word is translated as 'peace'). The aim was to create a piece which would honour the despair people were feeling, but which then transitioned to a place of relinquishment and peace. Another important idea was to include poems in numerous languages – languages which represented as many of the cultures within the university as possible. The choir asked the 'Varsity Sing' crew if they could use the time intended for filming choral rehearsals rather to film them composing this piece. 'Varsity Sing' agreed (although they did not actually air much of that material), and so an artistic response to the crisis was born.

How was the critical process active in these events? Firstly, I realised very quickly that alone I could not control the situation. I too had strong opinions about protest and I also was the university's 'representative', as the paid director of the group. Thus, on my own, I had too great an investment in the university *status quo*. Any decision I made about the choir alone would not have built solidarity. At best I may have been viewed sympathetically, at worst as an instrument of institution. However, I did know, through my interaction with students in the choir, that a number of them had been the victims of gender-based violence, and that they might be able to help shape the situation. One chorister, in particular, was working on a PhD which included chapters on rape and violence. Additionally, I knew, also through interaction, that several students were creative writers. As a result, I actively chose to relinquish my traditional power of leadership, and through a 'safe space' encounter, find ways in which to creatively address the emotions and difficulties which we as a group faced. In essence, my leadership had to be transformed from being an isolated dictator, to being an ordinary member of the group with equal status and without a deciding vote. It may have been this approach which helped the choristers to open up and to find a solution which worked for them. Alternatively, it may have been the choir's particular group dynamic that year. It is difficult to tell.

Another aspect of critical pedagogy which informed the situation was that I relinquished control of the piece the choristers wanted to create. Van der Nest (mentioned above) led the process. She collated the poems which choristers wrote or found, moulded them into a cohesive whole and guided the process of shaping the poems above the two songs which provided their accompaniment. Power also transferred to the choristers who participated in the process of creating the piece. They submitted poems in several different languages and with various foci. It was their voice, not mine, which formed the essence of the piece.

Critical pedagogy is not always helpful in that while it offers critique about power relationships, it seldom provides solutions to the problems of power (Vodica 2007: 98 - 100). Relinquishing power in the context of a volatile context may not always be appropriate nor constructive. And yet, in this particular situation, power sharing seemed to have a positive impact. In what sense, though, was this really a power sharing situation? Had I completely relinquished leadership of the choir? Truthfully, I retained a fair deal of authority over the group, perhaps because I had been honest about my weak-

nesses in the situation, and my willingness to hear the students' different perspectives. In this sense, my symbolic authority may have been a result of my honesty and my genuine concern for the group's well-being. In real terms, I still conducted the piece in the concert, and I still provided musical direction about the balance of choral parts and dynamics – both indicative signs of leadership. And yet, there was a strong sense of group ownership of the piece and a willingness to use it as an instrument of potential transformation. Perhaps the balancing of the inward (personal emotional release) with the outward foci of the song (providing a collective response for the benefit of others) was the key to the transformative action of creating the song. Indeed, the transformed nature of the group that year, as a result of the process, was tangible, although I cannot provide any scientific evidence for it.

Composing, or more accurately compiling, the piece did create potential for empowerment. By being free to use any language for their poetic submissions, and by being able to actually recite the poems themselves in the performance, students were allowed to publically air their views. It must be said too that those who submitted poems were not required to recite them, and poets were able to remain anonymous if they wished. As can be seen from the texts of the poems (Appendix 1), the views expressed were quite diverse: ranging from intense emotions, to moralising, to prayer. Interestingly, the poems did not concentrate only on the rape of women, but of men too, showing that the concern of the students was broad and nuanced. The bravery of students who did choose to recite their poems was tangible both in rehearsal and in the concert, and the 'safe space' created in the original meeting described above needed to be extended into rehearsals. By including a traditional struggle song and a Zulu hymn as backing for the poems, the students' response was rooted in the community's context, only this time the 'struggle' was not against racism, but against rape. In other words, the struggle had been reinterpreted.

Discussion

The initial strife in the choir was precipitated by differing views on forms of protest. While it seems that the compilation and rehearsal of the piece did help to address some of the emotional distress experienced by choristers directly related to the rape crisis protests and its effects, did the 'solution' to the problem of conflict about forms of protest actually transform choir

members? Was there effective conflict transformation? As Vodica (2017: 140) says, 'Ascertaining whether or not transformation has taken place can be a challenging, if not impossible task'.

The solution, which the choir endorsed as its method of protest, helped to focus the energy of the group. While the choir's compilation was a direct response to the rape crisis, it was not an endorsement of the protests at the university, nor the violence which accompanied it. Instead, it offered a middle way between not participating or acknowledging the importance of the protests and actively engaging in them. In this sense, it did transform the conflict, and channelled the energy surrounding the intense emotions aroused by the protests in a slightly different direction; namely addressing the hurt and pain of the protesters. Thus, the transformation was rooted within the group and not individuals per say. In fact, some students continued to participate in the protests on campus throughout the rehearsal process, while others chose to protest in other ways.

Did the transformation have a lasting effect? Here again, it is difficult to give a definitive answer. It may possibly have shown choristers that the energy which emerges as a result of intense emotions can be channelled in different ways, and that it need not always result in conflict. What the process did create was a strong sense of solidarity within the choir. It was this solidarity which characterised the choir's behaviour for the rest of the academic year, particularly as it participated in the Varsity Sing contest. What seemed to buoy the students was that they appeared to be the only choir in the competition which actively and visibly protested against rape culture through its purple ribbons and the policy of explaining the meaning of the ribbon to interviewers[9].

Music-based Intervention through the Concert 'Light in Darkness'

Composing and assembling the special song discussed above, however, was just the beginning, because the choir still had to prepare for the term concert, and had to find a way of incorporating the song within the greater fabric of a programme. After much thought, the choir committee tasked me and Van der Nest (mentioned above) with arranging the repertoire around locally written

[9] The rape crisis protest spread from Rhodes university to other South African universities in the weeks and months after April 2016.

poetry related to the music the choir had already learnt, under the theme 'Light from Darkness'. The choristers' piece would form the climax of the concert. An important consideration for me was to ensure that the lead-up to the piece was appropriate and that the music which followed would help to lift the audience out of despair and allow them to have a sense of emotional release (see Appendix 2 for the concert programme). Thus, the piece just before the climax included the implication from the text that a female character 'led a man astray' (Hallelujah by Leonard Cohen), and just after it a piece about new birth (*Lux Aurumque* by Eric Whitaker), symbolic of a new beginning. Furthermore, to reinforce the possibility of singing creating the potentiality of social change, I included a piece by the Estonian composer Avo Pärt (*Bogoroditse Dyevo*), linking it to Estonia's struggle to freedom from Communist rule through mass singing. In essence, there needed to be a strong sense of textual resonance.

Furthermore, the choir was engaging with a long-term programme of transformation, and this too formed a second focus to the programme. The three-year plan I had in mind was to showcase the diversity of South African culture in our concerts. This concert was the first in a series we had planned for the whole of 2016, and was the culmination of the three-year plan. My introduction to the concert described in this article encapsulates this ideal:

> As a choir we have been working actively towards transformation. All of us have slightly different understandings of what this policitised word means. Tonight we will try to show how through music and movement we have been engaging with the diversity we find in this university. Transformation demands continuous self- and group-introspection, and over the past few years and months, this group has given much of their energy to do the intensive work of changing and becoming fuller human beings. Now you, as our supporters, will be able to see how far we have come (and perhaps, how far we still need to go) (Bethke 2016).

In my spoken commentary between songs and poems, I tried to pull out themes which linked in some way to issues of power. I include three important vignettes which related directly to the careful planning that went into the placement of pieces in the programme. I introduced Cohen's *Hallelujah* saying:

> If you listen carefully to the words, which are by Leonard Cohen, you'll notice that he got his Bible stories somewhat confused. Even though the stories are mixed up, they still contain a striking theme which was strong in the ancient world (and even until recent times); that is, women are dangerous because they can lead men astray. Somehow, for too long, men have seen themselves as the victims of feminine sexuality … as far as I can see, [this] says more about the morals of men, than those of women.

This song directly preceded the students' own composition (Bethke 2016).

The students' special compilation, in particular, required a careful introduction:

> We come now to the heart of tonight's programme: a piece which has been put together by the choir members themselves as a response to the recent protests against rape culture. This is going to be a deep moment, and one which may distress some of you. We are hoping to create a safe space through our music and poetry to allow the deep feelings of those who have been violated to be felt. For some of you, though, this may be too intense. If you need to leave for a while because you feel the words may cut too deeply into a raw wound, we completely understand and respect this… I invite you to join the familiar songs *Senzenina* and *Ukuthula* during this piece by humming along with the choir. The word *Senzenina* means 'what have we done?' and *Ukuthula* speaks about peace. At the end of the song, we will leave an extended time of silence before we sing the next song *Lux Aurumque* – a song which expresses something about the healing nature of Divine Light. We have placed it deliberately after our own piece as a message of hope for a future where everyone's bodies are respected … (Bethke 2016).

To reinforce a sense of safe space, the choir left the stage and created a circle around the audience. In other words, the poems and music came from among and around the people rather than in front of them. Symbolically, the choir was placing itself on an equal platform with the audience and, by inviting them to participate the song by humming, were blurring the traditional boundaries between performers and audience. In a sense, this reflected

something of the influence of critical pedagogy which had been informing the choir's rehearsals. The piece itself lasted just under ten minutes. The words had been available to the audience to follow if they wished, and extra copies of the texts were available at the back of the concert venue. The silence which followed this piece was the actual climax of the concert. Even though it lasted only sixty seconds, it seemed to carry a huge weight – a weight of heaviness. The words of the next song also speak of heaviness (see Appendix 2), but of a different kind: the weightiness of golden light. A subtle transformation of two forms of heaviness and a transformation which was intended to help the choir and audience to emerge gently from the heaviness of pain and despair.

After *Lux Aurumque*, I introduced the piece by Pärt by relating it to the theme of protest through song. Van der Nest intentionally chose Siegfried Sassoon's poem 'Everyone Sang' to strongly resonate with this theme. I introduced Pärt's piece as follows:

> I wonder how many of you are old enough to remember the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989? Some feel it was as monumental as our own transition to freedom in 1994. Little by little after 1989, smaller states which had been engulfed into the Communist Soviet Union gained their independence. One of those states was Estonia. They staged one of the biggest peaceful protests in human history – two million people held hands across the country and literally sang themselves to freedom. It is a thrilling story of liberation through song – and perhaps a very creative example to us in contemporary South Africa. The culture of singing is so strong in Estonia that it is considered the national sport of the country! The song which we are going to sing for you now was written in the wake of this revolution by Avo Pärt, who is himself an Estonian. It is the ancient prayer 'Hail Mary' in church Slavonic (Bethke 2016).

Discussion

Was this live choral programme, with its special student compilation, an example of a music-based intervention? While neither I nor the choir initially saw the concert as a musical intervention in a charged situation, in retrospect, its effects on the choir and the wider community indicated that something

important had occurred that evening. As a result, the university management asked the choir if it would be willing to repeat the concert early in the second semester. The second concert attracted members of the press and was attended by a number of the university's leadership core. One journalist recorded the student compilation[10], and published an online reflection of her experiences. Her article opens thus:

> There is no single way for one to put into words the fountain of emotion felt by the University Currently Known as Rhodes during the #RUReferenceList protests against rape and sexual violence. However, the Rhodes Chamber Choir managed to encapsulate this through song and poetry.
>
> I went to their first performance, titled 'Light from Darkness', and absolutely bawled my eyes out when they performed their adaptation of the struggle song 'Senzenina'. The room was stunned into silence. This was conductor A.J. Bethke's aim – creating a space where these very specific feelings could be felt and expressed however people were comfortable with. A safe space was created, even if it were only for a single evening.
>
> With purple bands wrapped around each performer's arm in solidarity with survivors, the chamber choir conveyed the hurt and sorrow felt and experienced by the community with a multitude of carefully-selected songs. The evening was made more diverse with performances by various poets, their words echoing the common emotions associated with the theme of the night (Bellairs-Lombard 2016).

From this extract, it seems that at least one person was able to identify with the aims of the choir in the concert. And, if the university management was willing to endorse such a concert, perhaps they saw the potential for emotional transformation (or at the very least, emotional affirmation) it offered.

[10] The recording can be watched through this link. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6IPKhsk8fo&list=PLEFxWgsguH9JqxLOtWBPr7zbhDAeItcJt&index=8&t=0s

Thus, while the concert was not an intentional mass music therapy session, it provided *some* of the necessary ingredients which are characteristic of professional interventions. For example, the safe space for expressing emotions openly during the concert created the potential for a therapeutic effect. Whether audience members decided to express themselves or not was their choice. However, in a negative sense, if they felt in some way violated or further wounded by the so-called 'safe space', they were exposed to the music none-the-less. Safe spaces are usually created in order for a therapist to listen without judgement to a patient. The 'patients' (audience) in this circumstance were able to voice their feelings through crying and humming, but they were not verbalising their emotions in words to a listening outsider. In other words, the choir only sought to allow people to express hurt through tears, ululating and shouting, while holding these expressions together through poems and music – a type of active solidarity. In a sense, the concert was a type of debriefing session which the university was not able provide *en masse* to the community. However, there was no formal follow-up session for further debriefing after the concert. In retrospect, it would have been helpful to alert the audience to avenues of further counselling and professional assistance for those who felt they needed it.

There is the possibility that some of the audience and choir experienced the concert negatively, although the choir committee and I did not receive negative feedback. The positive hype around the performance may have 'silenced' dissenting voices. For example, there may have been those who felt that expressing emotions in public was unnecessary or an opportunity to create further feelings of pain.

Conclusion

This article has sought to heed Bergh's call for further investigation into music's role in and its potential for affecting situations of conflict (Bergh 2007: 152). A further aim was to situate what occurred at the 'Light in Darkness' concert within the greater discourse surrounding group music therapy. The discussions related to these two aims already provide numerous conclusions about the choir compiling and performing their artistic piece. In summary, the process of putting together the artistic piece created the potential for conflict transformation. In particular, the meeting which conceived the idea to create the compilation of poems to address the rape

crisis protests seemed to be the most important moment for conflict transformation. Music itself was not the catalyst of the transformation, but rather a basis of critical pedagogy which created the potential for a reinterpretation of traditional power bases within the choir. For some choristers it seems that the conflict was transformed into a creative and meaningful response to a highly charged situation. And, it seems that the choir grew closer as group as a result of the process. However, it is entirely possible that some choristers still felt that the conflict was not fully resolved. In a sense, while the initial heat of the conflict surrounding forms of protest deescalated as a result of the meeting and process of compiling the artistic piece, it is likely that underlying beliefs about forms protest were not changed. However, through creative group-work, a possible alternative form of protest has now become a further choice for these particular choristers. Additionally, the process allowed some students to debrief from the trauma of the protests.

The concert where the piece was performed was itself carefully prepared so that there was a sense of textual resonance throughout. The themes of power, diversity and unity were important to the organisers and found voice in the musical and artistic repertoire. Additionally, the apex of the concert, where the special piece was performed, was treated very carefully. A 'disclaimer' to warn the audience of what was to come was provided, and the creation of a corporate safe space was attempted. Consideration was given to what would happen immediately after the piece. Thus, the concert displayed aspects of a formal music intervention. The success of the intervention was difficult to assess, but at least one person was able to express their feelings about the concert and its effects through the media.

Finally, the use of critical pedagogy as a basis for choral rehearsals and performances proved effective in this context. Issues of power, in particular, were a strong component of the protests themselves, and thus critically engaging with relationships of power within the choir and the audience was important and necessary. Can this experience inform other contexts? It is important to note that all contexts require unique interventions and approaches. While aspects of the Rhodes University Chamber Choir's experiences were generally positive, some of the processes here could have been more constructively addressed, particularly the provision of further debriefing.

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