10-1-2002

Collaborative Musical Expression and Creativity Among Academics: When Intellectualism Meets Twelve Bar Blues

Gary P. Radford

Stephen D. Cooper
Marshall University, coopers@marshall.edu

Robert W. Kubey

David S. McCurry

Jonathan Millen

See next page for additional authors

Recommended Citation

Radford, G. P., Cooper, S. D., Kubey, R. W., McCurry, D. S., Millen, J., & Barrows, J. R. (2002). Collaborative musical expression and creativity among academics: When Intellectualism Meets Twelve Bar Blues. The American Communication Journal, Vol. 6 Issue 1. (http://www.acjournal.org/holdings/vol6/iss1/index.htm)

Authors

Gary P. Radford, Stephen D. Cooper, Robert W. Kubey, David S. McCurry, Jonathan Millen, and John R. Barrows

Collaborative Musical Expression and Creativity Among Academics: When Intellectualism Meets Twelve Bar Blues

Gary P. Radford, Stephen D. Cooper, Robert W. Kubey, David S. McCurry, Jonathan Millen, & John R. Barrows

Current Issue

Archives

Editorial Info

Search

Interact

Printer-friendly PDF version

Abstract

The Professors are a blues, rock, and sometime heavy metal band made up of communication professors from a number of New Jersey schools. Formed in 1995, the band has played in clubs in New York City as well as a number of academic venues, including the annual conference of the International Communication Association in Chicago in 1996 and the annual conference of the National Communication Association in New York City in 1998. The Professors have been featured in both local and national press, including the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. When we learned of the call for papers for this special issue of the *American Communication Journal* addressing the creative endeavors of Communication scholars beyond their regular research agendas, we were delighted to have the opportunity to reflect upon the place of musical creativity within our lives as working academics. What follows in this paper are the thoughts of a number of band members, past and present, who trace the relationship of the musical, the creative, and the intellectual in terms of their own personal histories and academic interests.

Keywords: creativity, music, academia, education

Gary P. Radford, Ph.D.
Department of English, Communication, and Philosophy
285 Madison Avenue
Fairleigh Dickinson University
Madison, NJ 07940
gradford@prodigy.net

Stephen D. Cooper, Ph.D.
Department of Communication Studies
Marshall University
Huntington, WV 25755
coopers@Marshall.edu

Robert W. Kubey, Ph.D.
Department of Journalism and Media Studies
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
kubey@scils.rutgers.edu

David S. McCurry, Ed.D.
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Monmouth University
West Long Branch, NJ 07764
dmccurry@monmouth.edu

Jonathan Millen, Ph.D.
Department of Communication
Rider University
Lawrenceville, NJ 08648
millen@rider.edu

John R. Barrows
Director, Communications
RCI Cendant Corporation
1 Sylvan Way
Parsippany, NJ 07054
barrows_john@hotmail.com

The Professors are a blues, rock, and sometime heavy metal band made up of communication professors from a number of New Jersey colleges including: Rutgers University, Monmouth University, Rider University, and Fairleigh Dickinson University. Formed in 1995, the band has played in clubs in New York City as well as a number of academic venues, including the annual conference of the International Communication Association in Chicago in 1996 and the annual conference of the National Communication Association in New York City in 1998. The Professors have been featured in both local and national press, including the *Chronicle of Higher Education* ("The Professors: Where Research Meets Riffs," 1997; "Gary

The Professors have composed an impressive collection of original songs, many with a direct academic spin. "Untenured Blues," written by Gary Radford and Marie Radford, concerns the travails and fears of a new assistant professor encountering the realities of university life; "Peer Review," written by John Barrows, takes the peer review process, so prevalent in academia, as a metaphor for the professional and personal troubles of a young man's life; "Foucault Funk: The Michel Foucault Postmodern Blues," written by Gary Radford, Stephen Cooper, Marie Radford, and Michel Foucault, sets to music some key passages from Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault, 1972) and *The Order of Things* (Foucault, 1973).

When we learned of the call for papers for this special issue of the *American Communication Journal* addressing the creative endeavors of Communication scholars beyond their regular research agendas, we were delighted to have this opportunity to reflect upon the place of musical creativity within our lives as working academics. What follows are the thoughts of a number of band members, past and present, who trace the relationship of the musical, the creative, and the intellectual in terms of their own personal histories and academic interests.

Musical Creativity Through the Distancing of Performer and Audience
Gary P. Radford, Guitar and Vocals, 1995-Present

> There are two musics (at least so I have thought): the music one listens to, the music one plays. The two musics are two totally different arts, each with its own history, its own sociology, its own aesthetics, its own erotic; the same composer can be minor if you listen to him, tremendous if you play him (even badly) (Roland Barthes, 1977, p. 149).

These are the opening lines of Barthes' (1977) essay "Musica Practica." They do much to describe and explain the creative experience of playing in The Professors in its early days in 1995. The Professors began in the front room of Robert Kubey's house in Highland Park, New Jersey. The room was small and Bob's drum kit (which he borrowed from former student, Craig Brown) filled half of it. The furniture was pushed back to the walls, extension cords criss-crossed the floor for powering amplifiers, and bottles of beer adorned the fireplace. The reason for these get togethers was an overwhelming desire *to play*. Not to play songs, but to *play music* in Barthes' sense. These sessions consisted of 20 minute jams, usually around the classic 1-4-5 blues chord sequence, with Tomasz Imielinski and I trading the rhythm and lead guitar roles. These jams didn't go anywhere. They didn't have an end point. They couldn't be repeated. We enjoyed them in the moment of their playing, in the act of their playing. As Barthes notes, this music would be awful to listen to, but tremendous to play. I remember well the looks of horror on our wives' faces as we exposed them to this noise. I also remember their polite condescension as they told us how "good" we sounded. They seemed to know and understand that this music was for us, the players, and not necessarily for them, the audience. In these early sessions, the idea of an audience was quite irrelevant.

This gap was between players and audience was explicitly recognized and exploited in many Professors' songs. For example, one of the Professors' earliest original compositions was entitled "Crap." The title was derived from the reaction we expected from the people who might listen to the song. Tomasz Imielinski would introduce the song in performance by saying: "This next song is called 'Crap.' Just in case you call this music crap, it *is* crap!" In other words, we don't care if you think this song is awful because we know it's awful. Another song which addressed this self-reflexive recognition of the purposeful distancing of the audience was Tomasz Imielinki's "The Arrogant Song." In explaining the rationale of this song, Tomasz notes the following:

> When we perform in a club, there is a certain tension. Every band wants to be original and yet every band wants to be liked. They want to perform and do things that they hope the people will enjoy. I was thinking that, instead of being like everybody else, we should be arrogant and obnoxious. We just come on and say that basically we don't give a shit about you (personal communication, May 31, 1997).

This cavalier and arrogant attitude displayed in those early days was really a defense mechanism against our own insecurities about our abilities as musicians and the deliberate shifting of identities (from Professor to rock guitarist). Yet the deliberate and self-reflexive invocation of this defense mechanism also worked to create a space in which we could play and write where the fear of outside criticism and judgment became managed and diffused. In effect, we transposed the principle of academic freedom from the classroom to the jam session and, ultimately, to the performance. As classroom professors we had the right and the privilege to express ideas without fear of reprisal. As musical Professors, we had the right to make music in any form we wanted without fear of criticism. This mindset of academic/musical freedom allowed us to be creative and original. It enabled us to rationalize away, to a large extent, any potential negative feedback of our audiences.

The beauty of the original Professors was that we did not work from music that was written down. As Barthes so rightly describes, *this music* was not inscribed in chord charts. It was inscribed in the body: in the fingers of the left hand struggling to find the right notes on the fret board; in the fist of the right hand as it hits the guitar strings; in the biceps and triceps of the arms pounding the drum skins; in the foot tapping frantically up and down keeping the time and rhythm. Barthes (1977) describes this kind of music as:

> an activity that is very little auditory, being above all manual (and thus in a way much more sensual). It is the music which you or I can play, alone or among friends, with no other audience than its participants...; a muscular music in which the part taken by the sense of hearing is only one of ratification, as though the body were hearing - and not 'the soul;' a music which is not played 'by heart:' seated at the keyboard or the music stand, the body controls, conducts, co-ordinates, having itself to transcribe what it reads, making sound and meaning, the body as inscriber and not just transmitter, simple receiver (p. 149).

One of our early jams was given the title of "Retro." It consisted of three chords and a guitar riff and emerged spontaneously, as these things do, from a chord sequence I was fiddling with during a break between songs. Tomasz soon joined in, and then Craig Brown on the drums. The sequence evolved into a full-blown 25 minute jam which Bob Kubey captured in its entirety on video. Bob's video represents Barthes *musica practica* perfectly. He pushes the camera into contorted faces, with close ups of fingers, hands, ringing guitar strings, and knees pounding up and down. In this video, Bob captured a music that is "manual, muscular, kneadingly physical" (Barthes, 1977, p. 150) which has no direction except that which is spontaneously created in the moment of its playing. It captures "that style of the perfect amateur" (Barthes, 1977, p. 150), the great value of which touches off in us "not satisfaction but desire, the desire to *make* that music" (p. 150).

I often use this video in classes as a demonstration of Barthes' *musica practica*. Barthes laments that *musica practica* has disappeared and that "concurrently, passive, receptive music, sound music, is become *the* music (that of concert, festival, record, radio)" (p. 150). Barthes (1977) continues: "So too has the performer changed. The amateur, a role defined much more by a style than by technical imperfection, is no longer anywhere to be found; the professionals, pure specialists whose training entirely esoteric for the public..., never offer that style of the perfect amateur" (p. 150). I offer Bob's Professors video as an example of a form that is not as dead as Barthes implies, and that *musica practica* is alive and well in front rooms and garages all over the world. I compare Bob's video with a video of Pink Floyd's "Delicate Sound of Thunder" tour (Marvis & Isham, 1989), where the music is overshadowed by the expertise of the technician "who relieves the listener of all activity, even by procuration, and abolishes in the sphere of music the very notion of *doing*" (Barthes, 1977, p. 150). The comparison works well and makes the point vividly for the students, who are also pleased and surprised to see their professor in a black t-shirt and jeans wailing away on a guitar with way too much distortion.

The Professors in Flow
Robert W. Kubey, Drums, 1995-2000

Merge the two stereotypes of a fractious faculty meeting and prima donnas in a rock band fighting over status issues and you will gain a glimpse, but just briefly, of the worst moments of the first five years of The

Professors. In reality, the great percentage of the time, it was a terrific creative experience of exciting performances, camaraderie, and regular escape and tension release from the daily conflicts and minutiae of academe.

Only rarely has a musical band sent and received more email messages to one another, both about the band's creative direction and *always* over the play list prior to each gig. Email helped most in quickly communicating when and where we would next practice. But being verbal and critical folk by training, if not by nature, there were all too many attempts in The Professors to also work through creativity issues by email.

One lesson from The Professors' efforts to manage collective creativity is that too much email time and too little face time does not a happy band make. And I rather suspect the same goes for many academic departments, although the adage that familiarity breeds contempt may also be one of the reasons that academics gravitate to email, i.e., interaction without *really* interacting. The Professors never tired of one another's physical company. Things were much better in person than in cyberspace. Sometimes email did give us a way to deftly deal with a conflict that couldn't be dealt with in person. Private phone time sometimes seemed conspiratorial.

We too often incorrectly assumed that we could apply our critical minds and verbal abilities through email to resolve our creative differences when over and over we learned that things were better worked out in session and through the music itself. When in doubt, play! Having worked and written a good deal with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, I, for one, should have known this, realizing that the band needed to spend more time deeply involved in session obtaining the "flow state" that Csikszentmihalyi describes in *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975) and *Creativity* (1997) than trying to work things out via email.

Flow is the state of enormous engagement that each of us experiences when intensely involved in an activity where challenges and skills are equally matched and where positive feedback comes regularly and quickly. "In flow experiences, people report very high concentration but ease of concentration - they feel active, strong, and in control. Concentration is so focused during flow activities that people typically report a diminished awareness of their surroundings and they lose track of time ('time flies')" (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 141).

Musical performance is one of the prime activities that will engender flow. In a band, when a group is improvising and "in the groove" and the music just keeps getting better there is nearly nothing better in life. The Professors were often in flow, especially when we would abandon the playlist and just jam, or improvise within a well structured blues progression. We found that one of the hardest things to do is to be in flow and feel free and creative when recording in the studio. We learned a lot from that experience. Trying to capture our best, live funky garage-band sound when layering tracks in the studio was nearly impossible.

One of the great advantages that well funded musicians have is vast amounts of time in the recording studio so that they can become familiar enough with the surroundings that their creativity is no longer constrained by the $50+ an hour fee of renting someone else's space and the precious time of a sound engineer and producer. As audience members we all learned this from the Beatles creation of Apple Records and even more so from The Band's Big Pink album. As older readers will recall, The Band rented a large pink house in the Catskills, moved in together, and recorded many classics that would never have been produced in someone else's alien studio.

Studio recording, we found, was an enormous challenge that we never had the time or money to even begin to master. The drummer (me) is cordoned off in a separate glassed-in room, and so too are the singers. Everything that makes a band a band is broken down (deconstructed?) and interfered with in the recording studio. One is separated from others. One could not even see all of one's fellow musicians in the studio we used. Everyone wears earphones to hear the track and the other musicians. All the chances for the interpersonal contact needed to creatively collaborate and work off of each other are muted or removed. And layering the tracks means that you aren't even playing together any more in real time. No wonder the sound seemed more synthetic and less live. It was the biggest mistake we made, trying to layer tracks rather than simply recording live; although we did have a great professional producer who did his best with us and

our limited resources (all profits from gigs were plowed back into recording and the purchase of our own PA system).

Over analysis also impedes flow. For most of the years of the band's existence there was jostling over our oeuvre and in the definition of our sound and image. Some members wanted to play more identifiable cover songs that audiences could readily dance to, while members on the other extreme wanted to do originals only. Unless you really hit a groove, unless they are already warmed up, audiences are reluctant to dance to material they've never heard before.

Art and creativity can be a struggle and collaborative art involves particularly complicated interpersonal struggles. While managing creativity in a five person band may not be as complicated as what television and film producers do routinely (Ettema & Whitney, 1982), a lot of *good* communication, whatever that is, is necessary to maintain a band's creative edge.

Data Analysis, Flow Theory, and Song Lyrics
John R. Barrows, Guitar, Harmonica, Keyboards, 1998-2000

Despite lengthy professional writing experience in the public relations business, and several dubious but serious forays into poetry, I was never able to write songs. For many years, I was content to play other people's music, and I wondered why I was unable to bring my enthusiasm for wordplay to the creation of lyrics. Eventually, I succeeded in writing some couplets to the tune of another song. Knowing that I could never proudly display a song comprised of my original lyrics but Bob Dylan's music (although this was the primary compositional practice of Dylan's muse, Woody Guthrie), I eventually sent the lyrics to a friend, who set them to music, creating something entirely original and compelling.

This inspired me to set about writing lyrics at a furious pace, but I quickly found that there was at once both a limitless number of things to write about, and nothing to write about. There seemed to be fresh material all around me, just beyond arm's reach, with every idea or scrap of couplets seeming to just repeat the efforts of other writers before me, all of whom inevitably had far better captured the essence of the song.

It was during these weeks that I first began studying flow theory, the premise that there is a process which guides breakthroughs in creative thought (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). One of the consistent events that occurs in this process is a deliberate stoppage of effort against a particular challenge or project, putting all conscious thought aside for a period of time. It is typically during this time, when the conscious mind is not actively working on the matter at hand, that a solution appears. Often the best ideas I had for new songs, new lines, new ideas for songs, occurred to me while I was most deeply absorbed in academic challenges, such as statistical analyses, or thinking through the ramifications of a new theory contemplated for the first time. Some of these ideas were songs tangentially about academia, including "Peer Review" and "The Space Left Empty," the latter inspired by the writing of Michel Foucault.

Eventually, it occurred to me to see if the reverse could be achieved. I spent a summer and fall analyzing a dataset and looking for something new, arranging and re-arranging the variables and subjects into different combinations, looking at different approaches from related and unrelated fields of thought, with little success. During these months I had begun a routine of walking around the perimeter of the gymnasium where I exercised each morning, to cool off after a workout. The rhythm of my footsteps always lent itself to song writing, and I came up with many ideas in this manner. I decided to see if I could think about my academic challenge during the workout but then put the matter aside and concentrate on songwriting during the walk; it did not work. Eventually, I gave up on trying to force flow theory to bend to my will, acknowledging that there was little in the literature to support the notion that it could be wielded quite so much like a socket wrench.

Some time later, having forgotten about flow theory, I was walking around the familiar hardwood floor humming a new melody and developing a new and, to me at least, compelling song premise, when out of the blue a flash of energy pulsed in my brain and an obvious possible explanation for my data-set behavior, one that had never been considered within the literature: a chance to contribute a new idea to the body of study. This idea was prominent in an article that was recently published in the *Journal of Communication*

(see Kubey, Lavin, & Barrows, 2001). From song lyrics to intellectual breakthroughs - it seems that both musical and intellectual creativity are deeply connected.

Improvisational Ensemble as Metaphor for Group Communication
David S. McCurry, Harmonica, 2000-Present

Edward Lueders, an American poet, author, professor and one-time chair of the English department of the University of Utah, once described to me a writing project he was working on. Something novel in length (he has written and published poetry through most of his life) which involved his reflections on experiences in World War II as part of the troop entertainment services (he was, and is, an accomplished jazz pianist as well). The main storyline was set on one of the troop transport ships that carried thousands of soldiers and sailors back from the China-Burma-India Theater of Operations at the end of the war (see Lueders, 1989).

The interplay of the characters and depiction of people going about their business was to be based on the metaphor of a jazz group, improvising their individual parts, moving from solo to rhythm, combining in duets, separating in constructive dissonance, all the while pursuing their interpretation of a familiar melody.

I remember listening to this description in my parent's living room, on a break from college, over 20 years ago. Edward Lueders is my uncle, on my mother's side. All of this was particularly interesting to me at the time since I was pursuing a psychology degree at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and, perhaps more significantly, trying to balance as best I could that and the experiences of playing harmonica in a rhythm and blues band. Balancing a professional academic career and the seemingly pedestrian pursuit of "playing in the band" has enriched my teaching, and my life, for a long time now.

Like many musicians of that time and geographic space, the influence of the unique improvisational style of the Grateful Dead saturated many "jam" band experiences. The ability to improvise was a necessary part of playing the music we enjoyed. Improvisation, the way we experienced it in those times, was something that bordered on the spiritual. We fleetingly believed that communication was possible in paranormal ways, foolish us. By day, we read existential texts such as Martin Buber's *I and Thou* (1970) and explored concepts such as "transpersonal psychology." By night, music allowed transcendence beyond normal communication boundaries in the group.

We came to understand that there was something beyond the usual, direct speaking and exchange of mundane ideas. It was all confused with emotion and thought. It was disturbing. It was ego and non-ego at the same time. At one time soloing ("sometime the light's all shining on me" - see Hunter, 1970), and then sublimating the music to the group totality. Stepping out front to solo and being noticed, your band mates supporting you with the rhythm and harmony, falling back to join the security of the group (strength in numbers); raising your hand in class, speaking out, or just falling back and listening; the chrono-synchronous experience of performance (of knowledge and skill) and learning. Communication, as expression of the individual, was rearticulated as group expression - what "we" have to say.

I think that is why the concept of "band" has been so important for young creative minds, especially for men, although I am not sure what the gender implications are. I suspect women likely have an easier time of competently communicating within small groups of their own gender, but I'm not sure why. It is still a mystery. It would seem entirely likely that academics (men and women) in all kinds of fields find creative expression both within and outside of their "normal" milieu.

The model of my uncle, accomplished as an academic and author, performing and enjoying jazz, persisted and made such expression permissible in my mind. The two always seemed compatible to me. The "academic as artist" is a well-known archetype in our cultural history. It was no coincidence that his earlier work involved the study of Carl Van Vechten, critic, author, and photographer of the Harlem Renaissance and urban cultural landscape of the 1st half of the twentieth century (Lueders, 1955). We study culture, and we create it (Freire, 1998).

Rock and Roll, the sweet release (our band's name) of physical liberation and rhythm. These were the

influences in our times, back then. In music, we found meaning, we communicated, and we communed. We escaped what we felt to be a repressive cultural history (most of us were middle and upper-middle class, white kids from central California and had no idea what repression really was) if only for short periods of time by indulging in Roszak's (1995) "counter culture," using music and performance as escape velocity vehicles from the gravity of normalcy and cultural assimilation. Creative minds, creative times.

Music as a metaphor for communicating seems all the more relevant now. True to the duality of popular culture and counter-culture in American society over the past 50 years, today's music seems similarly fractured into Britney Spears Pepsi commercial sex rock rhythm and blues pop mélange and punk-grunge-metal-ska counter rebelliousness, streaming silently from house to house over the new electronic communal pathways in blatant disregard of commercial copyright. A safe and silent rebellion, our communication has both increased and fractured our existence. In the midst of all this, I cautiously found myself involved, again, with a group of musicians who would pull me away from my *usual* duties. This time though, they were not fellow students, or casual acquaintances. They were *colleagues*.

A music ensemble metaphor can prove a useful framework for small group communications (Purser & Montuori, 1994), especially in the process of learning. In a society and time that screams for the individual to be heard, we as professors often must orchestrate listening space in our groups of students. Who is the soloist? What is the rhythm in the group's pattern of communication? What is the melody that they all have in their heads? What are "they" saying? Does all this have anything to contribute to our academic pursuits, or is it just avocational relaxation?

With graying hair, we play our own familiar melodies in a group called "The Professors" (as that path seemingly chose us), balancing the fun of music with more serious pursuits. Our historical concepts of "professing" seem rooted, like so much of communication theory, in the outward articulation of ideas, dominated by foci in the communicator. In advertising, like politics, the focus is on "getting the message out." We hone the effectiveness of our communication through public speaking, for all intents and purposes, a one-way process. But communication, we remind ourselves, is not always about the communicator. Playing music, especially music that involves improvising, requires listening. Hearing others and the self. Hearing the self in the context of others and, for all-too-brief moments, hearing the others *in* the self. (What *are* they saying?) Perhaps that is why we are drawn to it. Academics are, mostly, creative minds. We are scholars, researchers, communicators, teachers, musicians, and our choice of multiple channels for expressing ideas, concepts, feelings and perceptions is not to be an unexpected thing. I don't think it diminishes our profession in the eyes of our students. Hey, my professor plays in a rock band! Why not? At least I know a few of them are listening.

Music, Performance, and Connecting with Students
Jonathan Millen, Drums, 2000-present

On a number of occasions I have performed as part of a band for my students. I find that music is not only a universal language, but also a discourse of connection. Music brings people together though common experience. The pragmatics of music performance as a "speech act" thrusts students and educators into a relationship in which the traditional norms of interaction fail. Students tend to see faculty as just that: People whose job it is to teach and conduct research. But, using music as a kind of bridge, students often experience a moment of epiphany: "Wow," they say, "he's a drummer, too!"

In teaching a course on the social impact of rock and roll, one of my focal points is on the unique experience of media consumption through live performance. When compared to radio, TV/video, and personal music media (i.e., stereos), the live performance has the potential to create a fleeting communicative identity (in the narrative sense of, remember when...) among the participants/members of the audience. Performing for my students is in some ways an effort to do just that.

Discursive identities in the classroom are constructed through a wide array of events including lectures, question and answer sessions, exams, and pre/post classroom discussions. But our identities become much more complex when students participate in a wider array of episodes with faculty. While the student generation is arguably the rightful trustee of popular music, I find I develop a certain amount of Ethos with my students after they attend a performance. Performing rock and pop brings us back *up* to the level of the

student. We temporarily regain the wonderfully naive and unpretentious spirit that drives so much of the music and is often missing from our lectures. On a related note, I also experience a sense of role conflict: If I screw up a drum part, will I lose credibility in the classroom? While I have little sense of nervousness in the classroom, with the same audience I am much more nervous behind the drum set.

Therein lies the richness of it all. By expanding the perspective through which my students see me, I invite them to do the same in return. They have brought in their favorite CDs for me to listen to, played demos for me of their own original music, and even invited me to jam with them. Others share stories of their favorite concerts and bring in their personal memorabilia. The result is a relationship that transcends the typical classroom boundaries as it embraces the notion that we all are far more complex than we may appear to be. It seems everyone has stories to tell about the music in their lives, and when given the opportunity, will share them openly and enthusiastically.

In general, playing in a band allows me to consider myself an artist. While scholarship demands a certain creativity, music is bound by a less restrictive set of expectations. Similarly, I always have said that teaching must be considered a performance. But with music, the reaction of the audience is more spontaneous (and usually more critical!). We teach and write to some extent because we have to for professional and economic reasons. We also play because we have to, but we are driven, like all artists, by passion and creativity.

The Rock Band in Rehearsal: Small Group Communication Theory at Work
Stephen D. Cooper, Bass Guitar, 1995-1997

A rock band in rehearsal is an intriguing example of small group communication. When the rehearsal goes well, there are clear examples of an assembly effect (Collins & Guetzkow, 1964) and process gains (Nunamaker, Dennis, Valacich, Vogel, & George, 1991). Even when the band members work well together, however, there still can be indications of process losses (Salazar, 1995; Nunamaker et al., 1991; Steiner, 1972). In other organizational or social contexts, group communication typically includes primarily verbal communication with an overlay of such nonverbal communication as paralanguage, kinesics, and proxemics. In a musical context, however, an entirely new realm of nonverbal communication is added to the group process in the form of aesthetic qualities of the performance.

This new level of nonverbal communication within the group is of extreme importance to the group's work. Ordinarily such variables as the volume balance of the instruments, timbre (i.e., sound color), competition within the aural frequency spectrum (i.e., masking of each other's sounds), and temporal coordination (i.e., rhythmic tightness) are thought of solely as aesthetic considerations. Such variables also yield insights into the functioning of the band as an instance of group interaction, however. Table 1, below, begins to map constructs essential to the life world of musicians, identified here in musicians' jargon, onto related group process variables recognized in the communication literature.

Table 1

Musicians' Jargon Related to Group Process Variables

Musical Construct	Group Process Variable
too loud	dominance
too busy	attention blocking
drowning out	blocking
rhythmic looseness	coordination problems
not listening	free riding
going stale	cognitive inertia
in the pocket	positive synergy
out of the pocket	negative synergy
leaving holes	air time fragmentation

It is quite interesting to note that variables associated in the literature with process losses may actually measure process gains in the context of a musical group. A striking example is the musicians' practice of "leaving holes," which can be seen as a form of air time fragmentation. While Nunamaker et al. (1991) categorize air time fragmentation as a process loss in a decision group, in a musical context "leaving holes" is a much-valued enactment of turn-taking and a significant contributor to positive synergy. By contrast, playing too much - in musicians' jargon, "filling all the holes in the groove" - is a violation of group norms in turn-taking, is likely to contribute to negative synergy, and may well be a form of dominance, just as playing too loud is a form of dominance.

Collective Creative Process As Synergy

As performing musicians are well aware, even the most sophisticated musical notation simply cannot specify all the aesthetic information crucial to a satisfying performance of the work. Perhaps this is most apparent in classical music, where scores contain detailed information about pitch, volume, articulation (i.e., the attack and release of the notes), and tempo, yet there are striking differences between performances of the same score by different orchestras, different soloists, and different conductors. In a very real sense, then, a given classical musical performance is a time- and context-specific collective reading of a polysemic text, no matter how explicit the notation in the score.

In more improvisatory musical forms, such as jazz and rock music, the significance of the aesthetic information filled in by the performers is even more obvious. In these genres, the written score - if any - may consist simply of a melodic line with chord symbols and lyrics, and some minimal notation of the overall structure of the tune. The significance of the ongoing interactions within the ensemble becomes obvious, then, when one considers how much musical information is created during the performance itself in a dynamic process. Much of the decodable aesthetic information in an ensemble musical performance consists of the juxtaposition of sounds generated by individual performers. If we consider these juxtapositions of sounds as double interacts (Weick, 1979), it is apparent how very complex and multidimensional the interactions among performers are, in even the most pedestrian of performances. In improvisatory forms the performer-as-listener is necessarily attuned to minute differences and similarities in time, timbre, and volume (in addition to the more obvious dimension of pitch) which are contained in an irreversible stream of auditory information, generated in a collective creative process.

For this reason the aesthetic success of a performance is in large measure the outcome of the group's interactions. It is appropriate that musicians often use the metaphor of "head" to describe the collective creativity of a group. This usage can be seen in the term "head arrangement" for the collectively-generated orchestration of a tune. Another example (indicating this author's chronological age) is in the lyric of a song by the British rock group Cream, referring to that group's creative burnout: "Do you, don't you, will you, won't you know when a head is dead?" While it is routine to physiologically distinguish various component parts of the brain in an anatomy book, it is by no means clear where a given thought or expression originates. So, too, is it possible to specify various dimensions of group interaction with a scholarly degree of validity, yet be unsettlingly vague about the precise nature of collective musical creativity.

In this light, the synergy of a rock band's performance is reminiscent of the synergy in the collaborative authorship of a journal article, a spirited panel discussion at a conference, or the meeting of a well-functioning committee. The richness and complexity of the verbal and nonverbal communication in those contexts have been well studied. The roles, task-oriented and socioemotional, assumed by group members have been well theorized. Those groups have been conceptualized as open systems, in which the whole of the group is by no means the roster of its individual members, and the potential of the group is by no means determined by its members' individual limitations. The same logic applies to musical ensembles.

Unusual Routines: Negative Enactments of Positive Values

Unfortunately, repetitive negative interaction patterns can also evolve within a band's communications, interactions which Rice (Rice, 1996; Rice, Hale & Dare, 1996) and Cooper (2001) have named *unusual routines*. Cooper and Rice (2001) define the unusual routine as "a repetitive interaction pattern which generates negative outcomes for organization members or clients, yet proves resistant to feedback or other

corrective efforts" (p. 1). Such persistent communication dysfunctionalities are likely to cause band breakups (entropy, leading to the termination of the group), changes in membership (withdrawal), or negative synergy (musical performance below the band's potential).

Cooper (2001) found the persistence of unusual routines - their resistance to attempts to fix the communication problems symptomatic of the unusual routine - to often lie in underlying, implicit values shared by group members. Paradoxically, values which are clearly positive in intent, and about which there exists substantial intersubjective agreement as to their merit, can support clearly negative interactions within a musical group. *Artistic integrity* is an excellent example of such a value. The appeal and merit of this value is apparent; most serious musicians would say they share this value. Yet, musical groups frequently terminate when disagreement over the appropriate enactment of that value leads to such process losses as dominance (conflict about the volume balance of the instruments), cognitive inertia (creative stagnation resulting from conflict over aesthetic questions), and negative synergy (impaired musical performance resulting from the inability to develop shared understanding of aesthetic standards).

In sum, a rock band in rehearsal provides a surprisingly rich opportunity to apply both established and contemporary work in group communication, to a creative process not often recognized as group communication.

The Professors Website

Works Cited

Works Cited

Barthes, R. (1977). Musica practica (S. Heath, Trans.). In R. Barthes, *Image, music, text* (pp. 149-154). New York, NY: Noonday Press.

Buber, Martin. (1970). *I and Thou*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Cooper, S. D. (2001). *Unusual routines and computer mediated communication systems.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University.

Cooper, S. D., & Rice, R. E. (2001, May). *Unusual routines, part I: Development of model and application to computer mediated communication systems.* Paper presented at the annual conference of the International Communication Association, Washington, DC.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety: The experience of play in work and games.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1991). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1997). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention.* New York, NY: Harper Collins.

Ettema, J. S., & Whitney, D. C. (Eds.) (1982*). Individuals in mass media organizations: Creativity and constraint.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge* (A. M. Sheridan Smith, Trans.). New York, NY: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. (1973). *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. New York, NY: Vintage.

Freire, P. (1998). *Teachers as cultural workers; Letter to those who dare teach*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Gary Radford: Rockin' with the Professors (1997, August 31). *New Jersey Sunday Record*, p. NJ-5.

Hunter, R. (1970). Lyrics from "Truckin" (Music by Garcia, Lesh, & Weir). Copyright Ice Nine Publishing.

Kubey, R., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Television and the quality of life: How viewing shapes everyday experience.* Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kubey, R. W., Lavin, M. J., & Barrows, J. R. (2001). Internet use and collegiate academic performance decrements: Early findings. *Journal of Communication*, *51*(2), 366-382.

Lueders, E. (1955). *Carl Van Vechten and the twenties*. University of New Mexico Press.

Lueders, E. (1989). *The wake of the General Bliss*. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press.

Marvis, C. (Producer) & Isham, W. (Director). (1989). *Pink Floyd in concert: Delicate sound of thunder* [video recording]. New York, NY: CBS Music Video Enterprises.

Nunamaker, J. F., Dennis, A. R., Valacich, J. S., Vogel, D. R., & George, J. F. (1991). Electronic meeting systems to support group work. *Communications of the ACM*, *34*(7), 40-61.

The Professors: Where research meets riffs (1997, July 3). *Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. A6.

Purser, R., & Montuori, A. (1994). Miles Davis in the classroom: Using the jazz ensemble metaphor for enhancing team learning. *Journal of Management Education, 18*(1), 21-31.

Rice, R. E. (1996). *Unusual routines, part II: Problems with feedback about systems problems*. Unpublished manuscript, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

Rice, R., Hale, R., & Dare, M. (1996). *Unusual routines, part I: Detecting Kafka circuits in computer information/communication systems*. Unpublished manuscript, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ.

Roszak, T. (1995). *The making of a counter culture; Reflections on the technocratic society and its youthful opposition*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Salazar, A. J. (1995). Understanding the synergistic effects of communication in small groups. *Small Group Research*, *26*(2), 169-199.

Steiner, I. D. (1972). *Group process and productivity*. New York, NY: Academic Press.

Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.