

MUSIC AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Flows and Peaks

Matthew Collins

ABSTRACT This article investigates music's ability to facilitate flow states of consciousness as peak experiences. The research first uses two first-person methods, phenomenology and structuralism. The phenomenological inquiry explores my experience as an audience member at live music performances, and the structural section assesses my relative strengths and weaknesses related to musical capacity and my kinesthetic, interpersonal, and emotional awareness. The results of two second-person methods, hermeneutics and ethnomethodology, are then detailed. The hermeneutics section details an interview of a musician while the ethnomethodological section explores a participant-observer experience of a college guitar class. The final research section uses two third-person methods, empiricism and systems analysis. The empirical section utilizes a survey, while the systems analysis section investigates factors that contributed to the phenomenological research method. Results focus on tracking a conceptual understanding of the terms *flow state* and *peak experience*.

KEY WORDS: mixed methods; music; flow state; Integral Theory; peak experience

The music starts and a shiver of exhilaration rushes from my head to my toes. With the first note, my consciousness initiates a continuous shifting in response to the aural stimulation. The vibrations of sound through the air, the energies in the audience swaying to the rhythm, and the pure expressions of emotion and inspiration the musicians weave throughout their songs take me on a boundless journey. Curiously, I inquire, what causes this experience to occur?

Music contains the necessary elements to engender altered states of consciousness for beneficial effects (Bourguignon, 1979). Elements that allow for this capacity are a lack of rigid syntactic and semantic rules, and various musical characteristics such as rhythm, tone, harmony, and melody (Mithen, 2006). In Schopenhauer's view, music similarly cannot be subjected to literary analysis, as he claims it replicates acts of will, or in his conception, the vital force of human life (Wood, 1996). If used conscientiously, music can potentially guide listeners toward an expanded conscious experience (Richards, 2003, 2004). The difficulty of researching flow states and peak experiences related to live music is each of these phenomena's inherent inefability. From a transpersonal perspective, any description of the states I am researching (or the experience of live music) is, by nature, incomparable to the actual experience (Wigram et al., 2002). Thus, my inquiry is limited in clearly demonstrating the experience of live music in relation to flow states and peak experiences.

Flow states and peak experiences are not entirely limited to any particular activity. One perspective on flow states indicates they are the result of an individual's capacity for maintaining balance between the perceived challenges of a situation and that individual's skill at addressing those challenges. Too much challenge for an

Correspondence: Matthew Collins, 318A Edwards Street, Crockett, CA 94525. *E-mail:* mat.j.collins@gmail.com.

individual's skills typically results in anxiety, while too little challenge for those same skills typically results in boredom (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). A flow state, then, occurs as a result of directing skilled activities toward accomplishment of a goal while maintaining a balance between the continuums of skill and challenge, boredom and anxiety. An individual might describe the experience as total immersion in an activity, absolute focus, loss of external distractions, loss of a sense of time, and loss of self-consciousness (Seligman, 2004). Flow states allow the individual a psychological momentum toward achieving and accomplishing goals that are just within an appropriate reach.

A peak experience is neither synonymous with nor in any way a necessary dimension of flow state experiences. Some standard characteristics of peak experiences are an emotional "rush" or "charge," ego transcendence, and revelations of new awareness sometimes associated with religious rites. A peak experience might come on very quickly, and only occur for a brief instant. Other times, however, peak experiences extend beyond the initial rush and conclude with a plateau phase that might last for minutes, days, or weeks (Maslow, 1994). David Hartman and Diane Zimberoff (2008) summarize the moments of Maslow's conceptions of peak experience such as fascination, giving up the past and future, innocence, lessened defenses and inhibitions, strength and courage, and acceptance. Peak experiences are of significance, particularly to what Maslow (1994) calls a "self-actualizing individual," as the experiences lessen the self-importance of their own self-actualization, and increase their sense of responsibility toward service and contribution in the world.

In pursuit of increasing the knowledge regarding music's psychoactive elements, I use an Integral Research methodology for exploring live music, flow states of consciousness, and peak experiences (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2006). Integral Research combines first-, second-, and third-person methods as a means to explore subjects from multiple perspectives, converging data from mixed methods. The first-person methods, phenomenology and structuralism, act as a means for reporting personal subjective experiences and structures of awareness related to the topic. The second-person methods, hermeneutics and ethnomethodology, act as an invitation for me to become part of the culture surrounding the research topic. The third-person methods, empiricism and systems analysis, situate the research topic within objective and social systems. The importance of a mixed methods approach is to explore how a phenomenon can be interpreted from one or more different perspectives while grounding each perspective with appropriately documented data (Creswell & Clark, 2007). An Integral Methodological Pluralism approach is unique because it simultaneously integrates each research method, and illustrates how they fit amongst one another (Wilber, 2006). Although I chose primarily experimental research methods for this investigation, more orthodox methods for research in music education and therapy are outlined in Wheeler (2005) and Colwell and Richardson (2002).

First-person Research

Phenomenological inquiry is concerned with how personal experience relates to the topic of investigation (Roald, 2008). For this study, I was concerned with my personal experience of flow states and peak experiences as related to the experience of live music. The method-specific research question I used was, "How do flow states and peak experiences appear in an individual person's experience of live music?"

Structural analysis, from a first-person perspective, is concerned with the capacity and structures of awareness related to an individual's comprehension of a topic. The typical parameters for a structural analysis are defined through developmental psychology or psychology of personality (Wilber, 2000). In this article, I detail my structural capacity for musical understanding and appreciation in relation to flow states and peak experiences. The method-specific research question for the structural analysis was, "How does my current

musical awareness influence my experience of flow states and peak experiences during live music?"

Phenomenological Research Method and Design

Phenomenological research is an attempt to document, report, and analyze the personal experience of any topic of interest (Roald, 2008). Attending concerts and journaling on my experience allows me to present an overview of the states of consciousness I experienced related to live music.

I attended a total of 13 live music performances and wrote a total of 18 pages of journal entries, including a short journal documenting my intentions within my live music experiences. I attended a diverse array of concerts from several musical genres (jazz, classical, bluegrass, reggae/rock/hip hop blend, blues/soul, folk, reggae, and hip hop). The music experiences took place from October 14, 2007 to November 25, 2007.

I then read each journal entry as a means of gaining a basic feel of their overall content. Next, I highlighted the key phrases I determined as the most important. On a third read-through of the journals, I focused directly on the highlighted phrases and labeled each one with short, one-to-three word descriptions. Using a thematic coding approach to qualitative data analysis, I generated 115 total labels and organized the labels into 11 categories. As a thematic analysis, I distilled the 11 categories into 3 main themes within my journal entries, and then analyzed and reflected on the experiences as I presented the data in terms of the themes (Creswell, 2007; Shank & Villeda, 2004). I then described one example from each of the themes, providing an illustration of how the labels and categories manifested within the data set. These examples act as intensive examples of recent experiences related to the topic question.

Phenomenology has many advantages and disadvantages in regards to answering research questions. One advantage of using a phenomenological exploration is the presentation of experiences of flow states and peak experiences relative to music. As my research is strongly directed toward personal experience, these data present rich examples. On the other hand, the phenomenological context cannot give accurate accounts related to others' experiences. Therefore, my autobiographical survey cannot produce objective universal definitions for flow states or peak experiences or a comprehensive array of musical elements that may produce these experiences.

As mentioned above, I distilled the 115 labels I produced from the phenomenological research into 11 distinct categories. The 11 categories I created were conversation, connection, alcohol, environment, somatic experience, mood or emotion, my understanding/impression, communication/expression, control, effects on me, and New Age interpretations. I then separated each of the categories into one of three different themes. The three themes I determined from my data were interpersonal, personal, and external. These themes indicate the influence of my study of the first-, second-, and third-person elements of an Integral Research agenda.

Interpersonal Theme

The interpersonal theme contained 3 of the 11 categories, including communication/expression, conversation, and connection, and included 41 of the 115 labels from my journals. The communication/expression category contained all musical expressions. The conversation category contained verbal and musical conversation, and how the music related to the tone of conversations within the audience. The connection category included my connection with the music, the audience, and how the musical vibration influenced my experience of emotions.

A specific example of musical conversation from my journals occurred during the sole blues/soul concert I attended. Toward the end of the concert, after introducing band members, the lead singer played his harmonica to each band member, and the other musicians responded with their own instrument. When the lead singer reached the trumpet player and the sax player, he addressed them each individually, but in the midst of one of the dialogues, the third person jumped in and the dialogue became a discussion. None of the musicians skipped a beat with this added dimension, and in my interpretation it enlivened the interaction. An important note of interest for the interpersonal theme is that while the data represented information transmitted from person to person, it did not just include verbal language and conversation—much of the data were found in the way music expressed a feeling, mood, or interaction between musicians.

Personal Theme

The personal theme included five categories, including somatic experiences, mood or emotion, my understanding/impression, effects on me, and New Age interpretations, and contained 58 of the 115 labels from my journals. The *somatic experiences category* included physical reactions, and awareness of vibration and other sensations. The *mood or emotion category* contained mainly joyful or fun labels, and mood shifts in the music and myself. The *my understanding/impression category* consisted of my interpretations of the musical performances. The *effects on me category* included labels indicating feelings or lasting impressions in response to the performances. Finally, the *New Age interpretations category* contained labels I considered as “alternative” explanations of experiences related to the music. From the somatic experience category, a common label was music’s effect on my movements, especially while dancing. During the research process, I found myself able to start dancing even while at concerts I attended alone, which was previously uncommon for me.

External Theme

The external theme contained 3 categories (alcohol, environment, and control) and 16 of 115 labels. The overall qualities within this theme were things that were not really a part of the music or my personal experience, but nevertheless affected the research. The *alcohol category* appeared in that, while journaling, I wrote about things I had to drink or eat at each performance in bringing myself back to the experience as much as possible. The *environment category* included the weather and the performance’s setting. The *control category* included elements of timing and coherence mechanisms within the performance.

A major portion of the external theme was the conductor’s role during a classical music performance. The conductor functions as a time-keeping device for the entire band. Moreover, the conductor influences the musical dynamics within the different instrumental sections. I considered the conductor’s role external because he himself was not playing an instrument, and did not have a direct effect on my experience, apart from the above-mentioned insights. On the other hand, the conductor expertly guided the musicians through a magnificent performance, thus serving his role in the performance while not actually producing the music himself.

Discussion

The data presented represent an honest and sincere description of my personal experience related to the research topic. Each journal entry I cite is an attempt to express typical experiences I had in response to the live music I researched. With each example, I attempt to illustrate potential flow states or peak experiences. I also present examples containing insights concerning different sensory inputs (e.g., seeing, hearing, feeling).

With this in mind, the capacities for live music to facilitate flow states of consciousness as peak experiences

are expressed through interpersonal, personal, and external dimensions. Interpersonally, live music appears to literally transmit information between persons, including between musicians and from musicians to the audience, that cannot be communicated through any other means. This kind of interpersonal awareness is also a critical dimension of music therapy (Wigram et al., 2002). Personally, I feel the data indicate both flow states and peak experiences resulting from live music might occur physically, somatically, emotionally, or mentally. In the personal dimension, flow states as peak experience might take place in any of these realms of awareness. Externally, the environment and time-keeping devices (e.g., a conductor) can catalyze and enhance flow states or peak experiences. The existence or absence of any external influences can also affect the experience of flow states and peak experiences.

Interestingly, my phenomenological data appear to indicate that flow states and peak experiences can occur in many dimensions of experience. These states might occur personally or interpersonally, and they can be influenced from external sources. Ensuing investigation will analyze music's more direct influence on flow states and peak experiences in specific aspects of the interpersonal, personal, and external dimensions (e.g., music's impact on flow at the somatic level, how environment impacts peak experiences influenced by live music).

Structural Research Method and Design

The flow states of consciousness and peak experiences an individual is capable of witnessing and reporting on are influenced by the individual's structures of awareness, perception, and attention. I offer an analysis of my musical abilities in order to provide an understanding of my musical capacity at the time of this research. For this structural method, I recorded myself practicing guitar on 11 different days from October 29, 2007 to December 7, 2007. I produced a total of 40 recordings, using all except 6 that did not categorically resemble the others. Of the 34 remaining recordings, I analyzed 10 different songs and 96 minutes of recorded music.

Structuralism is primarily the product of developmental psychology. An individual's structures of awareness are considered to develop through various stages capable of holding different degrees of complexity (Wilber, 2006). Without relying on a specific developmental model, I analyzed the strengths and weaknesses within my own structural awareness through my musical capacity and reanalyzed my phenomenological journals structurally. First, I classified each song I recorded as either primarily rhythmic or melodic. Then I counted the number of rhythm mistakes and melodic mistakes I made throughout each song. For each mistake, I noted whether I returned to the point of the mistake in order to correct the mistake or not.

I informally reflected on my general strengths and weaknesses relative to three lines of development (emotional, kinesthetic, and interpersonal) based on examples from my journal entries. Daniel Goleman (1994) defines *emotional intelligence* through the domains of knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships. With a mindfulness perspective, Jon Kabat-Zinn's (2005) position on *kinesthetic intelligence* includes the understanding and habitation of the body's "ever-changing boundaries, limits, and capabilities" (p. 275). Goleman (2006) describes *social intelligence*—herein, interpersonal—as the ability to be present and mindful in relationships.

I analyzed my journals through the phenomenological themes and categories for evidence of flow states throughout the experiences. Thereafter, I related any insights during these self-determined flow states to a particular line of development. If the experience appeared to have contributed to strengthened insights within a line of development, I considered it a peak experience.

Structural Data

I consider myself a beginner to intermediate guitar player and each of the songs I recorded were from *Christopher Parkening's Guitar Method* (Parkening et al., 1999). During my playing, I counted a total of 274 melodic mistakes and 151 rhythmic mistakes (see Appendix A). The total number of times I attempted to correct an incorrect note in the melody was 79, while I attempted to correct an incorrect rhythm 7 times. On average I counted 8.06 wrong notes per song, 4.44 rhythm mistakes per song, 2.32 corrections of wrong notes per song, and 0.21 corrections of wrong rhythms per song. I returned to correct the wrong notes 28.8% of the time, while I returned to correct wrong rhythms 4.6% of the time.

For melodic songs, the average number of incorrect notes played was 7.89 per song. The average number of rhythmic mistakes was 5 times per song. I corrected incorrect notes in melodic songs 2.79 times per song, and corrected rhythm mistakes in melodic songs 0.21 times per song.

For rhythmic songs, I played an average of 8.27 incorrect notes per song. The average number of rhythmic mistakes was 3.73 per song. The average number of times I corrected an incorrect note was 1.73 times per song while I only corrected wrong rhythms 0.2 times per song. The songs varied in length and difficulty, which added to variance of the data.

While listening to the recordings, I noticed the majority of rhythmic mistakes were a result of pausing to situate my left hand fingers on the correct frets. In this case, I might have been able to maintain the rhythm with my picking hand, but my fretting hand did not situate fast enough to allow a steady rhythm. Melodic mistakes, on the other hand, were the result of various causes such as fingering the wrong note, not pressing down hard enough on the string, or plucking the wrong string.

From these data, it appears I have a stronger capacity for playing rhythm in classical guitar songs than I do melody. In addition, I am stronger playing melody in more melodic songs than I am in rhythmic songs, whereas I am stronger playing rhythm in rhythmic songs than I am with melodic songs. I was also more likely to return to correct a melodic mistake rather than a rhythmic mistake. I will now turn to my phenomenological journal data to compare my awareness as an audience member with the data from my musical ability.

Journal Data

When considering my *emotional line* of development (as represented in my journal entries), I examined the mood or emotion category from my journals. It appears that I have a considerable amount of insight regarding when I am feeling strong emotions, but I am not particularly skilled at naming or categorizing these emotions. From the personal theme, an example of my emotional awareness relates to the way I experienced an emotional reaction to musical vibration. For example, I noticed that if a song reached a sad part I would feel the vibration more in my eyes and heart as compared to in my legs, torso, or shoulders during more lively parts of songs.

In regards to my *kinesthetic line* of development, I expressed an ability to connect my awareness to my breath and to my movements. I additionally had the ability to expand these insights to include my perceptions of bodily energy flow. On the other hand, I was not regularly aware of these perceptions and typically needed to direct my awareness toward my breath or my body. Again, from the personal theme of my phenomenological data, my kinesthetic awareness was exemplified through noticing my breath and the musical vibrations' effects on my body. Changes in my breathing pattern were mentioned several times in one journal entry, but I

did not mention how the music affected this awareness. Vibrations played a role in the ways I danced at one particular concert. Musical vibrations appeared to activate certain body parts while dancing, but this awareness was fleeting, and I was unable to sustain it for extended periods of time.

My first realization while analyzing the *interpersonal line* data was that they did not include conflict. (I remember conflict occurring while at one concert, but it was not noted in my journal.) An example that highlighted this interpersonal nature is the environment music provides as a space for entirely non-verbal interactions with audience members. I left many concerts having never engaged in conversation, and it appears that I enjoy music because it provides a social atmosphere that does not rely on conversation.

Discussion

My methods illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of one individual's emotional, kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences in relation to musical experience and ability. Others may relate to the analysis of my personal structural awareness regarding flow states, peak experiences, and live music, but may differ depending on their own individual structures. The most significantly transferable results are the assertions that flow states are closely related to context, and peak experiences are related to an expanded understanding of content.

In terms of musical flow states and peak experiences, flow states seemed to occur in my emotional and interpersonal intelligence within my understanding of emotions and relationships. Peak experiences tended to occur as I increased my ability to utilize understandings as action directed into the world. The trend reversed in my kinesthetic awareness, as flow states occurred while dancing and sensing my bodily reaction to the context presented through music, but peak experiences occurred as I increased content of understanding or had heightened insight into my body in relationship to the music. More broadly, then, these data indicate how individuals vary interpersonally in their ways of understanding and modes of orientation to experience flow states or peak experiences related to live music across lines of development.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes flow as providing order to consciousness. Thus, musically induced flow states seem closely related to rhythm through their repetitive patterns. Furthermore, peak experiences might be similarly related to content and melody, as peak experiences appear as the highest expressions of meaning, understanding, and reality (Hartman & Zimberoff, 2008). Interestingly, from a structural perspective, it appears that an individual's experiences of flow states and peak experiences are capable of varying across lines of development within individuals, and in terms of the experience of differing musical elements (e.g., rhythm and melody).

Second-person Research

For my hermeneutic analysis, I interviewed a musician on his perspective of performing live music, the dynamic between the musician and the audience, and writing songs. Within these parameters, I attempted to gain an understanding of how a performing musician experiences and observes flow states and peak experiences during live music performances. The research question I used was, "What is a musician's experience of live music's ability to facilitate a flow state of consciousness as a peak experience?"

For my ethnomethodology analysis, I enrolled in a community college guitar class. I attended this class as a participant-observer investigating evidence of flow states and peak experiences within the class. As I analyzed the class proceedings according to examples of group flow states and peak experiences, I noticed the teacher's role in facilitating a musical learning experience. My method-specific question for this analysis was,

“How do flow states of consciousness as peak experiences appear within a classroom of guitar students?”

Hermeneutic Research Method and Design

I interviewed David Kai, a performing musician, in order to develop narratives of experience with the research topic and to establish a means of conversation about the topic (Patterson & Higgs, 2005). On his website (www.davidkai.com), David describes his music as “inspirational folk rock that invites his listeners on a journey of the heart.” David is a friend and musical collaborator of a classmate, and I became interested in interviewing him because the classmate said David would be interested in my research topic. After contacting David, we agreed on a time, date, and place for the interview. Prior to the interview, I prepared a list of potential questions, tested my recording device, created a participant release form that we both signed, and informed David of my intentions for the interview. I informed David that the interview was for academic research, that I would record it, and that it would last approximately one hour.

After transcribing the interview, I used a similar coding process as described in my phenomenological method. I highlighted and labeled 220 significant phrases. After organizing the labels into 22 categories, I created 6 themes (tools, personal qualities, practices, essence, utility, and extraneous variables), noting the number of labels in each category and the number of categories in each theme. The *tools theme* contains five categories, namely, the instrument, musical elements, people involved, listening, and body/functions. The *personal quality theme* contains four categories, including mental, focus/presence, inspiration/desire, and complacency. The three categories in the *practices theme* are organization, time, and preparedness. The *essence theme* contains four categories, including expression, feeling/sensation, music descriptors, and effect/affect. The *utility theme* contains three categories, including healing capacity, creation, and transformation. Finally, the *extraneous variables theme* contains three categories, including energies, external influences, and connection to life.

Tools Theme

The tools theme contains categories that represent not only physical tools, but also aspects of a situation that contribute to a creative experience. This might include the people involved, musical characteristics, breath, and listening. David used various dimensions of the tools theme in his song-writing process. In explaining this process, he stated: “I come up with some guitar chords that go nicely together, and I come up with a rhythm that I like, and I just play it for a while. Then, I start humming, ...start making sounds, and eventually out of those sounds will come a melody and on the melody will come words.” In other words, David plays the guitar with his understanding and skill, but also crafts his songs using rhythm, melody, and lyrical content that takes shape in spontaneous ways.

Personal Qualities Theme

The personal qualities theme represents some personality characteristics that David considers useful for a musician. These qualities might be in paradox, as a musician is always trying to improve their musical skills, but while performing the musician must work with whatever skills they have acquired. David emphasized the need for a musician to hold attention in the present moment while performing. One of the ways he claimed a person slips out of the moment while playing is by thinking too much. David stated, “As soon as you start thinking, or thinking about what I’m going to say before or thinking about what I just said or anything, it just stops it, it just turns off.”

Practices Theme

Each of the elements of the practices theme is an expression of preparing for performing live music. These preparations include organization of songs, practice time and preparation, and preparedness in choosing the correct songs without a pre-set plan. The practices theme presented itself in David's discussion of preparing songs to play during a performance. For example, "When I'm playing with other people, they like me to have a song list so they can mentally prepare for the next song." Alternatively, when David performs alone, "If I write a list and I go by the list, I'm really disappointed afterwards because I [sometimes] feel like that wasn't the right song to sing at that time." He enjoys the freedom to choose songs depending on the energy of the audience and environment present.

Essence Theme

The general subject matter within the essence theme deals with the overall feeling of or created through music. The elements of this theme relate to expression and generating particular emotional effects. David explained that it might take months or years "before you really have the total essence of a song or what it's about or why it came through." After that understanding takes place, though, "Later in life you can be like, 'Wow, that song's perfect, I totally understand.'" His explanation illustrates the depth and complexity within the essence of music.

Utility Theme

The utility theme contains the uses of musical practice and performance. These uses might be for the performer or songwriter, or for the audience or listener. An example of the utility theme is an experience David had while playing guitar in a small café. While playing, David noticed a woman listening intently in the audience, and directed the music toward the woman and she began to cry. After David finished his performance, the woman put a note in his tip jar that read, "I didn't come here expecting to have my life changed tonight... I lost my true love of 50 years, and I haven't been able to... mourn it quite the way as I did listening to your music." She added that he created a comfortable place for her to go through the emotions of losing her husband.

Extraneous Variables Theme

The extraneous variables theme is comprised of categories that are not necessarily directly relevant to my research (e.g., experiences and explanations of David's life tangential to his experience as a musician). For example, David discussed how he keeps his life in balance with his music. David observed, "You don't always live up to everything, but I'm trying to be in balance with what it is that I'm singing about, what it is that I'm saying, that I actually live that way." In this way, David attempts to let his music be an expression of his life and at the same time let his life be an expression of his music.

Discussion

The validity of the hermeneutic method depends on the honesty and sincerity within the questions and answers, as well as recognition that data are subject to the researcher's analysis and interpretation (Seidman, 2006). David's answers seemed to be honest and sincere. He backed up many of his statements with stories of real-life experiences, which provided me with an understanding of his background with the topic. As with my first-person research, the hermeneutic data represent only a qualitative investigation of this research topic. Because it involves my interaction with another individual, some generalizations might extend further, but other musicians might experience the topic differently from David.

Throughout my interview, it became apparent that David had insight into the states of consciousness live music is able to affect (i.e., David's examples of performing and writing songs illustrated experiences that I am unable to present with my own phenomenological and structural analyses). When crafting a new song, preparing for a performance, or setting a comfortable context for the audience to process their personal lives, David appears to have mastered various dimensions of taking advantage of music's capacity for facilitating flow states and peak experiences. Likewise, the connection between flow states and live music appear to be more intimately intertwined than I had previously considered. As music provides a soundtrack for "order in consciousness," it appears to be largely a product or expression of flow states (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The flow state can be either planned/strategic or organic/improvised. This continuum represents the difference between technically based classical music, and more free form and improvised jazz or blues music. The targeted flow state also can occur on a broad scale, as indicated by selective succession of songs in a performance or a listening session, or on a narrow scale as indicated in a select passage within a single song.

Participant-Observer Research Method and Design

Researchers using a participant-observer method straddle seemingly conflicting roles in data gathering. In one role, the researcher participates within a collective, and uncovers data that tells a story of commonly shared experiences. In the other role, the researcher detaches from participation and offers a critical lens through which to understand the group dynamic (Butler, 1997).

I acted as a participant-observer in an intermediate level guitar class at Diablo Valley College (DVC) in Pleasant Hill, California. The guitar class allowed me to investigate my method-specific research question, "How do musically induced flow states of consciousness as peak experiences appear in a group of guitar students?" This method not only presents a lived experience of a guitar student inquiring into the states of consciousness for research, but also presents a shared group experience for the research.

The guitar class met for 40 minutes on Saturdays starting January 26, 2008 and ending March 20, 2008. Throughout this time period I attended six classes. I used an audio recorder to record two of the class sessions, and listened to each recording twice. After listening to the recordings for the first time, I created three questions related to my research topic related to music and states of consciousness in a group setting. The three questions were, "What are classroom expressions that show evidence of group flow states?", "What are classroom expressions that show evidence of group peak experiences?", and "What is the teacher's role in providing material to create these expressions?"

While listening to the recordings a second time, I answered the three questions with evidence from the recordings. I then broke down each of the answers into its key components. I organized the components into themes for each question and used these data to compare and contrast the group flow states and peak experiences.

I used recordings of the class proceedings as data in order to focus my attention while in class. (I considered writing journals, but decided that writing them in class would distract me from the class material, and writing them after class would produce data more removed from the classroom environment.) For this reason, and so that the recorded data would represent the group experience in its entirety, I recorded—with the teacher's permission—and analyzed two class periods.

Question 1

"What are expressions that show evidence of group flow states?" yielded five different answers. The answers

contained 19 components, which I organized into 5 themes: subject/role, action, relation, practice mode, and musical element. Each answer referenced what was being practiced or played and evidence of how the class related to one another and the particular music while playing. One example answer to this question was, “Group speeding up the tempo during warm-up song.” This statement represents maintaining a flow state because the level of skill within the class was able to maintain a tempo faster than what the teacher set.

Question 2

“What are expressions that show evidence of group peak experiences?” yielded a total of seven different answers. The 7 answers had 20 components and broke down into 5 themes: improvement, action, practice focus, objects, and extras. The peak experiences I noted all related to evidence that the class was improving on particular pieces of music, and most specifically on difficult passages in the songs. One of the answers for this question was, “Increased ability to maintain a steady tempo.” I consider this a peak experience because it represents a strengthened ability to restrain from playing as fast as possible, and maintain the intended pace of the song.

Question 3

“What is the teacher’s role in providing material to create these expressions?” yielded 12 different answers. The answers had 35 components and reduced to 4 categories: actions, song elements, class material, and preparing. The answers represented that the teacher not only had to present music at just the right level to challenge the class’ skill level, but also had to understand the ways music students differ in their playing styles and skills. An example of one answer to this question was, “Soloing along with the songs the class is learning.” This answer represents the teacher’s ability to give the students an experience similar to that of performing a jazz song professionally, completely matching the students’ skills with their own improvisational skills.

Discussion

The validity of my participant-observer method benefited from investigating the classroom environment in a natural setting (i.e., it was not set up for the purposes of this study). However, the participant observer data only serve the purpose of studying the topic in a controlled environment; the expressions of flow states and peak experiences outside of the classroom likely would manifest in differing ways from the classroom. Additionally, without discussion and conversation with other students, I cannot report on their awareness of or understanding of flow states and peak experiences related to the class.

The difference between the questions regarding flow states and peak experiences is the practices involved for creating each. The answers to the flow state question included the sub-theme practice mode while the answers to the peak experience question included the sub-theme practice focus. A practice mode might be warm up, a whole song, a phrase, old/new material, and so on. The goal for practicing within these modes is to increase fluidity, and to maintain consistency throughout the entire portion of practice. A practice focus involves a particular structural foundation of music or a musical element. The purpose of a practice focus is to deepen the musician’s understanding of the particular structure and increase their technical proficiency.

The teacher’s role is important for facilitating flow states of consciousness as peak experiences in the classroom for many reasons. If it can be said that music is largely a product of directed flow states of consciousness, and that peak experiences are related to deepening or heightening insight and capacity, then the teacher effectively trains students in flow states and peak experiences. In this case, the teacher’s role is much greater

than simply training the students in guitar, as he facilitates an ability to sustain musical awareness and strive for new skills and understanding. In addition, a teacher's capacity might improve through the use of various corollary practices such as those outlined in the Integral Life Practice framework, and more specifically practices or technologies designed to increase flow state and peak experience capacities such as meditation (Wilber et al., 2008).

Through the data analysis and my newly emerging opinions, the musical classroom appears to be a particularly rich environment for my topic's phenomena to naturally occur. However, my study would be incomplete without an objective exploration of music, flow states of consciousness, and peak experiences.

Third-person Research

For my empirical assessment, I created a survey to measure many different people's awareness of the occurrence of flow states of consciousness as peak experiences during live music. I designed this survey to measure distinct reasons people have for attending concerts and different flow state and peak experiences people might have at concerts. My method-specific research question was, "What is the general public's opinion of music's ability to facilitate flow states of consciousness as a peak experience?"

For my systems analysis, I analyzed the social systems that influenced my experience of the concerts I attended for the first-person section of this project. I chose to analyze several social infrastructures and systems that played a role in my experience or my ability to attend the concert. My method-specific research question was, "What aspects of social systems affected the research I am performing on live music, flow states of consciousness, and peak experiences?"

Empirical Research Method and Design

I created a survey measuring a range of experiences concerning live music, flow states of consciousness, and peak experiences. The first four questions on the survey are categorical, inquiring into the respondent's gender, age, number of recent live music experiences, and musicianship (i.e., if they play an instrument or not). The next 10 questions rate the extent to which the respondent agrees with various statements (1=agree and 5=disagree) (Burgess, 2001): the first four questions relate to live music, the next three relate to flow states, and the final three relate to peak experiences. The final two questions ask how often the respondent experiences flow and group flow at concerts (see Appendix B). The questions explore intentions for attending concerts, behaviors around music and spontaneous music experiences, and internal feelings and thoughts that occur when listening to live music. Aside from the final two questions on flow states, the questions do not use the terms *flow state* or *peak experience*.

I surveyed friends, co-workers, and fellow concertgoers in order to receive a range of responses that were not too wide or narrow. The respondents completed the surveys in my presence, and I received a total of 23 completed surveys. My intention was to survey various ways in which people connect to music in their conscious experience.

Empirical Data

All survey participants answered the first categorical survey question, age. There were three people in the 18-22 age range, eight people in the 22-28 age range, two people in the 29-35 range, five people in the 36-45 range, three people in the 46-55 range, and two people in the 55+ range. Thus, most people were concentrated

between the ages of 22 to 28, and 36 to 45. In hindsight, I recognized I mistakenly included the ages of 22 and 55 in two different categories.

I received two blank answers on the question regarding concerts in the past month. The remainder of the answers included 14 people attended 0, five people attended 1-2, and two people attended 3-4. On the number of concerts the respondents attended in the past year, five people attended 0, six people attended 1-5, one person attended 6-10, one attended 11-16, and one person attended 15+ concerts. Nine people did not answer this question.

All respondents answered if they played a musical instrument, with 9 people answering yes and 14 answering no, which resulted in 30% of respondents playing a musical instrument. Five of the musicians played guitar, three played piano, two played violin, one played flute, and one previously played clarinet.

The average results of the agree/disagree rated response statements are presented in Appendix C. The two highest levels of agreement from these questions were on statements #1, "Live concerts are more entertaining than musical recordings," and #10, "I typically feel a *natural* high at concerts." On question #1, no responses on these questions fell on the disagree side of the scale. Five people were neutral to the statement, which means that of the 23 people I surveyed, 78% of people agree that live concerts are more entertaining than recordings. On question #10, only five people were neutral and one person answered "N/A," which equates to 82% agreeing that they feel a natural high at concerts.

The only responses that averaged on the disagree side of the scale was question #4, "I attend concerts for social interaction more so than for music." The average answer was 2.07. The averages of the remaining seven rated response questions fell close to the neutral range. One average fell slightly under the neutral mark of three while the rest fell slightly above three.

On the final questions, no one answered that they never experience flow or never feel a part of group flow during a concert. Six people answered that they sometimes feel flow at concerts, 12 people answered that they often feel flow, and 5 people answered don't know. Similarly, 7 people answered that they sometimes feel a part of group flow at live concerts, while 12 people often feel a part of group flow and 4 people answered don't know. The primary importance of these statistics show no one reported never feeling flow states and peak experiences while witnessing live music.

Discussion

The validity of the empirical method is the extent to which one can analyze and make generalizations about the respondents (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). My survey measured the respondents' agreements with their experience of particular types of musical experiences, flow states of consciousness, and peak experiences. Generalization is inherently strongest for these 23 respondents and perhaps only loosely to the populations I surveyed, including developmental service workers, John F. Kennedy University Holistic Studies students, and concertgoers. It does not appear valid to generalize my findings to a broader population.

The survey confirmed that most people experience flow states and peak experiences while attending concerts. In terms of flow states, respondents were most likely to experience them as an ability to anticipate changes in the music during a concert. Answers to the final two questions indicated that most individuals experienced flow and group flow during concerts. Related to peak experiences, all three questions averaged higher than in

the neutral range. The results of the final question indicate that peak experiences can be addictive, and generate a craving for more and more intense peak experiences (Maslow, 1994). These kind of peak-to-peak experiences can be dangerous if the individual does not recognize an addictive craving for this experience. Related to live music, a concertgoer solely interested in the kind of natural high described in the survey question and not interested in the value of these experiences might develop an unhealthy relationship to live music.

My data would benefit from a further analysis of how age and gender affect the average responses. Additionally, increased depth might be gained through comparing respondents that practice music as compared to those who do not. Nevertheless, the data present a general account of how the group of respondents typically responds to live music.

Systems Research Method and Design

I used the concerts I attended to analyze my research topic related to social systems. I created a chart listing many systemic influences related to each concert (see Appendix D). The chart depicts various systemic factors that inform and influence a person's decision to attend a concert. This method takes a third-person perspective on the information and systemic factors I detailed above in the phenomenological section.

The categories of social systemic influences I chose to use were date, name of band(s), price, concert location, availability of alcohol, availability of food, number of attendees, number of bands, type of venue, whether the concert was seated or standing, genre of music, and the modes of transportation I used to arrive at each concert. This information was readily available through the Internet, on my ticket stubs, and in my own memory.

This method does not measure any specific experience in relation to my research topic. Rather, it measures how structures of society affected decisions and enabled me to attend the live concerts I analyzed in the first-person section of this study. A systems analysis like this one can only measure what means society has in place within a particular location to enable a music fan to make decisions and attend particular concerts.

Systems Data

I attended 13 concerts from October 14, 2007 to November 25, 2007. During this span of the research, I did not go more than six days without attending a music performance. I saw a total of 15 different bands/performers throughout the research period.

The price of the concerts ranged from free to \$22. I attended six free concerts, one \$10 concert, one \$12 concert, one \$15 concert, three \$20 concerts, and one \$22 concert. Of the 13 concerts, all but one were located in the San Francisco Bay Area. The most common city in my list of concert locations was the city in which I live in, Crockett, which appeared five times. The second most common city was San Francisco, appearing four times. The one town outside of the Bay Area I attended a live concert in was Floyd, Virginia.

The availability of food and alcohol, type of venue, and seated or standing audience were also categories in my systems data. These categories are similar because they measured the systemic influence on the concert's atmosphere. All but three venues made alcohol available to the audience, and about half of the venues served food. Venues included cafés, an art center, bars and/or restaurants, a non-profit music organization, nightclubs, and a fellowship hall. Five of the concerts had a standing audience, while eight had a seated audience.

The number of bands playing at each concert was the next category in my systems data. The number of bands influences the length of the concert and duration of the break between sets. I attended nine concerts in which only one band performed, three concerts in which two bands performed, and one concert in which three bands performed. Finally, I coded the concerts according to musical genre. I attended concerts in the genres of jazz, bluegrass, old time, folk, reggae, hip-hop, rock, blues, soul, and classical. The genre of music influences the experiences of the audience member in terms of enjoyment and also influences the decision to attend the concert.

Discussion

The social systems method is only valid in terms of measuring different social influences on a music fan's decision to attend a concert and the experience they might have at the concert. It would not be valid to use data in this section to make generalizations about audience members' particular experiences during a concert or details of the concert proceedings. Additionally, the systems analysis is only valid for the systemic factors in the areas it is measuring or sampling.

Through a thorough investigation of the systems data (Appendix D), I arrived at two distinct themes within the data. I recognized that typically the further away from my home the concert was, the larger the audience and more variation in venue occurred. One exception was the concert I attended furthest from my home, which was one of the smallest that I attended. Additionally, the venues in my hometown were limited to a café and a fellowship hall. The second theme in the systems data is the size of the city or town I attended a concert in was directly related to the size of the audience at the concert and the variety of genres available. The smallest towns, Crockett, CA, and Floyd, VA, had the smallest concerts and least musical variety. As the cities increased in size, so did the size of the audience at the concert and the variety of musical genres available.

This analysis illuminates the information a music fan might use to determine their desire to attend a concert, and to evaluate how they might enjoy the concert. Directly related to the research on flow states and peak experiences, the systemic influences available for the music fan might cause them to decide what kind of musical experience they might have. Whether or not the person is directly aware of flow states and peak experiences, they might make a decision based on how similar music affects them, how excited they might be about hearing a band or a style of music, and what they might gain from the experience. All of these factors are related to and influenced by the flow states and peak experiences the music fan previously and might experience at a particular concert.

Conclusion

The methods explored in this article give a general sense of the experience of, interaction with, and observation of live music's ability to facilitate flow states of consciousness as peak experiences. This study is one example of how to use an Integral Research methodology for a complex investigation (Esbjörn-Hargens, 2006).

From phenomenological and structural research, this study illustrated the variety of flow states and peak experiences available within individuals, between individuals, and across groups. My phenomenological research indicated the various dimensions of these states as a result of direct musical experience, while the structural research showed how an individual's patterns of awareness could vary in the areas of emotional, kinesthetic, and interpersonal development. The hermeneutic and participant observer research sections illustrated music and flow states and peak experiences in conversation and the classroom environment. The hermeneutic

research indicated various experiences of flows and peaks as described by a musician in an interview, while the participant observer research showed changes in capacity for flow states and peak experiences in a group of guitar students. The empirical research illustrated a small portion of the general population's experiences of flow states and peak experiences related to live music. Finally, the systems research indicated the systemic factors in place for informing consumer's interest in live music performances.

As a result of a mixed methods design utilizing first-, second-, and third-person methods, this study was very inclusive of many different types of data. However, my choice of research methods did not allow for an exhaustive analysis of the generated data. An additional limitation of this study is the unavailability of similar data to confirm my findings. Although there is information on music and altered states (e.g., Bonny & Savary, 1990; Bourguignon, 1979; Richards, 2003, 2004), I was unable to find similar research on music, flow states, and peak experiences. Through repetition of these and similar research methods the research would gain increased validation and a deepened understanding of this topic.

For further research, I propose focusing on distinct flow states of consciousness and their roles in various systems related to music. While I did not focus direct attention on music therapy, the implications of this research might be of interest to music therapists. More information on music therapy can be found elsewhere (Bruscia, 1998; Wigram et al., 2002). Research of the correlations between particular flow states, peak experiences, and music could contribute to theories in music therapy, music education, and personal growth designed to stimulate flow states of consciousness to produce particular peak experiences for learning, healing, and growth. It is my opinion that peak experiences are one necessary element of personal growth, as they involve ever expanding insights into different aspects of life.

And now the concert comes to a close, but I have a whole new conceptual organization of myself as a person and the world overall. I will take the reverberations of rhythm, tone, harmony, melody, creation, and inspiration along with me as I walk out of this experience slightly more awake and invigorated. My experience, in itself has been inspiration; it has inspired a need to investigate, communicate, fully appreciate, and be in awe of the experiences I have available throughout my life. I leave knowing there will be more concerts ahead, but with more capacity to embrace life's metaphorical concert as it is occurring, now.

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Appendix A*Structural Data Chart*

	Rhythmic=1 Melodic=2	Note Mistakes	Rhythm Mistakes	Note Corrections	Rhythm Corrections	Times Played
<i>Song Categories*</i>						
Rhythmic	1	8.27	3.73	1.73	.2	15
Melodic	2	7.89	5.0	2.79	.21	19
<i>Individual Songs</i>						
“Etude”	1	18	7.75	2.5	.5	4
“Fur Elise”	2	5.4	3	1.2	.2	5
“Moderato”	1	3.67	.83	1.33	0	6
“Waltz”	1	6	4	1.6	.2	5
“Spanish Dance”	2	4	3	1	0	2
“Rondo”	2	14.75	10	5	.5	4
“Canario”	2	7	3.5	4	0	2
“Scottish Folk Song”	2	3	2	.33	0	3
“Andante”	2	10.5	6.5	4.5	0	2
“Minuet”	2	10	8	7	1	1
Totals	-	274	151	79	7	34
Average	-	8.06	4.44	2.32	.21	34

*Data are shown as averages.

Appendix B

Copy of Survey

Live Music and States of Consciousness Survey

This survey is part of a research project investigating particular states of consciousness live music has the ability to influence. The project is an intensive look at this particular topic using six distinct methods from first-, second-, and third-person perspectives. I will use the data from this survey as one of the third-person perspective methods in this project.

Gender? Male Female **What is your age range?** <18 18-22 22-28 29-35 36-45 46-55 55+

Approximately how many live music concerts have you attended in the last:
Month? 0 1-2 3-4 5+ **Year?** 0 1-5 6-10 11-15 15+

Do you play a musical instrument?
 Yes No **If Yes, what instrument?** _____

**Please circle your answer to the following questions according to the level you agree with the statements:
 1=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 5=Agree**

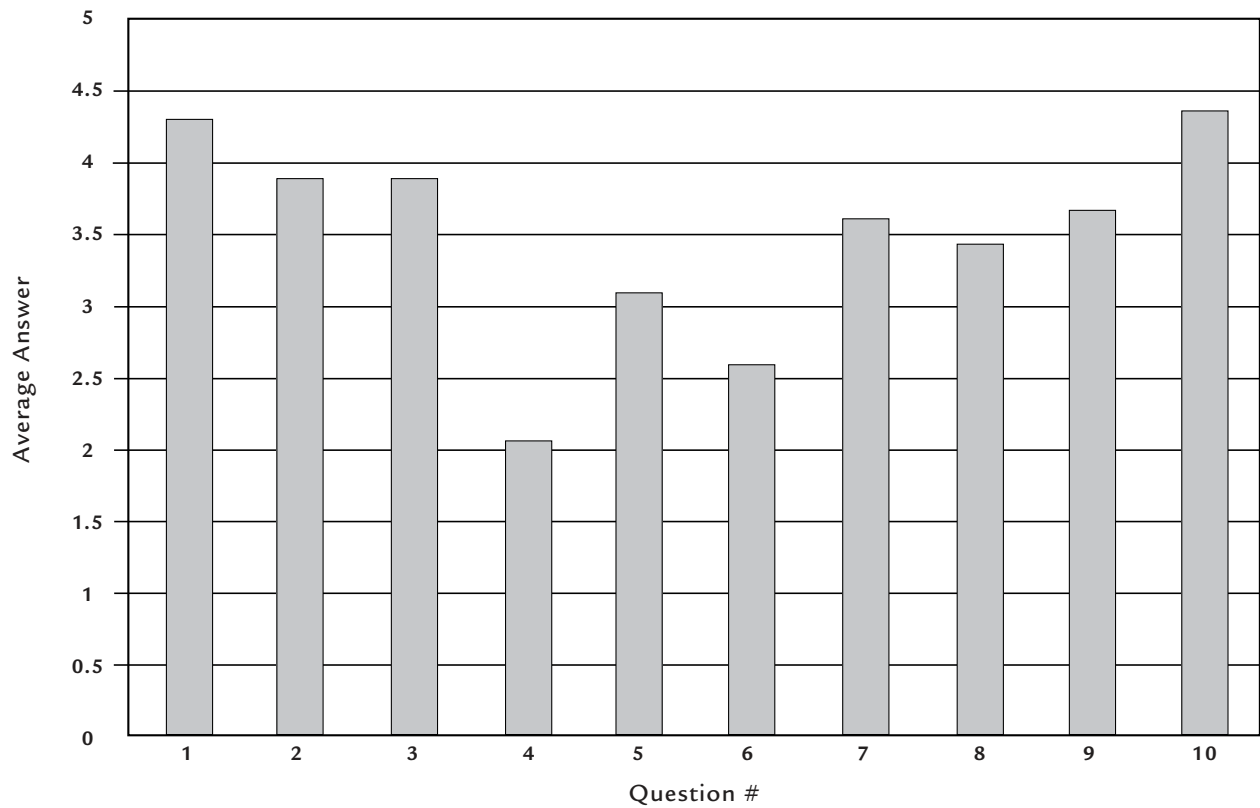
1. Live concerts are more entertaining than musical recordings	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
2. Live concerts connect me more deeply with the artists' music than recordings	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
3. When I hear someone playing music (e.g. on the street or at the park), I tend to move closer to hear	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
4. I attend concerts for social interaction more so than for music	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
5. I feel that I myself am part of the performance when I dance at a concert	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
6. I prefer not dancing and instead strictly listen to the music at a concert	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
7. I find myself able to anticipate changes in the music while at a concert	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
8. While at a concert, I typically gain new insights about life, others, or myself	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
9. I typically gain new insights about the topics in the songs during live concerts	1	2	3	4	5	n/a
10. I typically feel a <i>natural</i> "high" at concerts	1	2	3	4	5	n/a

I feel a sense of flow during experiences of live music Never Sometimes Often Don't Know

I feel like a part of the group flow during live music Never Sometimes Often Don't Know

Appendix C

*Graph of Survey Agree/Disagree Questions**



*X-axis numbers correspond to the 10 questions in Appendix B. Y-axis, 5=agree; 1=disagree.

Appendix D
Systems Chart

Date	Show	Price	City	Alcohol?	Food?	Attendance	# Bands	Venue	Seated or Standing	Genre	Mode of Transportation
Oct. 14	Terry Henry Trio	Free	Crockett	Y, Wine/Beer	Y	10-30	1	Café	Seated	Jazz	Drive
Oct. 16	California Symphony	\$20	Walnut Creek	Y, Wine/Beer	N	350	1	Art Center	Seated	Classical	Drive
Oct. 24	Carolina Chocolate Drops	\$12	San Francisco	Y, Full Bar	Y	60-80	1	Bar / Restaurant	Standing	Bluegrass	Drive, BART, Bus
Oct. 27	Stairwell Sisters	\$20	Berkeley	N	Y	100-120	1	Non-profit	Seated	Folk	Drive
Nov. 2	From the Bottom, N2Deep, Planting Seeds	\$10	Concord	Y, Full Bar	N	~60	3	Bar	Standing	Reggae/ Hip Hop /Punk	Drive
Nov. 3	JJ Grey and Mofro, Mark Ford	\$20	San Francisco	Y, Full Bar	N	300	2	Nightclub	Standing	Blues/Soul	Drive
Nov. 4	Terry Henry Trio	Free	Crockett	Y, Wine/Beer	Y	10-20	1	Café	Seated	Jazz	Drive
Nov. 7	Band @ St. Marks Hall in Crockett	Free	Crockett	N	Y	20-40	1	Fellowship Hall	Seated	Folk	Drive
Nov. 10	Junior Reid, Reggae Angels	\$15	San Francisco	Y, Full Bar	N	80-100	2	Bar	Standing	Reggae	Drive
Nov. 11	Terry Henry Trio	Free	Crockett	Y, Wine/Beer	Y	10-30	1	Café	Seated	Jazz	Drive
Nov. 17	Lyrics Born, Ryan Shaw	\$22	San Francisco	Y, Full Bar	N	300	2	Nightclub	Standing	Hip Hop /Soul	Drive
Nov. 23	Ben Kirkland	Free	Floyd	N	Y	5-10	1	Café	Seated	Folk	Fly, Drive
Nov. 25	Terry Henry Trio	Free	Crockett	Y, Wine/Beer	Y	10-30	1	Café	Seated	Jazz	Drive

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MATTHEW COLLINS, M.A., recently graduated from John F. Kennedy University with a master's in Integral Psychology. He wrote his thesis on the topic of the uses of musical practice for personal growth within an Integral Life Practice. Matt also possesses a B.S. in Psychology and a B.A. in Philosophy from Virginia Tech. He currently works with adults with severe, persistent mental illnesses at Rubicon Programs in Richmond, CA, where he conducts weekly music groups. In the future, he hopes to apply his understanding of the AQAL model to organizational development and wellness.