

EDITORIAL

Community Music as Intergenerational Memory Work

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Musical traditions are often described as repertoires handed from one generation to the next. The metaphor suggests a stable object transferred between separate owners. In practice, transmission is more dynamic. Learners select, misremember, reinterpret, combine, and sometimes reject what they receive. Elders also revise their accounts in response to new performers and circumstances. Tradition survives through these interactions, not outside them.

Small's concept of "musicking" is valuable because it locates music in relationships created through performance rather than only in musical works. Intergenerational memory similarly resides in the act of making music together: who leads, who listens, when a story is told, why a verse is omitted, which instrument is considered appropriate, and how a community responds to change.

Programs built around heritage music can unintentionally reproduce a one-way model in which older participants possess authentic knowledge and younger participants receive it. Respect for experience is essential, but the model can make younger musicians' knowledge of contemporary genres, technologies, languages, and social life appear irrelevant. It may also conceal differences among elders.

Intergenerational exchange begins with reciprocal questions. What do participants want to preserve, and why? Which changes are welcomed or disputed? What knowledge do younger musicians bring? How do migration, schooling, religious practice, gender roles, or digital media affect participation? The facilitator's role is not to resolve every disagreement but to create a structure in which it can become part of the learning.

Community music scholarship em-

phasizes hospitality, participation, and context-sensitive practice. These principles support memory work because they shift attention from producing a polished final event to sustaining relationships. A performance can still matter, but it should not be the only evidence of value.

Recording rehearsals and performances can support learning and preserve knowledge, especially where migration or aging threatens continuity. Documentation also changes the social life of music. A song once shared in a particular setting may circulate without context; a performer's experimental version may be mistaken for an authoritative one; a recording may be commercially reused or incorporated into automated systems.

Consent should therefore be ongoing and specific. Participants need to know what is being recorded, where it will be stored, who can access it, whether it can be downloaded or remixed, and how permission can be changed. Group consent does not eliminate individual rights. Programs should preserve contextual information and, where appropriate, maintain layered access rather than defaulting to unrestricted publication.

The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage stresses community participation and the living character of heritage. Safeguarding should not turn a community's music into a fixed digital specimen. Documentation is best treated as one resource for continued practice.

Attendance and output are easy to count. Intergenerational change is less visible. Evaluation can ask whether participants formed relationships across age groups, acquired confidence to teach or lead, learned the histories attached to repertoire, developed new collaborative arrangements, or changed their understanding of authenticity. Inter-

views, reflective journals, observation, and participant-led evaluation can capture these outcomes without claiming that every benefit is measurable.

Programs should also look for exclusion. Are rehearsal times accessible to people with care responsibilities? Are instruments affordable? Does musical leadership remain concentrated? Do language choices silence some participants? Is disability access incorporated into practice? A program cannot claim community continuity if the conditions of participation reproduce avoidable barriers.

Intergenerational work needs time. Short projects may create memorable performances but end before participants can assume new roles. Funders should support multi-year coordination, transport, instrument care, accessible space, documentation, and paid mentorship. Schools, libraries, cultural centers, and local ensembles can share responsibility so that transmission does not depend on one charismatic organizer.

Continuity also means allowing projects to change. A younger group may choose a different platform, combine repertoire, alter language, or create new work in response to inherited material. Such changes should be evaluated through community discussion, not dismissed automatically as dilution.

Community music can preserve memory, but preservation is not its only or even primary action. It creates a social setting in which memory is negotiated and renewed. Treating this as intergenerational memory work shifts emphasis from exact reproduction to reciprocal authority, consent, access, and continuity. A tradition remains alive when people can do more than repeat it: they can explain it, question it, teach it, and make it answer their present lives.