Singing to your Self?
Momentary Musical Performing and the Articulation of Identity

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Introduction

The notion that musical performing can become part of everyday domestic situations is one that has been commonly held in British popular culture and there are numerous representations of such circumstances in radio and television programmes. From Tony Hancock whistling and singing to alleviate boredom in the revered radio situation comedy, *Hancock's Half Hour* (BBC radio, 'Sunday Afternoon at Home', 1958), to Hilda Ogden, one of the best loved characters from the soap opera *Coronation Street* (Granada Television, 1960-present) singing as she was cleaning, there are a number of examples of this type of activity in programmes that are treasured by many members of the British public[1].

Indeed, the idea that musical performing can enrich everyday situations has continued to have cultural resonance. For instance, earlier in this decade a long term advertising campaign by Century FM, a major radio network that is broadcast in England (though the network has recently been re-branded as Real Radio) featured the slogan 'Radio You Just Have To Sing Along To'. Its television and billboard advertisements featured listeners singing along to popular British chart hits from the last three decades. For example an advert broadcast in a prime-time slot during *Coronation Street* on the 23rd of April 2007 featured a white couple aged approximately in their early thirties enthusiastically singing along to the song 'Rio' that was written and recorded by Duran Duran (1982).

The central image chosen to market Century FM was that of the fun-loving 'hairbrush diva' and their target listener was the imaginary 'Debbie' who GCap Media (the previous owners of Century FM) had described as, 'a 25-44 main shopper who's grown up but not grown old!' (GCap Media plc, 2007). 'Debbie' was a listener who, for Century's marketers, would appreciate the station's 'unique blend of the best, infectious "grab your hairbrush" style music' (GCap Media plc, 2007). The concept of the 'hairbrush diva', therefore, was one that this particular media company obviously felt would have relevance for significant sections of the British public. The idea of unashamedly singing along to popular hits from 'the 80s, 90s and Now' while grasping a hairbrush or similar microphone substitutes was marketed as something that Century's target audience would identify with (GCap Media plc, 2007).

However, despite the notion that musical performing can be commonplace in everyday life, there is very little research on how musical performing can become part of domestic life and on why this performing might be significant[2]. This absence of studies of everyday domestic musical performing is striking given the slow but steady growth of sociological research on the roles of music in domestic life from the likes of Tia DeNora (2000), Antoine Hennion (2001), Christina Williams (2001) and Sian Lincoln (2005). Furthermore, the absence is interesting given the increased usage of musical performing as a central concept for understanding musical activity within a

variety of academic fields such as human geography (Thrift, 1997; Morton, 2005), music therapy (Ansdell, 2004; Aldridge, 2005) and musicology (Shumway, 1999; Cook, 2003; Auslander, 2006).

The main reason for the lack of analysis of domestic musical performing may relate to methodology. As Roger Dickinson et. al. have pointed out, conducting qualitative research in peoples' homes is a problematic enterprise, particularly because the home is seen as a sanctuary in which observation-based study is mostly unwelcome (Dickinson et. al., 2001: 242). A long term ethnographic research project conducted between the years 2000-2006 presented an interesting opportunity to address this absence and explore the roles of everyday musical performing. This is because the research took place in a supported living scheme for four people with learning difficulties based in the northwest of England. The scheme (where I was already working as a support assistant prior to commencing research) provided a distinctive environment for ethnographic research. As the residents were already used to my presence as a support assistant and because support assistants in general were an integral part of their everyday lives, I was suitably placed to conduct observation-based research that did not compromise their privacy[3].

The environment at the supported living scheme which will be called '17 Orwell Street' (pseudonyms will be used throughout this account to refer to locations and individuals) and the ethnographic approach adopted during research will be discussed in a little more depth later. However, soon after working at 17 Orwell Street and even prior to beginning research in earnest it became apparent that small instances of musical performing were prevalent amongst the residents and their support staff. Popular music mediated through the television, compact discs or the radio often afforded instances of momentary musical performing. That is, types of musical performing that are relatively mundane and commonplace, which means they may be forgotten both by the performer and the people around them. Examples of the types of performing being referred to include foot-tapping to a song being played on the radio, or singing along to an advertising jingle.

Due to the regularity of this type of performing at 17 Orwell Street it became necessary to explore the significance of such activity further during ethnographic research. As will be seen, the momentary musical performing that was observed did not seem to be enacted in order to display a musical skill (which is the usual formal way in which 'musical performance' is defined) nor was it necessarily enacted with an audience in mind. However, the use of the phrase 'momentary musical performing', while emphasising that these types of event were often short-lived and transitory, should not obscure the significance of such performing within a domestic situation or moment. Although such performing was often momentary, it will be suggested during this chapter that it could become instrumental for defining domestic situations, interactions and relationships (Goffman, 1959).

By examining ethnographic case studies, it will be revealed that this performing was a rich medium for communication, even when the performers had difficulties with verbal articulation. Musical performing will be explicated as, to borrow Tia DeNora's term, a flexible *resource* for self expression and self management (DeNora, 2000: 13). It could help people to express thoughts and feelings but it could also help people to cope with uncomfortable thoughts and feelings in productive ways. Thus, this chapter will provide insights into the potential value that momentary musical performing can have as a resource for the articulation of self-identity. With this aim in mind, it is instructive first of all to focus upon issues relating to identity in more depth.

Music, Self-Identity and People with Learning Difficulties

Engagement with popular music has been connected with the formation of self-identities in a significant amount of literature from sociology, popular music studies and cultural studies. For instance, Simon Frith has asserted that identity needs to be defined as a process, 'a becoming not a being' and that 'our experience of music – of music making and music listening – is best understood as an experience of this *self-in-process*' (Frith, 1996: 109). Frith's definition of identity and his discussion of the role of musical activity in identity formation are important because they suggest that identity, while never being 'complete', can be *strived for* through musical engagement. Robert Walser (1993) explores this notion in his discussion of heavy metal fandom and gender identity. Walser utilises the evocative concept of *forging* to discuss the ways in which ideas about masculine and feminine identity are articulated through heavy metal imagery, musical sounds and music videos, but also through fan activities like letters sent to specialist magazines (Walser, 1993: 108-136). Like Frith, Walser indicates that this type of identity work is never fixed but in a state of becoming; being subject to debate and socio-cultural change.

Scholars like Tia DeNora (2000) and Raymond MacDonald and Dorothy Miell (2002) have made it clear that music-related identity formation also needs to be understood as frequently embedded within specific social interactions and relationships. For instance, MacDonald and Miell (2002) conducted a research project that examined

the impact of playing music in music workshops on the development of the self-identities of individuals with learning difficulties. They illustrated that different kinds of identities were both fostered through participation in the workshops and developed 'in negotiation and collaboration with others' (2002: 165). Yet, while such studies are highly significant in stressing that musical activity can become important to identity formation, they tend to privilege interview data. Therefore, peoples' verbal recollections of the significance of musical activities, such as playing and listening, to their personal and social lives are often prioritised in these accounts. Consequently, the ways in which identities are socially or musically performed are not expounded in these studies.

This prioritisation of interview data has particular implications for the study of the cultural experiences of people with learning difficulties, especially those with profound communication difficulties. For, as Jani Klotz has identified, interviewing is a method that is: 'generally inappropriate for people who have limited and seemingly incomprehensible forms of communication, and who do not readily understand or respond to questions that demand reflection upon their experiences' (Klotz, 2004: 98). Klotz goes on to assert that there is a dearth of qualitative research that takes seriously the everyday cultural experiences of people with learning difficulties (Klotz, 2004: 101). This is a notable absence because, as has been commented upon by a number of scholars from disability studies, people with learning difficulties and people defined as 'disabled' in general have often had identities imposed upon them through various discourses (Digby, 1996; Atkinson et. al., 1997; Oliver and Barnes, 1998; Race, 2002). Consequently, issues of how the self-identities of people defined (often by others) as 'disabled' are *determined* has become a key aspect of disability rights movements and a central topic in disability studies literature. There is not sufficient space to delve deeper into these issues here. However it is now necessary to focus (albeit briefly) on how identity politics has influenced the lives of people with learning difficulties in Britain. This is because in recent decades notions of identity have had a major impact on the political policies affecting this social group.

In his seminal book *The Cloak of Competence* (1967) Robert Edgerton drew on Erving Goffman's work in *Stigma* (1963) in order to highlight the segregation and exclusion that outpatients with learning difficulties experienced when they were released from a long-stay hospital into the community in a US city. Edgerton argued that institutionalisation and stigmatisation had fostered 'spoiled identities' in the outpatients that prevented them from leading 'normal' lives. The findings of Edgerton's study were an important contribution that helped to change policies regarding the treatment of people with learning difficulties in the US and Europe. His comments about the damaging effects of institutionalisation on identity helped to foster the eventual adoption of the principle of normalisation within British policy (Klotz, 2004: 96).

Basically, normalisation is a principle developed in the writing of Bengt Nirje and Wolf Wolfensberger that proposes that people with learning difficulties should be encouraged to adopt 'culturally normative' behaviours within 'culturally normative' surroundings (Wolfensberger, in Emerson, 2005: 116). Therefore proponents of normalisation espoused the belief that for people with learning difficulties to lead 'normal' lives they had to live in their local communities and participate in community life as far as possible. Partly influenced by this principle and also by the economic policies under Margaret Thatcher, there was a shift towards care in the community for people with learning difficulties throughout the 1980s in Britain.

The concept and implementation of normalisation and the rise of community care have been highly controversial amongst disability studies scholars. For example, Steve Dowson (1997) has argued that policies based on normalisation are problematic because they mainly perpetuate segregated lifestyles for people with learning difficulties, merely shifting these lifestyles to smaller community based settings rather than large institutions. Consequently, identity remains a key issue because of this continued segregation. Such segregation has led John Borland and Paul Ramcharan (1997) to adopt the term 'excluded identities' in order to discuss the lives of people with learning difficulties. They argue that: 'If the conditions for experiencing everyday life are those in which the person is excluded, it is likely that a person will be socialised into an excluded self-concept and identity' (Borland and Ramcharan, 1997: 88).

Yet, while Borland and Ramcharan contend that people with learning difficulties are likely to develop 'excluded identities', it is important that we do not generalise that this is always the case. This is because, as was indicated earlier, some researchers have illustrated how cultural practices such as musical activity can be crucial for enabling individuals with learning difficulties to develop different, more positive senses of self-identity. For example, returning to consider MacDonald and Miell's (2002) research project, their interviews revealed that certain individuals were actively resisting attempts to impose 'spoiled identities' upon them. They had developed identities as professional musicians with responsibilities that countered the initial expectations of those who defined them as 'disabled'. Indeed, there are publications by music therapists that emphasise that music making can be crucial for

boosting self-esteem and fostering a positive self-identity for individuals with learning difficulties (Wood, 1983; Ockelford, 1998; Magee, 2002).

However, what all of the accounts mentioned above have in common is that they focus upon the roles of music making (in the sense of playing musical instruments) in order to explore the relationships between musical activity and self-identity. Regrettably, there is a lack of studies examining such relationships through a consideration of the less obvious, but nonetheless pervasive, everyday domestic musical activities of people with learning difficulties (such as listening to popular music). This is a significant absence because there is quantitative evidence to suggest that domestic musical activity remains especially commonplace amongst people with learning difficulties in the UK, partly because of a lack of access to outside leisure activities (Reynolds, 2002; McConkey, 2005).

As will be conveyed in the sections that follow, close examination of relatively small instances of domestic musical activities can reveal their rich potential as devices relating to the self and to social relationships. Prior to this, however, it is germane to provide a little more detail about the environment at 17 Orwell Street.

The Research Setting

17 Orwell Street was a somewhat intimate domestic environment. The supported living scheme was based in a bungalow with four bedrooms. The lounge was very much the hub of activity in the house and, as it was effectively one large room that led into the kitchen and dining area, it was an important space in which residents negotiated social relationships with each other. Yet the lounge/dining/kitchen area was also frequently inhabited by support staff; ensuring that it was a relatively cluttered social space. Indeed, the four residents had to contend with a number of staff members entering and leaving their house every day. On any given day there would usually be at least five different members of support staff who would enter and leave the house. This was because the residents required twenty-four-hour support. Consequently, different support assistants worked on morning shifts, afternoon shifts and night shifts.

Thus, while ostensibly it was a 'home' for the four residents who lived there, 17 Orwell Street was also akin to an establishment that has been seen as the antithesis of the home – the hotel (Douglas, 1991). As with hotel stays each resident rented their bedrooms separately and ultimately paid for everything related to their accommodation on an individual basis. The presence of support staff throughout the day and night also meant that the setting had similarities with a hotel.

The supported living scheme also had some similarities with another type of environment that is usually seen as the antithesis of a 'home' – the medical institution. As in the 'total institutions' discussed by Erving Goffman in *Asylums*, the scheme featured a plethora of paperwork designed to monitor the health of the residents – from medication charts to daily diaries (Goffman, 1961: 19)[4]. Thus, this was a 'home' environment in which the residents were used to being observed and written about by other people and where the presence of a number of people who did not live in their house had become relatively naturalised[5].

Given the distinctive nature of this environment, it was imperative that good social relationships were fostered between residents and between residents and staff members. This was recognised in 17 Orwell Street's Mission Statement which stated that one of the key initial aims of the supporting living scheme was to: 'ensure that 17 Orwell Street is recognised by the service users as their home. Staff will support them to create and to enjoy a friendly and safe home environment (17 Orwell Street, 'Aims and Objectives', n.d.). The complex nature of the 'home' environment at the house has been discussed elsewhere (see Hassan, 2008), yet from this statement it is clear that the creation of 17 Orwell Street as a friendly 'home' setting was something that was seen as an important aim. The statement suggests that 'homes' are *made* and that desirable friendly environments have to be created. In the case studies that follow shortly, it will be revealed that everyday musical activities had the potential to be central to this creative process. That is, they could facilitate the presentation of self in front of others; shaping domestic social situations and interactions in a positive manner. Furthermore, it will be revealed that musical performing was also integral to the much more personal processes of self formation (the expression of a sense of individuality) and self management (coping with uncomfortable personal feelings and circumstances).

Everyday Musical Performing

As a support assistant working at 17 Orwell Street, in certain senses I was in an ideal position to conduct a specific type of participant-observation. It was an essential requirement of my job to develop friendly relationships with both the residents and the staff in this setting. My job role also necessitated interactions with the people in the house on a number of levels, participation in daily routines and the facilitation of leisure activities (both inside and outside of the house). Clearly, this approach to participant-observation had its limitations and it was an approach that entailed particular power relations (see Hassan, 2008). Nevertheless, the research approach enabled the observation of a number of musical activities as they were enacted within everyday domestic life. What quickly became apparent, even prior to ethnographic research beginning in earnest, was that 17 Orwell Street often housed small instances of musical activity that were referred to earlier as momentary musical performing.

Aspects of this performing will be explicated shortly, although it should be noted at this stage that it is not possible within the space of this chapter to convey the range of performing observed during the aforementioned ethnographic research. Consequently, brief case studies will be utilised in order to provide an insight into the significance of such performing. However, as a precursor to this, it is important to dwell for a short period on the concept of musical performing as it being used here. Earlier it was suggested that the phrase 'momentary musical performing' was being used in a dual sense. Daily musical activities such as humming and singing are momentary in that they are often fleeting and easily forgotten. Yet paradoxically such musical activities as they occur *in the moment* can be vital to social situations, interactions and the presentation of self. It is this definition that will be maintained throughout this account.

Furthermore, the term 'performing' as opposed to 'performance' will continue to be utilised throughout this chapter, even though the ethnographic case studies that follow are outlining past events. This is because the term 'performance' does not adequately denote the processes of *becoming* that were involved with musical activities that were part of ongoing identity-related experiences. To write of 'a performance' implies that musical activities that were observed were 'complete' and 'stable' rather than shifting and fragmented. By maintaining the term 'performing' this chapter will concur with a contention made by Richard Bauman that performing has an *emergent* quality (Bauman, 1977: 38). It is this quality that makes performing a significant area of study for an ethnographer because, as Bauman argues, performing exists in a dialogue between past and present. Therefore, analysing performing enables the ethnographer to engage with 'residual forms and items, contemporary practice, and emergent structures' (Bauman, 1977: 48). As will be made clear shortly, musical performing can provide telling insights into aspects of identity and social situations that are related to both past and present experiences.

A final factor to consider before the discussion of ethnographic case studies that depict musical performing is that it is important to conceive of such performing as not only musical but *social*. Goffman (1959) has made clear that, within social interactions any performing, whether musical or otherwise, can have a significant impact on the general environment as well as on social actions and relationships. He writes: 'it seems that there is no interaction in which the participants do not take an appreciable chance of being slightly embarrassed or a slight chance of being deeply humiliated. Life may not be much of a gamble, but interaction is' (1959: 236). Therefore, with social performing the stakes are high. Performing can influence the ways that people act and interact within a specific situation but it can also be vulnerable because there are no guarantees that actions will not be misinterpreted or even ridiculed.

Indeed, Goffman's influential definition of social performing is highly relevant for the current chapter. Its value lies in its open-endedness. Goffman defines performing as 'all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants' (Goffman, 1959: 26). By not stipulating that performing involves any special, deliberate social action, Goffman allows us to consider that performing can be either witting or unwitting. That is, it can be intentional and enacted with a degree of reflexivity or it can be accidental or unintended to be treated as performing by others. The relevance of this position and of the above discussion will be expounded in the case studies that follow.

Music and Domestic Routines

Certain domestic routines at 17 Orwell Street regularly involved musical performing. John, a man aged in his mid-sixties who was the eldest resident in the house and Charlotte, a woman now in her early fifties who was the youngest resident, would often request music in the morning during breakfast. For instance, once John had purchased a Boney M *The Best Of* (1997) album in 2001 he would usually ask me to put this on while sat at the

kitchen table having breakfast. He actually did not remember the name of the group but would ask for 'sugar in a plum, plum' (referring to the song 'Brown Girl in The Ring' (1978). When he heard 'Brown Girl in The Ring' or 'Rivers of Babylon' (1978) he would usually begin singing along enthusiastically for a few moments. Generally his singing would not last for long and he would content himself with listening to the remainder of the songs as he drank a mug of tea and ate his breakfast.

John's singing was not only evident during breakfast but during other meal times as well. For example, the following field diary extract describes how John wholeheartedly began singing during his lunch (again the music playing was by Boney M):

> When most people had finished and Charlotte and Andrew had left the table, John asked me to 'put music on' whilst he and Christine were still at the table. I asked him what he wanted and he 'Sugar in plum, plum' – meaning 'Brown Girl in The Ring'. I put this track on for John immediately from his Boney M CD. Once the track began, immediately starting with the chorus, John began enthusiastically singing along fairly loudly in his high-pitched voice. He was smiling widely and clearly enjoying himself. He kept up with most of the simple lyrics – singing 'Show me emotion' and 'wash my clothes' during the last few lines (Field notes, 12 September 2004).

This type of performing was significant on a number of levels. Firstly such acts of joyously singing along to music during a daily communal domestic situation affect that situation. Meal times were a ritual when each of the residents was in close proximity to one another. Consequently, because relations between residents were sometimes strained there were underlying tensions that occasionally surfaced while everyone was sat at the kitchen table. For instance, Christine the oldest female resident in the house would sometimes become upset with John if he was overly mischievous, as he would occasionally mimic her actions. Also Charlotte would sometimes attempt to adopt an authoritative role in relation to the other residents. She would do this by prompting them to eat food that they had left on their plates. When this happened staff members had to dissuade Charlotte from doing this by reminding her that the other residents were free to leave food as they pleased. Since meal times had the potential to be awkward social situations, it was interesting that John often requested music and chose to sing or dance to songs while sat at the table. Such musical performing may have been partly an attempt to project a sense of fun and joviality into a social situation that was prone to tensions.

However, clearly John's performing in such domestic situations cannot be solely linked to an attempt to positively influence those situations. John's singing was also connected to the articulation of self-identity; he was providing cues regarding his self and his mood through this musical performing. Furthermore, it was important that in such domestic situations John was acutely aware of an audience and often enjoyed being the focus of others' attention. Moreover, in the instance detailed above John was not performing 'Brown Girl in The Ring' in front of just anyone. He was singing near to me, the person who had discovered his preference for Boney M and supported him to purchase the CD. Consequently, the music-related social relationship that John had developed with me must also be taken into consideration when examining this specific moment. Therefore, at this juncture it is plain that by only focusing upon one moment of domestic musical performing a whole series of issues regarding the significance of this performing are raised.

Musical performing such as singing could thus play a central role in helping to define and enhance domestic situations and routines at 17 Orwell Street. This was also the case with more private routines. For example, Charlotte frequently listened to music in her bedroom while carrying out routine activities such as getting ready or cleaning and tidying. During an interview she made clear that she also liked to sing while listening to music and cleaning her room. When asked about how she felt when singing during cleaning she replied by saying 'Oh, nice and…keep easy' (Interview with Charlotte, 27 March 2004). The phrase 'keep easy' is an evocative one that provided a striking insight into her feelings. As was the case during many daily conversations, throughout the interview Charlotte often found it difficult to put her thoughts and feelings into words. Given her difficulties with verbal articulation it was significant that she chose the phrase 'keep easy' to describe how she felt when singing and carrying out this domestic chore. This is because cleaning and tidying her room was an activity that Charlotte seemed to dislike. She frequently neglected her bedroom and had to be reminded to clean it by staff members and this, in turn, often caused some friction between Charlotte and the support assistants trying to help her. Consequently, if singing to her CDs and tapes helped Charlotte to relax and 'keep easy' while she negotiated a chore she was uncomfortable with, then this activity was far from insignificant.

Interestingly, later in her interview Charlotte intimated that listening to music during car journeys made the journey better because it enabled her to experience a more relaxed sense of time. At this moment in the interview, through both words and gestures, Charlotte evoked the idea of 'keeping easy' that she had alluded to earlier. Describing music's value on car journeys she said that: 'You take your *time* going up y' know, going that way mmm,

y' know' (Interview with Charlotte, 27 March 2004). At the same time as uttering these words she performed a slow, calm movement bringing one of her arms out gradually from her chest in a straight line as if to imitate a slow moving car. Therefore, through her words and actions Charlotte implied that music listening and performing helped her to feel relaxed during different everyday situations. This discussion of Charlotte's singing, along with the earlier discussion of John's singing, illustrates how musical performing was potentially a resource for coping with everyday situations as well as a resource for influencing other people. These issues will now be expanded upon in more depth by considering the significance of a very personal song that was enacted by Charlotte during different domestic situations and routines at 17 Orwell Street.

Love Me Tonight

As it was made clear above, Charlotte was someone who liked to sing along to music while doing housework. Indeed, she was by far the most outgoing and talkative resident living at 17 Orwell Street and she would frequently hum and sing to music she heard through CDs, the television or the radio in various domestic situations. However, while observing Charlotte it soon became apparent that she liked to sing or hum in ways that were not dependent on the mediation of recorded popular music. In particular, she would sing a specific phrase as she went about domestic routines or was faced with certain situations. The phrase that she could often be heard singing was 'Love me tonight'. This was also something that other staff members had noticed and they relayed this during interviews or within diaries of musical observations that they completed. Charlotte's singing of 'Love Me Tonight' was so commonplace that Natalie, the team leader at 17 Orwell Street, intimated during a conversation that she used to find herself going home from her working shifts singing the phrase. However, noting the frequency of the song does not provide much insight into its significance. Thus, it is necessary to consider the manner in which this personal song was performed and the everyday domestic activities and situations it was often part of.

Charlotte's singing of 'Love Me Tonight' did not seem to refer to a specific song. This is not to imply that there are not popular songs that feature that lyric. For instance, there are two singles entitled 'Love Me Tonight' that have featured in the British pop charts since they began to be compiled in 1952[6]. Although it may have been influenced by these or other songs featuring similar lyrics, Charlotte's singing could not clearly be traced to an individual song. This is because the manner in which she sang 'Love Me Tonight' often varied. For instance, Charlotte was observed singing this phrase in a gently paced, somewhat wistful manner as she went about chores such as tidying laundry or during a quiet moment such as when she waiting for a bus to collect her and take her to the day centre she attended. Yet the phrase was also witnessed being sung in a far more bright and lively manner with a quicker rhythm during similar domestic routines and situations.

Thus, variations in metre, pitch, melody and tone made pinpointing the source for Charlotte's song difficult, and this problem was exacerbated by the fact that she would sometimes add different lyrics to the end of the phrase. For example, on some occasions she was heard singing 'Love me tonight, love me today' with a gentle melody and somewhat wistful tone. Conversely, there were times when she sang 'Love me tonight, la, la, la' in a more upbeat tone and with greater pace. Furthermore, Charlotte also did not seem to know if her singing of 'Love Me Tonight' was derived from a particular artist or song. When asked about the song in a conversation one day she indicated that she did not know who sang it. Therefore, the song seemed to be a very personal one to her. This was also evident from the way in which she performed it. Unlike some of the times when she was singing along or dancing to music playing from a CD or the television, Charlotte did not look to other people to gauge their reactions or to see if they were joining in. These were more shared moments of musical performing, but when singing 'Love Me Tonight' it always seemed that she was performing to her self rather than for other people.

During an interview Mel, one of the support staff, suggested that the singing of 'Love Me Tonight' might have provided a sense of 'comfort' for Charlotte. She suggested that she was able to put her self into a certain mood through singing. As Mel put it: 'That line that she continually sings, "Love me tonight", I feel that it is her way of being comforted by *saying* that but not actually having…feelings of love' (Interview with Mel, 26 April 2004). Therefore, 'Love Me Tonight' seemed to be a uniquely comforting phrase in that it appeared (certainly to Mel) to be a phrase that soothed Charlotte's yearning for love, while providing her with a way of expressing it.

Mel's conception of the importance of 'Love Me Tonight' is an interesting one that has some similarities with Tia DeNora's theorising of music as a resource for 'self-regulation' and 'self-modulation' (DeNora, 2000: 53). DeNora argues by referring to extensive qualitative interviews that people choose music to regulate their moods and bodily energy (for example to calm down if they are feeling uptight) or to modulate and structure these aspects of self (for instance by putting a certain type of music on to 'get in the mood' for a night out) (DeNora,

2000: 53-54). As DeNora puts it, her respondents use music's 'specific properties…as referents or representations of where they wish to be or go, emotionally, physically and so on' (DeNora, 2000: 53). If, as has been argued, musical performing such as singing can help Charlotte to 'keep easy', then it follows that one way of interpreting her singing of 'Love Me Tonight' was as a resource for self-regulation. It seemed to be a way of maintaining a relaxed mood as she was faced with domestic routines and situations.

Also the performing of this phrase can be related to self management in that the singing of 'Love Me Tonight' may have consoled Charlotte during certain routines or situations if she felt vulnerable or lonely. As has been explained, the phrase was sometimes sang in a wistful, longing manner, suggesting that, as the lyric implies, she was yearning to feel loved. Musical activity, as DeNora argues, can be a medium for 'venting' one's feelings – it can be 'both an instigator and a container of feeling' (DeNora, 2000: 58). DeNora makes this argument when discussing how her respondents select music to listen to when managing their moods, but with this example it is apparent that this process of mood management could also be achieved through everyday musical performing.

Mel's interpretation of Charlotte's singing of 'Love Me Tonight' as a yearning for love also implied that this singing was a powerful metaphor that provided a distinct insight into Charlotte's life history and domestic situation. This was an argument with some credibility because, in many respects, Charlotte was dislocated from the area she called 'home'. While her brothers had married and made their own families, after her mother's death and her move to Orwell Street, Charlotte was increasingly on the periphery of her previous family circle. At the same time she was situated in a social environment where all of the staff supporting her had partners and, in many cases, families of their own. Combined with the fact that Charlotte had to contend with sharing a house with three other residents who were somewhat older and had different support requirements to her, interacting with these staff members may have increased her feelings of isolation. It may have been that her interactions with staff reminded her of a life that she was precluded from having due to a myriad of social factors, many of which were out of her control. Assessed in the context of these circumstances, the singing of 'Love Me Tonight' takes on added poignancy and it could be argued that the phrase was powerfully evocative of Charlotte's feelings and life history.

However, while some data derived from participant-observation supported this conclusion, it was vital to be cautious when considering the phrase 'Love Me Tonight' as a metaphor for understanding Charlotte's life. Although scholars like Tim Booth (1996) have suggested that methods that analyse research subjects' comments for their metaphorical value are useful when studying the lives of people with learning difficulties, there is a danger that such methods could simplify the lives of the people they are trying to understand. What is important to consider with 'Love Me Tonight' is that Charlotte sang this phrase in a variety of ways in different situations. In some situations, such as the ones mentioned earlier, the song seemed to constitute a way for her to pleasantly pass the time, rather than to articulate her feelings.

Furthermore, Charlotte's singing of this phrase changed over time. During 2005 she began a romantic relationship with a younger man with mild learning difficulties similar to her. During this time period it was striking that the lyrics of 'Love Me Tonight' sometimes altered. On more than one occasion Charlotte was heard singing 'Love you tonight' in an upbeat manner as she attended to household chores. At this time of her life while she was in a relationship it is highly significant that this personal song changed. No longer a phrase suggesting a yearning for love, 'Love you tonight' seemed to be an affirmation of love for another person, but also perhaps an expression of self confidence and security.

It is apparent, therefore, that personal songs such as 'Love Me Tonight' are rich resources for the articulation of self-identity. Despite the fact that Charlotte had some difficulties with verbal communication, her small instances of musical performing could potentially convey a range of meanings regarding personal history, relationships and emotions. This performing also helped her to structure regular domestic activities in ways that gave such activities more of an aesthetic, pleasurable dimension.

Yet the performing of 'Love Me Tonight' was not necessarily enacted with an audience in mind. Rather than being what Richard Bauman calls 'meta-communicative' and soliciting attention from others to indicate that 'this is performing', the singing that has been discussed could be termed *supra-communicative* (Babcock, 1977: 68; Bauman, 1977: 16). This is because such singing is not primarily produced to display a skill or to convey a message to an audience by drawing attention to the 'performer'. Rather it is instigated in order to *cope* with everyday situations and routines and the complex thoughts and emotions that an individual may have in the midst of them[7].

In this sense everyday musical performing can, in some instances, have much in common with work songs and sea shanties. Describing the work songs of African-Americans, Alan Lomax wrote that:

These songs are full of love for people, they are lonely for people and they are full of hunger for gentleness and kindness in this world...These songs rose up out of these people without their having to think about it, because they were lonesome for more kindness and goodness and richness than they could find in life right where they were (Lomax, 2003: 76).

Although Charlotte's personal song was not performed in a context of slavery or hard labour, the above quote has some resonance with the singing discussed above. Musical performing that is a resource for coping with everyday life does not necessarily have a straightforward referent; it is enacted by people without thinking about it. A familiarity with the daily contexts and personal histories of those concerned can enable an ethnographic researcher to gain some insight into how such songs might 'rise up' in people, but it cannot capture the affective power involved when performing such songs. However, while providing some clues to the significance of 'Love Me Tonight', the ethnographic case study featured above also underlined that everyday songs are never static. Personal songs or phrases may emerge from particular social conditions but they also shift as those conditions change.

Conclusion:
Towards an Understanding of the Significance of Momentary Musical Performing

Musical experiences, as other scholars have suggested, are not necessarily self-conscious (Riesman, 1990: 6; Berger and Del Negro, 2004). In other words, people are not necessarily aware of how their musical activities may have an influence on their selves or on those around them. Particularly in societies where the mediation of music is pervasive, it has become all too easy to take the roles of musical activities in our lives for granted. (How many of us can remember the songs we wake up to via our radio alarm clocks or why we have a song 'stuck' in our minds as we engage in mundane tasks?). Although data derived from interviews can shed some light on how musical activity becomes part of everyday life, it is hindered precisely because people often do not reflect on the centrality of musical activities to their everyday experiences *as they unfold*. This chapter has suggested that a productive way of alleviating this problem is to try to interrogate musical activities *within* everyday social action and interaction.

Such an approach involved primarily paying attention to data from a type of participant-observation that enabled the researcher both to observe actions and to engage in interactions with research subjects. As DeNora has asserted, musical activities have to be situated within ethnographic contexts in order for us to learn about how they have power on a socio-cultural level (DeNora, 2000: 18-19). From the outset of this chapter it has been argued that within a domestic environment like 17 Orwell Street everyday musical activities, such as the musical performing discussed above, are often *momentary*. Unlike musical performing at highly framed events such as concerts or dance-centred settings like night clubs, this domestic musical performing is not usually enacted with the same degree of reflexive consciousness. Rather it seems to become naturalised and taken for granted as an aspect of domestic life; a 'mundane' occurrence, rather than a special event. However, as this chapter has revealed, the seemingly smooth way in which this performing can mesh into everyday life, should not obscure its fundamental importance to everyday activities and moments.

Although this chapter has only focused upon a few ethnographic examples from a single household, it has made clear that everyday domestic musical activities can relate to self-identity in ways that are profoundly affective, dynamic and socially significant. Small instances of musical performing were revealed as affording individuals the potential to foster a sense of 'home' in a social context where it was imperative that the feelings of togetherness and social cohesion usually associated with a 'home' were aimed for (Douglas, 1991). While some of the residents at 17 Orwell Street may not have always felt 'at home', musical performing was also revealed as a particularly felicitous means of coping with the distinctive domestic circumstances they were faced with.

Thus, everyday musical performing was established as an extremely versatile resource for self management. For instance, when Charlotte was singing 'Love Me Tonight' she may well have been, in a sense, 'singing to her self' in ways that could both manage and express her feelings. Yet in the context of an intimate domestic environment such performing was also interpreted as a type of communication that told others about her self and those feelings.

Consequently, the aforementioned ethnographic examples reveal that if identity is forged through musical activity, it is not only forged through the more obvious and visible reception practices that have previously been written about by scholars from popular music studies (for instance, fandom and subcultural activity). Identity is also forged in those intangible, fleeting and seemingly mundane moments of everyday domestic life where musical activity can fit in almost seamlessly. Such a conception of identity that emphasises the dynamic and contingent

nature of identity construction, even within the minutiae of domestic life, makes problematic the relevance of over-arching theories of identity, even for people who may be excluded from engaging in certain socio-cultural practices. While individual's identities may become 'spoiled' or 'excluded', it is vital to recognise that these processes are never complete and that such 'given' identities can be challenged and that newer, more positive, identities can be created (Berger and Del Negro, 2004: 138).

Acknowledgements

Endnotes

[1] *Coronation Street* continues to be one of the most enduring programmes on British television; consistently achieving high viewing figures. Hilda Ogden was voted the nation's favourite soap opera character in a survey published in 2005 (BBC News, 2007).

[2] Although the term 'everyday' is used throughout this chapter, this should not imply that the term is unproblematic. As Hesmondhalgh has pointed out, the notion of 'everyday life' is complex and, while the 'everyday' is often associated with the routine and momentary in this chapter, this is not to suggest that a consideration of peoples' longer term life histories is any less important (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 126).

[3] For a detailed account of the approach to ethnography undertaken and of the limitations with the methods used see Hassan (2008).

[4] For more information see Hassan (2008).

[5] Of course, this does not mean that the presence of support staff was always accepted. There were some occasions when there were tensions between both staff and residents, and, indeed, between individual residents. See Hassan (2008) for more information about this.

[6] These were performed by Tom Jones (1969) and by Trevor Walters (1981) (Guinness World Records, 2002: 581).

[7] I am grateful to Mike Brocken (personal communication, 21 April 2007) for discussing these ideas with me.

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