VOICES OF EXPERIENCE:
INTERVIEWS OF ADULT COMMUNITY BAND MEMBERS IN LAUNCESTON, TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA

Don D. Coffman

University of Iowa

From March through May 2002, the author traveled from the United States to teach at the University of Tasmania and observe a large community band program in Launceston, Tasmania. The program consists of six bands of increasing musical ability (Beginner through College) and is open to musicians of all ages and abilities. This paper is a summary of observations, a survey (n=90) and interviews (n=12) completed during the author's stay. Adults who had learned to play their instruments in this program were interviewed to examine their motivations, their hopes, and their frustrations. The paper also describes the pedagogy used in this band program, presenting it as a model for attracting and retaining adult learners in music performance.

Introduction

A steady diet of casual, unserious leisure in the sizeable blocks of time left over after a substantially reduced workweek, month, or year, ultimately tends to cause a spiritual wasteland. What is needed is the encouragement and opportunity to participate in serious leisure, *backed by the sort of education that makes this possible* (italics added for emphasis). (Stebbins, 1992, p. 19)

Robert Stebbins is a Canadian researcher who has spent a career exploring the concept of leisure by observing and interviewing a variety of amateurs, including musicians (jazz, classical, barbershop quartets), magicians, stand-up comics, archaeologists, and astronomers (Stebbins, 1992). His careful work has led him to develop a concept of "serious leisure" that will be used as a theoretical basis for this paper. As a teacher and researcher of older adult musicians, I am challenged and inspired by his assertion that leisure is not trivial, but rather vital to human well being.

American adults over age 60 now outnumber those younger than age 15, a shift largely due to the aging of the so-called baby boom cohort (those 70 million people born between 1946 and 1964). Recognizing that most adults over 65 are retired persons of "leisure"—only 13% are employed (U.S. Census, 2000)[1]—leads to the realization that a significant number of adults are undoubtedly seeking ways to structure their time.

Casual and Serious Leisure Defined

Leisure is commonly viewed as discretionary activity. Leisure can be distinguished from activities associated with survival (eating, sleeping), work (activities receiving monetary compensation) and work-related activity (e.g. commuting to work), and non-work obligations (e.g., family relationships, cleaning the house). Max Kaplan (1960) notes that leisure has elements of play, pleasantness, freedom of choice, little or no social obligations, and spans a range of activities from trivial to important.

Stebbins considers casual leisure to include primarily social interactions and self-gratification (what he calls "pure fun"). Going out to eat some ice cream and watching a situation comedy on television would be examples of casual leisure. In contrast, serious leisure activity is typified by: a significant effort to acquire knowledge and skill, perseverance, career elements (i.e. developmental phases), the development of a subculture identity (ethos), obtaining durable benefits[2], and a resulting strong identification with the activity (1992, pp. 6-7).

Casual leisure activity lacks necessity and is fleeting. Serious leisure is not a matter of somberness or cheerlessness, but rather earnestness and commitment, which requires structure and organization. Involvement in a community band, with its schedule of rehearsals and hierarchical organization, illustrates the difference between these two types of leisure.

Three Types of Serious Leisure

Stebbins (1992, p. 5) segments serious leisure participants into three types: amateurs, hobbyists, and volunteers. Amateurs are situated in a Professional-Amateur-Public (PAP) social system of relationships (p. 10). This is an interdependent system where amateurs and professionals share similar expectations and rely on a public consumption of their activities. Hobbyists are as equally dedicated to their pursuits, but they have no professional counterparts (e.g. no professional bird watchers) and their activity is typically solitary—the need for a public is vastly reduced. Hobbyists include collectors, makers and tinkerers, players (i.e. competitive sports), activity participants (noncompetitive, skilled physical movement

required, e.g., fishing, sailing, hunting, barbershop quartet singing), and folk artists, who have little or no interaction with professionals or amateurs and produce their art largely for themselves or a limited community. Volunteers are identified by altruism and a certain degree of self-interest, because they do often derive some satisfaction from serving and feeling needed. Volunteers' roles are typically a special class of "helper" in someone else's occupation.

Stebbins's typology offers a useful framework for categorizing leisure activities. The categories are reasonably, although not rigidly, mutually exclusive. For example, he places pianists in the hobbyist category, because this is often a solitary activity, even though one can quickly identify professional pianists that depend on a public. Table 1 summarizes the distinctions between these three versions of serious leisure. Attributes are hierarchically displayed within three groups of principles—motivation, institutional role or status, and perceived contribution of the activity.

Table 1. Distinctive Attributes of the Types of Serious Leisure*

Differentiating principle	Amateurs	Hobbyists	Volunteers
Motivation	1 Self-interest	1 Self-interest	1 Altruism; self-interest
	2 Public interest	2 Public interest	
	3 Altruism	3 Pecuniary interest	
	4 Pecuniary interest		
Institutional role	Near profession	Non-work	Delegated work
Contribution	1 Satisfaction	1 Satisfaction	1 Helping; satisfaction
	2 Cultural	2 Cultural	
	3 Helping	3 Commercial	
	4 Commercial		

* from Stebbins, 1992, p. 19

Stebbins acknowledges that some individuals may participate in a leisure activity for a short time or to a limited degree. He labels these individuals as dabblers or dilettantes and categorizes them separately from the above forms of serious leisure participants.

A Typology of Music Participants

J. Terry Gates (1991) modified Stebbins's scheme, adding an additional category of "recreationists" who expend a little more time and effort in a given leisure activity than do the dabblers (see Table 2). He differentiates between music participants, music audiences and the musically uninterested or uninvolved.

Table 2. A Typology of Music Participants in Societies

	View music as:	Are reinforced:
Professionals	work	In a P-A-P social system
Apprentices	work	In a P-A-P social system
Amateurs	serious leisure	
Hobbyists	serious leisure	Idiosyncratically; not reinforced primarily by a socio-musical system
Recreationists	play	Idiosyncratically; not reinforced primarily by a socio-musical system
Dabblers	play	Idiosyncratically; not reinforced primarily by a socio-musical system

*from Gates, 1991, p. 15

Gates is particularly concerned about individuals who may regard music activity as play and therefore may choose to discontinue involvement after a short time (drop out). He asserts that music researchers should explore "work/play/leisure" beliefs in order to satisfactorily understand why people participate in music making and in order to devise appropriate music-making experiences (1991, p. 17). He argues that if music educators could identify and accommodate all six types of music participants, then they would experience reduced attrition within their musical ensemble programs. Current practices largely adhere to the PAP system, which inevitably means that participants with lower levels of commitment will discontinue.

Educating for Lifelong Music Making

Judith Jellison (2000) is also concerned about keeping people involved in a lifelong pursuit of music making. She advocates that music educators should provide music experiences for young people that will be valued in adulthood. One of her strategies for facilitating the transition from school

music experiences to adult music making is having students interact with adult community music organizations, performing with adults in both school and community settings. She asserts that experiences for children need to approximate the experiences they will encounter as adults. Part of this effort would require that educators understand how adult learners differ from younger learners.

Although Malcolm Knowles (1968) did popularize the term "andragogy" in the United States to differentiate instruction designed for adults from "pedagogy" for children, andragogy is not so much a learning theory as it is a set of assumptions about adult learners. Brookfield (1986) offers six characteristics of adult learners, which incorporate and extend Knowles's list:

- adults learn throughout life as they negotiate life phase transitions
- adults display diversity in learning styles
- adults like problem-centered learning, germane to a specific life situation, and they desire some immediacy of application
- effective learning is linked to the adult's willingness to conceive of himself or herself as a learner
- prior experiences can help or hinder current learning
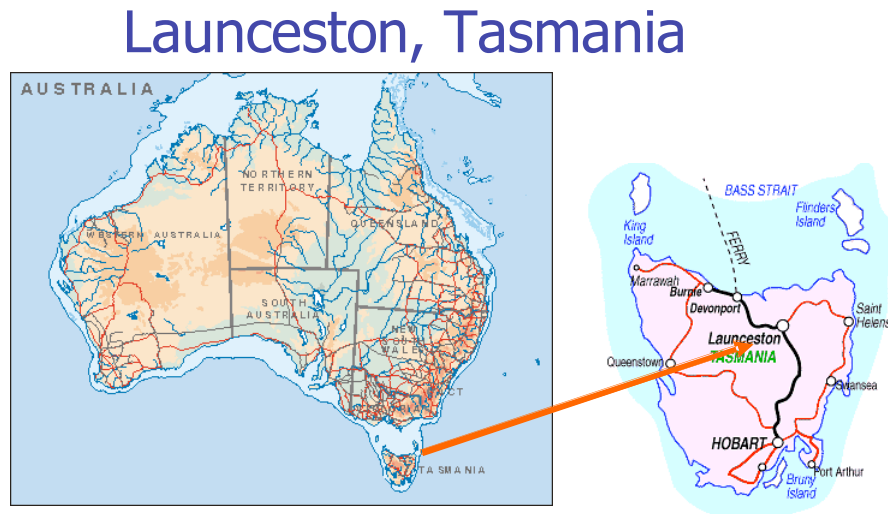- adults exhibit a tendency toward self-directedness in their learning. (p.31)

Self-directed learning, which has been acknowledged as more of a goal than a defining characteristic of adult learners (Brookfield, 1986), requires a redefinition of the role of a teacher, particularly in formal educational settings. This learner-centered perspective views the adult as a mutual

partner or the primary designer of his or her learning, as long as the adult feels competent or committed to the process. Adult learning is largely voluntary, requires mutual respect among learners, and is often collaborative.

Purpose of the Study

During the summer of 2000 I attended the International Society for Music Education's Community Music Commission meeting in Toronto and met Monte Mumford, Lecturer at the University of Tasmania and Director of the University of Tasmania Community Music Programme (UTCMP). Established in 1985, his organization spans six wind bands from beginners through advanced players. The bands are open to children and adults in the Launceston area (the population is approximately 100,000 inhabitants, see Figure 1). There is a fee for participation and some university-owned instruments are available for "hire" to individuals who are unable or unwilling to purchase an instrument. I was intrigued that he annually attracted adult novices and I arranged for a teaching exchange with him in the spring of 2002 so that I could observe his program firsthand. I had three purposes for the study: (a) to understand the structure of the program, (b) to understand the perspectives of these adult novice musicians, and (c) to examine this instance of adult learning through the theoretical lens of serious leisure.

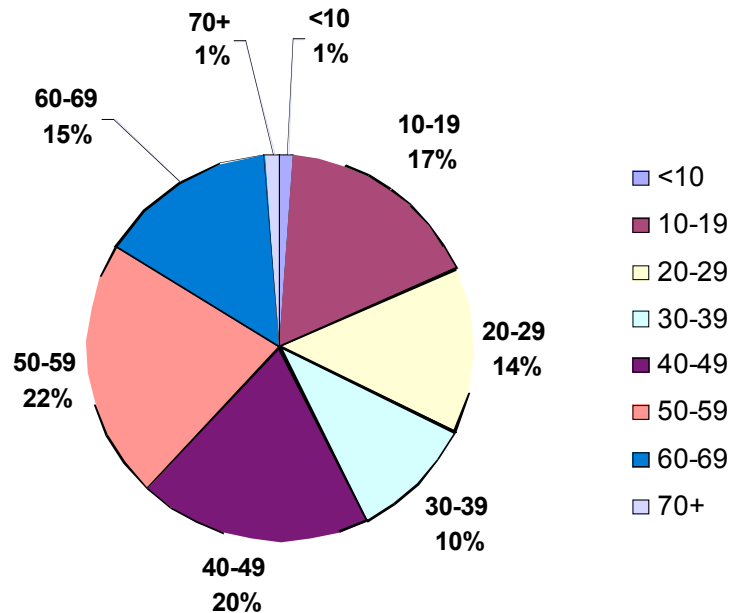*Figure 1. Maps of Australia and Tasmania*

Launceston, Tasmania

Method

I used three complementary forms of data collection: survey, participant observation, and an interview guide. Approximately 50% of the of program participants (n=90) completed a printed questionnaire, indicating the band (or bands) that they played in, as well as their number of years of participation, prior experience on an instrument, motivations for joining, and their goals. I observed the bands for 11 weeks, leading them from time to time as a conductor. Finally, I interviewed a dozen band members individually. Monte Mumford identified members that he felt would be comfortable being interviewed, and I narrowed the list to reflect an array of players with respect to age, gender, and proficiency (based on the band they played in). I used three questions to guide the interviews: (a) "How did you come to be a _____ (name of instrument) player?" (b) "What is it like being a musician?" and (c) "How do you make sense of it all? Why is it

meaningful?" These questions were developed to provide some consistency across interviewees while allowing them considerable freedom in describing their experiences. I recorded these interviews on audio tape using a portable cassette recorder, had the recordings transcribed by research assistants, and then verified the accuracy of the transcriptions by comparing the audio and text settings. I analyzed the transcripts to identify the themes that appear in the Results and Discussion section.

Participants

At the time of this study, the UTCMP provided musical instruction to 199 people (30 in the Beginning Band, 38 in the Development Band, 23 in the Intermediate Band, 43 in the Concert Band, 47 in the Symphonic Band and 38 in the Wind Orchestra). Nearly three-fourths of the members (74%) had started on their instrument in the program. Females outnumbered males 59% to 41%. Other research (Coffman & Schilf, 1998) affirms this finding that females are more likely to begin a band instrument as an adult. Twenty percent of the members rented university instruments. Approximately 9% of the members were categorized as youth (age 9-18), 28% were university students (referred to as "Uni" students in Tasmania), and the remainder (63%) were adults (defined as those individuals who have ended their initial formal schooling and have taken on adult social roles)—see Figure 2 for a more detailed breakdown of age groupings.

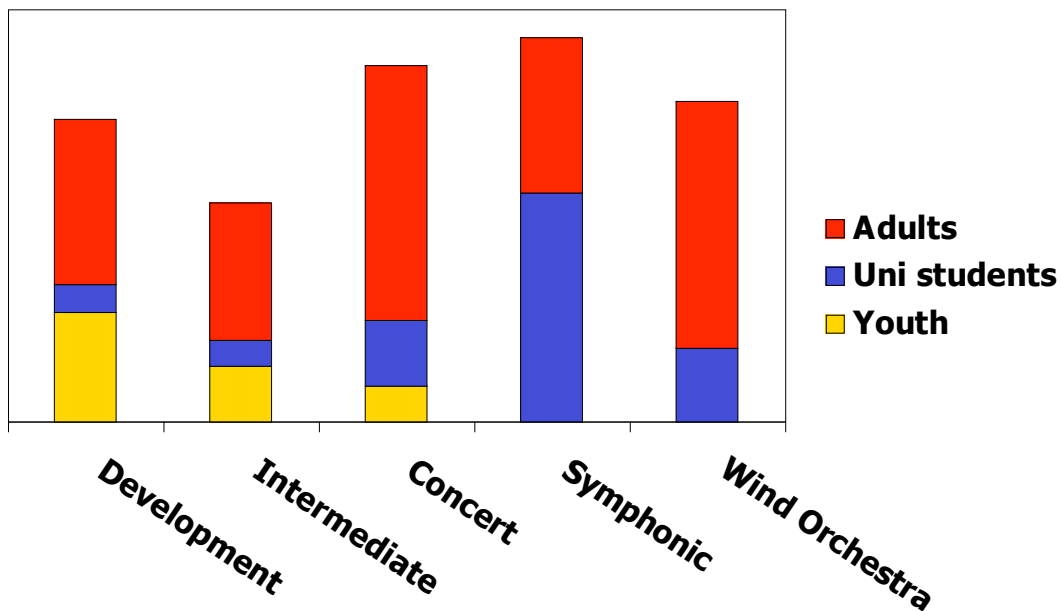*Figure 2. UTCMP Participants by Age (in years)*

The Program

UTCMP rehearsals occur on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday nights. The bands are hierarchically organized according to player proficiency, so the less proficient (and typically the younger) players appear in the lower ability bands (see Figure 3). Beginners meet in small groups of like instruments in various rooms of the music building on Mondays from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. At the same time, the Intermediate Band rehearses in a nearby rehearsal hall. The Symphonic Band rehearses from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. after the Intermediate Band rehearsal. On Tuesdays the Development Band meets in the rehearsal hall from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30, followed by the Concert Band (7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.). The Wind Orchestra meets on Wednesdays from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. As players develop proficiency they move through Beginning, Development and Intermediate Bands. An audition is required

for participating in the Concert Band, Symphonic Band, and Wind Orchestra. All bands prepare for three performances per semester. An optional week long Summer Music School is offered in early January (the middle of the Tasmanian summer) that provides a schedule of intensive rehearsals with internationally known guest conductors. The advanced ensembles have performed outside of Launceston, including trips to mainland Australia and New Zealand.

Figure 3. Age by UTCMP Band

A mixture of local professional music educators and advanced university undergraduate music education students provide the instruction. Instruction for members of the Beginning, Development, and Intermediate Bands is balanced between teaching ear training, musical concepts, technical skills, and performance literature. Each rehearsal begins with an intensive period

of modeling/ear training—instructors play melodic or rhythmic patterns on an instrument and band members echo the patterns on their instruments.[3] A heterogeneous band class method book is used to develop notation reading and instrument technique skills.[4] The Concert and Symphonic Bands do not use a band method book but do continue the ear training exercises.

The success of this program can be seen in it's longevity (now over 20 years) and in two former graduates of the UTCMP successfully replicating this "total learning community" concept in two other Tasmanian communities (Burnie and King Island). Participants also testify to the importance of the program, and these ideas are developed in the next section.
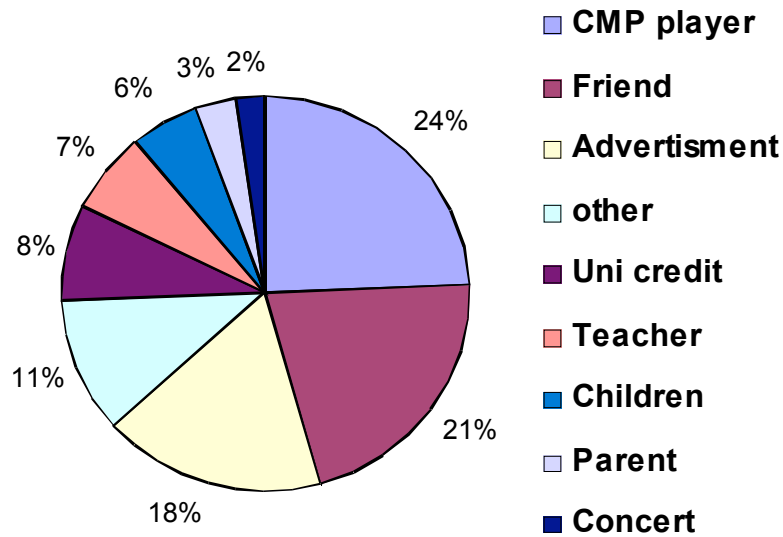
Results and Discussion

The interviewees can be typified as middle-aged (six in their 50s, four in their 40s, one in the 20s, one in the 60s), representative of the gender proportions of the program (eight females, four males), and varying in proficiency (two each from the Developing, Intermediate Band and Symphonic Bands and three each from the Concert Band and Wind Orchestra). Six players used UTCMP instruments and the other six owned their instruments. Concepts that appeared across interviews and questionnaires have been organized according to the three broad interview questions.

How did you come to be a _____ player?

I was surprised to hear six of the twelve interviewees respond that they came to play their instrument "by accident." These individuals came to the UTCMP desiring to learn an instrument but didn't already own an instrument, so they were depending on the UTCMP to provide an instrument for hire. The UTCMP allows newcomers to express a preference of instrument but instructors make the final assignment based on program needs for instrumentation balance and available instruments. These players ended up with an instrument that was either not their first choice or they had no particular preference. I was pleased to hear that all thoroughly enjoyed their instrument, despite receiving it by default, so to speak.

Family and friends significantly influenced participants' decisions to join. The survey data indicated that family and friends comprised over half (54%) of the respondents' reasons for joining (see Figure 4). People frequently commented that they were either inspired by a UTCMP participant ("if she can learn, so can I"), were recruited by a UTCMP participant, or decided with a friend to learn together. Others related that they got involved through their children (in short, after a period of years taking their children to the rehearsals they decided to join, too) or from the encouragement of parents. The UTCMP advertisements in the local paper also alerted a sizeable proportion of newcomers (18%). One other type of impetus was a change in lifestyle that created more discretionary time, such as retirement or the death of a spouse.

Figure 4. Impetus to Join the CMP

These comments were categorized under the theme of Access/Opportunity. This theme highlights the fact that potential participants often need the encouragement of others as well as some financial assistance to begin a new leisure activity. Reflecting on Gates's encouragement for music educators to provide experience for a broad range of music participants, particularly dabblers, I believe that the UTCMP's practice of loaning instruments is a successful strategy in supporting a full range of participants.

Another theme linked to this interview question emerged from comments subsequently organized within a Musical Background theme. Five respondents indicated that their parents (typically the mother) were musical. Two mentioned that while their parents weren't musical, their grandparents apparently were, although they had no memories of hearing their music—

one of these respondents felt that perhaps she was encouraged in her musical activities by her parents, who perhaps felt a void in their lives, while the other stated that he was hindered in pursuing music by his father. Eight of the interviewees had learned some piano as children (three continue to play frequently). I was intrigued by three pianists who mentioned that their motivation for learning a band instrument was so that they could play with other people; they described their piano practicing as a lonely endeavor, interspersed with periodic recitals or proficiency exams, and for one woman it was a rather dreary and intimidating experience due to a "knuckle rapping" nun who instructed her. The sense of isolation expressed by these pianists is congruent with Stebbins's (1992) description of solitary hobbyists, yet for these individuals, that activity was not sufficiently satisfying, even for those who have continued to play piano and enjoy it.

Other comments within this Musical Background theme described home environments where music was prevalent through recordings and school music instruction on the soprano recorder. The two individuals commenting on recorders felt that these were "dreadful" instruments and one woman lamented that her son was also struggling with learning the recorder at school, when he would rather learn drums or guitar or saxophone. I am reminded of Jellison's (2000) assertions that the way to facilitate the transition from school music activity to lifelong music making is to provide children with musical experiences that they will engage in as adults. These interviewees would apparently concur with her.

What is it like being a musician?

This probe generated a variety of issues, although most respondents were initially perplexed about how to respond. I extracted three themes from their comments: Emotional Response, Limitations, and Commitment.

Examples of the Emotional Response include the importance of making sounds with others. For some individuals the enveloping, aggregate sound of the ensemble resulted in positive responses:

"It's a buzz…Certainly nothing I thought existed. I never realized what people went on about when they said there's music inside music. It's like being on a rollercoaster or something. It's actually an adrenalin rush to me. To feel the whole thing lift. It's musical but not just a musical experience."

"I'm surrounded by it. You're just inside it and you're giving to the music."

"It's engrossing. I'd like to have been twenty and go on to it—I would've made a game of it and chased it around for the rest of my life perhaps."

"It's like breathing."

"It sounded like singing from your heart." [the French horn] "It sounded like water." [the flute]

Other emotional response comments dwelt on negative emotions, specifically nervousness:

> "It's pretty stressful…probably because you're trying something new—your ego is a bit more fragile."

Some of the developing players mentioned that they hesitated to audition for the higher-level bands because they were nervous about going through that process.

These negative emotions overlapped with other comments that I categorized as Limitations. All interviewees were enthusiastic about playing their instruments, but most alluded to some struggles. They frequently mentioned regret about not being able to practice as much as they felt they should— most aspired to practice daily but many confessed to periodically not practicing at all outside of band rehearsals. Tasmania is an isolated part of the world, and players expressed some frustration in securing instruments (e.g., one individual ordered a trombone and the supplier mistakenly shipped it to Tanzania), music, and instructors on their specific instruments. Tasmania is also comparatively less prosperous than other parts of Australia, and musical equipment and supplies are proportionately more expensive.

Despite these Limitations, players uniformly expressed strong Commitment statements about their musical activity. While the interviewees typically felt that their playing was not very good, they all aspired to improve. Ten percent of the UTCMP participants play in multiple bands while others play in other bands in the Launceston area, which means multiple nights of

rehearsal during the week. One woman undergoes weekly chiropractic treatments so that she can continue to play her instrument. Two individuals in their 50s and 60s had decided to intensively study music by pursing Bachelor degrees at the University of Tasmania—they were not looking to have professional careers, rather they just wished to learn as much as they could.

The ideas emerging from these comments partially align with Stebbins's (1992) descriptions of the PAP system—the UTCMP has Professionals interacting with Amateurs to present Public performances. Yet, I believe that the "amateur" label does not quite describe these participants' views of themselves. While they exhibited many of the traits and activities that Stebbins delineates (especially in the areas of commitment, systematization, and regimentation) and they are clearly "lovers" of music (the Latin meaning of the word), the only individuals I observed who aspired to move "up" in this PAP system were the handful of university students who were preparing to become professional music educators.

How do you make sense of it all? Why is it meaningful?

From the 90 questionnaires and 12 interviews I encountered only one individual who was ambivalent about group music making (he was equally happy playing his instrument alone). For the remainder, the reason they were involved in the UTCMP was to make music with others, and I categorized these comments under a Community theme. For them music making was inherently a social activity, and most players mentioned both aspects in the same breath, so to speak. Participants found a profound sense

of community within their respective bands (what Stebbins refers to as an ethos):

> "It's so supportive…we're all in the same boat…The band brought me out of a black hole, when I thought I'd lost the plot…It gave me something to aim for."

They also expressed a sense of contributing to a larger community beyond the UTCMP:

> "Our experience is a gathering for rehearsals punctuated by concerts. Getting out and into the community and playing for somebody also gives it more reason for existing—makes it more of a community band."

Conclusions

Participants in the UTCMP display perhaps all of the attributes of serious leisure proposed by Stebbins (1992). Their beliefs and activities have an aspect of necessity, obligation, perseverance, and a strong identification. Participants report benefits that are similar to Stebbins's durable benefits. The program could be considered a model for Jellison's (2000) call for intergenerational groups that foster lifelong learning in music, and it embodies elements of andragogy, particularly relying on adults' willingness to conceive of themselves as learners.

Identifying a successful music program that largely conforms to the PAP system does not refute Gates's (1991) assertion that music educators should develop more experiences for musical dabblers and recreationists. Some of the UTCMP participants could be viewed within these categories, because some players confessed to doing very little playing outside of the weekly rehearsals.

Nevertheless, I believe that the UTCMP illustrates a way for music educators to reach individuals in a manner that embraces Gates's ideas within a PAP system. I believe that a key element of the UTCMP is in providing beginning instruction to individuals with no musical experience. Most community music groups expect participants to have experience, which is obviously a barrier to novices, dabblers, and dilettantes. The UTCMP's instructional plan allows participants to begin and progress at their own pace. Another influential aspect is the low cost entrance to participation through the hiring of instruments, which probably allows some potential dropouts (dabblers and recreationists) enough time and experience to successfully continue.

The UTCMP is not unique—other musical organizations exist that have an educational as well as performance orientation, such as the New Horizons International Music Association (Coffman & Levy, 1997; Ernst & Emmons, 1992). Nonetheless, it exemplifies a successful approach to fulfilling our need for serious leisure.

References

Brookfield, S. (1986). *Understanding and facilitating adult learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Coffman, D. D. & Schilf, P. (1998). *Band instrument gender associations by senior citizen musicians.* Paper presented at the Southeastern Music Education Symposium, Athens, GA.

Coffman, D. D., & Levy, K. M. (1997, November). Senior adult bands: Music's new horizon. *Music Educators Journal, 84*(3), 17-22.

Ernst, R. E. & Emmons, S. (1992, December). New horizons for senior adults. *Music Educators Journal,* 79(4), 30-34.

Gates, J. T. (1991). Music participation: Theory, research, and policy. *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, 109,* 1-35.

Jellison, J. (2000). How can all people continue to be involved in meaningful music education? In C. K. Madsen (Ed.), *Vision 2020: The Housewright symposisum on the future of music education* (pp. 109-137). Reston, VA: MENC—The National Association for Music Education.

Kaplan, M. (1960) *Leisure in America.* New York: Wiley.

Knowles, M. S. (1968). Andragogy, not pedagogy. *Adult Leadership, 16,* 350-352, 386.

Stebbins R., (1992). *Amateurs, professionals, and serious leisure.* Montreal & Kingston, Canada: McGill-Queens University Press.

U.S. Census Bureau (2000). *Aging in the Americas into the XXI century.* Retrieved May 23, 2005 from http://www.census.gov/ipc/prod/ageame.pdf

Notes:

[1] U.S Census Bureau web press release Older Americans Month Celebrated in May

[2] Stebbins lists eight durable benefits that can be realized through serious leisure activity: self-actualization, self-enrichment, recreation, renewal, a sense of accomplishment, enhanced self-image, tangible physical products, social interactions, and self-gratification. These last two benefits are benefits of casual leisure as well.

[3]The aim of the ear training is to develop ear-to-hand coordination and a conception of tonality based on the Circle of 4ths principles presented in Edward S. Lisk's *The Creative Director* (Meredith Music Publications, 1991).

[4] Bruce Pearson's *Standard of Excellence Comprehensive Band Method* (Neil A. Kjos Music Company, 1993).

Don Coffman **is Professor and Head of Music Education at the University of Iowa. E-mail: don-coffman@uiowa.edu**