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## **Music, Leadership and the Inner Work of Art**

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"The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils."

William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

Music and leadership are rarely considered side-by-side, much less as integral aspects of a more comprehensive way of understanding human thought and human action. But that is exactly what we will pursue in this chapter, the possibility that both music and transformational leadership shape and are shaped by similar patterns of human experience and human energy, that the best leaders display a certain “musicality” that distinguishes them from others, and that actual musical expressions, skillfully facilitated, can be employed to tap and evoke significant aspects of the leadership experience and help to unveil its mysteries. In other words, our leadership can be enhanced by recognizing and drawing

upon our aesthetic make-up. To turn our opening quotation from Shakespeare around, the best leaders have “music in themselves” that moves them to think and to act, engaging emotion, imagination, and will. If this is the case, then locating and bringing forth the aesthetic element of leadership can be extremely helpful in the practice of leadership.

What is it that transformational leaders do that causes others to follow? Our answer to this question is simple: we think that the best leaders *connect with us emotionally in a way that energizes us and moves us to act*. Transformational leadership engages others in a very special way, touching elements of desire, commitment, and possibility that are deeply seated in the inner lives of potential followers. In addition, these leaders provide the assurance that we often need to pursue important values. Transformational leadership is about change, and change involves bringing new energy to bear on important, and often shifting human values. Leaders facilitate a reshaping of human energy, restructuring the narratives of human experience and bringing alive a new progression of possibilities, even in spite of ambiguity, complexity, and uncertainty (Denhardt and Denhardt 2005).

Interestingly, this is similar to the role of music in our lives. Music connects with us emotionally, communicating a certain energy that resonates with one or another emotional state. It touches us physically, emotionally, even spiritually and primes us for what might be called *a feeling-based exploration* of our personal condition. In this way, music relaxes us, assures us, consoles us, inspires us, excites us or calms us as its rhythms and harmonies interact with our own. In a very real way, we are *moved* from wherever we might have been to a new condition, noticeably more in tune with something we value, and definitely a couple of notches removed from any of our default states. The music’s progressions and transitions – its changes in harmony, melody and rhythm -- become progressions and transitions in our own feeling states and, indeed, over time we are primed for analogous progressions in other aspects of our lives, more or less at ease with complexity, dissonance, ambiguity, dramatic emotion and more.

It's easy to think of music as a metaphor for leadership. For example, many have illustrated leadership by reference to the role of an orchestra conductor or the leader of a jazz ensemble. To this point, Denhardt argues that leaders are rarely able to write and conduct a "symphony" that others play. More often they are called on to be fully integrated into the performance themselves, to play along with others, like the leader of a jazz ensemble improvising a tune. "By establishing the theme, the leader of the ensemble . . . can chart the basic pattern and direction in which the performance will move. By setting the tone and the tempo, the leader gives focus to the spirit and energy of the group. By modeling effective and responsible performance in their own solos, leaders can energize and articulate the performance of others. But it is the performance of others that is critical" (Denhardt 1993, 180-181).

More importantly, leaders confront many of the same issues faced by musicians and do so in ways that go beyond metaphorical parallels. For example, leaders, like musicians, are concerned with rhythm and timing, and leaders can learn a great deal about rhythm and timing from musicians. We understand that groups and organizations have rhythmic patterns that organize the experience of those in the group. We understand the different cycles of group life and the varying pace at which different groups work. Many have experienced what happens when a group accustomed to a particular rhythm in their work gets a new "boss," someone with a completely different rhythm, typically resulting in chaos and frustration. And there is the matter of improvisation: leaders, like musicians, often improvise (though they rarely think of their work in this way), and can certainly learn the basics of improvisation from musicians (see Denhardt and Denhardt, 2005).

For this reason, we think the relationship between music and leadership is not just metaphorical but far more intimate. Both music and leadership are concerned with shaping human energy, with energizing people and encouraging them to new horizons. Both are concerned with summoning things into existence, with enlivening and deepening the human endeavor. In this way, both music and

leadership participate in the same philosophical tradition, not the tradition of physical or empirical thought, not even in the tradition of social or political thought. (Indeed, we have often been misled by efforts to categorize both music and leadership in these ways.) *Rather, music and leadership are both better situated in the tradition of aesthetic thought, that field of study concerned with the exploration of mind, body, and spirit in relation to art, beauty, and imagination – the world of possibility and potential.*

We will explore this contention in greater detail. But first, by way of introduction, we should make another point – that recently a new field of practice has emerged which builds on the ideas we have just laid out, indeed employing music as a modality of exploration and interface with leadership and its companions, creativity and resilience. Although there is likely no single originator of the arts in the corporate sector and consequently no particular date we can mark as the birthday of the field, the early 1990s saw the emergence of a handful of practitioners from several disciplines doing new and experimental work in organizations. Percussionists gathered executives in drum circles to experience synchrony, collaboration and listening as never before. Senior Fellow in Creativity and Innovation, Stan Gryskiewicz, at the Center for Creative Leadership, brought in jazz musicians to demonstrate improvisation in communities of practice. Consultants such as Michael Jones and John Kao sat down at the piano and merged their speaking careers with spontaneous performances from the keyboard. Acting companies brought Shakespeare into the board room and visual artists, including Cheryl De Ciantis, also at the Center for Creative Leadership, developed activity modules for executives working with clay and other sculpted materials to create tangible expressions of their personal missions. Creative Leaps International entered the scene in 1991 with “Concerts of Ideas” designed to spark new thinking and accelerate discussion of leadership issues. The marvelous thing about this cluster of years was that no one knew what anyone else was doing. Each emergence was spontaneous and independent, an experiment that seemed right for the times.

In the decade that followed, the practice proliferated rapidly across the USA and Europe. Violinist Miha Pogacnik from Slovenia convened the first European Arts and Business Summit at Castle Borl in his home country, the castle, incidentally, being the ancestral home of Percival's father and the famous Grail Quest. Conductors Benjamin Zander and Roger Nierenberg began their extraordinary work from the podium, inviting corporate groups right into the orchestra to witness the dynamics of precision teamwork in a mighty symphony. The Orpheus Chamber Ensemble, a conductorless orchestra, turned the leadership model on its head, demonstrating leadership as something that could emerge from a finely attuned, dedicated group of professionals. It is a field which is still growing, and still an amazingly well kept secret to many, but we would not be surprised if in the next decade it occupied the mainstream of leadership, organization, and innovation.

In the pages that follow, we examine music and leadership as richly interwoven aspects of an encompassing aesthetic tradition. We share stories from the field demonstrating this inter-relationship and seek a glimpse of the underlying stream which nurtures and drives both passionate endeavors.

## I.

### Leadership

In exploring leadership and music together, it is perhaps wise for us to identify the particular meaning we associate with the idea of transformational leadership, as not every school of leadership lends itself equally well to the assertions we are making tying leadership to the aesthetic tradition. Leadership for us is not associated with positions or power, but rather with the act of leading. The one who leads is not necessarily the king, the queen, the boss or the manager, but anyone who energizes others in a group, an organization or a society. Leadership is not the result of hierarchical position but of a human relationship between the potential leader and potential followers that results in the

energizing effect of leadership. Further, this leadership effect is not to *direct* followers to do something but to *engage* with them in such a way that the full potential of the group is brought to bear on the choice of its future activities. While "management" may be concerned with agency and desired outcomes, transformational leadership is more concerned with creating a narrative that portrays the group's future and compels movement in that direction. In this, the leader doesn't exert power or control, but is more concerned with facilitating an ongoing dialogue that enables participants to explore possible values they might pursue, and, when they find those values compelling, to act in their pursuit. In this way of thinking, leadership is less about "getting things done" and more about developing meaning, insight, and choice.

Within this way of working, the potential leader must be keenly perceptive of the dynamics, traditions and structures native to a particular group. He or she must engage the group at its own tempo, in its own language and via its own mechanisms, channels and structures. This is careful, measured, and intuitive work. It means living and working with large helpings of ambiguity, shifting and often competing perspectives, and the full panorama of human emotions, virtues and frailties. Like the artist, the potential leader must excel at seeing "what is" in all its complexity and richness of context in order, gradually and painstakingly, to envision "what might be." Like the artist, the potential leader must assimilate the structures, boundaries and limits of the field of action, the better to know its potential for renovation, renewal and creativity. The artist uses boundaries and limitations as springboards for innovation. "Every force evolves a form," said Mother Ann Lee, one of the founders of the Shakers in upstate New York. The leader, like the artist, must sense this in his or her bones.

The particular breed of leadership dialogue capable of birthing a group's emergent narrative is both time-intensive and time-sensitive. It is necessarily an affair of great patience, subtlety and skill. It is almost always more about listening than it is about speaking, and more about feeling than it is about reasoning. The heartbeat of the group, its rhythm of breathing in and breathing out – these are the life

signs of greatest interest to leader. The leader's interventions must be timed just so, on the in-take, the breath inward, yes, exactly on the beat, a perfect inspiration. The leader here is artist personified, music maker, evoker of new visions and stories.

There are dozens of exciting tales emanating from the new world of leadership and the arts working in concert which illustrate the potency of such arts-fired thinking. *As a touchstone for discussions, for breaking through to new understandings, for bringing a community together in whole-hearted reflection – the arts are being called upon as never before.* Here is the first of three short tales of the arts in the public and private sectors:

In April of 2007, Michael Gold was asked to present his Jazz Impact program to a gathering of IBM's thought leaders at their world headquarters in Armonk, New York. They were gathering to explore the relationship between transformational leadership, creativity, risk and innovation and seeking a touchstone experience for their discussions.

Jazz Impact held appeal for a number of reasons. First, jazz is an art form based in the essentials of collaborative transformation: generative growth, integrating change and the ability to sustain innovation. Secondly, jazz musicians know how to work with ambiguity, how take action despite uncertainty, and how to challenge the status quo. Finally, the Jazz Impact group promised a collaborative style learning experience tied to the challenges of complexity and accelerated change.

When the executives entered the meeting space, they were, of course, surprised to see a jazz ensemble- piano, upright bass, small drum kit and alto saxophone. Before any words were spoken, the musicians engaged them with their music, prompting their minds in a way entirely unexpected. Incoming information in the form of music was captured and stored as *somatic experience*, coded into the body's senses and feeling states with the result of intensifying its capacity for recall. Longer recall would also facilitate the possibility of integrating this new experience with deeply seated existing

knowledge. But no one in the audience was aware of this at the time. They were fascinated just listening and this was good.

When the piece ended, Gold engaged the 25 participants in a simple polyrhythmic exercise of clapping opposing rhythms and singing a simple melody. The intent was to push their processing away from the rubric of handouts, power-point and analytic monologue. Bit by bit, they got into it. Over the next two hours, the model of the jazz ensemble would push them further still, helping them to frame discussions of organizational dynamics difficult to address in ordinary language. Jazz, however, provided the perfect vehicle because it was made of the same stuff -- our key point.

Gold placed the executives in what he likes to call “liminal” situations and challenged them to work creatively and collaboratively. The term “liminal” refers to the threshold between what we *do* and *do not* understand. In jazz, as in life, we are constantly moving back and forth across that threshold. Just so, we discover new knowledge, and via the cognitive process known as *transfer*, we integrate our new knowledge with our existing knowledge. The most useful integrations, (those actually facilitating transformational change) take place only when our new knowledge has been retained in a deep and meaningful way -- and for long enough periods -- to allow transfer to happen. This is why the *experiential and somatic aspects of musical engagement*, and jazz in particular, as well as other art forms if done correctly, are so important. They have the durability and potency to serve as catalysts for shifting our perspectives and our organizational cultures towards new states, and potentially more flexible and sustainably innovative states.

For example, when an ensemble is playing jazz successfully, we say that it “swings”. Lovers of jazz will tell us this happens when the boundaries among the players and their roles appear to dissolve. We might say that leadership and support flow spontaneously among them. How can there be such clarity of shared intent, such collaborative definition of ideas, such momentum and passion all without a score? In fact, there is a score; but it is not a literal one. The score is internalized by each of the



musicians and works as a set of minimal guidelines for working towards, achieving and then creatively sustaining the incredible balance that is “swing”. In jazz, as in leadership, the goal is the process, not the score, *the process of finding and sustaining a high-functioning dynamic balance*.

As we learn to look and listen more deeply, we discover that the process that is jazz is based on an ability to embrace ambiguity, interdependence, inner-directedness and an appreciation of unique ideas. The Jazz Impact program created a safe, novel environment in which participants could explore these qualities *as experience* and then discuss their correlations to leadership and management challenges. Participants were also treated to an entertaining and visceral experience of risk and a way to speak about the tensions inherent in risk. *Risk was an interplay* of the challenges of personal performance and our quietly grounded self-acceptance – and they could see this at work in the musicians before them. They could also see *authenticity* in these musicians, the *sine qua non* of leadership bound up in the experience of trust. Taken together, the collected insights set the stage for a fresh grasp of *creativity, leadership, risk and trust being applied in any innovative collaboration*, reminding us as well that each of us plays a key role in sustaining or derailing that creativity on a daily basis.

#### Interlude: “Music and the Inner Work of Art”

What is the “inner work of art”? There’s nothing like a little paradox to start our wheels spinning. Is it the *inner work* of art? Or the *inner work of art*? What are we talking about here? Blended meanings, ambiguity, holding two competing perspectives in mind at the same time – this sounds like a day in our board room. Let’s examine the layers one by one.

Firstly, *the inner work of art* points to that “inner work” compelled by the experience of beauty, all the many ways in which the art experience stimulates and sharpens our senses, refines our perceptions and tempers our reflective thought. This is “inner work” *par excellence* and by any standard. Secondly, it points to the ‘self’ as a potential work of art, (as in “the inner work of art is the self”) how we can direct our creative talents inward, literally to re-shape our sense of *who we are*. Just as an artist gives shape and form to a new work of art, we can choose to create not just a new self-image, but new and real self essences, consciously crafting and authoring the story of “us” and our trajectory in the world. “I know very well who I am”, said Don Quixote, “and who I can be, if I choose.” This is the transformative power of imagination at work: (a) to sharpen the acuity of mind and senses (the *inner work of art*), and (b) to give new definition to our boundaries of self and our place in the world (the *inner work of art*).

In the case of music, we are refining our listening processes, making the experience of music more conscious, more active, and more dimensional. Instead of listening passively, we learn to listen actively, attentive not only to what’s happening in the music, but what’s happening within us: how we are feeling, what we might be seeing, sensing or remembering internally. The music is coupling synesthetically with our other senses, and as we are adding *synesthetic dimension* to our listening process, we are quite literally engaging more of our brain matter in the listening experience. Listening in this way, *integrates* listening more comprehensively into the unified flow of all our mental and emotional processes. Instead of functioning as an isolated sensory channel, listening moves to the *supra-modal* level and is joined into the core of our unified selves.

Leaders and artists alike, both by inclination and necessity, endeavor to attune themselves to experiences carrying the potential for transformation. They seek ideas and experiences that are rich in inflection points, changes of key and shifts of perspective. They are all about orchestrating change,

subtly or dramatically, and have acquired a kind of sixth sense for things that *move* us. Moving us, after all, is what leadership and artistry are all about. Music is particularly powerful in this realm and, can reach far beyond the mundane. Like beauty, it can journey swiftly to the center of our beings, maneuvering agilely through the wondrous tangle of feeling and sense imagery that lines the way. Indeed, beauty often stops us in our tracks, not because of any personal decision we may have made, but because we are brought to an experience of awe before something that connects with us in some ultimate way. Gregory Bateson referred to this connection as a moment of *aesthetic recognition*, a powerful moment of suddenly recognizing “the pattern which connects” you, in your deepest nature, to that which has inspired your awe. (see Bateson, 1979) We experience joy, rapture, hope. We may even weep, but we are called forcibly into our lives, into a deeper knowing of ourselves, and our connection with the world. Just so, beauty transforms us, and art – that playful, potent *inner work of art* -- becomes life! (see Cimino, 1993)

## II.

### Creativity

As we mentioned earlier, both music and leadership are concerned with summoning things into existence, with enlivening and deepening the human endeavor. This is, of course, the realm of creativity. But how does it happen, what primes us for the act of creation, and what is the price of admission?

To begin with, creativity demands a level of mastery in a domain. Before one can be creative upon the violin, for example, one needs to learn quite a lot about it, and not just “about it,” one must, in

truth, “learn the violin.” This means acquiring the arduous technique essential to playing music upon it. And more than that, it means learning to play lots of music upon it *very well*. “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” You know the old refrain, “Practice, practice, practice!” Ten thousand hours at a minimum, say the great teachers and also the neuroscientists these days. Moreover, the great artists are not only masters of their technique, they are vulnerable before their art. They learn to risk everything, to go right to the edge of what is possible, and then just a bit farther, breathing life and their own life’s blood into their creations and performances.

Creativity is clearly *transformative* for the artist. It is also transformative for the leader, and anyone who harnesses himself or herself to the task. Its demand for mastery is matched only by its demands for self-knowledge, risk-taking, passion, constant challenge and stimulation. Creativity is fed by imagination, by new experiences and new connections. Priming the mind for creativity means activating its capacities for connectivity and meaning-making -- connectivity in the realm of ideas, most certainly, but also in the realm of sensation. We must literally *come to our senses* in order to tap our creativity, senses both external and internal, sight both through the eye and in the Mind’s Eye. “As a Man is, so he Sees,” says the poet Blake. “As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers.” Relentless attention to this formation and transformation of the self – the constant making and re-making of the eye, the mind and the senses -- is the artist’s and leader’s price of admission to the domain of creativity.

And as they look inward, they must also look outward to the world and its systems, structures, forms and limits. The form, the genre, be it a sonnet or multi-national corporation, is the grounding bedrock for the creative impulse. Whatever is possible or emergent, will be born from this bed. Creativity is thus counter-balanced by that which is fixed. The fixed inspires restlessness, tension, irritation, and is springboard and point of departure for the imagination. The leader and the artist must be students of the world, the better to serve as vectors and catalysts for its future. The leader’s dialogue with a group is precisely this: *an exploration of existing values and commitments, and a*

*simultaneous and mutual process of building possibilities for the future.* Like the artist, the transformational leader is mid-wife to the “not yet,” bringing into concert the existing and the imagined, the mundane and the exciting, the old and the new.

Vision inward and wonder outward are, therefore, the *sine qua non* of transformation. Leaders and artists must be dedicated to this discipline: that knowledge of the world and self-knowledge are each critical and ultimately inseparable. This next story is about the quest for self-knowledge, the quest for vision and transformation in the lives of leaders and their companies. Music becomes the guide for a deep exploration:

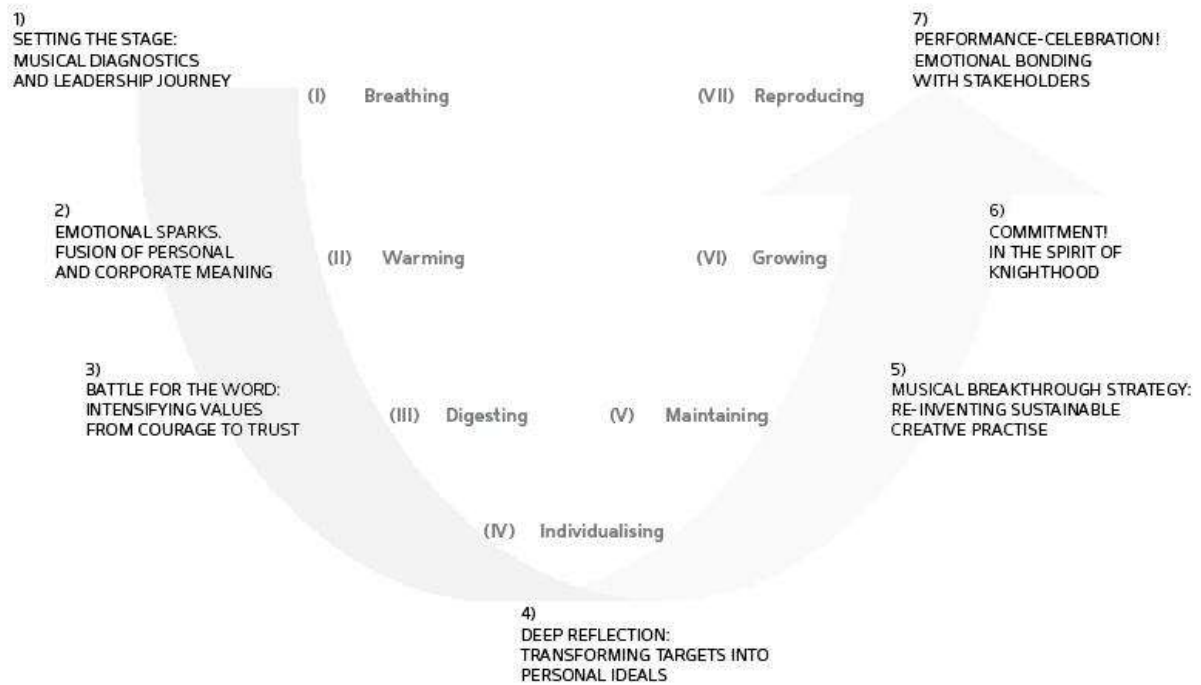
Miha Pogacnik is a concert violinist, entrepreneur and cultural ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia. In the past 20 years he has worked with the leadership of more than 100 world brand companies delving into the life force and inspiration of classical music masterpieces. Why? “Because they are archetypal, profoundly inspired higher productions of nature gone through the genius of the composer's individuality.” OK, one might say. Perhaps that’s a good thing. But where’s the connection to leadership? Miha’s answer is as straight as an arrow and just as penetrating. “Is not your life or your organization a potential masterpiece? This life-long, unfinished product, with which we are all more or less consciously engaged?” Miha Pogacnik is absolutely convinced that music, consciously experienced and keenly observed, offers us an ideal learning field for the exploration of what he calls “the biographical masterpiece.” The musical masterpieces, he says, are chock full of revelations about those moments of life when we have to puzzle our way through a maze of difficulties, perhaps seeing the truth of ourselves in the mirror or learning something new that may change us or steeling our resolve to take charge and act with courage. He calls this approach “a productive, sustainable leadership learning DETOUR” as powerful as it is unconventional.

Miha's language is direct, impassioned and immediate. In any given minute, he is speaking, playing heroically on his violin and drawing furiously on his easel pad. The music *lives* in him and moves like a barely controlled tornado into our own portals of awareness. This is no ordinary consultant performing his shtick. This is an artist – the real thing. And transformation is his game.

Miha's method and process follow a pattern. First comes the music – the experience. Then comes the interdisciplinary psychological insight derived from the experience. He literally “de-composes” the music, offering us the opportunity to dive with him into the processes of meaning-making, the evolution of meaning and the musical patterns emerging through the hands of the violinist. At the end, we are stunned and exhilarated, but there in front of us is the architecture of the musical masterpiece arisen as a totality -- a “brand”, an identity – perhaps your own or your company's.

Have you ever “heard” a Kandinsky, he says, the “musicality” of the painting turning eyes into ears? Or “heard” a pyramid when standing in awe beneath it? Some would call this an experience of *synesthesia*. For Miha and for us as well, it points intriguingly to something deeper. Not merely a refraction of sensory experience from one modality to another, but rather something a couple of levels beneath or above, what the neuroscientists call a *supra-modal recognition* of a pattern alive in both – in the hearing, in the seeing -- and in our selves too, a pattern, in fact, connecting us to the very thing before which we stand in awe. This resonance startles us, providing an experience we would call (after Bateson) a moment of *aesthetic recognition*. This, by the way, is precisely the moment Miha, in all his genius, is urging us towards: the recognition – *the aesthetic recognition* – that our organizations, our personal life-dramas and all intricate human relations are alive and echoing with the same archetypal patterns we find embedded in the great masterpieces of art and music. And to enter into those masterpieces is to enter into ourselves, into our deep natures, and potential for growth. We too, says Miha, can be emerging masterpieces, and our organizations “masterpieces of meaning!”

In leading participants through this process, Miha takes the journey with them, a journey he describes as corresponding pretty well with Otto Scharmer’s “Theory U” of transformational change. (see Scharmer, 2007) Inspired by Scharmer’s work, Miha has adapted Otto’s famous diagram to his musical context.



In the first stage, the essential issues of the client’s change agenda are identified with a musical theme, perhaps the subject of a Fugue. Then, with the aid of his easel pad, Miha sketches the stages of archetypal biography in relation to the maturation of various leadership styles. This in-take of information and sensation, he likens to the act of “breathing”. Next, comes his “warming” stage where participants gather in small groups for conversation, reflection and sharing. The third stage is alive with more music - themes in opposition, intensifying, musical ideas traced to their origins. And likewise, the elements of the change agenda – values in opposition, intensifying and traced to their origins. Participants begin to see the outline of a kind of scaffolding leading toward “detoxification” and change. The moment is now ripe for independent, personal reflection, a retreat into our individual worlds to

notice subtle shifts in our feelings and perspectives. This fourth stage is called “Individualizing” and is typically scheduled through the lunch hour. The fifth stage commences immediately thereafter with a torrent of Miha energy flowing from his violin as he re-caps the interplay of opposition and intensification and demonstrates how a magnificent culmination can develop out of very simple elements. He likens this to each person’s individual practice of personal mastery – simple elements again culminating in something extraordinary. The sixth and penultimate stage is the crucial growing stage. This is when we shape our resolve and strengthen our commitment to work steadfastly at the change agenda – to never give up. He calls this “the spirit of knighthood,” a re-dedication to our purified and more clearly understood values. The final stage is a grand celebration with colleagues, family and clients and a festive re-telling of the day’s adventure. The learnings are shared, passed along, “reproduced”. And at the end of the day, what has changed? What has changed is that work-in-progress that lives within us, that emerging potential masterpiece we call the self. No power points, no bullets, lists or formulas: just one sustaining insight, that this inner masterpiece is ours to create and we can see glimpses of it, glimpses of ourselves, in the great works of music and art.

### III.

#### Resilience

One of the most important messages that music and leadership impart is their effect on the resilience of the human endeavor. Music has a special relationship to healing and restoration. In times of crisis or disaster, music can soothe the soul and restore the spirit. It can bring us back from the edge of chaos and energize us for future struggles, often making us stronger than we were in the beginning. For individuals, music can perform a therapeutic function; for communities music can perform a restorative function. What we have here called “the inner work of art” is a peek at *how* music enters,



engages and transforms our feeling selves. The progressions and transitions in the music spark progressions and transitions in our feeling states. Fresh energy courses through us, reconditioning and revalidating us. Music helps us recover.

Interestingly, when music is experienced in certain novel or unexpected circumstances, taking us by surprise and perhaps off-guard, the effect can be that of a mild stressor, what psychologist and creativity expert Stan Gyskiewicz has called “positive turbulence.” This level of stress does not trigger a fight or flight response or anything approaching anxiety, but merely causes us to notice things freshly and with slightly heightened emotions, making the moment more vivid, more memorable. Imagine a slightly larger than average wave rocking your boat, the scenery shifts in your perspective, your spell of quiescence is broken, the moment feels new, and, in the aftermath, you are also inoculated against the stress of similar disturbances in the future. (see Gyskiewicz, 1999)

We are coming to understand that resilience plays an important role in transformational leadership. Groups, organizations, and communities suffer unexpected stresses and even disasters on occasion. (Indeed, some are now saying that change is constant and stability the exception.) Under these conditions, leaders and their groups more than ever must be able to bounce back not just to their previous state, but to a position that is “better than before.” Experience in dealing with turbulence and the unexpected can actually better prepare groups for a resilient response. Though positive turbulence is most often a natural occurrence, Gyskiewicz has prescribed it in any number of forms to individuals and organizations around the globe as a strategy for building resilience in the face of more serious stressors. ‘Whatever doesn’t kill us makes us stronger,’ or so the saying goes. You may or may not subscribe to this more extreme approach to character building. But positive turbulence is far from extreme and has proven a boon not only to organizational resilience, but to organizational learning, opening companies to new and unexpected sources of innovation. Leaders today must be at the ready for what might be called *high adaptation*, that is, for not simply doing things better than before, but

doing new things and doing them differently. Our final story is a story of resilience. The scene is *Katrina* New Orleans:

“People were lifted to a place of hope and peace they had not dared to imagine for some 24 long months,” wrote Laura Olson, research scientist at the George Washington University Institute for Crisis, Disaster and Risk Management. Olson had put her finger precisely on the turn-key issue: the loss of imagination. *Daring to imagine*, we suggest, is at the crux of the life impulse, and it was precisely this which seemed impossible to members of the Southeast Louisiana Chapter of the American Red Cross nearly two years after Hurricane Katrina had ravaged their beloved New Orleans. How to rebuild their spirits? How to rekindle hope and possibility for getting back on track for the new hurricane season just a couple of months away? The SELA Chapter of the Red Cross had itself been decimated, members losing their own homes and loved ones to the storm. They had pushed themselves beyond the breaking point, working for others, neglecting themselves.

Three groups were brought in to help SELA and its people put itself back together: The George Washington University Institute for Crisis, Disaster and Risk Management; the James MacGregor Burns Center for Leadership at the University of Maryland; and Creative Leaps International, a nonprofit educational and consulting group headquartered in the Hudson Valley of New York. The teams from GWU and UM lead the way with painstaking research, interviews, and archetypal interventions pointing the way to recovery. Significant progress was made, enhancing self-knowledge and reframing the realities that had defeated the Red Cross workers. Yet, somehow, hope continued to be elusive. Something was missing and it was in the wake of this realization that Olson called in Creative Leaps International, an organization known for its innovative use of the arts in leadership development and organizational renewal.

Jumping right in, the team from Creative Leaps helped to design a culminating Resilience Retreat for the SELA participants, rich in arts inflected workshops and activities. Chief among them was a “Concert of Ideas”, a lively interactive performance designed, in this instance, to honor heroic service, catalyze new thinking and gently, but surely re-surface the emotional trauma of SELA’s Katrina experience. The “Concert of Ideas” is a trademarked invention of Creative Leaps International with a very particular architecture and style of interaction. From the very beginning, it takes its listeners by surprise, the performers emerging from among the audience making their way minstrel-like toward the front of the room, leaning in for personal contact, all the while performing at the top of their game. The music is dynamic, energizing and very thoughtfully selected, largely classical and theatrical with a blend of spirituals and original compositions. But there’s also poetry, stories, listening games and conversation across the footlights, an engaging mix of ideas and activities drawn from the arts, sciences, philosophy and cultures of many lands.

Each of the performance elements is keyed to the central theme, issue or questions of the day. But no answers are offered, only directions of exploration and openings to alternative perspectives. The images and ideas simply refract off one another, sparking new possibilities, setting the mind and heart in curious exploratory motion. The design principle for the Concert of Ideas is called “creative juxtaposition” and capitalizes on our human inclination to seek out connections among closely juxtaposed inputs. It’s quite similar to the way we all use metaphors and stories to leap from one tiny island of knowing to another, expanding our thinking and inner narrative as we go.

For the Red Cross workers, there was hesitation at first even to sit down and give the performance a chance. “What could this possibly do for us? We’ve got mountains of work to do.” But as the music washed over them and the performers reached out heart to heart, person to person, something began to happen. The music entered and loosened that which was locked away. Tears

flowed, glances raced from one to another, and smiles began to break out from tightly clasped lips. Within minutes, the room came alive and the journey with Creative Leaps International was begun.

Over the next two days, discussion circles and workshops took explorations the deeper. The five workshops offered by Creative Leaps had to be repeated three times by popular demand. Running concurrently, their topics spanned “leadership and perception”, “mind-body stress management”, “risk-taking and habits of excellence”, “lessons of courage and adversity” and “the hero’s journey”. The participants drank in the messages and used these safe, personal gatherings to voice their own closely held truths.

Finally, on the afternoon of the last day, the Creative Leaps team recruited 15 volunteers to partner with them in the creation of a “Harvest of Learnings”, a performance event to be authored and performed by the SELA participants themselves with a bit musical and theatrical assistance from their Creative Leaps colleagues. Through two bubbling hours of meetings, interviews and quick-fire rehearsals, the Harvest was prepared. The performance that followed was part celebration, part solemn ceremony, and moved through everyone with the force of a wave, every hard-won truth, every personal victory uplifted. Through tears of joy and gestures of triumph, the SELA participants exclaimed, “We’re back!” -- And the room shook with their life force.

What had happened? How to describe it? To be sure, the music had served as a catalyst and prism for their emotional release, for deepening their understandings and drawing the community back together. Yet the leap from where they had been to where they were now *felt* miraculous and full of awe, surpassing a completely rational explanation. “The *feeling* of what happens” to paraphrase Antonio Damasio, is the essence of our consciousness and the key to our life impulse. (see Damasio, 1999) The feeling of what these Red Cross workers had been through was again palpable to them, but no longer paralyzing. The numbness (*the anesthetic*) had retreated and the life impulse (*the aesthetic*)

had returned. From the Creative Leaps perspective, they had completed the *inner work of art* and could, once again, *dare to imagine*.

#### IV.

#### Conclusion

Music and leadership are easy to compare metaphorically. But we think there is much more to the relationship between music and leadership (and more generally the arts and leadership) than just the possibility of one providing interesting metaphors for the other. Instead, we see music and leadership engaging in the same endeavor – to move us to think, to feel, and to act in new ways, ways that express the best possibilities of the human spirit. In this way, both music and leadership are elements of the aesthetic tradition, that tradition concerned with the exploration of mind, body, and spirit in relation to art, beauty, and imagination – *explorations felt and sensed as well as cognitively processed*.

We have presented cases in which groups have been inspired by skillfully facilitated performances of musicians to achieve higher levels of consciousness, presence, and self-awareness. We would argue that such performances tap into an aesthetic dimension of leadership, a dimension that is rarely remarked upon but frequently tapped by the very best leaders. Even in the absence of musical performance, aspiring leaders who recognize the aesthetic dimension of their work will likely be more effective in touching and reshaping human energy. The leader who recognizes and draws upon “the music within” will be the most effective in shaping “energy without,” and that is the essence of effective and transformational leadership. What are the elements of leadership that express its aesthetic dimension, elements that aspiring leaders would do well to recognize and regard?

First, there is the creative and imaginative aspect. The artistic side of leadership is that which sees the possibilities in the world and sets leaders apart from followers, who are often trapped in the present - or the past. The leader develops his or her art by a simultaneous process of empathy and creativity in which he or she grasps the needs and interests and potential of the group (or organization or society), even though those in the group may not be aware of them, and also adds a creative element which permits those needs, interests and potential to be expressed publicly in terms of aspirations for the future. The publicly articulated expression of the leader/group's vision is revealed in the leader's performance. If the performance adequately expresses the potential of the group then an "aesthetic" reaction will occur through which those in the group are motivated by the elegance and completeness of the vision to take action in pursuit of that vision. There are a variety of techniques that the leader can employ in his/her performance, but the key is *resonance*, touching the "soul" of the audience, the members of the group or organization.

Second, the art of leadership, like other arts, is oriented toward the creation of objects of "beauty," here not the beauty of physical attraction or emotional attraction (though those may play a part), but the beauty of laying out a field of values that people find compelling. While the musician creates beautiful sounds, the artist beautiful shapes and beautiful colors, and the dancer beautiful movements, the leader creates beautiful values. But, just as the creations of other artists are not commentaries *on art*, but are art, the values created by the leader are not lofty philosophical claims *about values*, but are values to be realized in society. The leader's aesthetic role is to challenge society with values so striking that they compel action.

The key to the aesthetic tradition is what we have here called "the inner work of art," the inner work compelled and catalyzed by the experience of beauty, the moment Bateson has called "aesthetic recognition," the moment of suddenly recognizing "the pattern that connects" you, in your deepest nature, to that which has inspired your awe. This same aesthetic recognition occurs in response to

transformational leadership. Leaders and followers alike experience *a pattern that connects* them energetically to their world, to their shared vision, and sense of what might be.

That leadership is in fact an art is compellingly evident in the three stories we have shared. They show how the arts, and especially music, stimulate significant reconsideration of leadership, creativity, and resilience and, more importantly, aid us directly in performing the inner work so essential to instilling and re-instilling their essences in our lives. The arts, in this light, constitute an active and underlying *resonance in design* running through all the myriad patterns that connect us to our world, a kind of underground stream of aesthetic content that our rational world typically conceals. We would argue that leadership, and most especially transformational leadership, hums mightily with this same aesthetic resonance and we would do well to learn to play upon it often and exceedingly well.

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