

Music for Health, Development and Conflict Resolution: Photo Documentation from Lebanon

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How we think about music education has changed significantly since ‘singing’ was implemented as a school subject in Norway more than 200 years ago. At that time, it was decided that schools should provide all children with some training in singing to improve the quality of song performance in church. What was then called ‘singing or song’ as a school subject we today call ‘music’. But more profound changes have taken place: Music is increasingly taught outside the classroom. Today, music schools, conservatories, departments of music and music academies together establish a chain of values that helps maintain a rich and varied music life in society and provides both quality and cultural diversity. Another shift has gradually occurred: Music is not only taught and practiced because of the implicit musical value and skill involved, but we engage in music because it provides personal and social benefits.

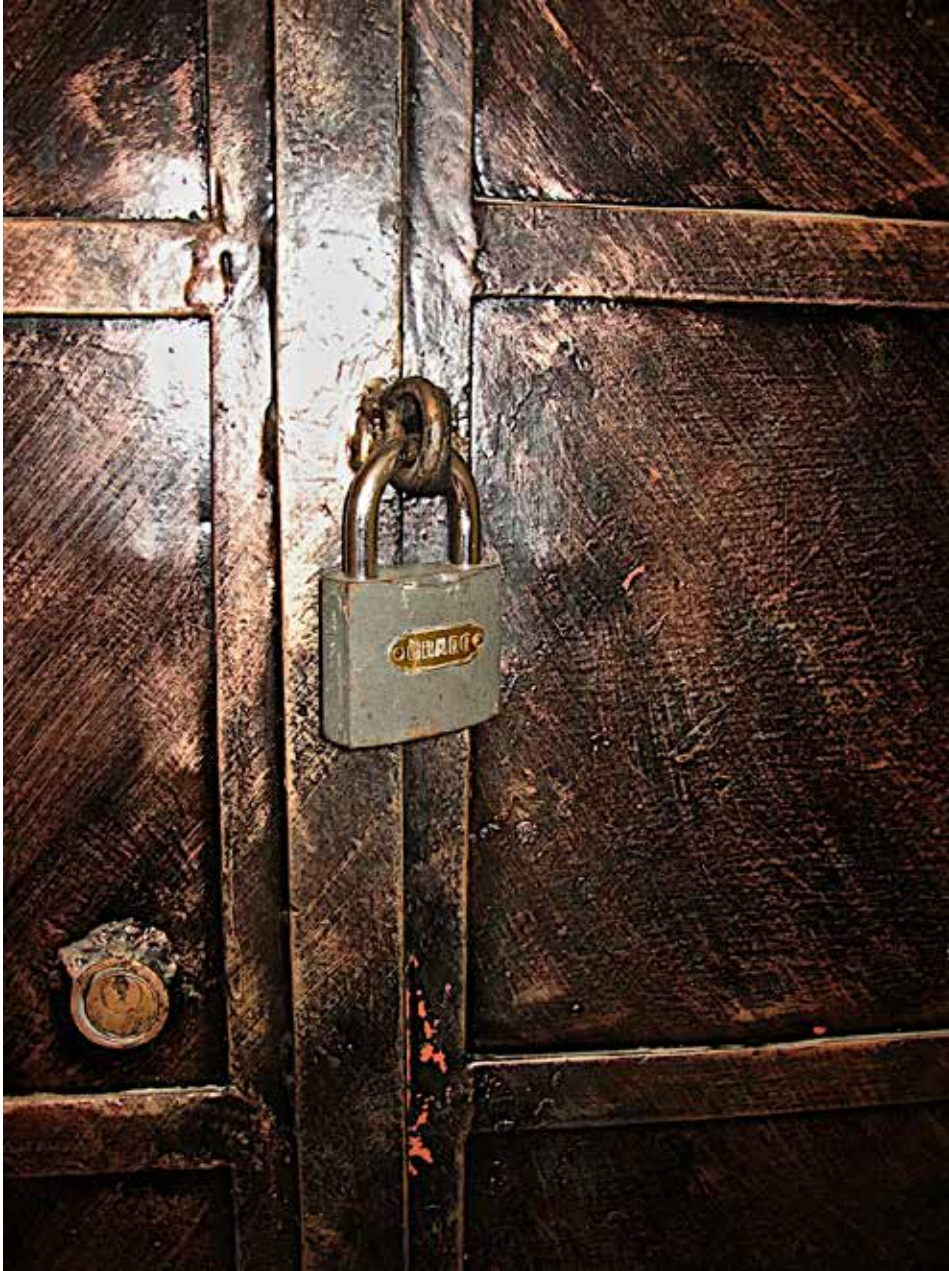
What we see today is an emerging ‘community music’ movement where music educators, music therapists and community musicians engage in projects to encourage certain groups of people, such as children in hospitals, prisoners, outpatient groups, homeless children and old people suffering from dementia, to take part in musical performances not only to increase their aesthetic experiences but to strengthen their musical competencies, identities and development.

In Norway, we have seen how music organisations send music educators to South African townships or to the Palestinian West Bank and to Jordan. Even though music education is the main goal, some underlying themes related to development and social organisation are high on the agenda. For the past 10 years, the Norwegian Academy of Music (NMH) has sent music education students to a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. There, senior lecturer Vegar Storsve has systematically established an orchestra for children and adolescents. Approximately 50 children and young people receive training on a number of instruments. At the same time, Norwegian music

students have the opportunity to experience what music may come to mean for children living under extremely adverse conditions where future prospects are not good. In these circumstances, health comes to mind when asked why this musical work is so important. Although musical skills are absolutely a focus in this project, it comes easily to mind to ask if this musical community also provides the young participants an experience of safety, mastery, belonging and meaning, which can be preventative and health-promoting.

In collaboration with Sophie Rodin from the *Forum for Culture and International Cooperation (FORUM)*, Storsve has established a three-year programme for pre-school teachers, social workers, special educators and music teachers in Tyre, a town in south Lebanon on the closed border of Israel. This 'community art' project aims to increase the competency of educators in terms of writing, narration, drawing, dance and playing instruments. But at the same time, another process has been going on. For the first time after the conflicts that have dominated the everyday life of Lebanon for so many years, a mixed group of predominately women has come together regularly over a number of years; Christian Lebanese, Shia and Sunni Muslims, Palestinians and Hezbollah are all represented. Could we have imagined how this steady contact affects how these groups now look upon each other, that conflicts may have been reconciled and that hopes for new relationships may appear? Could it be that by creating something together and developing skills in musical interaction and cooperation the arts can be an important arena for conflict resolution and reconciliation among groups and individuals?

The following notes are taken from my dairy and are illustrated with photos taken while following Vegar Storsve over the course of a week-long visit to Beirut and Tyre in June 2012.



1. The locked door can be seen as a symbol of the Palestinian situation in Lebanon. The Palestinians live in camps without the right to own property, to engage in certain professions, to travel freely, etc.

Sabra Street

Sunday, June 6, 2012

We seem to be lost in the middle of Sabra Street in Chatila, a large refugee camp in Beirut. The street was named after the legendary refugee camp that was destroyed in 1982 at the same time as thousands of Palestinians were massacred by Lebanese Christian Phalangists under the protection of Israeli soldiers. Today is a busy Sunday, the market is open and the street is packed with people and sale stands. You can buy almost anything here—shoes, clothes, fruit and vegetables, car equipment, stereo equipment, kitchen tools. Everything is stacked in chaotic diversity.

Vegar picks up the phone to call the driver who left us 10 minutes earlier. The car is gone. We were supposed to visit the Beit Atfal Assumoud (BAS) Centre, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) supporting Palestinian refugees. Sunday should have been the day for children's activities, but we were met by a locked door and a playground for children that looks more like a construction site.

As Vegar is about to dial the number from the card the driver has given us, a stranger suddenly takes Vegar's mobile phone and dials the number. He then hands the phone back to Vegar without a word. 'Well', I think, 'he might as well have taken the phone and run away.' But Vegar keeps calm. He has managed to build a network in Lebanon, and the contact list on his local mobile phone is a valuable asset for culture, social and health workers who need to get involved in Lebanese society.

It turns out that the driver had just parked in the alley around the corner. He is suddenly there, and we are head out of the market. No cars are allowed to drive here, and we are quite relieved as we turn into the main street. The driver is still shaky though. He negotiated a good prize when we left the Hamra district early this morning to go all the way to the Palestinian refugee camp. The camp looks like a poor neighbourhood with immigrants from all over the Middle East.

Vegar cannot help joking with the driver and asks if he can take us to Ain-el-Hilweh. This is a notorious refugee camp in the city of Saida, an hour's drive south of Beirut. The camp is well known for its frequent violent riots. The driver turns pale at first but then understands the joke. He seems happier when we instead ask him to go to



2. Playground or construction site?





3. The elephant foot off the coast, Beirut. War and conflicts have marked the capital of Lebanon. Beirut was once called the 'Paris of the Middle East', a glamorous capital. During the past 20 years, the city has been rebuilt after the civil war. The view from Bayrock Café is memorable.



4. Bambi on ice? The unstable political situation in Lebanon and the whole region has created a backdrop for musical and humanitarian engagement in Tyre. Walls and houses in Beirut are decorated with socially engaged political street art that constantly reminds us about realities, conflicts and different values.

Bayrock Café, a famous tourist attraction. He leaves us outside Starbucks opposite the legendary restaurant with its view of the gigantic rock that looks like an elephant's foot.

This is how we start our stay in Lebanon. The next day, we will continue to the city of Tyre in the south. This is where Vegar has established an orchestra for children and adolescents and where he and Sophie Rodin from FORUM have established a further education programme for pre-school teachers, social workers, special educators and music teachers.

Street art in Beirut

Beirut is replete with street art. This is my fourth visit, and new murals pop up all the time as older ones fade or are painted over. I discover a new slogan on one of the walls: 'Destroy the mainstream'. We adopt this slogan as a motto for the tour and choose to have dinner at a restaurant beside the head office of the Great Syrian Socialist Party, perhaps not a smart move as the war in Syria continues to unfold just a few hours away. Armed soldiers patrol outside the restaurant. This could be because of bomb threats or maybe just because they serve alcohol inside. But mezza with a glass of arak is guaranteed to be a great experience.

A week later upon our return to Beirut, Vegar discovers a small plastic address tag on my photo bag with the logo *Sabra Tours*. The tag was left there after a trip to South Africa I made some years ago through a Norwegian travel company. We make a joke that this could be something to offer the taxi driver who is still hanging around the hotel. He does not offer us any trip this Sunday morning when he sees us.

Hotel Mayflower

Monday, June 25

We have breakfast at the Hotel Mayflower in the Hamra district of Beirut. This is the place to meet other Norwegians, people who work for NGOs and the foreign department, journalists and health workers. This morning, two young Norwegian women approach us. They already know who we are, and we ask what they are doing here.

They are volunteers, one of them a musician. They are on their way to Ramallah, via Amman, to do social work and to give a concert.

Sometimes, musicians think they also are qualified to work as music therapists, which worries me because in Norway you need at least a master's degree in music therapy to do this kind of work. This is especially important if you should work with people with psychological trauma. We often have these kinds of discussions. What is the relationship between music education, community music, performing music and music therapy? Can performing music have some kind of health effect? Can we build bridges between different religious and cultural groups through music, dance, visual art and storytelling? What does it mean to the children in the refugee camp to participate in Vegar's orchestra?

Rashidieh: Arafat's favourite camp

Wednesday, June 2

Together with Sophie Rodin and Gro Gjestrud from FORM, we have caught a wreck of a taxi from the city of Tyre to Rashidieh a few kilometres south of the city. A few days earlier, Sophie and Gro visited the Lebanese military camp in Saida to arrange permission for all of us to enter the refugee camp. They have done this numerous times during the 10 years they have been coming to Lebanon. Yet, there is always a risk that the young soldiers from the Lebanese army will not let us in. And there is not always a logical explanation for why we sometimes have to turn back to Tyre and try again the next day.

Today was just one of those unhappy days. After scrutinising our written permission and consulting their protocols, only Storsve is allowed to enter. We have to turn the car around and drive back a few meters to the main road. We try to call the military centre in Saida, but they ask us to wait. Suddenly, Vegar steps out of the car and walks over to the heavily armed soldiers. Surprisingly, he gives us a sign; we are allowed to go in. He has no explanation. The soldiers communicated only in Arabic, and they repeated a couple of times in English: 'Problem, yes, problem, no.' Then it suddenly was 'no problem' and we could enter the camp.



5. We find this piece of street art on many walls in the Rashidieh refugee camp.



6. There are still Palestinians in Rashidieh with Palestinian passports from the time when the country was internationally recognised as a separate country. The photo shows one of the oldest citizens in Rashidieh proudly showing us his old passport.

Which day is it today?

Thursday, June 28

There is a seminar for the participants in the X-Art project. Vegar takes care of 15 women and 1 man in the music group. Sophie is responsible for the art and drawing group. Vegar is always prepared to meet whoever will show up. He has learned to improvise from years of experience. He never knows who will show up, how many or when. These are some of the conditions that will never change. His repertoire is large and he is skilled on many instruments, even though the guitar is the most useful for following the songs.

After the welcome song (by the music therapist Tom Næss), I suggest he move on to another song from the music therapy repertoire by Paul Nordoff, *Which day do we have today?* I sing it to Vegar and he immediately improvises his own version adapted to the skill level of the group. Most of the participants can perform with one chord on the guitar, and one after another takes the guitar and leads the group. Soon they have made an Arabic version. They change the song to *Which juice did you have today?* *Which month do we have today?* and so on.

The intensity is increasing and the women conquer the song musically and verbally. To me, I can see a significant change in the group since I visited two years earlier. And this song is an addition to the song repertoire of the pre-school teachers and special educators in their daily work. I also sense the mutual confidence and vitality in the group—a musical force behind their expression.

In the room where Sophie teaches, I listen to a group discussion about how the participants have managed to apply the skills and knowledge they have learned by taking part in the course over the last three years. Do they see any changes in the children they work with? One of the women translates from English to Arabic and back again. I recall the last time I visited when Sophie Rodin and Gro Gjestrud introduced narratives and pictures. There is no tradition for the use of free drawing or narratives as educational tools among the women. Participating in the workshops with different teachers from Norway has taught the participants the value of artistic expression. For many of the children, not least those who are living in the refugee camps, there are also therapeutic possibilities in the use of storytelling and drawing.





9. Palestinian preschool children in Chatila made this drawing of bombers and rockets during the attack on Beirut in 2006.



7. Sophie Rodin illustrates

Draw a face

Friday, June 29

Sophie Rodin stands beside the whiteboard and draws a face. Twenty Palestinian preschool children are curiously watching. 'Now, it is your turn to draw', Sophie tells them. 'But you have to close your eyes while you are drawing.' Everyone gets paper and coloured pencils and starts drawing, even though not everyone is following the instructions. Later, I study all the drawings spread out on the floor, faces in all kinds of colours and shapes.

Sophie likes to demonstrate to the preschool teachers how she actually works with the children. She takes a long sheet of paper and asks the children to draw a line, their own line. The children are divided into groups, and they lie flat on the floor and crawl along the sheet of paper while using their pencils. Some of the children prefer to be independent, while others cooperate in making the lines. Some copy others without showing any sign of independence. I realise how drawing together affords interaction and cooperation in real time, sometimes I always thought of as only possible when making music together.

One of the main goals of the X-art project has been to provide further education to the preschool teachers about how to use drawing and storytelling in their daily work with the children. Now, they have the opportunity to observe how Sophie is working with the children. It is important to teach the children to learn to visually express themselves, Sophie tells us. The children will thus improve their observation skills. When they close their eyes, they train their imagination. Their reality and how they experience the world may come to life through the pictures. The role of the educator is to listen and acknowledge the children's expression. Children who live in conflict in the midst of bombings and where cruel histories impinge on their identities will need a language of symbols to create some distance from the reality. It is a thin line between education and therapy in this kind of work.

Arabic music

The orchestra is practicing and the sound is spreading around the house. Kim Boeskov is standing in the middle of the big room at the top floor and gives his instructions to



8. Draw a face—with your eyes closed.

different groups playing different instruments. Kim is an educated jazz pianist from the Rhythmic Conservatory in Copenhagen. He contacted Vegar Storsve to explore the possibility of working as a volunteer in Rashidieh and other places in South Lebanon. He and his wife Kristine contribute weekly to the music project in Rashidieh. Kim has also taught music in a gymnasium outside Tyre. Both Kim and Kristine study Arabic a couple of evenings each week, and Kim has bought an oud in order to learn how to play this Arabic string instrument.

Vegar has been coming here for 10 years and has carefully laid the foundation for this local music school. Now he can finally see the results. More teachers have been employed. Haider now has 20 violin students. Nabil, a drummer, is surrounded by a group of students. A professional singer and oud player leads the guitar group. Chadi, the local musical leader, takes control of the synthesizers and all other electronics.

I can clearly see the musical progress that has happened since I visited the first time four years ago. The orchestra is better organised, and the skills have improved. New young talents have showed up. The saxophone group is strong on the melodies. More singers give the music a richer expression. The Arabic musical expression is becoming distinctive, both melodically and rhythmically with addition of the percussion section. We can sense the tradition of debke, the folk dance Palestinian children take part in from preschool age on. Vegar shows Haider how to make a simple groove on the violin by using only one single note. He sends all the small violinists out on the floor and it becomes obvious how their bodies now suddenly become part of the musical expression.

Music as a solution to conflict?

June 2010

Two years ago. Vegar is in the middle of a session and the group is about to learn a new song. Vegar wants to divide the group into smaller units. The women are sitting along the wall, and Vegar gives them each a number; 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3,4 he counts at the same time as he points to the women. He tells them that everyone with number 1 will go into group 1, everyone with number 2 will go into group 2, and so on. In this way, he breaks up the tendency to always sit beside the same person or in the same





10. A meeting place between different musical cultures



11. Kim Boeskov and Chadi Ibrahim are handling the technology

cultural group. Suddenly, a Palestinian will have to play together with a Lebanese, a Shia with a Sunni and a person from Hezbollah with a Christian.

I ask Vegar two years after this observation how the group process has evolved during these years. He confirms that the pattern of communication has changed. Everybody is talking to each other; there is no longer a one-sided group formation. I can also see how the interaction and the group dynamic have changed. I now experience a cohesive group when I listen to their music or watch them dance. It is more of an Arabic identity. Or, is there an emerging Lebanese identity?

In musicology or the sociology of music, the question of whether music can play a political role has been a central one. Lately, we have seen an increase in the publication of books on the role of music in conflict resolution. This literature is not dealing with how classical music can disseminate a message of peace or affect a political situation. Rather, the trend is to study the role of popular music in contemporary culture. Researchers study what happens when people from different cultural or political groups come together and make music.

A critique of many of these projects is that they are short term. They perhaps last only a few days or weeks. What about this project in South Lebanon that has lasted 10 years? Vegar Storsve and Sophie Rodin have created a unique political and religious neutral network that has given them access to many groups. People from cultural and political groups who have never before talked with one another or who have in certain cases been involved in deep political conflicts for many years now dance, draw, talk and play music together.

Family Guidance Centre

Monday, June 25

We meet many volunteers and representatives of organisations that come to Beirut and Lebanon to help. Cooperation and information is important, and Vegar spends a lot of time contacting, informing and holding together different networks. We have just heard there is a British–Italian music therapist and her musician husband in Lebanon right now. Vegar traces the couple to the same organisation he is involved with—BAS.





12. Vegar teaches how to 'get the groove' into the music.





13. The Palestinian joy of dancing is implanted early in life.

There will be a workshop in Beirut. Through our contacts we are allowed to attend a session, with supervision, for a group of speech therapists, special educators, psychologists and social workers from different family guidance centres in the many Palestinian refugee camps spread throughout Lebanon. I must admit we are somewhat sceptical. There are many musicians who want to declare themselves music therapists, especially in countries like Italy where the discipline is not well organised with national standards. But in this case, we meet a certified music therapist trained at Cambridge who is supervising a group of health workers. They use video examples from different clinical situations in discussing important working principles in music therapy.

But how is it possible to do music therapy without any music skills, Vegar wonders. A few days later we meet the music therapist again, this time in Tyre. We understand there is a lot of idealism and too little money behind their project. And their projects are based upon supervision every second month throughout the next year. Vegar knows how difficult it is to find the right musical competency in Lebanon. Although there are many good musicians, both in the classical and popular fields, many are marked by a formal music educational tradition based upon drilling and musical notation. And we know that therapeutic work through music does not depend solely on skills in Western or Arabic musical traditions. You also need to know how to improvise music and communicate with people based on their skill level and cultural/musical background. But from this workshop we clearly see that there is lot of health-related competency in this group. Perhaps this could be worth acting upon in the long term? There is absolutely an aspect of health in the work that Storsve and his group of teachers are doing in Rashidieh.

Music as therapy

I am talking with one of the social workers at the BAS Centre and ask her if she has any examples of how music may have helped children with special difficulties. She mentions a little girl who was allowed to play violin because she needed to get away from her parents a few hours each week, as her parents had great difficulties. I mention this to Chadi Ibrahim and ask if he has similar stories from his own work with the children. And he has more stories to tell. First he tells about a little girl who did not want to separate from her mother. She did not want to play together with the other children because each time someone laughed or even smiled she thought she was the reason. But Chadi had activities that made her forget about her worries, and

she started to come alone to the music group. Another girl did not want to speak. She started to cry when someone approached her. She would rather sit alone than join the other children. Chadi accepted her shyness, a sort of selective mutism. He gave her space and allowed her to choose when to join the others. Gradually she approached the group, and after a year she started to smile. One day she picked up a small rhythm instrument and started to play together with the others. Then, she joined Nabil's percussion group. Chadi says that now she talks to the older children and sits in the circle with all the other children.

Such examples tell me that Chadi has a good understanding of other people or relational competency, as therapists call it. He also understands how to adapt the music for the children to be challenged based on their ambition and level of functioning. At the same time, the groups are so diverse and the musical repertoire so differentiated that there are many roads into this musical community to participate, perform music and establish new identities.

A Palestinian future?

Saturday, June 30

'We have to stop thinking that Palestinian will ever have fulfilled their rights here in Lebanon'. The words come from Abu Wasin, the leader of the refugee camp Borj el Shemali. 'Those who believe they will ever get permission to own their own house, have civil jobs in the Lebanese community as teachers or medical doctors believe in a mirage', he says. With the help of Kim and Kristine, the two young Danish volunteers, we are invited to meet Abu Wasin. He arrives a few minutes after nine o'clock in the evening outside the BAS in Borj el Shemali, where his office is located. The electricity supply is off for the evening, and he leads us upstairs through the dark. The power supply has been bad the whole summer. Sometimes they have electricity for only two to four hours during the day. There are frequent demonstrations against the profit-driven generator industry and corruption. People are suffering in the heat and dark.

The atmosphere in the little office becomes special when Wasin lights a few candles. I am not able to see how he looks. But he seems to be tall and slim and in his sixties. He speaks slowly and has a soft, deep voice. He exudes authority and charisma, which



14. Gender roles in the traditional Muslim culture are challenged in this music project.

in the dark reminds me of Kofi Annan. Abu Wasin is responsible for all three camps in the south. He gives the impression of a visionary leader. He has launched the idea of a kind of health insurance for all Palestinians living in the camps. This will allow the necessary medical health care in situations of crisis. Now, he presents the idea of a kind of Palestinian community of production. He wants to train specialists, create a Palestinian industry of handicrafts that can generate income and increased welfare.

In the dark office, he tells us more about the idea of BAS. It is an organisation that not only supports Palestinians but also trains leaders to work outside the camps. We are also interested in how he views the musical work going on in Rashidieh. We know he has himself put a lot of effort into re-establishing the tradition of playing bagpipes among Palestinians. He has trained more than a hundred bagpipe players, many of whom now earn money by playing at weddings. Later he becomes more enthusiastic about how music can express the souls of people, and he would like to offer a broader selection of music and instruments. His dream seems to be to establish a big Palestinian orchestra.

The candles are burning down and the tiny amount of light coming from Sophie Rodin's mobile phone in the corner of the room has faded. Abu Wasin offers to drive us back to the hotel. We leave the camp the same way we arrived. We avoid the military checkpoint and sneak out in the dark.