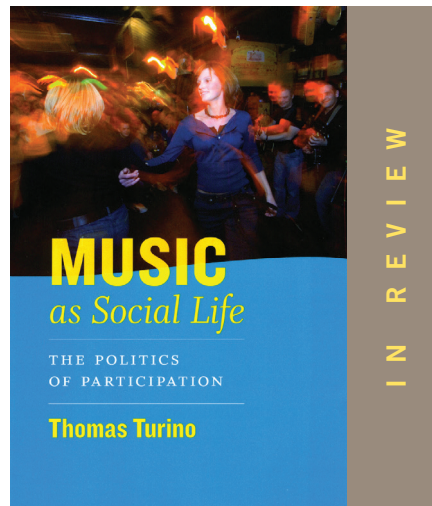


Reviewed by Sandra Sanchez Adorno

## Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation

Written by Thomas Turino  
University of Chicago Press, 2008



As music educators and advocates, we are often faced with answering questions concerning the value of music and its inclusion in schools. Why do we need music? Why *does* music matter? In his book *Music as Social Life*, Thomas Turino addresses this question through his thought-provoking perspective of music as a social experience and innate need, rather than an object or product. The author, who originally wrote this for undergraduate non-music majors in his Music of the World course, brings social theories and conceptual models to life through rich description and contextual examples free of academic jargon.

Turino sets the stage for the social meanings and functions of music through a variety of lenses, moving from anthropology to psychology to philosophy. From an anthropologist's viewpoint, he suggests the centrality of the arts to evolution and survival. People articulate their identities, form and sustain social groups, and distinguish others through music. Music is how individuals describe themselves to each another. With its deep emotions and unique qualities, Turino suggests that the study of music from different cultures and societies can "help us achieve a balance between understanding cultural difference and recognizing humanity." He progresses through the chapter, now through

a psychologist's view, to discuss how music aids in self-integration. Csikszentmihalyi's *theory of optimal experience*, otherwise known as "flow," is described as a state of heightened concentration where one is "fully in the present," experiencing that indescribable feeling of getting lost in time. Turino acknowledges an individual may achieve flow through a variety of activities including sports, games, and dance, and discusses five conditions essential for reaching this state: (1) proper balance of challenge and skill, (2) expansive opportunities for new challenges, (3) immediate feedback during activity, (4) activity is bounded by time and place, and (5) clear, established goals that directly relate to the time/place and skill/challenge. Lastly, Turino explains music's meaning through American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs, or *semiotics*. A *sign* is something an individual perceives that represents or reminds them of something else, which then creates some effect on that individual. The three characteristics of this happening include the sign, the object (i.e., the idea related to the sign), and the effect or meaning of that perceived relationship.

Music educators might be inspired to design lessons focused on the musical activities discussed in each of the cases through informative descriptions and the recorded examples provided.

In *Music as Social Life*, Turino conceptualizes music making as a social experience through four distinct fields: presentational, participatory, high fidelity, and studio audio. Distinctions between these fields focus on not necessarily how the music sounds, but the types of activity, artistic roles, goals, and the people involved. Real-time music performances include presentational and participatory music making, which differ by audience distinctions. In participatory performances, there are no distinctions made between the audience and performers. The goal of the music is to involve everyone in the performing role. Presentational performances are quite the opposite and occur when a group of artists present music to others in an audience who do not directly collaborate in the music making. Further, the making of audio-recorded music is explained through high fidelity and studio audio art. High-fidelity constitutes the recording of a live performance, with additional artistic roles of tech, producer, and engineer, whereas studio audio art does not represent live performance and involves the recording of manipulated sounds to create an art object or “sound sculpture.” These fields of music making can serve as models in our classrooms and beyond, as each offers different potential for creativity along with its own constraints.

Following these theoretical discussions, Turino presents intriguing case studies to describe his theories in action and within particular contexts. He enhances each of the studies by providing specific details and musical examples (found in the book’s included CD) to connect the culture and events being discussed. Music educators might be inspired to design lessons focused on the musical activities discussed in each of the cases through informative descriptions and the recorded examples provided. The first case study examines participatory, presentational, and high fidelity music in Shona villages in Northeastern Zimbabwe. History, meaning, and

characteristics of music making in the district are explained in great detail through events, accounts, and recorded musical examples. The second case provides Turino’s own account of the music and events he experienced growing up in the northeastern United States in the 1960s and discusses the role of folk music and dance in establishing cultural groups. In addition to discussing the function of the music, examples and characteristics of old-time string band music are included. The last case study discusses music in politics by providing snapshots and musical examples throughout history, particularly in Nazi Germany and during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States.

As Orff Schulwerk educators, we often think of not only the musical implications of what we teach, but also the personal and social connotations. We recognize that people engage with music every day for a variety of reasons and we know it has deep meaning that has the power to connect us on many levels. *Music as Social Life* conceptualizes in a clear and straightforward way many of the feelings and experiences we encounter daily as individuals and with our students. It puts into words many of the phenomena we think of when trying to explain music’s uniqueness and importance in the school curricula. Finally, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* provides detailed examples and recordings of a variety of music that educators may choose to integrate into their own teaching. ■

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