

Moving Performance

by Ben Hines, Founder, Moving Performance, A Mobius Alliance Partner

Music plays a significant part in all of our lives, whether we know it or not. Ben Hines, founder of Moving Performance, an organization pioneering the use of music in people development, shares his thoughts below on how music can make a shift in performance in businesses and organizations today.

Throughout the auditorium, the bankers were moved to tears through the emotional power of what they had just experienced. These were tears of appreciation, accomplishment, and the deep realization that new possibilities had just opened up before them. The catalyst for creating this experience was my intuitive hunch that music could unlock a powerful communication for the group. I took a gamble and it worked. The result was not only a highlight for the conference, but subsequently the launch of Moving Performance, a training organization committed to improving business through the power of music.

The challenges that block the best in business are emotional, not rational. The programmes we've been developing at Moving Performance break open these blockages and release new learning. We use the power of music to do this. Top leadership raise their game through an immersion experience in brilliant performance, teams catch a vision for greatness when sitting amongst a world class collaborative ensemble, struggling employees shift their mindset when the issues faced in a change situation are given voice. The key is not merely the music, but how we've developed creative approaches to link the power of music and music

performance to effective business learning.

Here's the story of how we got to this place, and what we've been learning.

In 2004 I was a senior member of the product management team in the African business of Barclays Bank. I managed the product portfolios and was responsible for bringing to market new and innovative propositions for the Bank's retail and business customers across the continent. At that time, I attended a three-day leadership conference for the top 150 leaders from the business. Delegates attended from all over Africa. Half way through the conference we were divided into 6 teams of 25 people and told to write a play on the customer lifecycle. Each team contributed to a six-part drama documenting the sequence of turning a bad customer experience into a good customer experience. My team was given the part of the "turn around". The activity was to be competitive and the winning team would be announced for the best performance.

Having been around groups of

business people trying to act before, I figured that the majority of "plays" would be at best amusing and at worst embarrassing. Wanting to win the challenge, I suggested that rather than stage a "play" where all 25 of us would inevitably be trying to get our turn on the stage, why not make a real impact and do something altogether on the stage? Why didn't we sing a song?

After some discussion, some creative song writing, and much rehearsal, the end result looked like this: Stage lights down, our group of 25 people huddled together in a scrum on stage. Silence in the auditorium. Then through the PA system came the haunting hummed tune of the hymn *Amazing Grace*, sung by a lady from Zimbabwe who had a beautiful soulful gospel voice. You could hear a pin drop.

The second verse continued with hummed harmony from several of us, and some finger clicking to get a rhythm going. Then the Zimbabwean lady started to sing the lyrics to our new song, *Amazing Change*. The



words hit the conference theme perfectly. Three more verses followed each building up with more and more energy, passion and volume. Meanwhile, the stage lights started to increase, our scrum opened up like a flower and by the end this group of 25 bankers were a full-on arms-in-the-air gospel choir belting out *Amazing Change* from their hearts.

It was stunning. The audience was moved to tears - they could not believe their colleagues had just achieved what they did. The choir had just achieved something that most thought impossible - new possibilities opened up to them. For myself, it was the start of something very special - it sowed the seed that music can make a real impact and difference in organizations. Of course, we won the competition hands down!

So how and why does music make an impact in business?

Here are 3 examples of how music is effective in organizations.

1. It is the most emotive art form, and as such everyone responds to it. If used skillfully, it becomes an enabler for people to start to engage with the deeper, more emotive issues in the workplace.
2. As a metaphor for performance, team work and leadership, music

contains a wealth of useful insights for performance in the workplace, especially when demonstrated with world-class ensembles.

3. As a practical activity, music making becomes an excellent role-play for challenging situations in team performance, leadership and stepping outside one's comfort zone.

1 Music is the most emotive art form

Most organizations I come across share that the biggest challenges they face are around executing change, innovating ahead of the curve and inspiring their people. All organizations need to change, be that a result of growth, decline, external pressure, re-organization, or implementing a new strategy. The rational reasons for change are relatively straightforward; the hardest thing is getting the organization to *want* to change. And this is an emotional issue.

Organizations tend to communicate change by explaining the rationale. They do this well. People understand that sales need to increase, costs need to go down, or the operation needs to become more efficient. And yet many leaders wonder why change is so difficult to bring about.

The problem is that for many, they

just don't *want* to change. They are not happy with the change; they don't like to move away from what they know. It makes them feel uncomfortable. There is nothing intrinsically wrong in this, it is just our survival instinct kicking in - it is safer to go with what you know when the future looks uncertain. Yet many leaders and organizations fail to address this in their employees.

Music can make a difference here.

Back in the middle of the UK banking crisis, one of the banks bailed out by the Government asked me to speak at their management conference. The new leadership team had a vision for where to take the organization. Their challenge was the management population seemed "stuck" in the leftovers of two years of uncertainty, lost share portfolios, and continued negative press. They lacked enthusiasm and resolve to pursue the new vision. How could we help turn the mindset around?

It seemed to me that the organization was trying to implement their new vision in a rational way, whereas the people were responding emotionally. It was clear the new leadership team had not dared to ask the question of the organization "so how do you feel?"

Our solution was to access people's emotions through music. In the conference we started talking about music and the courage it takes to stand up and perform, and relating it to our own experience in the FS industry. Through various ice-breakers and activities designed to lower people's inhibitions, we played them a range of music and then asked them to discuss how the music made them feel. The fascinating thing was the diversity of people's responses. On listening to a clip from a Mahler symphony, one person said it made them





feel frightened, whereas another said it made them feel energized. We not only demonstrated that everyone has feelings (even bankers!), but that everyone feels differently to the same thing. By expanding this into a process of facilitated discussion on their corporate situation, the delegates started a song-writing process. They shared their journeys, and their positive and difficult emotions. We then brought them together in a grand performance.

The results were stunning. Firstly the lyrics were brilliant – they were powerful, they said it as it was. They were very real. They were also amusing. The process of song writing brought the team together, discussing for the first time things that really mattered. The moment of performance stretched them. They were taken outside their comfort zone, and yet all performed fantastically well.

Most important was the transaction that took place. In musical performance performers communicate to an audience, and the audience listens. For the first time this organization listened to itself, to how it really felt about itself, the situation they found themselves. They now had a common understanding – it was aired, and it was done so in an incredibly

creative and inspiring way.

Symbolically it drew a line in the sand. It was a cathartic moment, allowing the management to move on from the past and embrace the direction they were being led into. That organization has now successfully been re-privatized; they attribute the musical input in that conference has a significant step on their journey.

2 Music is a powerful metaphor

Leonard Bernstein, the composer, conductor and educator, said “the best way to know a *thing* is to understand it in a different discipline”. The idea of stepping back from your own context and into another to gain fresh insight or new ideas is a proven way to problem solve. The music metaphor gives a wealth of opportunity to explore business challenges in a dynamic and creative environment.

Using the symphony orchestra as a metaphor for organizational performance is one such example. Our leadership programme, Know the Score, takes business leaders into the heart of the world-renowned Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. The focus here shifts to the music making itself. How does this group of experts working in multi-functional teams create such consistently brilliant performance? We get inside the or-

chestra to experience first hand the dynamics of collaboration, leadership, communication, and support that happen in surprising ways hidden from a normal viewing audience.

For opening up insight into how complex teams operate, the orchestra has proven to be one of the best tools out there. For one thing, the whole team is right there on stage for the delegates to scrutinize. Any shifts in performance are immediately discernable. This aspect of immediate feedback and accessibility to the thinking of the orchestra members is fully exploited in our carefully crafted workshop programme. Delegates discover how communication happens within the orchestra to enable immediate change to happen simultaneously throughout the whole ensemble, how vision is translated from the composer’s notes and brought alive with powerful clarity, and what is actually going on when the conductor takes the podium.

In each workshop we open up more than 20 such areas for learning. And the key to powerful learning is that this is not merely a chalk talk, it’s live on stage. Experiential. Inspirational. Even those who don’t think they like classical music are awe struck when sitting on stage in the midst of a performance. The nature of music bypasses intellectual barriers.



The senses are awakened and the brain is activated on many levels. Delegates feel the pain of an ensemble playing out of tune. They know when it's put right. They sense the beauty of a soloist's contribution and note how the entire ensemble adjusts their performance to support that individual. Collaboration and synergy within a team takes on a whole new significance.

On their own, these are merely experiences. And learning from such an experience won't happen naturally. There is a difference between enjoying a concert and using an orchestra as a learning tool. We prepare delegates beforehand in order to focus their attention on their particular area of interest. We teach them how to use what they see, what they hear, and what they think throughout the workshop to capture key observations. We then lead them through a process to connect their observations to their workplace. The power of metaphor is that the delegates discover their own learning through this experience. When the learning comes from within, it sticks. They own it. We design the programme to open up each delegate's understanding about what brilliant performance is

all about and apply it to their own situation.

Our experience is that they get it. And can then see themselves and their team in a new light.

Through the immersion in the metaphor and understanding the inner workings of an orchestra there is a significant amount of insight, which if carefully and relevantly connected to the corporate world, can make a transformational change in the performance of individuals and organizations.

One team that went through the programme recently came from a leading global firm. They were already a high performing team, experts in their field. Yet they knew they needed a higher level of collaboration in how they worked together. They didn't need more information or analysis, they needed a dynamic and strategically creative space to re- envision how they could be a brilliant team. That is what we provided.

The orchestral session with this team was transformative. They were immersed in world-class performance, teamwork and leadership. In the afternoon application session we asked them to think of this experience as a yardstick, as though the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra was a 10/10 performing team, where did they see themselves? A gap was articulated, the issues and obstacles drawn out. The work then shifted to generating an action plan using our leadership tool "*Six Keys to Brilliant Performance*". This thinking tool looks at a range of orchestral performance elements such as listening, balancing, leading, and empowering star performers, and applies these directly to the delegate's situation.

The team got hungry to see their own performance lifted; it gave them a common language and experience to reference brilliant performance;

they were inspired to learn about each other more, to listen more effectively, to balance their own role to those around them. They have new ideas for managing their key players – to empower and encourage in order to release new potential.

3 Music as an effective role-play

Music is usually considered an exclusive activity for "musical" people. As a result most people do not get involved in music making, even though most actively listen to it.

When we take a group of people into practical music making, they are usually out of their comfort zone – they are being stretched and as such are in a great place to reflect on why they feel uncomfortable and to learn about themselves.

Practical music making can include performing on instruments, playing on their own in front of people, playing in groups, composing music, singing, writing songs, listening and observing professional musicians.

One professional services firm we work with sought to develop the emotional intelligence awareness of their management. In particular, how they managed their personal impact to leverage client relationships.

We gave this group a challenge: to compose music that would be performed by a professional music quintet. Out of their comfort zone? You bet. And this was precisely why it proved to be so effective. They had to step in and produce results in an environment that they knew little about. They were dependent on a group of professionals who knew far more than they did. How would they manage their personal impact, and manage the range of emotions they had - from disbelief that the task

was possible to fear that they may be found out as someone who was not that confident?

Once engaged, the group came alive with creative ideas. We have developed a method for how a group like this can write music, but it requires clear communication with the musicians. At the end of the exercise the compositions were performed, and they were excellent.

The process highlighted key lessons for the group in how to handle themselves in an ambiguous environment, and how to work collaboratively with complete strangers who are professional at what they do. This scenario is not too different from professional services firms engaging a client and embarking on a project. Because the subject matter (creating music) is not directly relevant to their work, the delegates are freer to explore how they managed themselves in the process – they do not feel as exposed as if this was a technical role-play situation. As such they are free of irrelevant detail, and can focus on their personal behaviors and group dynamics.

In Closing

We've found that music opens up possibilities for effective learning. One reason for this is that it so powerfully engages the whole person. Daniel Barenboim the acclaimed conductor and pianist, puts it this

Ben Hines is pioneering a new way to Learning and Development in organizations using the power of music. He combines his commercial leadership experience, built up over 12 years in the international financial and legal service industries, with his talent and passion for music. Working with leading organizations in the private and public sector, he is rapidly gaining a reputation for delivering change and results that last. He believes that in order for to bring lasting change in L&D programmes, it is vital to build an emotional connection between the learners and their objectives.

Moving Performance has recently launched a world-class leadership programme in partnership with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, which explores how business leaders can empower a multi-functional and diverse workforce to produce consistent world-class performance. Something a professional orchestra does all the time, and something businesses need to do far more often!

Ben has worked and lived in UK, South Africa and Kenya, and worked widely in USA, Africa and India. He lives in London with his wife Louise, and their four young children.

way: “The power of music lies in its ability to speak to all aspects of the human being – the animal, the emotional, the intellectual and the spiritual. Music teaches us, in short, that everything is connected”.

It's when the whole person is engaged that individuals and teams perform at their best, and this is the key to corporate success. Music is proving to be a fantastic medium to bring about this holistic learning; connecting people to their core and helping them discover how to apply this in the business world.

One of our recent delegates de-

scribed our workshop as the most amazing experience of their life. This is no longer a surprise to us, as many others have said the same thing. People want to learn, want to provide inspirational leadership and contribute to a high performing team. When they experience this first hand and gain insight into how they can do it themselves, something shifts inside them. Motivation is rekindled. Connecting this sort of experience with deeper learning focused on delivering value is what we are about. ■

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