From trauma to well-being: how music and trauma can transform us

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Abstract

Traumatic events can have a profound influence on the way musicians experience "musicing" as well as on their actual performance. An interpretative phenomenological analysis of two case histories is presented here – one being that of a professional singer whose family members were brutally murdered, and the other of a conductor whose mentor committed suicide and who was paralysed for three months after a serious motor vehicle accident. Before turning the focus to the two musicians, issues pertaining to the subject of trauma are highlighted and the author "brackets out" her own experiences with particular reference to work as repétiteur for the opera *Winnie* and postgraduate piano studies in Warsaw. For the two case study participants, healing comprised a journey consisting of various phases in which music played an integral role. Traumatic influence was seen to have a discernible impact on expression of emotion in music, memory for music, career choices and interpersonal relationships. It was through music that they re-established their connection to self and others, and, after a period of struggling with emotional expression, experienced a deepening of affect. For the conductor, drumming played an essential role in recovering lost motor function and memory. Counselling formed the other pillar in their recovery process, and for the conductor this also entailed a journey leading to spiritual growth. The participants offered advice to others. Both these case histories provide striking examples of how musicing can first suffer in the wake of experiencing overwhelming traumatic events, yet later prove to be instrumental in restoring well-being and bringing about transformation.

The experience of trauma

This paper is an interpretative phenomenological analysis of two professional musicians' journey toward full well-being in the wake of experiencing severe trauma. These individuals, a singer and a conductor, experienced events that had a profound influence on their personal and professional lives as well as their experience of their "musicing", a term coined by David Elliott (1995) encompassing various aspects of music-making. Before shifting the focus to a discussion of these two musicians' experience of, and recovery from, trauma as described by them, the concept of trauma is briefly introduced and some of the challenges in studying it are highlighted. This is followed by an outline of the aim and chosen methodology of this paper after which, in the spirit of phenomenology, I briefly "bracket out" my own experiences in acknowledgement of the fact that we can never fully remove ourselves from a situation or achieve total objectivity.

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The subject of trauma raises many challenges. Derived from the Greek *trauma*, meaning "wound", the term brings to mind associations of pain, shock, disillusionment, life-altering experiences, human aggression and betrayal, and not uncommonly criminal deeds and even murder. The latter is central to the singer's experience of trauma. Physical trauma is associated with injury and often with hospitalisation and visits to the emergency room: these associations are not excluded from this discussion of emotional trauma since its consequences, if they remain unresolved, often include emotional manifestations presenting at a later stage. Indeed, Swallow (2002, 48) describes trauma as "a sudden and unexpected physical or psychological event which is appreciated as a threat and often associated with profound emotional disturbance". Not all traumatic events leave physical scars as even learning of events affecting others can also be regarded as traumatising, possibly leaving emotional scars or having other damaging consequences (APA, 2000).

Events deemed traumatic can raise difficult ethical and moral issues such as questions about blame and responsibility, and about the roles of victim and perpetrator. In essence, no matter how much the argument revolves around where the responsibility lies and who has been harmed, the words of former President Nelson Mandela illustrate how the collective is affected. In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994, 751) he stressed that the act of taking away the freedom of another leads to becoming a prisoner of hatred and prejudice, robbing both oppressed and oppressor of their humanity. He believes that both are in need of liberation, of being shown the superior possibility of a way of living which honours and reinforces the freedom of others (Mandela 1994).

In attempts to reach reconciliation there is a danger of going so far in attempting to rectify the injustices of the past that we risk creating a new set of victims through collectively forcing a generation born after the era of injustice to bear the punishment for the effects of the actions of their predecessors – adding yet another side to the intergenerational transmission of trauma, a phenomenon discussed below. However, very often nothing is done – the survivor becomes a survivor through a process of healing, but justice is never served. Debating this and other dilemmas created by trauma is not the aim of this paper. Rather, the emphasis is on the possible positive outcomes of trauma, including the widely acknowledged realisation that trauma can serve to awaken us spiritually and to act as a catalyst for transformation (Levine 2005). These conditions may be achieved if the experience of trauma changes our entrenched perceptions of our (previous) reality and forces us to face a (newly) uncertain world and perceive it afresh (Levine 2005).

Trauma brings with it practical and academic challenges and its varied manifestations can make it difficult to treat. Its seriousness must never be underestimated: early trauma can lie at the root of personality disorders and character disturbances (see, for example, Miller 1997; Nijenhuis, van der Hart & Steele 2004; Van der Kolk 1989; Van der Kolk & McFarlane 1996). Phenomena associated with traumatic experiences do not always appear logical at first: in understanding trauma we often need to think beyond what seems immediately apparent. Consider Stockholm Syndrome for a moment, an example of betrayal bonding where, when survival is at stake, the victim bonds and sides with the perpetrator to ensure survival (Freyd & Birrell 2013). The phenomenon of "betrayal bonding" can manifest on a broad continuum and include such common occurrences as remaining part of systems we disagree with but depend on for our livelihood or our education, or staying with those who cause us emotional or physical harm, because the consequences of doing otherwise could be more severe than the status quo (Smith & Freyd 2013). A commonly employed mechanism during extreme trauma, i.e. dissociation, can dull the severest pain and enable people to live through

otherwise intolerable experiences. In extreme cases dissociation can also cause the splitting of the personality into many separate identities, a tragic but fascinating condition called dissociative identity disorder, formerly known as multiple personality disorder (APA 2000; Hartman 2009; Nijenhuis, Van der Hart & Steele 2004).

In response to shock or extreme acute stressors, the body prepares a fight-or-flight reaction (Cannon 1929, 195-7; Bracha ***et al.*** **2**004, 448). If neither of these is feasible, the subject "freezes", also called the "immobility response", which is a dissociative response. If one wants to understand why traumatic sequelae can be long lasting, it is extremely important to understand the function of the "freeze" response as relates to reptiles and animals in response to predation in the wild. Levine explains at length the four biological functions of numbing (Levine 2010, 50). These include feigning death to mislead the predator into believing the animal is already dead, possibly abandoning it for a moment and thereby allowing a moment for escape; affording the animal a degree of invisibility; enhancing group survival by distracting a pack of predators long enough to enable the other members of the herd to escape; and lastly but importantly, numbing the animal to pain and dulling terror with endorphins (akin to an analgesic effect), enabling a wounded animal to attempt escape despite injuries, or sparing the animal the full agony of being torn apart by the teeth of a predator (Levine 2010, 49-50). Levine states powerfully that "until the core physical experience of trauma – feeling scared stiff, frozen in fear or collapsing and going numb – unwinds and transforms, one remains stuck, a captive of one's own entwined fear and helplessness" (Levine 2010, 73-4). In addition, to move through the experience of immobility and face the fear, one risks facing anger and rage. In Levine's view this anger can be channelled in healthy ways, but since as socialised animals we find anger unacceptable, the fear of anger is often the cause why an individual would rather avoid the work of healing.

Trauma can be so commonplace that it can become indistinguishable from ordinary everyday life. Sometimes what has become ordinary in certain parts of the world would be considered as an extreme circumstance by people from other parts of the world. This does not disqualify it from being traumatic, but might impact on the way in which society chooses to deal with it.

Rationale, methodology, scope and aim

For a very long time trauma sequelae have not only been overlooked but actively denied. Turnbull attests how the topic has until recently been brushed under the carpet even by those caring for soldiers showing adverse reactions to experiences far beyond the ordinary (Turnbull 2011). However, in recent years much research has been done on the phenomenon of trauma in general and the development of a comprehensive understanding of the various kinds of trauma and their treatment (Levine 2010; Scaer 2005; Van der Kolk 1994). In turn, music therapy has been used very successfully in the treatment of trauma victims (Lee 2009; Sutton 2002). However, there is a gap in the literature on the influence of trauma on musicians, yet the expressive nature of their work indeed makes them an ideal population to study (Swart 2010, 8, 197). At a basic level, music can be defined as 'organised sound' (Levitin 2006, 111; Swallow 2002, 45). The two musicians discussed in this paper perform Western art music, or what is also commonly known as "classical music". But the concepts regarding trauma, emotion, memory and other aspects discussed here are equally applicable to other styles of music. Elliott's description of "musicing" and "musicers" is appropriate here (1995, 49, 109).

As depicted in Figure 1 below, he (1995, 40) describes music as a four-dimensional concept involving a doer which he calls a "musicer", some kind of doing which he calls "musicing", something done which he describes as "music" as well as the complete context in which these actions take place. His definition of "musicing" includes all five forms of music-making which he lists as performing, improvising, composing, arranging and conducting.

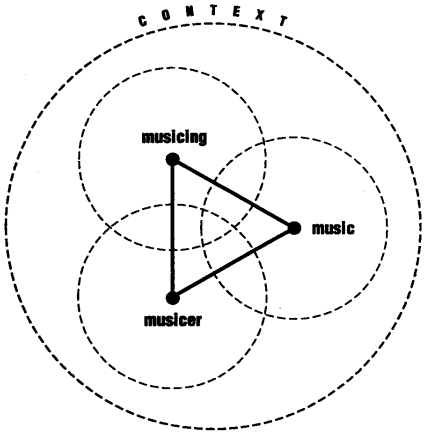

Figure 1: Musicing: Four dimensions (Elliott 1995, 40)

This paper presents an interpretative phenomenological analysis of the experiences of two successful professional musicians who both suffered significant trauma. The word "phenomenology" is derived from the Greek *phenomenon*, meaning appearance, and the suffix *–ology*, meaning "branch of knowledge". Husserl is regarded as the founder of phenomenology in the twentieth century (Beyer 2011; Vandenberg, 1997, 11). Working after World War I in a milieu where European perceptions of reality had been shaken to their roots (Eagleton 1983, 54), Husserl placed the emphasis on how phenomena presented themselves to people's consciousness (Groenewald 2004, 4). By looking at textural descriptions of "what" was experienced and structural descriptions of "how" it was experienced, the observer arrives at the "essence" of the experience. Phenomenology is particularly relevant to the arts in that Vanderberg (as translated by Van Manen 1997, 41) calls poets and painters "born phenomenologists", who share their insights on what messages phenomena hold for us through the use of word and image. In addition, "psychological phenomenology" is highly suitable for the investigation of psychological phenomena (Moustakas 1994; Creswell 2013, 273), and through its qualitative perspective it deals with "human experience in its richness" (Ashworth 2003, 4). The study of fewer research subjects in interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) allows for the detailed exploration of the meaning that experiences and events hold for participants as well as how they are making sense of their "lifeworlds", whether personal, social or professional (Smith & Osborn 2009). In addition, IPA acknowledges the dynamic nature of the research process as involving a double hermeneutic: participants attempting to make sense of their world on the one hand, and the researcher, through his/her own experiences, conceptions and understanding, "trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world", on the other (Smith & Osborn 2009, 53).

Previous research has highlighted particular aspects in which traumatic experiences influenced the music-making of musicians at different levels of accomplishment (Swart 2010). In an exploration of this vast terrain, a distinction should be drawn between the

various populations studied previously and factors that could affect the ways in which trauma manifests in these populations, accounting for differences. It should be stated at the outset that differences in the way that professional musicians process trauma, as compared to music learners, could be attributed to their greater accumulation of crystallised ability and years of experience. Therefore, while the focus in a previous article was primarily on students and the way that teachers can be equipped to recognise signs of trauma in students (Swart 2013), this paper focuses on its effects on professional musicians only.

The paper attempts to fill a gap in the literature: while we do know the stories of the unsettled lives of great musicians such as Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Mozart and Shostakovich, we generally do not know how professional musicians feel that trauma affects their music since we do not ask them directly. The professional singer and the conductor whose narratives are presented here talk about their musical background, what happened to them, which they experienced as significant life traumas, the effects of this on their lives, their relationships and their "musicing", as well as on their journey to recovery. The purpose of this paper is not to investigate the intricate psychological mechanisms at work through which recovery took place. For descriptions of these, the reader is referred elsewhere (Swart, Van Niekerk & Hartman 2010; Swart 2010). In addition to the importance of music in the recovery process, the role of spirituality is highlighted and linked with what pre-eminent trauma researchers have to say about spirituality and trauma.

Epoché

In the spirit of phenomenology, I shall begin with a description of how my own experiences influenced my views on the subject in order to position myself, recognising that I could not completely remove myself from the situation – a process described as *epoché* by Moustakas (1994, 84-90). I have personally witnessed the effects of trauma on previously disadvantaged learners studying music in South Africa, as well as the pervasive influence on musicians in Poland, who experienced the carnage of war and its effects on the city of Warsaw, where I studied from 2007 to 2008. The older generation experienced World War II first hand, while both the older and the younger generations endured the stifling effects of communism on freedom of thought, choice and action. Like too many fellow South Africans I have also experienced violent crime first hand. However, two events I witnessed stand out as culminating experiences, not only stimulating an interest in the subject but also contributing to a deeper understanding of it: my postgraduate piano studies in the great city of Warsaw, capital of Poland, and my work as one of the official repétiteurs for the Vundowl production *Winnie The Opera*, an opera about the life and mission of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. This opera was premièred at the Pretoria State Theatre on 28 April 2011.

Through being involved in the preparation for the opera *Winnie* and collaborating with the cast and director, I gained a deeper understanding of something that I was aware of before only as an outsider, namely black people's collective experience of the struggle against apartheid. I gained a sense of how people of colour felt humiliated and denigrated by the oppressive regime of racial segregation – how they suffered deep wounds to their sense of identity and their humanity, and how subsequent generations are still affected through inter-generational transmission of trauma. A short discussion of inter-generational trauma is warranted at this stage: the term entails the transmission of the consequences of trauma from

one generation to the next (Danieli 1998). Sources making mention of and attempting to explain inter-generational trauma include Levine (1997), Yehuda *et al*. (1998), Heart (2005) and Danieli (1998). It is important to understand that trauma does not only affect people directly involved during the exact time of its occurrence, but that its remnants and consequences could be carried over into subsequent generations in various ways. A practical example in South Africa is the inter-generational transmission of the trauma of the effects of racial discrimination among large segments of the population.

The music to the opera *Winnie*, a lady who was dubbed "mother of the nation", was composed by Bongani Ndodana-Breen (2011) and it helps to portray vividly some of the key events of the apartheid era. The opera is about the important role of Nelson Mandela's former wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, during the freedom struggle. I acted as repétiteur while the experienced American director Shirley Jo Finney and the singers worked long hours to polish their performances, and was fascinated by an essentially human drama unfolding, peacefully this time, and believe I benefited greatly from this in many ways. While people of all ages, races and backgrounds were working together wonderfully, one event occurred that particularly intrigued me: on the opening night, after a successful performance of this huge work, Winnie herself ascended the stage, thrust her right fist into the air and immediately launched into cries of "*Amandla!*", a Xhosa and Zulu word which means "power". This reverberated through the State Theatre, the entire audience joining in. I wondered whether this strong symbolic gesture could not in itself be a manifestation of the unresolved traumas of power being taken away from her and the trauma of long years of incarceration on Robben Island of her husband, former president Nelson Mandela, together with other Comrades.

This experience left many unanswered questions. Do these wounds go so deep that a resulting almost Adlerian need for power persisted to this day and did not subside even long after liberation had been attained and a peaceful political and economic transition achieved? While the opera was about her, Mrs Mandela did not take part in the almost cathartic experience of producing and performing the opera and the music. One wonders whether, had she been part of the musical side of producing the opera and experienced the conciliatory experience of black and white people working together to portray this important part of history, she would not have felt the healing effects of the music and so not retained the need to display this rather aggressive gesture? Without an opportunity to ask her personally and directly, one cannot know the exact meaning this rallying cry has for her. However, it remains strongly associated with protest and not with reconciliation and community. On the other hand, for those directly involved with the production of *Winnie The Opera*, the music served to help us honour and understand the experiences of those involved in the Struggle. I would like to argue that music in this instance also exercised healing power.

The other eye-opening experience was my postgraduate piano studies at the Fryderyk Chopin University in Warsaw, a city that came close to annihilation during the Second World War. Poland was again brought to its knees during Soviet occupation and under Communist rule, which came to an end in 1989, only five years before apartheid was abolished in SA in 1994. Through working so closely with people affected, I came to the realisation that this was a Polish liberation struggle with its own dynamics and particulars, and that these people were affected to the very core of their being – high levels of justifiable paranoia persist years after, stemming from the experience of deceit and of being spied on by government agencies.

I witnessed the effects of unresolved trauma by observing a person who had, in his own words, "by many miracles" survived the Second World War, living in Warsaw at the time. He

may well have benefited from psychotherapy or debriefing, but this was not common in those days and even looked down upon. The tragedy of the lingering effects of his experiences is illustrated by his own words: "I was from my early infancy and I will to my death be under the influence of these long terrible days, years and images that I still have in my memory, in my brain." The debate whether "shell-shock"[2] was a consequence of the effect of cowardice or the physical environment contributed to the stigma around it (Mc Farlane & Van der Kolk 1996, 563). Therefore it could be expected that survivors of the war would be reluctant to openly discuss any severe emotional reactions to the war. The son of a famous pianist, Wladyslaw Szpilman, states in the foreword to his father's book that his father never spoke about his wartime experiences until late in his life (Szpilman 1999). These experiences instilled in me a respect for survivors of trauma. The wish to better understand both the psychological mechanisms at work as well as the possibilities for facilitating recovery inspired my research into individuals who had emerged on the other end of adversity.

Two musical journeys through trauma to well-being

Five years ago the life of a professional singer was changed irrevocably by a horrific event: his mother, father, grandmother and a friend of the family were murdered in a brutal attack in their own home. He says that the shock took a while to register in his brain and that despite the circumstances he felt he needed to go forward with an opera production in which he was involved at the time. "The show must go on!" – musicians so often say. However, he did notice that despite his courage, he was human and he was affected. He had trouble memorising the music and giving his full attention on stage. Even though he knew the part well, he did not think that he projected emotions as well as he should in the musical drama. It was difficult to perform at that time as he felt insecure and shocked. Paradoxically, after this loss he achieved more in the professional music arena and he noticed that he could express emotions through music much better after the trauma than before.

Music expresses emotions; it is not neutral and human beings often associate pieces of music with people, memories, places and events (Davies 2010, 18). The singer says that his parents, grandmother and his music were interlinked; they were the ones who always supported him, and that it was difficult to carry on with music without their support. Sometimes he performs music which reminds him of his parents and this makes him weep. Through singing and playing music he worked through emotions which he had initially been afraid to face. He mentions that one tune will always carry a negative association: when his phone first rang with the terrible news of what had happened to his family members, he had a ringtone from an opera aria. When he hears this music he still gets a fright. The interpersonal effects of trauma are very common. Traumas perpetrated by other humans tend to be especially damaging (Freud 1965, 14). This is evident in this case, since the singer no longer trusts people as much as he did before. Temporarily devastating interpersonal effects of trauma were also reported by the conductor in the second narrative presented in this article.

The singer's journey to recovery was long and difficult – sometimes he still feels that the recovery period might never end. At first he thought that he was fine and emotionally strong, but when he went for counselling about a month after the murders he discovered that there

[2] A term applied to a constellation of symptoms observed in populations of military veterans as well as active soldiers.

were still many unhealed wounds. He never took any medication as he wanted to work though the trauma by way of music and physical exercise. He says that his own music performance during the time of trauma was the single most significant factor aiding his healing process. June Boyce-Tillman (2013) writes at length in her book *The wounds that sing* about music's healing capacity in various ancient and current traditions. While life will never be exactly the same for the singer again, returning to a fully functional state and leading a fulfilling life can be defined as "a return to well-being".

The second narrative is the recovery journey of a highly successful conductor, as described by him.[3] Like all conductors, he was also trained in other forms of "musicing" – particularly piano, cello, classical percussion and composition. The two events which greatly influenced the course of his career and his life were the suicide of a friend and mentor, and a serious motor vehicle accident which left him paralysed for three months. This narrative illustrates how trauma can influence the path a musician takes, even within the music profession, in addition to it possibly causing temporary interruptions in a career.

The conductor's best friend and mentor committed suicide two weeks before his final Master's degree concert – about 18 years ago. He initially dealt with the shock by starting to compose. He was also still involved in conducting and, like the singer, he noticed an emotional deepening in his musicing. However, while becoming more expressive musically, he realised that he was distancing himself from the audience at the same time. His explanation for this is that his mentor's suicide made him very suspicious of people, an interpersonal consequence of trauma also experienced by the singer. He became increasingly aware that he was approaching his work in a much more clinical manner with too little regard for the feelings and dynamics inherent in interpersonal relationships. To counter this, he adopted an approach to life that focuses on living "in the moment". Still his fears and suspicions drove him to suspend his successful professional career for a period of time to return to his hometown in the countryside and allow time for contemplation. He subsequently became involved in didactics and methodology, and wrote books, produced albums, gave workshops and clinics, and lectured at universities and conservatories. The course of his career changed and he became involved as vice-president and teacher/conductor in an art education centre with 2 200 students. He also worked with amateur choirs and orchestras and says that the children played a catalytic role in making him a passionate person again and in regaining his love for people. This experience of sudden loss of a friend and mentor specifically helped him to understand the music of Mozart and Brahms at a deeper level. He received no professional treatment for the first trauma. However, the switch to classical music performances and the move to the countryside helped him to find balance within himself again, while re-entering the professional orchestra world as a conductor helped him re-establish the direction and focus of his career. After four years he started conducting musicals until the second trauma struck six years later.

The conductor's second serious traumatic experience was a severe motor vehicle accident in which he was not at fault. He says that a moment before the impact his entire body shut down, which, according to doctors, may have saved him from sustaining lethal fractures. He was presumed dead and when the emergency personnel finished sawing away the metal and

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3 Aspects of this narrative pertaining to how trauma can influence musicians' memory for music were briefly touched upon in the article 'Trauma-related dissociation as a factor affecting musicians' memory for music: Some possible solutions' published in the *Australian Journal of Music Education* (Swart, Van Niekerk & Hartman 2010). However, the case is presented here in its full context.

took him out of the car – a process that took 90 minutes – he awoke and saw the coroner's car. When they then saw that he was still alive, the car was sent back. During this time he had an out-of-body experience which he describes as a feeling of circling above the car and seeing all the people around the car in a "helicopter view". He later told his wife that during the out-of-body experience he saw students wearing soccer gear standing behind the car. Since he was stuck in the car with his back to the students, not able to move, this was impossible for him to observe from the position in which he lay. This experience so intrigued him that he later called the students for confirmation of these details. For him this experience raised many questions. Although it generated such fascination in the conductor, this "out-of-body" feeling is described and explained in the trauma literature. The four biological functions of numbing were described earlier (Levine 2010, 49-50), the fourth of which correlates with this experience of the conductor. Levine calls this form of distancing a dissociative state which has analgesic features. Levine's own description of a motor vehicle accident after which he had an out-of-body experience is very similar and he notes that such a state of analgesia makes it possible for the victim to witness the event as though from outside his or her body and make the unbearable bearable (Levine 2010, 3-9, 50-52).

The conductor was hospitalised for three days, after which he was discharged since the doctors determined that there was no physical cause for his paralysis. Lying in the emergency room and hearing the medical personnel speculating about whether he was permanently paralysed was the most traumatic aspect of this experience. The diagnosis of his doctors was that, as a result of shock, his nervous system and body had shut down. He remained paralysed for three months – he even says that his thinking patterns had frozen during that time. His memory of music was severely affected: the moment he heard music it would "evaporate" again. "There was not one single melody in my head", he said.

After the accident he experienced a "strange spiritual awareness" and a reiki practitioner offered to help. He associates the reiki treatments with the "New Age" spiritual movement.

Although this had positive effects on his physical recovery, he says his "soul was suffering" and he felt distanced from himself and his intellect. Soon after he again regained basic mobility, a Christian friend suggested that it would be good for him to play the drums. This played an integral role in his healing process. Slowly he went back to his former lifestyle. Starting a year and a half after the accident, he received Christian pastoral counselling for an extended period during which he attempted to make sense of his experiences. This healing journey was not without its challenges and six months into treatment he became depressed and wanted to end his career. He distanced himself from others to the point of hating people and, in the capacity of conductor, wanting "use them for producing a sound". Although he wanted to make a contribution to people's lives, he felt frustrated after every concert for not achieving this and as a result became very cynical about audiences worldwide. In addition, he struggled to make eye contact with people, became an extreme introvert and started avoiding groups of people.

After an extended period of counselling and the help of his own knowledge of prior studies in neuropsychology as well as the help of others he literally rebuilt his life to encompass a renewed belief system and worldview. While Christian counselling took care of his spiritual recovery, his physical recovery was aided by drumming. A friend had suggested that it would be good for him to play the drums: it felt as if he immediately "came to life" when he initially started playing the drums. For the first time after the accident, his body and brain started to move and respond to what he was hearing. This could possibly be the result of the release of

the "frozen energy" of dissociation, as described earlier with reference to the work of Levine (2010), which was mobilised by drumming. Drumming also had anxiolytic effects since as long as he played drums, he did not need any morphine to reduce the pain. The anxiolytic effects of music are documented by music therapy researchers (see, for example, Spintge 1991, 65). Within a couple of weeks after starting drumming, all functions returned, including again being able to remember scores learnt previously. He played the rhythms of music by Mozart and Bach on the drums to enable him to again connect melodies to the rhythm, but also played rock, pop and metal styles. He describes drumming as "conducting with drumsticks" with the difference that, unlike conducting where the conductor silently leads others to play their instruments, when engaged in drumming "every part of your body, every limb is [involved in] making a sound". Soul, body and spirit connect when playing drums. The effect of drumming on his right-brain functions helped his perceptual skills as well as his interpersonal and communication skills.

The conductor states that his profession had a great influence on his spiritual journey. He has collaborated with many famous composers including "New Age composers" and composers experimenting with "new mathematics". He was exposed to both over-emotional and over-intellectual approaches to the composition of music. He considers himself to be a reborn Christian and states that his faith played an important role in his full recovery. Through recovering from his traumatic experience and coming to terms with its significance and also the possibility that, if things were slightly different, he might not have been so lucky to recover fully, he learnt a great deal about not taking anything for granted, living "in the moment" and the value of interpersonal relationships. Indeed, Scaer (2005, 283) draws attention to the possibility that the trauma survivor, after having witnessed the fragility of life and being confronted with its finite nature, can experience transformation and acquire a sense of altruism in the healing process, appreciate the value of their existence and become better able to empathise with others. Like the conductor's journey in moving from treating others as objects, "using" orchestra members to create sound and becoming a vastly more empathetic human being through the experience of trauma, Scaer states that knowing oneself enables one to know others.

Insights and advice

The singer and conductor allowed us access into their personal "lifeworlds" and shared what they felt to be essential to the topic. In this phenomenological analysis we were guided by these individuals in what they wanted us to understand while learning about their experiences. Apart from explanations of some of the phenomena that emerged throughout these narratives, further interpretations are redundant and could only be speculation: the purpose of this paper is to gain an insight into these musicians' experiences and not to serve as a psychological investigation of the mechanisms of trauma. That had been done elsewhere in its appropriate context (Swart 2010). The phenomenological "essence" of their experiences had been distilled by the singer and the conductor themselves. They generously provided the following thoughtful advice to others involved in musicing.

- Carry on with music; it is a way of expressing emotions through voice or instrument.
- Take nothing for granted: being able to walk or play an instrument is a gift.
- Love people first, then music.

- Primarily focus on how you can contribute rather than making competition your most important goal.
- Learn to self-assess when something significant happens to you: first reflect, then act and move on to the next experience.
- Always submit your body to your spirit.
- Always believe in your childhood motives to play music.
- Do not carry negative stuff around in your heart.
- Get two or three people around you to create a healthy system of accountability.
- Keep a balance between the various aspects of musicing.
- Music is a variation on silence. You don't put silence into music.
- Most importantly, live in the perceptual presence, not in the past, and not in continuous anticipation.

Conclusion: a spiritual journey

Coming to terms with trauma is a process, a journey, and it often forces us on a new journey by creating unexpected detours. It might alter our plans for our lives, sometimes through necessitating change and at other times through opening our eyes to possibilities not previously recognised by us. Unresolved trauma can determine our destiny without our being aware of it. However, through becoming fully present and paying attention to what lessons might be learnt from our experiences, we can become captains of our own ship, navigating the winds of adversity instead of being blown off course. Distinguished writers such as Levine (2005) and Scaer (2005) strongly affirm this viewpoint, emphasising the opportunities for personal as well as spiritual growth.

Music therapist Julie Sutton (2002, 31) describes the journey on which trauma might cause us to embark as consisting of a series of processes. She says: "Trauma does not occur due to the external factor of a single event. Trauma is enmeshed in an internal process of an attempt to assimilate how the event has irrevocably affected the individual" (Sutton 2002, 31). She also explains that what traumatises the individual in such a situation is primarily the loss of control and a perception that one is controlled by an event happening to one, a feeling stemming from a compromised ability to experience, act on and re-experience one's own agency.

Trauma survivors can be affected to the core of their being. Louise Montello's work on essential musical intelligence (EMI) teaches that a person can dissociate from his/her 'core being' in order to protect themselves. Montello (2002, 201) also believes that a person's EMI is what is at work in leading them back to their true essence or true self. She explains that EMI can bring a person from a sub-optimal state of not resonating with their ideal identity towards being centred and secure in their identity as a valuable and creative human being, enabling unhindered expression of one's identity.

Where human perpetrators of traumatic events are involved, we will do well to heed the advice of Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who played a leading role in establishing a new democratic order in South Africa and also chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He cautions that forgiveness is not cheap and that real reconciliation is only possible if it is arrived at after acknowledging and discovering the truth. He says that a future without forgiveness isn't feasible, because responding to revenge with further violence only provokes a vicious cycle of counter-reprisals and retaliation (Tutu 2011, 47).

Spiritual growth often occurs in the wake of trauma, and for the conductor this was particularly profound. Peter Levine describes trauma as a "profound compression of 'survival' energy" and explains that innate survival responses are geared towards activating incredible bursts of focused attention and effective action (Levine 2010, 349). However, this energy is often not allowed to complete its meaningful course, since human trauma survivors don't always carry out the natural instinct to flee for their lives or to fight the perpetrator, for which evolution intended this energy. Levine explains that the ability (or lack thereof) to access the rhythmic release of this bound energy, so effectively achieved by the conductor through drumming in the case narratives presented here, makes all the difference to whether this thwarted survival energy will destroy or revitalise us. In the book *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* a team of researchers argue that the brain structures that are central to the resolution of trauma are also pivotal in various "mystical" and "spiritual" states (Newberg, D'Aquili & Rause 2002).

While people often rightly associate trauma with suffering and negative experiences, it can have profoundly positive spiritual consequences. The healing journey can lead to wholeness, transformation and growth. Scaer (2005, 283) emphasises that this transformation manifests not only in the form of the recovery of a degree of homeostasis, but also in a new level of perception and adaptation to the challenges life brings. This process can result in our becoming more empathetic, more adaptable, resilient, regaining an appreciation of the value of our existence, and acquiring invaluable wisdom.

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