

# Musical communities in the society of captives: Exploring the impact of music making on the social world of prison

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## Abstract

This article examines the ways in which music making can inspire and facilitate social change amongst the “society of captives.” It explores the social dynamics of prison music projects, and then looks at the ways in which music making can begin to transform the wider social world of prison. It reports a qualitative investigation of two such projects delivered by the Irene Taylor Trust (ITT) in a medium-security, adult male prison in England. Methods comprised participant observations of the projects over a period of 14 months, and semi-structured interviews with prisoner participants, facilitators, and members of prison staff.

Much research shows that taking part in prison music projects can help participants develop social skills and thus contribute to their rehabilitation and desistance from crime. The present study revealed that the ITT projects were not merely the setting for learning individual social skills; the participants also felt themselves to be joining or forming a community that was distinct from the wider prison community. The impact of their musical activities on their lives in prison was as important to them as its potential contribution to their lives following release. The findings are discussed with reference to the work of DeNora, suggesting that music projects can provide the setting for *removal communities*, with norms distinct from and better than those of typical social life in prison, and can transform or *refurnish* the wider prison environment, as participants continue their music making on the landings and in their cells.

## Keywords

Music, prison, musical communities, song writing, pains of imprisonment, removal activities

This article explores the idea that prison music projects can shape prisoners’ social worlds. There is much evidence that music making in prison can contribute to the development of social skills. The collaborative process of working together in a group can develop people’s

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listening and communication abilities (Bilby et al., 2013; Cox & Gelsthorpe, 2008; Cursley & Maruna, 2015); group music making can provide an opportunity for prisoners to demonstrate cooperation and develop nonviolent and prosocial methods of dealing with disputes (Cartwright, 2013; Henley, 2012); and there is evidence that prison music projects create an environment in which participants' perceptions of others can change (Caulfield et al., 2010). Research tends to view the impact of music making in prison through the lens of individuals' journeys of rehabilitation and desistance, whereby the group context is seen primarily as the setting within which a participant develops personal and social skills that might help them distance themselves from crime upon release (Cohen & Henley, 2018). More recent scholarship has attempted to move away from a merely desistance-based framework (Balfour et al., 2019), but little is yet known about the way in which music projects might engage with and act upon the social world of prison itself.

This article focuses on the in-prison social impact of prison music projects, examining their potential for allowing participants to develop musical communities. *Community* can be a contested term (Shelemay, 2011), but here it is used to mean a group with a shared experience and collective identity. This article suggests that music making in prison provides a way of forming communities with norms that are different from those that are typical of prison social life, and which have the potential to transform the broader social world of prison. While these findings have implications for life post release, the focus of the article is on participants' immediate social world. It begins by reviewing the literature on the "society of captives" (Sykes, 1958). Next, it introduces the Irene Taylor Trust (ITT), on whose work in prisons the study was based, and outlines the research methods. Finally, it presents and discusses the findings of a qualitative investigation of the ITT's work in one prison, using the concepts of *removal* and *refurnishing* (DeNora, 2013) to highlight the distinctness of the community in the music projects from the wider prisoner society, and the potential of music making to transform social life in prison.

### *The society of captives*

To understand the social impact of music making in prison, it is essential first to grasp something of the experience of imprisonment, and particularly the social world of prison. This provides the backdrop against which musical communities form, communities that are defined by the contrast they offer to the surrounding culture and which present ongoing alternative social possibilities. Fundamentally, the purposes and effects of imprisonment clash with such values as equality, empowerment, and hospitality, which underpin much participatory and community music practice (Cohen & Henley, 2018; Higgins, 2012), and many of the anticipated benefits of music programmes can be undermined by the myriad psychological, social, and personal consequences of imprisonment (Cheliotis, 2012). Research into prison life has consistently shown that imprisonment is a painful experience, involving not only the deprivation of liberty and separation from family and friends, but also ongoing physical and psychological burdens (Crewe, 2011; Johnson & Toch, 1982; Liebling & Maruna, 2005; Sykes, 1958). According to Liebling and Maruna (2005), "Fear, anxiety, loneliness, trauma, depression, injustice, powerlessness, violence and uncertainty are all part of the experience of prison life" (p. 3). As well as having long-term ramifications for individuals, these "pains of imprisonment" (Sykes, 1958, p. 63) contribute to the structure of social life inside prison.

In his influential book, Sykes (1958) refers to the imprisoned population as the "society of captives." Prison does not just hold individuals living in close quarters; prison holds "a society within society" (Sykes, 1958, p. xii). According to Crewe's (2009) detailed study of prison life conducted in one medium-security, male prison in England, this society has an identifiable

“system of [behavioural] norms” (p. 443), fostered by the interplay between values imported from the outside and responses to the power structures and pains of prison life. The behaviours prisoners expect of one another within this society can often be contradictory, such as avoiding both weakness and aggression, and are thus difficult to meet (Crewe, 2009). It is common for prisoners to adopt a facade in order to navigate prison social life, exhibiting a tough masculine exterior to other prisoners and avoiding any display of vulnerability (de Viggiani, 2012).<sup>1</sup> While there are some areas in prison in which it is possible to show emotion (Crewe et al., 2014), prisoners generally guard their feelings in more communal areas.

This, of course, affects relationships in prison. Friendships are sometimes developed during incarceration (Wulf-Ludden, 2013). However, the lack of interpersonal trust in prison, stemming in part from the fact that “prisoners are acutely aware that their peers have committed some form of social transgression,” makes it difficult to forge new and close personal relationships in prison (Crewe, 2009, p. 301). Social groupings are common in prison, often formed around regional or cultural and religious identities (Phillips, 2012), but the general attitude to social life is “prudent individualism” (Crewe, 2009, p. 229). The social context in which prison music projects take place is one with many demands and expectations, but with little support, trust or openness.

### *The Irene Taylor Trust*

The data for this article come from 14 months of fieldwork conducted during 2015–2016 for the author’s doctoral project (Doxat-Pratt, 2019), which examined the work of the Irene Taylor Trust (ITT). A leading organisation in the arts-in-criminal-justice sector, the ITT runs a number of music programmes in prisons and the community; the research looked at their work in a large, medium-security, adult male prison in England.<sup>2</sup> Two types of projects were run by the ITT in this prison: week-long, intensive projects for between six and 10 participants, led by three music facilitators, and weekly, two-hour sessions for between two and six participants, led by a musician-in-residence. The ITT participants put themselves forward for the projects, often on the recommendation of support workers or other prisoners, to take part in either a week-long project or a series of (usually) four to six weekly sessions with the musician-in-residence, or both. The projects were inclusive, participatory and collaborative, involving professional musicians working with groups of prisoners to create original songs using live instruments (predominantly keyboards, guitars, bass guitars, drum kit) and voice. There were occasions of instrumental music making, but the focus of this article is on the songwriting aspects of the projects, as these were often the most significant for community building.

Ethical approval for the research was given by the National Offender Management Service (now Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service) and, due to inter-institutional supervision arrangements, by the ethics committees of both the University of Nottingham and the University of Leicester.

## **Methods**

### *Participants*

All the prisoners who took part in an ITT project during the fieldwork period were invited to be part of the research. Forty-eight prisoners consented, of whom 17 took part only in a week-long project, 21 in only the weekly sessions, and 10 in both. Overall, there were five ITT facilitators; one was the musician-in-residence (male), who led the weekly sessions, while the other

four (three male, one female) facilitated the week-long projects in teams of three. All five were willing to take part in informal conversations about the research, and two, the musician-in-residence and one of the male week-long project facilitators, were willing to be interviewed, as was the ITT director. Of the organising staff at the prison, three women and one man, selected because they had all overseen some ITT sessions, were interviewed in pairs.

Henceforth, individuals are referred to according to their role within the ITT projects: prisoners who took part in an ITT project are referred to as *participants*, musicians who led a project as *facilitators*, and members of the organising staff in prison as *staff*.

### *Design and procedure*

The research was a grounded study, designed primarily to understand how ITT music projects were experienced and valued by those who participated in them, and how these experiences were shaped by the prison context. I conducted participant observation of three week-long projects and 20 weekly sessions, and carried out semi-structured interviews with 29 participants, two facilitators, the ITT director and four members of staff. All participants were invited to be interviewed, but some had been transferred or released before the interviews could be arranged. Of the 29 participants interviewed, 11 had taken part only in a week-long project, eight only in the weekly sessions, and 10 in both. Interviews with participants took place approximately two weeks after the end of their project, and covered themes such as expectations and motivations, highlights, relationships with the rest of the group and facilitators, suggestions for improvement, and personal change. Interviews with staff and facilitators explored the administrative and organisational aspects of the projects, and their personal and professional goals for the projects.

I kept detailed field notes of my observations. Informal conversations with all participants, facilitators and staff proved hugely informative and were therefore also recorded in field notes. As I only observed the ITT projects themselves, all the examples of activities and relationships in the wider prison are taken from information provided by participants during the project sessions or in the course of interviews.

### *Analysis*

Fieldwork and analysis took place concurrently. Data were analysed manually and using NVivo (<https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home>). Analysis was an iterative process through which ideas emerging from the data could be pursued further in the course of observations and interviews.

## **Results and discussion**

### *Removal and refurbishing*

ITT participants spoke about their experiences in ways that highlighted the distinctness of the social environment of the music projects from that of typical prison social life, and their preference for it. Many participants also shared anecdotes from their lives in prison that showed that the music projects were transforming social life beyond the sessions. These two ideas are discussed here using DeNora's (2013) concepts of removal and refurbishing. Developing the work of Erving Goffman (1961), DeNora explores the ways in which music can provide *asylum spaces*, examining how music can promote wellbeing and enable human flourishing in everyday life.

According to DeNora (2013), music can be “a medium for removal from and refurbishing of social environments so as to make existence habitable, hospitable, better” (p. 138).

DeNora’s ideas around removal are drawn from Goffman’s (1961) idea of removal activities. According to Goffman (1961), a defining feature of any total institution, such as asylums and prisons, is the presence of removal activities: “voluntary, unserious pursuits which are sufficiently engrossing or exciting to lift the participant out of himself, making him oblivious for the time being to his actual situation” (p. 67). Such activities can involve physical relocation or a more “conceptual or perceptual relocation” where the actor remains in the same place but “blots out” the world around them (DeNora, 2013, pp. 49–50). Music can be such an activity, creating “a place that is removed from causes of distress that are otherwise present in the social environment” (p. 136). DeNora suggests, for example, that by listening to music individuals can create for themselves a private space even when they are in public, thereby removing themselves from society, and particularly from spaces in which they may experience psychological or ontological harm. While DeNora focused on listening, research shows that musical engagement of all sorts – listening, learning, participating and performing – can provide such an escape from everyday life (Pitts, 2005).

For the purposes of this article, DeNora’s ideas are applied to everyday life in the kind of institutional context with which Goffman (1961) was concerned, although here specifically a prison rather than an asylum. The pains of prison life are such that removal activities are necessary for psychological survival; prisoners seek “sheltered settings and benign activities that insulate them from mainline prison” (Johnson, 2002, p. 109). Music has been found to be effective for this: music provides an escape (Maruna, 2010) and a “temporary respite from negative thoughts, traumas and pain” (Tuastad & O’Grady, 2013, p. 222). This was certainly evident in the ITT projects. Participants spoke of their experiences in ways that suggested a separation from more typical prison life. As Tyler<sup>3</sup> put it, “For the times I was there, it wasn’t like I was in prison”. There were frequent claims of feeling “free” during the music sessions; Aaron compared it to being “on holiday”.

While musical activities certainly provided a sense of escape or respite, the group dynamic fostered amongst participants also provided the possibility of removal. The ITT projects allowed for the formation of what I refer to as *removal communities*. Given the loneliness and isolation that are typical of the prison experience, removal for some prisoners requires positive social interaction rather than a retreat from the social world. Many participants referred to “the social side” of the projects as being the best or most significant element, distinguishing between relationships within the groups taking part in the projects and those that characterised the rest of prison life. Their sense of removal was not merely realised individually, nor was it only to do with attending a course or doing an activity; removal was a social experience. Participants were given a sense of belonging to a group, a community within which the interactions were distinct from, and better than, those in the surrounding social culture.

DeNora is interested not only in how music can enable temporary respite from pain, however, but also in whether music can transform environments. She questions whether removal can lead to or be effected in ways that mean “removing the sources of distress, rather than removing oneself from distressful circumstances” (2013, p. 62). Music promotes wellbeing and enables human flourishing not only by providing an escape from pain, but also by being “an activity oriented to furnishing the social environment with things (symbolic and material) that are conducive to, or afford, wellness” (p. 136). In an example taken from research on community music therapy, she describes group participation in singalongs, performances, and other musical activities, all of which established new social possibilities for and between participants (see also Ansdell & DeNora, 2012).



The question here, then, is whether the social experience of the music projects can have an impact on prison social life more widely, or if they are simply temporary distractions that leave the individuals and their surrounding culture unchanged. To a certain extent, the existence of removal communities is in itself evidence of refurbishing, in that their members interact very differently with each other while taking part in music projects compared with the ways in which they report interacting in other situations, suggesting some transformation of social life. But refurbishing consists of more than just the existence of removal communities; it means individuals “acting upon and in their environments in ways that affect those environments” (DeNora, 2013, p. 50). Although the ITT projects took place, physically, inside prison, the fact that participants described them as feeling not like prison indicates that real prison, so to speak, is considered to be elsewhere (Crewe et al., 2014). Most social life is conducted on the landings and in cells; these are where some of the pains of imprisonment are felt most acutely, where prison is most clearly a “dangerous, dangerous place” (Ben). Yet it became apparent that on occasion even these spaces could be transformed, as groups of participants began to make music together on the landings and in cells. For all the participants the removal communities stood out from typical prison life, but at times these communities also brought about a refurbishing of the social world of the prison. The next two sections address these themes in more detail. What did these removal communities look like, and how did they refurbish the prison?

### *Removal communities*

The capacity of music to bring people together is well supported by the findings of research, in relation, for example, to friends forming ensembles and strangers coming together in community settings to make music (Bartleet & Higgins, 2018; Finnegan, 1989; Pitts, 2005). Music making has been used to bring opposing groups together for the purposes of conflict resolution and transformation in ways that can supersede cultural and national identities (Howell et al., 2019; Urbain, 2007), and to reinforce pre-existing collective identities in immigrant and diasporic communities, for example (Cohen, 1998; Shelemay, 2011).

Before taking part in the ITT projects, participants were generally neither friends nor complete strangers; many recognised each other but often did not know each other’s names and had never spoken. Brought together from among the wider prison population, many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the prevailing culture in prison. They were described by one member of the organising staff as enjoying “being part of something separate to the prison,” in other words being members of removal communities, a group with a new collective identity. These communities had four distinctive features: they were *purposeful*, *diverse*, enabled the *expression of emotion*, and *supportive*. These features are described and illustrated below.

*Purposeful communities.* The starting point for the development of group identity was an assumed shared purpose. There was a mutual, though tacit, understanding of a common passion for and dedication to music making. Pitts (2005) asserts that “[making] music with others is a public statement of intent, which invests that activity with a high priority and value assumed to be commonly held by other members of the performing group” (p. 70). This seemed to be the case in the ITT sessions: commitment was rarely demanded explicitly by anyone, but most participants referred to a shared enthusiasm for the musical process, and criticised those participants whom they perceived as occasionally being lazy or apathetic. Participants assumed that they were “all there to learn something” (Adrian), and were equally committed to “doing some serious music” (Arthur) and writing high-quality songs.

This dedication to achieving specific musical outcomes led to a sense of commonality. The initial aims of individual participants often became subsumed into the needs of the group as a whole. According to Liam, “egos dropped,” while according to Tyler there was “no tension, everyone was trying to help everyone,” and Dean felt that they were all trying “to not mess it up for every other person.” The shared sense of purpose both necessitated and fostered a positive group dynamic. This was reinforced by the ITT facilitators, who often encouraged groups to give themselves a band name and refer to themselves by it.

*Diverse communities.* Participants were struck by the way that the ITT projects brought together prisoners from different social groups to work together. Prison choirs have been found to provide “a sense of group cohesion, camaraderie, and interconnectedness, irrespective of skin colour, religious affiliations, or class” (Cohen, 2012, p. 231). The ITT projects likewise provided a space for “building bridges” (George) between existing, potentially opposing groups, and forming a new group in which “there was no conflict against one another” (David). Participants reported that they enjoyed learning about others’ cultures and being able to incorporate different musical cultures in their songs. Many participants referred to unity and togetherness in ways that suggested that a collective identity that superseded other groupings had developed within the ITT projects. As Edward, for example, reflected, “it was good to see people of all kinds of culture, race . . . For me, the most important thing was to see the unity. There we all was like family, that was what I loved most.” Ian recognised that “music cuts through the divisions of race, religion, what not” and was overwhelmed to see “different groups laughing together – laughing, wow!”. Participants perceived this unity in diversity to be highly unusual in prison, and a feature that reinforced the sense of removal.

*Expression of emotion.* The community was also shaped by the high degree of emotional expression afforded by the projects. Even in the prison environment, in which emotions are generally suppressed, there are areas where displays of emotion and intimacy are accepted or even encouraged (Crewe et al., 2014), and the music projects were certainly considered to be among these. Several participants indicated that music was better than many of the other options available to them, or even unique, as a way of expressing emotion. George, for example, said:

Gym you get [an opportunity for emotional expression]. But it’s not the same. In the gym you just let out your testosterone . . . you let the aggression out. But, with music, I find it can be an emotional rollercoaster . . . For me, music is the best outlet, the best.

Song lyrics were full of emotional and sometimes highly personal content, often referring to families and loved ones. One participant rapped about his childhood:

Knowing the pain of having no one to love ya,  
 . . . Beaten every day, by my side, go take cover  
 Had a life full of stress and a life full of drama  
 Grew up in care and I wasn’t looked after

One group wrote a song collaboratively, which they entitled “The Journey,” drawing together their histories of crime, drugs, loss and hope. Other songs contained honest statements about how they were coping with imprisonment; for example, one participant, who was outwardly a very confident man, wrote a song which expressed the loneliness that he believed every prisoner, including himself, experienced at times, and the feeling of being in a cell wanting home to

“come close.” Music clearly provided a way for him to show vulnerability without its being equated with weakness (see Baker & Wigram, 2005; Levy & Keum, 2014). Writing songs became “a much easier way to communicate [and] a good way of connecting to people” (Oscar). Things that could not be said in conversation could be shared in song.

Some participants felt music making not only offered an opportunity for expressing their emotions, but actually required it. Participants considered incorporating emotional content in their lyrics the most authentic way of writing and performing songs; as Isaac said, “the best way I can sing is from emotion, or perform is from emotion.” Several participants spoke of wanting to “take things seriously” and write “good” songs, the definition of which included its being emotionally expressive, and therefore a certain amount of personal disclosure was necessary.

As participants revealed more of themselves than they usually would, trust and openness began to form. Prisoners’ tendency to adopt facades to hide their emotions means that prison is usually “considered [by prisoners] a highly partial and inauthentic social setting” (Crewe, 2009, p. 307), making it nearly impossible for one prisoner to discern the true character of another. The ITT projects enabled participants to learn more about one another, as personal narratives were shared in song. As a result of this disclosure, participants seemed to find it easier to come to conclusions about each other’s characters, backgrounds, and intentions, and therefore to form deeper relationships with other participants in the music projects than elsewhere in prison. Aaron, for example, found by listening to Dean’s lyrics that the two of them shared a similar history; he realised they were “identical in [their] journeys,” which had “helped the bond” between them. Crucially, these personal disclosures were also celebrated, as participant’s stories and emotions contributed to music that was considered good. The expressive nature of this musical community, then, served to both form and reinforce its collective identity, as participants felt connected to one another in new ways.

*Supportive communities.* The purposeful and diverse nature of the community of ITT project participants, and their freedom to express emotion, made for an encouraging social dynamic. Normally, “everything’s negative in prison, nothing’s positive” (Greg), but in the music projects, “there was no negative thing, everything that was said was positive, positive, positive” (Dean). Participants even responded to their peers’ displays of vulnerability and emotion with encouragement and applause rather than scorn. They offered support not only in the form of spoken words but through their behaviours: high fives and fist bumps were common, and participants would often dance along to others’ songs when not playing themselves.

Participants found these interactions highly significant. Liam said the environment was “100 times different . . . There was a lot of encouragement – in here, you don’t hear that very much.” Ollie likewise found it an encouraging environment: “we’re all praising each other, it does help build up a good morale”. Aaron described it as “camaraderie” and Simon found that “everyone listened . . . we had a common ground . . . Everyone had the utmost respect for one another.” Perhaps the best example of respect within the group was observed at the end of a week-long project, during which a participant, clearly affected by some lyrics, left the room in tears. He subsequently apologised for “blubbing like a baby,” to which the other participants responded with “no shame in crying mate” and stories about what made them upset or angry. The fact that this occurred after only a week shows the speed with which the ITT projects succeeded in fostering an encouraging, supportive environment rarely experienced by participants elsewhere in the prison. Interactions such as these undoubtedly deepened relationships between prisoners taking part in the ITT projects.



The ITT facilitators played a key part in creating this environment (see Doxat-Pratt, 2019, pp. 90–95 for further discussion of their role in the projects). The experiences and perspectives of practitioners in these settings is often overlooked (although see the articles by Lamela and Mangaoang in this Special Issue), but their manner and example are crucial in shaping the social dynamic of the group. All the participants appreciated being treated with respect and kindness. It was particularly important to them that the facilitators came from outside the prison and could therefore lead the sessions without seeming to be authoritarian (Cohen & Henley, 2018). The facilitators modelled the kinds of behaviour necessary for participants to form and function as bands, such as listening without interrupting, practising their own parts, suggesting ideas, and treating others' ideas with respect. The facilitators demonstrated and encouraged these behaviours but rarely demanded them of the participants.

To summarise, the ITT projects created a space in which their participants formed removal communities with a collective identity and shared purpose, producing unity in diversity, and in which emotional expression and vulnerability were encouraged, respected, and applauded.

### Refurnishing

The social impact of music making is evident in the very formation of these communities and indeed many participants had profound social experiences within them. However, it must be asked what happens when project sessions end. If participants are not provided with tools and strategies that they can use to improve their lives outside the removal community, they may face returning to a painful normality that seems even worse by comparison. Further, there is a risk that their participation in the projects might elicit jealousy, hostility or derision from other prisoners who had not been able to participate. As DeNora (2013) points out, “when [removal activities] end, they deliver the actor back to the irritating world, a world that may even seem to be lying in wait” (p. 62). If the ITT projects merely served as removal communities in which participants were happier and experienced more positive social interactions, but that did not make any difference in the long term, it would be necessary to give serious consideration to the possibility of them experiencing harm post-project. In the next sections I discuss the potential of musical communities to refurnish social life in prison with reference to the journeys of individuals and groups who took part in the ITT projects.

*Individual Change.* Although this article is not primarily about individual journeys, it is worth pointing out that participants changed in numerous ways during the ITT projects, with knock-on effects on their wider social worlds. Experiencing unity in diversity during the projects was particularly important to participants; they found it “helpful . . . for seeing people in a different light” (Oscar), often producing a “permanent mentality shift” (Malcolm) in their perceptions of others. Participants reported feeling more sociable at the ends of ITT sessions and having more positive things to talk about with others on the wing. Many thought the ITT projects were stress-relieving and found themselves calmer as a result; some thought this had the potential to contribute to prison safety, because music making could “keep the violence down” (Greg), thus making the prison “a more peaceful place” (Arthur). Many participants were on separate wings, and therefore unable to continue getting to know each other outside sessions, but members of the prison staff reported seeing participants interact with each other when they crossed paths around the prison: for example, Duncan said “they still acknowledge each other, and ask each other how they’re doing . . . so it carries on, and it carries on.” These journeys of individual development support the literature outlined at the beginning of this article showing that music making can develop social skills that contribute to desistance from crime; it is important

to note that prisoners can and often do make use of these in prison to navigate their immediate social world, as well as to improve their prospects for life upon release.

*Ongoing music making.* Nevertheless, participants' reflections suggest that their social world was refurnished to an even greater degree when they could make music together outside ITT project sessions, on landings and in cells. For those participants who were able to get hold of resources, mostly guitars, music making became an important part of their lives.<sup>4</sup> There were instances of more advanced players teaching others they had met on their ITT project, and cases of barter such as cooking for cell neighbours in exchange for guitar lessons. The members of one group had first met on an intensive week-long project; they subsequently reorganised their schedules so they could all go to the same weekly session as, although two were on one wing and the other two on another, they wanted to continue learning and playing together. In their spare time they worked in pairs to write music, and came to their sessions ready to share it with the other pair and work on it, as a group, with the facilitator. Two important points arise from this example. First, relationships and musical development were interdependent. Second, the ITT's work in this prison was organised in such a way that projects were delivered in parallel and, crucially, their work could be complemented by the self-organised efforts of the participants themselves. In the carceral context, this kind of 'ongoing music making' depends on many factors outside the prisoners' control; however, when it is possible, it can be transformative.

Another group consisted of participants who were all on the same wing: Isaac, Ollie and Arthur. Isaac joined the weekly sessions that Arthur and Ollie were already attending; over time, the three began to teach each other and write songs together during association time (i.e., when prisoners are not locked in their cells and do not have to undertake scheduled activities). He described this in his interview:

*Isaac:* I knew them on the wing, but we weren't friends. I was friends with Arthur . . . the other ones I was friends with, like, we was pleasant to but we never sort of sat down and spoke.

*Interviewer:* So now if you see them, would you . . .

*Isaac:* Yeah, we go, we've all got guitars. So, we just go in Arthur's cell, make a cup of tea, we just start playing, talk about music. Everyone's slowly progressing as well.

Arthur corroborated this, saying that he was spending his spare time learning the guitar and playing with others. He described this as "brilliant," both for enabling him to improve musically – he was always excited to demonstrate his new skills in weekly sessions – and for fostering different kinds of social interaction that kept him away from the more troublesome aspects of association time. This group shared a collective identity; they saw themselves as a band and had given themselves a name. Isaac indicated that they wanted to keep the band going in the long term: "I'll see how serious they are when we get out but everyone's talking about sort of maintaining it, staying together."

Christopher, another man on their wing who subsequently attended weekly sessions, was also conscious of how the band's music making was shaping life on the landing. He said he could hear them practising together "nearly every day," something he found enjoyable rather than irritating. He gave more details in his interview:

Sometimes you see Isaac in [Arthur's] cell. And he's sitting on his bed playing it, and I think, Isaac is a bit better than him, so he's teaching him. Yeah they go for it, and I can see how buzzing they are

sometimes Monday evenings when they come down the landing, they're all singing [laughter] on the way down, they're getting hyped up [laughs].

As the group continued to play together, they functioned as more than just a removal community on the landing; others were able to be involved. DeNora (2013) points out that an important feature of a refurbishing activity is that it “adds to an environment something which others will encounter” (p. 50). Christopher said he felt inspired watching people learn something, and various participants said that their peers on the landings would listen, watch, and sometimes join with their musical activities. Isaac said that others had been complimenting his playing, and Christopher suggested that this must “boost his confidence, people telling him that it's sounding much better now.” The unusual encouragement that characterised the removal community in the ITT projects began to be evident on the landings, as the music making continued, and bystanders encouraged and supported the musicians.

Since the landings are where the pain, “danger” (Ben) and “madness” (Lee) of prison social life are most evident, it is significant that they were also the location of musical refurbishing. This account of one group's experience is a particularly clear example of the potential for music making to refurbish prison landings, but other participants shared similar stories. Of course, there may have been prisoners who did not, like Christopher, find joy and inspiration in the music making of their peers; hearing music but feeling excluded from it may cause rather than alleviate pain. It is also important to note that the transformative possibilities of the music projects were limited by the realities of the prison world; the examples used here serve to demonstrate what group music making *can* do inside prisons, recognising that it cannot and does not always do this. That said, when ITT participants could continue making music together, this certainly had a positive impact on some other prisoners as well as the participants themselves. Groups could meet in a music project, form a collective identity, and then continue to practise together, teach one another, and/or write songs together during association time. It is possible that this kind of ongoing musical activity can affect not just participants but the wider “society of captives” as well.

## Conclusion

In this article I have argued that prison music projects can have an impact on the social world of the prison. While much published research investigates the effects of music making on prisoners' life post-release, it is equally important to consider the impact of music making on prisoners' immediate social reality. Using the work of the ITT and drawing on the ideas of DeNora, this investigation has shown that prison music projects provide spaces in which removal communities can be developed with norms that are distinct from, and preferable to, those of typical social life in prison. These communities are formed and maintained through the participants' shared commitment to music making, and are characterised by a willingness to express emotion; encouragement and support; and the promotion of unity in diversity. Moreover, these communities do not necessarily stay removed; ITT participants often continued to make music together outside the projects, enabling them to refurbish wider social life in the prison, by transforming their interactions with other prisoners on the landings and in cells. This exploration of community building, with its focus on the interaction between the cultures of the ITT projects and the wider prison, suggests new theoretical and practical avenues for examining the social impact of music making in prison. Moving research beyond specific programmes and projects into the rich and varied landscape of music making that is taking place across prisons in the UK and further afield would serve to deepen our understanding of the social impact of music

making in prison, and help harness the possibilities of music to transform the social world both inside and outside prison.

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### Notes

1. Language referring to emotional regulation and expression in prisons can be quite gendered, partly because much of the relevant research is focused on the male estate. For a more balanced discussion of the ways in which both male and female prisoners manage their emotions, see Laws (2018).
2. The prison is anonymised, as requested by prison personnel at the time.
3. All participants are referred to by pseudonyms.
4. Prisoners could buy guitars via the Argos catalogue. Guitars could not be sent in from individuals outside, nor could strings be bought separately.

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