

## **Benefits of Music Participation for Senior Citizens: A Review of the Literature**

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### **Abstract**

*This article is a review of the literature in the physical, psychological, and social benefits of active music participation for healthy senior citizens. It shows a connection of these benefits to an overall quality of life of older adults. Evidence suggests that active music making has a positive effect on quality of life. Active music participation holds numerous benefits for senior citizens, including, but not limited to (a) an overall sense of physical and mental well-being, including the lessening of stress, pain and medication usage, (b) the slowing of age-related cognitive decline, (c) feelings of pleasure and enjoyment, (d) pride and a sense of accomplishment in learning new skills, (e) creation and maintenance of social connections, (f) a means of creative self-expression, and (g) the construction of identity at a time in life when sense of identity may be in flux.*

Most music education researchers tend to focus on studying the musical experiences of groups and individuals from pre-school age through the university level. The effect of music participation beyond the early years of adulthood has received relatively little attention (Myers, 1995). The importance of music participation in older adults cannot be overlooked. The United States Census Bureau (2008) projected that approximately 13% of United States citizens would be over the age of 65 in 2010, that over 20% would be over the age of 65 by 2050, and that average life expectancy would continue to prolong from 78.3 years in 2010 to 83.1 years in 2050. Globally, the population of senior citizens, 60 years of age and older, has been growing by 1.8% to 1.9% each year since 1950, and this rate of annual growth is expected to increase to 2.8% between the years 2025 and 2030. By the year 2050, the number of senior citizens will surpass the number of young citizens (15 years of age and younger) (United Nations, 2002). Senior citizens are increasingly an important component in society, and their window of musical opportunities is expanding.

Furthermore, research on older adults holds a strong potential value for all age groups. A leader in the field of aging and geriatrics states, “a focus on

aging or older adults in a given study might lead to new clues for younger subjects” (Cohen, 1992, p. 898). This principle may apply to music education as well. Senior citizens’ participations in music could be attempts to catch up on a music education that might have been missed in earlier years, or continuances of music education during their earlier years and reflections of their beliefs in music cultivated throughout their lives, all of which suggests that lifelong learning should be a consideration in the music education of school-aged children. In addition, music participations of senior citizens may contribute to music education of members of their family, community, and society.

In a study of age-related trends and differences in achievement, learning rate, and self-perceived attainment among groups of younger, middle-aged, and older adults in a music learning program, Myers (1986) found no evidence to support stereotypical assumptions that achievement declines with increasing chronological age. Even though older adults’ self-perceptions of skills in aural-manipulative tasks, such as playing the guitar, were lower, these lower self-perceptions were not supported in post-test results after 10 two-hour music classes.

Cohen (1992) recognized that many capacities continue to develop independent of age and that “some strengths *emerge* in association with aging” [emphasis in original] (p. 900). Among these strengths include (a) vocabulary, (b) specialized skills, and (c) psychodynamic growth, which was related to “personal insight, a component of wisdom” (p. 901). Cohen and his colleagues also found many benefits of arts activities in senior adults (Cohen, 2000, 2006a; Cohen, Perlstein, Chapline, Kelly, Firth, & Simmens, 2006). In music, certain strengths, values, attitudes, abilities, or benefits may emerge as age increases. As life expectancy continues to prolong, the impact of these emerging strengths must not be ignored.

The impact of music in the lives of senior citizens has been accompanied by a shift in attitude towards senior citizens in the United States (Davidson, 1982; Gibbons, 1985). In the 1960s, senior citizens were described as “forgotten souls,” “the needy elderly,” and “unutilized talents” (Voris, 1962). Current senior citizens are not thought of as frail and

passive, but instead are viewed as “individuals interested in active lifestyles during their retirement years.” Accompanying this shift has been an “increased focus on improving the quality of life for older adults” (Coffman, 2002, p. 76).

Gates (1991) posited that, with regard to music, “there are three classes of people in any large segment of our society: music participants, music audiences, and people who perceive neither music activity to hold personal benefits” (p. 14). The last category of people was also described as “musically uninterested or uninvolved” (p. 15). This model clearly presented a difference between the active music participants and the spectators. Music professionals, apprentices, amateurs, hobbyists, recreationists, and dabblers were all music participants who “directly or indirectly produce musical events for an audience, even if the audience is the performer him/herself, and even if the audience is not yet present as when an individual learns or composes music for an upcoming performance” (p. 7). We adopted this definition for this review of the literature with a difference in that we focus on the production of musical sound rather than the production of the musical event, to exclude the dancers, producers, instrument makers, and others who contribute to the causes of a musical event but not making any musical sound. Senior citizens who participated in music making beyond being solely in the audience are considered in this paper.

While benefits of music participation for senior citizens could be idiosyncratic to each individual, there is an abundance of support in the literature concerning these benefits (e.g., Coffman, 2002; Gibbons, 1985; Jutras, 2006; Kraus & Chandrasekaran, 2010; Michalos, 2005; Solbu, 1987; Weinberger, 1995). Evidence came from studies conducted by researchers in fields such as music education, psychology, sociology, psychiatry, and various health professions. Detriments of music participation are hardly mentioned in the literature. Of the studies we reviewed, only Michalos’ (2005) study found a negative effect in that music participants who sang alone for a number of hours per week was negatively correlated with general health ( $r = -.19$ ,  $N = 315$ , age range = 18-86 years, average = 48 years). Michalos explained that those who sang alone were “not only alone but lonely, which might lead to moderate depression” (p. 38). We believe that detriments of music participation occurred in exceptional circumstances only, if they occurred at all, along with other reasons such as depression.

Over the course of this literature review, we have decided to exclude the literature that targeted those senior citizens who were not well, such as those suffering from aphasia, Parkinson’s disease, Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia, or in

hospice, palliative care, or other intensive care facilities. We feel that the physical and psychological states of these senior citizens are vastly different from those who are healthy and that music educators are normally not expected to provide musical treatments for these patients. Music therapists and other health professionals are much better equipped to help them. Therefore, studies focusing on such samples deserve a separate treatment. A review of such literature with empirical data is found elsewhere (e.g., Hilliard, 2005).

The central question for this literature review is: What are the benefits of music participation for healthy senior citizens? “Healthy” here refers to those who do not have a medical condition that prevents them from living independently and do not need extensive medical treatments. They are assumed to have normal cognitive and physical abilities in congruence with their age. Based on the literature on healthy senior citizens’ music participation, the benefits could be grouped in three categories: physical, psychological, and social. They are presented in the next three sections, followed by a section on the benefit in the overall quality of life, a brief summary, and implications for music educators.

### **Physical Benefits**

A large body of literature addresses the physical well-being of senior citizens as a result of music participation. Due to the age of senior citizens, they are more prone to have various health issues. Evidence in the literature suggests that there were multiple physical benefits regardless of the senior citizens’ health conditions. A landmark two-year study examining the effect of arts participation on 300 senior citizens, aged 65 or older, in New York City, San Francisco, and Washington, D.C. showed remarkable results (Cohen, 2006a, 2006b). Compared to the control group with limited arts participation, those who participated in weekly arts programs, including music, showed better health, fewer doctor visits, less medication usage, more positive responses on mental health measures, and more involvement in overall activities. The findings “point to true health promotion and disease prevention effects” (Cohen, 2006b, p. 6). In Cohen’s (2006b) words:

The significance of the art programs is that they foster sustained involvement because of their beauty and productivity. They keep the participants involved week after week, compounding positive effects being achieved. Many general activities and physical exercises do not have this high engaging, thereby sustaining, quality. (p. 4)

Music participation, a social activity by nature, has offered a world of benefits for senior citizens regardless of their health conditions.

Although health and wellness are important concerns for many senior citizens, music participation is considered as a beneficial activity even for the normal and healthy. Based on in-depth interviews of 38 (Hays & Minichiello, 2005a) and 52 (Hays & Minichiello, 2005b) senior citizens in Australia, aged 60 to 98 years, music participation was a central contributor to the seniors' subjective experience of good health. The seniors felt a sense of well-being and good health due to their musical participations. One of the participants in the study stated that music was stimulating for her brain (Hays & Minichiello, 2005b). It kept her awake, thinking well, and functioning well. Music participation might even be perceived "as a way of slowing down the aging process because it kept them occupied, focused and, as one participant stated, gave him 'a youthful outlook on life'" (p. 447).

Senior citizens who participated in a band for older adults in the United States were not much different from the Australians mentioned above. Dabback's (2008) qualitative study revealed that the older band participants in the United States negotiated an identity of healthy productive older individuals through social interactions in the ensemble. The band was described as the "fountain of youth" that helped them to live longer. The connection between health and identity was interpreted through Marcia's (1966) identity theory, which posited that those with strong commitments to an identity tended to be healthier and happier individuals. The older band members seemed to have a strong commitment to the band given its reported low attrition rate.

The age-defying benefit of music participation was not only claimed by subjective perception of music participants. Evidence was found in classical pianists in a series of two studies in the maintenance of cognitive-motor skills when playing the piano. The older pianists' average age was 60.3 years, with ages ranging from 52 to 68 years, in one study, and the average age was 71.4 years, with ages ranging from 60 to 81 years, in another study (Krampe & Ericsson, 1996). As a form of active music participation, the amount of deliberate practice on the piano in later adulthood was a strong predictor of maintenance in musical-pianistic skills. In other words, deliberate practice on the piano had slowed the age-related decline on these domain-specific cognitive-motor skills.

Engaging in musical activities would help seniors be distracted from common wellness issues like anxiety, stress, and common pain (Hays & Minichiello, 2005b). Based on a survey of 711 piano students across the United States, whose average age was 51 years,

with a range from 24 to 94, stress reduction was reported as one of the more highly rated personal benefits of piano playing (Jutras, 2006). Scientific evidence using mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) analysis and induced stress as baseline on 32 adults, whose ages ranged from 18 to 76 with an average of 40.8 years, with no prior experience playing a musical instrument supported the fact that recreational music making activities could reverse stress-induced genomic expression (Bittman, Berk, Shannon, Sharaf, Westengard, Guegler, & Ruff, 2005). (*Gene expression* is the "translation of information encoded in a gene into protein or RNA", MedicineNet.com, 2003). The recreational music making was designed to foster "a group-based sense of nurturing, camaraderie and creative non-verbal musical expression in a non-threatening, relaxed and caring environment" (Bittman et al. p. 39). Enjoyable and relaxing music making activities seemed to make the stress reduction effect of music more clearly identifiable using scientific methods.

Drawing from a range of studies involving senior citizens, Table 1 presents examples of how music participation may have an impact on senior citizens' physical health. Some of them are clearly instrument-specific, such as singing for improving respiratory function, playing the organ or piano for finger dexterity. Others are rather general. Some physical benefits are often related to psychological health; at times, it is difficult to clearly divide physical benefits and psychological benefits because one type of benefit is often attached to the other.

### **Psychological Benefits**

Retirement is a time of significant psychological and social change for senior citizens. Variables that must be negotiated include cessation of full-time work, the aging process, increase in free time, changes in financial status, changing interpersonal relationships, and cultural perceptions of retirees. Depending on the capabilities of senior citizens to address these variables, retirement can range from a time of great fulfillment and adventure to a time of psychological crisis (Dabback, 2008).

Research from several fields suggests that active music participation can benefit senior citizens by contributing positively to their psychological well-being or mental health during the transitional years of retirement and beyond (Coffman, 2002; Coffman & Adamek, 1999; Dabback, 2008; Cohen, 2006b; Frego, 1995; VanWeelden & Cevasco, 2009). Through music participation, senior citizens are able to (a) increase self-understanding, (b) achieve success as learners, (c) participate in experiences that are rewarding and interesting, and (d) express themselves

creatively. These elements have been shown to enhance the quality of life of older adults (Coffman, 2002).

Some psychological or mental-health-related benefits of active music participation for senior citizens are accessed through the process of active music making (Chiodo, 1997; Coffman, 1996; Coffman & Adamek, 1999; Coffman & Levy, 1997; Ernst & Emmons, 1992; Hays & Minchiello, 2005a; Jutras, 2006; Murphy, 2003; Wise, Hartmann, & Fisher, 1992). Other psychological benefits also result from music participation, but may not occur during the process of music making. These benefits may emerge

and develop over an extended period of time in which a person participates in musical activities, and can be divided into the subcategories of (a) benefits related to perception of self (Coates, 1984; Dabback, 2008; Hays & Minchiello, 2005a, 2005b; Ruud, 1997; VanderArk, Newman, & Bell, 1983; Wise et al., 1992) and (b) benefits related to continuity of music participation (Bowles, 1991; Chiodo, 1997; Cohen, Bailey, & Nilsson, 2002; Dabback, 2008; Patchen, 1986; Ruud, 1997; Sheldon, 1998; VanWeelden & Cevasco, 2009; Wise et al., 1992).

Table 1  
*Reported Incidences of Music Participation and Physical Health for Senior Citizens*

| Type of Music Participation                      | Effect on Physical Health   | Reference                                 |
|--|---|---|
| Singing  | Improve respiratory function  | Hays & Minichiello (2005a, 2005b)         |
| Playing an organ                                 | Keep fingers, feet, and the brain agile; maintain physical stamina        | Hays & Minichiello (2005a, 2005b)         |
| Playing the piano                                | Keep fingers reasonably free of arthritis; reduce stress                  | Hays & Minichiello (2005a), Jutras (2006) |
| Deliberate practice on the piano                 | Slowing the age-related decline on domain-specific cognitive-motor skills | Krampe & Ericsson (1996)                  |
| Being in band                                    | Help aerobic capacity   | Ernst & Emmons (1992)                     |
| Playing an instrument a number of times per year | Positively associated with general health                                 | Michalos (2005)                           |
| Recreational music making                        | Reverse stress-induced genomic expression                                 | Bittman et al. (2005)                     |
| Non-specific                                     | Maintenance of muscle tone, increased cardiovascular strength             | Hays & Minichiello (2005b)                |

*Benefits evident during active music participation*

Some of the most important psychological benefits received by senior citizens during active music participation are strong feelings of pleasure and enjoyment elicited through the act of music making (Coffman & Adamek, 1999; Coffman & Levy, 1997; Darrough, 1990; Ernst & Emmons, 1992; Hays & Minchiello, 2005a; Murphy, 2003). Ernst and Emmons (1992), in a study of a volunteer band comprised of older adults, reported that senior citizens involved in active music making experienced a heightened sense of vitality, an uplifting of the spirit, and strong feelings of enjoyment and fun. In a study of older Australians,

Hays and Minchiello (2005a) found that active music making helped participants to achieve feelings of inner happiness, contentment, satisfaction, and peace.

Another benefit of active music making for older adults is the challenge of learning new musical skills, resulting in pride and a sense of accomplishment (Coffman & Adamek, 1999; Darrough, 1990; Ernst & Emmons, 1992; Hays & Minchiello, 2005a; Jutras, 2006; Wise, et al., 1992). In a study of members of a volunteer wind band for senior citizens in the Midwest region of the United States, Coffman and Adamek (1999) found that 60% of the participants reported musical reasons (new musical knowledge, sense of

accomplishment from learning new musical skills, and personal musical development) as perceived primary motivations for senior citizens to join the band. In addition, it is worth noting that Wise, Hartmann, and Fisher (1992), in a study of a volunteer community chorus in a senior retirement village, found that even though one goal of the chorus was to improve and master musical skills, a larger, more important goal was that of working collaboratively to make music. Hence, occasional missed notes or lapses in concentration by individual chorus members were tolerated or overlooked by the group.

Closely related to the challenges of acquiring new musical skills, seniors also receive positive benefits from the demonstration of musical skills through music performance or other forms of active music making. In a qualitative study involving 28 musicians of varying instruments and levels of experience, Chiodo (1997) found that one of the most meaningful benefits of music participation for older adults was self-expression, which in this case was not focused on communication of emotions through music, but instead was concerned with the display of individual accomplishment. Senior citizens in Chiodo's study cited feelings of satisfaction and self-actualization they experienced while demonstrating or "showing off" of their musical skills to others. Other researchers have found self-expression to be a means through which older adults can express themselves creatively, and an important benefit of active music participation (Avery, 1997; Flatten, Wilhite, & Reyes-Watson (1988); Hays & Minchiello, 2005b; Jutras, 2006).

*Benefits resulting from extended periods of active music participation*

*Benefits related to perception of self.* Music is commonly thought of as a personal experience through which people can access their feelings and emotions. Evidence suggested that active music participation helps senior citizens access their emotions and construct meaning of their own identities, at a time of life when sense of identity may be in flux (Dabback, 2008; Hays & Minchiello, 2005a, 2005b). In a study of volunteer members of a senior citizen band in the Eastern region of the United States, Dabback (2008) reported that:

Identities emerge from and are shaped by the social interactions among members in the ensemble setting. Players form new musical identities, reclaim identities that were important in their youth, or revise existing identities by taking up new, social instruments. These musical identities are distinguished not merely by the acquisition of musical skills, but also by the

adoption of roles as valuable contributors to a larger musical ensemble. The approval and encouragement of significant others appears to confirm and reinforce musical identity, regardless of whether those others are themselves musicians. Members also use social interaction to negotiate identities as healthy, productive older people. (p. 267)

In addition, the elements of (a) connections made with like-minded peers in music ensembles, (b) pride developed through musical accomplishment, and (c) the positive reinforcement of appreciative audiences have been shown to raise senior citizens' levels of self-esteem and self-confidence (Chiodo, 1997; VanderArk, Newman, & Bell, 1983) and lessen feelings of alienation (Wise, et al., 1992), isolation, and loneliness (Hays & Minchiello, 2005a). Dabback (2008) found that the perceived increase in self-esteem associated with participation in a senior citizen band had a significant positive effect on participants' self-identities as musicians and as productive older adults.

Finally, participation in music can help senior citizens connect with feelings of spirituality, enhance spiritual health (Dabback, 2008; Hays & Minchiello, 2005a, 2005b), and on a lesser level, help them to achieve a sense of regeneration or renewal (Chiodo, 1997). Hays and Minchiello (2005a) found that participation in music promoted a sense of well-being in senior citizens, thus helping them balance "the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual facets of their lives" (p. 269).

*Benefits related to continuity of music participation.* Theories that support music participation as a contributing factor in the psychological well-being of older adults included those of activity and continuity. Activity theory, as applied to older adults, was based on the following premise:

More active older adults are happier and better adjusted to aging than less active older adults. This theory assumes that a person is validated by participation in various roles and activities from middle age. Therefore, it is desirable for older adults to maintain as many activities from middle age as possible, and to substitute new roles and activities for those that are lost. (Coffman & Adamek, 1999, p. 27)

In addition, activity theory supported the premise that activities in late life were essential to reconnect with one's self as defined in younger years, and boost one's sense of well-being in later years (Hampton & Russell, 2005). Atchley's (1989)

continuity theory posited that adults who were able to continue activities in which they participated in younger life were less susceptible to negative psychological changes associated with aging. The ability to persevere in cherished lifelong activities, such as music, contributed to the psychological well-being of older adults.

Research from the field of music education showed that there was evidence of a connection between early participation in music and continued music participation as older adults. Older adults who participated in music were likely to have participated in music as children and adolescents, during their schooling years (Wise, et al., 1992). Music participation in older adulthood can provide a sense of continuity and coherence in life for those who have continued their participation from younger years. This sense of continuity through music participation contributed to a sense of place and purpose in life (Coffman & Adamek, 1999; Dabback, 2008; Ruud, 1997), and thus enhanced psychological well-being and mental health.

### **Social Benefits**

Music has been shown to reflect patterns of human relationships (Blacking, 1995), and be influential in the construction of social identity (Crozier, 1997). This was especially evident in older adults, for whom music can serve as a critical vehicle for social interaction. Research showed that one of the primary reasons older adults choose to participate in music was the desire for social interaction (Coffman & Adamek, 1999; Coffman, 2002).

Music participation can provide a means of establishing social connections with others of different generations. Findings of Conway and Hodgman (2008), in a study of a collaborative intergenerational choir project whose participants were comprised of a college (tertiary-level) choir and a community choir who had not worked together prior to the study, showed that both choirs were able to establish positive connections with different age groups through music participation. Similar findings resulted from intergenerational music participation studies involving older adults (Bowers, 1998; Ernst & Emmons, 1992; Darrow, Johnson, & Ollenberger, 1996; Leitner, 1981).

In addition, music participation can create strong social connections among senior citizens. In a study of 52 Australian adults over the age of 60, Hays and Minchiello (2005b) found that social interaction during active music participation helped older adults feel connected to other older adults and that feelings of social connectedness grew increasingly important as they aged and experienced loss. One participant in this study “referred to music as ‘social glue’ because it facilitated people coming together” (p. 442). Other

research findings have been similar and showed that music participation helped older adults to find friends and form close, personal bonds (Coffman & Adamek, 2001; Gibbons, 1985; Hays & Minchiello, 2005a).

Connections with other like-minded, older musicians have been shown to enhance and intensify the feelings of joy and pleasure that accompany active music making (Ruud, 1997). Older adults in another study (Hays & Minchiello, 2005a) stated that they were able to share the emotion of music on a deep level by making music together, without the necessity of language or conversation about the music.

Positive associations with others in musical groups have been shown to be important means of facilitating a sense of community and belonging in older adults (Coffman & Adamek, 2001; Hays & Minchiello, 2005b; Ruud, 1997; Wise, et al., 1992), resulting in positive growth of the social self (Dabback, 2008). Ruud (1997) posited that music participation could serve as an “entrance ticket to a social group, to experience communality and attachments to others” (p. 95). Ernst and Emmons (1992) went so far as to suggest that participation in musical groups could replace the workplace as a source of friendships and a place of belonging. Musical groups can provide participants with heightened feelings of inclusion, as well as deeper bonding relationships with others (Coffman & Adamek, 2001), through collaborative work towards achievement of group goals (Chiodo, 1997; Dabback, 2008; Wise et al., 1992). Members construct both social and musical identity through their roles as musicians within groups (Dabback, 2008). Each individual’s performance is important, especially in small musical groups where absence, musical accuracy, or interpretation have a clear effect on musical quality (Gibbons, 1985).

Research showed that bonding established through music participation often extended to non-musical situations (Ernst & Emmons, 1992), such as group members meeting socially outside the group for coffee or dinner (Coffman & Adamek, 2001), or providing social support in the death of a loved one (Coffman & Adamek, 2001; Dabback, 2008). Musical ensemble participation can also aid older adults in constructing identity outside musical groups but within their community, through outreach activities or performances of musical groups (Dabback, 2008). In addition, musical outreach activities and performances provide healthy senior citizens with a means of establishing communication with less-healthy senior citizens who have lost the ability to communicate through language, such as those having Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, dementia, aphasia, or those who have had a stroke (Hays & Minchiello, 2005b).

Finally, music participation in older adulthood can aid in the positioning of the social self within culture and history. Dabback (2008) found that older women who participated in the Rochester, New York New Horizons Band were able to transcend gender stereotypes and choose to play instruments traditionally played by men. One participant in this study related a prevailing view that “percussion instruments were reserved for boys when she was in school, yet New Horizons opened up the possibility of learning to play [percussion] instruments that were once off-limits to her” (p. 278). In addition, music participation can foster a sense of historical belonging, through which older adults were able to identify musically with their historical roots as well as their contemporary place in society (Ruud, 1997).

### **Overall Quality of Life**

The physical, psychological, and social benefits presented above were important components of quality of life. This was evident in many definitions and measures of quality of life (e.g., Arnold, 1991; Berzon, Donnelly, Simpson, Simeon, & Tilson, 1995; Kane, 2001; Testa & Simonson, 1996). At an individual level, judgments in quality of life may be idiosyncratic depending on the individuals’ value system (Bech, 1993; Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2000). Most contributing factors to quality of life were generally related to the benefit areas mentioned above. For example, one may value mobility, family live, and a worry-free lifestyle, yet mobility was related to physical health, family live was related to sociability, a worry-free attitude was related to psychological health. This section of the paper offers a review of the literature on the effect of music participation on the overall quality of life as perceived by the senior citizens. The overall quality of life refers to a combination of contributing factors.

Coffman and colleagues conducted a series of studies focusing on senior citizens’ music participation and quality of life. A hint for a link between music participation and quality of life was revealed in Coffman’s (1996) study, where senior citizens in the United States who participated in band valued the social aspects of the ensemble and showed a strong desire to accomplish challenging musical goals. This seemed to be consistent through time and space as Coffman (2006) found similar desires ten years later in Australia. In an intergenerational band, “two individuals in their 50s and 60s had decided to intensively study music by pursuing Bachelor degrees at the University of Tasmania—they were not looking to have professional [music] careers, rather they just wished to learn as much as they could” (p. 19).

Although there was no systematic focus or data analysis on quality of life, Coffman and Levy

(1997) described their experiences involving the New Horizon Band in Iowa City for senior citizens, who had a minimum age of 55 years, in ways that contributed to many aspects of their quality of life. For example, band members were highly motivated and committed to the band. Band members seemed to have made musical progress with great enjoyment. In the words of Coffman and Levy, “without their capacity to laugh at themselves, they would not have progressed so rapidly” (p. 22). The senior citizens’ perseverance seemed to have overcome many barriers posed by health-related limitations also. They described:

One band member broke a leg within a month of starting, yet soon returned. Another broke a hip and returned after it had mended, then promptly broke the other one, but returned once more. Two seniors surprised us all by undergoing quadruple bypass surgery and returning within a month’s time. (p. 19)

Continuing to focus on senior citizens’ band participation, Coffman and Adamek (1999) found that social relationships, personal well-being, and recreational activities were dominant factors in defining quality of life, which was in line with the physical, psychological, and social framework used in this paper. Their findings were based on a survey of 52 senior citizens, aged 55 to 86 and averaged 70 years, who participated in a band in a small city in the United States. These senior citizens also described most frequently musical benefits from participating in the band. They have learned new knowledge, gained a sense of accomplishment and personal development. They also showed enjoyment in playing an instrument and playing in a band and believed that they had benefited socially, mentally, and physically.

In another study, Coffman and Adamek (2001) found that slightly more than half (17 of 33) of the New Horizon Band members considered other band members as part of their social support network. Participants could list up to 20 significant persons in their lives, and 17 of the 33 included at least one other band members to be such. Other network categories included key individuals such as spouse or partner, family, friend, neighbor, health care provider, minister, priest, or rabbi, and work associate. Five of the band members included other band members with reciprocity. This finding supported the fact that social interaction within the band was an important contributor to senior citizens’ quality of life.

Instead of looking at band participation, Wise, Hartmann, and Fisher (1992) examined the effects of senior citizens’ choral participation on quality of life. Chorus members ( $n = 49$ ) from a retirement village were compared against the same number of non-chorus

members from the same retirement village. The two groups did not have a significant difference in age, health condition, social class, education level, and religion. The average age of the entire sample was 64.1. The sample was described as upper-middle class, high school or better educated, Protestants, and in good health. Both the choral and non-choral groups scored near the top 20% in life satisfaction but the choral group showed greater homogeneity, meaning that the choral participants had a narrower range within the same high level of life satisfaction. In an earlier study (VanderArk, Newman, & Bell, 1983) of senior citizens from two nursing homes, one with bi-weekly music sessions for five weeks (average age was 78 years) and the other had no music session (average age was 82 years), senior citizens participated in music showed higher scores for life satisfaction, music attitude, and self-concept in music.

After a study of 21 participants in a banjo band, an instrumental/vocal ensemble, a handbell choir, and a recorder group, age between 61 and 84 years, Rybak (1995) developed a model for older adult leisure music, which pointed directly to achieving quality of life. The model was consistent with the senior citizens' need for optimal musical challenge, through music participation involving the body, mind, and spirit, to keep life going. Quality of life was interpreted as keeping life going.

As in the prior report of music participation contributing to good health (Hays & Minichiello, 2005a, 2005b), music participation was also central to senior citizens' overall quality of life, which entailed positive self-esteem, feelings of competence and independence, and the reduction of the feelings of isolation and loneliness.

From a music educator's standpoint, offering music education to young citizens could be aimed at improving the quality of life for their lifespan (Jellison, 2000). This idea has been suggested by many others (e.g., Cohen, Bailey, & Nilsson, 2002; Gibbons, 1985; Palisca, 1976; Ruud, 1997). Positive experiences with music earlier in life could contribute to music participation later in life, which in turn would contribute to the senior citizens' quality of life.

### **Summary**

From a review of the literature on the benefits senior citizens receive from music participation in the form of active music making, the evidence is clear in that senior citizens who participate actively in music reap benefits in almost all areas of their lives. In the areas explored in this review (physical, psychological, and social), it is apparent that not only do benefits exist for senior citizens in each area, but also that numerous benefits exist in each area. These benefits can be placed on a continuum from

being merely an enhancement of life (fun, enjoyable), to serving as a medium through which senior citizens construct and maintain self-identity and coherence in life, and to "keep life going."

Secondly, the benefits of music participation for senior citizens are compounded by interaction with each other and length of participation. As was stated earlier, many benefits apply to more than one of the areas examined in this review. For example, the benefit "lessens stress" can be considered to be both a physical and psychological benefit. The benefit "provides sense of community and belonging" falls under both the categories of psychological and social benefits. Benefits that apply to more than one area or several areas could be considered to be heightened or magnified benefits, because they overlap or triangulate to positively affect the overall well-being of senior citizens. In addition, these benefits have been shown to be continuous over an extended period of time in which senior citizens participate in music, suggesting that senior citizens who participate in music for a lifetime may receive more and deeper positive benefits than those who only participate for a short time. See Figure 1 for a listing of benefits that fall under the categories of physical, psychological, and social, as well as benefits that overlap categories.

In summary, the many benefits senior citizens receive through active music participation clearly appear to have a positive relationship to physical and psychological health, as well as sense of social well-being. Since these three areas have been frequently identified in literature and research as major components of quality of life (e.g., Arnold, 1991; Berzon, Donnelly, Simpson, Simeon, & Tilson, 1995; Kane, 2001; Testa & Simonson, 1996), it is logical to conclude that active music participation has a positive effect on the quality of life of senior citizens and that most senior citizens would benefit from opportunities to participate in music.

### **Implications for Music Educators**

The benefits of music participation for senior citizens, coupled with research findings that seniors who participated in music younger in life are more likely to participate in music as older adults (Wise, et al., 1992), convey an important message to music educators, to those who serve in administrative roles in the field of education, and to those who generate funding for education. As was stated earlier, offering music education to young citizens could be aimed at improving the quality of life for their lifespan (Jellison, 2000). Positive experiences with music earlier in life could contribute to music participation later in life, which in turn would contribute to the senior citizens' quality of life.

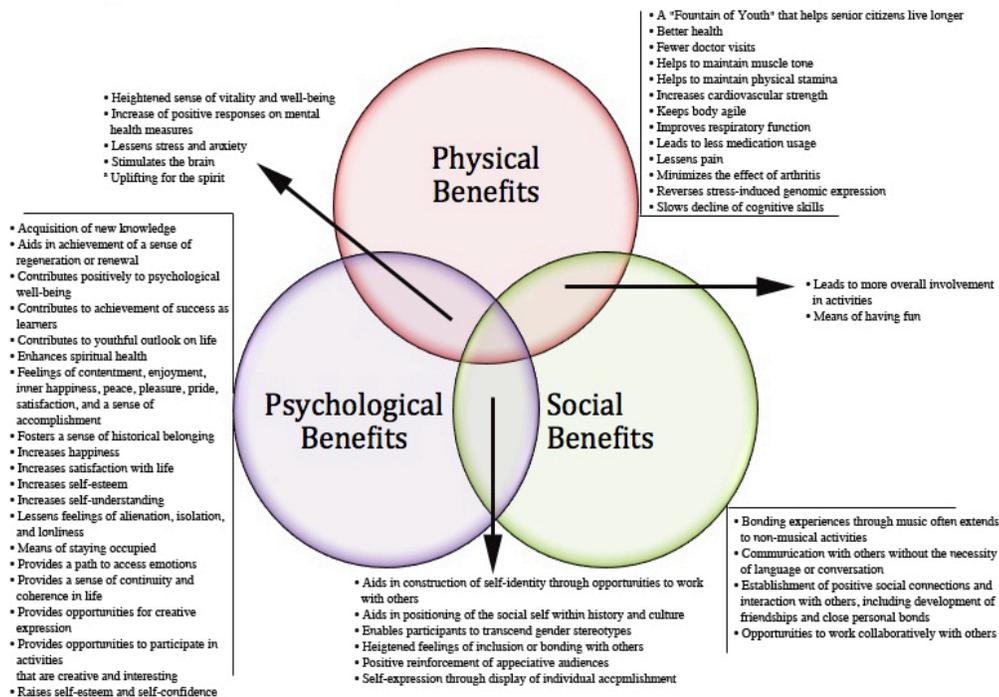


Figure 1. Senior citizens' participation in music: Benefits that enhance quality of life.

These research findings should be considered in the context of the prolonging lifespan in the population. If music education were limited to the schooling years, most people in the population would not have it for the majority of their lifespan. Music educators should expand the window of musical opportunities for adults who are not in schools anymore. They may integrate their music curriculum in the schools with musical offerings in the community. Intergenerational music groups could be a good option. Collaborating with non-school music organizations in the community is another. Musical opportunities should be available for various age groups throughout the entire lifespan to ensure continuous opportunities in music. This could lead to better quality of life for more people.

Finally, more research is needed to learn about the role of active music participation in the lives of senior citizens. Extant research has mainly concentrated on the experiences of healthy senior citizens in community music ensembles and less healthy senior citizens involved in music therapy activities in long-term care facilities. Although the latter is excluded in this review of the literature, factors of ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status on the role of music in the lives of senior citizens warrant further investigation. Some case studies of successful community musical groups for senior citizens could help unfolding the relationship between their current music participation and their past musical experience and skill acquisition.

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## CHINESE ABSTRACT

### 中文摘要

老年人參與音樂活動的益處：文獻回顧與梳理

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本文回顧與梳理了老年人積極參與音樂活動從而獲得的生理、心理、以及社會效益的研究文獻。研究發現，積極參與音樂活動所獲得的益處與老年人的生活質量有一定的關聯，而且參與音樂製作能夠提高他們的整體生活質量。積極參與音樂活動主要有以下幾方面的益處：1，能够使老年人從生理和心理上受益，例如減輕壓力、疼痛、以及由於藥物治療帶來的生理和心理痛苦；2，減緩心理年齡的老化；3，有愉悅感；學習新知識和新技巧能夠帶來自豪感和成就感；5，促進并保持社會交往；6，成為顯示創造力的方式之一；7，幫助老年人重新建立與認同自己新的社會身份。