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***What Can Participation in Folk Music Teach the Arts More Widely?***

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**Year paper completed:** 2013

**Leadership Content Theme/s:** Inclusive Leadership Practice, Sector Insights

**AHRC Subject Area/s:** Cultural Geography, Policy Arts Management and Creative Industries, Music and Society

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WHAT CAN PARTICIPATION IN THE PRACTICE OF FOLK MUSIC TEACH US  
ABOUT PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS MORE WIDELY?

*A report for the AHRC*

by

**Katriona Holmes**

**Creative Scotland Clore Fellow on the Clore Cultural Leadership programme,  
2012--13**



**Session musicians in the Holiday Inn, Glasgow, 23 January 2014.**

**Photo: K Holmes**

**Abstract**

This report explores the meaning of the term ‘arts participation’ and considers how participation is understood and supported in the UK. It does so by looking at some of the ways that people participate in British folk music, both formally and informally, and considers the implications of this for enhancing arts participation in the UK. The main source of this report is personal observation, and experience from my own background as a promoter of an independent roots music festival in Scotland. I also draw comparisons with modes of participation across a number of styles of music in Zanzibar, Tanzania, which I visited in February 2014, attending a celebrated festival of African music, Sauti za Busara. In my conclusions, I build on recent perspectives and research

on cultural participation in the UK, and consider what the concept can incorporate, and the implications of this for how we value music in a formal and informal context.

**Supervisor: Dr Lucy Duran, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London**

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## Introduction

It is said that the UK is experiencing a rise in participatory arts culture. The Arts Council of England's [Taking Part](#) survey of 2012, which looked at arts and heritage participation between January and December 2011 found a percentage increase across the board in the number of people that had engaged with the arts since the last survey of 2005/2006<sup>i</sup>. The National Endowment of the Arts 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts also showed that in the USA whilst attendance at arts events was dropping, engagement in making art was on the increase.<sup>ii</sup>

There are two manners in which 'arts participation' is actioned. They are not mutually exclusive. The first is very deliberately in a 'learning and participation' context, when institutions or projects aim to involve those who would not normally engage with the arts, or deepen their current involvement, in an activity they believe will 'help' participants, either in learning or developing their confidence. This participation usually involves established or professional artists teaching or facilitating the learning of non-professional participants. Part of the motivation for extensive participatory programmes today is the need to justify public funding for the arts. If public money is being used the public must benefit. I call this participation 'top led' participation.

The other form I call 'bottom led' participation, perhaps better described as DIY culture, or what Professor John Holden calls 'homemade culture' <sup>iii</sup>. Concepts such as 'everyone is an artist', introduced when community arts were born in the 60s, have made their impact. Amateurs in all art-forms are organising, performing and exhibiting. Bottom led participation is small scale, often informal and/or self taught and can range from hobbyists to part-time professionals, from individual practice, self funded groups or even publicly funded community groups. Though it can be facilitated by institutions, bottom led participation is often not obviously 'led' by anyone. It is the 'grassroots' and is harder to measure, quantify and control.

'In homemade culture ... culture is created among people by the interaction of audiences and artists, producers and consumers.'<sup>iv</sup> Homemade culture is increasingly being given more credence as it is recognised that culture is something "constantly created and reinvented through dialectic", a fluid, dynamic happening, the outcome of a relationship and dialogue between producer and consumer, rather than a high artform decreed by the elite<sup>v</sup>.

Much has been written about the 'blurring' between amateur and professional<sup>vi</sup> and researchers Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller have introduced the term the 'professional amateur' – individuals on the rise who are not 'professionals' because they earn their livelihood through other means, but who work in fields such as the arts at a professional standard. They postulate that the 'Pro---Am Revolution' will greatly shape the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>vii</sup>

This report will look at some aspects of participation in the context of the genre known as folk music, a cultural practice which historically has existed in a non---elite and ambivalent space in relation to 'the arts'.

The way that folk and traditional 'world' music is constructed and presented in the UK and Zanzibar, the two places where I have conducted research for this report, has more in common than is immediately evident. It is either part of a global music industry or a funded development / education programme. The extent to which I have been able to investigate the 'true grassroots', the homemade, is limited by the timeframe of this research. However, comparing the UK scene with a radically different cultural context --- Zanzibar --- is revealing in understanding and challenging the concepts of participation and the professional, and the cultural framework in which these terms have meaning, providing space for new definitions that might be helpful in rapidly changing times.

This research is timely in the context of a wide re---evaluation of participation and examinations of formal and informal culture and may add to a new perspective on arts, culture and creativity.

## Context

Amongst the burgeoning of homemade culture and arts participation, a simultaneous burgeoning of 'folk' and traditional musics and festivals is taking place. Musicians that call themselves folk musicians are achieving great success in the commercial music industry. Traditional music is being taken more seriously in the arts world --- with organisations such as Traditional Music Forum (TMF) and the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS) moving from strength to strength. The inaugural industry event for English folk music: the English Folk Music Expo took place in October 2013. Festivals such as Celtic Connections, the Cambridge Folk Festival and Knockengoroch World Ceilidh are enormously popular, with more than one choice available on any one weekend over the summer. In the fashionable fringe areas of East London a younger audience are seen coming to the table, attending sessions, ceilidh dance, sea shanty singing and traditional music classes.

'The whole landscape of our music has changed. The biggest change is this feeling that there is respect for the music' Donald Shaw of Capercaillie on BBC Radio 3's *World on 3* show 1 November 2013.

## Scope of research

This is a preliminary investigation into the folk music revival and how this might relate to wider questions of arts participation, looking at what participation in folk music is.

I embarked on the research project and report as a result of my own interest and involvement in UK festivals and the presentation of folk music, beginning in October 2013 and ending in March 2014. Due to its brief nature I did not investigate any of the numerous folk clubs which exist throughout the UK or many of the informal sessions in which many of the hardened 'amateurs' are likely to be found. I have not been able to carry out substantial research with audiences/ participants, but those I have spoken to have tended to be in the age range 20 to 40 years.

Due to my role as director and programmer of Knockengoroch World Ceilidh festival I have been able to attend music industry events and therefore had access to folk artists, managers, agents and other promoters. Due to the nature of the 'folk' world many of those in the industry are also participants and there is much to be learnt about the participatory nature of the field even, or possibly more so, when working with the 'professionals'.

My trip to Zanzibar was two weeks long. Again my contacts and exposure time was limited. Through observation, interviews and the study of relevant texts I believe I discovered enough to make a useful comparison with elements of the traditional music scene in the UK. My contacts in Zanzibar, aided somewhat by my supervisor at SOAS, were largely through the two organisations Sauti Za Busara Festival and the Dhow Countries Music Academy, the centre for promoting traditional music. I also managed to speak with artists, academic music experts on Zanzibar, those working in the industry and some audience members, both local and international.



## Methodology

My working methods for this research project have been largely derived from the established methodologies of social anthropology and ethnomusicology, in other words, participant-observation – which in fact chimes well with the topic of my research, the participatory nature of folk music. I have also read across the relevant literature in the field, of academic texts in the sociology of music, and on folk music in this country and abroad.

I have been taking part in ethnomusicology lectures at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, including the MMus courses Music in Africa and Music in Development, in order to understand the field from a more theoretical and academic perspective, and gain an overview of Africa, in order to contextualise the festival in Zanzibar that I attended. When attending concerts as a member of the audience, I observed and noted elements that were of relevance, and spoke informally to other audience members to elicit ideas about the concert and about folk music participation in general.

My participant observation has led me to speak to and interview leading characters in the scene in both the UK and Zanzibar; artists, academics, those working in the industry and participants who define themselves as playing, working with, or listening to ‘folk’ music.

Another important element in my research has been a focus on the music industry itself and what role participatory folk music might play in it. To that end, I have taken part in industry networking and discussion events at Showcase Scotland at Celtic Connections festival in Glasgow and Santuri Safari (‘Vinyl Journey’) and Movers and Shakers at Sauti Za Busara in Zanzibar. I also attended the inaugural English Folk Music Expo, WOMEX World Music Expo, Artworks Scotland and the Association of Festival Organisers. I carried out several methods of research at these events including interviews with professionals and experts in the field, studying the language used in promotional and programme material, and collecting ‘vox pops’ from audience members.

I carried out interviews with key practitioners in the UK folk music industry and further study visits to the English Folk Dance and Song Society at Cecil Sharp House, which exists to promote English folk music and the Dhow Countries Music Academy, which exists to promote Zanzibari traditional music.

I have been self reflective of my own experience in the field and my own inherent knowledge of a music festival gained in 17 years of organising the Knockengorroch World Ceilidh.

## **'Folk' music**

Entire books and PhD theses have been written about the definition of 'folk' in a Western context. In the UK the term 'folk' can incorporate 'traditional' music. Sometimes the terms are seen as very distinctive from each other, whereas in other contexts they are used interchangeably.

In many countries, local music is described as 'folk music', but it is less common to hear this term applied to indigenous music in Africa<sup>1</sup>. In the context of Zanzibar I did not hear the term 'folk' being used, and so I will use the term 'traditional' music.

Swiss ethnomusicologist Laurent Aubert talks of how the term traditional music is used to designate a large 'fuzzy' domain, meaning 'world music' as referring to the extra-European genres ostensibly uninfluenced by the West and to European music of relatively old and often rural origin. He talks of the common view that traditional music genres are survivors of the past that have remained at a pre-industrial stage in their development'.<sup>viii</sup>

Much of the music that we consider 'folk' or 'traditional' music in the UK was collected during the early 20th century. One of the most celebrated collectors of that time was Cecil Sharp. This movement to record and notate the music was linked to the industrialization and stratification of society, the breakdown of rural life and a perceived need to preserve the music. Known as the first folk revival this music was taught in schools, influenced classical composers and sung as parlour songs by the upper classes. Several scholars have critiqued this revival as constructing an ideal rural past, an 'imagined village' which did not represent the reality.<sup>ix</sup> Nonetheless thanks to Cecil Sharp and other collectors, we now have an extensive archive of musical and historical material, which may well have been lost otherwise. This 'first folk revival' could be considered the written source of most 'traditional' music as performed today in the UK, though many tunes and songs may have been handed down orally, and still exist in different versions across the country.

The second 'folk revival' in the UK started in the 1940s. It was less historically based and more political in nature, emphasizing the more industrial songs of the workers. It

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<sup>1</sup> Although interesting to note, an in-depth discussion of why this might be, or an investigation into the status and hierarchy of different kinds of music in Zanzibar, is outside the scope of this report

coincided with the influence of African---American popular music called skiffle, an inherently accessible form of music, that used homemade or improvised instruments including washboards, jugs, tea chests and musical saws as well as banjos and guitars. Renowned folk player Martin Carthy was one musician that began his career in skiffle.<sup>x</sup> The many folk clubs that sprang up had their roots in skiffle, only turning to British folk music later on. These clubs promoted a participatory ideology, in that anyone could participate and was encouraged to. Lack of ability was no criteria for exclusion. Commercially, folk was played on electric instruments, and bands such as Fairport Convention achieved success.

This second revival could be seen to climax in the 1960s. In the 1980s there were still a hardcore of 'folkies' but they were less visible in either popular (commercial), elitist or 'arts funded' culture. However in the 1990s things started to change. In the mid---1990s the Newcastle organization Folkworks started to bring folk music bands to formal concert venues. In 1994 the inaugural Celtic Connections festival took place, organized by the culture department of Glasgow City Council (Glasgow Life). The Knockengoroch World Ceilidh Festival was established in 1998. The first Scottish folk music degree was established by the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (now the Royal Conservatoire) in 1996 and the first folk music degree by Folkworks, now part of the Sage Gateshead, in Newcastle, in 2001. Folk was becoming popular and visible, this time in quite a professional way. The trend has been growing ever since. In the last few years we have seen the rise of arts institutions promoting folk and traditional musics and the phenomenal commercial success of now celebrity 'folksters' such as Mumford and Sons and Laura Marling.

The current UK folk landscape incorporates both elements from the first and second revivals, including music very 'traditional' in style, commercial bands with a 'folk' feel, contemporary protest songs, world music fusion and more. My purpose is not to define it, but to explore some of the ideology and practice associated with it. For the purposes of this report I shall retain a wide definition, using the term to refer to music called 'folk' or 'traditional' by the people who practice it or listen to it. I maintain that the ideal of participation is central to folk music and this is evident across publicly funded, commercial and voluntary practice.

# **Participation in folk music in the UK**

## **Top led Participation**

Top led participation in the arts is when larger publicly funded or state---approved organizations run programmes or activities to involve a wider demographic of people, in order to achieve social and/or economic objectives. It may include engaging with the national education system to involve children in music, offering opportunities for adults to engage through workshops or regular classes and developing raw talent to professional levels to strengthen the industry. Depending on how broadly you define participation, it could also mean attracting more people to watch and listen, otherwise known as growing audiences.

The English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS), based at Cecil Sharp House in London, is the national folk arts development organisation for England, existing to champion the English traditional arts – music, song, dance, storytelling, customs and traditions – as part of the rich and diverse cultural landscape of the UK. EFDSS has a wide remit, aiming to preserve, promote and develop these arts, through learning and participation, performance and artists’ development and advocacy. It has experienced a resurgence in the last five years, now becoming a visible player in the new folk scene. Major folk names such as Laura Marling and Mumford and Sons have performed at Cecil Sharp House. Artist development programmes include the BBC Folk Fellowship, which offers a salary and development opportunities for a year and Creative Artist Residencies, while an extensive education programme offers adult classes, study days, projects and workshops in schools. Neil Pearson, Artist Development and Programming Manager, states that they are keen to promote a wide definition of folk, to broaden the numbers of people that engage with the genre, and acknowledge the range of styles that ‘folk’ music encompasses today, as Marketing Director Sophia says ‘who are we to define folk?’

Feis Rois is an organization based in Ross---Shire. The term means a tuition festival, usually for children and young people, which celebrates the music and song culture connected with the Gaelic language. The first Feis Rois took place in 1986, organised by a strings instructor, a community education worker and local authority arts officers. Since then it has grown and its work extended across Scotland. It has achieved its aim of every child in the Highlands having the chance to play traditional music, and is now moving beyond the Highlands. Recently the organization delivered traditional music workshops in every primary school in Dumfries and Galloway.

Feis Rois' aims are explicitly learning, participation and development for every child in Scotland to have the right to try playing Scottish traditional music. Many of the young people that started with Feis have gone onto professional careers as musicians. Fiona Dalgetty, CEO of the organization, who grew up within the Feis movement herself, is realistic about the participants' futures as professional musicians however, stating that they must be entrepreneurial. A career as a musician must be thought of in a portfolio way, including teaching and other related activities, not only performing and recording. Dalgetty does not expect every player to become a full time musician. Many will not, she says, but they may well continue to play throughout their lives (personal communication 24 January 2014).

Celtic Connections in Glasgow exists to celebrate Celtic music and its connection to countries around the globe. It has grown from two weeks in one venue to become one of the largest celebrations of traditional music in the UK, featuring 2100 artists, 300 events and 20 venues. It takes place over 18 days featuring artists and collaborations from across the globe as well as some of the finest Scottish and UK traditional music, in the form of concerts, ceilidhs, talks, art exhibitions, workshops, and free events. 'Showcase Scotland' is an industry networking event within Celtic Connections, which introduces international and worldwide audiences to new music. Its aim is to secure performances for Scottish based artists on a global scale – creating new audiences for existing artists and introducing new artists to existing audiences. The event is very much a part of the Scottish music industry and plays a major part in furthering the careers of traditional and folk musicians in Scotland and further afield, as well as increasing audiences for traditional and folk music. For several members of those audiences that I chatted to, it was their first 'folk' music gig.



**On 'Celtic Drovers Tracks' concert at Celtic Connections 2014**  
**Photo: K Holmes**

These three examples of leading folk music organizations in the UK are all publicly funded with different aims but essentially all exist to further the practice, enjoyment and professionalism of folk music, whether that be at an early educational level, in an adult learning context, for industry and artist development or to grow audiences. They are motivated for either or both social and economic reasons. As we shall see this is not so different from the organizations I investigated in Zanzibar. But how is it different from bottom led participation?

### **Bottom led participation**

There are many informal situations where one can hear folk music played. I have experienced many pub music sessions over the years and attended numerous small scale folk gigs run by independent promoters. For this part of my research, I also chatted to audience members and other participants and artists and read publications which cover the more 'participatory' and 'amateur' side of the folk scene, such as Mackinnon, Turino and Brocken.

During Celtic Connections, much of the city becomes part of the festival, with pubs and other venues becoming available for producer and consumer to interact in informal vibrant sessions. Every evening until late the Holiday Inn bar is crammed full of

established musicians playing alongside amateurs and students. The feeling is one of 'connected chaos', with the musicians sitting around the same tables as non-musicians. During one of these sessions Éamonn Coyne, an established traditional musician of Celtic derived music, told me that he did not see the professional (amateur) divide coming into it. 'People might not play for a living but they might be just as good as those who do, they just don't choose to do it on the stage'. (personal communication, 24 January 2014)

The English Folk Music Expo is a younger English equivalent to Showcase Scotland. Produced by Playpen Agency, an established folk music agency, with support from EFDSS and the Arts Council of England. English Folk Expo provides an effective and previously unavailable route into the English folk, roots and acoustic market. The event takes place as part of the Homegrown festival in Bury, delegates are given access to all festival performances, as well as additional industry-only showcases and events to enable them to form links and new working relationships with industry gatekeepers to the folk, roots and acoustic music industry in England. At the English Folk Music Expo some of the stars of the English folk world including Seth Lakeman, Bella Hardy and Jim Moray played in the bar afterwards till the early hours, with industry delegates joining heartily in song.

Participation and informality is an important aspect of the definition and practice of folk music, therefore even in these top led contexts, a bottom led ideology is common.





**A folk club, Gregsons Arts and Community Centre in Lancaster**

**Photo: K Holmes**

Small-scale, local and founded on principles of participation and informality, folk clubs present performance opportunities for all types of performers on the professional spectrum. They range from formal concert style clubs to informal get-togethers, sometimes paid, sometimes free, but generally with less of a boundary between audience and performer. They reached their height was in the 1950s and 60s. Today they are largely attended by older participants and seem to be declining in number. As Henderson points out even while people talk of the folk revival they are expressing concern for the future of the folk club.<sup>xi</sup> However there is an area where this trend may be being reversed.

Founded by musician Sam Lee and partner Buirski, the Nest Collective, awarded BBC folk club of 2010, goes under the banner of 'New folk, Old folk, No folk'. It was founded in 2006 and aims to provide spaces for young people in London to hear folk and 'let audiences be part of the experience and not just its consumer'. As with its leader, the Mercury Award nominated Lee, the club seems to herald a new era of what 'folk' can be. The Nest Collective was recognized for contemporary attitude and attraction to a younger audience. It presents folk music in venues of different sizes, exposing many first timers to the genre and creating platforms for artists to perform. It differs from

most traditional folk clubs in many ways, not least that it is essentially an entrepreneurial initiative. However because it is still relatively small scale and does not receive funding, I define it as bottom led participation. Should its success continue it may well become an institution --- the challenge may then be retaining its links with the grassroots.

The Trad Academy is another entrepreneurial endeavor, started in 2012, in response to the popularity of folk musics in London. It aims to give people a friendly introduction to folk music through adult education classes in sea shanties, flat foot dancing, old time fiddle playing, Swedish folk and playing the bones amongst others, so that 'people can play folk music for dances, for pub sessions and just for the joy of playing it'. The Trad Academy is small scale and led by two committed individuals, musicians and music enthusiasts themselves, who make a living from their music. Many of its students are in their 20s and 30s.

Sam Lee, Éamonn Coyne and Nick Hart, who runs the Trad Academy, are very much 'professionals' and committed to what they do. Yet all, in their own way, state participation as an important part of what they do. The idealism of participation is vital to their practice.

The idealism of participation is central to the Knockengoroch World Ceilidh festival. We have three programmed stages at the four day greenfield festival but also have numerous opportunities for festival goers of all abilities to play music with others, from open mic slots to 'session' (folk jamming) areas. Often billed musicians will stay on at the festival after their set and join in with these sessions.

A demonstration of the idealism of inclusivity or participation within the folk music scene is a certain amount of discomfort around the rise of the folk music professional as a 'star', even by those who are themselves technically stars (or at least as close as a folk musician gets). An established traditional musician I spoke to at Celtic Connections posited one view that traditional music is someone playing music at home, that as soon as someone forms 'a band' they are not playing traditional music anymore. He suggested that perhaps real traditional music is not something to be 'flaunted' and that as soon as someone starts a band they are not playing folk music anymore. (Personal communication 24 January 2014)

Niall Mackinnon writes that 'the desire for intimacy and stardom may be the greatest of all contradictions'. In his view folk resists popularity and the folk scene is full of counter elitist strategies, which are chiefly targeted on those who are seeking to use positions of power such as top performers and music promoters. Folk resists commercialism and stardom though there are some 'countervailing tendencies within the folk scene; pressures to reverse this and to change the underlying nature of the folk scene – to turn it into spectacle to make it 'popular', to remove 'amateurism'.<sup>xii</sup>

Senior Music Lecturer Michael Brocken writes 'There is a fear that once a folk music artist acquires the trappings of popular music he or she will begin to adopt popular music attitudes and habits of mind, becoming totally commercial and corrupt or at best losing touch and sympathy with the folk world.'<sup>xiii</sup>

This anti stardom attitude is further illustrated by a Mumford and Sons quote --- 'we're just people. Just because I have the stage now it doesn't mean that you won't have the stage later... we're not heroes and hero worship is not something we buy into... its inclusive...just because we have lights on us and microphones doesn't make us any more abnormal than the next dude'.<sup>xiv</sup>

The blur between categories of professional and amateur, producer and consumer, and performer and audience is an important ideology and indeed often a defining characteristic of folk music. This central ideology (whether or not true) is I believe one reason why folk genres are enjoying a newfound popularity in these 'participatory' times.

To investigate further what participation can be, bearing in mind these categories of professional versus 'other' (amateur/ consumer/ audience), I turn to traditional music in a very different cultural context, Zanzibar.

## Zanzibar

My journey into participatory music developed in earnest whilst on secondment in the learning and participation department of the London-based jazz and world music organisation Serious. I read a UNESCO report of 2009 stating that the boundary between amateur and professional arts performers was already 'blurred in developing countries where much 'performance' was community or village activity and that such a blurring was taking place 'developed' countries'.<sup>xv</sup> Working in world music and with a degree in social anthropology this suggestion intrigued me and motivated my research into the relationship between professional and amateur in a developing country.

The Zanzibar archipelago is a group of islands of the coast of East Africa 22 miles from the mainland. It is part of Tanzania, a unification that came about in 1964 after independence from Britain. The population is around 96% Muslim and its traditions reflect its historical and current interactions with Europe, the Middle East, India and the African mainland. Zanzibaris speak ki-Swahili, which is spoken across East Africa.

I spent two weeks on the island during the international music festival Sauti Za Busara, which gave me great access to much of the professional music activity on the island. As an outsider with no knowledge of the language, my access to elements of the culture was limited and much of my information on the music and culture has been gained from speaking to and reading established scholars on the subject.

I refer to 'traditional' music, as this is what it was called by the people I spoke to on the island. Traditional music is sometimes treated as a static genre that existed in a pure fashion at a particular moment in time. Aubert writes that it is in fact 'the product of multiple contacts and events, of convergent influences whose fusion was achieved through long periods of assimilation'.<sup>xvi</sup> There is not a fixed definition of traditional and it is with this consideration that I look at the music of Zanzibar, bearing in mind the way music is marketed, consumed and practised.

The most visible form of traditional music, presented and performed on a stage, is *taarab*, which was brought to the island from Egypt by the Sultan of Oman when he was based there in the mid to late 19th century. The music is characterised by large orchestral ensembles including violins, oud (Arabic lute), qanun (a zither) and accordions. Though originally sung in Arabic in the palaces, the female artist Siti Bint Saad began to sing *taarab* in ki-Swahili in the 1920s, and established the music in the

hearts of ordinary Zanzibaris.<sup>xvii</sup> There are several types of *taarab* music including *kidumbek*, which is a more participatory, less formal style, incorporating African rhythm and dancing, as well as *rusha roho*, the most recorded, commercial music which is more modern style *taarab*, played with modern, electronic instruments.

Other forms of local music on the island include *ngoma*, which is the catch---all term used to describe all local forms of drumming, dancing and singing and *beni* which is brass band wedding music with lots of rhythm. *Bongo Flavour* is listened to and loved by all the young and not so young people I spoke to. It involves rapping over playback music.

### **Top led Participation**

There are Tanzanian Government initiatives to teach traditional music in the schools and state sponsored traditional dance and music troupes founded to instill a feeling of national unity post---independence. There were particularly predominant in the 1970s. These initiatives tended to structure and standardize dances and music.<sup>xviii</sup>

Then there are NGOs, which offer people the chance to engage with their traditional music and help develop talent to professional levels. The Dhow Countries Music Academy (DCMA), established by Hildegaard Kiel in 2001, is one such NGO. It exists to train and develop musicians practicing traditional music to broaden the educational opportunities for young people, women and children, preserve the cultural heritage of Zanzibar and help strengthen the Zanzibari music industry.



**Me at Busara Promotions office, Stone Town, Zanzibar**

**Photo: Anta Recke**

Busara Promotions is the NGO whose chief activity is organising the Sauti Za Busara festival, which presents music from Zanzibar, the mainland, and from across the African continent and further afield. Busara Promotions aims to 'enhance social, cultural and economic growth in East Africa through building appreciation of the region's music, developing skills and opportunities for musicians, strengthening local infrastructures and building international networks. Run by a British Director, essentially it aims to feed into economic development of the island through developing and strengthening the music and tourism industry. This is largely participation in the wider sense, meaning attracting more people to watch and listen, otherwise known as growing audiences.

Behind and around all of these activities, as with the UK, there is the commercial music industry, which has incorporated an international element since the late 1980s when taarab music was first recorded for the world music market to a positive reception, resulting in the touring of Zanzibari musicians internationally. There is also a local music industry, which takes the form of performances of traditional taarab, kidumbek and ngoma for the tourists and performances of taarab, kidumbek, rusha roho and other non---traditional styles for local people. The commercial music industry overlaps with

and motivates the participatory activities of NGOs and Government initiatives but as with the UK, participation for social aims is clearly not a conscious objective.

I attended Sauti Za Busara festival, which presents music from Zanzibar, the mainland and across Africa. It took place in Stone Town, Zanzibar's capital, over four days from 13 to 16 February 2014. The festival consists of a series of outdoors concerts in its main venue, the Old Arab Fort. Busara Extra was a complementary programme of smaller events that took place in venues around Stone Town. I also attended the Movers and Shakers forum, which provides a space for music professionals from across East Africa to share information, exchange ideas and network. In addition, this year, the festival was augmented by Santuri Safari, an initiative working with DJs and producers from across East Africa who work with indigenous African sounds and rhythms. The initiative included a business development group as well as practical music producing sessions and I attended one session about the challenges the East African music industry faced in establishing itself in the context of the homogeneity and hegemony of the global music market.

Participatory activities in the form of workshops or educational events are few and participatory activity largely takes the form of opportunities for up and coming artists of the island to perform, developing audiences for Zanzibari and African music generally and bringing people from many different backgrounds together in the space.

At the inaugural Sauti Za Busara festival in 2003, 90% of attendees were locals. As the festival has grown the number of foreigners has risen and the number of locals stayed constant, therefore that percentage is much lower now. There are cultural issues around attending the festival for some locals and some feel compromised by the space. To encourage local engagement with the festival, Busara has established various initiatives. Ticket prices for local people are vastly reduced so that cost is not a barrier to attendance, the festival gets involved with local groups and runs ticket giveaways to schools and youth groups. Busara also runs *Sauti Zetu*, a series of mini regional festivals around the island, and competitions in other parts of the archipelago for slots at the festival. However the reality is, with a third of its revenue generated through tickets sales, the festival needs to maintain a certain number of foreign visitors to sustain itself.



**Kazimoto, a German/Tanzanian collaboration performing at Sauti Za Busara**

**Photo: K Holmes**

I attended all the Zanzibari and most of the Tanzanian acts that performed at Sauti Za Busara, and, with the help of a local translator, spoke to some of the local audience members at these concerts about their view of the music. None of the people I spoke to played instruments and most told me that they did not engage in any kind of music including drumming or singing. Most also told me that this was their first live music experience. However from the reading I have done and informal conversations I had with other locals working at the festival and academics I found out that attending 'live' music events was a part of many people's lives and participating in life or religious rituals involving singing or drumming was a part of most.

It became clear to me that the audience members I was speaking to defined the 'live music' in my question as something different from the things they did on a more regular basis. For them, live music was something big, on a stage, through a big PA and with all the equipment required. The kind of music that they practice as a more inherent way of their everyday lives did not seem to be classified as music in the meaning of a leisure activity but more taken for granted as a necessity.



I visited the DCMA, which exists to play a key role in strengthening the music industry of Zanzibar by researching, training, promoting, preserving and developing the musical heritage of Zanzibar and the dhow (a type of boat from this part of the world) countries locally, regionally and internationally. DCMA takes music classes into private schools, runs concerts at state schools and runs classes and workshop outside of Stone Town. The building is based at the Old Customs House in Stone Town and classes and weekly performances happen there. I attended a taarab concert given by teachers, students and visiting international musicians, watched an impromptu kidumbek performance and sat in on a ngoma drumming class. Mohammed Matona, Director, told me that he believed the future of traditional music in Zanzibar was very positive and that more and more skilled musicians graduating from the academy would strengthen the industry. It is still not easy to be a musician and as Matona told me, you need another job to sustain you financially.



**Ngoma drumming class at the Dhow Countries Music Academy , Stone Town**  
**Photo: K Holmes**

Janet Topp Fargion writes of the professionalisation of music in Zanzibar. Taarab music had been played for women at weddings for many years but in the 1990s became increasingly of interest to tourists and incorporated into the world music market, with international recordings being made and Zanzibari musicians travelling to Europe to perform.<sup>xix</sup> Consequently, becoming a professional taarab musician has the potential to gain very high status, wealth and opportunities to travel the world. Amina, a talented

singing student at DCMA who I spoke to, was very clear on what a professional is and had compromised her life in other ways to be able to dedicate herself to achieving this goal.

In many ways the way in which these NGOs promote participation is similar to that of top led participation in the UK. They have a stronger emphasis on economic development over social but this is because economic development is viewed as essential for social development.

### **Bottom led participation**

Aside from large international events such as Sauti Za Busara and Zanzibar International Film Festival, which also features music, Zanzibaris take part in live music events in several ways. Firstly there are the taarab clubs, which go back to the 1950s and earlier. They function as small musical communities, which musicians or singers have to apply to or are invited to join, and from which performance taarab bands are formed. Some of the most prominent taarab bands are formed from these clubs. Topp Fargion writes that their popularity is diminishing as the DMCA offers a different and more accessible route for people to become involved in music.<sup>xx</sup>

There are live performances outside of tourist hotels, which take place in local venues, at Government events and at weddings. Popular local jazz, reggae, rusha roho or kidumbek bands perform at established venues such as the *Police Mess*. Dancing is always expected at a kidumbek performance. I attended a local rusha roho performance in a shisha bar. Two performers, a keyboardist and a musician sang and various female audience members danced, rather like you would see at many bar gigs in the UK.

Taarab music at government events and weddings exhibits a specific cultural way that the audience participate in the event. Kelly Askew has written about the use of taarab for airing and engaging in disputes<sup>xxi</sup>. Members of the audience lay claim to song texts in the negotiation of their own personal disputes through the act of tipping. A woman angered by a friend's lack of loyalty for example will tip the singer ostentatiously when a song is sung about disloyalty, so making public a private grievance. This tipping is the audience's medium of participation and shows taarab has a more complex performer/audience relationship than it might at first seem.<sup>xxii</sup>

Finally singing and drumming are an integral part of religious and ritual events, including healing, female and male initiation rites and funerals. Although music is a key aspect of these life rituals they are often not defined as musical events. With the help of ethnographic material, scholars and Tanzanian residents I learnt more about some of these music rituals.

Spirit possession is commonplace in Zanzibar. Waganga are the ritual specialists who lead spirit possession ceremonies for occasions such as illness or life rituals eg coming of age. Waganga will call up, bargain with and utilise spirits through ngoma appropriate to various spirit types. Waganga take many forms and vary in skill, from assistants to highly experienced and professional specialists. They are re---numerated for their services eg in the form of contributions from the family of the sick people. There are number of different musical rhythms and songs for these ceremonies, some of which are taught at DCMA.

As with many types of ritual, spirit possession ceremonies can resemble a performance in many ways, especially the larger, more public ones. However the music performance in these instances is very different from the type of presented performance though a PA on a stage. The whole ceremony is participatory and it could be argued, one of its roles is to bond the community as well as heal the individual/s involved. The participatory element of these performances goes beyond that of the performer and audience. In a very specific way these music performances perform a social function. Although the music is not designed to be presented on a stage and the ceremonies are highly participatory, they very much involve highly trained and skilled facilitators, who are taken seriously and re---numerated for their efforts.<sup>2</sup>

Although these rituals are functional in society and not strictly for entertainment or presentation purposes they are not necessarily secret and there are official groups that will perform them to an audience. A spirit possession ritual was performed on the stage at Sauti Za Busara in 2013 by the Mkota Spirit Dancers. Msahaba, a dancer in the group, explains that the spirits enjoy being part of large festivals like Sauti za Busara because the music itself is a gift that they enjoy and celebrate.<sup>xxiii</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Linda Giles and Katharina Schubert are two of several that have written about the complex nature of Swahili possession rituals and the role of the healer in society. Lizzy Brooks is making a film entitled Kibuki: Spirits in Zanzibar and has also been a source of information.



**Pungwa spirit dancers performing on stage at Sauti Za Busara 2014**

**Photo: K Holmes**

It seems there are two types of professional musician on Zanzibar. One is the type that we would recognise in the UK --- who becomes good at presenting and selling their music to those that can pay, and one, that is no less skilled or re---numerated, that performs music as part of a participatory social function of society.

Both of these types of professional are taken seriously in Zanzibar. I do not think there is a blurring between professional and amateur. It is true however, that traditional, 'bottom led' musical performances in Zanzibar, whether taarab or ngoma, involve high levels of social and contextual interaction and different models of the performer/audience relationship. Formal orchestral taarab is the least participatory local music on Zanzibar but still exhibits a culturally specific participatory element in the form of the tipping culture. Kidumbek demands dancing and ngoma rituals necessarily involve all the participants. The rituals and weddings in which live music takes place are not seen as leisure or additional to working life, they are a serious and important part of life and the musicians involved are treated as such. Music is taken seriously and is part of everyday life, so much so that it is not always recognised or called 'music'.

## Discussion

1. Chris Small says in his groundbreaking book *Musicking*. 'To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance ... or by dancing.' Catherine Tackley cites this approach in the Live Music Exchange Blog *The Pleasures of Amateur Music Making* when she talks of how listeners at amateur music performances may be more expert in their branch of musicking than performers.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Thomas Turino, an ethnomusicologist who has written about participatory musical events in Peru and Zimbabwe as well as American folk, talks of presentational and participatory music. Presentational music is when one group of people (the artists) provide music for another (the audience) with a distinct artist--audience separation. Participatory music's goals are more about the activity, the doing and the other participants rather than an end product that results from the activity. The two are not mutually exclusive --- there is more participatory type presentational music and more presentational participatory music.



**A 'presentational' music performance at Celtic Connections 2014**

**Photo: K Holmes**

It is clear that music does not and should not always have to be presented on a stage with a separated audience. As awareness of Chris Small's theory of musicking is growing, the ideology of British folk music offers an example of an alternative to the separated performer/audience and producer/consumer categories that dominate the arts in the UK. In addition I have shown how both presentational and participatory music in Zanzibar is part of a wider cultural event or ritual with many of who attend as participants.

2. There is also an alternative to the separated professional/ amateur categories. Turino suggests that perhaps we might reconsider our conceptions of the importance of 'work' and 'leisure' as well as the types of activities that currently constitute leisure. He writes: 'Because of the priority placed on occupation and work within our society it is mainly professionals who are considered serious or 'real' musicians. It is not that the Suya, the Shona or the Aymara inherently have more artistic and ceremonial activities available in their societies; it is that these activities are not devalued as merely leisure and that everyone's participation in these activities is valued as central to social life and personal well---being'.<sup>xxv</sup>

3. There is a wide body of literature which charts the rise of the concept of professions in the West and critiques the concept as closing off an area of information and creating elite specialist boundaries that grant privileged access to those with the right training or credentials only, a way to gain status or standardize a practice. The current high status of the expert or specialist in our society has not always been as pivotal in history. The term 'polymath' was used to describe great thinkers of the renaissance, who excelled at several fields in science and the arts, including Leonardo de Vinci and Francis Bacon, amongst many others. 'Part---timers' may be taken less seriously than 'full---timers' but we are seeing that a portfolio career in music is more common and more advised. Perhaps this is part of a revival of the multi---skilled polymath.

4. Like much top led participation in the UK, international development in the arts is still very much based on our concepts of the professional. We have started seriously promoting grassroots arts participation in our cultural sector at the same time as elevating a more traditional presentational model abroad. The recent recognition of the value of homemade, bottom led participation in our culture is also necessary in an international arts development context. We may even learn useful new ways of doing things from alternative cultural models.

## Conclusion

Top led participation is conscious policy to offer opportunities for all to engage in the arts. Bottom led participation may be inspired by top led projects or visionary individuals, but is ultimately hard to pin to one source and could be called 'the zeitgeist'. Wherever it comes from, it is where the creativity starts and is the original innovation that invariably informs top led participation and policy. For an innovative and growing society top led participation's aim must be to motivate, stimulate and enable as much bottom led participation as possible, empowering people to practise and innovate themselves.

This does not downplay the value and skill of those dedicated to developing and honing highly skilled presentational creative work, but it does attribute an equal value to participatory and presentational musicking. A strong grassroots creates a bedrock for talent to develop to new presentational heights.

In investigating some forms of participation in music in Zanzibar I have highlighted the way that music can be a part of everyday life --- not just a leisure activity. If music is recognised as an essential part of life, then music makers are taken seriously. In Zanzibar, rather than there being a blur between professional and amateur, it is that participatory 'community' rituals or events which might be labelled as amateur in this country, are considered a serious aspect of life and therefore worth re---numerating. There may be less of a concept of the amateur because music has an important function in society, rather than being 'extra'. The division (and therefore the blur) between professional and amateur is a division that may be contextual to our societal understanding.

We are in a time where we are re---considering our values and how we balance our working life and leisure time. We may even be re---defining what our working life is or should be. Once our basic survival needs are fulfilled what is next most important? Leisure may be coming to be viewed differently in our society. For 'Pro---Ams' (individuals who work in fields such as the arts at a professional standard, but are not 'professionals' because they earn their livelihood through other means) leisure is not passive consumerism but active and participatory, it involves 'the deployment of publicly accredited knowledge and skills, often built up over a long career.'<sup>xxvi</sup> Much of folk music in the UK is an example of 'Pro---Am' activity, relaxing the distinctions between formal and informal, leisure and work.

The status of 'high arts' over forms of grassroots creativity has served to reinforce hierarchies and may have resulted in the disaffection of many from creative pursuits. The current emphasis on arts participation and an acknowledgement of homemade culture as a powerful creative force is the beginning of the reverse of that. An acknowledgement of the value of homemade culture is not to downplay the value of the skills and achievements of artists that dedicate their life to their art. The professional amateur divide needs to be conceived as on a continuum rather than a binary, and all levels on the continuum valued.

In a country with more than enough economic and time resources we need to create the space and support for bottom led participation, perhaps enabled by top led participatory programmes, so that all people grow up participating in everyday creativity not as a leisure activity, nor a lesson or a treat but as a normal part of everyday life. I believe the creative possibilities for our society if we do this are limitless.



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- <sup>i</sup> The Arts Council of England *Taking Part* Survey
- <sup>ii</sup> National Endowment of the Arts. *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*  
<http://arts.gov/publications/2008---survey---public---participation---arts>
- <sup>iii</sup> Holden, John. *Culture and Class*
- <sup>iv</sup> p.48 Holden, John. *Culture and Class*
- <sup>v</sup> Holden, John. *Culture and Class*
- <sup>vi</sup> *The 2009 UNESCO Framework for measuring cultural participation*
- <sup>vii</sup> Leadbeater and Miller. *The Pro--Am Revolution*
- <sup>viii</sup> Aubert, Laurent. *The Music of the Other*
- <sup>ix</sup> Boyes, Georgina. *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival.*
- <sup>x</sup> p.80 MacKinnon, Niall. *The British Folk Scene: Musical Performance and Social Identity.*
- <sup>xi</sup> Henderson, Steven. Investigating the Health of the UK Folk Club.
- <sup>xii</sup> MacKinnon, Niall. *The British Folk Scene: Musical Performance and Social Identity.*
- <sup>xiii</sup> Brocken, Michael. *The British Folk Revival.*
- <sup>xiv</sup> Mumford and Sons interview <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDAsRt6GEyE>
- <sup>xv</sup> *The 2009 UNESCO Framework for measuring cultural participation*
- <sup>xvi</sup> p.20 Aubert, Laurent. *The Music of the Other: New Challenges for Ethnomusicology in a Global Age.*
- <sup>xvii</sup> Askew, Kelly, *Performing the Nation Swahili Music and Cultural Politics in Tanzania.*
- <sup>xviii</sup> pp.59---78 Kirkegaard, Annemette. 'Tourism Industry and Local Music Culture in Contemporary Zanzibar', in Maria Eriksson Baaz and Mai Palmberg (eds): *The Same and Other: negotiating African identity in cultural production.*
- <sup>xix</sup> Topp Fargion, Janet. *Taarab Music in Zanzibar in the Twentieth Century: A Story of 'Old is Gold' and Flying Spirits.*
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- <sup>xxiii</sup> Lichtenstein, Amanda. Mambo Magazine online. *Possessed by the spirit of ngoma.*  
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- <sup>xxiv</sup> Tackley, Catherine, in the Live Music Exchange blog 'Pleasures of Amateur Music Making' <http://livemusicexchange.org/blog/the---pleasures---of---amateur---music---making---catherine---tackley/>
- <sup>xxv</sup> p.233 Turino, Thomas. *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation.*
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## **Thanks to the following people for their input**

Dr Lucy Duran, School of Oriental and African Studies

Katy Spicer, English Folk Dance and Song Society

Neil Pearson, English Folk Dance and Song Society

Nick Hart, Trad Music Academy

Theo Bard, musician and promoter Woodburner

Andy Morgan, Journalist and writer

Terry O'Brien, Playpen Agency

Fiona Dalgetty, Feis Rois

Chris Pentney, Foikworks

Sam Lee, Musician and The Nest Collective

Colin Irwin, Journalist

Shane Power, Séamus Ennis Cultural Centre

Ian Smith, Creative Scotland

John Rostron, Welsh Music Foundation

Dr Fay Hield, Musician and University of Sheffield

Dr Stephanie Pitts, University of Sheffield

Stuart Thomas, British Council

Joe Buirski, Musician and Fire in the Mountain Festival

Éamonn Coyne, Musician

Joe Heap, Towersey Festival and Association of Festival Organisers

Chris Wade, Adastra Agency

Mariam Hamdani, Tausi Women's Taarab Orchestra

Mohammed Matona, Dhow Countries Music Academy

Hildegard Kiel, Music Mayday

Dr Angela Impey, School of African and Oriental Studies

Rebecca Corey, Sauti Za Busara

Amanda Lichtenstein, Sauti Za Busara

Sam Jones, Soundthread

David Tinning, Santuri Safari

Amina Omar, Singer, Dhow Countries Music Academy

Khatib, Translator

Journey Ramadhan, Sauti Za Busara

Lizzy Brooks, Kibuki: Spirits in Zanzibar film