

Rock School Barbey: Music Transmission Through Informal Learning and Community of Practice

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"Out of faith and conviction, a music school is born that can be described as alternative. Forget music theory and method. Music is learned like punk: with others, in bands, playing. And all the teachers come from the local rock scene."

– *Sud-Ouest* newspaper, special supplement marking the 20th anniversary of the founding of Rock School Barbey, 2009

Introduction

There was a time when live music diffusion was relatively simple and was based on the commitment of active minorities. The ecosystem of concert production and diffusion traditionally consisted of managers and producers who imagined shows, and the singers and musicians who performed them, and the concert promoters who sold the shows to festivals and halls. The major players in this sector – the American promoters Live Nation and AEG – have brought about a radical change in the economic model. Since the early 2000s, these two giants have diversified their activities. In addition to presenting concerts, Live Nation owns a large network of festivals and halls, including The Fillmore in San Francisco and the Heineken Music Hall in Amsterdam. Madonna and Jay-Z are among the artists under contract with the company. Live Nation's direct competitor, AEG, owns such imposing places as the Staples Center in Los Angeles and the O2 Arena in London, and it handles the tours

of stars such as the Rolling Stones and Céline Dion. The diffusion of live music has thus become a globalized, structured and professional practice.

In comparison with these show manufacturers, the national groups in France seem modest. However, Vivendi and Fimalac, the two main French players, have also embarked on the acquisition of performance halls: Vivendi took over the Olympia, a legendary Parisian venue, and Fimalac rushed to buy some 20 Zenith halls. For the time being, large groups and multiple small independent structures coexist. SMACs (Scènes de Musiques Actuelles, the French quality label for music venues), for example, still survive due to the involvement of the French state and local communities. Also, some smaller concert halls still manage to stand out by virtue of original and innovative differentiation and positioning, not forgetting that music is an object of transmission, whether in listening or in practice.

People's musical development occurs naturally, as they grow in society, often with a share of transmission from parents and peers who pass on some of their cultural tastes and practices (Derbaix and Derbaix 2019). Their musical development is also shaped and transmitted by the cultural institutions in which it takes place. Rock School Barbey (RSB), a SMAC in Bordeaux, has been developing a cultural and artistic project with social resonance in the music sector. Its mission is based on the pillars of diffusion and transmission. Regarding music diffusion, RSB makes choices focused on the

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discovery of the inventory of alternative singers/bands, mainly in rock and pop. In addition, RSB supports and promotes young bands and the local scenes and regularly organizes “Tremplin” contests. These contests identify promising young bands and also are familiar with the territory in which RSB operates. Concerning transmission, RSB offers music lessons based on informal learning and the community of practice principle. More concretely, it has made a decision to go with professional musicians who pass on their experience and knowledge implicitly and with group lessons favouring socialization and the participation of the local population. By choosing to focus on music transmission, RSB seems to have achieved innovative positioning compared with the big players that dominate the live music market. This transmission, achieved through informal learning, appears to have given RSB a competitive edge with respect to classical music schools.

The main goal of this article is to show how a cultural organization that seems to be increasingly institutionalized perpetuates the informal transmission practices of rock music counterculture. I rely on work by North and Hargreaves (2008) on informal learning to analyze RSB’s learning methods. The knowledge acquired about RSB through primary and secondary data (see Box 1) appears to be consistent with the different elements of the framework proposed by these authors. North and Hargreaves (2008) indeed highlight the importance of context in music learning. According to them, one’s musical development can be explained only in terms of its physical and social context. They draw on earlier works to identify the main features that distinguish between formal and informal learning: context, autonomy and leadership, learning style

and learning content. The interrelationships between these four dimensions of formal and informal learning determine the authenticity of the music learning context, and thereby its likelihood of achieving success.

BOX 1

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this article is to show how a cultural organization that seems to be increasingly institutionalized perpetuates the informal transmission practices of rock music counterculture and thus appears to have achieved innovative and authentic positioning. The methodology was that of a single case, Rock School Barbey (RSB) in Bordeaux, France. The data collection method consisted of three strategic conversations with two of RSB’s founders – Eric Roux, director of RSB, and Emmanuel Cunchinabe, president of the RSB association and first bass teacher – and Daniel Marrouat, RSB’s director of pedagogy. A semi-directed interview guide was elaborated on themes related to RSB’s history, mission, objectives, learning methods, constraints, influences, evolution and actors. In addition, the author had an opportunity to visit with students in the Master of Creative Industries and Culture program, to observe the functioning and structure of the school, and to have informal discussions with other RSB actors such as the communications officer and some rock and rap teachers.

Secondary data consisted of RSB internal documents such as *Cultural and Artistic Project for the Period 2015–2018*, the archives of the regional newspaper *Sud-Ouest* (in particular a special supplement in 2009 to mark the 20th anniversary of RSB’s founding), and the RSB website, mainly regarding the school’s history and evolution.

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ABSTRACT

For over 30 years, Rock School Barbey (RSB – a concert hall located in Bordeaux, France) has been developing a cultural and artistic project that has social resonance in the music sector. Its mission is based on two pillars: dissemination and transmission. With regard to transmission, RSB offers music courses organized on the basis of informal learning and community of practice. By choosing this approach to implementing a process of musical transmission, RSB seems to have achieved innovative and authentic positioning, particularly in relation to the big players that dominate the live music market. This company profile is based on secondary data and “strategic conversations” with people involved in RSB. From these interviews emerged questions that led to theoretical observations. The influence of RSB in the music sector is highlighted.

KEYWORDS

Music transmission, informal learning, community of practice, subculture, social mediation

This article is organized as follows. First, I provide a brief history of RSB, emphasizing the importance of the cultural and political contexts and people (founders and teachers) and their convictions in terms of building this kind of project. Next, I describe and analyze the music transmission methods and principles in which RSB is grounded.¹ I conclude with the development and extension of this music venue model.



Rock School Barbey: The Origins – Influence of a Generation

For 30 years, RSB has consistently defended a project based on a simple idea: to make music accessible to as many people as possible. This involves two main actions. The first and certainly the most in evidence is the diffusion of music and the organization of concerts. The second is the implementation of structures for transmitting and learning music and the provision of rehearsal rooms for bands. At the root of the Rock School project was Eric Roux, the current director of the institution. Roux was an intern at the time, and already had some experience in organizing concerts. His association, CCS (Counter-Culture and Subversion), had been producing “pure and hard” rock concerts with local or national bands since the early 1980s. At that time in France, rock was everywhere and, for some generations, had even become a common language: “We can talk about a generational phenomenon, all the guys who were in the concert halls at that time . . . these guys of my generation . . . we saw these bands together – Iggy Pop, the Ramones, Stray Cats, Lords of the New Church – there were 300 people,” says Roux. “There was one concert a

month, we all knew each other, and that changed a lot. And all the people who were in the room were also musicians.” Rock music has always been socially important, and in the 1960s it brought together a generation of young people to challenge power. It involves rebellious attitudes and values that were the cause of genuine conflict between generations and often between classes (Hesmondhalgh 2013). For example, lovers of rock and punk music have often been described as individuals with anti-establishment and rebellious political attitudes (Cancellieri and Turini 2018). In fact, Ulusoy and Schembri (2018) point out that subculture music (such as rock or punk) is a creative act, with language that facilitates learning and development, where members experience heightened social awareness and share an ideological awakening.

Since rock music is a real phenomenon, Roux imagined creating a place to diffuse it in order to meet the needs and expectations of his generation: “The youth wanted places where music was played – punk, rock bands – and young people wanted places to listen to this music. There was a kind of national movement everywhere, all over France. There was this generational movement, you had all the rockers who were starting to mobilize, a bit like at the time of the French Revolution . . . we were already having meetings, we were project leaders, then we were talking to the ministry and there was a whole thing going on. . . . And this is how the story actually happened.” In France, the authorities were starting to take an interest in this field of alternative music, including rock, in the early 1980s with the positions taken by Jack Lang, the minister of culture. “Jack Lang, who had a good understanding for his time, said, ‘Something is happening in this country’ . . . this minister

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis plus de 30 ans, la Rock School Barbey (salle de concerts localisée à Bordeaux en France) développe un projet culturel et artistique qui a une certaine résonance sociale dans le secteur de la musique. Leur mission s’articule autour de deux piliers : la diffusion et la transmission. Plus particulièrement, en ce qui concerne la transmission, la Rock School Barbey propose des cours de musique organisés sur la base de l’apprentissage informel et de la communauté de pratique. En choisissant cette approche pour mettre en œuvre un processus de transmission musicale, la Rock School Barbey semble avoir acquis un positionnement innovant et authentique et ce, notamment, par rapport aux grands acteurs qui dominent le marché de la musique live. Ce profil d’entreprise est basé sur des données secondaires et des “conversations stratégiques” avec des personnes impliquées dans la Rock School Barbey. Ces entretiens ont permis de mettre en évidence des questions conduisant à des observations théoriques. Enfin, l’influence et le rayonnement de la Rock School Barbey dans le secteur de la musique sont mis en évidence.

MOTS CLÉS

Transmission du goût de la musique, apprentissage informel, communauté de pratique, sous-culture, médiation sociale

of culture said, 'Rock is a cultural act' . . . he made things happen, he allowed us to be taken seriously." This was reflected in decisions to support the music sector, the most symbolic of which was the creation of La Fête de la Musique, followed by the establishment of several bodies such as an advisory commission for rock and variety and an agency for the development of small music venues. This was the start of a program that would enable the building of dedicated performance halls, designed specifically for alternative music.

In 1988, Roux established a professional project and had to find a place where he could carry out and develop it: "My professional project was very clear. It was the organization of concerts and the creation of something next to the concerts [that would enable] transmission, forgetting the great music theories, the classical methods." At the time, Barbey was an Italian theatre that hosted mostly conventional shows and whose infrastructure was not intended for concert presentation. Roux met the director, who validated his project and gave him the freedom to develop it at Barbey. In the 1990s, with financial assistance from the agency for the development of small music venues and the ministry of culture, major renovations to Barbey's infrastructure were undertaken.

"In March '97 we opened the new Barbey, with the rehearsal rooms, the recording studio, the concert hall – places suitable for learning and transmission. So . . . we were in a moment of grace." Roux views RSB as a collective project. Even though he was behind its creation, he could not have succeeded without the help of people with strong convictions – mostly professional musicians – who understood the scope of the project and helped him organize and structure the school. Among these people was the current director of pedagogy, Daniel Marrouat, a pianist-guitarist-singer "who

understands intellectually that it is a political and philosophical project – he is a musician and he knows how to translate it into music, he is the guardian of the school," says Roux, and a bass player and teacher, Emmanuel Cunchinabe, current president of the RSB association.

Roux saw RSB as more than a place for the dissemination of alternative music. He imagined a place where professional musicians could transmit this music, teach it, and even use it to build and strengthen social ties: "Many young people want to make music but they get discouraged very quickly. Putting rehearsal rooms at their disposal is not enough. They need to be supervised by professional musicians; it is the only way to progress. Over our lifetimes, we need benchmarks, otherwise we repeat the same mistakes. I think it is important that young people also learn to function in groups, that it is not everyone for himself."

"For me, 'rock' and 'school' are two words that do not add up," says Cunchinabe. "I was thus reluctant to embark on this adventure. But Eric was convincing. And I realized that the way RSB would operate was . . . a kind of legacy that is based on a pattern similar to the one we followed in the '70s. In my band, first we were listening . . . to music coming from the UK and the States. And then we tried to build something, to compose, even though we were not able to play music . . . we knew three chords, three pitches, but we practised. Later, in 1989, I became the first teacher of bass. When the first students came, I told them: 'Here, it is not a school where you will spend years to get a degree. You come and take what you want to express yourself, play and set up a band as soon as possible.'"

By creating RSB, Roux wanted to give the younger generation an opportunity to be not just concert consumers but also cultural players. The use of professional musicians at RSB illustrates the diversity of the contexts where the

RESUMEN

Desde hace más de 30 años que la Rock School Barbey (una sala de conciertos ubicada en Burdeos, Francia) ha venido desempeñando un proyecto cultural y artístico de cierta relevancia social en el sector musical. Su misión está basada en dos pilares: la disseminación y la trasmisión. De manera más específica, en lo que se refiere a la trasmisión, la Rock School Barbey ofrece cursos de música organizados a partir del aprendizaje informal y la comunidad de práctica. Al optar por este enfoque para aplicar un proceso de trasmisión musical, la Rock School Barbey parece haber adquirido un posicionamiento innovador y auténtico, sobre todo en relación con los actores importantes que dominan el mercado de la música en directo. Este perfil de empresa se base sobre datos secundarios y sobre "conversaciones estratégicas" con personas involucradas en la Rock School Barbey. Estas entrevistas revelaron cuestiones que llevaron a observaciones teóricas. Por último, se destaca la influencia de la Rock School Barbey en el sector musical.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Trasmisión musical, aprendizaje informal, comunidad de práctica, subcultura mediación social

profession can be practised (Coulangeon 2004). Marrouat explains: “To select the ‘teachers,’ we appreciate, evaluate their desire to transmit, to invest a lot of energy in this transmission. These teachers have, simultaneously, an artistic activity and a pedagogical activity . . . From the beginning, the idea was to work with musicians who are artists and thus have stage experience, knowledge of what happens on stage or during a tour. But what seems specific to our teachers is that some of them have never taken a course or attended an academy. They have learned on the job, which is not usual with other styles.” When speaking specifically about the teaching methods at RSB, Marrouat adds, “We are really teaching and they are really learning orally . . . not by reading music theory. The students do not go through reading at RSB even if some teachers did so. They progress at their own pace.” In this respect, classical and popular forms of music are now more and more opposed at the social and musicological levels: classical music is essentially written music and its performers are necessarily “readers,” whereas popular music is based on oral practices and transmission and gives great importance to improvisation (Coulangeon 2004).



Transmission Through Informal Learning

The music we listen to and the process of learning music inform and shape individual and social identities (O’Reilly et al. 2013). As far as learning is concerned, there are two main types of music education: formal and informal. Formal music learning takes place in regular schools and conservatories and via structured private lessons. Because of the time and effort needed to train as a competent musician, achieving success in music entails a lifelong commitment to practice and education. While this kind of formal music education is a prerequisite for classical musicians, it can be too restrictive in other genres. The lack of opportunities for formal education leads many young musicians to pursue informal music education, which is often perceived as rebelling against parental supervision, society and social institutions. For example, rock musicians and young hip hop artists tend to follow a more informal learning path, focused on groups rather than on individual musicians, practical music skills, and the development of personal and social identities (Clawson 1999; Fornäs et al. 1995). They are often self-taught and acquire skills outside of formal institutions. For many young people, joining a rock or rap band is a self-defining act, in the way that joining

a gang is for some young people: it provides an outlet for self-expression, offers a sense of belonging and self-respect, and acts as a substitute for family. A rock band represents a distinct musical world (Campbell 1995); young musicians develop their skills by working as a group in which socializing is as important as the music, by observing more accomplished artists, and by participating in a community of like-minded individuals. “Proponents of popular music pedagogy generally argue that the performance of these genres in schools attracts a broader representation of students with invaluable visceral opportunities to experience diverse identities via embodied creativity that ultimately facilitates empathy towards other ways of life and worldviews” (Hebert 2009, cited in Hebert 2011, 13).

Informal music-making and listening, which usually take place outside the school, are today seen as just as important as the formal music-making that takes place in schools, universities and conservatories. North and Hargreaves (2008) identify the main features that distinguish formal from informal learning, drawing on earlier attempts to do so by Folkestad (2005, 2006), Green (2005), and Hargreaves and Marshall (2003). These features are context, autonomy and ownership, learning style, and learning content.

The first dimension, the *context* of informal learning, refers to the “third environment”² – those places that are neither the classic school environment nor the home environment (thus in the absence of parents or the “usual” teachers). RSB typically falls into this category of third environment. In addition to two concert halls, it features a recording studio and eight rooms for rehearsals and music lessons, and these facilities are made available to everyone. According to Marrouat, “the goal of RSB is not to learn music but to learn music in a specific context, generally without a background based on music theory . . . the aim is to elicit immediate practice . . . After a while, they will use the rehearsal rooms and will play together without our help.”

The second dimension is *autonomy and ownership*. In the traditional music school, the teacher is in control of the music education program and the direction of all activities. With informal learning, on the other hand, music learning is typically self-directed: the learners set their own agenda and choose their own ways of working, which often engenders high levels of motivation and commitment. The case of RSB bears out the words of De Lissovoy (2010, 213): “[T]his is not a relationship between an expert and a novice in which the student is bound to the teacher by the process of apprenticeship.”

Musicians and bands are free to use RSB's equipment for their meetings and performances. In addition, experienced musicians, rather than teachers, transmit and share their music experience and practice with even the youngest participants: "For me, it should not be music teachers who are teaching," says Roux. "It must be musicians who play in groups and who want to transmit their knowledge. Classes here are not classes; they are something rather [more] interactive." Marrouat adds: "We are not in a relationship where some people 'know' and [others listen], as with the classic music lecture. The starting point here is to know the interests of those attending RSB and to help them [on that basis] . . . Our teaching philosophy is reminiscent of the relationship between the older brother who knows a few things and wants to transmit them to his younger brother." Here, implicit interactions are at stake.

The third dimension, *learning style*, refers to the nature and quality of the learning process, similar to the concept of working methods. Several aspects of working methods can be identified. First, informal learning involves playing and copying recordings by ear rather than from notation or from spoken or written instructions. Second, informal learning takes place in groups rather than individually, such that peer learning occurs consciously and unconsciously through discussion, observation and imitation. Third, it does not necessarily proceed like formal music education, which involves a planned progression from simple to more complex skills and achievements. RSB operates at a more holistic level. Finally, informal learning tends to integrate listening, performing, improvising and composing activities, in the service of creativity, rather than differentiation and increasing specialization, as with formal learning. On these points, RSB strives to maintain the oral tradition inherent in the history of rock/pop, to promote group lessons with professional musicians, to encourage learners to work with real-world pieces of music no matter how simple or complex they are, and, finally, to supervise and provide support to bands/groups to launch their careers. "The problem with the conservatory/academy is that they form executants who are just doing what they were taught," explains Cunchinabe. "In a sense, they kill creativity. These people are staggered by the burden of famous composers . . . When you learn by yourself, creativity is there but you must have a lot of energy, desire to progress, and that is easier in a group." He continues, "Informal doesn't mean rubbish. There is a minimum of organization. You have to know the role of each member of the group; there must be agreement on the objective of the group."

The fourth dimension refers to the "what" of music learning, and in particular the focus on different *styles* and *genres*. Traditional music schools are typically associated with "serious" genres, particularly "classical" music, whereas music out of school is typically associated with pop and rock, which are the genres primarily transmitted at RSB. For the past few years RSB has been developing a rap school, an even more popular and sometimes more controversial genre. "For me, rap and rock are the same thing," says Roux. "These music genres have something in common. It's the same blood flowing through the veins of rappers and rockers, or punks. It's the same thing. It's the urgency to say things. It's generational too. These are music, these are emergency practices. We have things to say, we don't really know how to play but we go on stage and we do it, we say things."

At RSB the transmission of music practice through informal learning is characterized by openness and emulation. In informal music learning there is no written culture, so the method of music transmission results in a music framework that is fluid, with no specifically defined musical content (as in a precise score), and relies on ear-based tuning (Ross 2013). Music transmission is based not on vertical teaching from a teacher to a student but on a more diffuse impregnation. Impregnation (or indirect socialization) is learned by modelling younger people's behaviour on a particular role model, who may be a professional musician or an artist regarded as an idol. Music transmission takes place through a process of observation, listening and imitation. This is reminiscent of the vicarious learning perspective of Bandura (1977): imitation, learning by observation or social learning. The learners' behaviour results from observing the teacher. The professional musician is the model. His or her behaviour is reproduced, whatever the consequences, because the professional musician has not only the knowledge but above all the experience. The consequences are rewarding if the behaviour is reproduced well. At RSB impregnation appears to take place when learners are exposed to the teacher's model and when the teacher's behaviour is imprinted on the learners. Imitation is a way to construct taste, to feel a natural affinity for some cultural genres. Impregnation, rather than inculcation (or direct socialization), is the process through which cultural transmission takes place (Oubre et al. 2011).

At RSB the grip of the instrument – that is, when one begins to play the instrument – is immediate (music writing is not a prerequisite for mastering the instrument) and collective

practice is fast (setting up a group structures the path of the musician). “From the first second of lessons, our participants have an instrument in their hands,” says Roux. “The idea is to desacralize the instrument, to make it clear that it is not something inaccessible. It is totally accessible and can be done very quickly. And one can very quickly be valued. When we intervene in certain environments – in a disadvantaged environment, for example – there is this idea of valuing what we can do fairly quickly with a musical instrument.” Cunchinabe comments: “Here, it is completely different from what happens in the conservatory, where you have to learn music for years before playing an instrument. Here, [there is the] idea of immediacy, urgency. We want to transmit quickly, play music as soon as possible, and it doesn’t matter whether this aesthetic is [different from that] of the conservatory . . . You have to give something immediately . . . if the student does not come back – even after just one ‘lecture’ – she or he must leave with something.” However, Marrouat concedes that “I am aware that it’s easier to implement the kind of teaching we do at RSB with rock and rap than with classical music. To grip an instrument immediately is perhaps easier in this case.” A pedagogy that cultivates a sense of listening and respect for others – all courses are collective – constitutes a tool for emancipation and for personal and collective identification. As stressed by De Lissovoy (2010, 203), “the recognition of an essential equality between students and teachers is a central principle for a renewed emancipatory pedagogy across educational context.” Green’s (2001) study of how young musicians learn to play in pop bands out of school reveals many of the processes (exchanging skills and knowledge by watching, imitating and talking about music) involved in informal learning. Learning takes place in groups rather than individually. This means that the individual members of the group are able to develop their own personal techniques and creativity by means of observation and discussion with other members of the band – of their own community of practice.



Community of Practice, Subculture and Social Mediation

A young person’s engagement with music is affected by several factors. When it comes to motivation to engage in musical practices at a very young age, support received not only from parents but also from teachers and peers seems to be crucial (Sichivitsa 2007). Later, the role of

the community cannot be ignored, as many young musicians develop their skills and understanding of music cultures by practising and rehearsing with a band (O’Reilly et al. 2013). At RSB, young people participate in groups that might be called “communities of practice.” The concept of community of practice refers to the social learning process that takes place when people with a common interest begin to collaborate. A community of practice promotes the creation of a knowledge-sharing structure and transmits this knowledge to its members (Lave and Wenger 1991). Communities of practice have three characteristics in common:

- learners share a *domain* of knowledge, which defines a set of issues (e.g., rock or pop style or a band that the young musicians are trying to emulate)
- a *community* of people who care about this domain (e.g., members of the RSB organization, the musicians’ friends and peers, and, perhaps, as their learning progresses, those who come to hear them play)
- the *shared practice* that they develop in order to be effective in this domain (Wenger et al. 2002) (e.g., sharing rock and pop music and transmission through lessons and rehearsals)

The term community of practice as applied to study groups or band rehearsals also implies use of the word “communication.” Communities of practice need to communicate their interests, work and goals. The concept and methods of study, especially when dimensions of music and art are involved, provide a variety of occasions and possibilities to communicate (Gruber 2019). “There are no individual lessons here,” explains Roux. “Everything is in the form of a workshop. There are three or four young people per workshop. In group lessons, our idea is . . . communication among all the members of the group, whether they are teachers or learners. So, there are notions of listening, listening to the other, which [is connected to] the notion of respect, too, respect in listening to the other [with] his differences, what he is, et cetera.” Marrouat adds: “In the workshops people come to play together even if they do not have the same level of ability . . . they ask to stay together, to keep playing with the same people.” Musicians working as a group are crucial to the socio-cultural construction of rock music, where a band is recognized as the main creative unit (Clawson 1999). One of the key skills in music groups is the ability to work together, the so-called listening ability (Adorno 1976). Sicca (2000), for example, refers to musicians’ ability to listen to themselves and adjust their playing and also their ability to listen

to other musicians. The glue that holds a group together, therefore, might come from a sense of community, togetherness and collective consciousness. Moreover, cohesiveness and a similar level of musical ability facilitate the survival of groups or bands. These community dimensions are usually associated with rock music: opportunities to socialize with like-minded people, camaraderie, teamwork, solidarity and friendship. “Sometimes they want to stay together even after school,” says Marrouat. “Bonds of friendship are created between people who didn’t know each other before attending RSB.”

The development of a community of practice associated with socialization seems to adapt better to a music subculture such as that favoured by RSB around rock and pop (and more recently around rap). Ulusoy and Schembri (2018) investigate the ways in which music subcultures (e.g., rock/pop or rap) offer consumers a learning context and potentially a transformative process. They highlight the fact that music subcultures provide consumers with a highly informal and unstructured experience in a participative, interactive and creative learning context. They show that (1) the messages in the music bring the members together in a powerful way because their values are aligned, they are engaged and they are interacting in a holistic manner; (2) creative and artistic expression through the production and consumption of music enables subcultural members to become and remain highly engaged and to support causes passionately; and (3) while some alternative music may not be the kind of music that speaks to the masses, the message is well understood by those who choose to immerse themselves in the scene. Subcultural music allows for a journey of learning at both the individual and the collective level.

The subcultural music experience is a means to achieve increased social awareness and a sense of awakening. Music as a creative act and language facilitates learning, development and transmission. Music is produced and consumed in a web of interactivity (Small 1998), where music, as a form of language and a communication vehicle, creates value and social meaning for subcultural members (Bradshaw and Shankar 2008; Goulding et al. 2013).

Finally, an important component of the main objectives of RSB – music diffusion and transmission – is to get involved in local life and the various popular cultures that make up society and thus foster social ties. In a way, RSB also tries to fulfil the role of social mediator. Social mediation entails a twofold challenge: to offer an experience that gives one a sense of belonging to a group (versus isolation), and to provide a

festive environment while at the same time ensuring familiarity and proximity to local events. As emphasized by Boudier-Pailler and Urbain (2015), fragile personal situations make access to leisure and culture all the more necessary, from both an individual point of view (personal development and increased self-confidence) and a social point of view (integration and socialization). These authors suggest that convivial spaces be made available to encourage the formation of neighbourhood social links, thus addressing the “desire to go to” by creating, developing and linking spaces where people in a neighbourhood can make contact, making use of today’s new microsolidarity. “You have kids – they live in all types of neighbourhoods in the city,” says Roux. “They can come here to rehearse, in a structured way, and there are a lot of things that fall into place. It costs them nothing and they meet other young people here. And music is something . . . music is above your social background or your skin colour.” RSB seems to have acquired legitimacy in the context of operations carried out with young people in difficult situations and so-called distant audiences through alternative teaching methods – which can sometimes be vectors of inequality – but also through their role as social mediator.



Conclusion

The music diffusion market is at a pivotal moment and the rise of giants worries smaller concert producers and venues. Rock School Barbey, created in 1988, is part of what in France is called the generation of “militant builders” in a subculture of music: alternative music. These places, created before the 1990s, are therefore strongly influenced by the personality of their founder-leaders, who are generally not focused on management issues. For Marrouat (and for RSB’s other founders as well), “The goal of RSB is that the students grow, are happy to be on stage and share with others.”

RSB’s artistic and cultural project was originally positioned and dedicated to the activity of music diffusion and – more innovatively, as stressed in this article – music transmission. Music transmission is focused on informal learning, leading to the development of a community of practice. In the case of RSB, there is a strong link between communities of practice, transmission (and informal learning) and diffusion. Indeed, through communities of practice and the transmission they generate, music bands are formed, which, in turn, are able to share their passion for

a common genre, perform on stage and contribute to the diffusion of their music. RSB also supports and promotes young bands and the local scene and regularly holds Tremplin contests. Finally, the ultimate mission of RSB is to accompany its bands “to the end” and let their young apprentices manage their music careers themselves by performing on stage, sharing and having fun.

In the orientation of his choices and the positioning of his institution, Roux also sees an authenticity not found in the companies that dominate today’s music distribution market: “We are a little guarantor of a certain authenticity compared to all these big groups like Vivendi . . . when I chat with my cinema buddies, there is arthouse cinema, and I would like to see a similar label in the field of music, and then we could do even more . . . transmission, it goes a little with something authentic, more honest.” Authenticity is crucial in that domain. According to North and Hargreaves (2008, 355), “the contexts of music-making and music listening are critical in determining the course of musical development and learning, as well as its authenticity for learners in music education.” Elliott (1995, 72) comments: “[T]here is much opportunity for authentic learning in the practice of music . . . musicianship develops only through active music-making in situations that teachers deliberately design to approximate the salient conditions of genuine musical practices.”

The challenge for RSB was to create a scaffolding structure integrated into the third environment sufficiently to provide knowledge, skills and even resources to support it, yet remain distant from the concept of the classical school of music. Thus RSB seems to have set up an innovative transmission project such that “rock school” has become the name given to this transmission activity for any organization, whether it is part of the Rock School network or not. “The name Rock School is registered in France, and there are specifications to be met,” explains Roux. “It is not a traditional franchise, but it is an educational franchise. There is no money to pay but if you do not respect our educational project, you cannot be called Rock School.” In 1997, RSB received a request from the Café Musique of Mont de Marsan (in Landes, France) to name its transmission sector Rock School. This became the cornerstone of a network that now extends, through a seminal process, not only throughout France but internationally: Boulevard des jeunes musiciens in Casablanca, Morocco; the Ampli in Quebec, Canada; the Vox in Wuhan, China; the Kuryokhin Center and the Stéreoletto festival in St. Petersburg, Russia; and Bilbao city hall in Spain.

Notes

1. These first two parts are illustrated by quotes from three RSB insiders. The opinions they express could of course be challenged by people outside the organization or by members of other music schools such as classical musicians.
2. “[I]n countries in South America and Africa for example, music is something that is such a natural part of everyday life that the idea of going to school to learn it seems faintly ridiculous: informal music learning takes place from early infancy, and is embedded in everyday work and play” (Hargreaves et al. 2003, 156).

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