

Response to Chapter 13 of *Music and the Mind*

John Sloboda

May, 2011 (by email)

Dear Adam

It was a great pleasure to read your chapter in "Music and the Mind", and I wanted to respond to it, as I am doing progressively to all the authors in this wonderful tribute (ccing the editors).

I was deeply impressed by your chapter. This is primary archival data of the sort which would easily make its way to a journal. That you chose instead to place it in this volume is indeed a signal honour.

I am pleased that in some small way my work with NP provided some background (and maybe stimulus) to your work with DP. But your work with and for Derek is far more deep and extensive in every way, and is, possibly, the paramount exemplar of meaningful scientific engagement with a savant in contemporary science.

It was a particular pleasure to see how you deploy your analytic approach (the zygonic theory) in a very productive way to the rich recall data that this kind of work provides.

I accept completely your analysis of NP's playing of the Bartok. Had I written the paper now, I would not have been so casual in my phraseology. The Bartok is, of course, not "atonal". The correct term might have been "non-diatonic". And yes, I absolutely agree that NP extracted and operated within the whole tone framework.

Your studies with DP really move the issue forwards. I very much like your construction of "Kooky Minuet". This is a very appropriate and creative "control" for the "Magical Kaleidoscope". I think your analytic technique, which combines algorithmic elements with elements of musical intuition, is entirely "fit for purpose", and the conclusions you draw are very convincing.

I particularly appreciate your taking the trouble to transcribe DP's recalls – this makes the chapter doubly valuable, since other scholars can apply different analytic techniques to the same material (as Wiggins and Mullenseifen did to such effect with the 1985 Sloboda and Parker data in Chapter 9 of this volume. I wonder how their approach would handle your data.

I'm in a way sad that I did not have the time or resources to follow NP over time. I was

very much the “junior partner” to Neil O’Connor and Beate Hermelin on that study, and I have no idea what has become of NP since (both Neil and Beate have now sadly passed away). He was only 21 at the time I met him (1982–3) so he will now be in his late 40s. As far as I know no-one has engaged with him in the context of research since then. The issue of long-term change and life satisfaction for such people is an important issue about which we know too little. I remember some of the very perceptive things you have said to me about Derek’s response to adulthood. What will he be doing when he is 50, I wonder?

I see DP and NP very much standing as indictments of the poverty of our culture to encourage musicality in a widespread way. Of course I recognize that they are remarkable and unusual individuals. But I think they would be somewhat less remarkable in a culture (such as the Colombian culture I have just returned from) where active participation (both reproduction and improvisation) in music performance is something that is everyday for many people, from early childhood onwards. DP and NP remind us precisely that you do not need high levels of educational support, or intellectual equipment, to do really musical things.

It is great that we are seeing more of each other now I am in London, mainly through the SEMPRE committee. I am deeply grateful for the honour you have bestowed on me with this wonderful chapter.

All best,

John.