

# Workshop: Invitations to Participate

By Thomas Cabaniss

### **Preface**

This morning we heard the experiences of people who are living in or visiting environments not of their own choosing. As musicians and artists, we can offer access to an art form that is all about choosing. We play and create music, and implicit in music is the notion that something else is possible. As Maxine Greene says, we can imagine the world as if it were otherwise. Music does that in a radical way, through abstraction and through the visceral physicality of sound. It realigns us internally; it can make us freer, and it can open the world to us in new ways.

When we perform, we create an environment. For a short time, we change the place we are. In music therapy, sensitivity to environment is a key element of work with patients. In shelters and prisons, as we have also heard, music is rarely part of the everyday experience.

While we should not underestimate the power of changing an environment by simply performing music for an audience, we must also be conscious of people's desire to become more involved with it. It's true of contemporary audiences of all kinds: They want to be more involved. How do we make that happen? By making a musical experience interactive—an idea that is gaining currency from concert halls to more unconventional settings.

As performers and artists we then need to decide to what degree and in what ways we should invite participation. How do we offer our listeners a deeper, more personal experience? And of course, we are not asking these questions in isolation, but rather in reference to a very specific audience. Today we are thinking about those who might be incarcerated or sick or without a stable home.

So what are our options? The range of possibilities is extraordinary. It can be as simple as a question posed. It could be a tidbit of information that allows for deeper listening. It can be inviting an audience to sing with you. It can even be something as complex as collaboratively inventing new music with an audience. But they are all invitations. It's as if you say, "Please, come in. Listen more, sense more, feel more."

### **Questions for the Group** (It's a good idea to document the brainstorming as you go.):

What is one invitation to participate you might offer in a particular environment?

### **Small Group Breakout**

Then, answer these two questions, with help from your colleagues and our staff:

1. How would you make the invitation?
2. What would it look and sound like if your invitation were accepted?

Divide into at least two ensembles per group; if they will be performing in the same environment, all the better.

### **Group Reflection**

After discussing in small groups, return to the large group and reflect together.

