

Draft Manifesto for Virtual Ensembles in Music Education

Formatted and Shared by Matthew D. Thibeault for the students of MUS 243
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How might music educators expand their consideration of virtual ensembles? From [Eric Whitacre's Virtual Choir](#) to the [YouTube Symphony Orchestra](#), to [the PS 22's chorus](#), there are an increasing array of ensembles with a substantial Internet presence. The term "virtual ensemble" is itself ambiguous (some would say these are *virtually* a *real* ensemble), but it seems to be sticking. I find that students and faculty are interested in VEs, but there is not yet much out there.

For those curious to start thinking critically about VEs, here's a collaborative manifesto from my undergraduate music education technology course. They tried to assess the good, bad and problematic, and comments are welcome! (Thanks to the students in MUS 243, and Chris Cayari, the TA for the course.) I helped a bit with the discussion, but the end product is truly the work of the students.

We perceive the following strengths for Virtual Ensembles (VEs):

- VEs allow musical performances to be accessed by limitless audiences
- VEs allow a diverse community from different places to be a part of something together
- VEs allow a social and musical connection across space and time
- VEs allow for a varied palette of interpretations, supporting diversity of expressions
- VEs may support and encourage participation in face-to-face live ensembles
- VEs allow safe participation for those who are unsure of musical ability or less comfortable in social situations
- VEs allow experiences with music and technology that have the potential to be motivating and pleasurable
- VEs can provide musicians experience with a wider variety of genres that may not be available locally

We perceive the following potential problems:

- Accessibility issues may create a systematic divide
- Digital literacy restricts creation to experienced individuals unless support is provided
- Resultant recordings can be edited and mixed without participation or involvement of participants
- VEs represent the product of learning and tend not to showcase the learning process
- VEs may have negative impact on the economic situation of other musicians
- VEs are still individual efforts without the sense of a performance in a group in the same way
- VEs may discourage participation in face-to-face live ensembles

Presently, VEs do not offer real-time experiences, only processed results

We perceive the following untapped potentials:

VEs could support non-traditional ensembles in playing traditional music and vice-versa

VEs could eventually support real-time performance and collaboration

VEs could support creation of new genres of music

VEs could invite ALL amateurs to participate

VEs could be a venue for education beyond the creation of performances

Driving questions:

How do VEs support learning?

VEs can be inviting and fun

VEs can renew interest in specific styles of music

VEs connect professionals and amateurs faster than ever before

VEs can promote intrinsic learning

How do VEs support diversity?

VEs support participation from different groups (social, economic, racial, etc.)

VEs support multi-generational interaction

VEs allow for monitoring, and therefor creation, of diversity

What might be some biases of VEs?

“Higher quality” musicians might be favored over “lower quality” musicians in the final product

VEs presume everyone has a computer and a quality internet connection

VEs are still restricted to developed regions

VEs assume individuals do not wish for any compensation

VEs can give a false sense of high performance

VEs might promote laziness towards performance

VEs require composers and musicians to change their traditions of creation

VEs often presume an equivalence between digital and physical communication