MSW NWU® | Research and Creative Outputs in Visual Arts and Music

Call for abstracts:

Character Strengths, Music and the Arts

Virtual Conference | 7–9 April 2027

Conference Theme

We are delighted to invite proposals for the upcoming virtual conference on **Character Strengths, Music and the Arts**. Grounded in Positive Psychology and in Peterson and Seligman's (2004) Values in Action (VIA) Classification of 24 character strengths and six virtues, the conference asks how music and the arts nurture, express, test and transform the qualities that help people and communities flourish. The 24 character strengths are organised under six virtues as follows:

- **Wisdom and knowledge:** creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness/judgment, love of learning, perspective
- **Courage:** bravery, persistence/perseverance, integrity/honesty, vitality/zest
- **Humanity:** love, kindness, social intelligence
- **Justice:** citizenship/teamwork, fairness, leadership
- **Temperance:** forgiveness and mercy, humility/modesty, prudence, self-regulation
- **Transcendence:** appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour, spirituality

In keeping with our wider focus on spirituality and wellbeing, we particularly welcome work on the character strengths associated with transcendence (appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humour and spirituality). We also welcome contributions exploring how other strengths connect with meaning, purpose, connectedness and the sacred. Because music and art-making rarely happen in isolation but rather take place in ensembles, classrooms, therapy rooms, places of worship and communities, we encourage submissions focused on how strengths come to life collectively as opposed to individually. Critical, interdisciplinary, multicultural, theological, philosophical, Indigenous and ecological perspectives are all welcome.

Conference Objectives

The conference offers scholars, researchers, practitioners, musicians and artists a space to share research, exchange ideas and build collaborations. Our objectives are:

1. Exploring how music or the arts cultivate, express and transform character strengths, and how this supports spirituality, well-being and flourishing.
2. Considering how the strengths of transcendence, and their links with character strengths associated with other virtues, connect to spirituality, meaning, purpose and the sacred in musical or artistic life.
3. Understanding character strengths as relational, communal and cultural resources that emerge when people make music or art together.

4. Critically exploring strengths-based approaches and character strengths, including the underuse and overuse of strengths in music or the arts, cultural assumptions in the VIA Classification, and the risk of toxic positivity.
5. Bringing Positive Psychology into conversation with theology, philosophy, Indigenous and other ways of knowing, and with musical or artistic, educational, therapeutic and community practice.

Conference Topics

We welcome empirical, theoretical, philosophical, theological, historical, practice-based and arts-based contributions on themes including, but not limited to:

1. **Musical and Artistic Practice and Character Development:** How musical or artistic practice builds, reveals or reshapes character strengths, and how particular works, genres and traditions express or question them.
2. **Performance and Creativity:** The strengths that musicians or artists draw on in performance, interpretation, improvisation, composition, collaboration and connecting with audiences.
3. **Music Education, Arts Education and Therapy:** Character strengths and strengths-based approaches in music or arts pedagogy, and music or arts therapy.
4. **Spirituality and Transcendence:** Sacred and religious music and arts, worship, ritual, connection with the natural world, and experiences of hope, gratitude, humour, joy and beauty.
5. **Critical and Cultural Perspectives:** Cross-cultural and critical readings of Positive Psychology and the VIA Classification, including Indigenous and historically marginalised ways of knowing, toxic positivity, suffering, vulnerability and injustice.
6. **Community Music, Arts and Collective Flourishing:** Character strengths as relational and collective musicking or art-making in relation to belonging, social cohesion, cultural continuity, reconciliation, activism, social change and the common good.

Submission Guidelines

We welcome proposals for individual paper presentations (15 minutes), panel discussions (40 minutes), workshops (40 minutes), reflections on practice (15 minutes) and artistic performances (10 minutes).

Prospective presenters are invited to submit a Word document with the following information:

- Title of presentation
- Type of presentation (individual paper, panel discussion, workshop, reflection on practice or artistic performance)
- Name/s of presenter/s
- Affiliation/s (i.e. principal place of work or study)
- Country/ies of residence
- Email address/es
- 4–6 keywords

- Abstract (300 words), showing clearly how the proposal relates to the conference theme. References are optional, should follow APA 7th edition style, and do not count towards the word limit.
- Biography (80 words), in narrative format, starting with your name. For proposals with more than one presenter, please include a biography for each presenter, if appropriate.

Important Dates

- **Abstract submission deadline:** 31 January 2027
- **Notification of acceptance:** 28 February 2027
- **Conference dates:** 7–9 April 2027 (online)

Submit abstracts and an 80-word bio to: anzel.botha@nwu.ac.za

Conference Venue

The conference will be held exclusively online, hosted by North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus), Research and Creative Outputs in Visual Art and Music (ViAMUS) Focus Area, South Africa. We look forward to creating a welcoming space conducive to critical conversation, knowledge sharing and creative exchange.

Take Note: Character Strengths and Music Book Call

Please take note of the call for chapter proposals for a forthcoming edited book on Character Strengths and Music in the Peter Lang series on Music and Spirituality. Extended abstracts are due by 28 February 2027.

Contact Information

For more information, please visit our website: https://mswinternational.org/ or contact Anzel Botha at anzel.botha@nwu.ac.za or Ewie Erasmus at ewie.erasmus@nwu.ac.za.

Join us in exploring the rich interplay between music, the arts and character strengths, and how it helps individuals, communities and societies flourish. We look forward to an inspiring and enriching conference in April 2027.

Sincerely,

The Conference Organising Committee

References

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. American Psychological Association; Oxford University Press. VIA Institute bibliographic page for Character Strengths and Virtues