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## Does Music Therapy Work the Way We Think It Works?

By Brynjulf Stige [|Author bio & contact info|](#) & Carolyn Kenny [|Author bio & contact info|](#)



This issue of the Journal section of *Voices* is rich in diversity and in substantial contributions to our understanding of music therapy around the world. In several different ways the articles of the present issue thematize how music therapy works. The contrasts are immense between many of the contributions, such as between the anthroposophical ideas discussed by German music therapist Andrea Intveen and the community music therapy perspectives discussed by South African music therapists Helen Oosthuizen, Sunelle Fouche, and Kerryn Torrance. In the first case the direct effects of particular instruments on the individual is in focus, while in the latter case the authors develop a contextualised understanding of music as collaboration. The other texts of this issue add to this diversity, for instance by discussing musical communication through improvisation, as the Korean music therapist Sungyong-Shim does, or by discussing the “marriage” of music and narratives, as North American music therapist Lillian Eyre does (and there is more, as you will discover when you read this issue of the journal).



When there are so many different ways of talking about how music therapy works we may start reflecting on whether or not music therapy works the way we imagine it works. One way to approach this theme is to acknowledge the possibility that the way we imagine music therapy working is part of how it works. As Even Ruud (1987/1990) has noted, the prehistory and history of music therapy is characterized by a striking diversity in perspectives and a continuous rethinking of how and why music works. Our beliefs and intentions create a powerful influence on our experiences. The proponents of music therapy seem to have been able to develop conceptions of music that legitimate music therapy in relation to the prevailing cultures of therapeutic practice. This versatility reflects an adaptability that at times could be challenged, but it probably also reflects music’s resourcefulness. And, it may be that the notion that the influence of our intentions, imagination, beliefs, ideas and values are integral to the therapeutic process (and not only to our understanding of it) is worth reflecting upon. While placebo effects to a large degree have been degraded by medical researchers, many psychologists have taken interest in this phenomenon because it reveals how important our experiences and expectations are for the outcome of a process. Certainly this has been demonstrated in traditional societies in which a belief in the prevention or cure of disease is a significant aspect of the effectiveness of interventions. In the study of musical healing in context, the cosmology of the participants is usually considered essential for therapeutic process and outcomes (see e.g. Gouk, 2000). So, in this perspective we could say that music therapy works the way we believe and imagine it works.

But, there are times when music therapy does not work the way we think it works. There are, for instance, times when we need to consider more carefully even a basic term such as the word “we.” It may be that communities of music therapy practitioners develop a “we-know-how-it-works-feeling.” But every case of music therapy practice represents the possibility that the music therapist encounters clients or participants who think differently. In other words; there may be a mismatch between the music therapist and the client participant in terms of how

music therapy works. If music therapy works the way we think it works, this kind of mismatch may make it not work. Or our misconceptions, at least, may inhibit music therapy from working in the best ways. This is one of the reasons why we need to develop contextualized perspectives on how music therapy works, and it is also one of the reasons why sensitivity to culture and context is underscored in the *Voices* vision statement. This does not suggest that any attempt of formulating more general theoretical ideas in music therapy are invalid, but it does suggest that we need to stay open and be willing to rethink our ideas.

For example, there were effective and well-articulated ways of using music for both prevention and cure in tribal societies. With the Age of Enlightenment much tribal knowledge was discarded. This particular knowledge stayed very close to the sensory domain because of the need of ancient peoples to survive without the technologies that we have today. With elaborate technological advances, we can elude ourselves into imagining that we could function without this sensory knowledge and intuition – the deep ecology of surviving and thriving. Yet as the climate crisis becomes ever-so obvious, some are returning to the ancient knowledge and wisdom.

In this issue, the interview with Ainu Arts Project leader Koji Yuki, describes one of these initiatives among the Ainu, the indigenous people of Japan, that acknowledges the rather profound relationships between the arts, the senses, the Earth, and more. His group strives to maintain tribal wisdom in a modern context, The Ainu Arts Project is similar to many indigenous projects in the arts around the world today. We see in these social and cultural movements the revitalization of indigenous societies through the arts. Such revitalization brings back values, practices and principles that can help all societies.

As music therapists we exist with our clients largely in the sensory domain since music is our way of being with patients and clients. *Voices* hopes to participate in the revitalization of some of the ancient ways of being in relationship through the senses. Perhaps our beliefs and values are different now. But our intentions are the same – to survive and thrive in the best possible ways and to improve the quality of lives, to alleviate suffering, to make an effort to keep some balance.

So our project is an exciting one. Dialogue creates the possibility to exchange worldviews, cultural practices, approaches to therapy and healing, and many other things. These bridges will guide us into new possibilities, but ones that examine the unfortunate discarding of ancient practices through colonizing practices around the world. Music therapy, if it is to endure, must establish a fluidity of ideas and practices in which we continue to learn from each other individually, collectively, and culturally. This issue of *Voices* represents an effort to advance this possibility.

## References

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