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What Could Music Therapy Be?

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In the opening of her book *The Mythic Artery. The Magic of Music Therapy*, Carolyn Kenny (1982) describes vividly how challenging the question "what is music therapy?" may be, and how a new or different answer may be required each time someone asks, depending on this person's pre-understanding. What Kenny describes could be seen as a practical problem of communication, but it may also reveal how the field of music therapy is an emerging field, in continuous change. Maybe, therefore, it would sometimes be more helpful to rephrase the question, and ask: "What could music therapy be?"



The vision of *Voices* is to give space for questions like this, and for various responses to it. In order to create such a space, one of our concrete goals has been to be able to present at least one text from each of the six continents in each of the issues of the journal. In most of the issues we have approached this goal but not reached it completely. We are therefore proud to present this third issue of the third volume of *Voices*, which includes essays from Australia, Canada, Germany, and Kenya, and reports from Brazil and Japan, in addition to a Canadian text in the series "International Archives."

Voices from all six continents are then represented in this issue, and several of the texts raise fundamental questions as to what music therapy could be: What is the relationship between music therapy and traditional healing rituals? What is the relationship between music therapy and the musicking of a string quartet? What is the relationship between music therapy and community? These questions are quite different, but share a measure of intrepidity, and may possibly reveal a tendency in the discipline and profession; there is now such a strong polyphony of qualified voices in the field that it is no longer considered possible to give a comprehensive presentation of what music therapy *is* from any one perspective. Consider, for instance, Diego Schapira's (2003) review of a recent textbook in the field; *A Comprehensive Guide to Music Therapy - Theory, Clinical Practice, Research and Training*:

As an "overseas" reader, I must point out an issue that comes out [of] music therapy, which I think it is a very common cultural problem. The book aspires to cover "a need for a more general overview and guide to the complex field of music therapy that can give a comprehensive understanding of the many different theories and clinical methods that have developed internationally." But it refers almost exclusively to developments in Europe and USA, with occasional and sporadic mentions of other countries. An example to clarify this point: a European colleague would probably find the proposal of a "general overview" regarding only developments of USA and Latin America, or just Asia and Africa, shocking. Besides this, it is a helpful book in any place of the world (Schapira, 2003).

What is music therapy? Who has the right (and the power) to define it? Maybe one of the contributions of *Voices* could be to create and develop an inclusive arena where visions of what music therapy could be could be shared? In a recent column in *Voices*, Lia Barcellos describes

a new openness in Brazilian music therapy, and this could probably work as a model in many other contexts:

When the first Music Therapy Program was formally established in Brazil in the early 70's, and when the clinical work was already being done in many institutions, one of the most discussed subjects was if patients should take part in public presentations. In these "shows" there were many kinds of "performances": bands, choirs, plays or even performing festivals of cultural/religious expressions. This discussion raised many issues such as: "the patient shouldn't be exposed in a public situation" or "it isn't music therapy."

But, as music therapy was becoming more well known and the music therapists got stronger identities, this kind of discussion gave rise to a different position. Nowadays music therapists accept not only the patients' "performances" but almost everything related to different music activities which contributes to the growth of their self esteem, to a better quality of life, as well as to the theoretical comprehension of the aesthetic growth as a sign of the patient's development (Barcellos, 2003).

Barcellos concludes her column by stating:

.nowadays, many Brazilian music therapists can "dance following the music," i.e., can accept and prepare choirs, popular festivals, musical workshops, bands, musical groups and every cultural expression, when necessary or desirable, in order to help, to promote health, to provide joy of life for people who are ill and not at their best (Barcellos, 2003).

What could music therapy be? It could be a call: Let's dance, following the music. Let's sing, following voices of pain and pleasure. Let's listen, also for the voices that have been silenced and relegated to the margins of society. Let's care, following the voices in need.

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