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Bergen: Lights in the Nights

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In May I spent a full week in what has to be one of the most beautiful places on the face of the Earth - Bergen, Norway. The Fana Folkehøgskole, a small school just outside Bergen, was the site of the 4th Nordic Music Therapy Conference. The conference offered keynote speakers and many professional presentations, all very stimulating and interesting for us, in terms of exchanging ideas across continents. There was a large international representation.



One evening, as I left the festivities after a long day of conference presentations, I noticed that the sky was beginning to turn a deep shade of blue, bordering on "dark". This was in contrast to most of the day/night at this time of year in this part of the world. It was midnight! The emerging night was punctuated for me by the contrast of two buildings on the grounds that created a silhouette against the night sky. In one building, Nordic music therapists, students, and visitors from around the world were playing rock music on electric instruments to wild dancing of the conference attendees. In the building next door, I could see and hear Norwegian folk music and dance with accordions and harmonicas - another set of music therapists and students and their friends.

One of the themes of the conference was "community", as presented by Brynjulf Stige, Gary Ansdell and others. There were many ideas being exchanged about how to define community, what "community music therapy" might be, and all of the implications of a newly rediscovered phenomenon with very old roots, now possibly being reformulated in a contemporary context. After a day full of listening to "ideas", the contrasting dance/music scenes in the two buildings described above was the perfect ending to a perfect day. Here was community. Here were different types of music, self-selected by two organically configured groups. The electric guitars and the accordions echoed two different times and expressed a set of entirely different qualities. But both were communal expressions of significance and depth.

We might choose to express ourselves differently in the same community. And this night brought many lights and many expressions into the conference proceedings as a grounding of our community and the individuals within our communities. I hope that music therapy gatherings of professionals and students will always have these important communal expressions as an integral part of their conferences. This is the way we walk the talk. This is the way we "create" community beyond the abstractions of our ideas. This brings much light into the night in more ways than one.

The Bergen conference was a real pleasure to attend. It was organized by a stellar group of Bergen music therapists and student volunteers. I'm happy to say that the spirit of music therapy is in good hands, if these young people are in charge of the future.

And I would like to personally thank Viggo Krüger, Coordinator and the entire organising committee composed of Liv Gunhild Brekke, Åsta Knudsen, Ingvild Lillevet, Øystein Lydvo, Hilde Røddland, Øyvind Selvik, and Lasse Tuastad for a "stellar" job!

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