

[More From This Issue](#)[Current Issue](#)[Back Issues](#)[Guidelines](#)

Vol 3(1), March 1, 2003
mi40005000192

The Song as an Anchor

By Marcia Cirigliano [|Author bio & contact info](#)

Music therapists, regardless their cultural background or theoretical approaches are also human beings. As such, they have limits, most of them unconscious. Unresolved emotional conflicts, personal life situations and memories from feelings of the past are some of the various forms of interference in clinical work, coming from the domain of countertransference.



When dealing with clients, being aware of countertransference issues helps the therapist to be more open for the one who seeks treatment. As a tool for the therapeutic process, the observation of what goes on in musical countertransference may be helpful. In other words, what feelings the client brings up in me, the therapist, and what do such feelings have to do with my personal issues? If so, when and how am I allowed to express this through music?

The following contribution aims to define a conceptual term for the Brazilian Music Therapy literature, based upon studies already presented at an international congress (1993), and material from clinical private practice that led to some considerations on the role of the music therapist as a facilitator, with a personal musical history.

Definition:

"Song as Anchor" is primarily the therapist's song. It comes up, without the music therapist's awareness, within a therapeutic situation in which, due to countertransference, the therapist is faced by some kind of impossibility in terms of interacting with the client. The song as an anchor functions as a resource that provides some sort of resolution for such impasse, creating an instrument for the therapist to overcome the state of 'being stuck', paralyzed, offering the possibility for the session to move on.

Definition sample:

In my infancy, fairy tale songs helped me to develop a very special path in stimulating my imagination and I had no difficulty in learning all the lyrics (the versions in Portuguese maintained the same original melodies). Later in my adolescence, they played an important role in my English studies: I could train my memory for new words and sentences, singing them ...and they also recalled my childhood memories.

As a clinical music therapist I noticed how often fairy tale songs appeared in musical improvisations with kids: Sometimes as simple melodies, other times with words, but always without my previous awareness, in a frequency relevant enough to get my attention.

With one of the clients I accompanied - an autistic boy - I noticed that, many times, while observing some of his behavior, I wondered how to interact or even help, (e.g.: isolating, throwing musical instruments away, crying). I used to sing,

and in singing, caught myself bringing up fairy tale tunes, such as Cinderella or Snow White themes. The result was that many times the child's behavior would change into something else (e.g: glancing at therapist, stopping to cry, etc) which led the session to continue.

The above definition (called in Portuguese *Cancao-ancora*) is the result of reflections upon an article, published in the Brazilian Music Therapy Newsletter (1998), which is partly a summary of the Final Project (1996) for the Master Program in Music Therapy at Temple University, Philadelphia, U.S.A. It has been a on-going consensual opinion that, here in Brazil, for theoretical purposes, this concept should be defined and published to make a contribution to the international professional community .

There are many studies on clients' behaviors and achievements in the Music Therapy literature. Little has been written about the therapist. In order for the therapeutic relationship take place, the therapist has a role to play. As mentioned before, this role involves not only his/her background as a professional, but also issues regarding personality and, most of all the connection with the music. The more the music therapist is aware of all these aspects, the more she is able to be there for the client.

In the therapeutic setting the element of countertransference is present and needs to come to the therapist's awareness as much as possible. While searching for the establishment of links between the psychoanalytical concepts and the Music Therapy approach, I base my clinical music therapy interventions upon the Freudian concepts of evenly suspended attention and free association. Therefore, songs brought by the therapist, for instance, are not a mere occurrence but reflect unconscious memories of their own, as well as some reaction to what is taking place in the therapeutic process.

It is important to emphasize that the song as an anchor needs monitoring regarding its use in Music Therapy. When interacting with the client the use of a song that persists in the therapist's mind can be at least twofold. First and foremost, it can be a way to the session regain its flow, as described in the definition sample. I believe each therapist has an anchor, maybe a song or some rhythmic pattern, or even some sort of harmonic sequence. It is up to them to discover, in their musical universe, what their anchor might be. Secondly, a therapeutic, musical anchor can be used as a defense mechanism and therefore needs to be discriminated. For this purpose, self knowledge is fundamental: the more the therapist recognizes his/her boundaries and personality the better the song as an anchor can be used as a therapeutic musical tool in the Music Therapy realm.

References:

Cirigliano, Marcia (1993). *Atencion Fluctuante Musical; una reflexión respecto al papel del musicoterapeuta*. [Musical Evenly suspended attention: a reflection upon the role of the Music Therapist] Paper presented at VII World Congress of Music Therapy. Vitoria, Spain.

Cirigliano, Marcia (1996). *A Dream Is a Wish: A Therapist's Song. Independent Project*. Temple University Music Therapy Master's Program. Philadelphia, PA, USA.

Cirigliano, Marcia. (1998). Pesquisa na Clínica Musicoterapica: a cancao como ancora terapeutica. [Research in the Music Therapy Clinic: the song as a therapeutic anchor.] *Revista Brasileira de Musicoterapia, ano III número 4*.

To cite this page:

Cirigliano, Marcia (2003). Contributions to Music Therapy: The Song as an Anchor [online]. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*. Retrieved from <http://www.voices.no/mainissues/mi40003000112.html>

Moderated discussion

Add your comments and responses to this essay in our *Moderated Discussions*. Contributions should be e-mailed to either **Barabara Wheeler** or **Thomas Wosch Guidelines for discussions**

View contributions on this essay:

- December 4, 2006: **Response to Marcia Cirigliano's essay "The Song as an Anchor"** by Shanna Clark
- March 1, 2006: **Developing My Music Self-The Prelude to Strength-Based Improvisation and the Joy of Collaboration** by Lisa Jackert

©2005. VOICES. All rights reserved

