

## MUSIC THERAPY THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES

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**SUMMARY.** This paper represented a modest attempt to depict a short history of the music therapy for those who have participated in the *International Conference on Music Therapy – The Role of Music in Therapy and Pedagogy*. We are well aware of the fact that music has always played an important part in the evolution of humanity, moreover, some scientists would argue, that our ancestors developed musical skills even before they could talk. Consequently, it seems only natural to investigate upon the history of the therapeutic effects of music from the earliest ages, also on the manner in which people have viewed this aspect and employed the 'magical' powers of music. Our symbolic journey will take us from the shamanism of ancient times to the scientific viewpoint of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when music is full heartedly employed in alleviating more or less serious physical or psychological illnesses.

**Keywords:** music therapy, history, music, medicine, healing

The impact that music has on the psyche is unquestionable, for every one of us who have ever sung, played a musical instrument or has listened to music can attest to this fact. However, we must make a very clear distinction between the mood altering, calming or stimulating effect of music and actual music therapy, where an educated professional uses music or certain elements of music to prevent or treat an illness.<sup>1</sup> This usually happens within a complex medical treatment plan alongside other methods of cure.

One may be tempted to ask why is music - alongside physiotherapy, chromo therapy, flower therapy, eurhythmics etc – suitable for healing. How is it that other art forms – let us take sculpture, for example – are not or not necessarily so? One possible answer might be that each person is musically inclined. When we are born the first thing we do is to cry, to emit a sound, because we have let air into our lungs for the first time, then we prattle, attempting to communicate with the world, and later we learn to talk and sing.<sup>2</sup>

Music is present not only in the early years of every man, but it has been also present in the early years of humanity. The life of primitive tribes existing today suggests this thesis, and leads us to make yet another supposition, that

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<sup>1</sup> <http://zene-terapia.gportal.hu>

<sup>2</sup> Darnley-Smith, Rachel-Patey, Helen M., *Music therapy*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd., 2003, p. 7.

from early times on humans have recognized its potential and used music for healing.<sup>3</sup> In shamanistic cultures for example, the goal was to bring back the lost or stolen spirit of the sick from the world of evil spirits. This was the only way in which healing was possible. In order for this to happen, the shaman had to travel through the different levels of the other world, music playing a crucial part within his journey. Firstly, the shaman usually asked the spirits of animals to come to his aid, by 'talking' to them in a secret language, namely mimicking their voices and behaviour.<sup>4</sup> The preparation of the mystical journey followed – through drum-roll.<sup>5</sup> The purpose was for the shaman to fall into a trance thus being able to look for the spirit of the ailed person in the other world. The chants and the magic songs were also important elements of the healing ritual. The chants of certain shamans were characterized by the fact that although they were built on the same pentatonic scale, every spirit had their own singular melody, which had to be carefully chosen in order for that particular spirit to be invoked.<sup>6</sup>

The role of music within the healing ritual has also endured throughout the great civilizations of antiquity. Around 5000 B.C. the Egyptian physician-priests also employed magic chants in their healing rituals, as did the physicians later in Babylon. Another crucial fact is that the most ancient Egyptian musical document is precisely a music therapy 'recipe'.<sup>7</sup>

In ancient China, music provided cosmic equilibrium between the energies of the yin and the yang, while the pentatonic scale used by them was considered to be in close connection with healing. In the Hindu world of that period, they were well aware of music's healing effect, but also of the influence, it had on the processes of learning and personal development. They gave a special significance to singing in temples and royal courts, for they believed that even the slightest change in intonation could have a positive or negative effect on people.<sup>8</sup>

The close-knit relationship between music and healing for the ancient Greeks ranked highly with their system of belief, philosophy and science. The god Apollo was at the same time the god of music and medicine. On the other hand, we all are acquainted with the famous mathematician, Pythagoras' (c. 570–c. 495 BC) theory named 'Music of the spheres', according to which the movement of the planets is linked to the same numerical proportions that produce musical harmonies. The great thinkers, Plato (428/427 BC – 348/347 BC) and Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC) both called attention to the effect music has on the psyche.

<sup>3</sup> Spătar, Anca Oana, *Muzicoterapia. Istoric, actualitate, perspective (Music therapy. History, actuality, perspectives)* – Ph. D. Thesis, Cluj-Napoca, *Gheorghe Dima Music Academy*, 2007, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> *Idem*, p. 14.

<sup>7</sup> Apel, Willi, *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Cambridge, Belknap Press, 1969, p. 559.

<sup>8</sup> Spătar, Anca Oana, *op. Cit.*, p. 31.

This effect could be both positive and harmful. Melodies written in Ionian modes were considered to have an energetic effect on people, whereas those in Phrygian and Lydian modes made them become more stubborn and suggested questionable morals, respectively.<sup>9</sup> Music was present also within the field of Greek medicine. A truly interesting legend offers insight about the manner in which Athenaops healed with the sound of his flute, with a sort of 'musical acupuncture' method, playing his music above the ailing body part.<sup>10</sup>

Hippocrates (c. 460-c. 377 BC), the founding father of medicine, had condemned the magic and religious rituals employed in healing, and had put emphasis of rational criteria. Subsequently, up until the empirical manner of thinking of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, medical diagnosis were given based upon the theory of balance between the four humours, namely blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm.

With the debut of Christianity, society stopped regarding sick people as being second rate citizens or damned by the gods, as they were perceived before. The mentally ill who were thought to be 'possessed by demons' were exceptions to this view, being more often than not locked away and harmed.<sup>11</sup> The European medical science of the Middle Age followed the model of the ancient Greek one, as its theologians subsequently developed their views on music based on principles deriving from the Christian faith but also from ancient philosophy. According to Boethius (ca. 480–524 or 525) music was thought to improve or weaken a person's morals, whereas Cassiodorus (c. 485 – c. 585) borrowed Aristotle's theory of catharsis regarding music. The truly emphatic role of music was present in this period not in the area of healing, but in that of religious ceremonies. However, hymns for example were recommended in treating respiratory problems.

From the standpoint of today's understanding of music therapy, we must pay close attention to the interesting views the Islamic world had on the subject. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Ebu Bekir Razi recommended melancholy to be treated in the following manner: the patient should indulge in pleasurable activities, hunting for instance, and in meeting other people the personality and moral conduct of whom he is partial to, they should listen to beautifully sung melodies.<sup>12</sup> Around 1100 they actively used music for healing in the Nureddin hospital in Damascus. Later practices of music therapy were also clearly depicted in the travel chronicles of Evliya Chelebi's:

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<sup>9</sup> Wigram, Tony - Pedersen, Inge Nygaard - Bonde, Lars Ole, *A Comprehensive Guide to Music Therapy. Theory, Clinical Practice, Research and Training*, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Spătar, Anca Oana, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>12</sup> [www.musictherapyworld.de](http://www.musictherapyworld.de)

"The late Bajezid, the benefactor; may God forgive his sins; to cure the ill, to relieve the aggrieved, to get rid of the passion of love and as a nutrition to the souls of the crazy, had arranged 10 professional singers and 10 musicians, of which 3 were only singers, 1 was a Neyzen, 1 was a violin player, 1 was a musikar (Pan flute) player, 1 was a Santur player, and 1 was an Ud player. They came 3 times a week to apply a session of music to the patients and the mad".<sup>13</sup>

However, let us return to the humanist thinking of the Italian Renaissance. Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), a 15<sup>th</sup> century theologian, poet, astrologist, doctor and musician thought that a carefully selected piece of music helps in harmonizing the human being. He himself practiced this<sup>14</sup> with musical improvisation, a technique that is so important in today's music therapy. Tinctoris (c. 1435 – 1511), the Flemish theoretician, spoke of the 20 different employments of music<sup>15</sup> in the fields of religion, morals, aesthetics and of course in the medicine.<sup>16</sup> In the renaissance period music was not only recommended in cases of melancholy, despair or insanity, but it was used also in preventing illnesses.<sup>17</sup> Music offered a positive and optimistic view to people<sup>18</sup> in the time when 'half' of Europe had succumbed to deadly epidemics...

The baroque theory of the affects, formulated by Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), resulted in an entirely new approach to the practices of music therapy. The theory suggests that music should be listened to according to personality types: persons prone to depression should listen to melancholic style music, whereas joyful people should listen to dance music. The same Kircher states a highly anecdotic fact, namely that the bite of a tarantula should be treated by the tarantella dance.

Nevertheless, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century medical science came to the forefront. By this time, only doctors who employed an integrated approach to healing used music in their treatments. However, this was the time that American music therapy was born, which heralded the later establishment of it as a profession and field of study.

In the article *Music Physically Considered*, published in 1789 by an unknown author, the principles unanimously accepted today in the field of music therapy were already present alongside the consideration that a professional must perform effective music therapy. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, two medical students from Pennsylvania, Edwin Atlee and Samuel Matthews reported on the successful employment of music in both physically and mentally ill patients.

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.voices.no/?q=country/monthturkey\\_march2006](http://www.voices.no/?q=country/monthturkey_march2006)

<sup>14</sup> Wigram, Tony - Pedersen, Inge Nygaard - Bonde, Lars Ole, *op.cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> *Complexum effectum musices* (1472-1475)

<sup>16</sup> Tatarkiewicz, W., *Istoria esteticii (The History of Aesthetics)*, vol. III, Meridiane, 1978, p. 361-362.

<sup>17</sup> Spătar, Anca Oana, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*.

In 1832 Samuel Gridley (1801 – 1876) founded a school for the blind. The curricula contained singing, piano lessons and other musical activities, taught by musical professionals. In 1878 a number of experiments were conducted in a psychiatric facility on Blackwell's Island. The purpose was to aid the mentally ill by way of music.<sup>19</sup> It is highly important to stress the fact that the government founded these experiments. Thanks to doctor George Alder Blumer (1857-1940), in 1892 continuous musical programs were launched in American hospitals. These programs were conducted by travelling musicians.

Before the turn of the century, another highly important event took place in 1891 in England. Father Frederick Kill Hartford established the *Guild of St. Cecilia* society, which had the following goals:<sup>20</sup>

- to name those diseases that could be treated with the help of music
- to demonstrate the role of music in inducing sleep, reducing anxiety and pain
- supplying a sufficient number of musicians to work alongside doctors
- to create a center in London from which music can be broadcasted to the city hospitals by way of phone connection

The society also recognized the necessity of listening to music in between therapy sessions. Hence, they recommended the use of music boxes in nurseries and that of the phonographs for adults.<sup>21</sup>

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the use of music in medical therapy began, however, most music therapists were volunteers working under medical supervision. Later, music played a crucial role in the healing of casualties of the two World Wars. In 1940, for instance, Doctor Sydney Mitchell founded an orchestra made up of patients in the Warlingham hospital, the primary goal of which was therapeutic and not that of a high-level performance.<sup>22</sup> Mitchell's colleagues who worked in nearby hospitals used live music in the treatment of alcoholics and neurotics. Music broke through defence mechanisms, released emotions and prepared the way of other therapies.<sup>23</sup>

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century music therapy flourished. Musicians, doctors, teachers and therapists began to work together. Music therapy organizations began emerging on national levels, and in 1985 the World Federation of Music Therapy was founded. The field has known a constant development ever since. At the Music Therapy World Congress held at Oxford in 2002, as many as 900 delegates participated.

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<sup>19</sup> Spătar, Anca Oana, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> *Idem*, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Darnley-Smith, Rachel - Patey, Helen M., *Music therapy*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd., 2003, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*.

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Music therapy today is a recognized profession in more than 50 countries, all over the world, from the Netherlands, to Brazil, Denmark, South Africa, Scotland, Hungary etc.

There are doctors also in Romania who employ music as part of their therapy in hospitals in cities like Bucharest, Timișoara, Satu-Mare, Oradea and Cluj-Napoca.<sup>24</sup> In addition, if we talk about our own city of Cluj-Napoca, we must mention the concerts held by the orchestral ensemble and conferences of medical professionals.

However, in our country music therapy is still in infancy, as we go on needing professionals who by way of their work show once again that music has a special power, many times proving to be more effective than science and drugs.

(Translated by Köpeczi Juliánna Erika)

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<sup>24</sup> Spătar, Anca Oana, *op.cit.*, p. 98.