



## Book review

### **Every Note Counts: The Story of Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy**

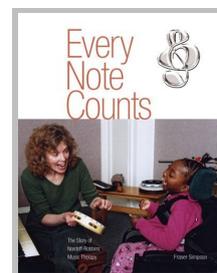
Fraser Simpson

By Maria Froudaki

*Every Note Counts: The Story of Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy*

Fraser Simpson

London: James and James (2007)  
119 pp, ISBN: 978-1-903942-79-6



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**Author’s note:** Prompted by *Approaches’* Tribute to Clive Robbins, this book review has two purposes: the first is to bid farewell to the last of the musical liberators<sup>1</sup>; the second is to introduce Fraser Simpson’s book *Every Note Counts*<sup>2</sup>, as the ‘family album’ of the Nordoff-Robbins approach in a way that

Clive Robbins’ essential contribution to music therapy is presented. Thoughts and proposals put forth in this book review attempt to incorporate the Greek field of music therapy into the wider picture.

<sup>1</sup> Liberator – he who brings about liberation (Δημιτράκος, 1951). Clive’s characterisation as liberator is explained in this book review.

<sup>2</sup> Ten years ago, Fraser Simpson undertook the significant task of recording and documenting the history of Nordoff-Robbins music therapy, from its inception – during the 1950s – to the time of Simpson’s research project which was completed around 2004. The successful culmination of this work was the book *Every Note Counts: The Story of Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy* which was published in 2007. The volume of data, which Simpson managed to gather through interviews, far exceeded what was finally presented in the book. Consequently, the book *The Nordoff-Robbins Adventure: Fifty Years of Creative Music Therapy* was published in 2009 as a complementary and more detailed version. A review of this book has been published in a previous issue of *Approaches* (see Froudaki 2009).

If I am to remember one word from Clive, that would be *generosity*. He would use that word<sup>3</sup> in a manner which was almost disarming, often speaking of music and music therapy. If we think of music as an act of generosity we will immediately stumble upon the fundamental idea which led to the fascinating journey of *Creative Music Therapy*<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> The word ‘generosity’ appears in both of Clive’s forewords in Fraser Simpson’s (2007, 2009) two books.

<sup>4</sup> The Nordoff-Robbins approach is presented as *Creative Music Therapy* by the progenitors of the concept in 1977 in a book that even today is considered to be current and pioneering (Nordoff & Robbins 1977).

The photo on the front cover of *Every Note Counts* has captured a 'living moment' from a music therapy session. What we see is a girl and a music therapist, mirroring each other's expression. We are allowed directly into the scene, making the moment last. We can almost listen to the notes being improvised. The front photo is an excellent and welcoming introduction to the book and its content.

The title *Every Note Counts* is a phrase which can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Every note counts because each note makes sense and has meaning; each note is important as it has something to offer; each note is a movement towards life; it forms a whole in context with the other notes; each note is different, it brings about change and it also costs – money - ... The reader is left to discover a world of other interpretations.

The subtitle *The Story of Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy* sets the frame and the purpose of this book. As the author states in the foreword, the book is a biography of an organisation – the Nordoff-Robbins organisation. The story of Nordoff-Robbins music therapy is documented and presented in a credible and reliable manner.

Yet, is this narrative a fairy-tale, a history, a chronology or a story? Is this book a family album or an encyclopaedia? Using extensive comparative studies, Fraser Simpson has managed to gather detailed information on the background of the Nordoff-Robbins organisation and presents a step-by-step account of how this complex enterprise was created. The resulting book could be given any and all of the abovementioned descriptions.

It can be a pleasant discovery for the reader to learn that the music industry and the musicians themselves played such an active part in the development of this story. This album contains the names and photographs of all who helped by working for fundraising. It acknowledges the enormous contribution of the fundraising group which was created in order to support the Nordoff-Robbins organisation.

The pioneering founders and progenitors of this particular approach to music therapy, Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins, were also the two 'father figures' in the story. Their lives met through music from the very first time. Clive had a spellbinding musical experience listening to a man playing the piano. Paul Nordoff was the pianist and this first encounter acted as a catalyst for all that was to follow. After a seventeen-year collaboration, for about thirty five years Clive remained the only 'father figure' after Paul's death in 1977. He was undoubtedly a 'good enough father'<sup>5</sup> for his music therapy family.

Through Clive's words in the foreword of the book his concept emerges of the starting point of their theory. The two progenitors are not the two men<sup>6</sup> (i.e. Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins), but two immensely human emotions: love for music and deep concern for people with special needs. Love for music and concern for our fellow human beings are emotions which we all feel to a lesser or greater degree and it is through such emotional channels that we are able to conceive music therapy in a direct and substantial way.

There is a widespread perception in Greece (I am also referring to health professionals) that music therapy is something exotic<sup>7</sup> or incomprehensible. This fact often leads to a distortion of the ways we, music therapists, communicate our work, and we can end up feeling frustrated when we cannot meet the exotic or incomprehensible expectations of our colleagues.

By entirely avoiding this trap, Fraser Simpson manages to present music therapy in simple terms and even brings it eye-to-eye with those who are 'unschooled'. The author proves to be a highly skilled master of simple words and, in this way, the book, beautifully written and with its wealth of information, slowly reveals itself to the reader. The reader is then in a position to enjoy the book and recognise it is a labour of love.

Interspersed throughout the book are ten brief music therapy case studies which paint a clear picture of the clinical work. In this way, readers who know very little about music therapy are brought into contact with small music therapy stories. There are also some very enlightening notes on various topics which help the reader to get to know the people and ideas which are integral to the plot of the story.

It is important to refer to the approximately two hundred photographs laid throughout the book. The expressions on people's faces exude love and generosity – that which Clive spoke of. The scenes travel us to historical moments of an adventure, the Nordoff-Robbins adventure<sup>8</sup>.

In this book, the past, present and future come together in perfect harmony under the watchful eye of the observer and author, who manages to convey the images to the reader so eloquently. The triptych comprising of clinical practice, training and research has been dominant in this particular music therapy approach from the early days of its conception to the present day. And of course, the basis on which this theory is constructed is Homo

<sup>6</sup> See Froudaki (2009).

<sup>7</sup> The choice of the work 'exotic' is based on real working situations.

<sup>8</sup> Reference to the book title (Fraser 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Reference to Winnicott's (1971) term 'good enough mother'.

Musicus<sup>9</sup>, i.e. the man who becomes aware of his existence through music.

Having read this book, the hope that music therapy as it was conceived and thereafter described in the book, may, first of all, be finally fully understood, and, secondly, be regarded by the reader and fellow health professionals with real interest in its clinical and scientific contribution.

Up to now, the story of Nordoff-Robbins music therapy was simply spread by word of mouth. The loss of the first generation of music therapists perhaps shows why *not writing such a book nowadays could be a faux pas*. Therefore Pauline Etkin, Chief Executive of Nordoff Robbins (UK), must be given the highest credit for having the initial idea of having the story of Nordoff-Robbins music therapy documented and for supporting the project whole-heartedly until its completion.

This book has opened a new path in music therapy literature. *Every Note Counts* is the first historical book on music therapy. I use the term ‘historical’ not only because the book refers to history – there are many other books which refer to history and one particular book on this approach is that written by Clive Robbins<sup>10</sup>. I use the term ‘historical’ because here the history of music therapy is not simply presented by a protagonist, but rather is documented through the credible and reliable perspective of a researcher.

I am aware that I present a book which someone could get only through the internet. Walking through Athens’ bookstores, I have come across the disheartening fact that the shelves are empty when it comes to books on music therapy. The reality of the situation could perhaps be altered if more readers were to request such books from the publishing houses.

I simply cannot disguise my personal satisfaction at seeing such a book published – my colleagues are already well aware of this... After working for ten years in a country where the field of music therapy is still in its infancy, the arrival of such a book signals the end of having to be looked as ‘weird’ when I claim that music therapy has a history spanning over fifty years. Writing remains! The photographs convince! I would like to propose the republication of this book as a pocket-sized edition so that I can carry it with me...

<sup>9</sup> This is the key point of the work of Zuckerkandle, ‘The man the musician’, to which Clive Robbins refers (Robbins, 2005) in his book, ‘A journey to Creative Music Therapy’, and forms the basic concept underlying the philosophy of the Nordoff-Robbins approach.

<sup>10</sup> In his book ‘A journey to Creative Music Therapy’ (Robbins 2005), Clive gives us a narrative of the journey of his collaboration with Paul Nordoff and the development of their theory.

Likewise, I often find myself in the mood to open the book and look over the faces, the teachers, the mentors, the thinkers, the musicians, young and old, allowing myself to be caught up in this musical family’s journey over time.

Playing around with the word ‘generosity’ (which means in Greek the provision of ‘brave gifts’<sup>11</sup>), the definition in the dictionary contained the word ‘free’ and, in turn, that word was defined as “not restricted or controlled”<sup>12</sup>. It is clear through both of Fraser Simpson’s books (2007, 2009) that the Nordoff-Robbins approach has always managed to preserve a quality of freedom in thinking and clinical practice and although other ideas and theories influenced its thinking, it never ‘attached’ itself to those, nor did it allow music to be overcome by them. That is why this approach is considered to be a music-centered approach; the first to be based on musical-clinical improvisation and the only approach to build its theory on the foundations laid by the clinical material obtained through music therapy practice.

Paul and Clive formed their music therapy concept on a musical free concept. They managed to keep music therapy free from theories external to music; they freed the concept of music improvisation from a matter relevant only to professional musicians to a serious matter for all people; they freed the ‘*music child*’<sup>13</sup>; they freed Homo Musicus; and finally they freed the inner belief of every musician that music ‘happens’ in order to take care of people.

The following excerpt from Clive’s last book is one more example as to why I call him a liberator:

*“Perhaps I am waiting for some moment of transmission, or for some appropriate wave – or should it be waves – of the unseen to lap upon the shore of possibility. In the meantime, I am overwhelmingly grateful that there is so much to be done, to be learned, discovered, celebrated, shared, and that an infinite ocean of creation and love awaits release”* (Robbins, 2005).

The last of the musical liberators left us in December 2011. Having honoured, for over a fifty-year period, all the principles of freedom and generosity, and having lived to enjoy the fruits of

<sup>11</sup> (Δημητράκος, 1951)

<sup>12</sup> (Δημητράκος, 1951)

<sup>13</sup> The ‘*music child*’ is documented by Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins as a music therapy term (Nordoff & Robbins 1977) and refers to the individualised musicality that is inherent in each person and which the music therapist tries to awaken during the sessions, using the wealth of musical elements available in structure and content.

all those efforts, Clive Robbins left gallantly<sup>14</sup> - in a manner befitting a nobleman. Clive Robbins is now a historical figure and in *Every Note Counts* Fraser Simpson allows us to look through his family album.

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<sup>14</sup> Gallantly – a manner befitting a nobleman (Δημητράκος, 1951). In Greek language gallant has the same root with the word generous.