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## Book Review

# **Adolescents, Music and Music Therapy: Methods and Techniques for Clinicians, Educators and Students**

Katrina McFerran

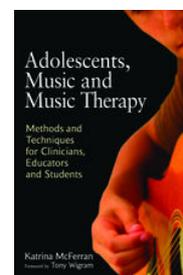
Reviewed by Sarah Weston

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*Adolescents, Music and Music Therapy: Methods and Techniques for Clinicians, Educators and Students*

Katrina McFerran

London: Jessica Kingsley (2010)  
304 pp., ISBN: 978-1-84905-019-7



**Sarah Weston** is a qualified freelance music therapist living and working in Cornwall, UK. Working with a variety of charities across the county, Sarah has set up a music therapy provision for children with learning and physical disabilities, as well as for adults with learning disabilities and mental health illnesses. Sarah's main work concentrates on working with children and adolescents who have experienced trauma and abuse. She is the music therapist for 'CLEAR' (Children Linked to and Experiencing Abusive Relationships), a local charity that specialises in providing support through a variety of models of work to support the local community.

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*Adolescents, Music and Music Therapy* is an invaluable resource for newly qualified music therapists and trainees, as well as for established music therapists and others interested in how music can benefit young people. Katrina McFerran uses her twenty years of experience to compile together a strong theoretical framework, supported by case studies, vignettes and practical solutions.

As a newly qualified music therapist, I have been working for two years with adolescents who have witnessed or experienced abuse. As my role is new to me, I often question if what I am doing is 'right' and constantly trying to ensure that I am providing the best I can within the 'chaos'. By this I mean the complexities that have to be negotiated; liaising with a number of other professionals,

working with the families and trying to support the young person can become stressful and chaotic. I feel I can admit to this is because Katrina McFerran admits to it too. Writing with such an honest approach, the author captures one's attention immediately. The recognition of the importance of the therapist's health and wellbeing is valued as much as the clients' is. *Adolescents, Music and Music Therapy* feels like supervision sessions, lectures and conversations with colleagues are all compiled into one book.

### **Themes and structure of the book**

The introduction explains McFerran's personal reasons for writing this book and sets out its

intention of providing ideas, inspiration, theory and evidence about why music should be used for the benefit of young people. It does not speak with strict authority; rather, it is an assembly of twenty years of experience and findings that is open to discussion and the beginning of advancing music therapy in this field.

The book, set in Australia, is divided into four parts covering work with adolescents in many varying fields of music therapy practice; from palliative and bereavement care through to eating disorders and drug abuse. Part one is grounded in theory. The reader is taken through what relevant literature is out there, what music therapy is, where it happens, what is involved, how it differs from other professions and what one can learn from this literature. On the face of it, it is a chapter that music therapists could skip, as surely we know this already, however, I found it very relevant to my work, confirming and supporting my work as a therapist. It reinstates and encourages the importance of the therapist being committed to and being supported by a theoretical framework.

Using four psychological and theoretical frameworks: behavioural, humanistic, psychodynamic and ecological, a map of approaches is introduced. It is simple and effective, displaying and complementing the flexible and creative ways in which we work as music therapists. McFerran describes it as a “security blanket” (p. 47) to turn to. It is reassuring and guides the reader through a “blended, eclectic approach” (p. 21). This is a great way of summing-up how music therapists constantly have to listen, watch, adjust and reformulate their approaches to meet the unique needs of the individual adolescent. With the flexible methods suggested throughout the book, one is always brought back to this underpinning theory.

Seeing a relationship between adolescence, music and health, McFerran creates four key elements to maintain adolescent health: identity formation, resilience, connectedness and competence. Much of my work consists of working with or towards these elements to provide my clients with a positive sense of self and development into adulthood. Through identifying these elements I have been able to place my work onto the theoretical map.

Refreshingly, parts two and three of the book concentrate more on practical guidance. They provide ways in which to engage young people in music; in singing, listening, playing and participating. As readers, music therapists are prompted to think about the instruments and technology they use; they are given lists of instruments, songs, approaches and even a workshop plan. This is invaluable when starting

out. I have found there to be a lack of practical guidance in other literature but this book has an abundance of it.

Part four draws on conventional music therapy practise and then moves towards a more contemporary approach. I have always been wary of how much emphasis has been put onto Community Music Therapy as a new contemporary approach. I feel it has always been there and has organically grown to meet the needs of music therapy clients. However, what this book does is provide evidence and theory as well as musical activities to consider, such as performance. Music therapists are asked to think carefully about this, and to pose a range of practical questions such as “*why are we doing it?*” and “*what for?*”

The book concludes with encouragement for the therapist. Such insight and enthusiasm is contagious, as well as the recognition that such work will make one reflect on his/her own adolescent self and how important it is to continue with supervision and personal therapy.

### General reflection

This is an accessible read, providing insight for those who do not know much about music therapy, demonstrating why it should be used to contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of adolescents. Admittedly, there a couple of parts I felt were a little patronising. I question if stating how music therapists have to accept the music of adolescents to fully engage in the work was necessary and, the list of songs seen a little out of date. However, the book is engaging, supportive, thought-provoking and practical. I have used many of the suggestions in my work and have placed myself on the theoretical map when in need of grounding. I am sure I will continue to refer to it in the future and recommend it fully to anyone working in this exciting and challenging setting.

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### Suggested citation:

Weston, S. (2012). Book review: “Adolescents, Music and Music Therapy: Methods and Techniques for Clinicians, Educators and Students” (Katrina McFerran). *Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education*, 4(2), 126-127. Retrieved from <http://approaches.primarymusic.gr>