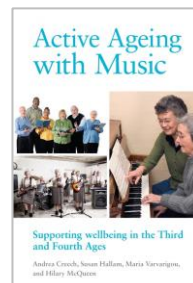


Book review

Active Ageing with Music: Supporting Wellbeing in the Third and Fourth Ages (Andrea Creech, Susan Hallam, Maria Varvarigou & Hilary McQueen)



Reviewed by Clare Monckton

Title: Active Ageing with Music: Supporting Wellbeing in the Third and Fourth Ages | **Authors:** Andrea Creech, Susan Hallam, Maria Varvarigou & Hilary McQueen | **Year:** 2014 | **Publisher:** Institute of Education Press | **Pages:** 184 | **ISBN:** 978-1-782770-29-9

Clare Monckton qualified with a MA in Music Therapy from Roehampton University in 2009. She has worked full-time for MHA Care Group since 2010 as part of the music therapy service, providing music therapy in care homes for older adults with dementia. Clare has recently presented at the World Congress of Music Therapy in Austria (2014) and is currently Dementia Network Coordinator for the British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT).

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Active Ageing with Music provides an exploration of the use of music from the authors' perspectives of work with older adults. The book focuses on data collected from *The Music for Life* and other projects, which are discussed in detail at the beginning of the book. These projects act as a point of reference for the experience of other professionals working with older adults.

All four authors come from both educational and music-orientated backgrounds, with an association at the Institute of Education, University of London. Creech is Reader in Education, following an orchestral career. She has been director of Community Music School in the Republic of Ireland and co-director of several research projects and has completed her PhD in Psychology of Music. Hallam is Professor of Education and Music Psychology and has pursued a career as a professional musician and educator. McQueen has studied music, psychology and education and is currently a tutor at the University. Varvarigou is a visiting research associate, also working as a Lecturer in Music and Performing Arts at Canterbury Christ Church University and Senior Researcher at the Sidney de Hann Centre for Arts

and Health.

The projects include *The New Dynamics of Ageing Programme*, which incorporated the *Music for Life Project*. This project partnered with *The Silver Programme* at The Sage Gateshead, *The Connect Programme* of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Westminster Adult Education Service. Musical activities within the project included small and large groups, instrumental classes; including keyboard and musical appreciation. The control group activities included languages, art and craft, yoga, a book group and a social club. Facilitators of the music groups seemed to be approaching the projects as musicians, playing a range of instruments, some holding Masters and Diploma qualifications, 6 of the 14 facilitators hold a teaching qualification.

The overall aim of the book is established early on with the knowledge, experience and belief of the power of music to support positive wellbeing and quality of life among older people.

As a music therapist working full-time with older adult client groups, it is encouraging to see a book dedicated to the use of music with adults in the later stages of life, acknowledging the impact and

power of music on health and wellbeing. There have been various studies in recent years looking at this effect of music and this book begins by setting out the research methods used within the project with reference to past studies. The early exploration of the term 'older people' in the book seems quite rigid at times, with reference to the third and fourth ages of life. However, it is acknowledged that assigning chronological age to the stages of later life is difficult, often with blurring lines. There are also signs that the way we are now culturally experiencing older age is changing as individuals lead increasingly active lives with a significant increase in life expectancy.

Divided into three sections, the book covers a wide area of thought, opinion and experience of music projects run for an older age group, drawing on the qualitative research data from the *Music for Life* project. Using a control group, data collection comprising mixed methods was applied from questionnaires, focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews, observations and consultation. Results were analysed and broken down into many individual components, including participant occupation, musical preferences and purpose. Section one looks into the use and effect of music on individual people's experiences of wellbeing (including cognitive, physical, socio-emotional wellbeing) and the importance of maintaining and developing social networks in later stages of life. Throughout the book there is the recurring idea of the importance of active ageing in the promotion of wellbeing and health, with reference to the guidelines and framework identified by the World Health Organisation (WHO 2002). Points and ideas are put forward by the authors following their findings from the various projects and then related to other similar and relevant studies.

Section two looks into how projects, groups and sessions are run, the practicalities of time, location and venue alongside the implications of facilitating groups for adult learners. Within this section, chapter seven looks at intergenerational music making. Within the *Music for Life* project, activities included those "which older adults provide service to children or youth; those in which children or youth assist the elderly; and cooperative programmes where different generations collaborate on activities as equal partners" (pp. 99-101). The examples used provide positive conclusion and impact of the sessions for both the younger and older generations but also identify the facilitator as falling into yet another generational group. All parties seemed to gain significant benefits and pleasure from the experience, with the

sharing of knowledge and perhaps vitality, but I also felt this went a long way in dispelling the myths and preconceptions both age groups have of their counterparts. Within this section the authors look into the anxieties older people have about accessing music groups and developing musical skills at a later stage of life. The authors discuss how to structure sessions, which teaching style can be most effective, and what to avoid, the importance to engage and inform without being condescending, while maintaining support, interest and enthusiasm.

Alongside the considerations previously mentioned, the participants, facilitators and authors who later analysed and reviewed the projects all acknowledge the difficulty in reaching out to this specific population. Promoting and advertising various community projects and groups was identified as a difficulty. The above is acknowledged by both facilitators and participants. Participants indicated they were often unaware that such groups were available. Furthermore, facilitators highlighted the financial implications and restrictions of setting up, advertising and running community groups. It was noted that issues of location, accessibility and cost had a significant impact on the potential success of groups. In addition, it was found that older adults still carry commitments to their own family (e.g. acting as a primary care provider) as well as being involved in other activities and obligations associated with an increasingly active lifestyle in later years.

When thinking about offering musical interventions to older adults, the authors look at the elements of musical interaction that can reinforce positive wellbeing for individuals and refer to the therapeutic benefits of music, both physical and emotional. When thinking about music and health, the authors discuss community music therapy; while acknowledging the differences between community music and community music therapy, the authors see "a cultural and social link between music therapy and music and health in everyday life" (p. 62). As a reader I would have liked to know more about the authors' perspectives on music therapy in relation to other therapeutic interventions with this client group and also in relation to their work and research.

Throughout the book, the authors – or perhaps the participants themselves – dispel the myth that older adults are unable to learn new skills. Reference is made to the differences and difficulties in supporting and promoting adult education into the later stages of life. Testimonials from the participants discuss achievements made as a result of participation in the projects, through

singing in vocal groups and choirs, learning new instruments and performing within the local community. Moreover, they discuss the importance of songs related to reminiscence, past experiences, knowledge and cultural identity. Alongside the practical achievements gained by the participants, the experience of positive personal and social benefits were felt to be just as important.

Although challenges and difficulties regarding supporting those in old age are acknowledged by both the authors and facilitators, there does still seem to be a gap in how we are able to reach out to those in the later stages of life, particularly for those experiencing health, social or financial difficulties. The outreach to this client group still feels limited; these limitations are identified by the participants and documented by the authors as part of the analysis of the various projects as well as a result of funding and limited resources. Much can be learnt from the experiences and views of the participants whom we as professionals working through the medium of music are trying to engage and support.

The scope of the projects did not extend to individuals with age-related health conditions. The work discussed by the authors focuses on older adults who remain fairly independent and active, able to access groups independently with active engagement and participation while contributing to the various projects. Although the positive impact of music for those with dementia is identified, it is unclear what provision would be made or if inclusion to community projects such as these would in fact be possible. The various aspects of ageing could be addressed, as the process of ageing cannot be ignored, whether it is impacting on emotional, social or physical wellbeing. Can these projects support those who may be limited by conditions related to age, as their needs change or progress? Can they still be engaged musically to meet the aims and outcomes of the various projects?

The authors acknowledge limited research in the use of music to support active ageing, and particularly how it works to support older adults. However, the publication of this book itself is a step in the right direction in opening up dialogue about the positive work taking place with older adults and the benefits of musical intervention, participation and the results achieved. The opinions, views and experiences of the participants are the greatest testimony to the use of music within the community projects. As a practitioner working in a related field, it is encouraging to learn from current work and research in relation to the ongoing development of my own understanding and practice, highlighting

scope for future research.

Whether offering community music projects, community music therapy or music therapy, practitioners need to be looking at how music can be used effectively to support and promote improved wellbeing with older adults. What is it about the use of music as an intervention that can enhance the active experience of older adults, how does it work compared to other modalities and can it provide long term benefits?

The authors have succeeded in demonstrating the use and benefits of music in the later stages of life in promoting personal development, social inclusion, occupation and even health benefits with studies showing singing groups to be a cost-effective intervention in promoting positive mental health (see also Clift et al. 2012); any move to develop and implement interventions to work in collaboration with medical and pharmacological treatments has to be a step in the right direction, alongside social inclusion and other positive benefits to both physical and mental health of older adults.

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