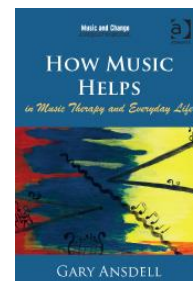




Book review

How Music Helps in Music Therapy and Everyday Life (Gary Ansdell)

Reviewed by Mario Eugster



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This extremely well-crafted book is the second volume of a triptych, a three-volume work based on the fruits of a six-year interdisciplinary study. The first volume, *Musical Asylums: Wellbeing through Music in Everyday Life* is written by DeNora (2013) and the third book, titled *Musical Pathways for Mental Health*, co-written by Ansdell and DeNora (to be published). Although the study was mainly conducted in the field of mental health, these works, and particularly this second volume, will speak to all areas of music therapy and also music and health in general. Ansdell leads the reader through an in-depth journey outlining in detail an ecological perspective, which has become a theoretical backbone of what is now termed Community Music Therapy. It needs to be highlighted, though, that Ansdell explicitly wrote this book for both professional music therapists and musicians working in various fields related to music and health; essentially, for people who “appreciate how music addresses human needs” (p. xvii).

The structure of the book leads the reader through key aspects related to music, music therapy and music in health, always keeping music firmly at the centre. It includes multiple perspectives from musical, ecological, developmental, social, and philosophical theories. As stated in the Series Preface, this volume “presents an ecological

framework for understanding the key continuities between the specialist area of music therapy and people's more everyday experiences of how music promotes wellbeing”.

The reading experience is continuously kept alive with regular vignettes, descriptions or interviews related to music therapy and other significant musical experiences. Throughout the book, the author weaves together the voices of so-called ‘informants’ creating an intriguing polyphony. These informants include ‘voyagers’ (e.g. music therapy clients), ‘locals’ (people with everyday music experiences) and ‘scholars’ (interdisciplinary theoreticians/thinkers). The multi-perspective stance that is evoked in the reader opens up a very stimulating, challenging and refreshing reading experience.

The main pillars of the book lead the reader from exploration of *Musical Worlds*, to *Musical Experience*, then focusing on *Musical Personhood*, opening up the perspective to *Musical Relationship* and *Musical Community* and finally into *Musical Transcendence*, which enters into less explored areas in music therapy.

Unsurprisingly, Ansdell writes from a stance deeply embedded in the Nordoff-Robbins heritage of music therapy, which, to quote Ansdell, emerged “as a reaction to what they [Nordoff and Robbins]

saw as the dominance of non-musical theories in the early phase of music therapy” (p.16). This quote, in many ways could be considered as a seed phrase, which resonates throughout the book. Thus, the work continues and develops the theoretical threads of music-centred approaches to music therapy, in particular the Nordoff Robbins approach, and underpins recent developments in its practice by including various theoretical perspectives. But it also deals quite fundamentally with the role and value of music in human existence and in relation to health and society.

The first two chapters (*Musical Worlds* and *Musical Experience*) explore the fundamental aspects of music and human experience. In *Musical Experience*, a fascinating journey through the themes of *Musical Space* and *Musical Time* opens the reader’s mind to explore the heart of musical experiences. Ansdell ponders on the metaphors of “moving music”, “musical landscape” and “music as moving force” (p. 78) very much drawing from and developing ideas formulated by Victor Zuckerkandl (1956, 1973). Further linking with ethnomusicology, linguistics and philosophy (e.g. Blacking, Johnson, Lakoff, Small), Ansdell makes the case for how musical experience is intrinsically connected to fundamental physical (bodily) and mental processes and how music is essentially experienced as a “continual interactive psychophysical coupling with the world around us” (p. 77). Ansdell establishes basic ideas of ecology in relation to musical events (tone relationships, people relationships, situational relationships) and the idea of ‘musical affordances’ (what music offers within situated action). Complex and abstract theoretical ideas are developed in reference to a broad range of literature; these, however, are balanced by vignettes of musical experiences and enable the reader to keep anchored in embodied musical experience.

The next chapter, *Musical Personhood*, takes the journey onwards into areas of music and identity, and introduces an ecological model of musical personhood, and the ‘homo musicus’, ideas that Ansdell has presented in previous books. Here, however, he elaborates on these concepts in greater detail, for example in investigating the musical parameters and qualities in *Music as Vitality*. Further examples from the ‘informants’ bring to life how core psychological and human needs can be met in music. Vivid examples illustrate the powerful role of musical characters, qualities or timeless archetypes in the psychological maturation process. As a reader I was inevitably drawn to recall and ponder deeply

on my own musical experiences and encounters, which is one of the many strengths of this book and makes it particularly valuable for music therapists.

As we enter into the chapters dealing with *Musical Relationship*, the focus now turns on connectedness and the nature of human relationships in music and also specifically within the music-therapeutic context. Ansdell elaborates on the discovery and formulation of ‘communicative musicality’ by Trevarthen (2002), again exploring topics of companionship, musical co/inter subjectivity and giving due attention to musical dialogue and musical meeting, where he also draws from such influential thinkers and writers such as Buber, Bakhtin and Stern.

In this context Ansdell offers a critique of what he calls the medical and managerial models of care and points to the risks of demoralisation or loss of genuine relationships of care. Undoubtedly, this will ring a bell in the reader’s mind and appears justified: “Where problems are seen only as needing to be treated and fixed, separable from the person who has them, monologue will dominate” (p. 164). However, one might also wonder how medical professionals would question generalisation about the so-called ‘medical model’.

The critique of the understanding of therapeutic relationship as “a rather fixed thing” (p. 166) stemming from psychotherapeutic and medical traditions might be challenged, too. Particularly in mental health, the insights and knowledge gained from these disciplines in recent years can be as valuable for music therapy as those from other interdisciplinary fields. Further, they need not be excluding or denying an ecological perspective, rather complementing or even converging, particularly in the light of new developments in mental health such as the ‘Open Dialogue approach’ developed in Finland (Seikkula et al. 2006).

What follows includes an intriguing account of interdisciplinary research and microanalysis of a music therapy case looking at ‘affect modulation’ using Stern’s ‘microscopic method’. Here, Ansdell illustrates some theoretical concepts introduced in earlier chapters (musical time/space) again bringing to life and connecting the various threads in this book. From here the journey leads towards deep and fascinating explorations of musical companionship, hospitality, belonging (including a chapter on the politics of musical belonging), community and ritual, in which the reflection on ‘musical utopia’ is most thought-provoking.

The book culminates by treading into a less explored territory in music therapy, a welcome step.

Having explored in depth the role of music in human community, the final part titled *Musical Transcendence* opens up what might be called the ‘transpersonal’ in music. Ansdell shines a light on people’s musical experiences which are on the threshold of dimensions which transcend the personal and communal realities; “spiritual experiences that take us out of the narrow confines of the self” (p. 257). Referring to Bateson and Bateson (1988), amongst others, he shares various theoretical perspectives on this subject, as well as moving and intriguing examples from his informants who talk about significant experiences from various cultural and musical backgrounds, including musical ecstasy and altered states. Reflecting on these experiences, Ansdell muses whether “music may still be our best help in both reaching and protecting such everyday transcendence” (p. 272).

The book comes to a close in reflections on *Musical Hope* and here Ansdell reconnects with the simple and powerful concept of the ‘music child’, developed by Nordoff and Robbins, a concept that “there is a core wholeness and healthfulness to all of us that we can find particular access to through music” (p. 294). The reader is led to a place of simplicity after a complex and thoroughly enriching, challenging and inspiring reading experience. Ansdell concludes by pondering on the “perhaps radical” (p.295) statements found in this book (not least of all in breaking down the boundaries between ‘music in music therapy’ and ‘music in everyday life’) and concludes very aptly with *The Love of Music*.

I highly recommend this book to any music therapist, musician and music lover.

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