

Musical Life Stories: Narratives on Health Musicking (Lars Ole Bonde, Even Ruud, Marie Strand Skånland & Gro Trondalen, Editors)

Reviewed by Maria Pothoulaki



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The relationship between music and health has a long history dating back to ancient civilisations. Since then, researchers from diverse disciplines have never ceased investigating this topic of interest. The fundamental questions surrounding this profound bond can be stated as follows: In what ways does music contribute to the individual's health? Is there a causal or a process relationship between health and music and how do the different roles that we adopt during our musical experience affect this relationship?

These questions and many more related to the experience of music are examined in the book *Musical Life Stories: Narratives on Health Musicking*. The book is composed of 17 chapters including the authors' personal narratives. Chapters reflect distinct musical experiences and contexts, as portrayed by the narratives of individuals. The editors of the book come from diverse but related disciplines such as music therapy, musicology, and music psychology, yet surpass fragmented

disciplinary theories and introduce an integrated epistemological framework through an anthology of synthesis. In addition, the interdisciplinary perspectives that authors provide in their analytical framework result successfully in a meaningful and coherent integration of core concepts highlighted in the research of music and health. Gary Ansdell, who introduces the anthology, contextualises key interdisciplinary concepts into four major principles: "continuity", "paramusical", "salutogenic" and "ecological", providing a platform of shared aspects of understanding, as pertinent to the book and also to the wider research literature of music and health.

One of the most interesting elements in this book is that it consists purely of qualitative research, and particularly of narratives of individuals which contextualise the reader within an empirical journey. In these narratives different experiences of 'musicking' are revealed by individuals in different contexts, adopting different musical roles. The meaning of 'musicking' is

evident in every single chapter of the book indicating the participatory experience of music on different occasions, professional and everyday life contexts. The plurality and the variety of experiences analysed provide a substantial qualitative work, where the vitality of music is examined through different glances and perspectives. The book has as a point of departure the successful contextualisation of health in a wider biopsychosocial model, where health is understood in a holistic way rather than in restricted bodily functions and the absence of illness (WHO 1948; DiMatteo & Martin 2006). This holistic approach is adopted throughout the book and becomes particularly evident in chapters 3 and 5, authored by Skånland and Beckman respectively.

In this context, the essential, regenerative and resourceful power of music is expressed in numerous ways. The participatory experience of music, the 'musicking' process, defines every single role adopted during this musical experience, whether it is of the professional musician, listener or fan. Authors point out key concepts and issues outlined in the research literature of health and music. For instance, the self-healing power of music as highlighted in chapters 2, 9 and 12, the musical experience as a health resource and renaissance indicated in chapters 15 and 16, the musical reflection, the importance of mirroring of emotions and the channelling of aversive feelings analysed in chapter 5, the sense of control, safety and self-regulation as indicated in chapter 3 are just some of the shared key aspects in this 'empirical journey'. In relation to the above, the contribution of music in the formation of one's individual and social identity, and the intimacy and connectivity experienced in the 'musicking' process are just a few of the principal concepts in this book. All the above issues expressed through individuals' narratives help reflect and demonstrate, as the editors suggest, the central scope of this book, which addresses the role and the meaning of music in everyday wellbeing and quality of life. The plurality and variety of experiences signalling this unique main emphasis is certainly one of the achievements of this book.

As a psychologist, what I personally find extremely interesting in the book are the experiences describing the process through which music forms a 'path' for reflecting emotions, helping individuals to become aware of them, accept, acknowledge and regulate them. The reader of the book becomes an explorer and a traveller in an

empirical journey, where music reframes existential issues, providing meaning, structure and change in individuals' lives. Although a stronger emphasis on the adopted methodology and the followed procedure of the reported cases would have been advisable, the book captures the reader in a reflective and insightful process. The narratives of individuals indicate how they experience music as a vital health resource, empowerment and a way of coping in their daily lives. They provide a coherent description of the process that takes place during the 'musicking' experience which is so personal and so collective at the same time. Practices describing the musical experience from a personal and professional perspective are elements that enrich the book and provide added value to the various aspects that it examines. Of exceptional interest are the personal narratives of the authors, which are in many ways linked to the life stories of their research participants, indicating shared aspects of experience and leading towards a 'collective' 'health musicking' concept. All those musical experiences can be seen as puzzle pieces that one can integrate to form a greater story, supporting the multidimensional meaning and use of music in the process of health experience and 'health musicking'.

I strongly recommend the book as a distinct piece of research work that achieves to provide a synthesis of different perspectives and disciplines, encapsulating a unique approach with a variety of elements and rich qualitative material.

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