



Book review

Music, Health and Wellbeing (Raymond MacDonald, Gunter Kreutz & Laura Mitchell, Eds.)

Reviewed by Fleur Hughes



Title: Music, Health and Wellbeing | **Editors:** Raymond MacDonald, Gunter Kreutz & Laura Mitchell | **Publication year:** 2012 | **Publisher:** Oxford University Press | **Pages:** 550 | **ISBN:** 9780-19-969682-7

Fleur Hughes (MMT, MTA, MT-BC, NMT) completed her Masters in Music Therapy in 2015. Fleur is currently working in Calgary with adults who have a wide range of mental health and neurodevelopmental disorders. She works mainly in Long Term Care Settings. During 2017, Fleur presented and shared examples of her work at two conferences. The Online Conference for Music Therapy (OCMT) and The Improvisation and Mobility Conference and Festival which was held at the University of Regina (U.O.R.). In 2018, she will be starting a PhD in Music.

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The idea for this book grew from a conversation between MacDonald, Kreutz and Mitchell at a conference in 2008. They wanted “to bring together an international and multidisciplinary group of articles that reflected the breadth and depth of interest in the link between music, health, and wellbeing” (p. viii). This publication seems to accomplish this task and is a robust and thorough example of the relationship that is established between music and our wellbeing and health.

This book was originally published in 2012 and offers important contributions within the fields of music, wellbeing and health. These contributions are still relevant today, five years later. The contents consist of 34 chapters, which are subdivided into five different sections. Structuring the work into sections is useful for the reader, who can pick out relevant sections as required. The editors note that “one challenge for researchers is to sensitively evaluate the evidence available in this area where there are a multitude of approaches” (p. 7). To overcome this challenge, this publication is informed by a multidisciplinary and international

panel of experts in their fields.

In this review I focus on specific chapters that I have found particularly relevant to the healthcare setting that I am working in. These chapters have been useful for shaping my approach with regard to being culturally informed, as I work with a culturally diverse caseload. Therefore, I would like to acknowledge all the authors who have contributed to the vast body of work that this book covers.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTORY CHAPTERS: SETTING THE SCENE (CHAPTERS 1-4)

The first section provides an outline of the conceptual framework of the book. The book does not focus solely on the clinical or therapeutic effects of music, but provides insight into music education, music therapy, community music and how we engage with music in our daily lives. Authors who contributed to this section (pp. 3-62) include Elliot and Silverman *Why Music Matters: Philosophical and Cultural Foundations* (pp. 25-39).

They discuss how music has impacted philosophy, society, education and can transform oneself. This takes place in musical practices, musical structure and experiences that involve participation and social engagement which can lead to self-growth and transformation. They state how music engages and stimulates us: “[...] music contributes to health and wellbeing in numerous ways because it interconnects the self as a unity – as a fluid and integrated matrix of body-brain-mind-conscious-and-unconscious systems [...]” (p. 33).

SECTION 2: COMMUNITY MUSIC AND PUBLIC HEALTH (CHAPTERS 5-11)

The next section opens up to a broader body of research. Within chapter 7, *The New Health Musicians* (pp. 87-96), Ruud mentions how “Music is being increasingly recognized as a ‘cultural immunogen’” (p. 87). The reader gains insight into the health and cultural benefits of group music making, and how this can assist in reducing stress and managing trauma. Ruud illustrates through a case study how a group of adolescents based in a refugee camp in Lebanon have been taking part in a community based programme. Despite the challenges that were faced, the music programme did have positive effects. According to Ruud, the adolescents “experienced a markedly positive effect upon their sense of vitality, agent and belonging” (p. 91). It seems music has provided the opportunity for bonding with others, offering joy and pleasure and provides a meaningful and engaging experience.

SECTION 3: MUSIC AS THERAPY AND HEALTH PROMOTION (CHAPTERS 12-20)

This is the longest section in the book and chapters focus on music and health within therapeutic and clinical contexts. It is the longest section in the book and focuses on mental health and health in general. Chapter 14 (pp. 183-195) written by Stige, on *Health Musicking: A perspective on Music and Health as Action and Performance*, describes how music takes place with the context of a nursing home, using music to facilitate health benefits.

This chapter focuses on how we need to use these areas/resources to meet the needs of the individuals with whom we work. How can we mobilise these musical resources to meet the health and wellbeing needs of individuals within the various settings we work in? Stige suggests that

there are five areas that are “musical and paramusical resources” (pp. 186-188) for “health musicking”.

These areas are:

- ❑ *Arena*: The situated site or experience/situation.
- ❑ *Agenda*: The conscious or unconscious issues or themes of the participants.
- ❑ *Agents*: The residents, families, health workers, music therapists etc. who provide or take part in health musicking.
- ❑ *Activities*: Interaction and levels of engagement within the music.
- ❑ *Artefacts*: This includes songs, lyrics or instruments.

He defines “health musicking” as “the appraisal and appropriation of the health affordances of the arena, agenda, activities and artefacts of a music practice” (p. 186).

SECTION 4: EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS (CHAPTERS 21-26)

In chapter 25 *Music-Making as a Lifelong Development and Resource for Health* (pp. 367-382), Gembris discusses how music can offer health resources and ongoing development throughout the lifespan. He focuses on how musical development shapes us, whether we are professional or amateur musicians. “Musical development can be understood as a lifelong process, which comprises time related changes in musical abilities, motivation, functions, and musical activities” (p. 367). He discusses two topics, firstly music-making as an activity in regards to lifespan development and secondly how music influences our health or how our health influences our music making.

Gembris notes how our changing environments, development, biological or age process, cultural aspect, health and so forth, develop and shape our musical abilities and tastes. This information is relevant to music therapists as we need to be aware of which preferred music our clients listen to, and be culturally informed in regards to the role that music may play in their traditions or cultural contexts. One of the immediate ways that we connect with those we work with is through singing or playing a preferred song that is relevant to their age, generation or culture.

The author also notes how “Musical learning and changes in musical abilities, music experience and interests and activities can potentially take place at any stage in life” (p. 367). Therefore we need to consistently be adapting our musical choice or repertoire to meet these changes.

SECTION 5: EVERYDAY USES (CHAPTERS 27-34)

Chapter 31 (pp. 477-490) discusses *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Music and Health*. Within this chapter Saarikallio discusses human behaviour and how it is situated with cultural contexts, focussing on “psychological factors and mental health” (p. 477). The way we engage or make sense of music is shaped by our background and cultural heritage. She provides insight into cognitive and ethnomusicological approaches, and the difficulties in finding “shared grounds” (p. 478) between these two approaches. Perhaps it is challenging at times to find commonalities in music therapy research and practice due to the methodological and theoretical difference in the various music therapy approaches we may use as clinicians.

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To summarise, this book is grounded in contemporary political relevance, providing examples into how we can connect cross culturally and break down divides through engaging in music. It also provides insight into contemporary healthcare issues, observing how health and medical care is moving towards a holistic method of treatment, and how we seem to be focusing more on prevention than cure.

MacDonald, Kreutz and Mitchell conclude that “the creative potentials of music and art are needed more than ever” (p. 10). I would recommend this book to any music therapy clinician, researcher or student working in a community, medical or educational setting. In particular, those who are interested in exploring research into the growing field of how music affects health and provides a framework that can encourage and respond to changes in our physiological, psychological and emotional wellbeing.

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