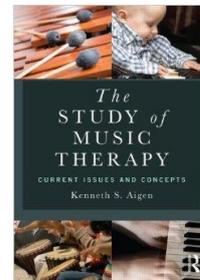


The Study of Music Therapy: Current Issues and Concepts (Kenneth S. Aigen)

Reviewed by Colin Andrew Lee



Title: The Study of Music Therapy: Current Issues and Concepts | **Author:** Kenneth S. Aigen | **Publication year:** 2014 | **Publisher:** Routledge | **Pages:** 280 | **ISBN:** 978-0415626415

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Music therapy has entered a period of immense growth in the last decade. As new models and theories have emerged, such as Community Music Therapy (Ansdell & Stige 2016), Neurologic Music Therapy (Thaut & Hoemberg 2014) and Resource-Oriented Music Therapy (Rolvsjord 2016), the profession has become broader and more diverse. Developments in practice have been reflected in conference presentations, the establishment of new organisations such as *The International Association for Music and Medicine*, and the content of peer-reviewed research articles. Book publishers have, for the most part, focused on printing edited volumes compiling contributions from different authors. Single authored books have become less common. It was with great excitement, therefore, that I approached Ken Aigen's new book on the study of music therapy.

As a fellow Nordoff-Robbins music therapist, I have read and consistently been challenged by Aigen's articulate and scholarly writings over the years (Aigen 1998, 2005). As an educator, I have used his articles and books as texts in many of my

undergraduate and graduate classes. As Aigen has developed and refined his theory and research, his ideas and arguments for music-centred theory and practice have become more focused and influential.

For some, reading a book on music therapy theory might seem like a dry, academic undertaking. Aigen's new book, however, is a compelling read and keeps the reader enthralled and involved with the questions he raises throughout this book. At no point in the book does he require the reader to believe or agree with his views. His often controversial theoretical analyses are always placed within clear and thorough academic understanding of current music therapy literature. As the book unfolds, so his views and beliefs become clear. It is his clarity of vision that makes this book such an important contribution to contemporary music therapy literature. The book is divided into six parts that examine critical questions about the balance and interface between music and therapy:

1. What is music therapy?
2. How is music considered in music therapy?

3. How are the non-musical aspects of music therapy considered?
4. How does music therapy relate to the other uses of music in society?
5. How are psycho-biological concerns addressed in music therapy?
6. How is music therapy theory developing?

In part one of the book, Aigen addresses issues related to the definition of music therapy and questions surrounding professional identity. He initially discusses music therapy using medical and psychotherapy frameworks, and examines the idea of the music therapist as a healthcare practitioner. He later analyses the professional identity of the music therapist by asking whether practitioners in the field are therapists who use music or musicians who do therapy. The arguments he raises defend the artistic nature of music and the building of communities through the development of community music therapy.

In part two, he considers how music therapy works from a socially based perspective, as highlighted through the notion of *musicizing* and psychoanalytic interpretation. He further explores music as culture and identity, and how musical styles contribute to an understanding of music-centred music therapy practice. How music therapists understand and create musical/clinical goals is central to this part of the book. It culminates with a chapter where Aigen discusses the “relationship between clinical and nonclinical music” (pp. 75-87). I found this part of the book to be exceptionally stimulating and thought provoking.

In part three, Aigen investigates the balance between words and music, and the importance some theories place on the need for translating musical expression into words. He emphasises that for music-centred music therapists, this need is not necessarily always as important. This part of the book concludes with an in-depth examination of the client-therapist relationship. In its last chapter, Aigen points out the lack of consensus in music therapy communities on such fundamental issues such as the primary identity of the music therapist and the discipline in which music therapy belongs. Without a clear consensus, he posits that with regards to the practice of music therapy, “the best course of action is one that accepts all views of the therapy relationship and that does not use the components of any particular view to legislate guidelines for legitimate and ethical practice”

(p.118) – a position that should be able to unify rather than divide the profession.

Part four considers music and healing, indigenous music healing practices, and their relevance for contemporary music therapy theory. The final two chapters of this part of the book are devoted to community music therapy. Aigen explores how notions of community and health affect the future of music therapy, and the breakdown of the traditional professional boundaries of therapeutic practice. As a performer and music therapist, I was particularly intrigued with his arguments on performance and client empowerment.

Part five includes some of the most contentious sections of the book. Apart from examining the merits and pitfalls of the relationships of early interaction and evolutionary theories with music therapy in this part of the book, Aigen provides a keen critique on neurologic music therapy’s apparent disregard for the value and significant role of other non-biologically-based theories for explaining the therapeutic efficacy of music in therapy.

Part six is the most important and innovative part of the book; Aigen highlights the importance of the development and application of theory in music therapy since its inception as a discipline in the mid-1940s. He reviews the history of generated theory associated with music therapy, and strategically divides the stages of theory development into three: a) the period when psychology had its strongest impact on theory (1945-1964); b) the period when specific models of practice were established (1965-1981); and c) the period when indigenous theory and broad-based general theories from the arts, other social sciences, and biological sciences began to influence practice (1982-present). He then lists 13 contemporary music therapy orientations, which emerged during the third stage of theory development. Aigen divides these orientations to three categories according to whether they: a) provide support for existing practice; b) provide foundations for new practices; or c) provide foundations for a new clinical model. By dividing the 13 contemporary music therapy orientations into these three categories, Aigen proposes an efficient and practical means of organising and classifying the orientations according to their *purpose* in the history of the development of theory in music therapy. Aigen further divides the 13 contemporary music therapy orientations to determine their *use of*

and *emphasis on* music in therapy: a) music as core organising element; b) music as an important element that exists in combination with other equal commitments; and c) music requires enhanced attention but without a particularly unique role. These two sets of categories are important to Aigen's central arguments and provide a fascinating glimpse into the challenges that music therapy will face in the future. If music therapy is to survive in the advent of recent developments such as music and health, music and medicine, and community practices, the role, properties, and qualities of music need to be determined and professionally articulated, particularly in the development of theory for research and practice.

The arguments presented throughout this book address some of the foundational struggles that contemporary music therapy continues to face. Aigen's view that the centrality of music is essential to an understanding of the therapeutic process is inspiring. As a music-centred music therapist who has devoted his career to advocating for the integrity of music in therapy, I am extremely gratified by Aigen's refreshing candour and staunch championing of the intrinsic value of music in our field and chosen vocation. I believe his book is one of the most important texts written in the last decade and should be essential reading for all music therapists.

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