

CONFERENCE REPORT

The 9th Nordic Music Therapy Congress 'Come together: Body and mind, heart and soul'

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CONFERENCE DETAILS

The 9th Nordic Music Therapy Congress
'Come together: Body and mind, heart and soul'
8-12 August 2018, Stockholm, Sweden

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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Publication history:

Submitted 31 May 2019
Accepted 16 Oct 2019
First published 18 Feb 2020

On 8th August 2018, the 9th Nordic Music Therapy Congress held its opening ceremony at the Royal College of Music (KMH) in Stockholm, Sweden. The congress attracted more than 200 participants from approximately 25 countries, with its theme, *Come Together: Body and Mind, Heart and Soul*, which appeared to emphasise the importance of clinical knowledge and experience, as well as scientific research.

Over the next four days, approximately 90 oral presentations, 17 workshops, 15 posters, six round tables and two symposiums were held at the Rönneberga Conference Centre in Lidingö, near Stockholm. This busy and diverse schedule was arranged by the board of the Swedish Music Therapy Association (FMS), and was sponsored by this association in partnership with the KMH and other organisations. In accordance with its theme, the congress focused on the sharing of professional and academic knowledge and provided an opportunity to come together, network, socialise, learn from each other and inspire one another.

PRE-CONGRESS SEMINAR

On 7th August, prior to the official opening ceremony, music therapists from various countries gathered to attend a pre-congress seminar. The focus was on the development of family-based music therapy in the context of families with children with special needs. This was conducted through the exploration of three different approaches to practice; family-centred music therapy, music-oriented parent counselling and music therapy to support families at risk where parents also have challenges. The

seminar was facilitated by Stine Lindhal, Tali Gottfried and Grace Thompson, all prominent music therapists and researchers.

Several music therapists who attended the seminar shared their experiences regarding the contribution of each of the three approaches to their practical as well as theoretical knowledge. In particular, attendees valued the contribution of workshops which presented case studies from multiple perspectives, exploring the varied layers involved in working with children and their families. Beyond the intensive learning and brainstorming, the participants emphasised the strong sense of a 'music therapy with families' community that was fostered and strengthened during this pre-congress seminar.

MAIN PROGRAMME

During the opening ceremony at the KMH, the organising team welcomed us, and invited us to use our voices and bodies to create a harmonic and rhythmic 'choir', which led to a strong sense of togetherness. We also enjoyed the playing of the extraordinarily talented pianist, Staffan Scheja, and musical interludes performed by the jazz group of KMH students.

The academic and scientific part of the congress was launched with a fascinating keynote lecture by Patrik Juslin, Professor of Psychology, Uppsala University, Sweden. Adapting the evolutionary approach, he discussed how music arouses various emotions and affective states. His focus was on the ancient psychological mechanisms engaged with emotional meaning in music at multiple brain levels. After this welcoming introduction, we had time to socialise over drinks and a splendid buffet at the KMH dining hall.



Photograph 1: Opening ceremony

The next congress days were held at the peaceful and beautiful Rönneberga, Lidingö. Surrounded by an amazing natural landscape, each day began with morning music making for warming-up our bodies, voices and souls. This was followed by musical highlights played by one or two performers and keynote plenary lectures at the main auditorium.

On the first day, Joke Bradt presented the challenges and opportunities for enhancing access to music therapy services in healthcare. During this inspiring lecture, she offered various strategies for

moving music therapy towards greater recognition across contexts and stressed the importance of publishing the findings of evidence-based research in our field. She also offered valuable ideas for marketing and advertising in order to reach out to broader audiences, influence policymakers and broaden access to music therapy services. These ideas may contribute to the global music therapy field, but were extremely relevant to my country, Israel, where music and other creative arts therapists are not yet formally recognised as licensed health professionals. Thus, it is crucial to strengthen the links between research, practice and public relations and to share our knowledge with professionals and clinicians outside our field. The lecture confirmed and strengthened my colleagues' and my own motivation to publish our knowledge in various platforms, and also in journals outside the music therapy field (e.g., Salomon-Gimmon, Orkibi & Elefant, 2019).

On the second day, dedicated to music therapy with children, Melinda Ashley Meyer DeMott presented EXIT (Expressive Arts in Transition), a project carried out with 145 refugee youths in Norway. During the lecture, videos about the project were screened, illustrating how EXIT, through group intervention, improved resilience and recreated a sense of belonging for young people who experienced trauma following war and natural disasters. The interdisciplinary learning, from professionals who are not music therapists, was important and refreshing. Personally, this lecture intrigued me because I had previously worked with trauma survivors at the Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya. It was interesting for me to learn about the protocol that Meyer DeMott developed for combining the various creative arts in the therapeutic process. Her research findings, showing that the arts may help people in reconstructing meaning and connecting with others by focusing on resources and creativity, also reflected my experiences in the refugee camp. Nevertheless, I believe that in contexts of this kind, an explicit discussion regarding the sustainability approach, its principles, and their connections to the work presented, would have been a helpful addition.



Photograph 2: The view from Rönneberga Conference Centre in Lidingö (by Cochavit Elefant)

On the third day, Tia DeNora took us on a deep philosophical journey of interaction between mind, body, culture and perception, when she presented the idea of music as an agent of change. She creatively highlighted some of the underlying mechanisms that may be related to change processes and influences of music, and stressed the importance of studying them in detail to develop and deepen our theoretical thinking. This and the other keynote lectures facilitated discussions between the participants throughout the congress, and increased our enthusiasm for the following concurrent sessions.

Bradt and DeNora's different presentations highlighted some important developments in the relationship between theory and practical activism. DeNora's theoretical contribution and Bradt's practical ideas encouraged many of us to discuss the music therapy field in our home countries and think together about various ways we might collaborate to improve the prominence of our field.

Each day, various paper presentations, roundtables, symposiums and workshops took place in six different rooms simultaneously. The topics were diverse and covered a wide range of music therapy theory, research and practice. There was a strong multicultural atmosphere. Although, as expected, many (55%) presenters were from Nordic countries, a significant number arrived from the US (12%), Israel (11%), and Great Britain (8%). Other countries were also represented, including from Europe, Asia, South America and Australia (14% in total). This diversity afforded and fostered a more global perspective in relation to the clinical and academic input and contributed to the understanding of different aspects and developments in the music therapy field worldwide. The one-hour poster presentations that took place at the middle of the congress offered an excellent opportunity for socialising, networking, and learning about interesting and innovative fields of scientific and clinical work.

SOCIAL PROGRAMME

In addition to the professional and academic input, there was a strong social programme. The congress organisers acquainted us with the unique Swedish culture and history. A sightseeing tour culminated in a visit to the Stockholm City Hall, one of Sweden's most famous buildings and home of the Nobel Prize. In its grand ceremonial halls, we enjoyed live music and an impressive buffet.

On the last full day, we had the pleasure of participating in a rhythm workshop with Kristina Aspeqvist, composer, percussionist, and teacher, in which all congress participants were invited to improvise vocally with or without percussion instruments. With her impressive musical and facilitation skills, Aspeqvist led participants to experience the precious qualities of group singing and 'musicking'. Although not a music therapist, she used some techniques that many music therapists, including myself, use while working in group settings with various communities. This workshop experience



Photograph 3: An impressive visit at Stockholm City Hall

emphasised the commonalities between 'community music' and 'community music therapy'. It made me think about the delineation of boundaries as well as the value of an open dialogue and collaborations between these two adjacent fields.

A formal dinner with musical accompaniment, held at the Rönneberga dining room, concluded the conference. As in the opening ceremony, the organisers led participants to create a big choir. Afterwards, we danced the night away with the soul band *Almost Motown*. The excellent blend of academic and scientific input, the great social program, the lovely musical highlights and the serene location all made for an unforgettable experience. The organisers did a superb job, sending us back home filled with inspiration and invaluable knowledge.

REFERENCES

Salomon-Gimmon, M., Orkibi, H., & Elefant, C. (2019). Process and outcomes evaluation of a pre-academic arts program for individuals with mental health conditions: A mixed methods study protocol. *BMJ Open*, 9(7), e025604.