



Clive Robbins – An Appreciation

Robin Howat

I first met Clive in 1977 when I was a student on the course at Goldie Leigh Hospital in London, UK. He and Carol taught in two teaching blocks and they had a very strong impact on our group. These were difficult days; Paul Nordoff had died months before and Clive's relationship with some members of the Board of Governors was troubled. For example, my diploma in 1978 was awarded by the "Nordoff Music Therapy Centre". Clive had temporarily been cut out of the equation! Despite these tensions Clive and Carol were warm and generous in their teaching and we learnt so much from them.

As years passed Clive and Carol came to teach on the London course every year and tensions eased gradually. Carol struggled with the fact that she was held in low esteem by some and Clive naturally resented the way she was treated. I look back with such respect for their integrity as they never held a grudge and were able to see past the personal difficulties to the bigger picture and the future of Nordoff-Robbins, to which they were quietly but passionately dedicated.

Clive enjoyed two long-term collaborations in his music therapy life: fifteen years with Paul Nordoff and over twenty years with Carol Robbins. Both collaborations had great significance for the development of Nordoff-Robbins music therapy in Australia, where I have been working since 1993.

Paul and Clive lectured in Sydney and Melbourne in 1974. Their presentations had a huge impact on many musicians and people involved in special education, especially Steiner education. One musician – Enid Rowe, a pianist and music teacher based in New South Wales – was inspired to move to London to train as a Nordoff-Robbins music therapist and bring the work back to Sydney in 1978. Nine years later, Clive and Carol settled in Sydney for three years and co-founded Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy in Australia with Enid in 1984. These years grounded the work, laying the foundations for 'NRMTA' as we know it today.

After Carol died, Clive continued a very close association with Australia visiting Sydney in 1997

Robin Howat RMT, is a Senior Music Therapist and former Centre Manager of Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy Australia.

Email: r.howat@uws.edu.au

and then the new Golden Stave Music Therapy Centre in 2002 and 2007. Clive adored coming to Australia and was absolutely delighted when the Golden Stave Music Therapy Centre opened in 2001. At this time the University of Western Sydney, in collaboration with NRMTA, began delivering the Graduate Diploma in Creative Music Therapy which converted to the Master of Creative Music Therapy in 2004. Although Clive's visits were brief, they had a great impact on the therapists, students, members of the Board of Directors, fund raisers and a whole range of people whose lives were touched by his humility, his inspiration and his spirit of compassion.



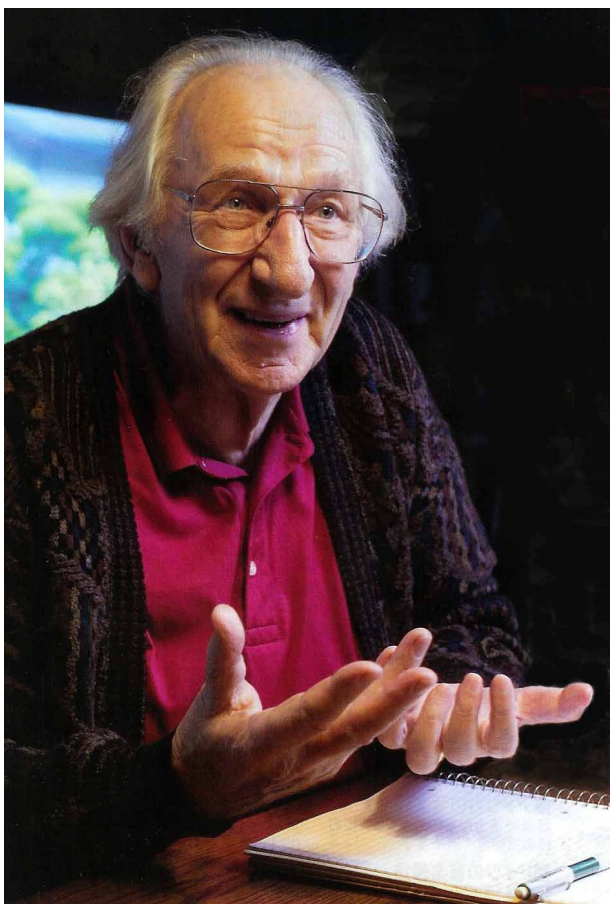
Picture 1: Clive lecturing at the Golden Stave Music Therapy Centre in 2002

I believe one of Clive's greatest gifts was the ability to convert his love for the clients and for music into an approach that was totally practical and down-to-earth. His intensely spiritual view of life was also intensely practical. This was true of his clinical work, his teaching and his supervision. He was a meticulous craftsman. When he listened



Picture 2: Clive with Joanne McIntyre, Bonnie Nilsson and Ann Lehmann, the first three students on the course in 2002

to the work of students or therapists, woes betide anyone who presented their work to him without doing careful preparation, or of not thinking things through. He was a demanding listener, but he was always encouraging, giving wonderfully insightful and generous advice. Any therapist who attended his presentations, came away not only inspired, but also with knowledge and strategies for use in future sessions. His audio-visual presentations are some of the best summarisations of Creative Music Therapy techniques. Many will remember his presentation of “Living in the Creative Now” illustrated through the case studies of Nunnu and Edward.



Picture 3: Clive giving a lecture to students in 2007

Matthew Breaden, a student when Clive came to Australia in 2002, remembers him with these words:

For a music therapy student, still wet behind the ears, Clive’s visit provided a massive dose of empowerment. His presence radiated a great inner strength, and his words to us were so well chosen: “*Music Therapy is like gardening*” is but an example... he clarified this by adding “*to help something to grow, you have to nurture it!*”

Clive’s sessions with the students taught us so much about how to help [and] how to take care of a situation musically. He encouraged us to see the potential in ourselves and in the clients, and the possibilities of the “here and now” in our work. His holistic approach, seeing the person rather than the pathology, was inspiring. Most of all, I will remember his seemingly inexhaustible faith in people, and in music.

In 2007, on his last visit to Sydney, Clive gave a lunchtime lecture for staff at the University of Western Sydney. His account of how music therapy reached and helped a man regain speech after a stroke was profoundly moving, yet made complete sense even for those with no musical knowledge. This is what Clive could do: he could explain complex processes and make them clear for people so that they could understand music therapy; they could ‘get it’.

Today we have highly gifted therapists and students who learn to encompass both the passion for the work with the practical knowledge of how to carry it out. The Master of Creative Music Therapy and the work of Nordoff-Robbins embody this spirit of love in action which is Clive’s great legacy to Australia, and for which I am personally so deeply grateful.

My appreciation of Clive has evolved over the past thirty-five years. From being in awe of him while I was a student and young therapist, to a more mature appreciation of his unique gifts as a co-therapist, musician, teacher, supervisor and mentor. I miss him, but his example has made me determined to do my part to ensure the future of the work he loved so much and dedicated his life to.

Suggested citation:

Howat, R. (2012). Clive Robbins – An appreciation. *Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education*, 4(1), 19-20. Retrieved from <http://approaches.primarymusic.gr>