



The Creative Spirit of Clive Robbins

Alan Turry

It was a bright sunny morning as I walked to the entrance of the Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy at New York University over twenty years ago. It was our very first day of clinical sessions. What would the day bring, meeting clients for the first time, working in newly established therapy teams? I felt a sense of wonder and anticipation as I turned the corner and looked towards the entrance. And then I saw a strange sight. Out of the fourth-floor window was a long rope that ran down to the floor. Attached to the rope were big, gold triangular shaped objects. “*What is going on?*” I wondered as I got closer. Then I realised - they were Koudounia¹! I got closer to the rope and stared in disbelief when I heard a voice up at the window, bellowing “*Ring the bells to gain entrance!*” It was Clive Robbins, laughing heartily as he watched my reaction. We laughed together as I rang and entered. It turned out that since sessions were starting on a weekend, the regular buzzer system to grant entrance was not operating, so Clive devised this innovative method of entry.

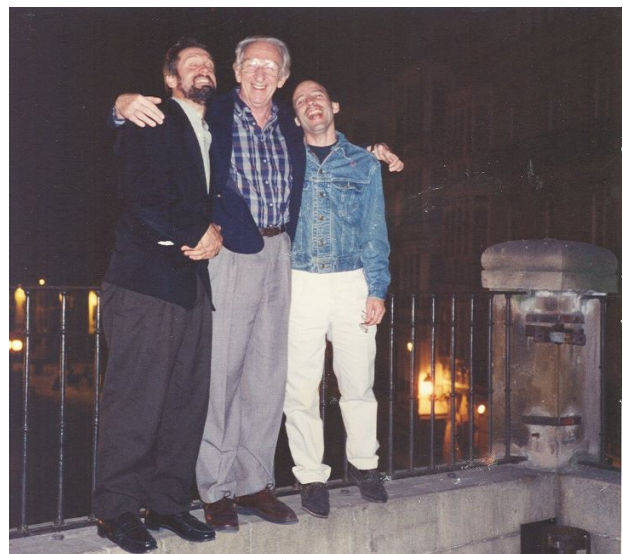
It was a wonderful way to start the day, and I share this story to convey the joyful, creative spirit that Clive Robbins shared with all those who were lucky enough to be around him. He loved to approach life with a sense of adventure that was contagious – we all felt it as we worked with him. This sense of adventure, and his enormous capacity to devote his attention to disabled children with love and ingenuity, was always present.

Clive’s pioneering spirit was essential to the creative partnership he forged with Paul Nordoff. Together they established an approach to music therapy that was virtually unheard of when they began. By the time they finished actively working together, a Centre dedicated to the practice of *Creative Music Therapy* was established in London. Music therapists from around the world were interested in continuing the approach, and a movement in focusing on music-centred processes in music therapy had begun that would have profound effects on the field in general.

¹ Percussion musical instruments, like bells, from Greece.

Alan Turry DA, MT-BC, NRMT, LCAT, is the is Managing Director of the Nordoff-Robbins Centre for Music Therapy at New York University’s Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development. He is the first music therapist formally certified to run a Nordoff-Robbins training course; he is responsible for the overall administration, research, clinical services and the training program at the Centre.

Email: Alan.Turry@nyu.edu



Picture 1: Alan Turry, Clive Robbins and Ken Aigen at the VII World Congress of Music Therapy, Vitoria Gasteiz, 1993



Picture 2: Clive Robbins, Pauline Etkin and Alan Turry

Clive's contributions to the practice may have been underappreciated because he consistently downplayed his own part in the success of the work he and Nordoff did together. A testament to Clive's achievements is how the work continued to develop and spread to new areas both geographically and clinically after Nordoff's death. Clive became internationally recognised for his teaching of clinical resources, his research into processes of music therapy and for his commitment to higher standards of clinical practice, creativity and musicianship in music therapy. Even when he was clearly faltering physically, he was inundated with requests to lecture around the world. Up to the final months of his life, he did continue, inspiring a whole new generation of music therapists.

approached sessions – with love and devotion to detail, being responsive to the individuals he was sharing with.

He was a great therapist, an inspiring teacher and he will be greatly missed.

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Picture 3: Clive Robbins and Alan Turry teaching students at the Nordoff Robbins London Centre



Picture 4: Celebration of the 50th year of Nordoff-Robbins' founding; the 20th year of the Nordoff-Robbins Centre at NYU; and the 100th anniversary of Paul Nordoff's birth; New York, November 2009 (Standing: Clive and Kaoru Robbins, Ken Aigen, Alan Turry, David Marcus and Adam Ritholz; Seated: Michele Ritholz, Allison Graham, Ruth Davis)

Teaching with Clive was a great learning experience because I could witness how he could transmit ideas about clinical work that were both practically and emotionally enriching. His theories on the creative process allowed each student to feel motivated, inspired to be more authentic in their relationship to music and to their clients. It was not so much *what* Clive said but *how* he said, lived and shared it. I think he approached teaching as he