

Conference report

15th World Congress of Music Therapy

'Moving forward with music therapy – Inspiring the next generation'

Katie Boom

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4-8 July 2017

Tsukuba, Japan



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INTRODUCTION

On 4 July 2017, the 15th World Congress of Music Therapy held its opening ceremony in the Tsukuba International Congress Centre, Tsukuba, Japan. Over the next five days, 2959 participants from 49 different nations (see Photograph 1) attended an incredibly wide range of 506 presentations. This impressive schedule was arranged by the organising committee from the Japanese Music Therapy Association, headed by Michiko Kato. The theme of the congress was *'Moving Forward with Music Therapy'*, with the sub-theme *'Inspiring the Next Generation'*.

PRE-CONGRESS SEMINARS

Prior to the official opening ceremony, delegates gathered to attend the pre-congress seminars on 4 July. These sessions included: a seminar

presented by Sarah B. Johnson on developing clinical skills through neurologic music therapy concepts; a presentation by Sheri L. Robb on music therapy and palliative care in a paediatric cancer setting; a workshop on traditional Japanese drums, presented by Michiko Kato and Natsuko Yasujima. Kenji Tsuchino presented a seminar on Usagawa theory for children with developmental disabilities, while Naoko Moridaira and Issho Fujitsu presented on mindfulness-based music therapy, and Buddhist meditation. Music therapy students attended a student seminar, during which Amy Clements-Cortes and Katrina Skewes McFerran gave advice on transitioning from student to professional. Finally, Gary Ansdell presented a session on the way music helps in everyday life, and a team of presenters from the USA, headed by Joanne Loewy, presented on NICU music therapy training in rhythm, breath and lullaby.



Photograph 1: WCMT 2017 delegates gather on the stairs for a group photo (used with permission from the Japanese Music Therapy Association)

SPOTLIGHT SESSIONS

Spotlight session 1

Each morning the WCMT began with a spotlight session. These spotlight sessions focused on specific themes, beginning with music therapy and the wellbeing of older adults. This first session was moderated by Amy Clements-Cortes, President of the World Federation of Music Therapy. Hanne Mette Ridder from Denmark opened the exchange with a presentation on musical interaction and wellbeing in caregiving and dementia. She shared a moving case study, which explored the intricacies of music's role in enhancing a caregiving relationship, and revealed that carers tend to underestimate their competency in attuned musical interaction. Following this presentation, Imogen Clark spoke about Australia's healthy aging policies, and how they can be innovatively incorporated into music therapy with older adults with cardiovascular disease and dementia. Representing Japan in this spotlight session, Mayu Kondo discussed the state of care for older adults and outlined the trajectory of Japan towards an aging society. She also described current music

therapy practice as it relates to older adults, which included working with groups in the community and working in hospitals and care centres. To round off the session, Karyn Stuart from South Africa presented a pilot study on therapeutic singing with caregivers in morning dementia care routines. She recommended further study into the training of caregivers in basic therapeutic musical skills, an approach which received some attention at this congress.

Spotlight session 2

The second spotlight session focused on music therapy and trauma work, and was moderated by Gene Ann Behrens. Elizabeth Coombes from the UK presented a project in Palestine, which centred on equipping local staff to engage in therapeutic music groups with children. She emphasised the capacity of music therapy to encourage the development of resilience and healthy coping strategies. From the USA, Barbara Else provided an illustration of the American Music Therapy Association's disaster response efforts, while Mireya Gonzalez from Chile outlined the music therapy method used in a burns rehabilitation

centre. Through using a variety of musical, artistic and movement-related activities to encourage creative expression, Gonzalez highlighted the importance of considering cultural aspects of music therapy in trauma work. Sanae Hori from Japan rounded off this spotlight session with a presentation on her experience of the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Hori provided a personal account of experiencing trauma and relating to patients in palliative care.

Spotlight session 3

The third day of the congress opened with a spotlight session on music therapy research, with a specific focus on evidence and story. Melissa Mercadal-Brotons from Spain acted as moderator, and Hyun Ju Chong from Korea opened the session with a presentation of her research on keyboard playing and forearm rehabilitation. She outlined the study's research method and results, which were strongly evidence-based. Chong, however, affirmed the need for both evidence and story in music therapy research, and she noted the importance of music itself in reporting results. Jaakko Erkkilä from Finland then spoke about his research on working with people with anxiety and depression. He explored the potential of improvisation to provide a safe treatment, and asserted that structure was important in this improvisational technique, in terms of understanding models and methods. Finally, Katrina Skewes McFerran gave a resounding call for courageous music therapy researchers willing to conduct rigorous qualitative studies in their field. McFerran prefaced her speech with a spoken acknowledgement of her privileges that had led to her being able to present at the congress, and then devoted her presentation to critiquing and challenging the evidence-based model of research.

Spotlight session 4

The final spotlight session was on music therapy and cultural context, and was chaired by Annie Heiderscheidt from the USA. Sunelle Fouché from South Africa drew on her experience as co-founder and executive director of MusicWorks, a non-profit organisation working in marginalised communities, to talk about the complexities of working in a culturally diverse context. She reflected that music therapists working in similar contexts should strive to value cultural differences while also keeping sight of a shared humanity and all the commonalities that attend that shared experience.

Laura Beer from the USA spoke next, highlighting the importance of careful reflection around the use of music from other cultures. She shared some of her personal journey with music from cultures different to her own, and advocated for open conversation with music therapy students and practitioners from other cultures. Rika Ikuno-Yamamoto offered a Japanese perspective on music and culture, and noted the wide variety of different music used daily in modern Japanese life. She gave insight into the shifting landscape of musical forms in Japan over the last 200 years and spoke about the ability of music to mediate relationships. To conclude this session, Brynjulf Stige spoke about health as both a universal human right and a situated cultural practice. He recommended further debate around the pros and cons of the medical and social models of practice, and suggested 'health musicking' (noting that the Norwegian equivalent is one word) as a useful term in discussing this.

Each session concluded with time for questions in which the audience asked pertinent questions of the presenters. This space resulted in some interesting and less structured discussion of each topic. For example, there was a question during the last spotlight session about how to respectfully use instruments from another culture, which the panel answered with a recommendation to know the history and typical cultural function of the instrument before incorporating it into music therapy practice.

OVERALL PROGRAMME

After each spotlight session concluded in the morning, the delegates dispersed to an astonishing number of workshops, round table discussions, and paper presentations. I attended some extremely thoughtful and reflective sessions on community music therapy in different settings, and encountered a lot of discussion about training caregivers, family and other invested people in music therapy skills. There was little scheduled time to rest during the congress week, with a total of 506 presentations tightly scheduled in every available room and time slot. Due to this timetable, some attendees found they had to skip sessions to claim some reflection time. However, the breadth of topics covered was wide and at the end of each evening I felt freshly inspired and informed. As a new music therapist, I felt that the WCMT fulfilled its stated goal of inspiring the next generation, particularly through the student events and also



Photograph 2: Delegates gather for a lunchtime performance

the willingness of respected researchers and practitioners to engage with students and younger therapists on a personal level. Although each delegate's experience of the congress was very different due to the wide variety of presentations offered, I felt that the theme of 'moving forward with music therapy' was represented by discussion around challenging the evidence-based research model, engaging the wider community in music therapy training and practice, and a call to investigate all aspects of musical intervention, including the possibility of negative effects.

MUSICAL MOMENTS

In a busy schedule, live music provided welcome interludes. Among the musical components of the congress were the 12 lunchtime performances in the large open foyer at the heart of the conference centre (see Photograph 2). The music from these performances could be heard and witnessed while riding the numerous open escalators from floor to floor in the centre, and large groups of delegates gathered around the performance to see enthusiastic musicians playing Japanese taiko drums (see Photograph 3), crystal singing bowls, and even a theramin, as well as choirs, dancing



Photograph 3: Taiko drumming at a lunchtime performance

groups and pop bands. Some of these performers were local musicians with disabilities – and with contagious energy.

A number of the sessions offered throughout the week were musical workshops, and I had the wonderful opportunity to be involved in leading hundreds of attendees in a song circle, with chant leaders Jodi Dunn and Barbara Winnwalker. This session was a highlight for me personally, as chant leaders from all around the world shared music from their cultures. This session also evolved into a concert held on Wednesday evening in the foyer

(see Photograph 4). Another highlight for me was attending the student jam session, in which music therapy students from Canada, Italy, Japan, France, Korea, USA, and Spain performed with voice, instrument and movement to a packed audience (standing room only). The atmosphere at this and other student events was energetic and infectious supportive. Music also bookended the congress during the opening and closing ceremonies, as local musicians came on stage to share traditional Japanese performances with the assembly (see Photograph 5).



Photograph 4: Song leaders after a concert on Wednesday evening



Photograph 5: Japanese performer Tazae Mochizuki leads a Sanbaso performance at the opening ceremony

HIGHLIGHTS

Every morning, the stroll down a long tree-lined boulevard from the local train station to the conference centre (see Photograph 6) was filled with fellow music therapists in knots of conversation and laughter. As the week progressed, this daily pilgrimage became a highlight for me. A bystander would have witnessed many hugs, jokes, and thoughtful conversations along this boulevard during congress week, and this felt to me like a lovely organic expression of an international

community coming together. In the same vein, the many informal gatherings and shared dinners at local restaurants were a highlight, as delegates shared affirmation and friendship. More structured highlights included the optional cultural programmes offered by the WCMT, such as a traditional tea ceremony, calligraphy class, and flower arrangement sessions.



Photograph 6: Music therapists on the walking street from the train station to the conference centre

On another note, there were several honours awarded to outstanding members of the international music therapy community, with Felicity Baker, Joanne Loewy, Alexia Quinn, and Jen Spivey as recipients. Notably, the esteemed Barbara Wheeler was awarded the WFMT Lifetime Achievement Award for 2017. A personal highlight for me was being selected at the closing ceremony to receive the Student Poster Award for my thesis research presentation. The 15th World Congress of Music Therapy closed (see Photograph 7) with the appointment of Melissa Mercadal-Brotons as the new President of the WFMT, and the announcement of South Africa as the host country for the 16th World Congress in 2020. Arigatō gozaimasu, Japan!



Photograph 7: Congress organising committee members celebrate at the closing ceremony

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