

CONFERENCE REPORT

11th European Music Therapy Conference 'Fields of Resonance'

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CONFERENCE DETAILS

11th European Music Therapy Conference
'Fields of Resonance'
26-30 June 2019, Aalborg, Denmark

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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The 11th European Music Therapy Conference was held in Aalborg, Denmark, 26-30 June 2019. The beautiful House of Music was the site for many of the sessions and each day's keynote address (see Photograph 1). Additional sessions and the research poster session were held at an adjacent building at Aalborg University. The conference venue was located near the river, which provided a lovely atmosphere during lunch and coffee breaks. The venue was accessible by foot from all conference hotels.

The conference committee started each day with a lively presentation of a story that was told over the course of the conference, singing, and jokes. 'Fields of Resonance' was the theme of the conference. After the morning introduction, a keynote presentation was given and followed by a panel of speakers. The speakers responded to the keynote address and conversed with the keynote speaker further about the topic. Monika Geretsegger delivered the first keynote "Resonating research – What is needed to make music therapy research and implementation more relevant, meaningful, and innovative?" The following day, Susan Hart discussed "Neuroaffective perspectives on resonance" and, lastly, Lars Ole Bonde presented "Resonance, intensity and will in music psychotherapy." After his presentation, all participants took part in a special retirement celebration for Bonde. Video messages from colleagues around the world were displayed and the group were led in song by Danish choral conductor John Høybye.

Speakers from several European countries and beyond gave a wide range of presentations. Approximately 520 participants from 43 countries attended the conference. The conference was an intersectionality of music therapists from around the globe, as participants arrived from six continents. Many Americans attended, as did delegates from South Africa and other countries. The

diversity of participants was one of the reasons I attended the conference. I enjoy hearing from music therapists in different cultures and assessing what similarities and differences they encounter in their work. In addition to diversity in cultural background, this conference also offered a diverse programme reflecting practice, theory, and research.



Photograph 1: House of Music, Aalborg¹

Some of the sessions I particularly enjoyed attending are described as follows. Grace Thompson (Australia) spearheaded a roundtable about “Music therapy with families”. She and her co-presenters engaged the active participation of the audience in discussions of current trends and challenges in working with families. Gerhard Tucek (Austria) led a team in discussing “Personalization in music therapy – Researching music therapy processes and relationships in selected fields of neurologic rehabilitation”. Detailed explanations were given regarding a wide variety of neuro-rehab components. Claire Ghetti (Norway) and members of her research team presented her “Longitudinal study of music therapy’s effectiveness for premature infants and their caregivers (LongSTEP): Results from feasibility studies and first steps in an international RCT”. It was fascinating to hear the challenges and successes experienced thus far by the team. James Hiller and Susan Gardstrom (USA) shared their research regarding “The impact of vocal re-creative engagement on nutritional intake of individuals with AD and related dementias: A multi-site repeated measures study.” Though the results were not as anticipated, they gained several significant findings. Gitta Strehlow (Germany) and her colleagues presented a lively discussion of “How do we understand the unconscious in contemporary music therapy?” The audience engaged quickly with the topic and contributed richly to the discussion.

Many other concurrent sessions included a variety of topics. Some included topics specifically for the music therapist, such as “Resonating our clinical mistakes out in the open: Why, how, when, and with whom?” by Gilboa, Thomas, Hakvoort, Balil, and Harris, “Personal music and imagery: A method for self-supervision” by Scott-Moncrieff and Story, and “Ethics in music therapy – How to

¹ The photographs are courtesy of Carol Lotter.

respond to ethical dissonance?" by Weymann and Stegemann. There were sessions on music interventions, such as "Soul song circles: Vocal improvisation, sound, and song in inclusive group therapy" by Schenck, "The role of musical improvisation in shaping bonding formations for clients with borderline personality disorder" by Foubert, Walton, and de Backer, and "Fields of resonance from therapeutic group song writing for people living with dementia and their family caregivers" by Clark, Stretton-Smith, Baker, and Tamplin. Other research sessions were also presented, such as "Short GIM in active treatment for gynecologic and breast cancer: An RCT pilot study" by Papanikolaou, Hannibal, and McKinney, "Enhancing the efficacy of integrative improvisational MT in the treatment of depression: Overview of an on-going RCT" by Erkkila, Brabant, and Saarikallio, and "Interacting brains of a client with dementia and a music therapist: An EEG case report on central neural markers of emotion during dyadic improvisation" by Maidhof, Bloska, Odell-Miller, and Fachner.

The poster session included traditional paper posters and some animated ones displayed on a computer. Each presenter had one minute to proclaim the details of their poster to the audience before people walked around and looked at them. While the one-minute speeches were informing and entertaining, it did not leave time in the schedule for people to engage in the traditional poster presentation format of walking around to the posters and addressing the authors. A variety of poster topics included "Moving the profession forward: Government recognition, access, and competitive pay (Kern and Tague), "Treatment of burn-out in health professionals through music therapy" (Sequera and De La Torre), "The kaleidoscope of empathy: Insights from music therapy with aggressive teenagers" (dos Santos), and "Who am I as a music therapist? A grounded theory study on professional identity in Israel and Germany" (Preissler and Druks).

All in all, the European Music Therapy Conference was a rich learning and networking experience. Colleagues from around the world joined together to share research and practice knowledge. The conference location was easily accessible, and the hosts designed a diverse learning and social programme. There were a couple of times when the venue seemed a bit small for the large number of attendees. The dinner space was cramped, and attendees were divided between two floors. The exhibits took place in several locations and thus appeared a bit disjunct. Perhaps there were more attendees than anticipated.

As a music therapist from the United States, I felt the presentations offered were more often based on research findings than some of the sessions I see at conferences in the US. I see many practical, music therapy intervention-based sessions in the US alongside research sessions. There were fewer sessions offered compared to what is available at the American Music Therapy Association conference. Obviously, this is most likely due to the number of attendees, since the EMTC conference is smaller.

One of the things I really love about the EMTC conference is the built-in opportunities for connecting with other music therapists. Coffee and tea breaks each day, planned group evening social events, and a conference dinner are all missing from an AMTA conference. Again, this could be due to the smaller number of participants at EMTC. Yet I also think it is due to the culture. I like the focus on taking time to talk with others. I also admire the timeframe of the conference events. Each morning of EMTC started at 9am, which gave conference-goers time to have a leisurely breakfast together or do other self-care activities prior to starting the day. The conference sessions

ended around 5pm, allowing time for the planned social events or time to use at one's discretion. While this may seem like a minor point to some, it is a significant point for me. I attended the EMTC conference as a presenter and session attendee. Additionally, I attended a World Federation of Music Therapy meeting and an *Approaches* meeting all while not being completely exhausted by the conference schedule. I had time to connect with others during the coffee/tea breaks (each morning and afternoon), lunches, and before and after the conference schedule each day. I had time to relax and process the information I had learned that day. Having a more manageable schedule, such as this one, allows one to take in information, process, make connections, and grow.

The popularity of this conference may be growing as an increasing number of music therapists from around the world take part. The abundance of learning opportunities within a welcoming community make me excited to attend another European Music Therapy Conference in the future. Mark your calendars for the next EMTC conference 8-12 June 2022, at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, Scotland!