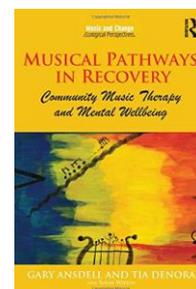


## BOOK REVIEW

# Musical pathways in recovery: Community music therapy and mental wellbeing (Ansdell & DeNora, with Wilson)

Reviewed by Penny Warren

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**Title:** Musical pathways in recovery: Community music therapy and mental wellbeing **Authors:** Gary Ansdell & Tia DeNora, with Sarah Wilson **Publication year:** 2016 **Publisher:** Routledge **Pages:** 263 **ISBN:** 9781409434160

### REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

**Penny Warren** trained as a music therapist at Guildhall School of Music and Drama and worked in the NHS and MusicSpace, Bristol, before emigrating to Aotearoa, New Zealand, in 1995. She works as a music therapist in the areas of adult mental health, children and families, and as a co-facilitator of a neurological choir, SoundsWell Singers. She is also beginning a PhD at Victoria University of Wellington. [[pennywarrenmt@gmail.com](mailto:pennywarrenmt@gmail.com)]

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[...] recovery is a process in time, something that comes about, something that is brought along with the person's engagement with life, something that is necessarily about the whole person and their lives, loves and aspirations. (p.215)

This is a fascinating, complex and stimulating book, with clear relevance in the current climate of the recovery model within mental health care and the congruence of community music therapy in supporting the ethos of this model. Gary Ansdell and Tia DeNora's collaboration in writing *Musical Pathways in Recovery: Community Music Therapy and Mental Wellbeing* (2016), is the final book in a trio from the *Music and Change: Ecological Perspectives* series. The trio began with Tia DeNora's *Music Asylums: Wellbeing Through Music in Everyday Life* (2013), followed by Gary Ansdell's *How Music Helps in Music Therapy and Everyday Life* (2014). The authors describe the series of books as a triptych, with *Musical Pathways in Recovery* (2016) placed as the centrepiece, bringing together the music therapy, ecological and music sociological perspectives of the authors. From the outset, an ecological perspective for music is at the centre of the text exploring how music therapy can uniquely or specifically help people in a particular situation, rather than fitting the evidence into a standard medical treatment model. The experience and expertise of Ansdell and DeNora shine through in this skilfully crafted work.

The book centres around the SMART Music project, which began in 2005 under the name Chelsea Community Music Therapy Project. It then became part of the charity SMART (St Mary

Abbots Rehabilitation and Training). This work covers the first ten years of the music therapy project, with the ethnographic research branch encompassing a six-year timeframe. The SMART members live with severe mental illness (SMI) and attend the music therapy session in a café that is situated within the SMART building in the grounds of a hospital in London, UK. The pathways that members take to come to the sessions may be from the mental health unit in the hospital and/or the community, and can vary for each person at different times. The lengthy timeframe of the research has enabled descriptions of “how music featured in the respondent’s daily experience longitudinally across, and how they used and related to music on their own, and on music’s, terms” (p.7). These are shared through vivid descriptions and stories that map the unique recovery journeys that SMART members are taking.

The overriding message for the project is that it is focused on working ‘with’ people. As a music therapist now living in Aotearoa, New Zealand, the following Whakataukī (Māori proverb) seems to capture the essence of SMART Music:

He aha te mea nui o te ao?  
He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata

[What is the most important thing in the world?  
It is people, it is people, it is people]

## WHAT YOU WILL DISCOVER

With a project of this length, consideration about how to present the complexity and richness of the vast amount of data in a form that offers detail along with the landscape of the work has been carefully considered. The work is multi-layered, and this has influenced the way the work is presented. Each section has aspects that are interwoven and do not exist on their own.

The book is written in three parts, with the first being significantly longer than the second and third. Part One is appropriately substantial as this section is about SMART, its members and their journeys. Part Two and Three offer the opportunity to step back and to consider the processes of the research, the researchers, the findings and the ethical considerations, whilst continuing to maintain the connection with SMART members’ stories and experiences. A brief Coda written by music therapist Sarah Wilson ends the book. Sarah began working at the SMART project in 2007 and continues running SMART Music that lives on and grows after the book. Sarah is acknowledged for her support, involvement and contribution to the SMART Music project. Two appendices add a further layer of reflection to the processes that are contained in Parts Two and Three.

Part One: *‘Musical Pathways’*, is rich, full and multi-layered, consisting of 45 sections. It is hardly surprising that this section is described as ‘bulging’, as it documents the complex journey of the SMART project over time through multiple aspects. Musical action is being studied ecologically throughout this project. Sections 1-15 cover the first six months of the project and help ground and situate the project within the mental health service, the physical environment and its establishment as part of the community. SMART members are introduced through following their journeys to the

SMART venue, and there is a growing sense of the project's emergence and establishment in these initial months. Emerging outcomes are shared by researchers after the six months.

In the early years of SMART, song was a core part of the music in the sessions. The development and use of song are discussed and explored, in, for example, the life of a song within sessions, and the connection to SMART members' identity and their journeys to wellbeing. Over time, some members expanded the music at SMART into music performances, and into different music projects and forms. This process mirrors the 'ripple effect' present in Community Music Therapy theory (p.151).

The presentation and writing of Part One reveal an absorbing window into the project. It includes carefully written stories of participants and researchers, excerpts from field-note logs, observations from the music therapy sessions, and the exploration of the role of music in participants' personal recovery journeys. Interspersed throughout the 45 sections are text boxes written in different font, visually highlighting that their content is linked to theory and concepts that relate to the music therapy sessions at SMART.

Part Two, *Continuous Outcomes*, offers the question "what is an outcome?". The authors explore, through refreshing reflection, what an outcome might look like other than in a traditional, quantifiable measure. Whilst the findings of the research are presented as a summary of the project's outcomes, as eight themes, the reflective considerations of the broader question enrich the work. There is no clear answer to the question posed, however, this section offers space to use different lenses to consider the question. The authors have created a schema that represents the continuity of outcomes that are present and which highlights that they are not limited to what happens 'during' the process of music therapy. The examples that are included from the SMART members' experiences enhance this concept effectively. The unique, ongoing and non-linear nature of the recovery pathway for each person is thoughtfully acknowledged.

Part Three, *Musical Recovery*, explores the different unfurling aspects and roles of music within the key findings of the project in relation to current thinking and practice in the field of mental health recovery. The development of the recovery movement has challenged the assumptions and norms of the medical model view of SMI over a period of 20-plus years. An overview of this process and the core factors of the recovery model ground the reader in current healthcare practice before returning to the results of the study and a broader view of 'recovery'. Three participants' stories of recovery in relation to music are also shared. Their journeys offer an individual experience with a common motif of recovering pieces of themselves and moving towards experiencing wellbeing.

## SOME RESPONSES

As the story of SMART unfolded in the early sections, I was absorbed by the descriptions, experiences and narratives of SMART members. They are skilfully woven throughout, and I was quickly engaged with the layers of their voices and experiences. I was very taken with the story of Eloise and the cymbal which develops throughout the project. Her identity in the group was woven with the cymbal. It was her instrument to play. Her level of participation and musical expression were observed to be linked to her well-being. The cymbal also acted as a catalyst for Eloise to share

stories about different aspects of herself and her life. Touchingly, her absence was also represented and acknowledged by the presence and silence of the cymbal in the group. As I read the musical pathways of specific SMART members, reflections about my own clinical work also emerged at times and prompted some “aha” moments. This was particularly so in the reflection and discussions around the attachments and relationships that were present with specific songs and instruments for different people. The framework that categorised songs that were included over time in the sessions is one I found useful, and which I will consider in my music therapy practice in mental health. Songs’ roles are described as ‘ubiquitous’, ‘tethered’, ‘migrating’ or ‘novelty’ (pp. 69-70).

The complexity of the multiple layers of information presented in Part One in my first reading made it less easy to read and absorb. I found I became saturated and needed to take frequent breaks to allow me to place everything, and to integrate the theories, concepts and reflections. Ansdell and DeNora have carefully considered how they would present their work in a way that captured the many dimensions of the project and thinking around the research. The reader will find their own way to adapt to this.

Part Three, *Musical Recovery*, may be short in length, however, it opens up the developing area of discussion and debate around the models of music therapy practice that align with perspectives and values of the recovery model. Ansdell’s voice and work is synonymous with the growth and development of community music therapy. It is no surprise, then, that the ecological perspective on musicking, creating a “musical ecology” (p. 41) and establishing of a musical community at SMART, underpin the work. However, the content of *Recovering Music Therapy* (pp. 222-224) may challenge those who work from a psychodynamic perspective, as there is limited acknowledgement or space to discuss this in relation to the recovery model. I feel it is important for the reader to contextualise the ecological perspective within the life of the music therapy profession and understand its evolution and development.

This book offers an impressive range of content which will be valuable to music therapy students through to experienced music therapy practitioners. I have enjoyed the opportunity to immerse myself in the ecological perspective and further consider its place in my own music therapy practice. This book sits close by when I supervise music therapists, and it is one I have recommended, and will continue to recommend.

## REFERENCES

- Ansdell, G. (2014). *How music helps in music therapy and everyday life*. Farnham: Ashgate.  
DeNora, T. (2013). *Music asylums: Wellbeing through music in everyday life*. Farnham: Ashgate.