

CONFERENCE REPORT

The 47th annual Canadian Association of Music Therapists (CAMT) conference *'Bridging distance. Honouring difference'*

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CONFERENCE DETAILS

The 47th annual Canadian Association of Music Therapists (CAMT) conference
'Bridging distance. Honouring difference'
29 May – 14 June 2021, Online

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Cathy Weldin is a retired music teacher, music therapist, and Primary to grade 6 classroom teacher who lives in Truro, Nova Scotia, Canada. She has been a member of the Canadian Association of Music Therapists (CAMT) since 1995. Cathy received her master's degree and music therapy training at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas (1990) where she worked with cancer patients, children and adults with mental health diagnoses, children with autism spectrum disorder, and patients in rehabilitation. [cathyweldin9@gmail.com]

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It was my pleasure to attend the online CAMT conference from 29th May to 14th June 2021. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the conference could not be held in-person this year. Therefore, the conference was held online over a period of time which included two sets of 'live' weekend keynotes and panel discussions and three weeks of concurrent session video releases. In order to avoid information overload and Zoom fatigue, the video sessions were made available to conference delegates until the end of July 2021. As a retiree, I was able to take in all of the live presentations including the three keynote speakers, three of the four poster sessions, the three panel discussions, and the vast majority of the thirty-five concurrent sessions. Spreading the content of the conference over a relatively long period of time was innovative and seemed to be appreciated by many.

The conference was entitled 'Bridging Distance. Honoring Difference.' The aims of the conference committee were: (1) to provide opportunities for music therapists to connect with each other, (2) to have delegates engage in learning new ways to promote and increase the sustainability of music therapy in Canada, and (3) to have fun doing so. It is important for CAMT to expand their outreach, provide more opportunities for music therapists to connect and learn from each other, and increase the organisation's sustainability.

There were just over 400 delegates attending the conference from as far away as Australia, Scotland and the United States. The majority of delegates and presenters were from Canada but there were at least two presentations given by American music therapists. The conference offered a wide

variety of sessions ranging from 30 to 110 minutes in length. The majority of sessions were presented by MTA and board-certified music therapists, registered psychotherapists, music therapists with doctoral degrees, and music therapy students.

After listening to each of the three keynote speakers, it seemed as though the overarching theme was to remind us where we came from, why we chose music therapy as a career, and how we should define the identity of the twenty-first-century music therapist. The opening keynote, by Canadian music therapist Guylaine Vaillancourt, asked the delegates to remember what initially led them to become a music therapist. She also asked what role music played in their lives and how delegates thought they could contribute to the field of music therapy. The international keynote was given by Marisol Norris from the United States. Norris spoke about the World Congress of Music Therapy coming to Vancouver, BC in 2023 and the role of race, discrimination, and healing in our profession. The closing keynote was presented by another Canadian music therapist, Adrienne Pringle. She spoke to the delegates about how the identities of true Canadian music therapists are defined by being excellent musicians, innovative entrepreneurs, visionaries, and connectors.

I really appreciated that the Conference Lead provided an 'Everything you need to participate' email to all delegates. It provided a guide to the schedule, session links, and sponsor presentations. The conference also offered two sessions in French and provided simultaneous interpretation of all sessions into either English or French. Each presentation was assigned a password to access the video link and a second link to evaluate each session. At least six of the presenters also provided a script to accompany their videos. I found this very useful for note taking and would encourage other presenters to provide scripts in the future.

The 2021 CAMT conference offered music therapists information on a wide variety of client populations. This included more familiar populations such as children with Down syndrome and autism, to other client populations such as LGBTQ youth and asylum-seeking prenatal women. Presenters also spoke about providing support to informal caregivers, prisoners, older Jewish adults, and women with chronic pain issues. I found that those who presented either on the more common or relatively new client populations both focused on how to move forward in our profession. What are the new techniques and ideas we need to be aware of? What do we know about the language surrounding the LGBTQ community and their specific needs? How multiculturally competent are we in our attempts to reach out to diverse populations? The bottom line here seems to be that we need to be more self-aware, adaptable, creative, and resourceful.

Themes covered by conference presenters included proactive wellness, diversity, and telehealth or virtual music therapy. Given that most of us are in the midst of states of emergency due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I found the "how to" sessions very informative. The pandemic provided a focus for some of the presenters to help those of us who may be more technologically challenged than others to work successfully with our clients. Since there are specific technical and practical considerations to providing music therapy online with a variety of populations, there were many questions to be answered. Which platform should I use? Does the client have their camera at eye level and notifications turned off? Is there a caregiver present who can help with sessions? Are you wearing anything around your neck that might hit your microphone and make unwanted noise? Have you considered the client's safety, right to privacy, and possible confidentiality issues? Should they complete a more specific consent form in order to participate online? Does virtual music therapy work better with certain

populations than with others? These questions, and many others, were answered during several sessions throughout the conference.

I do have a couple of concerns with regard to the conference. Given that the last group of video sessions was released to delegates on 13th June, I wondered if this would provide people with enough time to view as many sessions as they could or would want to. It is summer in Canada, the weather is nice and, although most people are still working, many are on vacation. I was also disappointed that even though one of the conference objectives was to discuss diversity and equity, some delegates had difficulty fully participating in sessions. It became increasingly obvious that some people were unable to follow some of the proceedings and meetings, access breakout rooms, or see comments in the chat box during sessions due to disability issues or technical challenges. I certainly understand that presenting the 2021 conference online was new to all of us but would recommend that the committee intentionally prepare for these challenges in the future.

To conclude, the 2021 CAMT conference was very informative and thought-provoking. As we all begin to hope that the pandemic is coming to an end, I am hopeful that CAMT will retain at least a portion of this online format even when it becomes possible for us to hold in-person conferences again. It provided some of us with opportunities to make professional connections that otherwise may not have been possible. As a retired teacher hoping to re-enter the music therapy profession, I am encouraged and amazed by the growth of music therapy in Canada during the past thirty years. Music therapists are now working with a wider variety of populations than ever before, using new models of intervention, accessing a vast number of resources, and continuing to make significant contributions to music therapy research.