

CONFERENCE REPORT

The 10th Nordic Music Therapy Conference “Music therapy: Adapting approaches for health”

Henry Dunn

National Health Service, UK

CONFERENCE DETAILS

The 10th Nordic Music Therapy Conference
“Music therapy: Adapting approaches for health”
27-30 April 2022, Helsinki, Finland

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Henry Dunn qualified as a music psychotherapist in 2002, and has worked for the National Health Service in the South West of England for 20 years. In this role he works as part of a creative therapy team with adults, individually and in groups, who have severe mental ill health, primarily due to trauma. In 2007, Henry set up the Autistic Spectrum Conditions Network for the British Association for Music Therapy, and in 2019 he was Chief Editor of the book *Music Therapy and Autism Across the Lifespan: A Spectrum of Approaches* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers). This showcased the variety of ways music therapy helps people on the autistic spectrum. Henry has presented at a variety of international conferences and delivers workshops and lectures. He lives in Exeter, UK, with his wife and three children. [jazzmanhenry@hotmail.co.uk]

Publication history:

Submitted 31 May 2022

Accepted 19 Aug 2022

First published 24 Oct 2022

INTRODUCTION

This conference, delayed from 2021 due to the pandemic and offered live and online, was the second part of what was billed as International Music Therapy Week, with the first half focusing on paediatric music therapy. Some presentations were co-delivered, with one or more people online. The hybrid event seemed to work well, and I’m not aware of any difficulties accessing the conference online. It is a positive that this enables more people to attend conferences.

On the first evening, there was a symbolic handover from the previous host city to the other in the context of a concert. This contained a composition by music therapist Ilan Sanfi, performed by a youth orchestra from the West Uusima Music Institute. We were treated to a wonderful guided journey on a hot air balloon, after which we were invited to create images of the journey. Live music was a feature of the conference, with each morning starting with a brief performance by English six string fiddle player, Robbie Sherratt, and Estonian kannell player Eva Väljaots. It was such a joy to experience live music with other people after two years of these events not being possible.



NMTC 2022
HELSINKI, FINLAND

Photograph 1:
Conference logo

As with all conferences, it would be hard to do justice to the depth and breadth of all the presentations. The plenary on the first morning consisted of a panel giving brief presentations about their current area of work and research. I found this format a little frustrating, as each presenter did not really have enough time to expand on their subject. On the other hand, it did give an opportunity to hear about more topics than would otherwise be the case.

Subjects included a comparison of music listening and music therapy in a psychiatric context. Using the Helping Alliance Questionnaire (Alexander & Lugorsky, 1986), Niels Hannibal demonstrated that music therapy promoted a stronger alliance and smaller drop-out rate than Music Listening. I enjoyed Kirsi Tuomi's discussion of taking an attachment-focused perspective on music therapy with adopted/fostered children and their families. This resonates with Gravestock's publication on the same subject (2021).

I did feel, though, that some presenters tried to cover too much in their allotted time. Claire Ghetti described using a socioecological model of music therapy, referring to McLeroy et al. (1988) and the World Health Organisation's social determinants of health (2022). She also described the LongSTEP (2021) clinical trial she is involved in, examining the effectiveness of music therapy with premature infants and their caregivers. They have been using the Post Partum Bonding Questionnaire (Brockington et al., 2001), and found it was an appropriate tool in this context. Covering these two subjects in a short presentation was quite ambitious; perhaps one topic would have enabled a deeper engagement with the material for the audience.

I was surprised that there was relatively little content in the conference on the topic of autism, traditionally a subject area that attracts many presentations. Monika Gerettseger did include it in her discussion, The MIDDEL project (Music Interventions for Dementia and Depression in Elderly Care), current developments in the Cochrane review for music therapy and autism, and rhythmic relating for autism (Daniel et al., 2022), but as I was not aware of many other papers on this topic. As this is a major area of work in the music therapy profession, I felt this to be something of an omission, and again wondered about the wisdom of overloading presentations with content.

Keynote speakers however had time to go into more depth in the presentations. One of these was on the theme of Music for Mood Disorders and Mental Health, with Jaakko Erkkilä examining two related randomised control trials (Erkkilä et al., 2011, 2021), analysing the efficacy of Integrative Improvisational Music Therapy with adults with depression, using microanalysis of various musical aspects. The research showed that improvisation could often lead to awareness of strong bodily and emotional sensations, as well as leading to clients verbalising about traumatic experiences for the first time. In addition to this, Erkkilä spoke about the use of other techniques such as Resonance Frequency Breathing (Courtney, 2022) and programmes of music to listen to at home as additional elements.

There were also keynotes, on the final day, by Teppo Särkämö and Wendy Magee, looking at the use of music and music therapy in the area of neurorehabilitation. This is an area that I am keen to learn more about as it is a very contemporary area of music therapy practice.

There was a very wide choice of presentations, and it was hard to know what to choose! Rather than trying to move between rooms to locate presentations I simply stayed in one space and decided to immerse myself in what was offered. Of particular note during one morning was a description of the work of Ai Nakatsuka with an orchestra in Sudan during a time of conflict. She described the importance of being there to bear witness, and quoted an adult participant saying "If it's only heard by

you, it's more than enough for me." The idea of bearing witness to our clients' experiences is one that resonates with me deeply.

The organisers are to be congratulated on putting together a wide variety of presenters and facilitators in a fantastic location, and with great hospitality. As always timetabling of sessions was difficult. I wondered if having longer presentations would be beneficial with short gaps between each one to facilitate movement between seminar rooms. There is, however, a skill in being able to speak about your work in a limited period of time. This certainly means that a wider variety of topics is available to conference attendees. There are also a range of formats for presentations. For example, I delivered a 90 minute-long workshop about a selection of different techniques for a range of creative therapies that music therapist could use in their sessions.

I am so pleased that I was able to attend this conference in person and experience live music-making with fellow music therapists as well as meet in person faces old and new after being sequestered away for so long. May this be the first of many hybrid conference opportunities to develop our profession; there are certainly many new areas of work that are being explored, moving our profession into the 21st century.

Correction notes: On 8th November 2022, this corrected version of the conference report was published. 'South Sudan' was corrected to 'Sudan' and the author clarified that the quote regarding the orchestra experience was by an adult participant.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, L.B., & Lugorsky, L. (1986). The Penn Helping Alliance Scales. In L.S. Greenberg & W. Pinsof (Eds.), *The psychotherapeutic process: A research handbook* (pp. 325-366). Guilford Press.
- Brockington, I. F., Oates, J., George, S., Turner, D., Vostanis, P., Sullivan, M., ... & Murdoch, C. (2001). A screening questionnaire for mother-infant bonding disorders. *Archives of women's mental health*, 3(4), 133-140.
- Courtney, R. (2022). *Resonance frequency breathing*. <https://www.rosalbacourtney.com/resonance-frequency-breathing/>
- Daniel, S., Wimpory, D., Delafield-Butt, J., Malloch, S., Holck, U., Geretsegger, M., ... & Amos, P. (2021). Rhythmic relating for autism: Bidirectional support for synchrony opening up for the possibility of playful therapeutic interaction. *Frontiers in Psychology*. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.793258
- Erkkilä, J., Punkanen, M., Fachner, J., Ala-Ruona, E., Pöntiö, I., Tervaniemi, M., ... & Gold, C. (2011). Individual music therapy for depression: randomised controlled trial. *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 199(2), 132-139.
- Erkkilä, J., Brabant, O., Hartmann, M., Mavrolampados, A., Ala-Ruona, E., Snape, N., ... & Gold, C. (2021). Music therapy for depression enhanced with listening homework and slow paced breathing: A randomised controlled trial. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12(613821):1.
- Ghetti, C. M., Vederhus, B. J., Gaden, T. S., Brenner, A. K., Bieleninik, Ł., Kvestad, I., ... & Gold, C. (2021). Longitudinal study of music therapy's effectiveness for premature infants and their caregivers (LongSTEP): Feasibility study with a Norwegian cohort. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 58(2), 201-240.
- Gravestock, J. (2021). *Music therapy in adoption and trauma: Therapy that makes a difference after placement*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- McLeroy, K. R., Bibeau, D., Steckler, A., & Glanz, K. (1988). An ecological perspective on health promotion programs. *Health Education Quarterly*, 15(4), 351-377.
- World Health Organisation (2022). *Social determinants of health*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1