

## CONFERENCE REPORT

# The 12<sup>th</sup> European Music Therapy Conference: 'music therapy in progress: please disturb'

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### CONFERENCE DETAILS

The 12<sup>th</sup> European Music Therapy Conference

'music therapy in progress: please disturb'

8-12 June 2022, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Born in London, UK, **Stella Hadjineophytou** is a registered music therapist working with Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy charity in the southwest of Scotland, facilitating music therapy in recovery settings, care homes, and a range of educational institutions. Stella is an editorial board member of *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy*. [[stella.hadjineophytou@nordoff-robbins.org.uk](mailto:stella.hadjineophytou@nordoff-robbins.org.uk)]

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### INTRODUCTION

The 12<sup>th</sup> European Music Therapy Conference was hosted by the British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT) between 8-12 June 2022 in Edinburgh, Scotland. This event marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC) conferences as well as the first hybrid EMTC conference following the Covid-19 pandemic and was consequently attended by over 750 delegates both online and in-person. The venue was Queen Margaret University (QMU), which offers the only music therapy training course in Scotland. The conference theme was 'music therapy in progress: please disturb', accompanied by an invitation to "shoogie", a Scots term meaning to "shake up" (Dowling et al., 2022). I was hopeful that this would encourage constructive challenges to the profession.



12TH EUROPEAN MUSIC THERAPY CONFERENCE, EDINBURGH 2022

Photograph 1: Conference logo

## OPENING CEREMONY

Arriving delegates were welcomed at the entrance by music therapist Rory Campbell playing the Highland bagpipes. Inside the venue, a jazz trio accompanied the excitable hubbub of chatter and laughter. Introductory speeches were heard from conference co-chairs Philippa Derrington, Giorgos Tsiris, Luke Annesley, and Claire Flower, as well as BAMT Chief Executive Andrew Langford and EMTC president Esa Ala-Ruona. Afterwards there was a rousing performance from Health in Harmony, a choir formed of care workers based in the Scottish Borders.



**Photograph 2:** Rory Campbell welcoming delegates



**Photograph 3:** Health in Harmony performing at the opening ceremony<sup>1</sup>

## PROGRAMME

The theme of 'disturbing' was reflected in the programme of workshops, roundtables, and presentations, and the organisers created additional spaces for meditation, music-making, art-making, and exhibitions. There were three refreshingly varied spotlight presentations. Brendan McCormack opened with a call for artistic creativity to inform the research of person-centred practice, illustrating with examples of poetry and imagery. Drawing on collective experience, Nate Holder and Jamal Glynn proved the need for revised music therapy frameworks to accommodate minoritised communities, and



**Photograph 4:** Brendan McCormack's keynote

<sup>1</sup> ©Diffraction Industries.

I found Glynn's account of training on a UK music therapy course as a steel pan player to be incredibly illuminating. Irish singer Karan Casey closed the conference with a discussion of singing as a performance of social justice. The final moments saw everyone singing the Scottish/Irish folk song "Wild Mountain Thyme," creating a sense of unity in the room just moments before we dispersed (see also the related podcast episode: Casey & Annesley, 2022).

The programme of parallel sessions was rich and stimulating. I was inspired by Francis Myerscough and Tory Williams' fantastic presentation charting the evolution of their Phoenix Song Project – which facilitates music therapy groups for transgender and nonbinary communities – into a co-produced, community-led organisation. They described how this helps to champion lived experience, subvert power dynamics, and challenge pathologised perceptions of trans people. I was encouraged to consider how I might facilitate co-led communities in my own work.

The Nordic Journal of Music Therapy (NJMT) offered a useful workshop on "Strategies for success in peer-reviewed publications," in which delegates learned about the journal's submission process and expressed aspirations for research. I was impressed with how co-editor Grace Thompson led the workshop with accessible language that catered for new and experienced authors alike, and I hope that NJMT consider replicating this workshop in more accessible spaces.



**Photograph 5:** Nate Holder and Jamal Glynn's keynote



**Photograph 6:** The conference co-chairs Philippa Derrington, Claire Flower, Luke Annesley and Giorgos Tsiris at the closing ceremony

Ludwika Konieczna-Nowak gave a memorable presentation on “asynchronous online music therapy” with a teenager with attachment trauma. Konieczna-Nowak recounted how messaging applications were initially used to overcome practical limitations concerning internet access and facilities, but that the temporal and physical space inherent in online communication aided the development of a trusting therapeutic relationship. Delegates queried the management of boundaries and Konieczna-Nowak provided well-considered explanations – the whole room felt quite “shoogled”!

I was keen to attend a roundtable which brought together the editors of four open access journals to tackle the topic of “Decolonising music therapy: What’s the role of open access journals?”. There was spirited debate on issues of accessibility regarding language (the primary publication language often being English), education (expectations to write in a particular style), disability (considering access to visual or written materials), and finance (authors and editors are not paid for their time and contributions). A notable comment came from Andeline dos Santos (co-editor-in-chief of Approaches), who suggested that open-access journals engage with the communities they foster by offering opportunities for individuals to be proactive in the “meaning-making” of the journal.

## ACCESSIBILITY

In a statement published prior to the conference, the organisers pledged to make this event as accessible as possible. This was my first in-person conference, and any apprehension faded quickly as I felt instantly comfortable and welcomed. I noted a sizable student population in attendance, and I commend the decision to engage QMU music therapy trainees as volunteers. The hybrid format was a triumph in circumventing matters of travel, illness, and personal circumstance. Presentation recordings were initially available for a month; this was later extended to three months, which I hope becomes standard practice for future conferences. The livestream management was impressively handled by the QMU volunteers although occasionally connectivity issues impacted the timings and/or audio of the presentations I attended. There was the option for live captioning, and the limited seating at the opening ceremony might have been better positioned to optimise viewing for disabled delegates.



**Photograph 7:** Open jam night



**Photograph 8:** QMU music therapy trainees volunteering at the conference

I consider the financial cost of the EMTC conferences (and of course many other music therapy conferences) to be another important issue of accessibility. At EMTC 2022, a face-to-face ticket was £450 (student price £200) if purchased during the “early bird” period, rising to £550 (student price £300) thereafter, which did not include the “Night at the Museum” social event (£66 extra). Whilst it is encouraging to see such substantial discounts offered to students, when compounded with the cost of travel, accommodation, and leave

from work, these ticket prices exclude financially disadvantaged voices and favour those individuals supported by academic affiliation or salaried jobs. I hope to see the profession collectively responding to this issue at conferences to come.



Photograph 9: Gala dinner at the National Museum of Scotland

## REFLECTIONS

This conference was a wonderful opportunity for friendship and growth. I was left feeling saturated and exhausted, yet simultaneously inspired and energised. Thank you to the organisers for their tremendous efforts and for curating an excellent programme. As I consider my attendance at future conferences, I hope continued focus on accessibility will help to diversify and nourish our profession. We can look forward to the upcoming 17<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Music Therapy in Vancouver in July 2023, as well as the 2024 UK BAMT conference and the 2025 EMTC conference in Germany!

## Note

Photographs 2, 3, 6, and 8 ©Diffraction Industries.

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