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## Music Therapy's Impact on Substance Abuse Recovery

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Lanier Sammons

### **Music Therapy's Impact on Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery**

To be caught in the tight clutches of addiction is not something to be taken lightly; it brings people to new lows by destroying lives, ruining relationships and even leading to death. As reported by Dr. Kima Joy Taylor, director of the Closing the Addiction Treatment Gap, in 2010, "one in ten Americans under the age of twelve are addicted to alcohol or drugs," and she goes on to say that, "only eleven percent of those with an addiction receive treatment" (Staff). Addiction is a real issue that impacts the lives of over 25 million Americans. Per Dr. Taylor's research only 2.7 million seek some sort of treatment program or clinical help (Staff). There are many different forms of addiction treatment such as a 12-step program catered towards your addiction, in-patient addiction centers, therapy, religion, art and even music.

A recent development in recovery therapy utilizes music to allow addicts a way of dealing with their illness in a creative and constructive style, while learning from their addictions and moving towards living a sober and meaningful standard of living. Music therapy is an effective form of addiction recovery therapy among addicts worldwide. Music is beneficial in addressing both addictive behaviors and the causes for those behaviors. This paper will explore the benefits of music therapy as well as different styles of music therapy professionals use to combat addiction. Finally, it will examine lives of everyday people who use some form of music therapy to deal with their addiction and their past. By examining the program of Alcoholics

Anonymous and the need for a 'Higher Power,' I will present how music has become my source of peace and solitude. This paper will show the beneficial uses music and expressive art have in the life of an addict. Without a creative outlet for one to express themselves it is hard to deal with the daily issues of being a person who has an addiction to a substance.

The lifestyle of a musician has been portrayed as a life of partying, drugs, sex and fast living. Artists such as Eminem, Elton John, Eric Clapton and even Demi Lovato all had extensive drug and alcohol addictions. Eric Clapton in the late 70s early 80s was spending \$16,000 a week on heroin (Norris). Having music in Clapton's life offered a form of "salvation." He says, "just being conscious of it [music], listening to it, has kept me moving" (Norris). During the peak of Clapton's career, it was all at risk because of his addiction to heroin, cocaine and alcohol (Elements). This global rock icon has been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on three separate occasions, has won 18 Grammy awards, and continues to produce popular music. Eric Clapton decided to get sober for the birth of his son Conor in 1987 after he had been drinking a lot but also came to the realization that he loved his son and needed to live for him (Giles). Tragically young Conor fell to his death in 1991, but Clapton stuck to music as an emotional outlet to create "Tears of Heaven," a Grammy-winning ballad that was "inspired by his loss" (Giles).

This paper will explore how mainstream musicians have been taken to the bottom of their careers by letting their lives succumb to their addictions only to pull themselves up by sheer determination, using their music as a form of self-therapy and a warning to those who still suffer. For the people who crave alcohol daily and the individuals addicted to substances, such as cocaine or heroin, there is hope through the proper channels if an individual is determined to do what it takes. No one person can do it alone, but with a stable support system and consistent

routine in sobriety an individual will be able to battle the symptoms of addiction. Music therapy outlets such as composing, improvisation, drumming, writing lyrics, dancing and group practice or performances are all viable creative options individuals can utilize to combat their illness with music. In the 1940s, professionals working in both music and medicine deduced music's effectiveness in assisting the treatment of certain ailments. According to the American Music Therapy Association, Veterans Affairs hospitals had a large demand for licensed hospital musicians to assist with the influx of veterans that were returning from World War II (Briggs). After years of successful practice in hospitals and institutions, universities and colleges nationwide started offering programs that specialized in music therapy education to musicians, physicians and psychiatrists. The first meeting of the National Association for Musical Therapy (NAMT) was held in 1950 in Cleveland, with the membership reportedly counting at 85 (Briggs). Over the next two decades, new organizations dedicated to helping individuals fight their mental and physical ailments began to rise through the nation. At New York University in 1970, the Urban Federation for Music Therapists (UFMT) was created, later changing its name to American Association for Music Therapy (AAMT) and finally deciding on the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) (Briggs).

During the 1970s, the drug culture was in full effect in America, with heroin, cocaine, mescaline, peyote and alcohol rampant in the streets. The traditional ideas of taking drugs for fun with no harmful effects was being discarded by the newer generation of addicts. When President Nixon signed into effect the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970, he declared drug abuse as public enemy number one (Little). This act allowed Richard Nixon to tap into the fear of the American people that the addicts "were criminals and decreasing social welfare funding would therefore attack the root cause of drug abuse" (Dufton). Because of this,

the government was one of the last to invest into the future of substance use prevention programs (Dufton).

The AMTA states “music therapy is useful regardless of musical background” (Bridge et al., 2014). By utilizing music therapy, patients can address feelings and desires that are unreachable by conventional means of communication. As stated in *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, “substance abuse and music therapy share one similarity, they both alter or produce an emotion or mood” (Baker, Gleadhill, Dingle pp.321-330). Within certain individuals a certain song will emphasize a specific memory or emotion. It is easy to use those emotions and feelings to one’s benefit while in a music therapy program, such as lyric writing or composing. When engaging in certain methods of music therapy, substance use disorder patients can relate to emotional changes easier if they write lyrics (Baker, Gleadhill and Dingle). Through my research, I have discovered that people who go through tough times after the military usually use artistic outlets to deal with their addiction to drugs or alcohol from PTSD.

Alcoholics Anonymous is a group of people who struggle with alcohol addiction. There are anonymous groups for people with all sorts of addictions, but this paper will focus primarily on Alcoholics Anonymous. The groups of AA have been around since 1939 and have served to show other alcoholics how to maintain a sober style of living. The program promotes acceptance, honesty, work and maintenance. With a 12-step-program addicts accept their addiction, that they are not alone, and that a “higher power” that can restore one’s life back to sanity. If dealing with addiction the addict must be connected to a higher power and be invested into a certain style of living. A higher power doesn’t strictly refer to conventional means of religion. *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* dedicates a whole chapter to agnostics and finding a higher power that suits your unique personal needs: “The main object is to enable you to find a Power greater than

yourself which will solve your problem” (Wilson). The idea is to find something bigger than you that you can turn to when times get hard. Members have said “you can pick a door if you wanted but it will always turn on you.” It is not suggested however, to pick specific members of the addict’s life as a higher power.

A young gentleman who attends Alcoholics Anonymous in Monterey, who will be referred to as Mr. Blue, was introduced to codeine cough syrup at the age of three and had his first drink at five. Mr. Blue had broken so many bones by the time he was eleven that they had to put him on drip morphine for his pain. The amount of heavy duty painkillers being administered to this child made him impervious to the effects other drugs, such as marijuana, which he started smoking when he was 13 years old. Mr. Blue started drinking in high-school during his junior year, and at the end of the school year he was finishing a handle of liquor a day. Being an athlete made him develop a mentality of having to be the best at everything, including drinking. After high school, he joined the military where he and his army buddies perfected their art of drinking. Mr. Blue was working as riot control in Afghanistan. He knew that it was time to get his life in order and it would be best to get sober. After experiencing heavy combat situations, this person found marijuana and decided to smoke it. He was tested shortly after for drug usage and kicked out of the military three weeks after deciding to get sober. Having no place to go, he started to travel and wrote a lot while he was on the road.

Mr. Blue uses lyrics and spoken word poetry to deal with his addiction to alcohol and drugs. He goes on to mention, however, he would always write to escape from the stresses of growing up and his hard childhood. He started writing when his sister and he were separated when he was about 13. A lot of themes in pieces that he writes deal with female influences in his life and his emotions towards them. Mr. Blue recalls a time when he was writing a piece to a

woman he had once dated back home when he was in the military and his buddy saw what he was writing and asked if he could copy it for the woman he had back home. He obliged and soon enough everyone in the platoon was copying his poem for their women waiting for them back home. Some other influences on his pieces include dependency issues he has towards his mother. He remembers writing two different pieces for the same girl; he kept starting over because it wasn't right, and the final time he realized he was writing a song about his mother. He wanted to perform it for her but she died that same week. Despite not getting to perform it for her, he felt that he did homage to his mother through the song.

When performing his songs onstage, Mr. Blue was less likely to get drunk or drink at all. He has used the lyric and stage performance as an escape from his stress of the day-to-day life and as a way to cope with his PTSD. There are many challenges that he faces daily when dealing with being a veteran, integrating back into society, and dealing with his addiction to drugs and alcohol, a lot of which stemmed from combat stress. With writing lyrics and poems, along with attending meetings of AA and keeping busy working two jobs, Mr. Blue is combating his addiction and his substance use disorder. As he has grown older the writing has gotten more insightful and has more meaning behind it. He knows his writing has to do with his emotions and that when he experiences negative emotions he just needs to write them down in lyric form. Mr. Blue has shown music therapy, in the form of writing lyrics, helps him with his addiction to substances and alcohol (G).

During my research of music therapy outlets, I concluded improvisational drumming worked as a viable means of music therapy to cope with addiction. By combining aspects of AA and music therapy, such as improvisational drumming, patients can try and understand the root causes of their addiction. According to Michael Winkelman in the 2003 article "Drumming out

Drugs,” drumming increases relaxation, reduces anxiety, and even addresses self-centeredness issues and isolationism. Traveling through Pennsylvania, Virginia, Wisconsin and Missouri, Winkelman visited various locations where substance abuse counselors would incorporate certain drum rhythms into their recovery programs. Winkelman would participate in the exercises and interview both patients and counselors. Drumming allows the addicted musician to escape into the rhythm of their art while subconsciously addressing the underlying causes of their addiction. During his research, Winkelman visited a program in Wernersville, Pennsylvania where Mark Seaman of Earth Rhythms held drumming circles to expose addicts to the expressive art of drumming (Winkelman). The Earth Rhythms program “allows people to play spontaneously to lay the groundwork for nonverbal communication and asks participants to show how they feel through playing a rhythm on the drums” (Winkelman). When given drums the groups are given the chance to work together to create music and make music as a group. When stressful situations arise within the group the patients can express their feelings non-verbally and are able to resolve their issues by expressive and improvisational drumming. At the end of the program, Seaman incorporates the Alcoholics Anonymous 11<sup>th</sup> step meditation with a variety of percussion instruments to reinforce a visualization process to connect with a higher power (Winkelman). The 11<sup>th</sup> step of Alcoholic Anonymous reads, “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out” (Wilson).

Another individual, who will be referred to as Mr. Orange, uses drumming to express himself artistically and to stay level headed through difficult situations. Growing up in Panamá, Mr. Orange always played percussion instruments, from banging on anything in the streets that made sounds with his friend to playing drums in his school band. Moving to America in 1959 at



the age of 13, young Mr. Orange had to stop attending school for a short amount of time to get his family home in California established with his father for his sisters and mother. When attending school again he joined the high school jazz band at Belmont High school in L.A. Drumming had always come naturally to Mr. Orange; he chose to play the drums as a child because of the intricate rhythms that were prevalent in Latin music and exciting sounds produced when the head was struck.

In 1965, the United States landed in the Dominican Republic to squash the rise to power of a “communist dictatorship” in the Latin American nation (Republic). The conflict was overshadowed by the war in Vietnam but still required President Johnson to send 22,000 Marines to the country to calm heating tensions between communist and democratic ideologies (Republic). Mr. Orange was a part of the 92-Airborne Infantry division that landed in the Dominican Republic between April 1965 until September 1965. From the moment he landed, he was thrust into a dangerous situation with death and destruction all around him. Friends of his were being killed all around him in a Civil War that he had no opinion on. The only thing going through the mind of Mr. Orange was the training he was given to survive; it was the one thing he could remember to stay alive.

After the 3-year military tour, Mr. Orange experienced what the Summer of Love had to offer. Mr. Orange was exposed to the drug culture firsthand, trying everything but sticking to marijuana only to get addicted to the drug. Marijuana was the best way to deal with the shell shock he had come home with. At the time the medical field hadn't classified Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as an actual disorder, and soldiers were coming home from wars being told they had shell shock because of the high levels of violence on the field of battle. Needing to get back into music, Mr. Orange bought a full drum set for 150 dollars and started practicing along with

old R&B albums, learning new patterns and gaining insight on how to improvise along with pieces. This allowed Mr. Orange to go to night clubs where he would perform his drumming sets at talent shows, and he was offered a job to play a Holiday Inn circuit across the country. During his time on the road, his drug usage increased, and it made him showboat his abilities and overshadow the other members of his group. Marijuana made Mr. Orange feel the music but to the point where his playing drowned out the band that had given him an opportunity to perform.

After getting released from the band and then being put into prison for reasons unrelated to addiction issues, Mr. Orange was given another opportunity to be involved with Arts-in-Correction, a program offered to members who are a part of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Art-in-Corrections offers a variety of activities for inmates to participate in, including but not limited to writing, music, theatre, poetry painting and even drawing (Arts.ca.gov).

Mr. Orange was granted the prospect of playing drums with Jack Bauer and a small group of inmates who had been vetted for their expertise at the Soledad Department of Correction. Jack Bauer is a pianist and oversees the program at Soledad Department of Corrections. Mr. Bauer also helped Mr. Orange with getting performances as a drummer upon his release from prison. The group specialized in both traditional and Latin jazz stylings and they would get together weekly after Mr. Bauer would coordinate times each group could practice for a couple of hours. They were able deal with the situational stressors presented in prison daily. After practicing for three to four months the groups would go out to the prison yard and put on performances for the other inmates, guards and staff of the prison. During his time in prison Mr. Orange got over his addiction to marijuana due to continuous playing with Jack Bauer's groups and by growing out of the sensation it had once produced. By drumming in prison, Mr. Orange's outlook on his

situation change; it allowed him to accept his circumstances and try and better himself from it. He quit his drug addiction and was released from prison to become a staple member in the veteran community of Monterey County, pushing for affordable housing and access to resources for impoverished veterans. Mr. Orange describes the effect music has on his soul by stating, “Drumming soothes the beast within; it allows me to become comfortable and happy by freeing me from what is going on in my mind.” Music has allowed Mr. Orange to get over his addiction while in prison and continues to grant him the opportunities to give back to the community and contribute to society (H).

If an individual with a substance use disorder is willing to participate in music therapy treatment, they will get more out of it than if they were forced into the treatment. Everything is a matter of perspective when dealing with addiction recovery, and an individual can choose to let certain situations affect them either positively or negatively. The use of music therapy is critical due to its ability to engage clients, decrease stress and anxiety, and decrease impulsiveness (Dingle, Gleadhill and Baker). Australia has had a constant issue with substance abuse disorders. A National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing states that 6.2% of the nation’s male population struggles with alcohol addiction, with 2.2% struggling with drug addiction. Out of those numbers less than 30% try and seek help for their illness (Dingle, Gleadhill and Baker). Unless an individual is willing to change there is no use in attempting to make them. Treatment programs are based on participation from the individual who is trying to overcome addiction.

Genevieve Dingle, Libby Gleadhill, and Felicity Baker conducted a study to incorporate cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) with music therapy lyric analysis. For 15 days, five days a week for three weeks, 52 patients volunteered to be a part of the study. For the patients attendance was highly recommended, though they were not coerced into the treatment in anyway

(Dingle, Gleadhill, Baker). The music was used to compliment the CBT by giving patients new means for emotional outlet. Songs would be selected before each session and the group would analyze lyrics and connect them to what was happening in their life. Other means of interventions included parody song writing, improvisation, and finally just listening to the songs (Dingle Gleadhill, Baker).

Clients in the program ranged from the ages of 17 to 52 with the average age being 35 (Dingle, Gleadhill, Baker). The music selection within the group revolved around popular music, but it was also common to find classic greats such as “Imagine” by John Lennon and “Jailhouse Rock” by Elvis Presley. The group facilitators would supply some percussion instruments such as djembes and various auxiliary percussive instruments. The treatment sessions engaged participants in a new form of therapy that they were not used to before. Utilizing music allowed them to tap into certain areas of their subconscious that they were unable to access with conventional CBT. The results of the survey yielded promising results for the music therapy community. The participation and motivation among clients rose to nearly 70% over the 7-week trial (Dingle, Gleadhill, Baker). 83% of participants said they would try music therapy again and about 46% of the participants enjoyed being able to be a part of a group setting. 16% of those did not say why they wouldn’t return (Dingle, Gleadhill, Baker). A main issue the surveyors ran into while conducting the sessions were that the clients were unsure or unaware that music therapy was a viable means to address issues at hand. After the initial unease wore off and participants had their concerns addressed, more and more individuals with addiction came to participate (Dingle, Gleadhill, Baker).

To be able to perform with a group is talent that requires patience, understanding and the fortitude to take whatever comes at you. The performer needs to be able to let things go, to adapt

to whatever changes come. This is hard when a person is struggling with a substance use disorder; a major set comes with anxiety, so anger and stress are easily generated. Little bumps in the practice or planning can seem like major hurdles, hurdles that will give the addict a reason to use substances to unwind and relax. If these stressful situations warrant these actions, the unhealthy behavior will become a pattern that will eventually lead to more stress and unpleasant situations. Social Distortion front man Mike Ness has gone through multiple hardships such as serving jail time and experiencing addictions with both drugs and alcohol. As a result, he went on two separate hiatuses with Social Distortion (Horn, 2016). Ness reconciled differences with the band after he regained control of his life and kicked his addictions. Through this struggle and pain Ness managed to create seven critically-acclaimed studio albums (Horn, 2016).

Inspired by classics such as the Sex Pistols, The Clash and The Rolling Stones, Social Distortion emerged onto the punk rock scene in 1978 and gained fast popularity. The punk rock scene was dominated by sex, drugs and rock and roll: fast music for a fast lifestyle. This lifestyle led Ness to hit his “rock bottom,” or lowest point of life, at the age of 23: I attributed hitting bottom a lot to being young; when I hit rock bottom I was 23. And, I attribute hitting bottom so young because of a painful childhood. So, to live a painful life as an adult didn't make sense to me. I had already been through alcoholism and divorce and foster homes and welfare workers, and all that as a kid. I didn't want to go through all of that as an adult. (Horn, 2016) Now 52 years old, Ness lives for making music with his band and relaxing on his large piece of land with his family (Horn, 2016).

Over the course of his career Mike Ness has created song that have been autobiographical representations of his life such as “Story of My Life,” the 1990 hit off Social Distortion’s self-titled album, in which he writes: “Good times come and good times go, I only wish the good

times would last a little longer. I think about the good times we had and why they had to end.”

There are many interpretations to the closing verses of the song, however I believe it to be relating to addiction and how Ness knew he wanted to live a sober life. An addict during recovery, Ness wishes he could juggle his vice with everyday life. Ness uses his music to tell the truth to his audience and let listeners know he is trying to change, even if it will be difficult along the way.

While doing my research in the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous I encountered a young woman, who will be referred to as Ms. Yellow, who has been using music production to combat her addictions. Writing down her experience and emotions as a young teen, Ms. Yellow tried to play piano, but she could never keep up with the amount of practice necessary. Ms. Yellow was too afraid to use drugs when she young, so she would overeat then. She then started drinking when she was 16 years old. When entering college, she would teach herself how to play the piano by using the practice rooms at the music building. She realized she was an auditory listener and started to listen to melodies by ear so she could teach herself. Ms. Yellow also started to drink more alcohol in college when her stepfather would belittle her about her weight publicly. These actions by her stepfather, with little intervention by her mother, drove her to contemplate suicide. The healthy escape for Ms. Yellow was singing and writing songs; however her drinking hindered her ability to write meaningful pieces. Ms. Yellow hit rock bottom when she was kicked out of school for her drinking, and she couldn't turn to her home because of the fear of her stepfather. She moved in with a friend who was also a member of AA and as an agreement to live with her she had to attend meetings with her. Whenever she feels sad, angry, hurt, or afraid she writes songs, and she uses her addiction as a main source of material for music. She wrote a song called “Black Rose” which deals with the issues she dealt with during her addiction to

alcohol. The song is featured on an album she is producing with the help of local producer and teacher Stu Hayden.

Hayden has been teaching Ms. Yellow guitar for the past three years while living sober himself for 24 years. He understands the frustrations an addict deals with and can speak to Ms. Yellow on relatable terms. There are no judgements with Hayden; when there is something she doesn't understand as a concept Hayden explains it in an alternative way. Hayden has been mixing and editing Ms. Yellow's album and doesn't impose his opinions; rather he suggests what he thinks would improve the sound, which allows Ms. Yellow to feel like an equal. The album, *Acoustic Pistol*, deals with loss, love, and grief but has allowed her to deal with her struggles over the past 10 years of her life. She doesn't have closure with her family, but by living a sober life, Ms. Yellow immerses herself in artistic creation and practicing with other individuals. Ms. Yellow doesn't know what tomorrow has in store, but she realizes that if she is able to write down her thoughts and feelings to address a situation she can turn them into songs that allow her to cope with the emotions (V).

There are many individuals who struggle with addiction worldwide, myself included. I have been sober from alcohol since September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, but I have been struggling with drinking since 2013. I have gone through four different higher powers: family, the universe, even my cat, finally reaching music after everything else didn't work. I fell back into the tight grasp of addiction until September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016, waking up in jail for the last time. That day I gave up all control of my life to music and decided to commit myself to my recovery. Music has allowed me to play my emotions on the keyboard. For example, if I am angry, I will usually play a minor chord progression with a lot of extended arpeggios. This improvisation allows me to release my

anger or sadness in a healthy and constructive way. When I lost my job I turned to listening to music to alleviate my stress rather than going to the bottle.

While preparing for my capstone I had to put together a small performance to showcase my abilities and talents I have learned. Putting together a small band has been rewarding but very stressful and has been a strain on my mental state. It has made me more capable of adapting to change and allowed me to let things go in situations I cannot control. During the process, certain members who agreed to show up to practice would bail at the last minute with no reason. There was a member who overbooked himself and needed to drop out two weeks before the performance, rather than freaking out and letting it affect me, I called Colin St. John who immediately agreed to help me. Being involved with this group has allowed me to react to situations with a different approach. Music therapy should complement another program of recovery, but it is useful to combat the mental effects addiction causes. Getting involved with a licensed music therapist, who can create a plan for your treatment is recommended.

During this paper, I have shown how certain aspects of music therapy are beneficial in combating substance addiction. Over the course of this paper the reader has examined how certain forms of music therapy, such as lyric writing, song analysis, group performance and improvisational drumming, impact the effects of stress and anxiety caused by addiction. Music therapy is a viable source for those who deal with their substance use recovery. Starting with professionals in the therapy field who utilized music to assist with soldiers returning home with PTSD and then evolving to be used for different facets of health recovery, music therapy has been utilized in substance abuse recovery methods for over 40 years. From the people I've spoken to, who have ranged from professors, Army veterans, hotel administrators and students,



one thing remains prevalent. Every individual seems to use a music method to express the emotions they find difficult expressing through conventional means of communication.

The road to recovery takes perseverance and determination that cannot be desultory. Two main components are self-honesty and self-determination; from my experience as a musician, those are also two important components. Unless a musician practices daily there will be no progress in their talents; they must be honest with themselves and practice when they say they will. When faced with addiction a musician can spiral out of control due to the party lifestyle most musicians live. Dedicated musicians and humans desperate for change, like Eric Clapton and Mike Ness, have gone to the lowest points in their lives, only to come out of addiction more motivated and with a repertoire of new music based on their struggles in life. Music is a getaway that will release some of the strongest emotions out of people; a man will listen to a song and cry because of the message the lyrics convey. There is a connecting force that comes from music that makes everyone, regardless of orientation, have the same background. Music allows people around the world who have never met to feel connected because they have both performed the same piece of music. Music therapy as a form of addiction recovery evokes raw emotion through word or improvisational instrumentals, and it all has a powerful message.

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