

1-5-2015

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Hiller, James, "Aesthetic Foundations of Music Therapy: Music and Emotion" (2015). *Music Faculty Publications*. 13.
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CHAPTER 3

Aesthetic Foundations of Music Therapy: Music and Emotion

James Hiller

The subject of aesthetic experience as it relates to music embodies a vast and fascinating territory of philosophical thought. Ancient philosophers to modern musicologists have engaged in scholarly debate over the topic from many perspectives (Davies, 2010; Kivy, 1989). Not surprisingly, a similar intrigue surrounds questions regarding the *clinical* value of aesthetic aspects of music and of music making for health, healing, and human development (Aigen, 1995, 2007).

Numerous links between aesthetic experience and therapeutic processes are found in the music therapy literature. In fact, volumes could be filled with theories and philosophical arguments for and against the meaning and/or meaningfulness of aesthetic experiences in healing, such as those found in music therapy treatment processes. However, in this chapter, I delimit our exploration to an assortment of perspectives that address, arguably, one of the most clinically relevant aspects of the aesthetic music experience: that of emotion and its expression in or through music (Ee-

rola & Vuoskoski, 2013). More specifically, I focus on a client's active music-making processes wherein emotions might be expressed *in* or *through* music rather than being elicited *by* music. I consider sources of emotion and where emotions might be located within music-making processes. And finally I explore theories that variously explain how musical expressions of emotions might occur. These theories provide guidance for the music therapist who wishes to understand and respond to the potential emotional meanings of a client's music making. In fact, to gain insights about a client's emotional world via music making is a unique and clinically powerful facet of music therapy.

Expression of Emotion

Emotional Expression and Music Therapy

Aigen (2005) notes that, regardless of the nature of specific clinical goals in music therapy, emotion is always a relevant con-

sideration in treatment. Before examining how a client might express emotions through music, we must consider how such emotional expressions might be clinically beneficial within a therapy process. What does it mean to the client, the therapist, and/or the therapeutic process when we say that a client expresses emotion while making music?

The notion of catharsis, or “release of difficult, repressed, or unconscious feelings,” is found frequently in the music therapy literature when clinical focus is on emotion, particularly with regard to the symbolic nature of a client’s expressive music making (Aigen, 2007, p. 115). But whereas cathartic release of emotional energies may be powerful experiences for a client, such experiences have been considered to be only temporarily beneficial toward healing if not linked to cognitions about the emotion expressed (Yalom, 2005). Nonetheless, such experiences undeniably take place, and it behooves a therapist to recognize their occurrence and understand the clinical implications and potentials for the treatment process.

In Priestley’s (1994) analytical music therapy (AMT), an improvisational approach to music psychotherapy, a client’s musical expressions are often recorded. The recordings are then reviewed by client and therapist and the material verbally processed. In assessment, this process aids in understanding the client’s emotional well-being, whereas in treatment it helps a client to gain insight about, and work through, conscious and unconscious issues and related emotions. In AMT, the client’s *process* while musically engaged is primary. In music psychotherapy there are times when a client may be unaware of, or uncertain about, emotions attached to specific events or relationships, and music making provides an avenue for identifying these. In considering a client’s process of improvisational music making, I note that a client “may hear evidence in the music . . . that an emotion is somehow being expressed”

(Hiller, 2011, p. 122) and thereby gain clarity about it.

Bruscia (1987) highlights the usefulness of analyzing a client’s improvised emotional expressions for assessment and treatment via the Improvisation Assessment Profiles (IAPs). Here, the *product* of the client’s music making may take precedence in analysis and interpretation of meanings. Accordingly, the various musical elements, as played and combined by a client, are considered projections of aspects of personality and emotion.

In short, a client’s music making may serve as a temporary release of emotional energy (catharsis), as a representation of the client’s inner emotional world, or as a reflection of the way he or she expresses aspects of personality and emotional experiences. Each of these perspectives may benefit client and therapist toward gaining clarity about, and addressing, the client’s emotional expressions in the musically based clinical situation.

Emotional Expression and Music Making

Throughout history, musicologists have declared that emotions may be found in, or expressed through, music (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010). Music therapists know that there is a relationship between emotions and music making, for we sometimes hear emotion manifested in a client’s music or see emotion being expressed through a client’s music-related actions. We may even feel a client’s emotions as they are manifested in his or her music through experiences of transference, projective identification, and countertransference (Bruscia, 1998b). But how do internal human experiences such as emotions find their way into music? Where does the emotion come from, and how does it become apparent in music or a music-making process?

Musicologists most often have focused on the relationship between emotions and music from a listener’s perspective; that is,

they have tried to determine how it is that a music listener may be moved to experience emotion or recognize it in the music heard (Eerola & Vuoskoski, 2013). In music therapy, however, a client's experience is not just as a listener who may be moved by a therapist's music or a recording; the client is often an agent in the creation of meaningful musical sounds and interactions with a therapist and others through playing, singing, and composing. This means that emotions ascribed to music in the clinical situation may sometimes belong to the client him- or herself. It also means that the expression of emotion in the music is, in some way, of the client's doing; that is to say, an emotion is expressed, revealed, or manifested through the client's actions while making music. This seems an astounding actuality, given the severity of challenges faced by many clients in music therapy. Reviewing how musicologists have sought to explain these phenomena is our present endeavor.

A few researchers have examined how skilled performers imbue composed music with a given emotion for a musically trained audience to hear and recognize (Behrens & Green, 1993; Juslin, 2001; Juslin & Timmers, 2010). Yet music therapy clients, who are generally a musically untrained group, repeatedly exhibit a similar ability to express emotion within musical processes of re-creating, improvising, and composing. Before reviewing some select theories, let us examine how the concepts of emotion and expression might be defined and consider the notions of locations and sources of emotion in music.

Emotions and Emotion-Related Terms

What are emotions, and what do we mean when we say that one *expresses* them in music? Providing a definitive description of just what emotions are is an ongoing human enterprise. In fact, although emotion has been of philosophical and psychological interest throughout recorded time, it remains

heavily researched across many fields of investigation, including aesthetics and the area of study known as the *affective sciences* (Lewis, Haviland-Jones, & Barnett, 2008). Let us begin our inquiry with definitions of a few emotion-related terms from Juslin and Sloboda's (2010) *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, and Applications* and Robinson's (2005) *Deeper Than Reason*.

Affect is an overarching term for all observable, emotion-related experiences. The term is meant generally to refer to experiences of emotion, but not as a reference to any specific emotion or emotional state. *Emotion*, on the other hand, refers to "a quite brief but intense affective reaction" (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010, p. 10) that is directed toward a specific object and that includes both physiological and cognitive components. An emotion may endure for a brief period of minutes or for hours and typically elicits an action response of some sort that might be expressed via facial appearance, bodily movements, and/or vocalizations. Action responses elicited by an emotion may be expressed intentionally and therefore consciously, or be manifested unintentionally and therefore unconsciously. Robinson (2005) stresses that emotions or emotional responses are processes that occur over time and stem from human interactions with the environment, with *environment* often meaning an interpersonal interaction. In that emotions are internal processes that occur over time, it seems that they possess an experiential or phenomenal flow that one may subsequently comprehend and recall.

A *feeling* is defined as "the subjective experience of an emotion or mood" (Juslin & Sloboda, 2010, p. 10), or the way our bodies and minds undergo an emotion. Feelings entail experiences of energy related to an emotion and movement related to that energy. The *feelingful* aspect of an emotional experience is of particular interest for investigating expressions through music, for it is a process that occurs over time with variations in flow and form, similar to the

way that music unfolds. The feelingful aspects of emotions have been the basis from which many theorists have symbolically allied emotions and music.

Expression

Juslin and Timmers (2010) begin their chapter, "Expression and Communication of Emotion in Music Performance," by stating, "There is still no universally accepted definition of the concept of *expression*" (p. 454, emphasis original). We nonetheless require at least a working definition. *The New Oxford American Dictionary* (Jewell & Abate, 2001) defines expression as "the process of making known one's thoughts or feelings" (p. 600). Robinson (2005) believes that the "core notion of expression in the arts is derived from Romantic artists—primarily poets, composers, and painters—who thought of themselves as expressing their feelings and emotions in the artworks that they produced" (p. 232). Robinson further holds to the Romantic view that expression in the arts is *about* emotions, or more specifically, about experiences of emotional processes. She invokes Kant's and Hegel's support for the idea that artists, through their art, demonstrate a specialized sort of knowledge and insight about emotions and, more importantly, the ability to uniquely convey emotions through their particular media (Robinson, 2005, pp. 232–233). Although arguably not *artists* per se, clients in music therapy are nonetheless human agents working in and through an artistic medium and are therefore capable, on some level, of gaining access to, recognizing, comprehending, and expressing emotional material through interactions with the medium—that is, the musical elements.

Locations and Sources of Emotion in Music

The importance of location of emotion in music making should become evident as the reader reflects on each of the following

questions: Can emotion be found in a client's musical products (songs or pieces), or is it found in the music-making processes that the client undergoes while playing, singing, or improvising? Can we recognize emotion in a client's physical actions while he or she makes music, or do we, rather, recognize emotion in the musical sounds thus produced? Does a client consciously express emotions in/through music, or is it the case that the way the client's music sounds reveals properties of emotions that are not necessarily in the client's conscious awareness? Can emotion be heard when listening to a recording of client-generated music rather than in a live rendering? Does a client need to feel an emotion while playing/singing in order for expression of that emotion to occur in the music? Interestingly, given the range of theorizing we encounter below, the answer to any of these questions can be *yes*. To summarize: Emotions may be found in a variety of locations during music engagement, including, but not limited to, musical products and processes, in bodily actions or in sounds produced through them, in or outside of a client's consciousness, in recordings, and/or in the moment of feeling an emotion or after a client's emotional experience has passed (i.e., from a memory of the experience).

From which source(s) of knowledge and/or experience might a client draw when expressing emotion through music? It seems that a client must first have some sense of the nature of emotions—for example, the different ways that emotions feel internally as they occur, or typical responses that people enact vocally, verbally, motorically, or via facial affect while feeling particular emotions. A client must also have experiences with musical examples that are related to emotions in some way. These subjective experiences, it seems, may accumulate simply through living in a world where music and emotions both exist (Robinson, 2005). Hence, it is apparent that a key source for emotional expression in clinical music mak-

ing is the confluence of a client's subjective understanding of how emotions feel, physical responses to emotions of oneself or others, and musical sounds that are related in some way to emotional experiences (Hiller, 2011).

The concepts presented below are limited to a class of theories that rely on symbolism or representational thought and include somatic, expressive code, contour, expression, and gesture theories. An important caveat is that none of the theories is more right or wrong than any other, but each provides potentially useful concepts that a music therapist may draw upon toward understanding a client's emotional-musical processes and products.

Symbolic Theories of Emotion and Music

Symbolism is "the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities" (Jewell & Abate, 2001, p. 1720). A symbol is the *thing* that represents something else. To *represent* is to "depict (a particular subject) in a picture or other work of art" (Jewell & Abate, p. 1445, parentheses in original). Many musicologists believe that music can indeed symbolize something about human emotions (Cumming, 2001; Robinson, 2005). Yet the processes of representation, as explained in the following theories, may occur in a variety of ways.

Somatic Theory: Music and Feelings

Music philosophers refer frequently to the writings of Hanslick (1885/1974) and Langer (1942) as foundational in addressing the symbolic relationship between music and emotions (Robinson, 2005). These authors focus on *felt* experiences of emotion, that is, the experience of changes internal to the human body. These may be termed *somatic* theories of emotion in music, referencing the Greek word *soma* (body). This frame of reference is akin to William James's (cited

in Robinson, 2005, pp. 28–29) theoretical view of emotion as an inner, physiological moving or stirring. Music, it is theorized, resembles "the rhythm and pattern of [emotions'] rise and decline and intertwining" (Langer, 1942, p. 238). Moreover, Langer's belief, like Hanslick's, is that there exists a structural likeness between the way music unfolds over time and the way emotions are experienced internally. An oft-quoted statement by Langer helps to clarify this stance:

There are certain aspects of the so-called "inner life"—physical or mental—which have formal properties similar to those of music—patterns of motion and rest, of tension and release, of agreement and disagreement, preparation, fulfillment, excitation, sudden change, etc. (1942, p. 228)

Hence, Langer believes that music sounds to us the way that emotions feel to us. In other words, our experience of a particular configuration of musical sounds may be so similar to our inner experience of feelings that the music may seem to us to possess an emotional character. In this regard, we may infer that emotion is located in the musical configurations that a client creates while making music.

Based on somatic theory, then, a client may construct musical representations of his or her emotions by using the musical elements in ways that imitate the feelings that are experienced internally; that is, inside the body. The client may intentionally use tempo, dynamics, and phrasing, for instance, to symbolize the flow of emotional energy experienced. As noted earlier, such configurations may also be manifested in music unintentionally and later be recognized by a therapist or the client as representative of particular emotions (Priestley, 1994). Further, a therapist may hear in the client's configurations certain sound structures that are reminiscent of the therapist's own experiences of emotional energy, and he or she may thereby interpret that the music represents the client's emotions.

With such awareness, the therapist may respond in a way that serves to validate and/or further explore the client's emotional materials, musically and otherwise.

**Expressive Code Theory:
Music, Emotions, and Expressive
Vocal Inflections**

Music psychologist Juslin (2001) and his collaborators aim to identify particular manipulation techniques (i.e., articulations and inflections) that performers use in communicating emotion to an audience via composed pieces. These researchers seek to explain a performer's *emotional communication* with an audience by comparing instrumental performance to the expressive nuances of human emotional vocal expression (Juslin & Timmers, 2010, pp. 470–471). A performer manipulates the musical elements in various ways by inflecting the music similarly to the way an emotion-laden verbal statement might be uttered. For example, a performer's use of *diminuendo* at the end of a particular phrase may mirror the way a person might vocally inflect a verbal statement of deep disappointment, as if concluding a statement with a sigh. Similarly, a performer may *clip* certain notes of a melodic phrase via staccato articulations, just as a person might vocally articulate an utterance in an almost stuttering manner while experiencing profound shock or dismay. The performer's manipulations are then to be comprehended by an audience, but not necessarily felt by those listeners. Accordingly, we may identify emotion as being located in the nuances of musical inflection rather than in the composed structures, in the composer or performer him- or herself, or in the listener. In other words, neither the composer nor the performer is actually feeling the emotion articulated in the musical inflections. Rather, the emotion is located in the inflection, which is drawn from knowledge of vocal emotional expressions.

Juslin and his colleagues refer to a performer's manipulations as the *expressive code* or acoustic cues (Gabrielsson & Juslin, 2003; Juslin, 2001). This particular research has focused on the following five *basic emotions* noted as those most often studied: tenderness, happiness, sadness, fear, and anger (Juslin, 2001). The researchers hypothesize that the effectiveness of the performer's expressive code is based on listeners' sharing of that same communicative code. The researchers further argue that the genesis of the code is in *innate brain programs* common in human vocal expression across cultures (p. 321). The acoustic cues (expressive code) include timbre, tone attacks, tone decays, intonation, articulation, vibrato, timing, tempo, sound levels, and pauses (Juslin & Timmers, 2010, p. 462). Coutinho and Dikken (2013) also include characteristics of sharpness/roughness as factors related to timbre. By way of example, Juslin and Timmers note that

sadness expressions are associated with slow tempo, low sound level, legato articulation, small articulation variability, slow tone attacks, and soft timbre, whereas *happiness* expressions are associated with fast tempo, high sound level, staccato articulation, large articulation variability, fast tone attacks, and bright timbre. (pp. 462–463, emphasis in original)

According to *expressive code theory*, a client and therapist share a communicative code based on knowledge of the ways that emotionally charged verbal/vocal inflections sound. Thus, a client may emotionally inflect aspects of performed or improvised music in ways related to his or her experiences of vocal expressions. This seems the case because, as human beings, clients experience nearly constant, lifelong exposure to expressive inflections in the verbalizations/vocalizations of others and, in many cases, may themselves have learned to use such inflections. Presumably, these experiences of enculturation occur to a point

where an individual's application of verbal/vocal inflections becomes a natural part of general sound-based communication.

Contour Theory: Music and Emotion Resemblances

Davies (2010) and Kivy (1989) espouse variations of a theory that the emotional expressiveness of music involves the relationship between a work's "dynamic structures and behaviors or movements that, in humans, present emotion characteristics" (Davies, p. 31). The idea here is that the dynamic properties (e.g., movement in rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamic changes) found in renderings of composed music represent human behaviors and *comportments* (i.e., how one carries oneself) that are equated with expressions of human emotions. Or, said yet another way, dynamic (i.e., varying, changing) structures in music *sound like* what various emotion-based comportments of human beings *look like*. According to contour theory, therefore, emotion resides in the resemblances between characteristics of a piece of music and an observable behavioral appearance that generally reveals human emotion. Hence, the way a person's physical body posture and movement characteristics appear when grumpy or anxious are represented through the way music sounds. Importantly, contour theory stresses that music does not express emotion (because music is not a live, sentient being who can express emotion), but that music is *expressive of* emotion (Kivy, 1989).

Robinson (2005) wittily refers to contour theory as the *doggy theory* (p. 300), due to the fact that both Kivy and Davies use as examples the sad-appearing faces of St. Bernard and basset hound dogs. For although people may find these dogs' faces sad looking, it is not necessarily the case that the animals actually feel the way that their faces appear; the dogs are not sad, they just look that way. Yet, Kivy (1989) tells us, we humans have a tendency to *animate*

things that we perceive (p. 59). With regard to music, then, contour theory holds that music may sound sad to a listener because of the way the elements work together, but the perceived sadness is simply a *trait* of the given music; the music itself is not expressing emotion, but rather it is *expressive of* emotion. The music is not sad—it is not in a state of sadness—it simply sounds that way, and therefore we may hear sadness in music.

Given the tenets of contour theory, it seems that a music therapy client may access memories of observing postures and/or comportments of others that reflect certain emotions to inform how to depict those emotions via singing and/or playing. For example, a client, drawing from the image of a highly anxious person—pacing, leaning forward with tense muscles, and wringing hands—may drum in a highly contained and intense manner to express the experience of anxiety, playing a constant and quick barrage of subdivisions. Or, referring to observations of others' depressed countenances—slumped shoulders, bowed head, and slow movements—a client may express such feelings on a xylophone via downward melodic motion, soft volume, and a series of slow *thuds* on the bars, rather than using the rebounded energy of the mallet head as used in a light, energetic stroke. Through such representations a therapist may recognize and respond to the emotional characteristics of a client's music making.

Expression Theory: Music and Immediately Occurring Emotions

Expression theory holds that emotions expressed in music belong to the composer or performer of a musical work, and that these emotions are drawn from the composer or performer's own immediate experiences of emotion during creation or re-creation of music (Davies, 1994, pp. 170–173). Robin-

T
son (2005), a strong advocate of expression theory, notes that expression of emotions via the arts shares the same processes as emotional expression in typical daily life. She believes that an individual's particular behaviors, enacted in response to an emotional experience, are indicative or evidence of that emotion. An observer may thus infer from an individual's actions the emotion from which those actions have their genesis (p. 258). For example, an individual's throaty, growling vocalizations may be considered reliable evidence of the immediate presence of anger or frustration. That is, when a person hears another person growling, he or she may infer that the person is angry or frustrated for some reason. Regarding music, therefore, a composer or performer's emotions should be recognizable from listening to their musical expressions.

Significant to the usefulness of expression theory is Robinson's (2005) acceptance of the idea of a *persona*, or imaginary person, to whom a music listener may attribute emotions heard in music, rather than attributing them to the performer of the work (p. 259). For example, we may not believe that a performer who is playing a piece on stage is, in that moment, *feeling* a particular emotion and that the emotion is revealed in the music. We may more likely accept the notion that an emotion heard in the music belongs to an imagined persona—someone who *could be* feeling that emotion right then. So, a performer may imagine the emotion that another person could be feeling and transmit that emotion through the music for the audience to hear. Or, a listener may infer emotional meanings from the music heard to an imagined persona rather than to the performer on stage or to the composer.

While making music, according to expression theory, a client may consciously transmit his or her own emotion or that of an imagined persona onto instruments, resulting in sounds that are artifacts of emotion-driven actions. The client does

this by choosing and articulating musical elements believed to most closely correspond to nonmusical emotional behaviors (Robinson, 2005, pp. 266–267). In clinical improvisation, for instance, clients are sometimes asked to improvise while in the role of a person with whom they are in conflict or from whom they need to gain understanding of that person's particular perspective—either instance necessarily includes emotional material. The client thus sounds the emotions of the imagined other through interactions with the instruments.

A music therapist's source for comprehending the client's expression is past experiences of witnessing others expressing emotion in various ways. The music therapist thus may hear *evidence* in the client's music that an emotion is being expressed and may attribute the emotion to the client or to a persona of the client's imagining.

Gesture Theory: Music and Communicative Gestures

Communicative gestures have been described as “any energetic shaping through time that may be interpreted as significant” (Hatten, 2006, p. 1), and they function when an interpreter recognizes the communicative intent of a given gesture. Imagine what may be communicated through a rapidly shaken fist or the slow reaching out of an open hand. These are simple examples of communicative gestures, each with a particular “envelope” or flow of energy from the beginning to the end of the gesture. In other words, each gesture has a rhythmic shape that, if repeated, reveals a recognizable pattern. Emotions, too, possess a flow of energy from the beginning of the emotional experience to the end. Hatten holds that the information conveyed through a gesture is often “affectively loaded” (p. 1); that is to say, it has to do with the expression of emotion. A communicative gesture, then, is a brief (but repeatable) movement scheme, irreducible to its constitutive parts without losing its meaning, and born of a

single human impulse (Lidov, 1987, p. 77). Lidov hypothesizes the existence of a limited quantity of distinct gestures that humans consistently correlate with particular emotional messages, thereby making it possible for others to interpret our gestures.

In linking perception of music with gesture, Lidov (1987) hypothesizes that a listener's perception of the shape or pattern of grouped musical sounds is compatible with perception of the total rhythmic profile of particular gestures. He therefore argues for the existence of a link between (1) the *energy envelope* of an emotion, (2) the *rhythmic shape* of a bodily gesture that reveals the emotion, and (3) the *sound shape* of a musical/rhythmic expression (pp. 28-29). In other words, when a client seeks to express emotion musically, he or she may draw from a repertoire of communicative gestures and apply a gesture in the process of interacting with an instrument. The resulting sounds, then, reveal the manifestation of the emotion. The presence of the emotion thus becomes available for a therapist to hear and interpret or for the client to perceive and comprehend. For example, imagine a crowd of people rhythmically punching at the air as a collective expression of rage against an oppressor. A client may draw from the same sort of motion to beat on a drum toward expressing anger in/through music making. The resulting drum sounds are considered congruous with the emotion attached to the gesture used.

Cumming (2001) points out the rhythmically embodied nature of musical gestures, in contrast to the actuality of written musical notes, melodies, and/or phrases. Although an emotion may be inferred from a specific composed musical passage, it is the performer/client, drawing from a repertoire of emotions and bodily movement experiences (i.e., affectively loaded gestures), who uniquely inflects the music through particular uses of communicative gestures. This may explain why the inflection of, for instance, Yo Yo Ma's musical phrasing of a particularly wrenching pas-

sage sounds different from that of other players; his emotional experience is different, as is the energy envelope of how he might apply gesture in communicating his emotion. Thus, a client's sounding of a musical pattern has to do, in large measure, with how the rhythmic aspects are enacted, meaning the unique energetic shaping of a musical action (pp. 136-137). This connection is the case due to the inextricable link between rhythm and bodily movement and gestures, which contain emotional information (Hatten, 2006; Seivers, Polansky, Casey, & Wheatley, 2013).

Emotion, according to gesture theory, is located in the particular energetic flow of the physical actions used when making music, either with instruments or vocally. While interacting musically or listening to a client's music making, a music therapist may conceptualize the client's musical sounds as related to expressive movement schemes (i.e., gestures). The therapist may thus witness and interpret the potential affective meanings contained in the client's sounds toward understanding the emotional nature of the musical expressions.

Conclusions

It is not an exaggeration to say that belief in the emotionally expressive potential of music is thousands of years old. Modern theorizing on the subject has brought us numerous ways of understanding how human emotions may be rendered and communicated through musical sounds. It seems noteworthy that many musicological theories relating emotion with musical expression rely on the potential of music to function as a symbolic form of human expression. Somatic theories allow us to relate the inner unfolding of emotional energies with the flow of musical and rhythmic expressions. In expressive code theory, we might relate musical expressions to the way verbal or vocal inflections of emotions commonly occur, thus providing a point of in-

ference regarding an individual's emotions. Contour theory, on the other hand, stresses that music can be expressive of emotion through its resemblance to the way humans carry themselves physically while feeling particular emotions. The belief that emotion is expressed during the moments of the creative process—for instance, of instrumental improvising—is the foundation of expression theory. The sounds created are thus considered specialized representations of the expresser's immediate emotional state. And lastly, gesture theory links the energetic envelope of particular physical gestures that humans use to express emotion with their application in producing musical sounds. For instance, using certain movement schemes that mimic emotional communicative gestures in order to sound instruments leads to potential communication of emotion through the music produced.

Whereas musicologists seek answers to questions of how human emotions are expressed through music largely as a scholarly pursuit, music therapists apply such theorizing to enhance a client's healing, growth, and development. Music therapists are indeed uniquely positioned to apply concepts from theories of music and emotion to more deeply understand and bring benefit to humans in their change processes. This benefit is due to the intimate roles that both music and music therapists play within the therapeutic relationship. Yet, it is important to understand that none of the theories presented herein is more or less true than any other, but that each has potential utility for comprehending how and when a client expresses—makes known—aspects of his or her emotional world through music making. By thinking in an integral fashion and thereby drawing from the most clinically useful theoretical stance in a given therapy situation, music therapists gain access to a great depth and breadth of knowledge about clients' emotions toward understanding and assisting in the change process (Bruscia, 2014).

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