

## THE HEALING POWER OF MUSIC: AN OVERVIEW AND RESOURCES GUIDE FOR COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE MODALITIES

*by Sara Anne Hook*



n my career, I have been fortunate to be able to move from being a librarian, to Associate Dean for a major university campus and now to my current position as Professor and Associate Dean for a brand new school, the Indiana University School of Informatics at Indianapolis. Yet I also have a desire to serve the community as well as an interest in music that has spanned nearly 40 years of participation in bands and orchestras. For many months, I questioned how I could use music to serve in more personal fashion than as a member of a larger group. Fortunately, while browsing in a music store, I discovered *The Healing Musician* by Stella Benson [1], which describes the emerging field of therapeutic or “healing” music. Around the same time, I noticed an ad in *Early Music America* for the Music for Healing and Transition Program (MHTP). [2]

Currently, I am in the process of becoming a Certified Music Practitioner through MHTP. At the end of my training, I will be prepared to provide healing music one-on-one at the bedside for patients in hospitals, hospices and assisted living facilities. Therapeutic or healing music is one of many areas within the rapidly growing field of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). An article on healing music thus is an excellent introduction to CAM and will also alert librarians to the kinds of resources available for practitioners of CAM, their patients and the general public.

### WHAT IS THERAPEUTIC OR HEALING MUSIC?

It is important to differentiate therapeutic or “healing” music from music therapy and between “music practitioners” and music therapists. The field of music therapy has existed for many years. Music therapists are trained through undergraduate and graduate degree programs from colleges and universities such as Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne, St. Mary-of-the-Woods College and the University of Evansville. The music practitioner program is quite new, having been founded in the early 1990s. It is offered through the national organization called Music for Healing and Transition (MHTP), which received its

nonprofit status in 1995. A music therapist engages clients in therapeutic activity with music as the tool and with specific care plans, goals and treatment outcomes. [3] On the other hand, “a music practitioner uses music itself as the therapy without soliciting verbal or physical feedback or interaction with the patient” – in other words, the patient does not have to do anything but receive the music. [3] It is also important to note that healing music is not meant to be entertainment or a performance; the music is generally provided in the patient’s room with only one or possibly two musicians rather than a band or orchestra giving a concert in a lobby or recreation room filled with people.

For the music practitioner, the emphasis is on “healing” rather than “curing” and speaks to the patient’s mental, emotional and spiritual needs as well as physical needs. MHTP defines healing as “the restoration, realization, and/or maintenance of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wholeness” and does not claim that illness will be erased through music, but only that music is useful in a healing environment. [2] There are variations on the music practitioner theme, including harp practitioners, who are graduates of the International Harp Therapy Program [4], music thanatologists, who work primarily with the dying and who have completed the program offered by the Chalice of Repose Project [5], and a variety of sound healers who may use non-melodic sound such as toning, chanting, drones, bells or tuning forks. There are other programs available, including an online course, but those mentioned above are the oldest and most well-known. I chose MHTP because I play Baroque (one-keyed, wooden) flute and psaltery as well as levered folk harp, and I also wanted to prepare myself for as diverse a patient population as possible. It is important to note that there is a substantial body of research that supports the impact that healing music has on patients and reputable training programs will always be significantly grounded by this research.

### HOW DO YOU BECOME A CERTIFIED MUSIC PRACTITIONER?

The Certified Music Practitioner program through MHTP takes at least a year to complete. Five weekend

modules are required, amounting to 80 hours of in-class time. These modules cover repertoire development, injury prevention, music as language, paradigms of healing, how music heals, etiquette, the profession of music practitioner, alterations in health and care of the dying. Modules include lecture and discussion as well as the opportunity to work with our instruments. Students in the modules I have taken have played harp as well as mountain dulcimer, hammered dulcimer, autoharp, Native American flute, modern flute, guitar, violin and viola. Module 5 also includes a clinical practicum where students will be oriented to work in a health care facility and will sing or play for patients at the hospital under the supervision of the instructor. These modules are offered in various sites around the country, with Cleveland as the location in the Midwest. Fortunately, each student has a mentor who monitors progress, provides encouragement and offers suggestions.

Students in MHTP also write ten book reviews from a list of required readings, prepare a 90-minute list of repertoire, provide a recording of 30 minutes of music, write a reflective paper, take a final examination and do an internship. Although students arrange their own internships, they must be hosted at a hospital, hospice or nursing home. Students must be supervised by someone in authority at the facility and the internship must include 45 hours of actual playing time for patients in a one-on-one situation. Detailed logs are required of patient visits and must be signed by the student's supervisor. St. Mary's Medical Center in Evansville and St. Vincent's and Methodist Hospitals in Indianapolis have provided internship opportunities for MHTP students. As part of our training, MHTP students are also provided with a 6-hour session on how to market ourselves. While many MHTP graduates choose to develop brochures and packets of printed materials, I decided to create a web site for my information instead, which is available at <http://www.iupui.edu/~facinfo/mhpt/index.html>.

The selection of music for each patient is based on individual needs and grounded in research findings. The ability to select and perform appropriate music is carefully cultivated throughout the MHTP training. You may be interested to know that there are four types of healing music: all types, familiar, heartbeat and arrhythmic. Although all types of music can be played for the chronically ill, and children and the elderly may benefit most from hearing popular folk tunes and nursery songs, those in a crisis situation or in intensive care are likely to require music played at 60-80 beats per minute. The intentional selection of "heartbeat" music is due to the process of entrainment – the body's natural tendency to match its environment. For example, if you and I begin a conversation, it is likely that we will adjust our volume, pace, posture and manner-

isms to match each other. In much the same way, a patient's breathing, blood pressure, heart rate and other vital signs will adjust to the beat of the music. Arrhythmic music lacks any beat, melody or recognizable pattern and is most useful for someone who is actively dying. It is thought that someone who is dying is in a complex process of letting go of life, and anything that would tie a person to memories or familiar images would not be helpful to this process. This is where the improvisation skills of the music practitioner are most important, but it can also be the most perplexing part of MHTP training. Many musicians have had so many music lessons and rehearsals that they can only conceive of music in terms of rhythm, structure and melody, making it very difficult to play something devoid of these elements that will still be beautiful and have healing qualities. Interestingly, there is great reliance on some very old musical traditions for improvisation in healing music, using musical modes like Dorian and Ionian (the white keys on the piano), as well as the music of Gregorian chant. It is exciting to be part of deploying old music in new ways.

There are several key markers that determine when a particular field of endeavor has become a profession in its own right. Among these indicators are formal education programs, journals and organizations, which have been called the "triumvirate" of the development of a profession. [6] It is interesting to see that the healing music profession already has some of these elements in place, such as the comprehensive and carefully supervised training program offered by MHTP and the International Harp Therapy Program, and journals such as *Music for Healing and Transition Newsletter*, *Harp Therapy Journal*, *Open Ear and International Journal of Arts Medicine*. [7-9] Additional indicators of a profession are professional conferences, continuing education opportunities, certification and a code of conduct. MHTP has a code of conduct that all graduates are required to sign and make available to facilities where they work or volunteer. In addition to MHTP's own national and regional conferences, there are several other conferences on healing music, such as the Harp Therapy Gathering, which will be held on June 15-18, 2005, in Salt Lake City, and will feature presentations by the top people in the field. Interestingly, representatives from MHTP and other healing music programs have been meeting to discuss such overarching themes as certification, continuing education and research opportunities.

## **THE PLACE OF HEALING MUSIC IN COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE (CAM)**

Fortunately, there is considerable support at the national level for healing music as one of many forms of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). The National Institutes of Health has as one of its many

subgroups a National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM). Not only does this agency support research, offer training grants, and host a lecture series, meetings and workshops for many CAM modalities, but its web site offers a wealth of information and research resources for health care professionals, patients and the general public. [10] According to the agency's definition, CAM "is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that are not presently considered to be part of conventional medicine." [10] It is important to note that "the list of what is considered to be CAM changes continually, as those therapies that are proven to be safe and effective become adopted into conventional health care and as new approaches to health care emerge." [10] The agency makes a distinction between complementary medicine, which is used together with conventional medicine, and alternative medicine, which is used in place of conventional medicine. [10] Healing music is considered an adjunct to, and supportive of, conventional medical care and thus falls into the category of complementary medicine.

NCCAM further classifies CAM therapies into five categories: alternative medical systems, such as homeopathic medicine, naturopathic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurveda, mind-body interventions that could include support groups, cognitive-behavior therapy, meditation, prayer and art, dance or music therapies, biologically based therapies, such as dietary supplements and herbal products, manipulative and body-based methods like massage, and energy therapies that range from qi gong, Reiki and therapeutic touch to the use of electromagnetic fields. [10] The range of healing modalities listed on the NCCAM web site should be encouraging to many people who seek self-healing, who see being "well" as more than being "cured" or who have become frustrated with the limitations and depersonalization of modern medicine. Librarians with patrons expressing an interest in CAM therapies will find the NCCAM web site to be an excellent place to start their research. Among the many features of the web site are several texts called "backgrounders" that are concise and well-written summaries of the major areas within CAM as well as an overall document called *Get the Facts* that describes the individual CAM modalities. [10]

Per the NCCAM web site, healing music falls within two of its backgrounder summaries, energy medicine and mind-body medicine. The summaries will be useful for patrons who want to know more about music as a therapeutic approach and some of the research that supports its effectiveness. The mind-body medicine summary has this to say about the potential benefits and advantages of mind-body approaches:

In particular, the physical and emotional risks of using these interventions are minimal. Moreover,

once tested and standardized, most mind-body interventions can be taught easily. Finally, future research focusing on basic mind-body mechanisms and individual differences in responses is likely to yield new insights that may enhance the effectiveness and individual tailoring of mind-body interventions. In the meantime, there is considerable evidence that mind-body interventions, even as they are being studied today, have positive effects on psychological functioning and quality of life, and may be particularly helpful for patients coping with chronic illness and in need of palliative care. [10]

This summary also contains details of some of the research that has been done on the impact of mind-body medicine on immunity, placebo response, stress reduction, wound healing and surgical preparation. The MHTP web site provides additional information on the successful application of healing music for treatment of migraines, for premature infants, to reduce the need for pain medication, to aid in digestion, to reduce the need for anesthesia and for physical rehabilitation. [2] Studies have shown that music can lower blood pressure, basal metabolism and respiration rates, increase the production of endorphins, increase production of salivary immunoglobulin which hastens healing, reduce infection and control the heart rate. [2]

The energy medicine summary on the NCCAM web site discusses sound energy therapy as one of the modalities within this category, including music therapy as well as wind chime and tuning fork therapy. The web site states that

Music therapy has been the most studied among these interventions, with studies dating back to the 1920s, when it was reported that music affected blood pressure. Other studies have suggested that music can help reduce pain and anxiety. Music and imagery, alone and in combination, have been used to entrain mood states, reduce acute or chronic pain, and alter certain biochemicals, such as plasma beta-endorphin levels." [10]

The text goes on to note that the use of energy fields overlaps with the domain of mind-body medicine. [10] Although the use of music for healing may seem to be a new trend to us, Pythagoras is actually credited as being the founder of music therapy, which he called the Harmony of the Spheres. As indicated on a web site about Laurie Riley, one of the founders of the MHTP program, "[t]he mathematical ratios between the vibratory rates of the notes on a scale reflect a universal law of harmony. A vibrating string, according to Pythagoras, represents both the fundamentals of music harmonics and the laws of the cosmos. He himself used music purposefully as a healing tool. The specific influences music has over the character and well-being

of man were recognized and used from his time until well into the 1800s” when our more “scientific” and modern view of medicine moved to the forefront. [11]

## RESOURCES ON HEALING MUSIC

In addition to the NCCAM web site, there are many other resources for patrons with an interest in healing music. In addition to *The Healing Musician* by Stella Benson mentioned at the beginning of the article, books such as *Body, Mind and Music* and *Composing Therapeutic Music* by Laurie Riley, *Modes for Moods* by Christina Tourin, *The Power of Sound* by Joshua Leeds, *The Mozart Effect* by Don Campbell, *Molecules of Emotion* by Candace Pert and *Biomedical Foundations of Music as Therapy* by Dale B. Taylor are possibilities and are on the required reading list for MHTP. [1,3,12-17] In addition, many of these individuals, such as Joshua Leeds, Laurie Riley and Christina Tourin, have informative web sites, as do the various training programs like the International Harp Therapy Program and the Chalice of Repose Project mentioned above. [18-20] Indeed, Joshua Leeds offers a wealth of listening programs through his web site that address specific needs, such as enhancing concentration, promoting relaxation, facilitating learning and boosting productivity, based on methods articulated by Tomatis.

A quick search of WorldCat reveals many books, sound recordings and musical scores that encompass the topic of healing music. In addition, Sylvia Woods, who publishes many music books for harp, has an excellent web site with lots of good information, along with a wide range of products that support the healing music profession. [21] The popular consumer health web sites *HealthWeb* and *WebMD* also contain information on CAM with links to resources and other web sites. As with any kind of medical, legal or financial advice, it will be best for the patron to seek information only from quality web sites of reputable programs and qualified healing music practitioners. There are also journals which cover healing music, including the *International Journal of Arts Medicine and the Journal of Alternative & Complementary Medicine*. Fortunately, there are other resources available in Indiana. Harps on Main, located in Rising Sun, Indiana, features the harps and psalteries of William M. Rees, as well as store filled with sheet music, CDs, books and other resources. [22] Mr. Rees has developed two different models of portable “lap harps” that are a perfect size for healing music work. In addition, Vanderbilt Music Company in Bloomington, Indiana, offers levered and pedal harps as well as sheet music and CDs. [23]

Patrons wanting more specific research on the impact of music on healing and physical function can also be directed to MEDLINE, either through the library

or directly through the National Library of Medicine’s web site, which offers a free version of the database. A simple search on the keyword “music” will result in hundreds of articles. It was helpful to narrow the search by adding the limitation “complementary medicine” or by confining the results to the most recent five years. It is also important to distinguish between research articles that focus on “music therapy” versus research on the effects of “healing music”. Many of the studies on music therapy will involve the patient actively engaging in producing music or interacting with the music therapist in contrast to the passive receipt of music through healing music sessions. It is also important to note that some of the studies will involve the delivery of pre-recorded music rather than live music. As music practitioners, we consider live music to have a much more powerful impact because it can be specifically tailored to the needs of an individual patient and modified appropriately throughout our visit with that patient. The amount of research already available on healing music is astounding and bolsters the credibility of efforts such as MHTP to bring this opportunity to all who would benefit. Articles on healing music are also appearing in the popular press. While I was in Cleveland for Module 2, a lovely article appeared in the local paper about Susan Krysiak, the coordinator of the Cleveland site, and her work as a music practitioner. [24]

## CONCLUSIONS

This has been an overview of healing music, an example one of many complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) modalities. As the range of CAM therapies continue to expand and as individual therapies are accepted as part of mainstream medical care and wellness initiatives, librarians will want to be able to guide their patrons to appropriate printed and electronic sources of information. Since research has already demonstrated the healing power of music, the demand for resources about healing music is certain to increase.

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Christina Tourin, <http://www.harpa.com/christina-tourin/index.htm>

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