

# **Music in the Lives of Older People**

**Terrence Neville Hays**

M Ed Hons, University of New England  
BA, Australian Catholic University  
DSCM, University of Newcastle  
Dip Ed (Music), University of Newcastle  
A Mus A, L Mus A, Australian Music Examinations Board

**A thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

School of Health

**University of New England**

December 2002

## **Abstract**

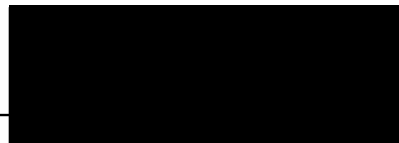
This qualitative study examines the meaning of music in the lives of older people. It maps the diversity of the experience of music for older people and focuses on the emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual roles that music plays in their lives. In-depth and focus group interviews are used to explore the meaning, importance and function of music for 52 older people living in the community aged 60 years and older. The findings reveal that music provides people with ways of understanding and developing their self-identity, connecting with other people, maintaining well-being, experiencing and expressing spirituality, and enhancing cognitive and physical functioning. The results also show how music can contribute to quality of life and positive ageing. Participants revealed how music provides ways for them to have positive self-esteem, feel competent and independent, and avoid feelings of isolation and loneliness. The study highlights the need for health practitioners, community workers, and educators working in gerontology to be better informed of how music can facilitate and sustain older people's quality of life.

## Candidate's Certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that this thesis is entirely my own work and that all sources used in its preparation have been acknowledged.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



Date: 17th December 2002

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>		<b>i</b>
<b>Candidate's Certification</b>		<b>ii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>		<b>iii</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>		<b>iv</b>
<b>List of Figures</b>		<b>v</b>
<b>Diagrams</b>		<b>vi</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>		<b>viii</b>
<b>Dedication</b>		<b>viii</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b>	<b>Music in the Lives of People</b>	<b>1</b>
	Introduction	1
	Music and culture	5
	Music, well-being and health	10
	The importance of this study	16
	Focus of the research	19
	Conclusion	19
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Literature Review</b>	<b>21</b>
	Introduction	21
	Music's role as a healing agent throughout history	21
	Music therapy in professional practice	34
	The role of music in health and well-being	38
	Older people with special needs	40
	The psychological aspect of music in people's lives	43
	The physiological impact of music on people	55
	Spiritual experience through music	58
	The concept of 'mindful' ageing	61
	Conclusion	65
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Theoretical Context</b>	<b>67</b>
	Music, Meaning and Emotion	67
	The conceptual context of the study	72
	Symbolic interactionist theory	74
	The nature of self in symbolic interactionist theory	76
	Phenomenology: ways of knowing	78
	A qualitative study	80
	Conclusion	85

<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>86</b>
	Introduction	86
	Ethics application	87
	Data collection	87
	Participants in the Study	90
	Stages of data collection	93
	Focus groups	93
	In-depth interviews	96
	The interviews	99
	Phenomenology: method and practice	105
	Validation and verification	106
	Analysis of data	108
	Coding	111
	Axial coding	113
	Conclusion	116
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>The Meaning People Give to Music</b>	<b>118</b>
	Introduction	118
	Music and the concept of self	120
	Music, identity and the developing self	121
	Music, self and being male	126
	The search for identity through music	129
	The experience of music	134
	Conclusion	164
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Music and the Experience of Well-Being</b>	<b>166</b>
	Introduction	166
	Childhood memories and introduction to music	167
	Careers, retirement and personal time	169
	Self and others: sharing and connecting	172
	The linking of life stages	176
	Shared personal accounts: the effects of music for people with special needs	180
	Music as an indicator of well-being	183
	The effect and influences of music	187
	Choice, independence and well-being	199
	Time, reality and escape	203
	Spirituality	208
	Music and the experience of spirituality	210
	Conclusion	214

<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>The Functions of Music in the Lives of Older People</b>	<b>216</b>
	Introduction	216
	Music and well-being	217
	Music as a means of connection	226
	Music as stimulus, challenge and life long learning	232
	Music in the expression and experience of spirituality	239
	Conclusion	244
<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Discussion and Conclusion</b>	<b>246</b>
	Introduction	246
	Contribution to knowledge	247
	Identity and understanding of self	250
	Connection: self and others	256
	Well-being, therapy and health	258
	Emotions: arousal and alignment	263
	Stimulus, fantasy and motivation	265
	Beauty, aesthetics, and spirituality	268
	Implications for practitioners, practice, education	270
	Limitations of the study	278
	Future research	281
	Conclusion	283
<b>References</b>		<b>285</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	Appendix I Ethics Application	300
	Appendix II The Interview Schedule For The Focus Groups	306
	Appendix III Letter To Participants	307
	Consent Form	308

## List of Tables

Table 1.1:	Examples of music categories	18
Table 2.1:	Veterans involved in rehabilitation programs, veterans hospitals: United States of America, December 1946 (Green, 1947).	33
Table 4.1:	The referral of informants by informants showing the snowballing effect	92
Table 4.2:	Participant information for the <i>homogeneous</i> focus group interviews	96
Table 4.3:	Participant information for the heterogeneous focus group interviews	96
Table 4.4:	Profiles of the informants who participated in the in-depth interviews	100
Table 4.5:	The open coding of concepts and their associated abbreviations used in analysing the data	112
Table 4.6:	The secondary and axial coding of the data	115
Table 5.1:	The diversity of musical backgrounds for the informants profiled	135

## List of Figures

Figure 4.1:	Data collection flow chart	88
Figure 7.1:	The functions of music in the lives of older people	218

## Diagrams

Diagram 4.1:	The initial mini-framework of the data analysis for music in the lives of older people	114
--------------	--	-----

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to the following people for their help, inspiration and kindness during my candidature for this degree. I am especially grateful to Professor Rod Gerber for his commitment and guidance as principal supervisor throughout my post-graduate studies. Rod always managed to find time to read my chapters and provide professional support and guidance when so many other people needed his attention in the faculty. I would like to thank Associate Professor Irene Coulson for providing me with opportunities to teach and publish my work and for being a key advocate for me being awarded a UNE School of Health Doctoral Teaching Scholarship.

My family have been especially important in teaching me the value of education in my life. It is through their love and support that I have been encouraged to complete my studies and meet new challenges in life. To Neville and Eileen I am very grateful. To my friends, David, Lyndall and Annmaree, thank you for the many hours of listening, sharing ideas and being a friend.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the people who took part in the study. I am especially grateful for their interest and the sharing of personal insights with regards to music. Without them, this study would not have been possible.



## **Dedication**

*This thesis is dedicated to Victor, whose love, support and intellectual inspiration over the last 20 years has given me strength to believe in myself and the encouragement to fulfil a life dream.*