

## HISTORICAL ROOTS OF MUSIC THERAPY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

Music has been used as a means of communication and healing since the beginning of mankind, Music Therapy, which involves the music therapist, the client and the music in an ever-evolving relationship, is rooted in the ancient literate societies. The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief historical overview of music therapy by illustrating the changing nature of the healer/ patient/ music triadic relationship throughout the centuries to the present-day, and the various factors influencing these changes.

Keywords: Music Therapy; Music, Healer, Patient/Client; Historical Roots

### INTRODUCTION

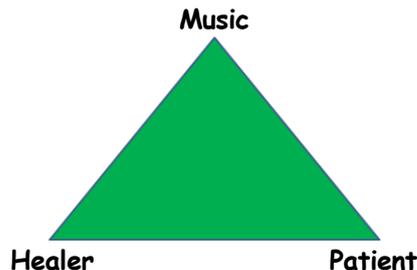
Music was created out of man's need to communicate with the outside world. He imitated sounds from inside the body and from outside (e.g., environmental sounds, animals sounds). Music played an integral role in ALL aspects of life - work, play, rites of passage and healing. And so the roots of Music Therapy are very deep for since the beginning of mankind music has been used as a means of communication and healing.

Let's look at how the roles of music, healer and patient/client have changed throughout the centuries until the present day – from the ancient literate societies to ancient Greece, to the early Christian era, the Renaissance and beyond, to Romanticism, and on to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the birth of Music Therapy as a professional health care discipline.

*Below are some factors to consider in the ever-evolving healer/patient /music relationship. This relationship is best illustrated by a triangle:*

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**Healer** ~ personality and healer's role in community; musical skills and knowledge; existing beliefs and theories regarding the nature and cause of the patient's illness; role of music in its treatment; philosophy and values.

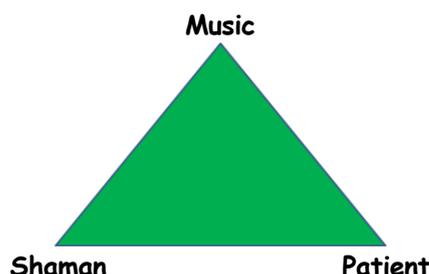
**Patient** ~ nature of problem(s); willingness to be treated; musical (and non-musical) responses

**Music** ~ style; instruments; pre-composed or improvised; particular use of the musical elements (e.g., rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics, timbre, form)

### **ANTIQUITY and ANCIENT SOCIETIES**

During **ANTIQUITY** and **ANCIENT SOCIETIES** (a period lasting about 500,000 years), the SHAMAN used music in magico-religious rituals to purge the evil spirits from the sick person's body. Through music and dance, the patient reached a state of trance and ecstasy, allowing for catharsis/purification and healing.

The famous story in the Old Testament of young David, the Israelite (born around 1037 BC), playing the lyre for King Saul, who was tormented by an evil spirit (chronic depression, melancholy), must be mentioned here. Why? Because David was not concerned with communicating with the gods or spirits to purge King Saul of his illness; rather David was playing music for King Saul in an attentive, empathic manner. In so doing, David is often considered the first music therapist.



**Healer** ~ SHAMAN / MEDICINEMAN / TRIBAL MUSICIAN - outcast, congenital anomaly, admired and revered, possessed specific musical knowledge and secret rhythmic patterns which were used to appease, communicate with, dominate and finally exorcise the spirits of illness within the sick person's body. Instruments were believed to be a go-between the concrete and spiritual world, and endowed with divine power because they were made with once-living materials (e.g., bones, wood, ebony, ivory).

**Patient** ~ possessed by an evil spirit or victim of an enemy's spell; fearful, dependent, out of control

**Music** ~ energetic (biorhythms: quarter note =72, or doubled = 144). Drums, rattles and chants were used. Family and other select members of the community were often part of the 'orchestra'. Specific rhythms were used, based on the secret patterns associated with the spirits (e.g., fever spirit → slow and simple rhythmic patterns to decrease body temperature; rheumatoid spirit → quicker and more complex rhythmic patterns to increase body temperature).

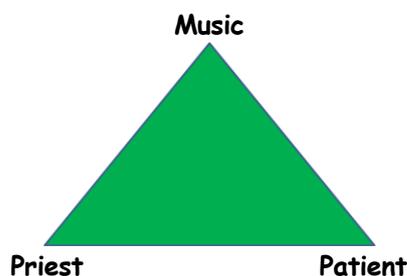


## ANCIENT GREECE

During **ANCIENT GREECE** (600 B.C → ), the Greek **PRIEST** used music to evoke specific emotions, build character and restore order between the body and soul. As in the ancient cultures of China, Egypt, and India, there existed in Greece a common belief that music had a fundamental power to either uplift or degrade, and thus enhance or corrupt entire civilizations. As Plato (428 BC-348 BC), one of the world's most influential philosophers, stated in the Republic (written around 380 BC): "Music moulds character, when modes of music change, the fundamental laws

of the state change with them." He also wrote that "Music is medicine to the soul" and "Justice is to the soul as health is to the body. Through music, the soul learns harmony and rhythm and even a disposition to justice."

**During this era, rational medicine gradually replaced the magico-religious nature of healing, as clearly reflected in Apollo, who was the Greek god of music and medicine.**



***Healer ~ PRIEST* – respected but not loved; the role of priest was inherited by casting lots; used specific musical modes to restore harmony between the body and soul.**

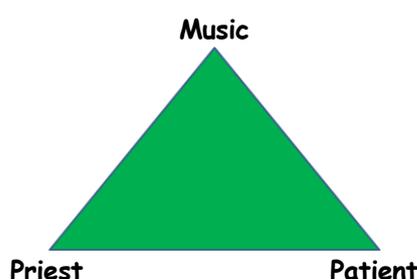
***Patient*** ~ considered inferior; emotional problems; guilty of committing a sin or breaking the law.

***Music*** ~ use of specific musical modes to effect desired changes in the patient's state, and in society at large. For example, the Dorian mode (associated with Athens) was believed to evoke purity and contemplation. The Phrygian mode (associated with Troy) was considered the warlike mode and used to stimulate combat. The elements of music were also used in conscious ways - harmony evoked spiritual feelings; melody appealed to the emotions, and rhythm appealed to the body.



## EARLY CHRISTIAN ERA

During the EARLY CHRISTIAN ERA (476-1450 AD), the PRIEST used music, in particular, hymns, to provide a spiritual experience that transcended the feeling of pain and offered hope. With the help of hymn specialists, or aretologists, priests sang hymns to ease the sick man's suffering and create heaven on earth. The notion of an evil spirit that must be exorcised was being replaced by a loving god, full of goodness and caring towards the patient. Sadly, however, individuals considered to be mentally ill, were incarcerated, abused, and believed to be possessed by demons.



**Healer** ~ PRIEST – like a father figure, loving and compassionate; saw in the patient a weak, mortal body, and an immortal soul to be saved; music was used as a message of hope.

**Patient** ~ **accepting, grateful and humbled before a loving god; this was not the case for those perceived to be mentally ill .**

**Music** ~ hymns; melodic element dominated to convey the idea of floating up to heaven. Instruments such as the flute, harp, drum and the trumpet, were outlawed because they were associated with pagan worship and loose morals of secular life.

## RENAISSANCE AND BEYOND

During the time of the **RENAISSANCE AND BEYOND (1580-1750 AD)**, the PHYSICIAN used music to effect desired emotional and physiological changes. Exciting advances in medicine, especially in anatomy and physiology (e.g., Harvey and his work on the circulation of the blood), marked the beginnings of the scientific,

cause -and-effect approach. Athanasius Kircher's theory of temperaments and affections, which go back to Greek medical theory, dominated the medical practice of the day. According to this theory, there are four human temperaments/ personality types - sanguine, melancholic, choleric, phlegmatic. Each is associated with one of the 4 body juices, or humours – blood, yellow bile, black bile, phlegm – and one of the 4 elements – air, fire, earth and water. According to the beliefs of the day, illness was a result of biochemical disturbances, namely the imbalance of one or more of the body juices. Music was believed to have an influence on the nervous system, resulting in a return to harmony of the body juices. The French philosopher, René Descartes (1596-1650) also observed the effect of musical intervals on emotional states, For example, large intervals stimulate and create tension; descending intervals calm and encourage contemplation .

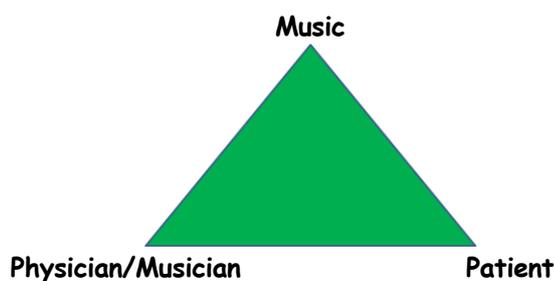
**Healer** ~ PHYSICIAN – influenced by new advances in medicine and the theory of the four temperaments; used different proportions of the musical elements to affect breathing, pulse, blood pressure and metabolic rate in different ways; also used music to evoke certain emotions.

**Patient** ~ emotional problems (e.g., melancholy) or physical problems.

**Music** ~ music listening or music-making; music with a slow tempo, regular pulse and extended melodic lines used to induce a relaxed state; music with frequent tempo changes, rhythmic variety and short melodic phrases used to induce a more active state.

## ROMANTIC ERA

During the **ROMANTIC ERA** (2<sup>nd</sup> half of 18<sup>th</sup> C. – early 20<sup>th</sup> C.), the **PHYSICIAN-MUSICIAN** used music listening, active music-making, and live musical performances in their work with patients of all ages and disabilities.



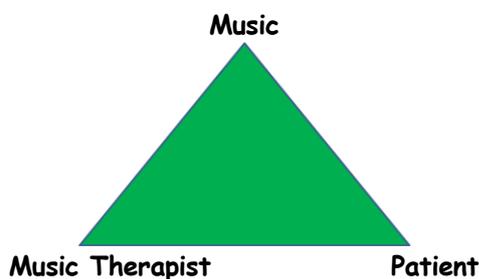
**Healer** ~ PHYSICIAN/MUSICIAN - beginning to recognize need for specific musical skill on the part of the healer and for assessment of patient's musical sensitivity.

**Patient** ~ increasing number of disabilities, settings and ages including children with sensory handicaps (e.g., visual and/or auditory impairments)

**Music** ~ music listening, music-making, live concerts for large groups of patients with mental illnesses.

## **TWENTIETH CENTURY ~ BIRTH OF MUSIC THERAPY AS A PROFESSIONAL HEALTH CARE DISCIPLINE**

Rapid urbanization resulted in large mental hospitals. One attempt to turn these mental asylums into active treatment centres was through music played by hospital and community musicians. Furthermore, with the return of World War II veterans traumatized by their horrific war experiences, and their remarkable responses to music, there was a growing interest in the therapeutic and rehabilitative value of music – both live and recorded (thanks to Edison's invention of the phonograph in 1877). At the same time, an increasing number of publications were presenting the case for music therapy and for training music therapists who were able to use specific music skills in the assessment and treatment of patients of all ages and presenting a wide range of disabilities.



The need for specially trained music therapists was realized in 1944 with the establishment of the first training program at Michigan State University. In 1950 the first Association for Music Therapy was founded in the United States, and in 2010, the American Music Therapy Association celebrated 60 years of development and growth. With the subsequent development of music therapy training programs worldwide, Music Therapy has become a recognized professional health care

discipline. For information on the state of music therapy throughout the world, go to [www.voices.no](http://www.voices.no) {World Forum for Music Therapy}.

Music Therapists draw from ancient healing traditions and from evidence-based research on the behavioural and cognitive effects of music (behaviour-oriented music therapy), the physiological effects of music (medical model of music therapy) and the psychological effects (insight-oriented music therapy ~ psychodynamic, analytical). Kenneth Bruscia, a key player and prolific writer in the field of music therapy, provides a definition of music therapy in his book, *Defining Music Therapy*, which has been translated into six languages ~ German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese and Spanish:

*“Music therapy is a systematic process of intervention wherein the therapist helps the client to promote health, using music experiences and the relationships that develop through them as dynamic forces of change.”*  
(1998, p.20)

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Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy – [www.voices.no](http://www.voices.no)

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