

## CONFERENCE REPORT

# The 3rd European Association of Music and Imagery (EAMI) conference: 'The power of music – embodiment, trauma healing, spirituality'

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### CONFERENCE DETAILS

The 3rd European Association of Music and Imagery (EAMI) conference

'The power of music – embodiment, trauma healing, spirituality'

21-25 September 2022, Denmark

### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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The biennial European Association for Music and Imagery (EAMI) Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) conference themed, *The power of music - moving towards the core of Guided Imagery and Music*, took place in Denmark from 21<sup>st</sup> through 25<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The call for papers was sent before the pandemic, as the conference was originally scheduled for 2020. Due to travel restrictions, a one-day online conference was held in September that year, but the planning for a full, in-person conference went ahead. The same brave team from Denmark—Inge Nygaard Pedersen, Catharina Messel, Charlotte Dammeyer, Julie Exner, and chair Bolette D. Beck—was responsible for both the online conference in 2020 and the hybrid conference in 2022. The invitation read as follows:

The conference will honour the spiritual qualities and affordances of music as the centre of the GIM method, and the ways in which the music moves and transforms our body, emotions, mind, and spirit, changes our ways of being in relationships and as citizens. The urgency of living in a world facing global conflicts, pandemic, climate crisis, trauma and terror challenges us in both private life and on collective levels. How can the music empower GIM clients to find their path? (Beck et al., 2022, p. 1)

Sixty-four delegates were welcomed at the Trinity conference centre in Fredericia, Denmark. The five days were filled with learning, sharing, inspiration, empowerment, music, and energy. After so many online conferences, we had an opportunity to see each other face-to-face with the bonus of the hybrid option for those unable to travel. Sixty-six delegates joined online.

Recognising the worldwide situation, the pandemic, as well as the war between Russia and Ukraine, the one-day pre-conference had *GIM and trauma healing* as its focus. Many European music therapists were actively involved in trauma work with war refugees. As the only South African delegate (not impacted by the war so directly), I felt humbled witnessing European music therapists' commitment to make a difference in many lives through music.

Two organising team members, Bolette Beck and Catharina Messel, together with Steen Lund, started the pre-conference with a workshop on treating trauma using music and imagery and GIM. In this workshop, we took turns to be the therapist or client, and this exercise brought home the fact that working with such deep trauma also affects the therapist. We were reminded to consider transference and countertransference, the importance of supervision, and self-care. Engaging in dyads opened opportunities to share our own experiences of trauma. The very important question of which music to choose in trauma-focused music therapy sessions was discussed and explored in the dyads. Key points included starting with music for relaxation before moving on to music that could be comforting for the grieving client. In this way, the client's window of tolerance could be opened incrementally, which could also lead to acceptance.

Flowing seamlessly, Rikke Høgsted, the first guest speaker after this workshop, gave us insights into the psychology of mental strain, the psychological and emotional pressure that one can experience as a result of stressors at work or in one's personal life. Mental strain can lead to burnout (psychological exhaustion) and secondary trauma (compassion fatigue). We were made aware of the signs that we should be looking out for within ourselves and our colleagues regarding burnout or secondary trauma. Delegates were given an opportunity to write a poem about accepting that therapists are not superheroes (Box 1). Another activity was to role-play different kinds of therapists - over-involved (red), under-involved (blue), or aligned (green). Whilst writing the poem brought hope and gratitude to mind, participating in the role-play created an opportunity to laugh at ourselves and realise the importance of personal balance.

The main conference started with Dea Siggaard Stenbæk's keynote exploring the role of music within psychedelic therapy. It was fascinating to listen to a clinical psychologist, who holds a PhD in neuroscience and is involved in music and psychedelic research (developing a music program to use with psilocybin interventions), especially when one considers how GIM was conceived by Helen Bonny. GIM was first implemented after Bonny's research experiences at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Centre, where music was used as a complementary therapeutic input during LSD therapy. The purpose of those experiments was to enhance the inner experiences of clients. It was later found that music alone, without LSD, could facilitate such experiences (Bonny & Summer, 2002). Bonny's work was extraordinary and she left behind a legacy, as we can see in these current studies on music within psychedelic therapy.

The keynote speaker on day 2 was Denise Grocke from Australia, who addressed dislocation and displacement during the pandemic. Grocke drew on her own background of dislocation and alluded to the displacement of so many through the ages, not only during the pandemic. The displacement of so

many people in the current war in Ukraine came to mind again. Grocke focussed on re-connection and using GIM during COVID-19. She discussed the value of GIM and the resilience of GIM therapists, pointing out how this music therapy method is still relevant.

Simon Høffding assumed a philosophical point of departure in his keynote as he shared his eight-year journey with the Danish String Quartet, exploring how they experienced making music together. Høffding focused on three forms of musical communication: (1) Motor-resonance, where two people spontaneously move together in the music without this being planned or rehearsed; (2) Explicit coordination, where one of the two focuses overtly and consciously on the other in a (sometimes desperate) attempt to synchronise better; and (3) Interkinaesthetic affectivity, where two people really feel they are in a similar space without any bodily or conscious effort (Høffding, 2018). He ended his presentation with this very important question: do we, as therapists, recognise any of these in our rapport with clients?

Apart from the keynote presentations that were streamed for online delegates, three presentations and/or workshops (two on-site and one online) could be chosen for the rest of each day from Thursday to Sunday. Papers and workshops concerned the exploration of music, including new music programmes, specially composed music, improvised music, validating and revising taxonomies of music, and new methods of analysing music. Other presentations explored adaptations of GIM, including Music and Imagery (MI), Music Imagery Relaxation technique (MIR), and Music Breathing (MB). Each topic and presentation were a reminder of how each and every GIM application is still relevant especially in this time of war and in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Various case studies were included that addressed applications in different settings. Due to the pandemic, a lot of work revolved around trauma, stress, and burnout. These were addressed with many different clinical populations, including working with people experiencing addiction, cancer, dementia, cerebral palsy, complex diagnoses, mental disorders, and even fertility. My own presentation highlighted the power of music in the process of change with a client who suffered from a dual diagnosis: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance use disorder (SUD). Using the supportive music and imagery method and offering the client the opportunity to use his own music led to an ongoing connection to his inner resources and deeper self-awareness, even years after music therapy had ended.

True to an in-person conference experience, there were other highlights away from the conference rooms. During the conference, we were privileged to have two live concerts (also streamed for online delegates). We were treated to traditional Danish music by Gangspil and the Danish saxophone quartet.



Photo 1: Gangspil



Photo 2: Danish saxophone quartet

**I'm only human**

What a crazy surprising team

I'm here, I'm here that's all

How to meet above – not the victim, not the blamer

I am a human, not a magician, and that is enough

To blame or not to blame, that is the impulse

Dark calmness

Let's find our secret escape space!

Life is so precious

I am human after all

Accepting, respecting, and nurturing our human vulnerabilities

Find the little moments that count

Feeling of the intensity, vulnerability and strength in constant motion

I don't need to die on any cross here

Thankfully I am only human after all

I am human after all, I want space in which to grow

I want safety, connection and support

Why feel as a superhero?

**Box 1: Delegates' poem: I'm only human**

The camaraderie was tangible in the bus when delegates travelled together to the Koldinghus castle in Kolding where we could learn and experience a little bit of Danish history. The new GIM graduates were introduced and welcomed into the circle of GIM therapists in the Koldinghus church hall. The wonderful acoustics were well utilised by the exquisite harp music played by Julie Exner. The GIM fellows sang the GIM hymn, specially composed by Bolette Beck. Graduates each received a special Nordic gift in the form of an amber necklace and a personal message from their trainers, followed by a toast and celebration.



**Photo 3:** Koldinghus church hall



**Photo 4:** Julie Exner playing the harp



**Photo 5:** Newly graduated GIM fellows and their trainers

This highlight continued when we returned to the conference centre. It was our last evening together and we were treated to a lovely three-course meal and wine. We could reminisce about our experiences and dance together with live klezmer music by the Channe Nussbaum trio.

The experience was invaluable for me on many levels, as a delegate, presenter, friend, and colleague. This conference allowed me to become part of a community that makes a difference in trying times. In South Africa, music therapy as a health care profession is still young and less acknowledged when compared to other countries. Thus, the connections that I made and the knowledge that I gained through the conference made for personal growth that I can only be grateful for.



**Photo 6:** Channe Nussbaum trio

It was no easy task to host a hybrid conference and in spite of technical difficulties, the team worked hard to have everything run smoothly. The organisers promised that the conference would be “brimming with music, dialogue and empowerment of the growing GIM community” (Beck et al., 2022, p. 1). This promise was kept from start to finish.

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