



Special issue

**Music therapy in Europe:
Paths of professional development**

in partnership with the
European Music Therapy Confederation



BULGARIA

Country report on professional recognition of music therapy

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HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Music therapy in Bulgaria dates back to the time of Joseph Moreno's first visit to the country. To a large extent the history of music therapy in Bulgaria coincides with the work of the Bulgarian Association for Music Therapy (BAM). In 2015 the association celebrated 20 years of its establishment. BAM was founded in the spring of 1995 in Sofia, following the idea of Joseph Moreno and a group of enthusiastic specialists in diverse fields, who were inspired by Moreno's workshop and thereby became confident about the potential of psychological work with music.

BAM currently has its third chairman. The first chair was Irina Schlezinger (1995-2002), whose main contribution was to organise and conduct a five-year long external training in the music therapy approach of the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM). From 1999 to 2004, a distance learning programme in Music and Imagery (MI), and the BMGIM methodology was held at the Art Therapy Institute in San Francisco, under its director Frances Goldberg. The faculty comprised Frances Goldberg, Virginia Clarkson, Dag Korlin, Edith Maria Geiger and Irina Schlezinger. The next chair, who had the longest mandate, was Liliya Ahtarova between 2002 and 2012.

The first project aimed at the training of Bulgarian specialists was carried out with the support of the British Council in 1997, when two of these specialists, Liliya Ahtarova and Ljudmila Kraeva were sent to the Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy Centre in London (UK) by BAM.

Over the years, workshops in various music therapy approaches have been presented by foreign lecturers such as Joseph Moreno and Heidi Fausch, as well as Bulgarian specialists who graduated abroad and now have their own private practices.

BAM launched its official website in 2002. The BAM library (which contains electronic books, paper literature,

journals, video and audio recordings) has been in operation since 2003.

In 2004, BAM was accepted as a member of the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC), with Ahtarova being its first country representative.

BAM members take part in different professional forums organised by similar organisations in Bulgaria and abroad. For funding the organisation relies entirely on the financial contributions of its 34 members and the voluntary work of both the board and general members. Members of the organisation actively participate in conferences and other forums with seminars and workshops in various Bulgarian cities, as well as in international events.

In 2009, BAM was accepted as a member of BAP (Bulgarian Association for Psychotherapy). So far BAM has organised three national conferences (2005, 2007 and 2011), with the last one being international. Short symposia are organised on a regular basis. In 2011, the first cohort of music therapists was certified for completing the basic level of training at BAM (nowadays the same tuition programme is offered at the Music Therapy Institute-Sofia) and are classed as 'Music Therapist/Music Therapist in Clinical Practice Under Supervision', enabling them to proceed to the advanced level of training. In October 2013, BAM took part in the 5th National Conference in Psychotherapy, held in Sofia.

In 2003, the first training group started for 'Personal Development and Experience' which featured music therapy and other approaches using art led by Ahtarova, who also developed the first structure of a complete training programme. Later on, both she and Nadezhda Vitanova developed the training programme 'Music Therapy Approaches in Psychotherapy' (2009).

In 2013 the Music Therapy Institute-Sofia (MTI-Sofia) was founded, led by Ahtarova. Currently MTI is BAM's official representative educational institution. Since this year, tuition is performed with the generous support of the Swiss Music Therapy Association (SFMT/ASMT), which sends tutors to teach modules where there are no qualified tutors in Bulgaria. The MTI board, as well as the curriculum, are supervised by SFMT/ASMT. The team of Bulgarian music therapists and psychotherapists in MTI-Sofia acquired their qualifications in Europe, USA and Bulgaria. Collaboration with international associations is a success for music therapy in Bulgaria.

Ahtarova and the BAM board established regulations for the training of music therapists and for clinicians as well as a register of professional music therapists in the country. MTI-Sofia is looking forward to the possibility of acquiring a state licence for an academic institution. There are two music therapy training courses at Master's level in Bulgaria: at the National Academy of Music (NMA, Pancho Vladigerov) in Sofia and the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts in Plovdiv. The first programme has an anthroposophical emphasis. Both programmes have to exceed their requirements regarding self-experience and supervision, in order to meet the level of a minimum of 200 hours of documented self-experience and also the minimum of 200 hours of documented individual supervision (or 100 hours of

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individual supervision plus 150 hours of group supervision). Psychotherapeutic training is still not included, as well as supervised practice. Programmes at these two universities do not provide training in music therapy at Bachelors level.

In addition, BAM is trying to broaden the musical culture of the young generation. Thus, in 2011, the chamber ensemble 'Come Ye Sons of Art' was established. The ensemble aims to promote baroque and classical music among adolescent and young people, and to reconcile their connection with the spiritual values of music in those eras. Conducted by Josif Gerdjikov, with Ahtarova being its musical director, 'Come Ye Sons of Art' already has given more than 20 performances. In 2013, the group compiled a video recording of the choir and solo performances from several concerts in order to publicise their work.

Heart: Music Therapy and Psychodrama. Bulgarian Association for Music Therapy (BAM)/ArtGraf.]

IMPORTANT STEPS IN THE RECOGNITION PROCESS

A pioneering period began with the establishment of BAM and ended with the graduation and certification from the external training of the first pioneers in 2004. Work towards recognition and approval of music therapy from the state and its health and educational systems commenced in 2010. BAM considers its participation in the work group developing and lobbying for a law for psychotherapy in Bulgaria, together with all professional organisations under the umbrella of the Bulgarian Association for Psychotherapy (BAP), as being the most important step in the recognition process for our profession in Bulgaria. We find this to be more effective than working on a law for music therapy at this moment, and as our chance of a successful outcome for the whole process.

On 15th November 2014 the first European Music Therapy Day was celebrated alongside all EMTC members. BAM and MTI-Sofia organised an open house day with workshops and art ateliers in partnership with Stolichna Biblioteka (Capital City Library) in Sofia.

SELECTED LINKS

- ❑ Bulgarian Association for Music Therapy (BAM): www.bulgarianmusictherapy.com
- ❑ EMTC country information: <http://emtc-eu.com/country-reports/bulgaria/>

SELECTED REFERENCES

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