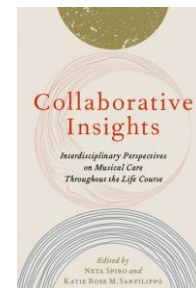


## BOOK REVIEW

# Collaborative insights: Interdisciplinary perspectives on musical care throughout the life course (Spiro & Sanfilippo, eds.)

**Rachel Darnley-Smith**

Independent scholar, UK



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### REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

**Rachel Darnley-Smith** was until recently Senior Lecturer at Roehampton University where she taught on MA and PhD programmes in music therapy and latterly counselling psychology. She trained in music therapy at the GSMD in London in the 1980s and her most recent publication is *Psychodynamic Approaches to the Experience of Dementia; Perspectives from Observation, Theory and Practice* (2020), co-edited by Sandra Evans, Jane Garner and Rachel Darnley-Smith and published by Routledge. [[rdarnleysmith@gmail.com](mailto:rdarnleysmith@gmail.com)]

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During 2017-2018 I was fortunate enough to attend sessions of the interdisciplinary UK Commission on Music and Dementia, which met on several occasions in the House of Lords, Chaired by Baroness Sally Greengross (Bowell & Bamford, 2018). The wide-ranging presentations from many experienced practitioners, commissioners, and researchers prompted debate, for example as to what constituted therapy, art or recreation; what was more important for whom and when. What was striking was the time given to this debate and that there was a sense that not only is there room for acknowledging difference, difference is crucial in enabling any practice to look in on itself (so to speak) and to stay alive.

Neta Spiro and Katie Rose M. Sanfilippo, editors of a fine new volume have taken this interdisciplinary approach further and broadly encapsulated a range of helping musical practices (including music therapy, community music, and education) and research under the heading of *Musical Care*. Each chapter is explicitly an interdisciplinary collaboration: At least one author is a music therapist/researcher and at least one other “a researcher with work in a related discipline,” including “psychology, education, sociology, and public health” (p.2).

The tone set is at once pragmatic with a fluid movement between research informed practice and practice informed research. But what is most satisfying overall maybe is that the editors and chapter authors explicitly avoid arriving at a place of some kind of completion, with each chapter including a “call to action” through a consideration of “future directions” (p.9). This is as wise as it is creative, the field that they stake out is vast for one book. A further distinctive feature is the framework of life stages. Spiro and Sanfillippo write how they highlight “the transformations and changes in the application of musical care as life progresses” and prioritise “the experiences within

the life stages over the diagnoses and contexts usually associated with them” (p.5). Again this allows for fluidity: the purpose or meanings of music may or may not vary greatly across the life course but may come in vastly different forms or modes of performance. This may be part of the very richness in the intergenerational projects to be found in end-of-life care, as described by Tsiris, Hockley and Dives (pp.130-131) and illustrated in different ways throughout the book.

It can be surprising to note that as recently as 2000, systematic enquiry into whether music therapy worked was relatively rare (see Wigram & Loth, 2000). This volume is an illustration of the sheer quantity and appropriateness of research that practitioners can now draw upon to substantiate what was once solely an intuition or general observation of what might be effective or good for people. All the chapters provide detailed accounts of research with some chapters functioning as substantial reviews. In Chapter 1, *Musical Care in Infancy*, Sanfilippo, de l’Etoile, and Trehub provide a welcome update on the links between infant musical engagement and musical care interventions, described here in contrasting terms as natural and targeted musical interactions. I found it most satisfying the way in which this distinction is later synthesised, the natural musical interaction, the type we all engage in informally and spontaneously, informing the targeted.

The question of what type of research for what type of knowledge is also given consideration. In Chapter 5, *Musical Care in Older Adulthood*, Stuart Wood and Stephen Clift provide an important acknowledgement of both the benefits and limitations of current experimental research, together with the necessity for qualitative studies that capture in a more immediate way the experiences and testimony of all those involved. Indeed, it was excellent to see clearly laid out the way in which testimony can inform some of the priorities for experimental research which in turn may support some of the long held intuitive *thinking* of practitioners.

The book raises many interesting questions and discussion points: In Chapter 3, *Musical Care in Adolescence*, Suvi Saarikallio and Katrina Skewes McFerran (together with another comprehensive review of literature) provide an important consideration outlining where music might not be helpful or experienced as care, in this case where it might be used for “reinforcing more complex moods and emotions, and even end up worsening pathological states” (p.75). This type of close observation, whilst probably common amongst practitioners, raises the question, crucial when considering the limits of professional practice, when is musical care not care? Is music making with/for another or alone always care?

I also wondered about a distinction to be made between the notion of musical care as a noun, (such as musical care for children) and as a verb, the very activity of care. In some case studies, for example, I wanted to know more about the intersubjectivity and felt experience of being with another and the musical care components of this, together with the attendant relational thinking from music therapy and other relevant disciplines such as psychotherapy. This perspective began to be explored in Simon Procter and Tia DeNora’s chapter, *Musical Care in Adulthood* where they present the matter of “‘how’ one person works to be with others [...] hearing all that they have to offer as music and responding to this” (p.95). To my mind this acute listening in music that they describe is central to a notion of musical care for another, natural or targeted. Acute listening is of course implicit throughout the book, but in response to the *call to action*, I was certainly left feeling that both these questions are worth future development and research. They are certainly a testament to the rigour and ambition of the book which has already led to a wider initiative around the development of an international musical care network, see <https://musicalcareresearch.com/>

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