



Conference Report

Rethinking Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Towards New Ethical Paradigms in Music and Health Research

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Rethinking Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Towards New Ethical Paradigms in Music and Health Research

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Niall Mc Guigan is an MA graduate of Ethnomusicology, Goldsmiths University London. He has previously completed a BA in Applied Music at Dundalk Institute of Technology, Ireland. His recent research projects, with a special interest in medical ethnomusicology include ethnographic and phenomenological accounts of sound healing groups in London and neo-shamanic rituals in Europe involving altered states, music and healing. Currently he is perusing the possibility of completing an MA in music therapy at Limerick University Ireland with focus on future interdisciplinary research related to music and healthcare.

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This report is a summary of the one-day interdisciplinary conference supported by the Society for Education, Music, and Psychology (SEMPRE) and the British Forum for Ethnomusicology (BFE) which was held at Goldsmiths University (London, UK) on the 19th October 2013. The conference programme brought together a variety of research departments within Goldsmiths University including the Music, Mind and Brain Centre, Psychology Department, and the Music Department. Panels were deliberately formed of music therapists, music psychologists and ethnomusicologists to ensure cross-disciplinary debate. Appropriate themes were selected to enhance discussion coherence. All speakers and chairs had been asked in advance to prepare presentations which were intelligible to non-expert

audiences and to ensure papers addressed the allocated themes. The embodiment of musical experience was included through two workshops: one by Catherine Pestano, Natural Voice Practitioners' Network and one by Kate Binnie, music therapist and yoga practitioner. These workshops highlighted the practical aspects of music, health and wellbeing, areas which are sometimes neglected in the academic setting.

The conference opened with papers relating to the theme of *Music, Stress and Trauma: Biomedical and Social Approaches to Enquiry*. Martin Greve, an ethnomusicologist by training, presented a paper on *Music in Dersim (East-Turkey): Research within a Traumatized Society*. This was followed by ethnomusicologist (and conference chair), Muriel Swijghuisen Reigersberg,

who described the challenges faced by the global music and health movement and the possible methods that can be used to engage with them. Daisy Fancourt provided insights into the emerging field of music and psychoneuroimmunology. The panel discussion then focused on methods of combining bio-medical research with social research in which to encourage a more inclusive attitude.

Inculturation, Enculturation and Musical Wellbeing highlighted the framework for the next three papers of the day. Friederike Haslebeck discussed *Music Therapy in Neonatal Care: Insights into Culturally Appropriate Approaches and Research*. In this presentation, Haslebeck demonstrated musical entrainment through both qualitative and quantitative data which suggested premature babies could be calmed by the effects of hearing simple melodies in an overstimulated and noisy hospital environment. The second and third instalments in this section of the conference were presentations by Mary Haiping Cui, *A Cross Cultural Study of Music Listening Experience, Preference and Health between China and Scotland* and by James Kennaway, *Medicine, Politics and Sexuality in the Invention of the Teenage Music Victim* respectively.

The theme for the next three papers was *Experience, Quantifying Outcomes Ethics and Government Policy/Research Funding*. Kevin O'Shanahan presented his paper, *The Benefit of Participative Music Making on Personal Recovery in Mental Health Care Contexts: An Ethnographic Enquiry*. This paper emphasised the difference between personal and clinical recovery encouraging a bio-psychosocial approach moving from pathology to wellbeing. Gwawr Ifan, a lecturer in music and professional musician, discussed *Developing a Typology of Competencies for Professional Musicians Involved in Music Residency Programmes for People with Dementia*. The research revealed skill sets required of musicians in these settings including a sense of empathy, observation, cultural sensitivity, improvisation, and adaptability. The final paper in this section was presented by Alexis Kirke regarding the *Ethical Issues in Intelligent Directed Media*.

The conference concluded with a panel discussion involving all key speakers. Music therapist Gary Ansdell (Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy) described his collaborative six-year longitudinal ethnographic research titled *Musical Pathways and Mental Health*. Ethnomusicologist Caroline Bithell (University of Manchester) discussed the need to convert ethnographic data into evidence and the ethical imperative to relate

research findings to cross-disciplinary theoretical paradigms. Music psychologist Ian Cross (University of Cambridge) followed on a similar note discussing the paradigmatic and methodological challenges faced before reconciliation between ethnomusicologists and music scientists can occur. In conclusion, music therapist Giorgos Tsiris (Nordoff Robbins Music Therapy and St Christopher's Hospice) posed questions in relation to collaborative research and evaluation: what counts as 'evidence', for whom, and why? Tsiris discussed the development of a research culture within music therapy as a means of enhancing research resources for the profession and to promote the growth of research 'users' and 'doers'. The plenary discussion was summed up by ethnomusicologist Kathleen J. Van Buren.

Having recently completed an MA in Ethnomusicology, where I developed a key interest in medical ethnomusicology, I found the conference underlined the need for further collaboration between science and the humanities endorsing both positivist and humanistic/holistic approaches to music, health, and wellbeing. From an ethnomusicological perspective I was left with a sense that there seems to be a positive cultural shift in the way we perceive music, health and wellbeing in western society.

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