

***Special Issue***

The Orff approach to special music education and music therapy:  
Practice, theory and research

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**Book Reviews**

**Orff Music Therapy: Active Furthering of the  
Development of the Child**

Gertrud Orff

**Key Concepts in the Orff Music Therapy:  
Definitions and Examples**

Gertrud Orff

Reviewed by Christine Plahl

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*Orff Music Therapy: Active Furthering of the Development of the Child*

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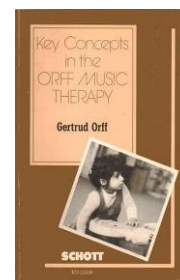
St. Louis, MO: MMB Music (1974/1980)  
163 pp, ISBN: 978-0901938596



*Key Concepts in the Orff Music Therapy: Definitions and Examples*

Gertrud Orff

London: Schott Music Ltd. (1984/1990)  
96 pp, ISBN: 978-0-946535-10-1



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In 2014 Gertrud Orff (1914-2000), one of the pioneers in developmental music therapy, would have celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is now fifty years since she began to use music in her work with

children not only in music education but also therapeutically. She had completed a musical training and had been working together with her former husband Carl Orff on the *Music for*

*Children* of the Orff-Schulwerk. This practical knowledge inspired her applications of music in paediatric clinics and schools for special education in Munich, Switzerland and California since 1963.

Gertrud Orff published the results of her experiences and encounters in her ten years of pioneering music therapeutic work from 1963 to 1973 in her first book *Orff Music Therapy: Active Furthering of the Development of the Child* (1974/1980). In this book she describes the essential concepts of Orff Music Therapy which she had drawn from her practice in music therapy especially in the Centre for Social Paediatrics at the Kinderzentrum in Munich ([www.kinderzentrum-muenchen.de](http://www.kinderzentrum-muenchen.de)). It was the then director of the Kinderzentrum, Prof. Dr. h.c. mult. Theodor Hellbrügge, who formed the name '*Orff Music Therapy*' as the therapeutic application of the Orff-Schulwerk. In his preface Carl Orff attested to his former wife's profound knowledge in the principles and possibilities of the Orff-Schulwerk and considered her therapeutic work as a realisation of the implicit potential of the Orff-Schulwerk that she had developed with great skill in a creative way. The twenty-one photographs taken by Isolde Ohlbaum in the book capture living moments from her music therapy sessions and show the moments of her early applications of music as therapy.

The starting point of her approach is the elemental musical expression of the child and in the first chapter Gertrud Orff defines the position of Orff Music Therapy as a multisensory therapy addressing all senses in using the musical means of rhythmical speech, rhythm, movement, melody in speaking and singing and in the use of instruments. In therapy the child can express herself or himself freely in spontaneous and creative cooperation with the therapist. Gertrud Orff formed her music therapy principles in relation to the ancient Greek concept of music *musiké* – "a total presentation in word, sound and movement" (Orff 1974/1980: 9). This includes not only more than our contemporary concept of music but draws special attention to the phenomenon of play and acoustic climate. She clearly relates here to the "sibling" of Orff music therapy, the *Music for Children* in the Orff-Schulwerk with its prominent concept of elemental music that is never music alone but connected with movement, dance and speech.

The following chapters describe the relation of Orff Music Therapy to the Orff-Schulwerk, the specific elements of the therapy, the practical work and therapeutic application with children with different forms of disabilities. She demonstrates in detail the therapeutic treatment with examples of different indications and explains the relation between therapist and parents. Several brief case

studies paint a picture of her clinical work in the form of small music therapy stories.

In her last chapter she writes about what was for her, the "secret of therapy": Even if the interaction in music therapy can be observed – the therapeutic effect of music therapy always takes place invisibly. For Gertrud Orff the secret of music therapy lies in the specific acoustic-musical climate that is animating and stimulating, calming and soothing, intensifying and moderating. This climate is formed through movement, rhythm and sound – and has always been seen by her as a present moment as the Greek notion of *chairos* describes it. Therefore in Orff Music Therapy it is a central condition for the therapist to become aware of the creative moment and to be attentive to the child's motivation. The aesthetic perception results from an animating energetic impulse, so that therapy can only be successful when the child participates emotionally. It is essential in music therapy to stay alert and to be prepared for the unexpected. Gertrud Orff often relates to the etymologic meaning of words. She explains the Latin expression for face *facies* as formed by the word *facio* which means action. So action and effect of the action form face and expression of the face: "facio facies mea". In music therapy it is the affect that elicits the effect and thus the essential requirement for therapeutic effects is the emotional encounter of the therapist with the child.

The clinical experiences obtained through her music therapy practice served to build the theory of Orff Music Therapy in the form of key concepts. In her second book published in 1984 (English translation 1990) Gertrud Orff describes 77 *Key Concepts* of Orff Music Therapy. These key concepts proved to be valuable both for the diagnosis and prognosis of a child as well as for the therapeutic treatment. She uses the word *key* as a metaphor for *opening* or *closing* the *lock* of a child, and emphasises that each word, each behaviour of a child can become such a key in therapy. In the beginning of her music therapy work two concepts were especially crucial to her: the first is the concept of "imitation and initiative", the second is the concept of "emotion". Therefore the question is on one hand, whether a child tends more to imitate or to take the initiative and on the other hand to which extent, respectively in which form, the child is expressing emotions. The 77 key concepts are part of seven chapters titled *Perception, Provocation, Gestalt, Object, Space, Time, Language, and Communication*. In each of the 77 key concepts she first explains the concept in a general way and then comments on the music therapeutic perspective of these concepts. These are illustrated lively with sheet music, drawings and examples from her music therapy practice.

Without explicitly referring to psychological theories Gertrud Orff explicates, how in Orff Music Therapy some base principles of the Orff-Schulwerk can be applied in a therapeutic context. Beginning with *musiké* as concept of music, multisensory aspects of music, spontaneous play and musical improvisation on elemental instruments – the so-called Orff instruments are completed with other string, wind, keyboard and percussion instruments. Gertrud Orff shows in the *key concepts*, how musical instruments especially can stimulate and encourage the child to explore and participate actively in the musical interaction. The specific use of these instruments forms the basis for responsive interaction in Orff Music Therapy and the resulting relation of child and therapist is a central factor for therapeutic success. Especially stimulating for her in paediatric music therapy are concepts like *chaos* and *order* but also *economy*, *richness* and *emptiness*. She uses repetition in a variety of forms such as gestures, rhythms, dynamics or paradox examples resulting in moments of ostinato, moments of contrast and moments of surprise.

Orff Music Therapy is a humanistic approach that promotes human growth through provocation in the literal sense of the word – stimulating perception and action through musical interaction and musical resonance. Gertrud Orff, as a pioneering founder of this particular approach of music therapy, always stressed the developmental potential of a child and in this context often used the word “*proficit*” in contrast to the perspective of deficits mostly taken in the therapy with developmentally delayed children. For her each child has something to offer and each child has several resources that can be mobilised through music. Therefore the most important elements in music therapy are impulses that emerge from the therapeutic interaction.

Today we would speak of empowerment, resilience and salutogenesis in referring to these phenomena. In the meantime in clinical intervention studies the developmental furthering effect of Orff Music Therapy has been evaluated and video microanalyses have proven the therapeutic effect of this responsive musical interaction (Plahl 2007).

Her pioneering books emphasising the elemental character of music opened new paths in music therapy: The basic elements of sound and movement work together in a stimulating play situation creating fascination through permanent changes in tension and relaxation, different forms of repetition and the richness of tonal sequences. Orff Music Therapy now has a history of almost fifty years and from the early days of its conception to the present day the concept of *musiké* is the

ground on which its practice and principles are constructed. Today indications for Orff Music Therapy are mainly in four areas of development: social-emotional development, auditory development, language development and motor development (Voigt 2003).

Gertrud Orff established a training course in Orff Music Therapy in 1980 which is now a three year study course offered at the Deutsche Akademie für Entwicklungsrehabilitation in Munich ([www.daer.de](http://www.daer.de)). In the meantime many trained Orff music therapists work with children, youth, adults and elderly people with different developmental disabilities. As human development is conceived by psychology in a lifetime perspective the furthering of development through music will also not be restricted to childhood and youth.

From today’s standpoint both books are valuable to both practising music therapists and members of other disciplines interested in the ideas of Orff Music Therapy and their practical application. The essential contribution of Orff Music Therapy is the multisensory developmental approach that uses music for human growth. The legacy of Gertrud Orff for contemporary music therapy is her enthusiastic view of the developmental potential of music.

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