



Clive Robbins' Influence on Polish Music Therapy

Krzysztof Stachyra

*"I despair that we shall ever have a peaceful world. But each of us has access to that power within that creates that holds spiritual values for human life. Each of us has and can share capacities for love and faith, beauty, decency, dignity, even nobility of spiritual purpose. We can be idealistic, we can strive, we can have humor, and appreciation and generosity of spirit. That is what we are privileged to live for and contribute to human growth. We have found our work and we must do it as well as we can. We must value our values"*¹

Clive Robbins

I think that you are never ready for the loss of a close friend. Although I was up-to-date with Clive's health problems I was surprised by the news of his death. Most music therapists all over the world know Clive Robbins as a co-creator of Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy, an approach that has restored hope for many seriously disabled people and their relatives. For me Clive was not just a Master, but most of all, a Friend. Everyone who met him knows what an amazing person he was; full of kindness, warmth and patience. He loved people and life – his face just exuded it.

Here I will not write generally about Clive's impact on the field of music therapy, but I will focus on his influence on music therapy and music therapists in Poland.

I met Clive for the first time in Florida, during the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) national conference in 2005. I attended his presentation. Afterwards we were talking for a while and exchanged email addresses. At that point I had no idea how much he would influence my life. Around the same time a Polish music therapist, Agnieszka Bryndal, trained in the Nordoff-Robbins approach in Germany and started to work on a Polish translation Clive Robbins' and Paul

Nordoff's book *Therapy in Music for Handicapped Children*.



Picture 1: Krzysztof Stachyra and Clive Robbins at the AMTA national conference (Orlando, 2005)

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Clive and I met again in 2007 during my visit to New York. At that time Clive was working on the video material for the Polish translation of *Therapy in Music for Handicapped Children*. It was to be published with an additional DVD containing 50 films about Creative Music Therapy practice from

¹ This is an excerpt from a personal letter sent by Clive Robbins to Dorit Amir on 15th September 2001.

the early work in Philadelphia in the 1960's to the contemporary work of Nordoff-Robbins music therapists in New York. We spent considerable time talking about the book and the DVD material. It was a very inspiring day.



Picture 2: Clive in his office in New York 2007

Clive was born in Britain and served in the RAF during the Second World War. He probably met some Polish pilots who flew with the RAF, but he never had the opportunity to come to Poland himself – partly because for over 40 years Poland was behind the ‘Iron Curtain’, and partly because no one invited him. So during my visit in New York I invited Clive to come to Poland.

He was very excited by this idea. And he came in 2008 - twice in fact. The first time he came to Lublin, to Marie Curie Skłodowska University. This was an event of great importance for the Polish music therapy community. He opened our new concert hall at the Music Faculty and gave the first lecture there, talking about the development of the Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy approach, presenting films and pictures. The hall was full of people, mostly young music therapy students from all over Poland. For most of them it was the first opportunity to be in touch with Creative Music Therapy. Everyone was impressed by Clive and his stories. The same day Simon Procter came from London (UK) to support Clive and lead a music therapy workshop. I remember that all day long Clive was full of energy and very patient. He was an unassuming and kindly man. Clive used to say that we should “use” his visits to promote music therapy in Poland. And that is exactly what we did. News about his visit and Simon’s workshops appeared on Polish TV. In fact, he always used to promote music therapy, never himself. He preferred to be with people and work with people, using every opportunity to share with others his passion for music therapy and life. Always ready to support someone, to say a kind word or smile, he was full

of optimism and trust in people. He simply loved people and could find and emphasise something positive in every person. This is the Clive whom I and Polish music therapists remember.



Picture 3: Simon Procter, Krzysztof Stachyra, Clive Robbins in Lublin, Poland

Just one week later Clive came back to Poland. This time he came to Krakow in Southern Poland to promote his and Paul Nordoff’s book. It was a very important point in the development of knowledge about Creative Music Therapy in Poland. I can truly say that people’s thinking about and approach to music therapy started to change. People saw that it is not only methods and techniques that count, but also the power of creativeness in a true meeting with another person. Clive Robbins and Simon Procter have done more for this than anyone else.

The last visit of Clive in Poland was in May 2010, when he realised his dream of visiting the Tatra Mountains. We had talked about it a few years before; I showed pictures of this beautiful part of Poland to Clive and he fell in love with it. During our trip by car from Krakow airport he was talking about music therapists all over the world. He had just come from Asia with a powerful feeling that we all are one big music therapy family. It doesn’t matter where you live; we all love music and do our best to share this love with people who need it. Music is universal for all of us.

When we arrived he was touched by the beauty of the place. He was like a child – open to new experiences, open to new discoveries. In particular, he took a special liking to one bench which provided an amazing view of the mountains. Each day he spent considerable time on this bench, looking at the mountains, contemplating, and telling stories about his life experiences. We were talking about the philosophy of life, music therapy, culture, even politics... he had that unique gift of describing the most difficult things in a very

simple, understandable way – like a wise person distanced from anything that is not important.

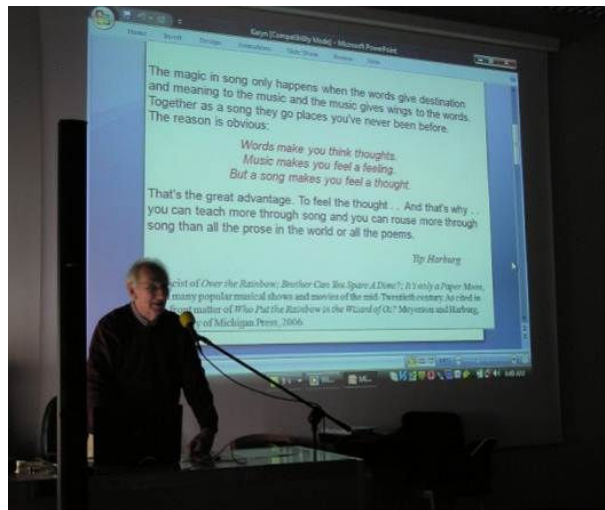


Picture 4: Krzysztof Stachyra and Clive Robbins at the Gubałówka in the Tatra Mountains



Picture 5: Clive on “his” bench in the Tatra Mountains

Clive would not be ‘Clive’ if he wasn’t working; so after taking a rest in the mountains we travelled on to the Music Academy in Katowice. There he met music therapy students, and Barbara Wheeler who had also come to teach there. I always admired Clive’s life energy and I couldn’t believe that this man, who was over 80 years old, could work so hard. He led an intensive life, but always had time for people – and I think this is not only my experience, but the experience of everyone who met him.



Picture 6: Clive in Katowice Music Academy

In the final email he sent me he gave his last lesson for Poland. Actually, I think this is, in a sense, a message for every one of us, for every music therapist in the world:

The Mission of life is to learn how to love - So I'm told. And love has so many active forms and purposes and contents and challenges and ground to break, so follow your heart's insights. You have so many great colleagues to support you! You are all blessed by this music therapy mission in life.

More later,

Clive

There was no ‘more later’. He died on 7th December 2011. But in a way, these casual words “more later” are still true. His books, work, films and contribution to music therapy mean that he is still more and more involved in music therapy work for the rest of us. He teaches Polish music therapists every day... he teaches all of us how to be better therapists, better people.

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