



## Book Review

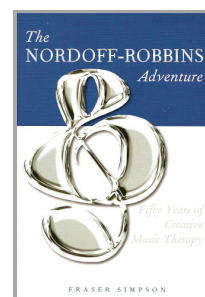
### **The Nordoff-Robbins Adventure Fifty Years of Creative Music Therapy** Fraser Simpson

Reviewed by Maria Froudaki

*The Nordoff-Robbins Adventure: Fifty Years of Creative Music Therapy*

By Fraser Simpson

London: James and James Publishers Ltd. (2009)  
192 pp, ISBN: 978 1 906507 06 0



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Once I held the book in my hands, I tried to fully take in its title. I asked myself, “Why is this an adventure?” A Greek dictionary, however, promptly provided me with a parameter that had been escaping me.

Adventure can be defined as “radical change” (Dimitrakos 1951) and this is exactly what this book is about. It offers the reader a detailed description, well-researched and eloquently expressed, of an exciting upheaval which took place in many people’s lives – over the course of fifty years – whereby these people stumbled upon a simple, clear and original idea – an idea which sweeps us back in time to Plato and his theory of ideas (Theodorakopoulos 1941).

The idea of music as therapy, as it sprang from the work of the very charismatic duet of Paul

Nordoff and Clive Robbins, seems – in Fraser Simpson’s book – to have a life of its own, as is always the case with original creations. Dolto (1998) writes about the will of the embryo to be born and this could also apply to Creative Music Therapy. The spiritual connection and collaboration of its two progenitors seems to have sparked the will of this pioneering concept into life.

Throughout the book, there are subtle and discrete intimations of the unique nature of Creative Music Therapy, which becomes interwoven with the human spirit and soul in such a way as to make radical change possible and almost inevitable. The initial change takes place internally, creating a strong personal motive. It then blossoms, weaving its way into society and different groups of people who more than willingly fall into its momentum.

The entire process brings forth an evolution in many different areas; an approach to music therapy develops, health services improve their effectiveness, research reveals new scientific tools, academic knowledge expands. In addition, many musicians discover a new path in their lives and thousands of people's lives are transformed by music as therapy.

This book encompasses the paradigm of a specific music therapy approach which grew and expanded in parallel with a very successful long-term fundraising strategy, where the UK music industry and the musicians themselves played such an important role. It is a most extraordinary accomplishment to have Creative Music Therapy bring together the very different worlds of public sector institutions, professional associations, charities, enterprises, the music industry and private entities, with the Nordoff-Robbins Charity at the very core of this creative convergence, fostering a long-term and sound collaboration of these sectors.

Fraser Simpson conveys the feeling of this 'adventure' in his characteristically sensitive writing style. He highlights the different needs of each period which led to the appropriate decisions being made. In this sense, Fraser Simpson's book is in fact about a real adventure, as it presents a blow-by-blow account of what was happening on the negotiation tables for many years - from the very beginning up to quite recently. He is painstakingly thorough in his documentation of the major decisions that were made; the quality of the research is of a commendable standard.

Whilst reading the book and if one has any personal connection to music therapy, one may become uncomfortably emotional and this is a clear indication of how accurate the narration is. If one was to take a closer look at some of the historical issues which appear in the narration (I refer to two of them: the internal splitting and the change of the generations) one could discern the universality of these difficult and crucial matters in the way they manifest themselves and confront you, whether you are an individual, group or organization. It is surely of great importance when maturity flourishes over the passage of time.

It is crucial for an institution to be able to ponder the actions of the past. The maturity demonstrated in sharing this history prompts the reader to have trust in Nordoff Robbins organisation, which has survived all these difficult stages in its development and overcome many obstacles.

In many ways, this book is a generous gift or a bequest for all future generations of music therapists. Lydia Flem (2004) highlights the vast difference between what one inherits and what one is bequeathed with. The inheritance is a legal action

which leaves you alone to face many open questions. The bequest can be seen as the generous choice of the old generation to pass the history on to the future.

Fraser Simpson's work provides the reader with an understanding of the history which enlightens the present and leads smoothly into the future. Moreover, the story of the people who created this history has been brought to light. Fraser Simpson has done excellent work in presenting a vivid picture of the events and the main characters. Through a series of vignettes and delightful short stories, he manages to give all the protagonists a human aspect, keeping the necessary distance to ensure accuracy.

It was in Clive Robbins's welcome note that my eyes fell upon the expression: "dramatis personae". This expression reminded me of the myths we encounter in ancient Greek drama. While reading this book, there were moments where I could see characters from the works of Aeschylus (*Evmenides*) and Euripides (*Orestis*) hiding between the lines. There were also moments where I could not but think of Paul Nordoff - "the sun among men" (Robbins 2005) - as the ingenious man described in the work of Aristotle (*Melancholia and Talent*) or the man who combines the philosophy, music and eros of Platonic thinking (Manos 2007).

The history of the Nordoff Robbins approach allows a side view of the history of the music therapy profession in the UK and other countries. Simpson writes about the establishment of the profession - the first music therapy posts. He speaks not only of the 'victories', but of the obstacles as well; all the frustration and the losses, the hostility, the lack of funding, the need for equipment.

Throughout the book, one can find a considerable number of possible tricks that the protagonists came up with in order to keep their work running. I could cite the idea of a mobile music therapy unit as an example.

If you are in any way associated with or a part of the music world, this book may inspire you to conduct further reading on various issues touched upon by the author - the history of the profession in the UK or in other countries, the theoretical basis of music therapy, or even the management of successful fundraising campaigns.

Questions may be posed which prompt further reading in addition to further writing and publications. As an example, I could mention the scores of Paul Nordoff's compositions or the existing correspondence of Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins with Dr. Herbert Geuter.

There are specific points in the book where one can find vignettes of music therapy theory which

illustrate how music therapy works in very simple words. Therefore, I urge you to share this book with friends and colleagues who might be interested in music therapy, as it provides a historical, human, theoretical view.

However, because the style of writing is at times very much like a detailed chronology, it is possible that a reader who is not interested in this specific approach may be overwhelmed by so many names and dates<sup>1</sup>.

Upon reaching the last part of the book which refers to all the international initiatives – though I wondered whether all information was up to date – the reader will discover diversity in the establishment of Nordoff Robbins music therapy, depending on the particularities of each country and the cultural or political differences. The message conveyed is that the establishment of an organization like Nordoff Robbins is not dependent upon a set paradigm. On the contrary, the work in each country develops its own national identity.

In this context, I encourage the reader to reconsider Even Ruud's (2009) view on human dignity by asking the question, "Is the way we perceive human dignity relevant to cultural, historical and political matters?"

Time is integral to history. This book shows that time and timing are crucial parameters to keep in mind. The shared knowledge of this book can be a very useful tool in the hands of a music therapist who would like to reshape his/her own professional path and find ways to map out future possibilities.

I may be writing this from the perspective of a pioneer music therapist in my country, but I do believe it is relevant to every professional. This book is a well thought out answer to the question, "Can we skip history?" The conclusion I have come to – through reading this book – is that, no, we cannot simply skip history. What we can do is live through it and create it. However, by achieving an understanding of history, we can probably speed things up.

I would like to conclude by quoting a Greek poet (Elitis, 1998): "Nicely fold the air in your cupboards", as this is what Fraser Simpson has expertly done for me.

I strongly urge you to read this book while enjoying a glass of "Moet and Chandon"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2007, Fraser Simpson published his book *Every Note Counts – The Story of Nordoff-Robbins Music Therapy* which is a companion to the book presented here. It is illustrated with many pictures and therefore it is easier for the reader. A review of this book is planned to be published in the next issue of *Approaches: Music Therapy & Special Music Education*, 2 (1), Spring 2010.

<sup>2</sup> The UK branch of "Moet and Chandon" has been a keen supporter of Nordoff Robbins.