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Music as a resonant experience – a contribution to health psychology from the discipline of music therapy

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Abstract

Music therapy has generated robust evidence for the role of music in enhancing health and well-being across populations. Drawing on empirical research, theory, and clinical observation, this evidence highlights how musical engagement can support vitality, agency, belonging, and meaning. These benefits extend beyond clinical settings, suggesting that everyday uses of music may contribute to health promotion and quality of life. Insights from music therapy are increasingly relevant to health psychology, particularly in addressing stress-related conditions, anxiety, depression, and insomnia. This paper argues for recognising music therapy as a form of contemporary folk medicine based upon active and receptive forms of health musicking with clear implication for public health initiatives. Two central questions guide the discussion: How can music support everyday health and well-being? And how might this knowledge inform health psychology? The paper introduces the concept of music as a “cultural immunogen,” focusing on four domains of health musicking, with particular emphasis on Hartmut Rosa’s theory of resonance.

Keywords

health psychology,
health musicking,
cultural immunogen,
existential health,
resonance

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Introduction

Music therapy, through practice, professional development, and the forming of a research discipline, has long produced substantial evidence regarding the role of music in improving health across various populations. This evidence arises from empirical research, theoretical reasoning, and music therapists’ observations. This varied evidence documents how engaging with music helps people restore their vitality, exercise their agency, find a place in their community, and create meaning and hope in their lives.

This evidence is not only relevant to the profession of music therapy but may also apply to the everyday use of music as a means to improve or maintain health and quality of life. Knowledge gained from music therapy with individuals in vulnerable life situations is highly pertinent to health promotion, disease prevention, and behavioural medicine, as explored in related fields such as health psychology. This is particularly significant in the current global health context, which has seen rising rates of stress-related illnesses, anxiety, depression, and insomnia. Against this backdrop, we aim to highlight how music therapy is poised to be integrated into the broader domain of public health. In this article, I will argue, then, how health-musicking can contribute to public health initiatives (see also Ruud, 2020b; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Fancourt, 2025).

The first general question asked in this paper is how music can contribute to a better life, health, and well-being in everyday life? How can this knowledge be of relevance to the field of health psychology? Then I will ask how music, as a meaning-making and existential resource may contribute to health and life quality, particularly in relation to the concept of “resonance” introduced by the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2019).

In what follows, I first address key issues within the evolving field of health psychology and suggest how music therapy may offer responses to the current health challenges facing Western industrial societies. I then briefly outline my theory of music as a “cultural immunogen,” presenting four domains of health musicking and corresponding “musical immunogens” that may enhance subjective health and well-being.

In medical terminology, an immunogen is a substance that protects the body from harmful pathogens, while an antigen is any substance recognised as foreign by the immune system and capable of triggering an immune response. Both concepts are used here metaphorically. For example, a “cultural antigen” may refer to experiences such as exclusion and loneliness, a diminished sense of meaning in life, or, in more severe cases, conditions such as depression. By identifying such cultural antigens, we may be able to mobilise engagement in music and musical activities as resources to counter threats to health and well-being.

The field of health psychology

According to the American Psychological Association, “health psychology examines how biological, social, and psychological factors influence health and illness. Health psychologists use psychological science to promote health, prevent illness, and improve health care systems” (APA, 2026).

During the first decades of the field’s development, art and culture did not appear to occupy a significant place in health psychology research, as reflected in early introductory textbooks (Ogden, 2000). In recent years, however, research on culture and health has expanded considerably. There is now substantial documentation of the impact of the arts, and especially music, on health and quality of life, with important implications for public health initiatives (see Fancourt, 2025 for extensive documentation of research).

In this article, I will depart from the notion of “behavioral immunogens” as introduced by American psychologist Joseph Matarazzo in the 1980s. Matarazzo spearheaded efforts to illustrate the potential synergy between psychology and medicine in enhancing public health. He documented how health behaviours contribute significantly to combating major post-war health challenges like

heart disease, cancer, and other life-threatening conditions. This period saw a decline in the threat posed by traditional infectious diseases due to advancements in medical science, pharmacology, and improved social conditions in Western countries. However, despite these improvements, conditions such as heart disease and cancer continued to impose a considerable toll on society, often stemming from stress-related behaviours (Type A behaviour) or unhealthy lifestyle choices like poor diet and obesity (Matarazzo, 1984).

Matarazzo introduced the concept of “behavior pathogens” to describe detrimental lifestyle habits that predispose individuals to heightened mortality risks. He developed a theory of “behavior immunogens,” representing behaviours conducive to health and longevity. Until that time, it was common to identify only pathogens or life-threatening diseases. With the introduction of salutogenic thinking by Antonovsky (1991), researchers began to look for behaviours that could enhance health. Within health psychology, a diverse array of behaviours was identified as part of the repertoire of immunogenic conduct. Notable examples include dietary guidelines, smoking cessation, moderate alcohol consumption, oral hygiene practices, proper sleep hygiene, and seat belt usage while driving.

It is worth noting that some of the biomedical diseases that formed the backdrop of Matarazzo’s theories in the 1980s, such as heart disease and cancer, still exist. However, many contemporary health challenges are related to depression, anxiety, stress, pain and insomnia. Although these challenges are often viewed as individual problems, they may actually stem from life conditions and social arrangements resulting from economic inequality, disempowerment, social isolation, and dislocation. These factors can lead to stress, estrangement, and a loss of meaning.

These life conditions are evident in the current labour market and life conditions influenced by social and economic acceleration, as observed by German sociologist Rosa (2019). Such arrangements may lead to pathogenic behaviours, which in turn trigger immunogenic responses of a cultural nature. An illustrative example is how the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in social isolation, prompting the well-known singing from balconies in Italy. This act of singing became an important and health-promoting response to the pathogenic behaviour stemming from social isolation, to combat isolation, solitude, anxiety, and boredom. German music therapist Eric Pfeifer has demonstrated how this might be described as a musically-evoked process of meaning actualisation, referring to Austrian psychotherapist Viktor Frankl’s three avenues to life meaning (creative, experiential, and attitudinal values) (Pfeifer, 2021).

Thus, diseases with known biomedical causes, like those due to the Covid-19 virus, have behavioural consequences. Some of these consequences can be addressed through behaviour associated with cultural performance.

Cultural immunogens

I will elaborate on the notion of “cultural immunogen” as a parallel to the concept of a “behavioral immunogen,” introduced by Joseph Matarazzo in the 1980s. Redefining “behavioral immunogens” to “cultural immunogens” involves utilising cultural artifacts or the arts, particularly music, to expand the repertoire of behaviours that promote health.

To communicate effectively with the field of health psychology and behavioural medicine, I propose a rhetorical framework for advancing health musicking, rooted in metaphors from medical

science. Terms such as "immunogens," "pathogens," or "antigens" are commonplace within medical discourse, as well as in health psychology and prevention. By metaphorically reframing musical engagement within this immunological paradigm, I aim to elucidate how various forms of musicking may have protective functions within a broader health promotion matrix. Through this lens, music emerges as a potent contributor to the repertoire of health-promoting behaviours.

Using medical terminology as a rhetorical device, I will refer to musical immunogens to demonstrate how "health musicking" may foster health behaviours and a sense of well-being. I have previously proposed four domains in which health musicking may influence health and life quality: (1) agency, (2) emotional regulation, (3) belonging, and (4) meaning-making (Ruud, 2002, 2013, 2020b). These domains are interconnected and mutually entangled through phenomena such as identity, self-efficacy and empowerment, emotions and meanings, networks and belonging, as well as spirituality and transcendence. By drawing on the "laboratory" of music therapy and research from the fields of music therapy, music medicine and other interdisciplinary research, we can explore how these connections operate in practice (Fancourt, 2025; Ruud, 2020b, 2020a). I will particularly focus on the last of these four antigens, the aspect of aesthetics, meaning making and existential health as this relates to Rosa's theory of resonant relations.

By introducing the concept of music as a "cultural immunogen," I aim to highlight the role of musical engagement in safeguarding and enhancing subjective health and quality of life. While music has long been recognised as a form of folk medicine or a part of personalised public health, there remains a reluctance to fully integrate it into our broader health culture. The ubiquitous presence of music in daily life, whether through listening, attending concerts, or engaging in amateur musical pursuits, underscores its pervasive influence and possible consequences for health.

A new set of antigens and pathogens

While Matarazzo's framework primarily addresses health-related concerns, its direct applicability to the intersection of music and health is limited due to its individualistic and biomedical focus on health and disease. However, there is a growing interest in public health research in exploring how cultural engagement, such as musicking, correlates with population health outcomes. Examining the role of musical practices in addressing health-related challenges highlights the potential for cultural immunogenic behaviours to enhance well-being (Bonde & Theorell, 2018, Fancourt, 2025).

We must consider how a new set of risk factors prevails in contemporary society, largely due to changing life conditions. Matarazzo observed that microbial pathogens no longer posed the same threat to health and mortality; instead, other risk factors, or behaviour pathogens, emerged as new threats. Expanding on this argument, we can introduce a new set of risk factors prevalent in contemporary society, not stemming from individual behaviour but from structural conditions within society. This includes, as mentioned, stress-related labour, economic inequality, social marginalisation, and dislocation. Such risk factors have psychological as well as biological consequences, leading to pathogenic behaviours such as stress, disempowerment, lack of autonomy, and estrangement.

In his descriptions of social development, Rosa (2019) has pointed out how an accelerating development in economics and technology creates a rush and stress in the population, which easily

leads to a poorer quality of life. In other words, social development creates conditions, or “cultural antigens”, that may cut us off from the opportunities to live a good life. As a sociologist, he puts the spotlight on structural and society-created conditions, while at the same time showing how this can affect existential conditions for creating a good life.

What Rosa calls “dynamic stability” is about the fact that we must increase our resources, grow more, in order to keep pace with a development that aims to create stability in the economy. Things should go faster and faster. We always have to do a little more than the previous year. It is like going down an upward escalator that goes a little faster every year. If we stop for a moment, we are back to the starting point. It’s important to keep up. This increasing acceleration occurs economically, socially, technologically and culturally. Rosa describes a logic that shows that growth requires more growth and that we are caught in a kind of loop where we are forced to increase the pace, produce more, live faster, and so on. This creates a form of alienation, an experience of never reaching, until it facilitates burnout.

Acceleration is a characteristic of modernity – faster transport, means of communication and means of production, and more frequent cultural changes characterise modern society. We are talking about time constraints and multitasking. Frequent, new technological gains mean that you must constantly stay up to date. New apps, new ways to buy tickets, banking, word processors, and vital services that require you to be on your toes. Instead of prioritising what we think is most important, we do what is most urgent first. The faster we live, the less time we feel we have.

A high pace is not in itself negative, says Rosa: only when it leads to alienation. This increasing acceleration creates alienation. This is experienced as a relationship to the world that is silent, cold, and rigid, where we are unable to form a relationship. Alienation involves a harmful experience of being separated from individuals and situations involving a sense of experience of communality.

Considerations such as social isolation, loneliness, disempowerment due to psychological or social factors, emotional distress, and existential crises are pertinent to contemporary health services. These facets, encompassing vitality, agency, belongingness, and meaning, represent key dimensions of present-day health challenges, transcending the scope of lifestyle diseases prevalent during Matarazzo’s era. Today, society grapples with a range of psychological and social complexities that intersect with health and well-being.

However, caution is warranted when making claims about a direct relationship between these health challenges and mortality rates. Rather than positing causal links, it may be more appropriate to examine how musical engagement is associated with subjective health perceptions and quality of life, and how it might thereby function as a potential resource for health promotion (Fancourt, 2025).

Comprehensive investigations into possible connections between cultural practices and mortality outcomes present substantial empirical and methodological challenges within public health research. Nonetheless, findings from the broader field of music and health may lend support to theoretical arguments that music-making can be understood as a form of cultural immunogen (while this remains a hypothesis requiring further empirical testing).

Moreover, there is well-established evidence that the body responds to prolonged negative stress in ways that affect both physiological and psychological functioning. Such research underscores the importance of attending to the dynamic relationship between body and mind when considering how musical engagement might contribute to health and well-being.

Four musical immunogens

A cultural immunogen is a metaphorical application of the term “immunogen” from medical science. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we became familiar with how scientists developed new vaccines containing various antigens to protect us from the virus. As said, an immunogen is a substance that protects us from being contaminated by a threatening virus. Metaphorically speaking, a cultural immunogen is a type of behaviour within the cultural domain—specifically music—that might serve the same function as an immunogen, not biologically but psychologically or metaphorically. Although there is interesting research in psychoimmunology on how listening to music might alter our immune system, this has not been my focus here. I will discuss below, however, that there is a strong connection between how people experiencing a meaningful life and are more motivated to take care of their health suffer less from stress-related diseases (Schnell, 2021).

I have been looking for cultural immunogens related to musical behaviour. This includes how listening to music, playing and learning an instrument, participating in choirs or co-singing, performing in rock bands and other musical groups, and attending concerts affect our subjective health and well-being. I have identified four domains to be elaborated on further below: i) vitality, ii) agency, iii) belongingness, and iv) meaning, transcendence and existential health (Ruud, 2020b).

Vitality

I will briefly address the first three domains I have proposed, giving more space to Rosa’s notion of resonance. First to mention is vitality and emotional regulation. The last decade has produced much research demonstrating how musicking is related to our emotional life. Musicking raises emotional awareness, helps conceptualise emotions, challenges our emotional tolerance, and provides a tool for emotional expressivity. Technological developments like the internet, streaming, and smartphones have made music accessible throughout the day, usable as a self-technology or aesthetic technology (DeNora, 2000) to regulate moods and energies. We can use music to control, alter, and regulate our moods and emotions to adapt to our immediate goals. Emotional regulation is a central theme in psychology and can be connected to vitality. It involves naming a feeling, tolerating it, and giving it expression. We regulate our emotions by changing them, making feelings disappear, or prolonging them. We can regulate unpleasant emotions, calm ourselves down, and remove stress. We can transform a dark mood into a brighter one. However, it is important to acknowledge that listening to music, in some cases, evokes negative emotions, or contributes to maladaptive rumination among vulnerable individuals (McFerran & Saarikallio, 2014).

We may regulate our emotions through music listening or by actively engaging in music-making, such as playing or performing. Individuals draw on a repertoire of tactics and strategies to manage emotional states, and musicking represents one of several resources used to shift mood, enhance energy, or alleviate tension. Numerous tactics contribute to emotional regulation: taking a bath, going for a run, breathing exercises, keeping a journal, sleeping, self-soothing, and so on. The question is whether music holds a special position among these tactics and whether it plays a unique role in emotional regulation. With a rich variety of music forms, artists, and individual pieces, musicking proves to be a potent source of emotional regulation.

Music, or musical engagement, can be part of the set of tactics we choose from to gain control over our emotions. Music is closely connected to emotions, and most people have experienced how music affects their feelings. Playlists are often named after the mood we want to set. In this way, music becomes an effective tactic for influencing our emotions. Music can involve everything from listening to music we like, playing alone or with others, attending a concert, singing in a choir, or dancing. Thus, musicking affords several possibilities to be included in the repertoire of behaviour immunogens suggested by health psychologist Joseph Matarozzo.

Agency

With regard to agency, there is a long-standing tradition within music therapy of documenting how musicking may enhance competence, support identity formation, and promote empowerment through active participation in music-making and performance. Participants in musical performances develop skills, build self-esteem, and gain a sense of accomplishment. Music acts as a powerful tool for self-expression and identity formation, allowing individuals to connect with their cultural roots, personal values, and shared experiences within a community. In many ways, how music strengthens our agency is fundamental to performing healthy behaviours. Agency is also connected to the other domains discussed, as there is an interactive relationship between agency, belongingness, and meaning.

Specific theories, such as Albert Bandura's notion of "self-efficacy," are important for understanding how our belief in our ability to perform specific actions influences the desired outcome (Bandura, 1977). Also, the notion of "empowerment" is crucial. Empowerment involves individuals or groups gaining power and autonomy in their lives, circumstances, and decisions. We strengthen empowerment by building self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy and supporting individuals in gaining autonomy, competence, and a sense of social belonging. In health psychology, "locus of control" is a key concept. Enhancing self-efficacy and fostering empowerment are central to maintaining a sense of control over one's life, which in turn supports the adoption of behaviours that protect and promote health.

Belongingness

As noted, a pressing issue in contemporary society is the widespread experience of social isolation. Loneliness and social disconnection pose significant risks to health. In light of this, it is essential to cultivate social spaces where individuals can connect and foster a sense of belonging. Music, in particular, has a unique capacity to generate feelings of togetherness and social cohesion (Cook, 2024).

Amateur music provides numerous ensembles—choirs, bands, and orchestras—that offer participation and the opportunity to experience belonging to a community. Keywords from the literature include network, "bonding and bridging," and music as social capital, all of which point to how musical communities can provide a context for cultural immunogens to counteract the adverse effects of social isolation. Experiences from community music and community music therapy clearly

support how music may support processes of social integration (Caneva & Mattiello, 2018; Higgins & Willingham, 2017; Stige et. al., 2010).

Meaning, transcendence and existential health

Health musicking not only facilitates empowerment, agency, belonging, social interaction, and personal growth, but it also provides profound experiences of meaning and transcendence. Strong emotional experiences, described as “kama muto” in many cultures, are central to these transcendental moments (Swarbrick, 2023). As documented by Swedish music psychologist Alf Gabrielsson (2008), people often report strong emotional experiences in response to listening to and performing music.

These experiences often lead to a sense of resonance, a concept explored by sociologist Rosa (2019). Rosa describes resonance as a mode of being in the world characterised by a responsive, affective, and reciprocal relationship with people, activities, and environments. Resonant experiences depend upon the individual’s sense of agency; they are highly-charged emotional experiences, they concern our relationships and belonging to the world at large, and are deeply connected to a sense of meaning, and all four domains previously discussed (Rosa, 2019).

Seen in the context of health psychology, this may be considered as part of existential health. For the field of music therapy, the question of how we define and understand “health” is a fundamental concern. While it is widely acknowledged that there are many perspectives on what health entails, one particular dimension, existential health, is especially relevant to the work music therapists engage in. We therefore need to develop a deeper understanding of what constitutes such existential health. A key aspect of this is how we experience meaning in life.

Tatjana Schnell, a professor of existential psychology, in her book *The Psychology of Meaning in Life* (Schnell, 2021), draws on a vast array of empirical studies that investigate what people perceive as meaningful, what sources provide meaning, and what strengthens this experience. She contends with how meaning is not something that objectively exists “out there,” but something we assign to an object, an action, or an event within a specific context. Meaning must be made. What is meaningful to one person may seem meaningless to another. What gives me meaning today might not have the same impact tomorrow. Meaning is dynamic, subjective, and relational.

Meaning in life consists of multiple dimensions. It is shaped by the direction we take in life, the goals we pursue, and how we evaluate our lives as more or less meaningful. Schnell identifies four primary dimensions of perceived meaning in life:

- *Coherence* refers to the degree to which our experiences, actions, and goals come together to form an integrated and meaningful narrative. When Schnell discusses therapeutic interventions to support meaning-making, one method is writing one’s life story. Here, writing a musical autobiography may become a meaningful approach in music therapy. Italian musicologist Maurizio Disoteo (2022) emphasises that such musical memory work is not just about recalling past experiences but about exploring how these encounters with music have shaped us.

- *Significance* refers to the extent to which our actions have meaningful consequences or create an impact. Music does not hold the same level of significance for everyone. Some might say “life is meaningless without music,” while others engage with it more casually. For musicians and fans who have invested time and identity in music, its absence could have profound implications for their sense of meaning.
- *Orientation* refers to having a clear sense of direction and purpose in life. Schnell emphasises that we live in a “multi-optional” society, constantly faced with choices. Deep engagement with music—for example, learning an instrument—requires focused effort and the deliberate exclusion of other options. Again, we see the connection between time investment and the eudaimonic form of happiness.
- *Belonging* is perhaps the most important source of life meaning. Schnell distinguishes between social belonging and existential belonging – a deep sense of being “at home in the world.” This existential belonging can counter what existential psychiatrist Irvin Yalom calls “existential isolation.” Music can play a critical role here by providing resonant experiences that affirm connection, as suggested in Rosa’s theory of resonance.

Motivation and moderation

Meaning in life affects health through two main mechanisms – motivation and moderation. People who find their lives meaningful are more motivated to care for their health. Aaron Antonovsky’s concept of the “sense of coherence” provides a useful framework here, especially the component of meaningfulness as a primary motivator for resilience against stress.

The second mechanism, moderation, describes how meaning in life serves as a buffer against stress. When people perceive their lives as meaningful, they tend to evaluate adverse events less negatively and experience fewer negative health effects as a result. They are better able to interpret challenges as part of a larger life narrative, which fosters resilience. This moderating effect overlaps with what Antonovsky referred to as “comprehensibility” – the sense that life events are structured, predictable, and explicable. Meaning helps integrate difficult experiences into a broader context that can reduce their psychological burden.

Schnell points to the relationship between meaning, health, and illness with references to a vast amount of empirical research. She documents robust links between a meaningful life and both mental and physical health. Those who experience life as meaningful report lower stress, stronger resilience, and fewer symptoms. They are more optimistic, self-efficacious, socially integrated, and compassionate toward themselves.

Physiologically, studies show moderate correlations between meaningfulness and markers like natural killer cell count and heart rate variability. People who find life meaningful also report better subjective health and fewer functional limitations. Large-scale national studies confirm that meaning in life significantly reduces mortality risk.

Tatjana Schnell (2021) notes that self-transcendence is a key dimension of meaning in life—an orientation that moves beyond the self toward others, the world, or something greater. Resonance can be understood as the experiential correlate of self-transcendence: in moments of deep musical connection, individuals often report feeling part of something larger, be it a community,

a shared history, or the mystery of life itself. In this way, resonance becomes both a pathway to meaning and a therapeutic process in its own right. Rosa has documented through self-experience how his favourite musical genre, heavy metal, has served transcendental functions in his own life (Rosa, 2023).

Resonance

Rosa's theory of resonance offers a compelling framework for understanding how music can support the experience of meaning in life. Resonance stands in contrast to alienation, where individuals feel disconnected, indifferent, or overwhelmed by the world around them. We saw how Rosa argued that while a fast-paced lifestyle isn't inherently negative, its detrimental effects surface when it leads to alienation. This pervasive acceleration results in a sense of detachment from the world, creating a silent, cold, and rigid existence devoid of meaningful connections. This alienation causes profound disconnection from both people and surroundings.

The solution, according to Rosa, lies in "resonance." Resonance, we saw, was defined as a profound relationship with the world, where individuals and their environment mutually influence and transform each other. This resonance stems from genuine encounters and engagements that deeply impact individuals. However, resonance cannot be contrived or controlled; it is inherently unpredictable and arises from authentic interactions (Rosa, 2019).

The concept of resonance is often used metaphorically, with a romantic connotation suggesting a kind of longing. Rosa acknowledges this but argues that these ideas from Romanticism point to something universally human, a yearning for closeness, belonging, fullness, meaning, and transformation.

For Rosa, resonance is a form of "relationship with the world," where the individual and the world meet and transform each other. This occurs through being (affectively) influenced by and responding emotionally based on one's inner interests and expectations of being able to influence the encounter in return. Resonance is about creating an experiential connection that is based on a response, rather than a mere echo.

Three axes

Rosa distinguishes between three "resonance axes" or "connection lines," which he also refers to as "spheres of resonance" that establish relationships with the world. The first axis, or connection line, is horizontal and relates to resonance opportunities within family, friendships, and politics. This horizontal or relational dimension provides important opportunities for resonant experiences. When such an experience resonates within the person, it may nurture transformation, therapeutic development, and personal change. In music therapy, we thus find descriptions of moments that emerge through the dynamic interplay between therapist and client. These experiences bear many similarities to the forms of resonance described by Rosa. Rosa also differentiates between profound, life-changing experiences and more everyday relational encounters that share similar qualities. He refers to these as "second order" experiences, noting that: "By no means only have the great,

identity-changing experiences of resonance unfolded a transformative power, but also the small, everyday ones (Pfleiderer & Rosa, 2020).

The second resonance axis includes objects, work, school, sports, and consumption. These form a link between the horizontal and vertical lines through the pursuit of goal-oriented practices. These axes pertain to engagement in music, as performers. Experiences of resonance within this horizontal sphere are well documented in music therapy research and literature particularly in settings where music therapists work with groups such as choirs, orchestras, or rock bands. Because all three axes can be activated simultaneously, it is often difficult to isolate them entirely. Nevertheless, specific forms of musicking or therapeutic approaches can generate distinct spheres of resonance within a given axis, shaped by particular artifacts, procedures, or rituals that vary across contexts.

Through the third axis of resonant relationships, Rosa emphasises that transformation occurs within us through resonant encounters. According to Rosa, this is where the experience of feeling truly alive resides. If we cease to allow ourselves to be called forth, or lose the capacity to respond, we may become internally dead, manifesting as depression or a sense of burnout. In such states, resonance is absent. Rosa associates depression with a condition in which all axes of resonance have become effectively deaf and mute (Rosa, 2019, 2020).

Examples of the third and vertical axes include our relationship with religion, nature, art, and history. These attain the status of “higher” and possibly “transcendent” spheres of engagement, such as in relation to gods, the cosmos, time, or eternity. Here, a projected world of (quasi-)divine beings can gain a voice, expressing humanity’s specific longings for spheres that offer transcendence in everyday life. This allows us to challenge given reality through ideological and institutional expressions of theological performance.

Final comments

Rosa’s concept of resonance offers an important contribution to the field of music therapy. Within his theoretical framework, resonance is clearly situated in social, cultural, and political contexts, thereby connecting music therapy to broader sociological perspectives. As I have sought to demonstrate, resonant experiences are relevant to all four domains of health musicking – vitality, agency, belonging, and meaning. A deep and resonant relationship with music may thus form part of our existential health, functioning as a cultural immunogen that contributes to overall quality of life.

This perspective may also extend beyond clinical settings into everyday musicking practices. As growing evidence demonstrates the beneficial effects of art, music, and other cultural activities on health and quality of life, it seems timely to position health musicking more firmly within health psychology, public health policy, and related initiatives. Such a development would require greater awareness of research in the field of arts and health (e.g., Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Fancourt, 2025) and could contribute to a broader cultural shift in how the role and function of the arts in society are understood.

Furthermore, it may strengthen the practice of prescribing participation in musical activities, whether as performers or listeners, as part of health promotion strategies. Against this background, it is timely to integrate music, and health musicking more specifically, into health psychology and other disciplines concerned with health behaviour. Large-scale population studies would be particularly

valuable in strengthening the evidence base regarding how everyday health musicking influences health and well-being.

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Ελληνική περίληψη | Greek abstract

Η μουσική ως εμπειρία συντονισμού – μια συμβολή στην ψυχολογία της υγείας από τον κλάδο της μουσικοθεραπείας

Even Ruud

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Περίληψη

Η μουσικοθεραπεία έχει παράγει ισχυρά τεκμήρια σχετικά με τον ρόλο της μουσικής στην προαγωγή της υγείας και της ευεξίας σε διάφορες πληθυσμιακές ομάδες. Με βάση την εμπειρική έρευνα, τη θεωρία και την κλινική παρατήρηση, τα τεκμήρια αυτά αναδεικνύουν πώς η ενασχόληση με τη μουσική μπορεί να ενισχύσει τη ζωτικότητα, την αυτενέργεια, το αίσθημα του ανήκειν και την αίσθηση νοήματος. Τα οφέλη αυτά εκτείνονται πέρα από τα κλινικά περιβάλλοντα, υποδηλώνοντας ότι οι καθημερινές χρήσεις της μουσικής μπορεί να συμβάλουν στην προαγωγή της υγείας και την ποιότητα ζωής. Οι γνώσεις που προέρχονται από τη μουσικοθεραπεία αποκτούν ολοένα και μεγαλύτερη σημασία για την ψυχολογία της υγείας, ιδίως όσον αφορά την αντιμετώπιση καταστάσεων που σχετίζονται με το στρες, καθώς και του άγχους, της κατάθλιψης και της αϋπνίας. Το παρόν άρθρο υποστηρίζει την αναγνώριση της μουσικοθεραπείας ως μιας μορφής σύγχρονης παραδοσιακής ιατρικής, η οποία βασίζεται σε ενεργητικές και δεκτικές μορφές μουσικοτροπίας της υγείας, με σαφείς επιπτώσεις στις πρωτοβουλίες δημόσιας υγείας. Δύο κεντρικά ερωτήματα καθοδηγούν τη συζήτηση: Πώς μπορεί η μουσική να ενισχύσει την καθημερινή αίσθηση υγείας και ευεξίας; Και πώς θα μπορούσε αυτή η γνώση να εμπλουτίσει την ψυχολογία της υγείας; Το άρθρο εισάγει την έννοια της μουσικής ως «πολιτισμικού ανοσογόνου», εστιάζοντας σε τέσσερις τομείς της μουσικοτροπίας της υγείας, με ιδιαίτερη έμφαση στη θεωρία του συντονισμού του Hartmut Rosa.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

ψυχολογία της υγείας, μουσικοτροπία της υγείας, πολιτισμικό ανοσογόνο, υπαρξιακή υγεία, συντονισμός