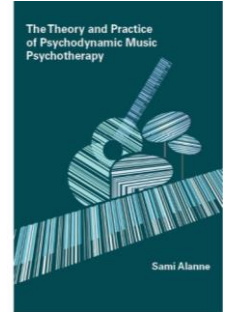


BOOK REVIEW

Theory and practice of psychodynamic music psychotherapy (Alanne)

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Title: The theory and practice of psychodynamic music psychotherapy **Author:** Sami Alanne **Publication Year:** 2023 **Publisher:** Barcelona Publishers **Pages:** 377 **ISBN:** 9781945411793 **E-ISBN:** 9781945411809

REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

Marianne Rizkallah MA GSMD is the Director and Founder of North London Music Therapy (NLMT) CIC and was the Vice Chair of the British Association for Music Therapy from 2019-22. For NLMT, she specialises in working with adolescents and adults with mental health conditions such as stress, anxiety and depression, including working with professional musicians. She began a PhD in 2023 with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama on the subject of power dynamics within therapeutic dyads. Marianne is also a professional singer and vocal coach. [marianne@northlondonmusictherapy.com]

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Many music therapists in the UK and wider afield would consider themselves psychodynamically informed. Many have received training with a focus on psychoanalytic texts. In practice, though, when working with patient groups and in clinical environments often far away from the private practice-style consulting room, there can feel a need to make clinical adaptations. When asked to define the difference between, for example, transference and projection, many would struggle. It can feel like, when discussing moments of clinical importance, that terminology doesn't matter when music therapists are working with the person in front of them.

Yet the terms are different; they mean different things. They come from different theorists and apply in different contexts within clinical work. They describe similar but particular aspects of the human condition, both of which music therapists see within sessions all the time. If we know about their distinctions, we will have the opportunity to discuss these aspects of our work in greater depth. The beauty of psychoanalytic writing is its complexity and the skill with which significant amounts of minute human endeavour can be noticed, thought about, given language to and worked with. The ways in which non-verbal and musical interactions can also be thought about, with the same set of theories, is humbling.

Sami Alanne is an extensively published music therapist and lecturer, especially on the topic of psychodynamic music therapy. The majority of his writing is in his native language, Finnish. He states in the Preface that this book was intended to provide an English language reference to English-speaking music therapists who were unable to access his work because of the language

barrier. Furthermore, this book developed from the interests of English-speaking colleagues interested in his existing monograph (Alanne, 2014) and numerous publications in the Finnish language.

Psychodynamic music therapy, what it is and how it works is explained in significant and thoughtful detail. While the book neatly fits into the lineage of psychodynamic music therapy texts (Alvin, 1966; Bruscia, 1987; Bunt & Hoskyns, 2002; Darnley-Smith & Patey, 2003; Edwards, 2015; Hadley, 2003; Priestley, 1994), it also expands on them, charting its history more thoroughly and fully than ever before. Alanne's clinical knowledge is superb; one would be hard pressed to find a more comprehensive book on the subject matter. It deserves to become a staple handbook for every music therapist interested in applying psychoanalytic principles to their work, whether they are in training or advanced in their career. That is not, however, to say it is an easy read.

In the introduction, Alanne states that the book is intended as a learning aid, to be read perhaps as part of a seminar series, but certainly with a teaching companion and not to be digested on one's own (p. 3). Certainly, the experience of reading the book for review, while tremendously enriching, also felt hard going. It is not so much that the writing is dense, more that there is a lot of information packed into every sentence. As a practising clinician for a decade, with a further degree in the foundations of psychodynamic psychotherapy, I still found many sentences where I wanted to make a note to follow up a point or do some further reading. It will fill in many intellectual gaps. For those not used to the terminology or familiar with psychoanalytic history and how to begin thinking about the concepts, the sheer amount of information could be overwhelming.

Alanne makes no apologies for this and nor should he. His recommendation to experience his writing more holistically runs parallel with an exhortation not to dumb down the subject matter itself. Psychoanalytic literature is complex. It considers the deep facets of the human psyche. It is the stuff that truly goes on in therapy of all stripes, including the transferences around music therapy, whether it is recognised as such or not.

Having acknowledged that the amount of "information, psychological theory, knowledge and skills, often complex in their nature" within the book may frighten a beginner (p. 2), what might have been a helpful olive branch is a greater emphasis on case studies throughout the book. There is a great tradition of music therapy case studies as teaching aids (several examples are quoted in Jones and Odell-Miller, 2023) and it would have been possible to provide a greater number and breadth of examples without diluting the effectiveness of the primary content. Especially for those earlier in their careers, it can sometimes feel hard to believe that what is being talked about in terms of psychodynamic music therapy actually happens in sessions until it has either been witnessed in one's own clinical work or a case example brings an idea out of theoretical concept into something more like actuality. Case studies do not feature until page 82 and it was until this point that I found myself hoping for relief from the density of information.

The book is divided into several sections, most of which are theoretically based. A chronological history of psychoanalytic thought and how it applies to music therapy begins the main body of the text. Next are two weighty theoretical sections: the first attempts a thorough overview of the clinical theory, with the second taking the theory into the clinical space with a specific focus on working through. The final two sections are based firstly around differing clinical approaches and then explore the how of how music therapy works using psychoanalytic approaches. These sections feel a little more constrained compared to the previous two sections which take up half of the book and have

been allowed to stretch out and flex their muscles. A small section at the end considers music therapy with different patient groups, with a welcome overview of the whole book to conclude the whole piece.

Despite the depth of information, the book is well worth persevering with, diving back in and back in again, because the sheer amount of nuggets of wisdom feel powerful and giving the more one reads. Some of the most helpful exhortations are the simplest and most elegant: on page 42, when referring to unconscious communication, he makes two statements: “What the client says is not always what the client means”, and before this, “What kind of a latent meaning does it have?” Both slipped into the middle of a sentence, it is the sort of statement, that when read repeatedly, can be applied to so many clinical situations. On the following page, Alan provides a list of considerations for the practising music therapist. They are so thoughtful and clearly drawn from considerable analysed experience that it feels like having a beloved supervisor on one’s shoulder, unflappable in their knowledge and reassurance.

It is Alanne’s considerable knowledge that has enabled him to write this book. Music therapists interested in this style of working will find much in this text to develop and enrich their psychodynamic music therapy clinical practice. Alanne’s recommendation to absorb the book in small sections, preferably as part of a seminar series, is a very appropriate way to tackle the book. In this way, that will make it possible to take in as much enriching information as possible.

In contemporary music therapy writing, much attention is rightly given to equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB; Mains et al., 2024; Pickard, 2020; Vencatasamy, 2023). With psychodynamic music therapy labelled in journal articles as “the consensus model” and unhelpfully set in academic opposition to Creative Music Therapy (Ansdell 2002), it can often be seen within the profession as old fashioned, problematic and out of date. Common criticisms of psychoanalysis centre around its heteronormativity, sexism and roots in colonialist thinking (Frosh, 2013; Khanna, 2003).

Alanne does not address these criticisms, not in regard to psychoanalysis nor psychodynamic music therapy. Considering the current focus on EDIB, this lack of consideration of psychoanalysis’ criticisms is an omission from the book. While the psychoanalytic concepts of transference, countertransference and the unconscious mind are, to this reviewer, essential tenets of successful music therapy, it does not absolve the theories espoused in the book – as with any theories across music therapy and beyond – of the opportunity to be criticised.

A new section in a future edition would elevate this already excellent text to a further well-rounded resource. This book is an exemplar in technique to the converted and a rich banquet of information for those newer to the topic. More case studies to bring the text to life, and earlier in the work, would have helped to bring the theory off the page. However, when Alanne is able to deliver such a substantial contribution to the literature in a way that will surely be beneficial for so many music therapists, it is hard not to simply be grateful for the book’s existence.

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