

## CONFERENCE REPORT

# Trauma, music and music therapy

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## CONFERENCE DETAILS

Trauma, music and music therapy

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## INTRODUCTION

The international conference *Trauma, music and music therapy* was hosted by The Karol Szymanowski Academy of Music in Katowice, Poland on 17th - 18th April 2023. We had the honour of listening to different speakers from Europe and the United States, and in this report, we offer our perspectives drawing on our experience as delegates and members of the organising committee.

The psycho-physical consequences after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the current armed conflicts across the world and the unpredictable economic situation in some countries are only some examples highlighting how “trauma” – the main conference theme – is highly relevant in today’s world. Focusing on trauma, music and music therapy, this two-day conference stressed the importance of expanding our knowledge about trauma.

Through the programme of presentations, workshops and discussions on the intersection of music therapy and trauma, varied perspectives were discussed such as attachment and

developmental trauma in the context of foster care, neonatal music therapy, mother and infant bonding, family music therapy, and refugee trauma. The keynote speakers of this conference were Viggo Krüger (Norway), Christine Wilhelmsen (Norway), Eva Phan Quoc (Austria), Claire Ghatti (Norway), Simon Procter (United Kingdom), Gene Ann Behrens and Barbara Wheeler (USA). The entire conference was conducted in English. There was access to live streaming of the oral presentations. The conference had 120 international participants, including 22 online attendees in total.



Photo 1: Conference logo

## THE CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

The initial day of the conference featured four sessions. To commence, attendees had the privilege of listening to keynote speakers' presentations. Gene Ann Behrens delved into the intricacies of polyvagal theory within the context of music therapy for trauma. Her thorough exploration of trauma, coupled with its correlation to the therapeutic potential of music, served as a well-considered and effective launching point for subsequent presentations at the conference. Following this, Barbara Wheeler presented her insights into trauma research in music therapy. Subsequently, Simon Procter shared his experiences working in a community mental health centre with a self-referred individual who had a traumatic childhood.

The second session commenced with a presentation by Viggo Krüger and Christine Wilhelmsen, who shared insights into their work on community music therapy with adolescents in Norway. Their emphasis lay in formally transforming challenges faced by young individuals, such as identity issues, neglect, abuse, and mental health struggles, into valuable outcomes through the process of music therapy. Ludwika Konieczna-Nowak then presented on the theme of the crucial roles trust and safety play in the therapeutic process when working with individuals who have experienced attachment trauma in the realm of music therapy. Following this, Łukasz Miga shared his experiences from the perspective of a music therapy client. The third section featured presentations on trauma among refugees, musicians, and victims of a car accident. The conference concluded with a concert featuring various musical styles performed by children, students, and the organising committee.

The second day of the conference was replete with presentations on perinatal, neonatal, and family music therapy. The first section commenced with presentations by Gene Ann Behrens, who introduced a neuro-informed approach to trauma treatment. Eva Phan Quoc explored a different trauma-sensitive approach in attachment-based music therapy, focusing on family-centered therapy and cases involving unresolved traumas of individual family members. Claire Ghetti examined the role of music therapy as a trauma-preventive measure within neonatal intensive care settings, based on the Longitudinal Study of Music Therapy's Effectiveness for Premature Infants and their Caregivers (LongSTEP). The second section seamlessly transitioned through presentations on music therapy among premature infants and their families, perinatal trauma, and ways of providing music therapy support in settings that enabled and nurtured female communities after many traumatic life situations.

The conference concluded with three simultaneous workshops: 1. "How to present/listen to music in a receptive way – possibilities and traps" conducted by Krzysztof Stachyra, 2. "Put down roots in your peace of mind" - an application of metaphor in art therapy in trauma-informed interventions led by Katarzyna Borkowska, and 3. Vocal and instrumental integration among participants, prepared by students.



**Photo 2:** Group photo (taken by Agata Sepiło Photography)

## REFLECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The conference provided a diverse perspective on the theme of trauma, presenting the latest knowledge and practices in response to contemporary challenges such as armed conflicts, post-pandemic consequences, refugee situations, religious trauma, family dynamics, and other daily experiences. The conference provided an opportunity for reflection on the significance of being aware of neurological and biochemical changes in the body during the experience of trauma or its episodes. This awareness is crucial in the planning and execution of music therapy sessions. The importance of a strong theoretical foundation and appropriate support in addressing overlapping traumatic situations, such as war, illness, emotional difficulties, and other struggles, was emphasised.

Additionally, the conference explored how cultural and social differences among participants influence the perception of trauma itself. The concept of trauma is not reserved only for serious life-threatening situations; it can affect any individual regardless of their age or circumstances.

The evening concert was a unique experience where we could come together through music. The words from John Lennon's "Imagine" song were particularly meaningful, as the entire audience sang, "and the world be as one." The song is a symbolic international call for peace, especially when thinking about current armed conflicts.

According to the reflection of the organising committee and discussions with participants, for future conferences, it might be a good idea to consider introducing changes to the conference structure, such as allocating more time for questions and discussions, and organising roundtables with similar thematic fields, because they were not included in the conference program.

The conference highlighted the importance of awareness that every music therapist encounters trauma in various circumstances and with different clients. We would like to express our joy at participating in the conference, and we hope that we will have an opportunity to meet again in Katowice in a similar or even larger gathering.



**Photo 3:** A few frames from the conference's concert  
(taken by Agata Sepiolo Photography)