

TRIBUTE

Fondly remembered and dearly missed: A tribute to Singaporean music therapist Eta Lauw

Estelle Li En Ng^{1,2}, Mei Ling Tan^{2,3}

¹ Singapore General Hospital, Singapore; ² Association for Music Therapy, Singapore; ³ Research Institute for Creative Arts Therapies, Alanus University of Arts and Social Sciences, Germany

Received: 21 September 2026; Accepted: 2 October 2026; Published: 12 October 2026

Editor: Jonathan (Jaytee) Tang; **Language consultant:** Caley Garden; **Copyeditor:** Anna G. Castells

It is a major loss for the music therapy community in Singapore with the sudden death of our beloved colleague, clinician, educator, and friend, Eta Lauw on 15th July 2026. Since joining the Association for Music Therapy (Singapore [AMTS]) as a student member in 2014, and later as a professional member in 2016, Eta had been an active member who rarely missed an event or meeting organised by the Association. Those who knew Eta then may remember her as a curious young clinician, enthusiastic about the profession. As Eta progressed in her career, she grew into a role model for student and early-career music therapists, and a dedicated comrade to those already in the field. Even after being diagnosed with a serious illness, she prioritised both the education of her students and the well-being of her colleagues, supervising them, ensuring all of them were well-supported. We were deeply saddened by the news of her sudden passing. In writing this article, we hope to document Eta's contributions to the field and express our appreciation towards her dedication.



Image 1: Eta Lauw
(courtesy of the Association for Music Therapy, Singapore)

Supporting children in special education (SPED) and older adults with dementia through music

Prior to becoming a music therapist, Eta worked in broadcast media and corporate communications for over a decade. Subsequently, she pursued a Master's of Music Therapy at the University of

Melbourne and became a Registered Music Therapist (RMT) upon graduation. Born into a family of musicians and music educators, she found her calling in music therapy—using her passion for music to touch the lives of individuals. Former colleagues warmly recalled how fulfilled and genuinely happy she was pursuing this new path.

After graduating from the University of Melbourne, Eta joined AWWA School, working with children and teenagers with special needs. Beyond her clinical work, Eta strongly advocated for music therapy across SPED and adult services at AWWA. A visionary at heart, she developed the Music Therapy Service Delivery Model, laying the foundation for the expansion of music therapy services when AWWA established its second school. Eta cared deeply about her students, particularly those who were minimally verbal and in need of emotional and mental health support. By introducing music psychotherapy and formalised practice guidelines, she created a safe and creative outlet to process complex emotions through an arts-based approach. Motivated to raise awareness that individuals with special needs experience the entire gamut of human emotions, Eta regularly shared her insights from her clinical work. Most notably at Music Therapy Day 2022 organised by AMTS, she presented a case study demonstrating how a music psychotherapeutic approach could support a minimally verbal autistic child¹ through bereavement. A natural collaborator, Eta was instrumental in bringing the multidisciplinary team together, enabling allied health professionals and educators to provide holistic care for the students. She championed person-centred care and shared innovative, collaborative practices through her published work (Lauw et al., 2024), inspiring future generations of allied health professionals.

In addition to working at AWWA, Eta provided music therapy to individuals with dementia in Camie Ward and Caritas Dementia Care Ward at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital (KTPH). She possessed an exceptional ability to use music to foster deep human connection, helping patients—especially those who were initially hesitant to open up—to articulate their thoughts and express their deepest feelings. The profound insights that emerged through these musical interactions proved invaluable to the multidisciplinary team in shaping holistic care plans. Eta also played a central role in one of the ward's most memorable events: the celebration of five years of Humanitude, a person-centred care framework adopted by KTPH's dementia care wards. For this occasion, she helped compose the song *Dance of Humanitude*. Her legacy endures through the exemplary care, love, and compassion she showed to those she worked with, as well as through the unforgettable music they shared.

Eta had a genuine care and compassion for people with special needs. In 2018, together with her spouse—a fellow musician and arts administrator—she co-founded the Harmony Community Choir, creating an accessible, welcoming, and meaningful space where people with special needs from age 18 and older could find a sense of belonging and make music together. Throughout her clinical career, Eta readily supervised music therapists and students. She is remembered as a mentor who was not only kind and inspiring, but also, witty and wise.

¹ Identity-first language (i.e. “autistic children”) is primarily adopted in this manuscript, reflecting Eta’s own perspective and advocacy for inclusive practice. We acknowledge the ongoing discourse surrounding language preferences globally and locally. In Singapore, views on terminology remain diverse (Disabled People’s Association, 2025). Official bodies like the Ministry of Health utilise a combination of positionality (Academy of Medicine Singapore & College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Singapore, 2023), and recent local research reflects mixed preferences among autistic students (Nah & Lim, 2025).

Inspiring the future generation of locally trained music therapists through her role as an educator

Eta deeply loved being a music therapist. In 2024, she made the significant decision to step away from her clinical roles to become the first lecturer in the newly launched Master of Music Therapy programme at LASALLE College of the Arts, University of the Arts Singapore. Driven by a vision for a culturally responsive curriculum that met international standards of clinical education, she brought to the foundational faculty team a depth of clinical experience grounded in Singapore's cultural context. Together with the Academic Director, Indra Selvarajah, she shared a core belief that clinical and intellectual rigour should be grounded in compassion, reflexivity, and respect for personhood.

To her students, Eta was a 'superwoman' – one who held them to high standards while demonstrating genuine care for their well-being. Leading by example, she was punctual and prepared, adaptable and grounded. In doing so, she quickly and easily earned her students' trust. In her lectures and tutorials, Eta made music therapy come alive. She energised early mornings with movement and intentionally chosen songs, inspiring students to become comfortable using their voices and bodies. Her case studies brought clinical work to life, cultivating both sharp clinical reasoning and deep empathy in her students. Eta was never superfluous with her feedback; she was incisive and constructive, driven by a deep belief in her students' potential. Many may fondly remember her raised eyebrows and piercing prompts: "Are you sure this is the right key for you?" or "Can you even hear your client?" Alongside her high expectations, Eta was a compassionate nurturer who held space for students during classroom experientials and group processing. With a gentle pat on the back or a timely whispered suggestion, she created a safe space for them to embrace their vulnerabilities, leaving them feeling affirmed and empowered.

The intention, wisdom, and care Eta poured into her role as an educator have left an enduring mark on Singapore's first two cohorts of locally trained music therapists. Her collegial grace and commitment to compassionate practice remain indelibly woven into the programme and Singapore's evolving music therapy landscape.

Legacy through advocacy and research

Eta was a firm believer in being a proactive contributor to the music therapy literature. During her final year placement as a music therapy student at an Australian aged-care facility, she recognised the lack of literature on culturally-centred care, particularly in relation to Asian cultures within a music therapy education and practice landscape largely shaped by Western-dominated perspectives. This led her to reflect on her own understanding of Chinese cultural nuances and how she adapted Western therapeutic approaches to meet the needs of her clients (Lauw, 2016). Later, upon returning to Singapore, Eta noticed a shared struggle among her peers who had also returned from studying abroad. This motivated her to conduct an independent study of professional readjustment, with the hope of supporting locally based music therapists returning to Singapore after studying abroad as they transitioned into professional practice (Lauw, 2017).

Eta was a deeply reflective clinician who believed that therapists should embark on their own personal journeys of inner work, self-awareness, and growth. Her clinical work with profoundly disabled children and older adults living with dementia kindled a deep curiosity about the therapeutic power of the voice and the unconscious mind, leading her to pursue specialised training in vocal psychotherapy. Driven by a desire to share her personal and clinical discoveries with the world, she published an autoethnography detailing how reconnecting with her inner child through free associative singing enriched her practice (Lauw, 2022). Eta was also curious about how pre-composed music could facilitate deep psychological and relational insight. This led her to pursue training in the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (GIM), eventually becoming a Fellow of the Association for Music and Imagery (FAMI) in 2024. Drawing on her own lived experience of using music and imagery to navigate tender emotional states as a bereaved daughter, she developed a GIM-informed programme in early 2026. Her abstract, titled "Tender Connections: A GIM-Informed Programme for Holding Gentle and Enduring Sadness," was accepted for presentation at the Music and Imagery Association of Australia (MIAA) Annual Conference in July 2026.

When Eta transitioned from clinician to educator in 2024, she paused to reflect on her eight years of clinical work in SPED and healthcare. In her heartfelt essay, "When the Dust Settles" (Lauw, 2024), she reflected on her clinical experience through the lens of Bruscia's (2014) core dimensions of music therapy—sound-centeredness, aesthetic-centeredness, and relation-centeredness. She ultimately concluded that at the heart of music therapy lies the privilege of connecting with our clients and entering their world, alongside the responsibilities that accompany this privilege (Lauw, 2024).

Unwavering dedication and contribution to AMTS and beyond

Eta was a well-loved and well-respected colleague. She dedicated time and energy to getting to know fellow music therapists and students in training. She believed that clinicians should contribute actively to their professional associations, as this would help the profession and industry grow. She first served as Secretary from 2017 to 2018, during which she established numerous foundational processes within AMTS, including single-handedly drafting the roles and scopes of all Executive Committee members. During her term, she also served on the editorial team of *Music Therapy Times*, the Association's annual newsletter.

Eta's efforts have left a lasting mark on Singapore's SPED community. Through AMTS, she shared and advocated for the use of music-based strategies, by facilitating a workshop organised by the Ministry of Education (MOE)'s SPED Branch in 2018. The workshop brought together 13 educators from SPED schools across Singapore and introduced ways to integrate music into the curriculum to support numeracy, literacy, and physical education, as well as to foster social engagement and emotional regulation. That same year, when AMTS was invited to present at the SPED Conference, Eta was one of the music therapists representing the Association. Alongside her peers, she facilitated two workshops titled "Engaged Learning through Music," equipping 80 educators and 70 parents with practical music-based strategies to support children in reaching their educational goals and strengthening parent-child bonding.

In her most recent appointment as Vice-President from 2022 to 2024, Eta continued to give her utmost dedication to the profession. In 2023, she was among the AMTS representatives who contributed a professional response to the Ministry of Health's Clinical Practice Guidelines on Autism Spectrum Disorder in Children and Adolescents, advocating for the role of music therapy in supporting the socio-emotional learning and quality of life of autistic individuals (AMTS, 2023). She also served as Conference Chair for Music Therapy Day 2023, which featured a Human Library experience at the Tzu Chi Youth and Humanistic Centre, and for the 2024 Music Therapy Symposium held in conjunction with the launch of the nation's first Master of Music Therapy programme. In addition, she oversaw AMTS student membership, checking in on the well-being of Singaporean students studying abroad and offering guidance as they returned home and reintegrated into the local professional community. In 2025, Eta also joined the editorial team of *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy* and supported numerous authors with their work.

Eta has touched the lives of countless colleagues, students, and clients. As Singapore launches its professional registration framework to advance professional recognition, uphold ethical practice, and ensure professional standards and competencies, Eta will be posthumously conferred as the nation's first Registered Music Therapist - Singapore (RMT-S) in recognition of her dedication and contribution towards the profession.

We have all been inspired by her spirit in different ways. We will continue our journey into this new era of music therapy with Eta-shaped patches in our hearts.

We love you. We miss you. And thank you.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express gratitude to Lynn Koh, Kayla Wong, Alicia Hu, Amelia Dizon, the team at KTPH Camie Ward and Caritas Dementia Care, and Indra Selvarajah for their invaluable contributions to the contents of this tribute. We also extend our appreciation to the AMTS Executive Committee – comprising Tan Xueli, Ng Wang Feng, Camellia Soon, and Jolene Yee, and incoming president Farhana Rizani – for their warm support in enabling the tribute to be put together.

Author information

Estelle Li En Ng (MT-BC, NMT) is a Senior Music Therapist at Singapore General Hospital and a professional member of the Association for Music Therapy (Singapore). Her professional leadership includes serving as Publicity Co-Lead for the 2025 Creative Arts Therapies Symposium in Singapore and as editor (2022) and co-editor (2023–2024) of the association's annual newsletter, *Music Therapy Times*. She is the co-editor of the book *Voices of Music Therapy at SingHealth*. At present, she is President of the Music Therapy Alumni Club of Chulalongkorn University.

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0582-6116>

 Estelle.ng.l.e@sgh.com.sg

Tan Mei Ling (MA) is a music therapist and research assistant at the Research Institute for Creative Arts Therapies (RIArT) in Germany, as well as an associate member of the Association for Music Therapy (Singapore). She has been actively involved with the association, contributing to its outreach and communications efforts, including the newsletter team (2024) and the communications committee (2025–2026).

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6247-1433>

 mei-ling.tan@alanus.edu

Author contributions

Ng conceptualised the manuscript, and wrote the majority of the first draft, with various sections contributed by Tan. Ng and Tan gathered resources together. Both authors reviewed and edited the drafts.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage

No AI assistance or generative tools were used for the creation of this manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to report.

References

- Academy of Medicine Singapore & College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Singapore. (2023). *Clinical practice guidelines: Autism spectrum disorder in children and adolescents Executive summary (2nd ed.)*. https://www.ams.edu.sg/view-pdf.aspx?file=media%5C6903_fi_880.pdf&ofile=2023+CPG+on+ASD+in+Children+and+Adolescents+Executive+Summary.pdf
- Association for Music Therapy (Singapore). (2023, June). *Support for the Clinical Practice Guidelines on Autism Spectrum Disorder in Children and Adolescents*. <https://musictherapy.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AMTS-Response-to-Autism-CPG.pdf>
- Bruscia, K. E. (2014). *Defining music therapy*. Barcelona Publishers.
- Disabled People's Association. (2025, November 28). *Commentary on language used to describe disability (in response to ST's style guide update)*. <https://dpa.org.sg/commentary-on-language-used-to-describe-disability-in-response-to-sts-style-guide-update/>
- Lauw, E. (2016). Mianzi and other social influences on music therapy for older Chinese people in Australian aged care. *Australian Journal of Music Therapy*, 27, 57-68. <http://www.austmta.org.au/journal/article/mianzi-and-other-social-influences-music-therapy-older-chinese-people-Australian>
- Lauw, E. (2017). When home feels familiar but yet so foreign—the professional readjustment experiences of returning internationally-trained Singaporean music therapists. *Music Therapy Perspectives*, 35(2), 239-246. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mtp/miw020>
- Lauw, E. (2023). Connecting with my inner child through vocal psychotherapy. *British Journal of Music Therapy*, 37(1), 36-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13594575221145387>
- Lauw, E. (2024). When the dust settles... Reflections from the music therapy working space. *Music Therapy Times*, 9-11. https://musictherapy.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/MusicTherapyTimes_ISSUE18.pdf
- Lauw, E., Kuan, M., & Heah, S. (2024). Breath is life! A two year collaboration between music therapy and physiotherapy for pulmonary rehabilitation in a child with brain injury. *Australian Journal of Music Therapy*, 35(1), 31–41.
- Nah, Y. H., & Lim, H. L. L. (2025). Preferences for Identity-first versus person-first language in a sample of university students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in Singapore. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-025-06902-z>