

## Themes for Therapy

Ritzholz, Michele Schnur & Robbins, Clive (Eds.) (1999).

*Themes for Therapy. From the Nordoff-Robbins Centre for Music Therapy at New York University. New Songs and Instrumental Pieces.*  
New York, NY: Carl Fischer. (103 pages).

Reviewed by Vilmante Aleksiene and Jautre Sinkuniene,  
Doctoral students, Vilnius Pedagogical University,  
Lithuania

Music possesses an inherent capacity for effecting handicapped children and providing an experiential ground for their engagement, their personal development, and their integration – both individually and socially. When music achieves this it becomes music therapy (Nordoff & Robbins 1971, p.16).

Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins were amongst the first people to compose music especially for children with disabilities. Their play songs, musical stories and other compositions still continue to inspire current music therapy practitioners. Whilst reviewing the new book *Themes for Therapy*, which includes musical and instructional material developed at the Nordoff-Robbins Centre for Music Therapy at New York University, we began to question: What are the distinct characteristics of music used in therapy?

*Themes for Therapy* reflect upon the conceptual model of Nordoff-Robbins. This book

describes examples taken from both past and current practitioners. The collection of original music is valuable for music therapists and music teachers working in special education, and musically skilled occupational therapists working with people with special needs. Moreover, some of the materials are suitable for and would appeal to pre-school children, and some can be used in the early elementary grades.

The musical material includes:

- Greeting Songs
- Songs to Promote Self-Awareness and Socialisation
- Songs to Promote Physical Awareness and Movement
- Easing Transitions and Encouraging Play
- Goodbye Songs
- Instrumental pieces and for Drum and Cymbals, Resonator Bells/Metallophone, Tambourine/Small Percussion and Multiple Instruments

The introduction describes the current Nordoff-Robbins practice and the importance of the creative process and improvisation, as well as the therapeutic possibilities in songs and instrumental pieces.

The creating and improvising of music is fundamental to Creative Music Therapy. The themes of this book result from musical creations developed whilst meeting the needs of children with various disabilities within the Nordoff-Robbins Centre for Music Therapy. Descriptions of the origin of each music selection and examples

of how to use the selections are detailed. These descriptions include a clinical situation, possible reasons for choosing the selection, and how the selections can be modified. In our opinion, being able to modify the selections stimulates and encourages experimentation.

We experienced great pleasure when we played the music. The piano accompaniment is not too technically difficult (although adequate piano skills are required), the melodies are expressive and the harmonies colourful (have a jazz influence). The lyrics have a central thought/theme with a specific situation in mind - greeting or saying good-bye, encouraging or acknowledging success, learning or communicating. As music therapists, we all know the effect of saying the word "hello" can have. This effect is even stronger when sung! According to Clive Robbins and Michele Schnur Ritholz, when a thought is combined with movement in the melody, rhythm and/or harmonic structure, it shapes an expressive form, which the child can encode in memory and then recall from session to session. It becomes a source of his/her inner strength.

Current practitioners of the Nordoff-Robbins model address their improvised or specially composed music for particular individuals or groups as did the founders of Creative Music Therapy. Their feelings, thoughts and creative energy are focussed towards the well being of the client and the development of his/her personality. For that reason, the music in *Themes for Therapy* has an especially therapeutic charge and creates an environment in which one feels comfortable.

The title of the book *Themes for Therapy* is not without meaning. The authors have given us themes/models, which will allow us to build a musical-therapeutic relationship with our clients. The authors state in the Introduction, "most importantly, put your living self in to the song", because all the qualities of communication with the client overflow spontaneously through the music making. So, other potentially effective therapeutic influences lie in the flexibility of interpretation and in the use of the expressive means, dependant on needs and mood of the

situation in the "here and now".

The collection of instrumental compositions and arrangements range in complexity from simple creations to more complex instrumental creations that need prior communicative experience in making music together. Step by step, the client's musical part becomes more complex, aiming to develop co-ordination, responses or communication abilities. The emotionally and stylistically colourful selections offer the possibility for experiencing various feelings and responses, both in individual and group sessions. We were captivated by the impressionistic sound of the "Serenade, Reverie, Promenade" (M. Schnur Ritholz), the exotic mood of the "Oriental Temple" (A. Turry), and the energy and joyfulness of the "Catch the Beat" (R. Thompson), to name a few examples.

In our opinion, the simplicity in the selections' structures, lend themselves to helping clients focus on developing concentration span, stimulating movement or arousing the emotions. Our attention was also drawn to the way instrumental parts to be played by the clients enter into play. As is noted in the Introduction, "each instrumental part is essential to the musical whole, so enabling each group member to play a vital role in the musical community of the group". The structure of the compositions allows the children/clients to create endings of the phrases or to play climactic notes in the melody. This allows the child/client to feel valued. Increased self-esteem and joy can result from stimulating the development of the client via improvisation and self-expression.

The special needs of the child/client and his/her individuality are the main criteria for choosing a musical theme. When the editors of the book write "considerations regarding music itself and its developmental roles have the broadest relevance", they certainly have the children's needs in mind. The compositions have numerous applications for both therapy and education settings. Firstly, the material is a useful tool in the therapeutic processes. Secondly, it can be applied at a functional level for developing social and education abilities. These include learning to

count, take turns and develop a concept of time. Thirdly, the compositions are also so enjoyable in that they could be used as performance items in concerts. Moreover, they are adaptable to meet the differing and changing needs of clients as well as being able to be adapted for a range of different age groups. This is because the musical fullness of the piano material creates a meaningful experience for all the simple parts played by clients. The music selections in *Themes for Therapy* are aesthetically pleasing, and therefore could be included in a long-term program, giving pleasure to both the client and therapist.

We believe that these charming songs and colourful pieces will be equally useful in Lithuania

as elsewhere. In answering the question we raised earlier "What are the distinct characteristics of music used in therapy?" we believe that 1) the quality of the musical material, which provides a wide spectrum of options in clinical work; 2) the approach to the client and attitude of the therapist; 3) the ability to use the means of musical expression for clinical purposes turns the music to music for therapy.

The book *Themes for Therapy* provides rich musical material for practical work and it is a valuable source for studying how to structure the material and to use the elements of music expression for clinical aims.

## NEW TEXTS

---

### Books

Bergström-Nielsen, Carl & Eckhard Weymann (Eds.) (2000). *First European Symposium: Improvisation Teaching within Music Therapy Training*. Hamburg: Förderkreis des Instituts für Musiktherapie der Hochschule für Musik Hamburg e. V. und Institut für Musiktherapie und Morphologie Hamburg.

Bitcon, C. Hampton (2000). *Alike and Different: The Clinical and Educational Uses of Orff-Schulwerk*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Gilsum, NH: Barcelona Publishers.

Drewer, Martin (2000). *Gestalt – Ästhetik – Musiktherapie. Argumente zur wissenschaftlichen Grundlegung der Musiktherapie als Psychotherapie*. Münster: Lit Verlag.

Granberg, Anita (2000). *Tre svenska utbildningar i musikterapi. En studie av inriktningar, arbetsfält och arbetsformer. Licentiatuppsats. Centrum för musikpedagogisk forskning*. Stockholm: MPC Kungl. Musikhögskolan/Stockholms Universitet.

Hibben, Julie (Ed.) (1999). *Inside Music Therapy: Client Experiences*. Gilsum, NH: Barcelona Publishers.

Jennings, Sue (1999). *Introduction to Developmental Playtherapy*. Playing and Health. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Kiddle, Cathy (1999). *Traveller Children. A Voice for Themselves*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Lindvang, Charlotte; Pedersen, Inge Nygaard & Niels Hannibal (Eds.) (2000). *Den musikterapeutiske behandling – teoretiske og kliniske refleksjoner. Årskrift 2000*. Aalborg: Musikterapi-klinikken, Aalborg Psykiatriske Sygehus/Aalborg Universitet.

Pratt, Rosalie Rebello & Denise Erdonmez Grocke (Eds.) (1999). *MusicMedicine 3*. Melbourne: Faculty of Music, The University of Melbourne.

Wallin, Nils L.; Merker, Björn & Steven Brown (Eds.) (2000). *The Origins of Music*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Some of these books are reviewed in this issue of the Nordic Journal of Music Therapy. Reviews of the other books will be presented in forthcoming issues.