

## Preface

*Can anyone explain in mere prose the wonder of one note following or coinciding with another so that we feel that it's exactly how those notes had to be? Of course not. No matter what rationalists we may profess to be, we are stopped cold at the border of this mystic area. It is not too much to say mystic or even magic: no art lover can be an agnostic when the chips are down. If you love music, you are a believer. - Leonard Bernstein (2004, p. 11).*

Every once in a while, a TV “reality” talent show or newsmagazine show will feature an amazing musician with a formidable neurological, developmental, psychiatric, or physical disability; perhaps multiple disabilities. The members of the show and the audience are filled with awe as this person sings or plays an instrument with extraordinary ability, delivering a moving performance that seems miraculous in the context of the person’s obvious challenges. The show is flooded with emails, texts and calls. Social media and the talk shows are abuzz about this phenomenon for a while.

Here is someone who, in most other situations, might be counted out, might never accomplish the things by which most people define their lives. Would this person go to college, have a decent paying job, drive a car, get married, cook a meal, be a parent, stroll unaccompanied through the woods on a beautiful day or even cross the street by himself? Maybe - but also, maybe not. Depending on the nature and severity of the person’s condition he or she may not be in the typical flow of life at all - deserving of care and kindness hopefully - but without much visibility or relevance in the busy lives of most people. Suddenly, an outsider whose fair shot in life has been obliterated has somehow found the way back in; back to being someone who has a voice, someone who can connect, someone who matters.

Through music, this person has offered a little opening; a view beyond the mundane, a glimmer of hope in this cynical, scary world. We realize that magic is possible. That which on the surface appears to be broken actually carries the greatest gift of all. The spirit is undimmed. That Divine spark that is in everyone, creative, longing to communicate, to express, to connect, to experience joy, to grow, to contribute - it is always there and nothing can take it away. That is what is so inspiring. That’s the message. People need this. We need to believe.

This is a book for believers, meaning people who believe, or would like to believe, that there is a door that opens to a world much bigger and more extraordinary than the one in which most people live. Maybe there are other ways to approach this door and walk through it, but we’ll be looking at the way music does that.

I have been a music therapist for thirty years. I have a lot of stories and I’d like to tell you a few. What do I do? I help people - primarily people with significant disabilities or those who have been through terrible trauma - to discover and express the music inside them. It’s different for everyone and there are myriad ways to do it. This thing that the general public sees now and then on TV - I see it, in ways large and small, almost every day. I seek communication with my clients’ spirit. I am not interested in the broken, oppressed aspects of their personae that they, and everyone around them, knows only too well. I’ve witnessed, time after time, music’s ability to draw in, uplift, empower and reach those who might otherwise be

marginalized, labeled, isolated, unreachable, lost. Music is a connector to the shining reality of their being that is far more boundless than they realize: *The Luminous Numinous*.

*People are just as wonderful as sunsets if you let them be. When I look at a sunset, I don't find myself saying, "Soften the orange a bit on the right hand corner." I don't try to control a sunset. I watch with awe as it unfolds. - Carl Rogers (1995)*

Music is much more than entertainment, a momentary diversion; it is more than the pop charts, one's favorite recording or musical artist or trip to a nightclub or a concert. Music is greater than the greats: greater than Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Coltrane, Segovia, Hendrix. It is greater than them because the music moved through them just as we breathe the air, but we didn't make the air. Just as a ship sails through the waves but it is not the sea. Just as you move through your life but you did not create life. Music is like the air, the sea, life. Musicians are music's messengers but music is...well, what is it? That's the big question we will be exploring, but as Leonard Bernstein says: It's a mystical area or even 'magic.' There is some kind of enormous passion contained within music; some kind of higher consciousness that is unknowable. We will have to be satisfied with that. That's what makes us believers.

When we hit on the "right" music, the transformative power it can unleash can seem momentous and inspiring or it can be relatively subtle. Either way, there is a release from ingrained, habitual pathological patterns. We can write about these phenomena and come up with theoretical models to describe them, but ultimately, one can only stand back in awe at the healing and growth potential that has been released. Pioneering music therapy great, Clive Robbins (from whom we will hear much more), poetically called it:

*The health and healing latent in the livingness of creative musicing* (2008, p.12).

However, we can't just say it's all just an unfathomable mystery and leave it at that. "The game is afoot," as my favorite fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, would say. Like him, we will take out our magnifying glass and review the evidence - that is, whatever evidence I've been able to deduce. I've organized this book into three main sections that elucidate the inner workings of what I call the Music Therapy Studio. *Part I - Music Therapy Studio: The Foundation*, sets the theoretical groundwork for the principles to come as well as offering a little backstory as to how all this came into my life. *Part II - Music Therapy Studio: The Framework*, identifies the different components of music and looks at the through-line between conventional musicianship and music therapy, and *Part III - Music Therapy Studio: The Philosophy*, examines some underlying principles and assumptions including esoteric and metaphysical concepts that explore the convergence of music and therapy, science and mysticism. At every step of the way, I will share a real-life story or two that illustrates how someone's life was transformed through a particular way of being in music.

What is a Music Therapy Studio? It is a space, permission, and whatever support people need to express and share themselves musically. It is a place for healing and the belief that the act of being in music and being creative is, by its nature, therapy. We, the practitioners, nurture and guide the process but it's music that does the work. My development in the field of music therapy would ultimately lead me to the concept represented by "the Studio" as congruent with my belief that the paramount active principle in music therapy is, in fact, "music." When I started my own business, I considered, but rejected, identifying the place where clients would come to engage in music therapy as a "Center," "Program," "Clinic," or "Service." I thought

those designations could apply as easily, or more so, to physical therapists, MD's, social workers, or psychologists. The "Studio" is where musicians do their work.

However, if we are to call ourselves as music "therapists," we are not simply talking about having a good time or improving at music. We are seeking to assess and address the core issues of a client's difficulties with the intention to help them achieve some functional improvement and personal growth. It is the music therapist's job to chart the right course. My experience has led me to a deep trust in music's power to transcend perceived boundaries and limitations.

At my first clinical placement - my music therapy internship at a psychiatric day program at a large New York City Hospital, Paul became my first real client. He was in his late 20's and diagnosed with undifferentiated schizophrenia with autistic traits. He wandered slowly through the corridors of the program, attended his assigned therapy groups, didn't socialize and didn't say anything unless directly addressed, and then, only a word or two. He was a loner on the periphery of the program and people, both staff and clients, pretty much just let him be. It was known he had some musical inclinations so we were introduced. When Paul and I played for the first time, I could tell he had talent. It's true that music is a language that is more fluent for some than others. In Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983), music is identified as an area in which a person might be particularly strong. Some people simply understand rhythm, melodic structure, harmonies, and musical styles. They don't need to be taught this. They just pick it up as people pick up their native tongue. It's natural for them.

Music was Paul's natural language but nobody really paid enough attention to him to communicate or connect with him. On the occasional opportunity he did have to share his ability, he couldn't quite organize his musical intelligence in a form to which others could relate. As an example, I was told that the year before I got there, Paul had played an interminable "Jingle Bells Jam," on a little electric keyboard at the program's traditional Christmas "talent show." Maybe for the first few minutes, people thought he was pretty good, but as Paul continued on, oblivious to his "audience," five minutes became ten. There was no indication that he was ever going to bring his piece to a conclusion and someone finally had to tell him to stop. This year, as the Christmas talent show approached, the staff was making jokes behind closed doors about the prospect of a repeat performance. His ability was overshadowed by his disability, even to the clinical team.

Paul could use support, clearly, but we want to enter that mystic, magic place, if we can. I found a song Paul knew, not "Jingle Bells." It turned out to be the early '60's "surf-rock" instrumental, "Pipeline." Paul could play the lead melody line on guitar as well as improvise around it. I played the rhythm guitar part, and we worked out an arrangement; a beginning, middle and end. That was really the main help he needed to communicate musically. The talent show came and Paul was a major hit, getting an enthusiastic, sustained ovation.

He went on from there with my support - participating in individual music sessions plus every music group, writing songs, doing a couple other performances. And as his musical life grew, his visibility, participation, socialization, inclusion and respect in his program also grew. I'll never forget the day I saw Paul playing pool with some clients and staff from the program. For him, that was a revelation! Then came the day that my internship was over. Paul raised his hand to share in the program's daily community check-in meeting (something he never would have done before our course of music therapy). In an angst-tinged voice, he announced, "Today is Rick's last day!" That is a painful moment every music therapist must

face - one moves on to another job, another location, ostensibly abandoning this person for whom you have become a lifeline. But for that period of time, we had our amazing journey that will live forever in the annals of spirit.

In this book, you will read about numerous such amazing musical journeys. Music is a different realm of experience from our everyday, cognitively-based awareness, and as such, it can lead to outcomes that wouldn't ordinarily occur and that can sometimes seem miraculous as will be illustrated in some upcoming examples:

- *A non-verbal and virtually mute client singing for the first time (Thomas)*
- *A profoundly disoriented and isolated brain injury patient writing a stunning song that others can share (James)*
- *A group of adolescents with disabilities giving an astonishingly confident and deeply moving concert performance, transcending their own and their parents' fears and insecurities (The Children's Performance Group)*

What is the Music Therapy Studio to me? When you boil it down to its essence, all I really know are two things:

1. *Try to find the right kind of music and the right musical experience at the right time for anyone who shows up.*
2. *The right music will take us to a better place than where we are right now (this is what makes me a believer).*

As Leonard Bernstein poses at the top of this Preface, "Can anyone explain in mere prose the wonder of one note following or coinciding with another?" Unfortunately, no. This is a book - mere prose. In any case, Bernstein says, if we try to explain music: "We are stopped cold at the border of this mystic area. It is not too much to say mystic or even *magic*." But I hope this book communicates some of that belief and some of that magic.