

Author biography

Naomi Thompson is an HCPC-registered Music Therapist currently working alongside adults who are homeless and have a substance use addiction in Cambridge. Alongside her clinical work, she is a PhD scholar at the Cambridge Institute for Music Therapy Research, Anglia Ruskin University, co-developing a model of music therapy for NHS inpatient mental health wards for people with dementia.

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Rick Soshensky, Foreword by Jon Samson. *The Music Therapy Studio, Empowering the Soul's Truth*. Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD, 2021. 248 pp.: ISBN 9781538154281 (hardback cloth) £85, 9781538154298 (paperback) £31, 9781538154304 (epub) £21.99.

Reviewed by: Carine Ries

Rick Soshensky is an American Nordoff-Robbins-trained music therapist who undertook his studies at NYU in the early 1990s. He now leads the Hudson Valley Creative Arts Therapy studio and lectures at SUNY New Paltz and Molloy College. In his book, Soshensky weaves in case stories and theoretical and philosophical thinking to investigate core concepts in music-centred approaches, where music as a creative expression maintains its intrinsic value, above clinical labelling and behavioural aims. Early in the book, Soshensky shares how he came to be a music therapist and discovered the healing power of music after working as a professional guitarist and song writer on the New York circuit. His journey might well resonate with many music therapists who have come into the profession from different walks of life and various musical backgrounds. Soshensky's down to earth style of telling his own story sets a personable tone which carries on throughout the chapters that follow. In the preface (xxi), the music therapy studio is introduced as a 'space, permission, and whatever support people need to express and share themselves musically' and Soshensky further emphasises the role of the music as 'the paramount active principle in the therapy', which runs as a central theme throughout the book.

In my own caseload in private practice, I work with children, adults and families across a wide range of referral reasons, and use a portfolio of approaches and frameworks including psychodynamically informed music therapy, Guided Imagery and Music and various adaptations, yoga-informed practices and community music therapy. Here too, music is the common denominator which, at least as a starting point, has brought most clients to the practice. While music often remains central to the therapeutic engagement, there certainly are also a number of cases where the relational aspect of the therapy becomes at least as important in its own right. For the growing number of music therapists who work in private practice, consolidating their personal way of working, with the skills and approaches they bring to the profession may be a fundamental part of their work. Soshensky's way of writing about the music therapy studio offers a sense of permission to work flexibly and in a truly client-centred way, while holding in mind what preserves the integrity of the therapeutic work across the caseload.

While on first impression, the index read as being a little chaotic, the structure of the book quickly felt engaging, and the content seemed well-balanced between case stories and theoretical thinking. The book is divided into three main parts which includes the foundation, framework and philosophy of the music therapy studio. Within each part, Soshensky elegantly weaves together his thinking about core concepts of music-centred music therapy, while taking the reader through case stories from his own practice. Quotes from spiritual traditions, philosophy, psychology and world music take writing beyond the therapy room while quotes from well-known music therapists situate Soshensky's thinking within the discipline. The quotes add refreshing moments for reflection and give writing relevance in an extended context. Soshensky's depth of experience shines through in the case studies which span different settings, age groups and clinical scenarios. While concentrating on the power of music as a catalyst for healing, the case stories also beautifully illustrate his client-centred thinking within the approach and capture the essence of music therapy.

In Part 1, Soshensky clarifies the differences between music therapy and therapeutic music experiences, a conversation which is familiar to many music therapists across different institutions. Much of my own work and supervision takes place within educational settings where it is common for music therapy sessions to be mistaken for music lessons at first; the need to clarify the processing, role of a music therapist and the outcomes of the work remains essential. However, as Soshensky illustrates throughout the book, when we work through the musical process and select interventions with empathy and compassion, transferrable and meaningful skills will no doubt develop. The art may well lie in translating some of the musical and therapeutic progress into a language which feels tangible and maybe even actionable to other professionals.

Soshensky moves on to outline the four distinct experiential states one can expect in music therapy, as discussed by Dr Ken Aigen (1993), including 'the real thing', 'the next best thing', 'just coping' and 'confusion'. This section was particularly a helpful reminder of a common experience, not only in long-term and slow-paced therapeutic engagements,

but in any context where it is important to keep looking out for musical entry points into deeper therapeutic experiences. We cannot possibly be expecting spectacular therapeutic turning points in every session, when the work feels challenging and we question our usefulness in the process. Soshensky further writes about the meaning of the music therapy room as a holding and interactive space, which nurtures creativity and opens up the client's potential space. The following words felt especially powerful as description of our place in a client's therapeutic process:

Our belief is the space our clients occupy. Beliefs are the walls, the enclosure in which the real thing happens. We cannot make the real thing happen, but we can create the interactive space within which the real thing is allowed to happen.

Once more this reinforces one of the threads that run through the many different forms our work can take and gives coherence to the different ways the work might appear to an outsider. For the remainder of this first part of the book, Soshensky elaborates on Nordoff-Robbins-based concepts, music-centred thinking, and origins and developments of the method. This provides an interesting overview and comparison to a variety of other approaches and the case stories at the end of the chapter exemplify the benefits of music-centred aims in the context of wider life skills.

In Part 2 of the book, Soshensky presents a number of case studies that provide more detail of the different musical directions the work could take, as introduced in Part 1. He talks about instruction and practice, jamming, composing, as well as performing and recording. Within each case study, Soshensky talks about bigger concepts, for example, transferrable and meaningful achievements, the beneficial impact of music making in neurological areas and life lessons that we can take from the work with our clients. Throughout different parts of the chapter, the question about power balance between client and therapist, the value of the musical experiences and the therapist's alignment with different models is examined. Soshensky explores the art of preserving the magic of musical encounters with their potential for healing, empowerment and personal growth, while also working in a clinical and evidence-based way which keeps in mind the functional goals outside of the therapy room. Soshensky captures the value of therapists with their attitude, knowledge, experience and presence as a resource themselves with the following quote by Carl Rogers (1961):

In my early professional years I was asking the question: How can I treat, or cure, or change this person? Now I would phrase the question in this way: How can I provide a relationship which this person may use for his own personal growth? (p. 144)

Soshensky's philosophical thinking in Part 3 of the book did not only speak to me as a music therapist in private practice but also very much resonated with the yogi in me. He touches on theories and frameworks from further afield to reflect on the value of being in the creative now, levels of consciousness, the body-mind-spirit model and the universality of the human existence. Soshensky's exploration of these deeper concepts was very enjoyable to read and placed the value of music therapy in an even wider context.

In conclusion, at several points throughout the book, I stopped and realised that Soshensky's writing had subtly affirmed or led me to rediscover something in my own understanding about our role as music therapists and journeying alongside our clients. Soshensky's approach to his own work conveys a refreshing sense of authenticity and humility while also clearly showing his deep understanding of the human condition.

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Author biography

Carine Ries qualified in 2010 and, soon after, started working in educational and community settings and set up her private practice. Carine leads a small team of therapists at Sound Resonance and offers external supervision. In 2017, Carine qualified as a yoga teacher and she became a qualified GIM therapist in 2020.