

Choosing the right music – an important step in music therapy

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Abstract: *Whenever it comes to finding the right music for a music therapy session, music therapists find themselves overwhelmed by the numerous possible choices, though asking themselves which one is the most appropriate and with the best results. The aim of this paper is to investigate the influence of music on people, and to find ways of facing the challenge of choosing the right music for each individual. Starting with the fact that listening to music is predicting the personality, is increasing the creativity and is improving our motor and reasoning skills, being the centre of the therapeutic process, we find challenging the method of choosing the music although, nowadays, the new technology is of great help in making the choice.*

Keywords: *choice of music, music therapy, sound*

1. Introduction

Music therapy is a therapeutic program using music to accomplish relaxation, pain and stress release and even healing. The recognition of the therapeutic value of music is based on scientific research made on two directions: on neurological, physiological and psychological research, and on the knowledge and analysis of the characteristics of music and sounds used in music therapy treatment.

Music is used as inherent element in a system that includes music, client and therapist (or educator.) Both, the music therapy method and the choice of music are adapted to the levels of functioning and accepting of the client.

To design the perfect playlist for a music therapy session requires creative sensibility and knowledge of music, an empirical understanding of the role of music within therapeutic work and respect for the precise structure of scientific procedures of therapy and medicine. It is known that music could influence people's emotional response. It is also known that music increases communication between the parahippocampal cortex, which has been associated to memory and the visual cortex, responsible for complex visions and visual attention. For example, a deep

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and heartbreaking music lower the level of joy and happiness while a happy, joyful music favors it; a repetitive song or music that is too familiar could reduce the ability to have a new experience bringing out memories of an experience already there. But those memories could bring an experience of success or pure joy, so by just hearing a few notes, the memories and feelings wake up and change to the pleasant mood once had. Music, as well as lyrics, if there is the case, becomes a symbol associate with emotions and/or situations (Sloboda, 1999).

Moreover, the characteristics of music are of importance in choosing the right music and so is the endeavor of it. One of the first questions a therapist is asking himself when choosing the music is: “*Why do I need the music for? Is that just for relaxation, for meditation in the beginning of the session, or it has a precise therapeutic scope?*” No doubt, during a therapeutic session either one of these reasons could be right at different moments, so the list should include diverse music for each one of the clients.

2. Literature Review

Music is seen as energy diversified in multiple forms, an expression of spirit and thoughts, an amalgam of sounds arranged in harmony, a “voice of spheres” according to Pythagoras. The sounds of music are acoustic vibrations defined by three aspects: the *physical* aspect - the vibrations produced in nature and their propagation to the body through the auditory organ that acts independently of human consciousness, the *physiological* aspect meaning the reception and transmission of vibrations towards the central nervous system where is transformed in sensation, and the *psychological* aspect, the one found inside the human being, in his affective and emotional conscience.

Since the nineteenth century, scientists have measured the physiological effect of music on certain diseases noticing changes on the respiratory level, on the psychiatric and psychological affects, and on cardiac and arterial pulse. Certain music was calming, took away hard pain, was improving the health and changing the mood while other music was quite contrary (Iamandescu, 2004). *What is the basis of the health improvement?* It was shown that the health improvement going next to healing is due to resonance, the penetration of the sound waves into the body where they produce vibrations helping to restore and strengthen it. Music, as Caycè said in his readings, should be „leading to self-healing first, and, then, to heal others” (Koechlin of Bizemont, 2005).

Research studies of the twentieth century opened a new path that gives unlimited access to music inventiveness increasing the role of human individuality, his creative capacity and his openness to new ways of relaxation and healing (Sacks, 2009). There are examples of scholars and artists that lack senses like vision or hearing who develop themselves up to worldwide recognition.

Convinced of the help given by music, another question comes into account. „*How important is the way of producing the music, therefore the sounds? Should we choose the music looking up to it?*” We distinguish between music of nature, human voices, instrumental music, sounds of the planet and universe. All of these sounds could be heard/listened separately or in different combinations and they all have an effect on human body. We think that the answer implies more than a scientific research, it is a combination of science and personal affiliation to one music or another. Given the fact that everything that exists is vibration just listening to the great songs of nature, for example, to the noise of water - waves, waterfalls or rain that fall rhythmically, we feel at ease getting relaxed and in good mood. The scientific explanation of the relaxation given by the water sound is that it is a low-frequency sound, audible to human ears as soothing and extremely pleasant.

The musicality of human voices is bringing up emotional reactions (from pleasant to harsh and disturbing), and so it is instrumental music that, apart from a physical reaction, could realize a symbolic relationship between music and mind. Moreover, each note has a specific vibrational frequency that affects certain areas of the human body or determine certain reflexes in it. For example, A is used in disorders of balance and paralysis, B for glands and metabolism imbalance as well as in nerve disorders, C is used for disorders connected to blood, D related to breathing disease, E is used in liver and gastrointestinal diseases, F in colds and allergies, and G for throat inflammation, eye disorders, skin diseases. Also, the timbre of the instrument is of importance giving the fact that, for example, percussion is noisier and is producing music with an impact on vitality, bells and gongs give a solemn atmosphere and help in relaxation, harps are associated with piety and meditation, wind instruments “spread” energy, violin influences the capacity of thinking and organizing, so on.

3. How to choose the right music

In music therapy, the most important role belongs, of course, to the music therapist and, undoubtedly, to his education both in psychology and music. If there is truth in the fact that any kind of music that affects emotionally has therapeutic attributes (even if it is a placebo effect) then why we are not encouraging clients to listen to “ideational-affective” music, music to stimulate his imagination and creativity, to offer him emotionally comfort and to restore suppleness of thinking? Although it will be ideal, same music doesn’t work for all people, so therapists should have a list of music for each client.

In preparing the list music therapists study the client’s responsiveness to music:

- Responsiveness to music in general - The music therapist is considering a wide range of answers that shows the state of relaxation, pleasure, stimulation of the imagination, but also anger, boredom or anxiety.
- Responsiveness to a particular genre of music.
- Increased customer confidence in the potential benefits provided by music therapy .
- Data about the client's responsiveness to music in various situations/ contexts of life: listening to music in family, personal history regarding contact with music.
- Data about the customer's musical culture: music education, the use of CDs or cassettes, ways of listening to music, favorite genres, composers, singers, bands, songs.

As we said before it is preferable that in the dissemination of music therapy to avoid pieces that the client knows very well, as it can occur saturation and the rejection is not desirable in the therapeutic process. Based on the given music test and on the medical and psychological records, the music therapist should evaluate the case, and with the objective in mind he should choose the music/ songs that will be used during the music therapy sessions. We note here the difference existing between a psychologist - licensed music therapist and a a music therapist whose job description counts less responsibilities.

Other questions are asked at this moment: *Does the client like/ accept the music or not? Is the music good for the client?* We are talking about music in the right tonality, for example, we cannot "match" a depressive person with a very sad music, or a music written in a minor tonality. It is also possible to look to the frequency spectrum of the music and at the music characteristics: sound, timbre, rhythm, harmony, and not the last, we could verify if the music works by monitoring and measuring the client's response with the new devices available (BioRadio, MindWave, so on.) If the client is a child, the therapist should be careful if the song is age appropriate, if it is repetitive, if the song/ music address the skill he wants to work on.

We recommend a decalog to be followed by the music therapist during sessions:

- Conduct the therapy professional, music is an instrument of work.
- Don't be intrusive, although never forget that the client comes to you because he needs you.
- The preferred music is not necessary the music the client needs – give the client what is best for him.
- Don't listen to extremely loud music, or only to sad, quiet music – music must inspire the joy of life.
- Be careful at the words, if the case, they have their own frequency.
- Have an empirical understanding of the role of music within the therapeutic work.

- Find out the degree of emotionality of the client - he gives emotional responses to the music (e.g. peacefulness, happiness or tension.)
- If it is possible combine music therapy with other therapies such as dance therapy, aromatherapy, dramatherapy and chromotherapy
- Look for the right characteristics in music: optimism – major tonality, sadness - minor tonality, harmony, timbre, rhythm, so on.
- Test the music for frequency and effect – use the new available technology.

An important study for marketing and music industry was conducted by North, Desborough and Skarstein from Heriot-Watt University. The study involved 36,000 subjects from around the world being tested to identify the link between their own personality and the musical preferences. For three years, subjects of all ages from different countries around the world participated to this complex study. They were asked to respond to several personality tests, thus revealing their musical preferences. The study findings were following:

- Blues fans have high self-esteem, are creative, outgoing, gentle and at ease
- Jazz fans have high self-esteem, are creative, outgoing and at ease
- Classical music fans have high self-esteem, are creative, introvert and at ease
- Rap fans have high self-esteem and are outgoing
- Opera fans have high self-esteem, are creative and gentle
- Country and western fans are hardworking and outgoing
- Reggae fans have high self-esteem, are creative, not hardworking, outgoing, gentle and at ease
- Dance fans are creative and outgoing but not gentle
- Indie fans have low self-esteem, are creative, not hard working, and not gentle
- Bollywood fans are creative and outgoing
- Rock/heavy metal fans have low self-esteem, are creative, not hardworking, not outgoing, gentle, and at ease
- Chart pop fans have high self-esteem, are hardworking, outgoing and gentle, but are not creative and not at ease
- Soul fans have high self-esteem, are creative, outgoing, gentle, and at ease

4. Conclusion

Choosing the right music is challenging for a music therapist. Sometimes it is hard to make a list that works for the client right away, so it is important to don't give up on choosing the "right" music and try again. Could be several "wrongs" before the "rights." There is not a recipe for all clients, what works for one, not necessary works for the others. Though, as long as the music therapist is engaged in the

process and has the necessary abilities and education, choosing the right music for the client should be successful.

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