

Music technology in therapeutic and health settings, edited by Wendy Magee, London and Philadelphia, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2013, 400 pp., £25.19 (paperback), ISBN 9781849052733

While technology has always had some kind of presence within the discipline of music therapy, whether for creating music, data collection, recording/playback or as assistive technology (Crowe and Rio, 2004), there has also been a certain sense of ambivalence among music therapists about the value of developing technology skills to enhance the therapeutic process (Magee, 2006; Magee and Burland, 2008). As technology becomes more user-friendly, portable and inexpensive, there comes a corresponding opportunity for this uneasy relationship to shift towards a more positive position, bringing new potential for the discipline of music therapy.

This would certainly appear to be the case made in *Music Technology in Therapeutic and Health Settings* (edited by Wendy Magee), which lays out a comprehensive overview of many of the possible applications of electronic music technologies (EMTs) and assistive technology within music therapy. These applications and interventions cross the lifespan and address a myriad of clinical issues. This book should appeal to ‘tech-savvy’ music therapists who may already employ technology, but there is more than enough detail, definitions and practical advice for a music therapist considering the potential benefits of music technology in their clinical work for the first time.

The book is divided into four sections: a general overview of the status and role of music technology within music therapy, child and adolescent work, work with adults and theory/research implications. Within these sections, many different permutations of clinical practice, population and technology applications are covered. Technology is presented as having much to offer music therapists in terms of facilitating access to music making for people with physical or sensory impairments; as an aesthetic, expressive or cultural tool for relating to clients; and as a way of finding new therapeutic spaces (through the use of the internet, for example). The book also devotes time to theoretical discussions of the role of technology in music therapy in relation to discussions of gender, identity and aesthetics, along with the role of technology in research and multi-disciplinary collaboration.

Assistive technologies (switches and voice output devices in particular) are discussed in three chapters on music therapy for people with physical and sensory disabilities, demonstrating the ways in which empowering musical experiences can be facilitated and the music therapy process deepened for this population. This applies to both one-to-one work – as described by Julie Zigo in her work in special education – and ensemble work, in the case of Adams and Lajoie’s chapter on ‘The Headbangers’, a band of musicians with physical disabilities who perform with the aid of head-mounted switches.

In some cases, the inclusion of technology in music therapy reflects the real-life needs, preferences and cultural norms of clients, particularly in the acknowledgement of the role of personal music players or smartphones and the internet in young people’s music consumption. This has corresponding implications for receptive music therapy work in hospitals (as described by Whitehead-Pleaux and Spall) and in end-of-life care (as described by Jackie Lindeck). Similarly, Nir Sadnovik’s chapter describes the development of a ‘Therapeutic Recording Studio’ to reflect the role of hip-hop in the lives of adults in an inpatient psychiatric unit.

Alternatively, EMTs are also recommended as a clinical asset to the therapist, chosen and utilised deliberately to facilitate the music therapy process. Andrea Cevasco uses digital music devices with premature infants in NICU care in a simple, yet effective manner. Felicity Baker, a prominent author on the subject of therapeutic song writing discusses (with Robert Krout) the possibilities of that method within *e-health* context, engaging with clients over long distances using Skype. This is an interesting feature of the work presented in this book: the balance or dichotomy between, on one side, the extension of standard music therapy techniques by the inclusion of

technology and, on the other side, applications of technology that require a reframing of what music therapy is and what it can do.

Whether due to their ubiquity in modern life in general, or because of their genuine value as musical and assistive device (I suspect both), iPads and tablets feature prominently in this book. Robert Krout's chapter on using iPad apps to engage young clients with ASD has many useful suggestions for apps and activities, while tablets are also recommended, being versatile and portable, for bedside work in hospitals. The loop-based GarageBand programme/app seems to be very popular in streamlining the music composition process for clients of all abilities. Ariel Weissberger goes so far as to describe the GarageBand recording software as a 'digital co-facilitator'.

In fact, the predominance of Apple computer devices (iPads, iPods and iMacs) and software over Windows-based technology in *Music Technology in Therapeutic and Health Settings* stands out. Including more PC applications may have been helpful to music therapists exploring their options, however, this is a minor complaint. Multi-media examples of the work described in the chapters – in the form of a CD-ROM or website for example – might also have supplemented the book's content.

It is important to note that music technology is not presented as an essential or infallible addition to a music therapist's practice. The limitations and contraindications of technology are well described. Ease of use does not imply necessity of use in any case, while the pre-eminence of the therapeutic relationship is emphasised throughout the book's chapters. The value of any device or software is in its capacity to support the music therapy process, which is highly individualised from case to case. Flexibility and accessibility are key features necessary to support the therapeutic relationship and the successful accomplishment of clinical goals. These criteria distinguish the more useful applications described in this book from, for example, educational music devices or applications (though these may still be useful for certain music therapy cases).

As a music therapist and researcher with a strong interest in the possibilities of music technology for people accessing music therapy, I was highly impressed by the comprehensiveness and clarity of this book. The various hardware and software interfaces are described elegantly while the role of EMTs is contextualised effectively in terms of the populations and goal areas addressed by the authors. The manner in which music is created and consumed changes rapidly, offering new ways for music therapists to engage with and help their clients. This book will be an excellent resource for any music therapist curious about new ways of working.

References

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