The Brain on Music: How Music Therapy Principles Shape Worship Practice
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Throughout history and across all human cultures, music is omnipresent as a means of mediating the divine, expressing emotion and enlivening social interaction. Music serves a central role in Christian Worship and is at the center of the therapeutic discipline, music therapy, that optimizes the ways the brain processes music in order to advance therapeutic goals in the areas of communication, learning, motor skills, emotions and social interaction. This workshop will illustrate the foundations of music therapy as they pertain to the use of music in worship and explore how worship practice can be shaped by this understanding.

1 Samuel 16: 14-20
Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul’s servants said to him, ‘See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better.’ So Saul said to his servants, ‘Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me.’ One of the young men answered, ‘I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the Lord is with him.’ So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, ‘Send me your son David who is with the sheep.’ Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. Saul sent to Jesse, saying, ‘Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight.’ And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

“Without music, life would be a mistake” – Friedrich Nietzsche

Music Therapy (American Music Therapy Association; www.musictherapy.org)
Music Therapy is an established health profession in which music is used within a therapeutic relationship to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals. After assessing the strengths and needs of each client, the qualified music therapist provides the indicated treatment including creating, singing, moving to, and/or listening to music. Through musical involvement in the therapeutic context, clients' abilities are strengthened and transferred to other areas of their lives. Music therapy also provides avenues for communication that can be helpful to those who find it difficult to express themselves in words. Research in music therapy supports its effectiveness in many areas such as: overall physical rehabilitation and facilitating movement, increasing people's motivation to become engaged in their treatment, providing emotional support for clients and their families, and providing an outlet for expression of feelings.

There is no one single musical center in our brains: rather, music is processed in scattered networks throughout our brains. (Oliver Sacks)
These examples of therapeutic music are noteworthy, **but are not clinical music therapy:**

- A person with Alzheimer’s listening to an iPod with headphones of his/her favorite songs
- Groups such as Bedside Musicians, Musicians on Call, Music Practitioners, Sound Healers, and Music Thanatologists
- Celebrities performing at hospitals and/or schools
- A piano player in the lobby of a hospital
- Nurses playing background music for patients
- Artists in residence
- Arts educators
- A high school student playing guitar in a nursing home
- A choir singing on the pediatric floor of a hospital

Here are examples what **credentialed music therapists do:**

- Work with Congresswoman Giffords to regain her speech after surviving a bullet wound to her brain.
- Work with older adults to lessen the effects of dementia.
- Work with children and adults to reduce asthma episodes.
- Work with hospitalized patients to reduce pain.
- Work with children who have autism to improve communication capabilities.
- Work with premature infants to improve sleep patterns and increase weight gain.
- Work with people who have Parkinson’s disease to improve motor function.
The Musical Brain in the Body of Christ

And the worship shall be the whole body in song. (Gordon Lathrop)

THE INDIVIDUAL AND (vs?) THE ASSEMBLY

FAITH FORMATION, EMOTION, AND MEMORY

PLANNING WORSHIP WITH THE BRAIN IN MIND

Goals

Intentional Tempos

Comfort and Anxiety levels

New Words to Old Tunes

Music and Well-Being

Active Listening

Discuss: Music in your Faith Formation

Pastoral Care

DANGERS:
Books:


Articles:


Websites:

www.musictherapy.org
American Music Therapy Association

www.musictherapy.org/research/factsheets/
Factsheets about Music Therapy with specific populations (ex. Military, Autism, Alzheimer’s Disease, Correctional Facilities, Crisis and Trauma, Medicine, Mental Health, Education, Pain Management, and more)

Blog by Belle Beth Cooper: 8 Surprising Ways Music Affects and Benefits Our Brains
https://blog.bufferapp.com/music-and-the-brain