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### Photo:

L-R (front): Charissa Tan, Patsy Tan, Dr. Robbins, Ng Wang Feng, Clara Chong  
L-R (back): Jane Tan, Melanie Kwan, David Khlentzos, Chen Hsuehlien, Loi Wei Ming



## President's Note

April was an unforgettable month for the local Music Therapy scene! We had our very first Music Therapy Day on April 11, 2010, with world-renowned Music Therapy Pioneer, Dr. Clive Robbins, as our distinguished speaker. You might be keen to learn that the idea first hit us when our student member, Jane Tan, student of Dr. Robbins, told us of his pre-planned trip to Asia.

The rest of the events unfolded like a symphony.

We enjoyed solid support from our co-organizer (the Singapore General Hospital) and generous sponsors (Advanced Bionics, the Hearing Solution Company, the Kwan Im Thong Hood Cho Temple, and the National Library Board) who each played a crucial role to help AMTS to sprout this miracle.

In commemoration of this milestone in the local MT scene, I salute local and international pioneers. The legacy of such pioneers who gave and continue to give of their time, energy and passion, speaks volumes about the nature of this work. In promoting health and making lives better, Music Therapy improves the human condition and inspires us to be more caring human beings.

With the launch of an accredited local training programme in 2011, and by attracting more trained professionals to return or come to Singapore to work, we will grow as a community. As Music Therapy is an adjunctive treatment modality that works with other therapies and treatments (and not as an alternative to traditional therapies), we also look forward to collaborating and connecting with professionals and partners in healthcare, educational and community settings.

**Ng Wang Feng,**  
MMT, MT-BC  
AMTS President  
June 2010

## Editor's Note

I'm truly excited about this issue of the newsletter, and it is only the second issue! What more exciting events herald ahead of us? Music Therapy Day, which fell on 11 April 2010, was a huge success and made a significant mark on Music Therapy's short history in Singapore. Music Therapy Day united Music Therapists in Singapore to proclaim the existence of this unique profession to people in Singapore. Music Therapy Day also made inroads into people's awareness about the profession. Read about this in our section about audience feedback. Most importantly, I am recharged about one of the key missions of the Association of Music Therapists in Singapore (AMTS) and a core reason why Music Therapists in Singapore banded together in 2007 to form an association - that is, to communicate to the local community about music therapy as a credible profession, with a scientific basis.

I would like to express heartfelt thanks to all who contributed to Music Therapy Day and to all who attended talks, asked questions and offered feedback. We will continue to keep you updated on the events in the music therapy profession in Singapore in our upcoming newsletter issues. So do keep connected with us!

**Charissa Tan,**  
MA, MT-BC  
Editor

# Music Therapy Day

## Music Therapy Pioneer Dr. Clive Robbins' Historical Singapore Tour

reported by Jane Tan\*



The week of 7th to 14th April, 2010 was a very special one. Dr. Clive Robbins, in the midst of his "epic" two-month long teaching tour to different parts of Asia and Europe, came by Singapore for the very first time, to spread the word of Creative Music Therapy (CMT).

Dr. Clive Robbins is a revered pioneer in Music Therapy. He established the approach of CMT with the late American composer, Paul Nordoff. Together, they built up the art and science of CMT, which stems from the belief that there is innate musicality in every person, regardless of pathology. Music improvisation, i.e. the creation of music in the moment without any pre-written music, and close listening to the clients forms the basis of this approach. This approach has been used with different populations, from medical patients coping with debilitating illnesses and/or rehabilitation, to children with special needs.

In illustrating how CMT was used in medical settings with patients with different needs, Dr. Robbins showed how music improvisation supported the physical rehabilitation of patients who had undergone neurosurgery as well as provided psychological and emotional support for children battling cancer.

One of the most moving examples he shared was that of a Music Therapist working with a coma patient. The patient emerged from his unconscious state to testify that it was the musical connection to the Music Therapist he experienced each time she had sung to him, following his breathing patterns closely, that gave



him the will to live. Dr. Robbins enthralled and intrigued the NUH audience with his sharing, and they, in response, with wide smiles, resonated with the message that music held immense therapeutic potential in medical settings.

Conversations with the music educators in attendance revealed that they resonated deeply with the importance of acknowledging the innate musicality and creativity that lies within each individual, something



### About Music Therapy Day 2010

by Ng Wang Feng, MMT, MT-BC

It was such an honor to welcome Dr. Robbins to the Central Lending Library (National Library Board) on 11 April, 2010, as our distinguished speaker. In retrospect, it is awe-inspiring to think that our humble island-state has received such a giant in the field! Thank you to all for making Singapore's 1<sup>st</sup> Music Therapy Day a **RESOUNDING SUCCESS!** AMTS is looking forward and planning for next year's Music Therapy Day. Do visit our blog for exciting new updates!

which has often been overlooked or forgotten.

At the age of 81, Dr. Robbins is still driven by his passion for his work. He arrived in Singapore with the mission to spread the word of CMT. At the end of the remarkable week-long trip, he said, with much satisfaction, "I believe I had come and completed what I had to do."

Indeed, Dr. Robbins, you have!

\* Ms. Jane Tan is AMTS' student member at the time of writing, and has since completed her Master's level Music Therapy training at the New York University. She was Dr. Robbins' mighty assistant throughout his historical whirlwind Singapore tour.

## We also asked you for your thoughts about MT Day and Dr. Robbins' sharing...



MT Day marks a milestone in our society... It was touching to watch [Dr. Robbins' video clip] this little girl (who was blind) transform from rejecting all activities to being able to sing and recognize various parts of the body – through music-making! - **Mrs Sue Liang, parent of a Music Therapist in training**

The video clips were inspiring and thought-provoking! I now know that Music Therapists work with different groups of people (e.g. the elderly, special-needs children, delinquent youth)! - **Student**

I'm really glad I attended Dr. Robbins' talk... The joy of witnessing the slightest response from a patient may very well be more fulfilling than any concert performance for a musician. Thank you for bringing this to Singapore!" - **J Pang - performer and vocal coach**

MT Day is a marvellous initiative to promote awareness about Music Therapy. Dr. Robbins' passion, compassion, empathy and love for his patients struck a deep and full chord. Very many congratulations to AMTS for creating fresh dimensions about what music can do to the 'heart' and the 'mind'! - **Dr. Rebecca Kan - Senior Lecturer (Music), Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts**



## Dr. Robbins spoke at...

### Date Venue: Target Audience

08/04 School of the Arts:  
SOTA students and staff

09/04 National Institute of Education:  
NIE students and staff

11/04 **Music Therapy Day**  
Central Lending Library:  
General public

12/04 Singapore General Hospital's  
Postgraduate Allied Health  
Institute: hospital staff, allied  
health professionals

13/04 National University Hospital:  
hospital staff, allied health  
professionals

13/04 National University of Singapore  
Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of  
Music: YST students and staff

## A Parent's Journey



Contact Dr. Patsy Tan at:  
[patsy.tan.l.p@sgh.com.sg](mailto:patsy.tan.l.p@sgh.com.sg)

*Since the 1980s, Music Therapists in Singapore have worked with children with special needs. At SGH, our professional member, Dr. Patsy Tan (top), works with children with hearing impairment. Read about the journey of Arthur Chan, the parent of a hearing-impaired child, in his own words:*

### In the beginning...

Our son Isaac was diagnosed with Severe to Profound Hearing Loss at the tender age of two. Prior to this we had no idea about HI. We found out the hard way about his condition and it was a traumatic time for our family... Back then, there was no mandatory check for HI in infants. Over time, we crossed the various emotional hurdles from denial at first to acceptance.

Isaac was fitted with a pair of hearing aids at 2 years old. We began therapy right away – including Auditory Verbal Therapy and Speech Therapy. He also underwent counseling for almost a year to prepare him for mainstream schooling.

### Challenges...

Isaac faces various difficulties in hearing sounds correctly, reproducing speech accurately and understanding what others are saying. A big challenge for him is losing out in terms of accidental listening or eavesdropping (it is a fact that 90% of what we learn is via accidental listening). Don't we all have our own little personal

deficiencies and difficulties? What we lack, we make up for in other unique ways. The same goes for little Isaac.

### Journey in Music Therapy...

Music Therapy (MT) is different from other therapies that Isaac goes to. Here, the children play and listen to different musical instruments. They learn to appreciate the variety of sounds that are present in the real world. They focus on various pitches, tones, rhythms, variations in sounds... They also learn teamwork, cooperation, patience and perseverance as they play musical instruments together.

Isaac was a very shy and reserved boy before he started MT. His goal in MT is to overcome his fear in a social environment, foster social integration with the other hearing-impaired children, integrate smoothly into a normal hearing environment, and to develop independent thinking.



Photo: Issac Chan

Initially, Isaac resisted learning new things. He had a fear of removing his shoes before entering a "strange" room (the therapy room). It took several weeks of innovative and creative persuasion, and gentle coaxing by Dr. Patsy before he agreed to remove his shoes. These days, he is more than happy to remove his shoes before entering anyone's house. It is a small step for most of us, but a giant leap for little Isaac. He has overcome his fear!

We have achieved various goals we set for Isaac. And we persevere to achieve even greater goals. He now helps and advises the younger children in his group. In MT, Isaac continues to build up his confidence, develop his communication and social skills, and bond with other hearing-impaired children.

## Upcoming Music Therapy Events

**NATO Advanced Research Workshop**  
*New Therapy Approaches in Countering the Negative Effects of Terrorism*  
15-16 September, 2010  
Ankara, Turkey  
<http://www.musictherapy2010arw.com/index.htm>

**36<sup>th</sup> Australian Music Therapy Association National Conference**  
*With Music in Mind*  
18-19 September 2010  
Melbourne, Australia  
<http://www.austmta.org.au/conf/>

**Music Therapy New Zealand Conference 2010**  
*Playing in Tune - Working Collaboratively in Music Therapy*  
2-3 October 2010  
Christchurch, New Zealand  
<http://www.musictherapy.org.nz/index.php?q=conference.htm>

**XII Annual Conference of the American Music Therapy Association**  
*Rock Out of the Past and Roll into the Future With Music Therapy*  
17-21 November, 2010  
Cleveland, Ohio  
<http://musictherapy.org/conference/confindex.html>

**Canadian Association for Music Therapy Conference 2011**  
*Music Therapy: Return to the Centre*  
May 5-7, 2011  
University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
<http://www.musictherapy.ca/conference.htm>

**Third International Music Therapy Research Conference**  
*Improvisation – Exploring the Art & Science of Clinical Practice*  
May 25-28, 2011  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada  
<http://www.musictherapyconference2011.org/>

**XIII World Congress of Music Therapy**  
*Music Therapy in Eastern and Western Philosophy*  
5-9 July 2011  
Seoul, South Korea  
[http://www.wfimt.info/WFIMT/World\\_Congress\\_2011.html](http://www.wfimt.info/WFIMT/World_Congress_2011.html)

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## Music Therapy and Autism

Reported by Melanie Kwan, MMT, LCAT, MT-BC

Children with autism may be challenged in connecting with others and in engaging meaningfully with the world about them. Music Therapy (MT) does not work like prescription medicine that has a predictable effect for 80% of those who consume it. Instead of teaching a set of behaviours, Music Therapists design and implement non-threatening musical experiences that build on the child's natural abilities and strengths. The MT process encourages awareness of self and others, tolerance of sound, two-way communication and joint attention while meeting emotional needs. Improvisational approaches may be used to increase the communicative behaviours of children with autism, while behavioural frameworks may be used to structure the sessions.

Numerous case studies from all over the world (since the 1950s) describe positive effects of MT on communication and social skills. However, scientific measure of its success is not easily documented since MT is grounded in one-to-one relationships and the child's emotional or behavioural responses—there is no neutral control for comparison and observer bias cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, the documented benefits for children with autism include:

- experiencing or exploring a wider range of emotions
- building relationships and positive interaction skills

- social-skills training (turn-taking, socially-appropriate behaviours and responses)
- decreasing obsessive-compulsive or perseverative patterns of behaviour, or self-harm tendencies through meaningful play

Please consult a professional Music Therapist to have your child assessed as to the suitability of this specialized mode of therapy. The Music Therapist will assess the child's response in and out of music contexts and design music experiences to address identified needs and towards non-musical functional outcomes. For a full list of references, please contact the author through the association.

*Boso, M. (2007). Effect of long-term interactive music therapy on behaviour profile and musical skills in young adults with severe autism. Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine. 13(7), 709-712.*

*Woodward, A. (2004). Music therapy for autistic children and their families: A creative spectrum. British Journal of Music Therapy, 18(1), 8-14.*

*This column aims to highlight an interesting topic or question that has been partially or fully addressed by recent scientific research. Contributions by our readers are also welcome!\**



### What is Music Therapy?

Music Therapy is the use of music and musical activities by a qualified Music Therapist in a process designed to meet individualized physical, emotional, social and cognitive needs, within the context of a therapeutic relationship. Music Therapy is about making music (singing/playing instruments/moving to music) and not only listening to music. Live music is preferred, though recorded music may be used.



### What is the Association for Music Therapy (Singapore) AMTS?

Formed in Sept 2007 by 11 professional Music Therapists, AMTS seeks to increase public awareness of Music Therapy in the community and serve as an organizational agency for locally-based Music Therapists. **Contact us at [musictherapy@gmail.com](mailto:musictherapy@gmail.com) to verify credentials of Music Therapists.**

### Who benefits from Music Therapy?

Music Therapy serves individuals and groups of various impairments and conditions at all ages, from neonates to the elderly. You do not need any music background to benefit from Music Therapy! However, Music Therapy is NOT a miracle cure-all. Only a Music Therapist can assess whether Music Therapy is suitable for you.

### Who are Music Therapists?

Persons who complete an approved college Music Therapy programme in the country of training. As credentials vary from country to country, the following are recognized: MTA (Canada), RMT (Australia), SRMT/HPC (U.K.), MT-BC (U.S.A.), and RMth (New Zealand).

<http://singaporemusictherapy.wordpress.com>

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