

# MUSIC THERAPY TIMES

ISSUE 16 | SEPTEMBER 2022

AMTS

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## AMTS EXCO 2020-2022

President: Mr Calvin Eng  
Vice-President: Ms Hu Shuying  
Secretary: Ms Grace Low  
Treasurer: Ms May Ng

General Members:  
Dr Tan Xueli  
Ms Chong Kai Wen  
Ms Trudy Chua  
Ms Farhana Rizaini  
Ms Jolene Yee

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## President's Note



Calvin

Earlier this year, Association for Music Therapy Singapore (AMTS) held Music Therapy Day with the theme "Broadening Landscapes; Deepening Practices". In my opening remarks, I expressed how amazing it was to witness the work my music therapy colleagues are doing in Singapore and internationally. You will be able to read more on the diversity and impact of the work my colleagues have done in this newsletter.

It has been a great privilege for me to serve in the Association the past four years, and I feel extremely proud of all that we have achieved. This includes the launch of our Research Initiative, the 2019 AMTS Symposium, formalising three key AMTS documents - the Recommendations for Music Therapy Curriculum and Training in Singapore, Professional Competencies, and Code of Ethics and Professional Standards - and producing public resources shared on our website to further engage our communities.

AMTS is now 41 members strong and music therapy services are offered in at least 28 healthcare institutions, social service agencies and private settings across Singapore. We are also very proud to share that as of 1st May 2022, AMTS is now an Associate Member of the National Council of Social Service (NCSS). We are proud and honoured to be a part of this family. Most recently, we have also been listed in the Ministry of Health's Allied Health Professionals list of [useful links](#). We thank the Allied Health Professions Council for valuing us as a key stakeholder in our healthcare system too.

Our incoming President, Dr Tan Xueli, will assume the role this September. Dr Tan is an accomplished clinical and research music therapist with 24 years of experience. Her clinical work includes the use of music therapy for pain management on the burn intensive care unit, working in post-surgical units, oncology, psychiatry, and with children and adults with disabilities. Her areas of research focus include medical music therapy, pain perception and management, music preference, music perception, cultural humility and responsiveness in clinical practice, and research design and analysis. I am confident that Dr Tan will bring the association and profession in Singapore to greater heights in her tenure.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all music therapy colleagues based locally and abroad for the great work you all do every day! It has not been an easy time for all of us, especially during this pandemic. We have found new ways of working, and experienced new possibilities within our profession. Let us continue collaborating with other healthcare professionals and our communities to provide better outcomes for the individuals we serve.

Thank you Grace, May and Shuying for your dedication to the Association. It has been a great privilege for me to serve alongside this team. Much appreciation to Estelle, Lynn and Trudy for putting this year's newsletter together!

Calvin Eng, MT-BC  
AMTS President

## Editor's Note

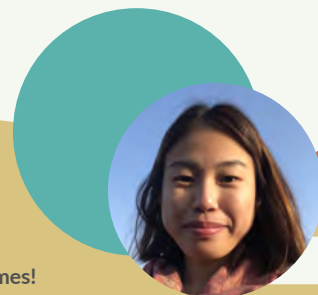
Welcome to the 16th issue of Music Therapy Times!

As the world shifts to a post-pandemic era, it is heartening that our music therapists continue to grow in strength and with resilience, in Singapore and beyond.

This edition pays tribute to the diversity of work done by our music therapists. We feature reflections from our members about their practice and in their professional development. We continue conversations with allies and learn more from them about their perspectives on music therapy. Get to know our new and returning members and members based abroad in the *Up Close and Personal* section. Finally, this issue ends with a new section *Music Therapy in the News*, which comprises media features of our members.

This newsletter could not have come to fruition without the work of Trudy and Lynn from the editorial team, the support of AMTS EXCO, as well as all the contributors to this newsletter. I hope this newsletter provides you with insights into the world and work of music therapists. May you have a pleasant reading experience!

Estelle Ng, music therapy student  
Editor



Estelle

# EVENTS IN 2021/2022



Daniel

## Music Therapy Day

Music Therapy Day (MT Day) is an annual public event organised by AMTS aimed at promoting and raising awareness of the profession.

On 28 May 2022, we had the wonderful opportunity to conduct a virtual Music Therapy Day to showcase music therapy services across various demographics in Singapore. The theme was “Broadening Landscapes; Deepening Practices”. In the morning, a series of presentations showcasing their work was conducted by professional members. These featured Eta Lauw on bereavement in a special education setting, Jolene Yee on care for residents with profound brain injuries, Calvin Eng and Divya Balakrishnan (occupational therapist) on telehealth practices, as well as Trudy Chua on song-writing in palliative care. Through these sharings, the audience gained deeper insights into the work of music therapists.

The afternoon segment provided the opportunity for individuals interested to pursue music therapy to find out more about various options available to them. Through active participation from our audience in “Ask Us Anything”, professional members Daniel Seah, May Ng and Tammy Lim shared their unique journeys in becoming music therapists in Singapore. Finally, the afternoon ended with professional member Jacqueline Chow leading an enriching and engaging songwriting experiential.

The event saw a total of 178 participants who joined us from Singapore and beyond, including Thailand, Australia, Vietnam, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, United Kingdom and China. On behalf of the organising committee (Hu Shuying, Daniel Seah, Chong Kai Wen), we want to thank everyone for making this day memorable and enjoyable, and we hope to see you all again for MT Day next year!

## Daniel Seah, RMT



Screenshot of MT Day committee and panellists

## Workshop on Music and Imagery:

### Assessing the Inner World with a Palliative Care Setting

A group of seven allied health professionals including music therapists, art therapists, and a social worker facilitated an unprecedented workshop in the 7th Singapore Palliative Care Conference in December 2021, titled “Assessing Inner World Through Music-Evoked Imagery – The Self within a Palliative Care Setting.” This workshop aimed to demonstrate how music and imagery can help with assessing one’s inner world to reveal the unconscious materials that evoke insights for self-awareness. The focus was on one’s self in relation to his/her role within the palliative care setting. After a music and imagery experiential, participants shared their insights in small facilitator-led breakout groups.



Tammy



Screenshot of facilitators on workshop for music and imagery

The second part of the workshop was conducted by our very own music therapists, Tammy Lim and Trudy Chua, together with art therapist, Calvin Pang, all of whom are trained in the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) method. They introduced the basic concepts of music and consciousness, and how GIM as a form of depth psychotherapy involves elements of art-making alongside selected sequences of classical music, which helps to facilitate clients’ integration of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of well-being.

The participants were mainly healthcare professionals such as doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals. Based on participants’ feedback, this workshop offered an eye-opening and transformative experience in understanding how music can be used to help get in touch with one’s inner self.

As mental health issues are increasing worldwide, especially with the Covid-19 pandemic, this is a very appropriate time to introduce the Bonny Method of GIM to the community. Improving self-awareness and developing appropriate self-care practices are crucial for all healthcare professionals in their caregiving journey. The Bonny Method offers a unique channel to achieve inner healing with the use of music.

Tammy Lim, MT-BC



Kayla

Eta

## Music and Health

“What does your music in your playlist say about you?” – this is one of the questions posed during a lecture in the 8-week long “Music and Health” course conducted by professional members, Eta Lauw and Kayla Wong, as part of the Continuing Education Programme for adult learners at LaSalle College of the Arts from March to May 2022.

The first of its kind to be run in Singapore, the course was designed to allow students to learn about the different roles that music can play in the wide continuum of health (physical, emotional, relational, mental and spiritual health) through a mixture of didactic and experiential learning.

Students were also invited to reflect upon their personal relationship with music in the areas of their identity (personal, social, cultural), how they used music to connect with others, and music strategies used for mood regulation and for physical health.

As full-time clinicians, it was a refreshing experience to be back in the classroom, albeit on the other side, and to be engaging in thought-provoking conversations which deeply reflect lived experiences of people using music in their lives. These sharings gave us a greater understanding of the impact music can bring in people’s lives.

Eta Lauw, RMT, Austin Vocal Psychotherapist & Kayla Wong, RMT, NMT

# MUSIC THERAPY RESEARCH

## Reflections:

### Research on the Role of Music Therapy in Children Undergoing Cancer Treatment



Kayla

In 2021, my esteemed colleagues and I published an article based on three years' worth of local music therapy work done with children undergoing cancer treatment in KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH). This population faces multiple challenges, since treatment takes place over a prolonged period of time during the years when children and adolescents are moving through crucial developmental milestones and forming their identities. As the first study of its kind to be published in Singapore, results contribute to understanding how music therapy could be of help to this population in the local context.

This study observed the element of therapeutic versatility in music therapy as being capable of supporting a wide range of physiological and psychological needs with a high rate of success for children across all ages (two to 17 years old). These results mirror the reports of international studies, further demonstrating the universal impact music therapy can have for children undergoing cancer treatment.

My hope is for more of such studies to be published in collaboration with local colleagues and communities. This would not only further inform the music therapy and medical communities but also enable us to understand the nuanced details of how music therapy works, is unique to our culture, and may be practiced in Singapore.

You may access the publication at [bit.ly/21ctr](https://bit.ly/21ctr).



This service was part of the Psychosocial and Supportive Care Programme (PSCP) and funded by the SingHealth DukeNUS Academic Research Grant and Children's Cancer Foundation, Singapore.

Kayla Wong, RMT, NMT



## Telepractice with Children with Multiple Disabilities:

### Perspectives of Caregivers, Teachers, and Therapists in a Combined Music and Occupational Therapy Session

A combined music and occupational therapy (MT/OT) session that we typically facilitate would include targeting goal areas of engagement and participation through music and movement. The “Circuit Breaker” resulted in schools shifting to full home based learning. We quickly adapted to these changes and provided our services using telepractice, as an alternative mode of service delivery. This study aimed to understand the perspectives of caregivers and teachers, on the effectiveness of our combined MT/OT telepractice sessions with children with multiple disabilities via Zoom once a week, for three weeks.

Six students aged between 11 and 13, with complex multiple disabilities, together with their caregivers, attended the MT/OT session and data was gathered through the use of surveys and semi-structured interviews. The results indicate the telepractice sessions were beneficial, enjoyable and engaging - which includes the occupational therapist using a dummy to demonstrate movement facilitation, to the clear audio (music) produced from the music therapist that paired with the movement facilitation. This allowed caregivers to follow along seamlessly. Teachers also felt that students were engaged during the sessions. The results highlighted some of the perceived barriers to the telepractice session, which include caregiver concerns on their appropriate facilitation of movement, lack of interactive instruments or assistive technology at home for engagement during session, and lack of specialised equipment to ensure adequate positioning for seating and/or supported lying.

This study illustrates that telepractice sessions are a viable alternative option and highlights their benefits and limitations, and the need for access to assistive technology at home to enable students to fully engage and participate in all activities as independently as possible.

Through this study, professional member Calvin believes that telepractice is successful because the platform allowed the MT/OT services to be more accessible as it allowed students who were previously not able to come to school for various medical reasons to be able to participate with their peers. In addition, occupational therapist Divya reflects that she could still feel the strong presence of the caregivers and students in the session despite the physical distance which she would have thought was impossible previously.



Calvin is a board certified music therapist who is currently working in Rainbow Centre, Singapore. Divya Balakrishnan is a senior occupational therapist who is currently working in Rainbow Centre Yishun Park School.

## Synchrony in Music Therapy: a Ph.D. Research



Sun Sun

Vienna-based music therapist Sun Sun Yap presented part of her Ph.D. research “Synchrony during music therapy and its relationship to self-reported therapy readiness: A mixed-methods case series study” at the 12th European Music Therapy Conference in Edinburgh in June 2022. Sun Sun investigated nonverbal synchrony, quantified as the coordination of body movement between patient and therapist dyads, as they engaged in unstructured conversations before and after music interventions.

Sun Sun’s motivation for her research is to deepen her understanding of therapeutic relationships. In psychotherapy research, nonverbal synchrony has already been established as an important factor in therapeutic relationships; patients rate sessions as having higher relationship quality when there is increased nonverbal synchrony. It also correlates with higher symptom reduction and patients experiencing higher self-efficacy. 11 in-patients from a neuro-rehabilitation ward and one music therapist participated in this study.

Results showed an increase in nonverbal synchrony after the music intervention as well as an increase in patient leading in the synchrony. In addition, a significant negative correlation was found between post-intervention synchrony and patients’ self-reported therapy readiness. This study also introduces the application, Motion Energy Analysis into music therapy research.

The next steps for Sun Sun’s research would be to examine heart rate synchrony during the interventions, to investigate through video analysis, the interaction between the dyads during the segments with highest heart rate synchrony and how moments of therapeutic interest may relate to heart rate synchrony.

**Sun Sun Yap, Ph.D. candidate, federal ministry registered music therapist**

# ADVANCED TRAINING IN MATADOC

## Using MATADOC to Assess Awareness in Persons with Advanced Chronic Medical Conditions



Jolene

In late 2021, I had the opportunity to attend the Music Therapy Assessment Tool for Awareness in Disorders of Consciousness (MATADOC) training online. MATADOC is a standardised and validated music-based measure to assess the awareness of persons with disorders of consciousness (DOC). This population typically presents with compromised motor, cognitive and communication functioning, which makes it difficult to assess their awareness holistically.

This tool was developed through clinical work and research by Professor Wendy Magee and her team of music therapists at the Royal Hospital of Neuro-Disability in Putney, Southwest London. The protocol involves the presentation of music, sounds, visual stimuli and verbal commands to assess the auditory, visual, motor, arousal and communication domains across four single clinical contacts with standardised scoring. To attain competency in administering the MATADOC, one has to go through training and supervision by the MATADOC team.

Upon the completion of my training, the MATADOC has since been integrated into the music therapy programme at Ren Ci Hospital. The scale is used primarily in the Chronic Sick Unit (CSU), a long-term care unit for those who require frequent medical and skilled nursing care due to advanced and complicated chronic medical conditions, such as brain injuries and degenerative illnesses.

As part of the initial assessment and ongoing evaluation, the MATADOC scale has provided a sensitive and systematic approach to guide treatment planning. Categories like musical awareness and responses inform music therapy goals as they reveal specific aspects of music residents respond to. Information gained from the MATADOC has also guided the planning and tailoring of suitable engagements for residents, such as interactions with family, celebrations, outings and volunteer programmes. The MATADOC has opened doors to better understand residents from the CSU and maximise their capabilities for meaningful interactions to happen.

Yee Xianfang Jolene, RMT, NMT



Screenshot of trainees of MATADOC Part 1

## SPED Music Therapy Workgroup

AMTS organises several music therapy workgroups on different areas of interests and clinical practice for its professional members. The purpose of these workgroups is to provide a regular platform for professional sharing of clinical expertise, knowledge and resources. On 15 June 2022, the bi-annual Special Education (SPED) workgroup finally resumed in-person after two years of gathering and sharing online. 11 AMTS members attended the workgroup hosted by professional members Eta Lauw, Hu Shuying and Amanda Low at the newly opened campus of AWWA School @ Bedok, the second campus of AWWA School.



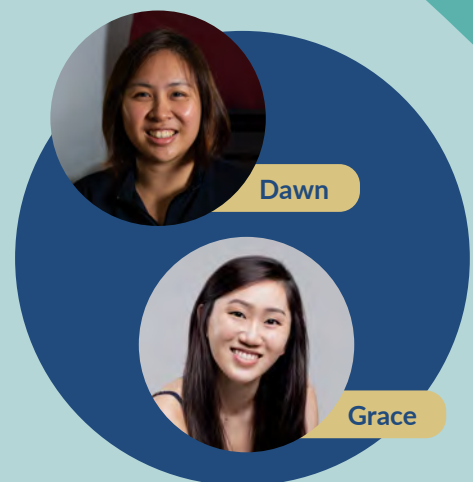
Photo of AMTS members working in special education sites

During this full day event, members took turns to present their clinical experiences and reflections. Presentations included a discussion on service delivery and referral processes, collaborative work of music therapists with art therapists, music therapist-led teacher training sessions, a clinical case sharing as well as a reflective sharing by clinician and educator, Ms Jacqueline Chow on her journey as a music therapist over the last 10 years. There was also a journal discussion exploring the transdisciplinary nature of work for music therapists working in special needs school-settings. Throughout the day, we had opportunities to make music together through singing, and exchanging intervention strategies, musical improvisations.

Overall, it was an enriching day of learning. We look forward to continue inspiring and spurring each other on in our clinical work with children and youths with special needs, be it in the early intervention programmes, SPED schools or in private services.

Last but not least, we wish to express our gratitude to AWWA School and appreciation for our hosts, Eta, Shuying and Amanda!

Dawn Chik, MT-BC & Grace Low, MT-BC



## Reflections of Writing a Commentary on the Use of Music in Dementia Care for the Press



Camellia

As a music therapist at Dover Park Hospice, an opportunity fell upon me to draw from my experience and work, to contribute an article on music therapy in dementia care for a local digital news outlet.

In the process of writing this commentary, I found a need to be concise, as well as to make it interesting and understandable to the general public. Multiple correspondences were needed with the press, in order for the piece to achieve a balance between being patient-centric and viewership-friendly reading.

The writing of the conclusion proved to be a difficult task, and it prompted me to think about and reflect on what our work is all about in the end - music, dementia care, music therapy. It is always about our identity - who we are to ourselves, and to one another.

In all, I was grateful for the opportunity to bring awareness about music therapy to the readers.



*We all have musical histories. Music reminds us of significant memories, and our identity such as religious faith, or nationality. Individuals with dementia are mothers, fathers, sisters; a person with a history. We can sometimes forget this and focus on their disease.*

*There are deep losses that dementia brings and the path can be difficult for both patients and their families. But in caring for our loved ones, it is important to see the personhood that is still present.*

*Music is a conduit to unlocking memories, helping individuals with dementia recall their identity. We also remember who they are, and who we are to each other. And that is what matters most at the end.*



You may access the article at  
[bit.ly/2021cnad](https://bit.ly/2021cnad)

Camellia Soon, RMT





Michaela

## The Pressing Need for Racial Awareness and Activism in Music Therapy

The death of George Floyd in 2020, and the global resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, sparked an awakening for those who identify as marginalised peoples of colour. Within the music therapy profession in the UK, many music therapists of colour who have experienced lifelong racism started to unpack what that meant on a systemic level and the impact of structural racism on music therapy trainings and practices. Following months of self-education and raising my voice in protest, I began working with peers who felt the same frustrations, particularly in work with clients where matters of race and culture were dismissed, or worse, conflated with symptoms and diagnoses.

In April 2021, we held a seminal Racial Awareness Event through the British Association for Music Therapy which kickstarted important conversations. However, interactions and presentations during the European Music Therapy Conference in June 2022 highlighted that change is still far off. Difficult and damaging issues around training and supervision continue to arise. A deference to Western Classical Music and Western models of medicine, psychology, development and theoretical and relational understandings persists. Many admit that much of what we learn does not apply to the multi-racial client groups clinicians work with, particularly in areas of deprivation around the UK. The experiences of racism endured by music therapists and trainees of colour is also another area which warrants much awareness and discussion. It is imperative we actively tackle these issues from their roots and build a more equitable and sustainable profession for all.

Michaela de Cruz, HCPC-UK

# CONVERSATIONS WITH FRIENDS OF AMTS

As the music therapy profession continues to grow and develop in Singapore, we recognise that the help and support of many friends and partners of AMTS have been crucial in leading the profession to where it is today. We hear from two Friends of AMTS who are allies of music therapy.



Joanna

Dr Joanna Sun is an environmental design specialist with 15 years of industrial experience in dementia care and continues to design inclusive environments. Dr Sun has also written, presented, and published extensively in the field of dementia and design, and knowledge translation. Earlier this month, together with researchers in Germany, Japan, and the United States, they published a paper looking at the cultural challenges met while developing environmental assessment tools in Singapore, Japan, and Germany. Dr Sun works to raise awareness globally in the space of dementia and design, translating research into action to help people design more inclusive environments that can support dementia care.

## 1. Please share about your expertise as an environmental design specialist.

I have been working in the field of dementia care for 15 years and designing environments that are dementia inclusive for 10 years. I have been privileged to work in various environments, from healthcare facilities such as nursing homes and day centres to community spaces like transport hubs and libraries. My passion in this field has also led me across continents, where I was privileged to be mentored by Professor Richard Fleming, a leader in the field of dementia and design. As a result, we co-developed the Singapore Environmental Assessment Tool (SEAT) and a user guide. I continue to design, teach, research, and present my work to increase literacy in the field of dementia and design.

## 2. Can you tell us more about the SEAT?

The SEAT is a systematic framework that can help users review environments supporting persons with dementia requiring high levels of care. It has a range of questions that are designed to gather information on how well the underpinning principles of design have been implemented (see principles below). The assessment tool is designed to be utilised by people with and without a professional background in design. In all, it is a platform to guide people from all walks of life who may be designing an environment for dementia care to come together to design inclusive spaces.

## 3. Having worked with music therapists, where do you see opportunity areas for the music therapy profession in collaborating or supporting the work you do?

Music therapists are an essential part of dementia care, as music is an essential part of a person's life. We know that there has been a huge emphasis on environments in care settings where sound is minimised and controlled and, in some environments, there is an acoustical separation. Within these spaces, people may reside for years in highly sterile and quiet spaces with little auditory stimulation. There is such a huge emphasis on negative auditory stimulation and the need for silence but little focus on the right and enabling auditory stimulation such as culturally appropriate and familiar music and soundscapes. Music therapists have much to contribute in the space of dementia care. The evidence has shown that there is without a doubt, power in auditory stimulation, and in music. That is where the strength of a music therapist is crucial to dementia care, to bring their expertise to the forefront to craft successful and life-changing therapeutic interventions that not only helps the person living with dementia but their families and everyone working with them as well.

### Principles of design

- Inconspicuously reduce risks
- Provide a human scale
- Allow people to see and be seen
- Manage levels of stimulation – Reduce unhelpful stimulation
- Manage levels of stimulation – Optimise helpful stimulation
- Support movement and engagement
- Create a familiar place
- Provide a variety of places to be alone or with others – in the unit
- Provide a variety of places to be alone or with others – in the community
- Design in response to vision for a way of life



You may access the article at [bit.ly/2020seat](https://bit.ly/2020seat)

### Reference:

Fleming, R., & Sun, S. (2020). Singapore Environmental Assessment Tool (SEAT): User Guide. Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health - Papers: Part B. Retrieved from <https://ro.uow.edu.au/smhpapers1/1501>

Ms Clare Isabel Ee has been working as a Speech Therapist in St. Andrew's Community Hospital in Singapore for three and a half years. In her clinical work, she mainly sees geriatric patients, patients recovering from stroke, and patients with cardiopulmonary, deconditioning or neurodegenerative conditions.

Fun fact: Outside of work, she is also a singer and avid music-lover who once considered becoming a music therapist!



Clare

**1. Based on your experience, could you describe the work you did with a music therapist? Could you share with us a case vignette?**

I have found music therapy to be a useful form of therapy for patients with speech and voice problems, and I greatly enjoy working with my music therapy colleagues! It is also a much more enjoyable form of therapy for persons who enjoy music.

There are so many success stories with music therapy that I struggle to think of just one!

Most recently, we had a patient with dysarthria (speech impairment) post-stroke, who shared that while his impairment was mild, he felt embarrassed to speak with his family and friends as his voice was no longer loud and booming as it used to be. He loved music and was open to joint music and speech therapy sessions to work on his speech. He was very motivated with music therapy, and over a few weeks, we managed to not only get him singing and speaking at much louder volumes, but also helped him to express his sadness at his post-stroke impairments, and joy at still being able to enjoy music and singing.

**2. Where do you see opportunities for more collaboration between a speech language therapist and music therapist?**

I think there is room for collaboration especially for speech, language, and voice therapy. Music is such a powerful medium for therapy and really does help patients feel motivated to participate! I would love it if there can be more group sessions (post-pandemic, of course!).

**3. What is something you would share with other healthcare professionals about working with a music therapist?**

Music is for everyone. Even if you aren't a "musical person", don't let that hold you back from making that referral!

**4. Is there anything else you wish to share?**

Thank you, music therapists (and all therapy assistants and volunteers too), for all that you do, and for bringing smiles to the faces of so many, including patients, caregivers, and even us fellow healthcare workers!

# MUSIC THERAPY STUDENTS' CORNER



Estelle

I am Estelle and am currently starting the second year at Master of Arts in Music Therapy at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. This programme runs on a hybrid model in which lectures are mostly conducted online while we gain clinical experience in our home countries. There is an intensive period at the end of each semester during which professors and students meet in-person. My professors come from different parts of the world, including Thailand, America, Europe, Korea and Taiwan, and we are encouraged to apply the concepts and principles learnt to our home countries, taking into account our own cultural nuances. I enjoy the hybrid model as it has allowed me to have clinical exposure locally at Assisi Hospice, Dover Park Hospice and currently AWWA School during my course of studies. Even though I am miles away from my classmates, I feel supported by them and always look forward to the intensive period where I get to meet everyone in-person - nothing truly beats sharing the same time and space while making music together! I also look forward to the post-intensive class trips that we embark on as we explore various parts of Thailand together!

Estelle Ng, second year music therapy student  
Chulalongkorn University



Karen

I'm Karen, currently doing my music therapy internship after studying a 1-year equivalency programme at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania, USA. My programme was made possible by the increased use of online education during the pandemic. Online classes which were previously presumed to be impossible, were found to be feasible, with adaptations. My professors are very dedicated to the effective implementation of online education, with live classes over Zoom and Microsoft Teams. What I enjoy most about the programme is their strong dedication to accessibility - they account for both full-time undergraduates as well as individuals wanting to make a mid-career switch and are studying part-time. Hence, all lectures are recorded, while group work and assessments are provided both online and in-person.

However, there is simply no replacement for clinical training! I am very grateful to AMTS members who have been my clinical supervisors, from Tammy Lim at Assisi Hospice, to Isabel Tan, May Ng, and Dr Tan Xueli during my internship at St Luke's Hospital. Through them, I have had the chance to see different approaches and philosophies to music therapy, which will no doubt help me become a better music therapist in the near future!

Karen Koh, music therapy intern  
Slippery Rock University



Mei Ling

Starting my postgraduate studies overseas in 2021 has been a whirlwind. Beyond settling into a new country, I had to keep myself updated about the latest pandemic regulations regarding mask-wearing, safe-distancing on campus, and quarantine. Many of our classes in winter were held online and we had to resort to creative ways of trying out intervention strategies virtually. While it was initially a little daunting, I learnt the importance of being adaptable to different situations and to be reflective about my own learning process.

Although gaining new knowledge in music therapy has been enriching, I am most intrigued by the fact that all my coursemates come from various parts of the world - bringing a palette of multicultural colours into our classroom discussions, which is very exciting! I also had the opportunity to attend the European Music Therapy Conference (EMTC) in Edinburgh this year. It was a delight to meet and connect with people in the music therapy field and to better understand the profession better through various lenses. I certainly look forward to returning to Singapore in August where I will be doing my clinical placement locally.

Tan Mei Ling, first year music therapy student  
SRH Hochschule Heidelberg



Melissa

My name is Melissa and I am just about to complete my music therapy master's degree at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, UK! Having started my studies in late 2020, the course was undoubtedly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Fortunately, since our course is classified as a healthcare profession, we were still able to have most of our lessons in-person in school with some online lectures. Whilst having my placement in a special needs school, one of the biggest adaptations I had to make was moving my therapy work ONLINE! While there were a lot of challenges, a significant advantage was being able to work with the students' caregivers in the therapeutic process.

Studying in Guildhall has been a wonderful experience due to the overwhelming support from teachers and coursemates. Amidst learning a wealth of information in music therapy, I was able to receive music lessons of an instrument of choice which was piano! I was also privileged to work in the National Health Service (NHS) with older adults in the dementia and mental health patient wards. Through this experience, I have learnt much from working closely with other healthcare professionals.

Melissa Chew, second year music therapy student  
Guildhall School of Music and Drama

# UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Get to know our new and returning music therapists, Amanda, Joanna and Stephanie!

## 1. What or who inspired you to become a music therapist?

**Amanda:** I've always been drawn to therapy work since my social work studies as I found the idea of connecting with and helping people meaningful. I've always been passionate about music, and I played the piano and sang in my church. In short, what drew me to music therapy was how it was a marriage of my two passions.

**Joanna:** While living in Taiwan in 2016, I volunteered weekly at a convalescent home. I grew so fond of the elderly residents, to a point of wanting to work with them in a full-time capacity. Having heard of music therapists serving the elderly and those with dementia, I looked into this the following year.

**Stephanie:** Wendy Kreuger, Brian Jantz and Brian Harris. They have all inspired me greatly in one way or another. I am grateful to have them as my professors/supervisors during my time in Boston.

## 2. Could you share an inspiring moment in your work as a music therapist?

**Amanda:** There was once when I offered the guitar to a girl to strum, another girl joined her and they were strumming the guitar together. They usually didn't interact with each other, and I thought that was such a lovely moment of joint attention and playing together.

**Joanna:** I currently work primarily with children and youth. I have been working with some clients for over 3 years, and one of them who used to engage for no more than 5 minutes at a time is now singing and playing on instruments with me throughout our 30-minute sessions!

**Stephanie:** I had the opportunity to work with a patient in the ICU with her husband and children as they engaged meaningfully together as a family for the last time. It had been a very trying time for the entire family in the hospital, and therefore, to see them bonding together over music was a very touching and encouraging sight for everyone. It felt as if they had set aside all their worries and whatever that had been bringing them down ever since, and left them outside the ICU room, solely focusing on being in the moment with one another.

## 3. Could you share about a challenging moment in your work as a music therapist, and what you learnt from it?

**Amanda:** During a session, I offered a boy a box of instruments for him to choose from, and he couldn't stop going through all the instruments. When I took away the box, he had a big meltdown even after an instrument was given to him. From then on I learnt to be more careful with how I offer instruments for clients to choose.

**Joanna:** I work with an 8-year-old client with emotional disturbance and it gets challenging when he displays anger, and sometimes even physical aggression towards me. I've been learning more about offering acceptance, and of the creative ways to allow the expression of big feelings!

**Stephanie:** It is tough whenever a patient passes on, especially if the case was a little more complex than the others, and that you've done all you could with the medical team for this patient and their loved ones. Sometimes, the feeling is indescribable. Some days are easy and some are not. I've learnt that self-care is important. Taking time off or going for a jog or walk in the park with my music helps me unwind and process my thoughts. Self-care varies for everyone. Do what works for you.

## 4. Could you share your experience of searching for work in the midst of a pandemic?

**Amanda:** My friends have been telling me about how difficult it is to find a job during the pandemic. I was hoping to start work in January 2022 but did not secure a job then. Thankfully, I eventually managed to secure a part-time job in March and another one in April, and for that I'm grateful.

**Joanna:** I was fortunate to already have a job then. I started working at Center for All Abilities (CAA), a nonprofit based in Manhattan's Chinatown, in 2019. When New York became an epicentre for Covid-19 in March 2020, I moved to Wisconsin for 6 months but continued my work at CAA remotely.

**Stephanie:** I was a little worried as I had to relocate back to Singapore in the midst of the pandemic. Thankfully, there were a couple of jobs available at that time. It was also great to see the music therapy profession gaining more public awareness in Singapore.

## 5. How has the pandemic impacted your practice as a music therapist?

**Amanda:** I've become accustomed to singing to my clients with a mask on. I even had to don a full PPE during my placement in Sydney, playing the guitar with gloves at a hospital!

**Joanna:** My work pivoted to doing some sessions on Zoom, and utilising more digital music-making resources. Besides my work at CAA, I was also still completing an internship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center at the start of the pandemic. I made music videos around the farm in Wisconsin I was staying at and sent these to patients I had previously been visiting in-person.

**Stephanie:** I learnt to be more adaptable and flexible in my approaches.

## 6. Tell us one interesting fact about yourself.

**Amanda:** I used to be an origami enthusiast - could fold things like cranes, lilies, dresses, yukatas, butterflies, roses.

**Joanna:** I enjoy making cocktails and would love to open a speakeasy one day!

**Stephanie:** I have a 2 year old Himalayan munchkin cat that I adore greatly!



Amanda



Joanna



Stephanie



Get to know our professional members who are based abroad, Sun Sun and Michaela!



Sun Sun

**1. Tell us about where you are based and what you are up to these days.**

I am a clinician-researcher, working as a music therapist in the neurology department of the University Clinic in Tulln, Lower Austria. The other half of my time is dedicated to my Ph.D. research on synchrony during music therapy, and as I am on a scholarship, I teach and I am a Scientific Associate at the University of Applied Sciences, Krems.

**2. You have been in Austria for about 20 years, first as a theatre actress and now a music therapist. Did you ever feel like being a foreigner hindered your role as a music therapist?**

During the audition/interview for the Bachelor's degree, I actually expressed doubts about my suitability to my current institute director, Prof Tucek. I thought of music as being very personal and was afraid that I might not be able to relate to and understand my patients as well as the locals. Now many years later, he reminded me of our conversation. Well, I did work hard to learn the language, the culture, and the music repertoire of my patients here. My personal experience has shown me that nothing can really stop us from understanding and connecting to each other, as long as we stay as the one who's searching, not the one who's knowing. Moreover, since I am a foreigner, my patients would take more time to share their stories and music with me. In doing so, we are able to connect and enter into a therapeutic relationship.

**3. Is there anything different about the practice in Singapore as compared to in Austria?**

I observed some music therapy sessions in Singapore during the earlier parts of my Bachelor's and had a culture shock because of the huge difference in the pace of work. In Krems, we were taught to decelerate, to take time to be in the moment. I think it takes lots of strength to be a music therapist in Singapore and I hope they have time for self-care as well.

**4. Could you share with us something you might be working on?**

I am providing music therapy services to all stations in the neurology department, ranging from stroke unit to outpatient. Currently, I am establishing MATADOC and also Music & Imagery in my clinical work. My next project would be to offer music therapy treatment for Tinnitus.

**5. What do you miss about home?**

I miss my family most of all. Many years ago, I would say I miss the food but I have come to realise that it's not really the food or places that I miss but the memories and experiences of growing up in Singapore.

**6. Is there anything you would like to share with the music therapists in Singapore?**

Music therapists in Singapore are trained in different countries and we, therefore, have multiple worldviews forming the local practice. It would be an advantage to offer all these different perspectives in our eventual curriculum, which I hope to play a part in that too. We cannot teach our students every existing method, the needs of the patients in that clinical field dictate that. We continue to learn on the job. However, one thing I would always fall back on is the mindset that my University in Krems has ingrained in me; we are the method and we are seekers meeting the patients where they are. Having studied in Austria, and being able to access both German and English music therapy literature, I've spent a lot of time confronting the different world views, also with my own. In German, we say "Auseinandersetzung". The biggest leverage for us is when we are able to recognise our own paradigms and transcend beyond them.

Last but not least, I would also like to add that although I am really far away, I strongly support AMTS and the music therapists in Singapore!



Michaela

**1. Tell us about where you are based and what you are up to these days.**

I moved to the UK in 2016, and eventually graduated from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London in 2019. When we went into lockdowns during the pandemic, I had just started my online private practice and was also working with the NHS in a community mental health setting. Working online enabled me to work with Singaporean clients, which gave me a very different perspective on Western therapeutic and musical approaches and the theoretical assumptions made throughout my training, supervision and clinical work. As I am currently on maternity leave, I am not doing clinical work but I continue to do activism work in the UK to raise awareness around issues of diversity in the profession, particularly around issues of racial discrimination. I am part of a task force working with the British Association of Music Therapy to expose and tackle racism and racial discrimination in all areas of the profession, and have spoken on two panels addressing this.

**2. Could you share something you have learnt from your time in the UK that could be applicable or relevant to the music therapy practice in Singapore?**

I often think about how I might practise in Singapore if I returned home. I only speak English, apart from the little I remember from studying Malay in school. I notice that the vast majority of music therapists practising in Singapore are Chinese and speak Mandarin or a Chinese dialect, which puts them in positions to work in care homes, hospitals and other settings where language becomes a barrier if Chinese is not spoken. I have learned from working in London with a very multi-racial, -cultural, -national client group that sensitivity around language, culture and race actually matters. We are fed the line that music is universal but when it comes to the delicate work that we do with vulnerable people, I don't believe this to be the case. What I have learned more than anything is to listen to the client, understand their background, and to gain their respect before I make any assumptions about their music, their musicality and their understandings of healing traditions. A couple of years ago I might have jumped to the conclusion that I could work with anyone because all we need are a few instruments and we can make a therapeutic connection. However, I now believe there is a lot more to it than that, particularly when working in mental health.

**3. Could you share with us something you might be working on?**

Together with members of my task force, I have recently launched a closed network for Music Therapists of Colour. The network is meant to provide a space where music therapists and trainees of colour can find comfort and support in each other, learn from each others' lived experiences, as well as seek advice when facing both overt racism or microaggressions on their trainings, in clinical supervision, or at places of work. Apart from this, I am also reopening my private practice in a few months with the aim of providing music therapy specifically through a relational-cultural and resource-oriented lens.

**4. What do you miss about home?**

I'm sure everyone living abroad says this but: Family, Friends and FOOOOOOD!

## MUSIC THERAPY IN THE NEWS



From harpist to music therapist: Singaporean tells why she made career switch during Covid-19 pandemic  
Published in TODAY Online on 25 June 2022  
A music therapy intern shares her journey and insights while giving glimpses into the work music therapists do.

[bit.ly/2022hmt](https://bit.ly/2022hmt)



受访治疗师：疫情下接受音乐治疗者增加一倍  
Broadcasted on Channel 8 news on 31 March 2022  
Music therapist Evelyn Lee shares about the increase in healthcare professionals seeking support from music and music therapy, and how one could use music for emotional regulation.

[bit.ly/2022emt](https://bit.ly/2022emt)



弹奏乐器治疗病患  
Published in ZaoBao on 1 July 2021  
Music therapist Jolene Yee shares about her work and music therapy services in Renci Hospital

[bit.ly/2022rcmt](https://bit.ly/2022rcmt)