



## WFMT BUZZ

From the desk of Dr. Melissa Mercadal-Brotons



# February 2020

Dear WFMT friends and colleagues,

We are five months away from the **2020 World Congress of Music Therapy**. I hope you have registered for the Congress and that your travel plans are under way. In the meantime, we have **#WorldMusicTherapyDay** to look forward to on **1<sup>st</sup> March**-do share your plans on social media.

As professional music therapists, we are well aware of the role and importance of research to both the practice and profession of music therapy. Research challenges us to modify the way we work as music therapists, helps define direction for new discoveries, reaffirms what we know, helps us change the way we view what we already know and, without doubt, develops and supports jobs. It is these possibilities of discovery and change that make research so exciting and diverse!

The practice and profession of music therapy and the field of research are both diverse and growing areas that are intertwined. As new music therapy models, methods, techniques, or even equipment are proposed, there are parallel new, evolving research methods and equipment to assess them. Music therapy research increasingly reflects this growing intertwined diversity and growth.

To continue our series of interviews with presenters at the 16<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Music Therapy, I am very pleased to introduce **Dr. Michael Viega**, who will participate in the spotlight session on **Advancing Research in Music Therapy**.

Melissa Mercadal-Brotons, PhD, MT-BC, SMTAE  
President WFMT



**Dr. Michael Viega, LCAT, MT-BC**

### **Michael Viega:**

Michael Viega, PhD, MT-BC, LCAT, is an Assistant Professor of Music Therapy at Montclair State University. Clinically, Dr. Viega has primarily worked with children and adolescents in medical, psychiatric, and community-based settings. His research interests include therapeutic songwriting, adolescents and adverse childhood experiences, the use of popular music in music therapy, and arts-based research. He sits on the editorial boards for the Journal of Music Therapy, Music Therapy Perspectives, Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy and The Journal of Applied Arts and Health. In addition, he is a practitioner of the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music, and is Fellow in the Association of Music and Imagery. For more information, as well as to hear examples of arts-based research in music therapy, visit [michaelviega.com](http://michaelviega.com).

## **Interview**

### **1. What drew you to the field of music therapy?**

As a teenager, songwriting, playing in a band, and being a devoted music fan were all vehicles for self-discovery and belonging. I will never forget the first time I recorded a song I wrote when I was 15 years old. An important teacher of mine brought in his recording equipment to school. As I talked into the microphone, he added an effect to my voice and suddenly I was transported to a new version of myself. From that moment, I was fascinated with exploring my identity through sound. At the same time, I would take any opportunity to play my guitar for people. I loved playing music for younger kids and older adults in my community, and I would play the songs I wrote at any open mic. Playing and listening to music became the primary way for me to socialize and feel like a valued contributor to my community. In 1991, around the same time when I was starting to play guitar and write songs, I saw news coverage of about music therapy after the United States Senate heard testimony about the importance of music in aging. I am pretty sure my mom strategically placed a news article about music therapy for me to read to help plant the seed!

## **2. What are your primary areas of practice and what fascinates you about that area/those areas?**

My primary clinical focus has been working with children and adolescents in psychiatric, child welfare, medical, and community settings. The common thread of my work has been understanding the impact of adversity and trauma on childhood and adolescent development, and the role of music and music experiences have in growth. Primary, has been the music relationships I have developed with the youth I have had the honor of working with. These relationships have been grounded in the rituals found in popular music cultures. With the vast array of digital music technology, there is a drive for youth to reinvent themselves and the world around them into something new, exciting, and beautiful by breaking through binaries and subverting neoconservative music traditions. The experiences and culturally-bound elements of youth music cultures will forever fascinate me as they reveal greater societal issues of our time. Therefore, for me, understanding the ecological elements of various music cultures is essential in any research related to music therapy with children and adolescents.

## **3. What are your areas of research?**

I am interested in arts-based research methodology. I see arts-based research as wholly distinctive from objectivist and interpretivist methodologies. Knowledge obtained through systematic and reflexive aesthetic engagement is unique from information garnered through statistics or socially constructed meaning. In fact, I find engaging works of artistic research to be more evocative as they stay with me, revealing new understandings the more I encounter, perform, and discuss their results. I am not just making meaning of the art, but instead living it and bringing it into my everyday life. I find that objectivist and interpretivist research have a handful of methods that certainly work for the questions they look to investigate. However, for me, artists-as-researchers can discover and invent new methods to create new theory and investigate complex social phenomenon of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century. Though I have focused primarily on the art of remixing as a method of research, the possibilities for method development in arts-based research are limitless; I find that so exciting!

The art of remixing, digitally sampling (cut and paste) micro moments from original source material to create new compositions, has been a primary way of experiencing and uncovering developmental and psychological processes within songs created in music therapy. Remix as a method of arts-based research developed naturally out of the core elements of my clinical practice: therapeutic songwriting, digital technology, and youth music cultures.

#### 4. Please describe in some more detail a study that you are currently involved in.

I have used remixing as a research method to investigate two large datasets of songs created in different contexts; one with songs created by adolescents who have experienced extreme trauma, and another with songs created by adults who have acquired traumatic injuries. In 2017, Felicity Baker and I published a series of articles that utilized remixing as a primary way of creating developmental theory on the process of recovery from an acquired spinal cord injury. A pilot study looked at the feasibility of remixing as a research method, as well as crafting a design that could work with a large dataset of songs. The results can be found in “What's in a Song: Combining analytical and arts-based analysis for songs created by songwriters with neurodisabilities” (Nordic Journal of Music Therapy, 2017, issue 3). That pilot study led to a larger arts-based analysis of songs created by patients who had experienced acquired spinal cord injuries, which we published in the Journal of Applied Arts & Health (2017, issue 1). What I love about that series of articles is the care taken in the design of the method and how remixing is central in discovering and generating new theories. People can also just engage with the art by itself as a source of knowing (visit [michaelviega.com](http://michaelviega.com) for more). Arts-based research provides infinite options for creative discovery, while placing aesthetic knowledge at the center of what we value as music therapists.

Currently, I am interested in audience perspectives and evaluation of arts-based research. I have been performing one of my arts-based research results, “Rising from the Ashes,” surveying and conducting question and answer sessions with audiences, focusing on the knowledge that is being heuristically generated through a shared performance experience. In addition, I have been developing research projects to investigate theoretical foundations of imaginative listening with digital music technologies. This stems from theories related to soundscape (Viega, 2014) and humanistic tenants of digital music technology (Viega, 2018). This includes a collaborative heuristic project with other music therapists investigating therapeutic listening when improvising with digital technology.



**5. In this congress you will be presenting as part of the spotlight session on *Innovation in Music Therapy Practice*. Please give us a sense of the uniqueness of your contribution in this area.**

Arts-based research generates new theory and discourse through systematic and reflexive artistic engagement and creation. For me, I have focused on remixing as a way of developing theory on the process of trauma recovery. My first creation was "Rising from the Ashes," (2013) which is a cycle of songs that takes the listener through three stages of trauma recovery, remixing songs created by adolescents who had adverse childhood experiences. The second creation was a song cycle called "My Curse is My Gift," (2017), which is a remix of songs created by adults who have experienced an acquired spinal cord injury (with Felicity Baker). For both "Rising from the Ashes" and "My Curse is My Gift," I have focused on the autonomy of music to disseminate the results. Without visual or textual element to focus on, the listener has to create their own narratives and theory by directly engaging with and listening to the music. I would like to present arts-based research as a vital and necessary methodology to investigate complex social phenomenon we encounter in music therapy within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Arts-based research allows for discovery of new methods of investigation, as well as innovative ways to engage and participate with research.

**6. What are you looking forward to about attending and what are your expectations of the World Congress of Music Therapy in 2020 in South Africa?**

I am most excited about the theme "The Polyrythms of Music Therapy." The mission of the conference committee to honor diversity, promote decolonization, and champion social justice discourse in music therapy is so vital for the people we work with, and for the growth of music therapy. Arts-based research has such an important role to play in these conversations. I have recently begun to reevaluate my arts-based research reflecting on how my whiteness has sought to maintain power and privilege while simultaneously training to maintain a veneer of cultural humility. I hope to engage in complex, challenging, and necessarily uncomfortable discourse at this conference.

**7. Please complete the following sentence which we will use to encourage others to attend:**

**Come to the World Congress of Music Therapy in 2020 because** it is a chance to network and be with music therapists from around the world!

**Michael Viega, PhD, LCAT, MT-BC**

