

## BAMT 2024 Conference: Opening remarks from Eleanor Tingle, Chair of Trustees



Photo: Bev Harden

On behalf of The British Association for Music Therapy, a very warm welcome to the BAMT Conference 2024 '**About All of Us, For All of Us, By All of Us**' and to this amazing venue, the Curve Theatre.

I asked the Artificial Intelligence co-pilot on my computer for some tips in writing these opening remarks, and was offered this combination of accuracy and enthusiasm:

*'Leicester: A Melting Pot of Music:*

*Leicester, our gracious host city, pulses with life. As we gather here, let's immerse ourselves in its musical kaleidoscope. Let's listen, learn, and harmonize.'*

Well, we are grateful to Leicester, it's a city I know a little and it is indeed a wonderful place to be.

This conference is a little different to previous BAMT conferences as we have worked hard to listen to and act on feedback from the membership not only in considering the venue, but also in the programming and structure of the weekend.

A huge amount of hard work has been put in to organise the conference and thanks go to Jonathan Poole, Chair of the Programming Committee, Davina Vencatasamy, Chair of the Local Organising Committee, to all those on the Conference Organising, Programming and Local Organising and Scientific Committees, to the Operational Team of BAMT, in particular Andrew Langford, BAMT Chief Executive, and Usha Aravinth, BAMT Operations Director, and Clare Maddocks, BAMT Education and Research Officer. All of these people have worked long hours in order to deliver the best possible conference experience. Thanks also to those at the Curve Theatre who have helped with arrangements, and to all who have advised and contributed. Particular thanks to all who are presenting and to all attending as we seek to talk, to listen, to enhance our learning, to celebrate the

Music Therapy community and to continue to work to develop our profession and ourselves as therapists.

In thinking **About All of Us, For All of Us, By All of Us**, I wonder who 'we' are individually and collectively and I am reminded of the mantra of the writer and mental health advocate Andrew Solomon - created through endless experiences of childhood victimisation - '*Forge meaning, build identity*' he says, '*Forging meaning is about changing yourself, building identity is about changing the world*'.

As therapists I believe we need courage, compassion and curiosity to underpin the ongoing development of our work, and I invite you to think for a moment about our individual identities; the identities of our Service Users; of the colleagues with whom we work; and about our Music Therapy community.

Forging meaning through understanding our own identity requires commitment: Personal therapy is a vital part of our training for a reason, without a continual commitment to better understanding ourselves, and those things which define and shape each of us, we cannot understand how to fully interact with and impact our clients. Or as RuPaul, would have it

*'If you can't love yourself, how the hell you gonna love anybody else?'*

In order to undertake the work of therapy we are also required to 'do the work' of actively seeking to better understand the lived experiences of others. To be proactive in engaging in conversations which can enable insight - and then to be proactive in moving to action, in order that our new insight can facilitate change and growth. To fail to do this work, is to fail to even begin to be *aware* of those things which we don't know, which we can't conceive of – things which may be central to the lives of both our clients and those around us.

This is very well stated in the Declaration of Racism as a Public Health Emergency, Louisville University:

*'My humanity is bound to yours, my liberation to yours, whoever you may be. Because of that, I commit to actively seeing, acknowledging, and elevating your humanity in any way that I can, however uncomfortable or risky that may be. I commit to listening, especially when it's hard. I commit to not looking away. I commit to being open to critical feedback in my pursuit of becoming more fully human.'*

Through Music Therapy we are privileged to have a unique connection with our clients as we relate through music. To use that connection with integrity requires ongoing work to ensure that the lens through which we look allows us to *actively* see and hear the other person in the therapy space, and *to not look away*.

In my own experience of managing a Music Therapy service over many years, I have noticed two things which I believe highlight the importance of 'doing the work' around the lived experience of others

Firstly, and I'm aware that this is contentious, - both in my own work as a clinician 'inheriting' clients from their previous therapists, and through heading up an evolving MT service in which therapists from time to time would leave, and their work be passed to others - I have observed that if a therapist has not allowed themselves to consider that an issue might be present in the therapy room, it **could not be** present in the therapy room - it did not and could not form part of the work. I am thinking in particular of the power of Music Therapy to celebrate and explore identity – the ability of clients to use Music Therapy to explore their gender identity, their sexuality; their cultural identity; their experience of living with disabilities; or to explore or disclose their experience of trauma or abuse. Such fundamental things can only emerge in the therapy room where there is a Music Therapist open to the possibility that these things are present, and who is willing and able to hear and hold them.

Secondly, taking a step back from the therapy room, it is important to do the work of looking at who is referring and who is being referred for Music Therapy. You may have read the recent paper in Approaches by Tasmin Mains, Victoria Clarke and Luke Annesley entitled *'Music Therapy is the very definition of white privilege: Music therapists' perspectives on race and class in UK music therapy'*. A paper which I wholeheartedly recommend and which is available online via the *Approaches* website. One of the issues noted refers to a data collection exercise which I undertook around 15 years ago, in which I simply looked at the protected characteristics of Service Users noted on each of our centrally held referral forms. This demonstrated that in a service working in the West Midlands area, across schools largely in the Birmingham area, and at which the vast majority of pupils were students of colour, white teachers were largely referring white pupils for Music Therapy – and, given the demographics of our profession - to a largely white Music Therapy team. This knowledge enabled change and dialogue both directly with the Local Education Authority, who addressed the findings at a systemic level, and with the team of Music Therapists as we worked together to ensure that we were proactive in enabling our purchasers to understand how to better assess and identify those who would benefit from Music Therapy from across the pupil population. This kind of data collection is a simple task and if not already doing so, we might each examine our referral systems, being alert to such patterns in order to ensure that, where possible, we first serve those who will benefit the most from our work.

But there is a final word from Solomon:

*'Forge meaning, build identity – and then invite the world to celebrate your joy'*

As a community of Music Therapists we can forge meaning, build identity and change the world, through weekends such as this. As the EMTC conference two years ago reminded us, we are individually and collectively a 'work in progress'. I hope that over this weekend we will bring our professional understanding and expertise, along with our lived experiences to share with one another the difficulties and joys of our work in the clinical room and around it. We can engage in sometimes robust conversations, and disagree, as families do, and we can make music together, learn from each other and return to our work with fresh ideas and understandings, with renewed energy to grow and to change, individually and as a community, in order to better serve our clients and to celebrate the power and joy of Music Therapy.

And so in the words of my AI co-pilot:

*'May your creativity flow, your networks expand, and your passion ignite. Let's keep the rhythm alive and let the music play!'*

#### References:

Andrew Solomon: [Forge meaning, build identity: Andrew Solomon at TED2014 | TED Blog](#)

RuPaul: [RuPaul - Biography - IMDb](#)

Monica Wendel [Declaration of Racism as a Public Health Emergency — School of Public Health and Information Sciences \(louisville.edu\)](#)

Tasmin Mains, Victoria Clarke and Luke Annesley, 31/01/2024. ["Music therapy is the very definition of white privilege": Music therapists' perspectives on race and class in UK music therapy | Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy \(qmu.ac.uk\)](#)