

## British Association for Music Therapy

The British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT) is the professional body representing music therapy and music therapists in the UK. It is a source of information, support and involvement for the general public, and acts as a voice for those who could benefit from music therapy and those who provide music therapy.

### What is music therapy?

As human beings, music plays a fundamental role in our identity, culture, heritage and spiritual beliefs. It is a powerful medium that can affect us all deeply. In music therapy, music therapists draw upon the innate qualities of music to support people of all ages and abilities and at all stages of life; from helping new born babies develop healthy bonds with their parents, to offering vital, sensitive and compassionate palliative care at the end of life.

Everyone has the ability to respond to music, and music therapy uses this connection to facilitate positive changes in emotional wellbeing and communication through the engagement in live musical interaction between client and therapist. It can help develop and facilitate communication skills, improve self-confidence and independence, enhance self-awareness and awareness of others, improve concentration and attention skills.

Central to how music therapy works is the therapeutic relationship that is established and developed, through engagement in live musical interaction and play between a therapist and client. A wide range of musical styles and instruments can be used, including the voice, and the music is often improvised. Using music in this way enables clients to create their own unique musical language in which to explore and connect with the world and express themselves.

Music therapy is an established clinical intervention, which is delivered by HCPC registered music therapists to help people whose lives have been affected by injury, illness or disability through supporting their psychological, emotional, cognitive, physical, communicative and social needs.

**BAMT** BRITISH ASSOCIATION  
FOR MUSIC THERAPY

To find out more about music therapy services in your area, or to support or learn more about music therapy, please visit [www.bamt.org](http://www.bamt.org) and contact [info@bamt.org](mailto:info@bamt.org) or call 020 7837 6100



## Music therapy and dementia - Bringing back the feeling of life

It is estimated that over 800,000 people in the UK currently live with dementia, and this is predicted to reach over one million by 2025. Music therapy plays a crucial role in the care of many people with dementia, helping minimise apathy, anxiety, restlessness and depression. It can support people at all stages of dementia.

Currently, provision of music therapy for people with dementia is uneven across the UK and those diagnosed are not always able to access the support they need. Many more could benefit from music therapy if services were expanded.

Oliver Sachs, the well known neurologist, in his book 'Musicophilia', describes music therapy as seeking 'to address the emotions, cognitive powers, thoughts, and memories, the surviving "self" of the patient, to stimulate these and bring them to the fore. It aims to enrich and enlarge existence, to give freedom, stability, organization and focus.'

David Jaques is 81 years old. Four years ago he was diagnosed with two kinds of dementia, both vascular and Alzheimer's. He has progressive short-term memory loss, has difficulty organising his time and sometimes gets lost. His wife, Penny, hoped music therapy would give him pleasure and stimulate him as it became harder to engage in previous interests. Now, she says, 'music therapy is the high spot of David's week.'



Photo by: Key Changes Music Therapy © Alick Cotterill

'David came through the door for his first session armed with books of folk songs and opera,' recalls Pemma Spencer-Chapman, a music therapist at the Guideposts Trust Music Therapy Service in Oxfordshire. Singing the folk songs and arias evoked strong memories for David – about childhood, National Service, getting married, and raising a family. 'If I played or sang the melody David could hold the tune and he sang in a warm bass voice.' He sang the melodies from memory and marvelled at his brain's ability to remember them.

***Most people, even at late stages of dementia, are able to access memories of long ago which are stored deep in the brain, but not recent events. The brain remembers emotional experiences more easily than facts and the emotional nature of music helps these memories come to the fore.***

David was often moved to tears while singing these favourite songs and reflected that it was the emotions, for instance, of loss and loneliness in the aria 'Dormiro Sol' from Verdi's Don Carlo that he could relate to and were the reason for his tears.

***Music therapy engages healthy parts of the brain to address the secondary effects of the illness, such as loss of confidence and self-worth, low mood and feelings of frustration, irritability and anxiety. Whilst singing is physically enlivening - supporting physical health, it is the sharing of memories evoked by the songs that strengthened David's sense of who he is and what he has done in his life – his identity. It involves him in an inclusive, meaningful experience, and offers him comfort in the release of emotion through tears and being listened to in the safety of a therapeutic environment.***

***"I feel more alive and happy after each session," says David.***

Later in his therapy, David enjoyed 'messing about' with the bass xylophone, playing the same musical motif during each session. 'I don't think about it, it just happens!' he said. But it was when Pemma suggested he improvise with his voice while she accompanied him that a real breakthrough was made. 'To my surprise David sang not just a melody but words as well,' she said. 'Afterwards he said he was picturing countryside and colour and calling to someone'. In subsequent sessions they worked this way, particularly when David was trying to tell Pemma about something important.

In this free singing extract, David gives voice to his own thoughts, hopes and fears. Rather than feeling tearful after this experience, Pemma noticed that he was stimulated and excited. 'Words and melody have come to him hand in hand, supported only by accompanying piano chords from me,' she says. 'He is surprised, pleased and empowered and I feel his identity has been strengthened in a different way, by being at the heart of the improvisation.'

Music therapists work with people with dementia to support inevitable losses and look for appropriate ways to use music to help meet their psychological needs. They work with individuals such as David, as well as in groups. They can offer sessions in a person's own home or in residential care settings or day centres.

***"I enjoy so many things... I hope I keep myself safe... I like to think that round the corner is not dark (pitch rises) because the future is mine and I share with those I love – sigh – and I won't look back if I don't need to. But what is round the corner?"***

***'I wish that this form of therapy could be available on the NHS as it is clearly so beneficial! Penny, David's wife.***



Photo by: Nick Spencer Chapman



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