Exploring the spiritual in music
Response to Sara MacKian’s Keynote
‘The constant hum of the engine’

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London: Nordoff-Robbins Centre December 8th 2017
Researching the extraordinary....

"We learn most about a thing when we view it... in its most exaggerated form" (William James 1902)

• Strong musical experiences can only be studied in a mediated form, e.g. as post hoc narratives on the experiences – or almost simultaneously in the Guided Imagery and Music (GIM) experience.

• We study meaning – as constructed intra- and interpersonal – not ’reality’.
Three Sources of Meaning in Music
(Ken Bruscia, NJMT 9(2) - 2000)

- **Meaning as Implicate Order**: The IO of the universe itself, the source/foundation of all meaningfulness. Can only be experienced from a particular, personal mode/location.

- **Meaning as Experienced**: Experiential samples of the IO – ineffable in nature

- **Meaning as Constructed**: We relate our (music) experiences to our lifeworld and create (linguistic or artistic) meaning *in terms of our own world* (c: influenced by culture)
Gabrielsson SEM descriptive system

1. General characteristics: Unique, ineffable
2. Physical reactions, behaviours: tears, thrills
3. Perception: multimodal altered p., synasthesia
4. Cognition: Changed attitude, Imagery, surrender
5. Feelings/emotions: intense, powerful (pos/neg)

6. **Existential and transcendental aspects:**
   1. Existence: Music as mirror of life
   2. Transcendence: ESP, Ecstacy/trance, Out-of-body
   3. Religious experiences: Visions, spaces, meetings

7. Personal and social aspects: New insights
   (Gabrielsson & Lindstöm, 2010. Lamont 2012)
Abrams’ 9 themes of transpersonal exp.

1. **Body and physicality**: physical sensations “beyond the conventional scope of human experience, and a sense of self expanded beyond the limits of the body.”

2. **Healing and wholeness**: “Forms of self-integration and wholeness which took place at a core level of being, transcending individual, personal proportions and the boundaries of the human body.”

3. **Self**: “A core sense of self, beyond an individual, specific, biographical identity, as well as fluid, impermanent forms of self.”

4. **Relationship**: “Aspects of relationship transcending individual, human purposes.”

5. **Humanity**: “A sense of global, comprehensive significance and purpose transcending ordinary humanity.”

6. **Life-meaning**: “Understandings of life meaning which were comprehensive, which concerned the core level of being, and which involved a sense of ultimate mystery.”

7. **Spirituality**: “Transcendence of mortal boundaries, embracing sacredness or goodness, and encountering or identifying with souls, spiritual beings, or Spirit itself.”

8. **Qualities of consciousness**: “States of awareness that were ethereal or mystical, comprehensive, and acute beyond the limits of mortality, and which transcended the duality of self and universe.”

9. **Ways of experiencing the music**: “Apprehensions of the music’s core depths (beyond its superficial qualities), instances of utterly embracing or merging with the music, and a sense of being expanded beyond conventional proportions through the music.”
Lines of development in understanding spiritual/transpersonal experiences in Guided Imagery and Music

• From a spatial to a dynamic understanding of consciousness
• Music not as time or space but as a multidimensional timespace
• From contents to processes in understanding of music experiences (and imagery)
• From intrapersonal to interpersonal understanding of spiritual/transpersonal experiences in GIM
1. Cut-log vs. Venn diagram

Goldberg’s Holographic Field Model (2002)

Clark’s Venn diagram (2014)
2. The Virtual Musical TimeSpace
(Christensen 2012)

The 5 basic and 4 secondary listening dimensions in music

- timbre
- pitch
- harmony
- micro-modulation
- intensity
- melody
- rhythm
- pulse
- movement
3. Archetypal imagery vs. Narratives unfolding

One dilemma was to make all different archetypal, spiritual and mystical contents “useful” and relevant to clients’ every-day life experiences. Often the GIM experience in its own right brought healing and strength, but for many clients there was also a sense of a deep “gap” between the GIM experience and life outside the therapy room. Clients asked questions like, “How am I supposed to bring these strong and deep experiences of emotions, symbols and messages into my everyday living in a meaningful way? How do they make a difference in my life?”

- Core metaphors
- Narrative episodes
- Full narratives

"The woman in green" is connected to serenity. She inspires me with serenity in certain situations when I watch the mandala.
4. Six categories/levels of interpersonal sharing in GIM (Kia Mårtenson Blom)

_Six categories_ - describing and mirroring how GIM clients
(1) share _attention_, (2) share _intention_ and (3) share _attunement_ with their therapist, and how this sharing is used to regulate attention and intention in highly emotionally charged moments of (4) _coherence/confirmation_, (5) _difference/non-confirmation_ and finally (6) “surrender”. - These relational modes may be inborn and independent of culture, even if the imagery “content” is coloured by culture.
Music to support/evoke/induce (?)
"Strong experiences of music"

• Helen Bonny created GIM music programs to facilitate "Peak experiences" (*PE, Positive affect*)
• Ken Bruscia has created new programs to do the same (*Sublime 1+2, Faith, Gaia*)
• Blom & Bonde explored what music facilitated 'the process of surrender' for experienced and inexperienced GIM clients: *Results:*
• Yes, certain programs and pieces afford the listener an entrance to the spiritual/transpersonal realm (if the client is open and ready for it).
Final quotes

• Definition of a spiritual/religious experience: ”...the feelings, acts, and experiences of the individuals in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever the may consider the divine” (William James, in The Varieties of Religious Experience, 1902)

• “It isn’t given to us to know those rare moments when people are wide open, and the lightest touch can wither or heal. A moment too late, and we can never reach them any more in this world. They will not be cured by our most efficacious drugs or slain with our sharpest swords.” (F. Scott Fitzgerald: The freshest boy, quoted by K. Bruscia (2017)

• ”..the magic could happen to others, as it happened to me, if a way might be found to enter and uncover the creative potential in each person through the use of carefully chosen music” (Helen Bonny, in Clark 2002)

• ”It is all in the questions, not in the answers” (Message in Bonde’s music travel 1998)
J.S. Bach: Mein Jesu was für Seelenweh
BWV 488 - from Schemellis Gesangbuch

Compare versions with e.g. 1) Fischer-Dieskau 2) Alice Babs 3) Peter Schreier
4) Amateur version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JVVnf-axaKI
with 5) the orchestral arrangement by Leopold Stokowski
Bruscia’s Music Quadrant

Inspired by Ken Wilber’s Quadrants: I – We – It – Its
References

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If you want references or are interested in some of the texts mentioned in the presentation.