

Book Review

Music Therapy – A Creative Discipline

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Becoming healthy is a creative performance. Health is something created through a process and developed in the relationship between an individual and his environment.

This very basic insight into the art of healing, formulated by Professor Even Ruud in his new book “Music Therapy: A Perspective from the Humanities” may well be seen as the outcome of the fruitful exchange of research and experiences between practitioners worldwide in recent years. It can be seen as a way to transcend the naturalistic philosophy that has dominated many of the social sciences. For too long art therapy as practiced in the western world has been linked to the natural sciences alone, adopting a naturalistic understanding of man as a purely biological being, that would also have strong bearing on the choice of research methodology and reporting.

Adopting the stance that art therapy should not only be seen as a curative, but first and foremost a preventive methodology, Ruud describes the art therapist as a social worker, a care taker and in a wider science, a cultural worker approaching people with trust, time and love, building relationships, creating hope. Faced with the social problems of isolation and cultural exclusion in our rapidly growing cities the advice given by Professor Ruud bears special weight. “Music therapists should strive to give marginalized people a sense of providing valuable input into society.” This is a challenge to art therapists and art educators alike – giving a voice to the voiceless. “Music therapy should direct itself toward expression and

experience, play and fantasy.” He advises art therapists to “empower and make visible persons who, because of their ill health and handicaps have lost access to symbols and expressive means so important in every culture.” And so, special chapters are devoted to the place of music-making as a catalyst for expressions of stress and anger and for overcoming repression and social phobias.

It all comes down to building on the centuries old tradition of Community Music Therapy defined by Ruud as “...a way of doing and thinking about music therapy where the larger cultural, institutional and social context is taken into consideration.” It aims to “use music to bridge the gap between individuals and communities, to create a space for common musicking and the sharing of artistic and human values.”

In the final round, this therapy must be “aimed at changing the systems that are part of the situation of the client.” But in so doing therapy in the perspective of the humanities would restore a lost dimension for music and art in our societies: “Music therapy could reclaim music back to everyday life as central forces in humanizing the culture.”

Even Ruud: Music Therapy: A Perspective from the Humanities
Barcelona Publishers, 2010, ISBN 978-1-891278-54-9