

The Healing Power of Music

People of all ages are using music therapy to get in tune with their health

By Rhonda Reinhart
Staff writer

"From somewhere a calm musical note arrives. You balance it on your tongue, a single white grape, till your whole body glistens. In the space between breaths you apply it to any wound and the wound heals."
— From "The Song" by Naomi Shihab Nye

Anyone who has watched a mother comfort a crying child with a soft, sweet lullaby or seen the speedometer steadily climb with the tempo of a favorite song knows how powerfully music can affect the human soul.

With its combination of rhythms, lyrics and sound, music can create harmony of mind and body. The concept is known as music therapy, and people all over the world are using music to get in tune with their physical and emotional well-being.

By definition, music therapy is the use of live or recorded music to bring about desirable changes in mood or behavior.

People who have benefited from music therapy include everyone from unborn children to the elderly. Music therapists are employed in hospitals, nursing homes, schools and psychiatric facilities. And most recently, large corporations have started to hire music therapists to help prevent employee burnout.

Music therapists observe clients' musical responses in order to assess their emotional well-being, physical health, social functioning, communication abilities and cognitive skills. They design music sessions for their patients in which they use songwriting, discussion of lyrics, music performance and music

listening to treat problems such as learning disabilities, Alzheimer's disease, eating disorders and substance abuse.

Al Bumanis, of the American Music Therapy Association in Silver Spring, Maryland, said although you don't have to be a musician to benefit from music therapy, interaction is an important part of the healing method.

"Therapists are more effective when they engage live music," he said. "The client becomes actively engaged in the therapeutic process."

Bumanis said that for music therapy to succeed, appropriate music must be chosen.

"You have to find what works," he said. "People have to be aware of their preferences and what does the trick."

Healthy individuals can benefit from using music in their daily lives. Both active music-making and passive listening have been shown to reduce stress and increase relaxation. Listening to music with alternating tempos changes your brain wavelengths, which helps you relax. "If you're willing to try it, it's amazing," Teresa Batts, a graduate of the music therapy program at Sam Houston State University, said. "It works every time."

Studies have shown that children who listened to music before routine immunizations felt less pain. And patients who listened to music before, during and after surgery experienced less anxiety and recovered more quickly than those who didn't indulge in music's healing forces. Music often provides support for physical exercise, and music therapy is being used to assist pregnant women in labor and delivery.

Music has been observed to affect mood and behavior almost since the beginning of

time. Early African cultures trusted in witch doctors who used music in magic and religious rituals to fight disease. And in ancient India, the Hindus used music to achieve oneness with the universe and to promote health of mind, body and soul. The healing influence of music also can be traced back to the ancient Hebrews. The Old Testament tells the story of a harp player who could calm King Saul with his music:

"And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him."
— 1 Samuel 16:23

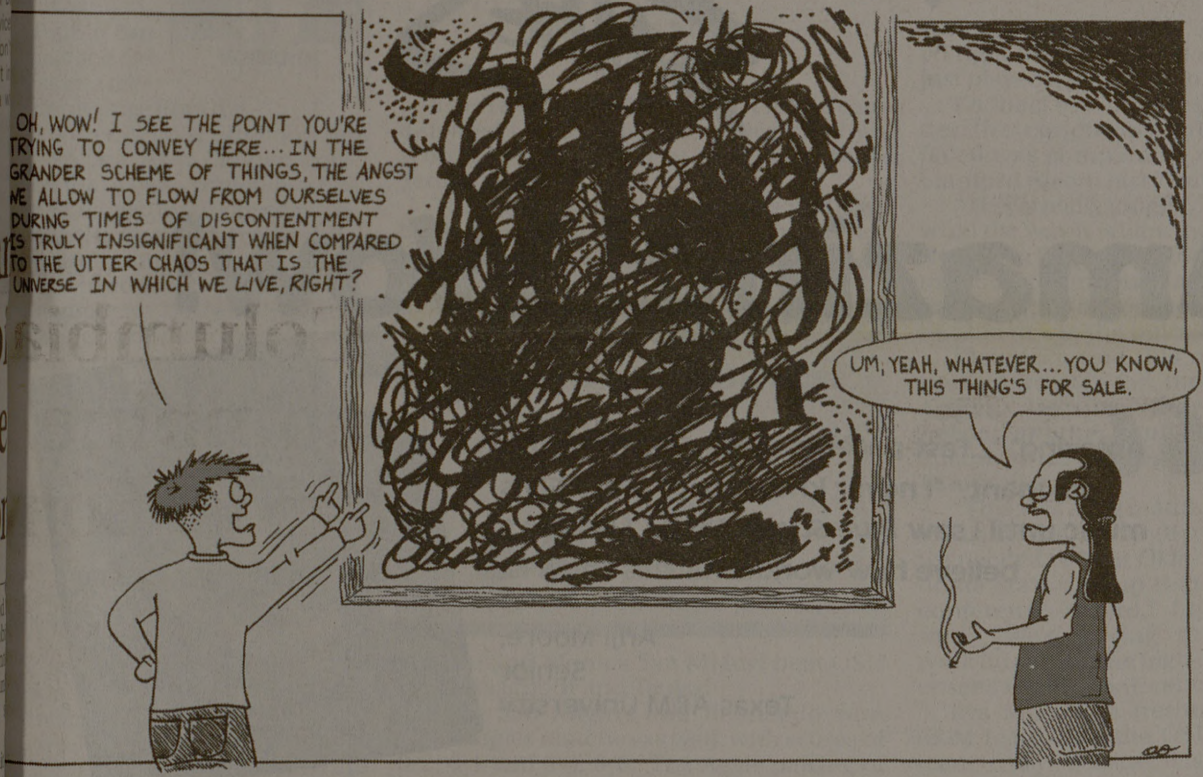
Although music's healing influence has been a part of life since ancient times, not until 1950 did music therapy become an organized health profession in the United States.

During and after World War II, physicians in veterans' hospitals observed that music could boost their patients' morale and aid in their recovery. The patients' responses to music led the hospitals to hire musicians to help ease the physical and emotional trauma soldiers suffered during war. Eventually, professionals in other health fields noticed the positive effects music could have on their patients, and Bumanis estimates that there are about 7,000 practicing music therapists in the nation.

Bumanis said that even though the popularity of music therapy has been growing, many people still consider it an alternative, new age treatment.

"We think of ourselves as under-utilized," he said. "We are growing and getting more acceptance, but more needs to be done."

Sketch



By Quatro Grease

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Back in 1978, my parents took me to see *Grease* at the drive-in. Even though I don't remember the details of that surely exciting event, I do remember the Saturday afternoons I spent watching the movie on television, singing the songs and dancing around the house.

Twenty years later, I took my mom to the rerelease of *Grease*, and the music was just as enjoyable as ever.

When Danny and Sandy did their final number on the Shake Shack at the Rydell High Graduation Carnival, I couldn't help but smile. The only bad part of watching *Grease* in a crowded theater was trying to keep from singing along with Frenchie, Rizzo, Sonny and the rest of the gang.

Only the makers of *Grease* could get away with releasing a movie in the '90s that was made in the '70s and set in the '50s. Let's just hope the anniversary of *Grease 2* is forgotten as fast as the pitifully disappointing sequel was.

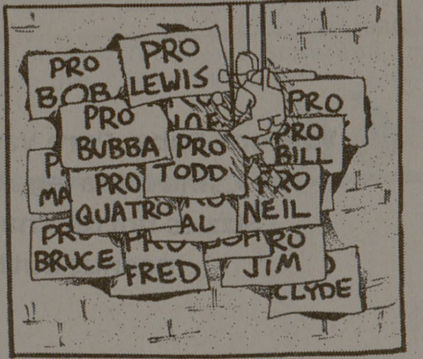
—Rhonda Reinhart

Simel & Lewis



By Mell Cartoons

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VOLTRON
Same as Robotech, but replace the planes with mechanized predatory cats and include Voltron's way of solving problems via giant laser sword.

This guy did things hands-on and found a way to brainwash one of my closer friends into thinking he was a ninja. Any cartoon that has such a profound effect on common sense deserves mention.

—Stephen Wells

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