

## Book Review

### *The Music Therapy Studio: Empowering the Soul's Truth*

Rick Shoshensky

Rowman & Littlefield, 2021

ISBN 9781538154281 [cloth]

ISBN 9781538154298 [pbk]

ISBN 9781538154304 [epub]

This book feels like a friend and mentor. Rick Shoshensky's *The Music Therapy Studio: Empowering the Soul's Truth* reminds me that the most important way I can do good in the universe is by being a music therapist. For those who have that sense, or want to, this book will stoke your fire and empower you to lead with what you love most about music and people. The invigorating theories and the clinical vignettes that they arise from are written with deep compassion and each page offers something to savour. Although I would recommend this read to any music therapist, the author seems to invite non-music therapists into this wonderful world as well. The book is written with reverence for both the mystery and power of music and the potential of all humans. I suspect this book will touch the heart and stimulate the mind of anyone who deeply loves either.

The book is divided into three main sections. The first is "Foundation," where author Rick introduces us to the breadth of what informs his approach to music therapy. In the first chapter he tells his personal story of how he went from trying to make it professionally as a songwriter/performer to becoming a music therapist. Along the way he wrestles with ideas from various muses such as Buddhism, Beethoven, and a client. The readers get a glimpse of how he arrived at the conviction that being a music therapist is a profound life calling and is an important response to the human condition. Chapter 2 clarifies and defines aspects of music therapy; my sense was this section was particularly helpful for non-music therapists. Furthermore, Rick explains the clinical benefit of viewing clients with wonderment and openness. He says, "our belief is the space our clients can occupy" (p. 48). Related to this idea, in Chapter 3, "Sacred Space," he references Carolyn Kenny and Taoism to explore the meaning of creating a space for a client to flourish. Finally, in Chapter 4, "Lessons from Nordoff-Robbins," he gives an electrifying overview of some of the key principles of his formal music therapy training.

In the second section, "Framework," Rick explores the tools he uses in therapy sessions, illustrated with theoretical backing from neuroscience, mysticism, musicians, musical idioms, and the clients who have ultimately taught him what he knows to be true. He dedicates a chapter each to the clinical use of instruction and practice, jamming (improvisation), composing, performing and recording, goals, and ritual. For music therapists, there is much in this section to incorporate into our own practice. I was particularly interested in the goal section where he shares his process of creating, "...a model of assessment and goal achievement that had a universal theme, one that didn't focus on pathology and could just as easily apply to the practitioner as the client" (p. 146).

I was struck by Rick's humble way of highlighting the transpersonal power of music. In the chapter on jamming he writes, "It's not for me to decide when or whether music will find some way to make it work. I assume music is a higher intelligence than me. The music doesn't come through me. I find a way into it" (p. 93). Similarly, in the chapter on composing, he says:

One could hardly say it was I who facilitated it. My role was simply to be willing to accompany him on his journey, to accept things as they were, to offer encouragement and support when he flagged and, most importantly, not to get in the way of the creative and healing forces larger than both of us. (p. 115)

The final section is titled "Philosophy." Rick explores some of life's biggest questions and how they relate to music therapy. Through a surprisingly deep dive into quantum physics and meta-physics, he ties his beliefs about consciousness and the nature of reality into music therapy in ways that are invitational and inspiring. He writes:

That is my philosophical understanding—doing everything possible to discover and serve the creative purpose, not only of my client, but of the universe itself, regardless of how it seems to be going at the time or whether or not it appears to be successful treatment. (p. 189)

I was touched by Rick's humility in acknowledging that even though he has developed an assessment model for tracking success in the therapy, aspects of life's creative purpose remain mysterious to his limited perception. To conclude the section, he leaves us with words that I felt most summed up the energy of this book: "[Music therapy] has to do with helping [our clients] to experience themselves as valued members of the human family and, more than this, as infinite beings in an infinite creation on an infinite journey" (p. 191).

What I appreciated most about this book was the authority with which the author expresses his thoughts, which are neither quantitatively verifiable nor from someone else. Rather, he draws from decades of clinical experience as practitioner, teacher, and supervisor. He speaks from his own lived experience and invites the reader to understand from his unique perspective rather than trying to painstakingly prove his way is the only way to do this work. The author creates a space and invites readers, trusting perhaps that people's humanity—their heart and soul—will respond to his ideas as we can in music. For music therapists this book offers a refinement and celebration of what we do, and for me, empowers what I love most about this work. This would be a heart-opening and informative read for anyone who loves someone who does not measure up to traditional notions of "success." Lastly, I would recommend this book to the many people I have met who do not know much about music therapy but light up at the notion of such a profession.

Finally, I will leave you with some words of Rick Soshensky to carry into your work day: "Can I change all the darkness and misery in the world? No. Can I bring music into those places? Yes" (p. 190).

**Reviewed by Luke Lee Burton MMT, MTA, RCC**

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