

## Something Old, New, Borrowed and all True

*Dominique Piquard, a certified music therapist practicing in Sussex and Moncton, has kindly agreed to be a guest writer for this edition of Notable AX. Dominique is a member of both the Canadian and Atlantic Associations of Music Therapists, and she facilitates local music therapy drumming and song-writing groups through the Sussex Activity Centre and Canadian Mental Health. Thanks, Dominique!*

I have a story about something old, new, borrowed and all true. As a certified music therapist in New Brunswick, I've been gifted with many great opportunities with clients who teach me what help looks like for them, and it's my job to pay attention.

I've been asked to define music therapy many times, and have answered in, what seems to be, in as many different ways. Although I can't completely define music therapy in this short article, I hope to at least start us off in the right direction and elaborate in future *Notable AX* guest articles.

But first, something old.

The concept of music having an impact on human health has existed for centuries. In 6 A.D., the early philosopher Boëthius wrote *Fundamentals of Music*, wherein he organized music into four categories based on purpose and intention: *musica instrumentalis*, music that entertains; *musica divina*, the music of the gods; *musica mundane*, music of the spheres; and *musica humana*, music for human health.

Many folks these days relate to music as *musica instrumentalis*, or music that entertains. As a certified music therapist, I practice the ancient art of *musica humana*, music for human health.

Now, something new.

The Canadian Association of Music Therapists defines music therapy as “a discipline in which credentialed professionals use music purposefully within therapeutic relationships to support development, health, and well-being.” We do this by using music “safely and ethically to address human needs within cognitive, communicative, emotional, musical, physical, social, and spiritual domains.”

Finally, I'll offer you a borrowed and true story from one of my clients, whose guardian of care has given me permission to share it.

Jen, as I'll call her, was a client in long-term care with two terminal diagnoses, one cancerous and the other a form of dementia. Both caused her much pain and daily challenges, and knowing this helped me to put her frustrations into

perspective. Each session began with a pain assessment; Jen told me how much physical pain she felt and, together, we assessed her need for pain management. I asked her to focus on where she felt the pain – a courageous thing for a patient to do – and we sang with deep inhales and slow exhales as we breathed through the pain. The smile eventually returned to her face and inevitably, when she reassessed her pain, it was lower than when we began.

At times, Jen invited a fellow patient to sing with her. Although both were at different stages of dementia, they could sing familiar hymns and wartime tunes, bonding and expressing themselves through their choice of songs. They shared the same faith and diagnosis, and therapeutic singing helped them meet their spiritual and cognitive needs. Music therapy helped them maintain spiritual self-expression and recall song lyrics with the potential to stimulate the memories and associations they could evoke. It was a joy to support them in these moments.

In other sessions, we created a legacy project around a poem that Jen found particularly beautiful – she composed a melody and turned the poem into her song. My role was to offer neurological stimulation in the form of musical choices that encouraged her to express her emotions melodically around those words. I recorded us singing it as a legacy gift to her family. It is a memory that can't be forgotten.

This is just one of many examples of how music facilitates human health when we use it for the wellbeing of another human being. I hope to share more about the rich history and new discoveries of music therapy in future *Notable AX* guest articles. Meanwhile, for more information, you can visit [www.musictherapy.ca](http://www.musictherapy.ca) and my practice at [www.musiqueubmusic.ca](http://www.musiqueubmusic.ca).