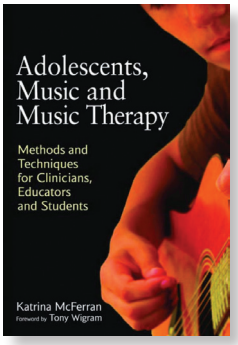
REVIEWED BY MARTHA O'HEHIR



Adolescents, Music, and Music Therapy: Methods and Techniques for Clinicians, Educators, and Students

By Katrina McFerran
Jessica Kingsley Publishing, 2010

When I first started teaching, I knew what pop music my students loved because I was only a little older than they were! I knew the genres, the artists, who was cool, and why, and to whom. I knew what pop music would be successful and appropriate in my classroom, and I could trust that my choices were "right on." Now, after a lifetime of being a grown-up, focusing in my career life on children's games songs, folk music, Schulwerk repertoire, and elementary choral pieces; and at home, listening to singer songwriters, contemporary Christian, and jazz by choice; Raffi with the kids, standards, musicals, and doo-wop with my a capella group; and Irish music with my step-dancing daughter, I have become distanced, by age and stage, from current pop culture.

Yet, it is really important to make an effort to understand the preadolescents and adolescents in the classroom before me. One way of doing that is to understand the music they listen to today. As teachers and adults, we will never be a member of their youth culture, and we might never understand it in quite the same way they do. However, we can work toward understanding them better so that we can design lessons and curricula that are responsive, relevant, and valuable to the lives they are living. This is what attracted me to this book; I felt I needed to re-enter the reality of my students, and the foreword by Tony Wigram, an established leader in the field of music therapy, promised that this author had a pulse on the kids and the music they love.

I came to my reading with questions. What music is popular today? What genres are my students listening to? And, how can I use pop music with integrity, in a way that serves the kids and the music curriculum? What can the music therapy community teach us about working with adolescents and music? I have learned that it isn't enough to know what music kids like or how it "fits" the curriculum. It is also important to know how kids relate to music, how they use it, and what functions it serves in their lives—and respecting the implications of that. For adolescents, music is an important, maybe even critical, tool for psychological survival and identity development, and whether I plan for that or not, it is happening. I have learned more about where our agendas meet and where they may be in tension, and how to navigate that better.

Katrina McFerran, an Australian music therapist who successfully works with adolescents, generously shares her exceptional knowledge and expertise gained from serving this age group through intentional music-making. Although her clients may have chronic or terminal illnesses that intensify the tasks of the adolescent passage, they certainly are alive, growing, and becoming unique individuals—and the stories of their musical experiments shed light on how all adolescents use music in their everyday lives.

In Part One, McFerran begins with a literature review, placing her present work in context for the therapist reader. She cites the typical use of musical games, songs, improvisation, and prerecorded music. As a teacher-reader, it becomes clear to me that therapists bravely go into the teen psyche, and that they have some serious training that allows them to make objectives and outcomes that are both musical and extra musical. Understanding the limits of a teaching practice is important, but at the same time, our students, though not in therapy, are busily using music as a functional part of their self-help strategies, too. Because teachers share with therapists the tools, materials, techniques, and clientele, the insights from her practice are completely transferrable, up to but not including, making goals for a student's emotional or behavioral growth.

After defining who she means as an "adolescent," McFerran describes the role of music in the lives of healthy adolescents. In detail, she captures how music helps the young person with her task of *identity formation*, with gaining *resilience* (a combination of mood and behavioral self-management in response to adversity), with achieving *competence* (often through participation), and with gaining *connectedness* ("one of the five C's in the positive youth development literature, along with competence, confidence, character, and caring"). In her chapter, "The Real Deal on How to Work with Adolescents," she offers some stark truths ("You never know what is going on.") and some sage advice ("The only thing you can know is yourself.") What follows is a readable explanation of how to know yourself and your responses to the "dance" and challenges adolescents place in our path to test our trustworthiness; she gives us some tools to be the kind of person who can work with teens, through being real and authentic.

To aid this self-knowledge, the author encourages the practitioner to "find yourself on the map." The map delineates how four different philosophical assumptions (one's orientation) lead to valid ways of being with the kids (one's stance) and how these lead to an intention (one's purpose), and even to an outcome that is conducive to student /client success with personal and musical tasks. For us as teachers, we may have pieced together our

orientation in terms of our philosophy of teaching, and it has led to a stance we take, and to goals we make to measure success with our kids. However, it was incredibly enlightening to read about four therapeutic approaches to therapy, and to see the intersections with my teaching philosophy. I was able to expand my thinking and to scaffold my experience and to see how different stances can serve different kids in their goals of achieving resilience, identity formation, competence, and connectedness. From brain research, we know students learn when the material touches the emotions, and when it augments meaning making. So, acknowledging the value of music from the teen's vantage point is definitely an asset to good teaching.

In Part Two, "Song Methods and Teenagers," the author offers some very practical information, a veritable goldmine for the music teacher who may not be familiar with the listening habits of today's kids. In the introduction is a chart of the "most frequently nominated songs of healthy older adolescents in 2009" with the artists, subgenres, and year of release provided. Second is a list of forty-two "common genres and sub-genres popular with adolescents." These could easily serve as a playlist for review and possible downloading, as keywords for personal or student research, as entry points for student discussion and analysis of the contemporary sound catalog. Since all of the songs were released between 1971 and 2005, these favorites were already at least five years old; perhaps they may be perceived as "classic" for their genre. Reading this list of song titles is like watching your life pass before your eyes: "where were you when this song came out?" For me, it is a handy repertoire, a starting place, plucked from a huge world of possibilities. Still, I know that what is considered popular changes so quickly that one must consider that the real gem here is the author's assumption that students should be surveyed and their preferences built into the curriculum we design.

Next, are two chapters on using existing songs and writing original songs, and in each, the author gives examples and strategies for individual and group settings.

Each strategy is fully developed with descriptions of the setting and the purpose, an illustrative vignette, an evaluation of its effectiveness, and a summary of key points to remember when using the strategy. The strategies in "Using Existing Songs," are lyric analysis, song contributions, singing together, group sing-a-longs, and song requesting. In "Writing Original Songs," we find song creation, musical composition, group song composition, individual song composition, and lyric substitution.

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Part Three, "Using Improvisation with Teenagers," includes a table of "An Adolescent-friendly Instrumentarium" with a fascinating blend of acoustic instruments and electronic devices. It makes a great wish list to keep handy, especially if you are seeking grants for updated and tech-savvy tools. It continues with two chapters formatted like the previous two, rich with strategies, how to do them, a vignette, and a summary of wisdom gleaned. The chapter on group improvisation includes thematic group improvisation, rock band jam, and free improvisation. In the chapter on "Individual Improvisations," we learn about reflective improvisation, grounding improvisation, and empathic improvisation.

Part Four concludes the book by addressing the contemporary therapeutic approach called "Community Music Therapy." As a therapy, it no longer limits the therapist to bear the brunt of the work: studying the client, selecting a goal, and providing all the musical experiences for the objective to be met within the therapeutic session. It presumes that music outside the session will also contribute to the client's (student's) well-being. Community music therapy appears to be the new and best practice and has five key features that definitely cross over into the educational world. It is *ecological* in that it sees the adolescent as influenced by connectedness to concentric circles of family, school, community, and culture. It is *participatory*, highly collaborative, and driven by values. It is *actively reflective*, with a leader who is constantly attentive and responsive to the needs and directions of the process. It is *resource oriented* in that it focuses on the strengths (as opposed to the deficits) and the pre-existing interests of the participants as a basis for the session work. It is *performative* in that it may result in audience-driven performance, taking the work outside the sessions, and it also seeks to encourage the authentic performance of each individual. In this approach, the role of the adult leader appears to be more of a moderator, allowing the participants great self-determination. As a teacher, this is a great checklist for evaluating my classroom learning environment.

Chapter nine offers four brief approaches to grief support: a school-based music and grief group, a monthly creative support program, music and grief workshops, and workshops for youth professionals. Music teachers could read this chapter and bring their music leadership skills to join with school counselors' skills to provide meaningful therapy for students. The last chapter, "Preparing for Performances," could be new territory for a therapist-reader. But don't put the book down yet, or you will miss the extended metaphor comparing ensemble rehearsals to sonata form in the "symphonic model of music therapy group development." It will make you laugh and give you courage to bear with the tribulations of group dynamics as experienced in performance preparation.

To close, this book supplies rich opportunities for self-reflection as a teacher, as a human, as a former teen, and as a guardian of and mentor to adolescents. Katrina McFerran's insights are resonant, her strategies are applicable, and her poignant vignettes will animate your imagination while nurturing your soul.

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