

# Music Therapy Charity

Final report – 25 February 2020

## 1. Title of project and your name

Performing spirituality in music therapy: Towards action, context and the everyday

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## 2. Study aims, planned length of the project and actual length of the project by the end of the project.

This doctoral research study aims to open up a space where diverse, even conflicting, spiritualities are explored. It is based on two complementary studies:

a) The pilot study aimed to provide a systematic overview of music therapists' perceptions of spirituality and its (ir)relevance to music therapy. Data collection started in June 2012 and the pilot study was completed in December 2013.

b) The follow-up study aimed to explore how spirituality is performed in everyday music therapy contexts. Data collection started in May 2015 and the follow-up study was completed in October 2017.

## 3. Please provide a summary of up to 500 words including:

With no single definition of spirituality, this doctoral research study sets out to open up a space where diverse, even conflicting, spiritualities are explored. It is based on two complementary studies through which I explore music therapists' perceptions of spirituality and its (ir)relevance to music therapy (pilot study) as well as the performance of spirituality in everyday music therapy contexts (follow-up study). The pilot study is an international survey of 358 qualified and trainee music therapists whilst the follow-up study is an ethnographically-informed exploration of spirituality within three UK-based music therapy contexts. The survey findings provide an insight into music therapists' perceptions of spirituality, including its place in their training, practice and professional life. Music therapists' dilemmas and suggestions for future actions regarding spirituality are also highlighted. Adopting a performative view of spirituality, the ethnographically-informed study offers an exploration of spirituality in-action and in-situ. The findings expand beyond immediate music-making situations, to include broader professional practices, systems and frameworks pertaining to spirituality in and around music therapy. This involves a critical investigation of professional vocabularies, identities, and organisational values and agendas in connection to music therapists' stances and practices. The study offers new directions in our ways of exploring, understanding and theorising about spirituality in music therapy. Instead of proposing a 'model', the study puts forward a hybrid understanding of spirituality in music therapy.

The study was supervised by Professor Gary Ansdell and Professor Mercedes Pavlicevic as part of the PhD in Music Therapy Programme at Nordoff Robbins / Goldsmiths, University of London, UK.

The study was partially funded by The Music Therapy Charity (Registered charity number: 259077) and the British Association for Music Therapy (Registered charity number: 1137807):

- March 2013: £600 (MTC grant) towards data analysis, final expenses in writing up

- December 2015: £1,427.79 (MTC grant) towards travel expenses of participants and visits to research sites
- November 2015: £550 (BAMT grant) towards visits to research sites

The research findings have been disseminated through academic publications (see related publications below) and numerous invited lectures and conference presentations, including a keynote address at the 3rd International Conference on Spirituality and Music Education (SAME) 'Music education and spirituality: Theory and application', North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa, 25-27 March 2015. In 2017, I also co-chaired together with Prof Ansdell the international conference 'Exploring the spiritual in music: Interdisciplinary dialogues in music, wellbeing and education' at the Nordoff Robbins Centre in London. This conference led to the publication of a special journal on the same topic. This special issue, which I co-edited with Prof Ansdell, was published in *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy* in 2019 (<http://approaches.gr/special-issue-11-1-2019>) becoming one of the first academic publications promoting an interdisciplinary understanding of spirituality in music therapy and related fields of practice. Further plans for dissemination include a roundtable discussion at the 2020 World Music Therapy Congress in South Africa and a book chapter. I have also started a new related research project; a systematic review of spirituality in music therapy (see separate report).

*Related publications:*

Tsirir, G., & Ansdell, G. (2019). Exploring the spiritual in music. *Approaches: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Music Therapy, Special Issue 11(1)*, 3-8.

Tsirir, G. (2018). *Performing spirituality in music therapy: Towards action, context and the everyday*. Doctoral thesis, Nordoff Robbins / Goldsmith's, University of London, London, UK. Retrieved from <http://research.gold.ac.uk/23037/>

Tsirir, G. (2017). Music therapy and spirituality: An international survey of music therapists' perceptions. *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, 26(4), 293-319.

Tsirir, G. (2014). Exploring music therapists' perceptions of spirituality: An international survey. In J. Fachner, P. Kern & G. Tucek (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 14th World Congress of Music Therapy. Special Issue of Music Therapy Today 10(1)* (pp. 210-211). Krems, Austria: World Federation of Music Therapy.

Tsirir, G. (2013). Spirituality. In K. Kirkland (Ed.), *International Dictionary of Music Therapy* (p. 125). New York: Routledge.