

Music and Medicine in Ireland: A Vibrant and Developing Community of Practice

An Ceol agus an Leigheas in Éirinn: Pobal cleachtais beo atá ag forbairt

Jane Edwards, PhD, RMT¹

This article provides a brief overview of the development of music therapy on the island of Ireland. It describes the first and currently the only training program in music therapy in Ireland at the University of Limerick, some of the work of practitioners throughout the island, traditional music within Ireland, the professional association, and related activities.

Tugtar spleáchadh sa pháipéar seo ar an bhforbairt a tháinig ar theiripe an cheoil in Éirinn. Faoi láthair níl ach clár oiliúna amháin i dteiripe an cheoil in Éirinn agus é in Ollscoil Luimnigh mar a raibh an chéad chlár oiliúna ar fáil agus déantar cur síos ar an gclár seo mar aon le hobair na gcleachtóirí, an ceol traidisiúnta in Éirinn, an cumann gairmiúil agus na gníomhachtaí a bhaineann leis.

Keywords: clinical improvisation; creative arts therapy; music improvisation; music therapy

The music of Ireland is world renowned and distinctive. Perhaps because of the extensive reach of the Irish Diaspora, Irish music can be heard regularly played live or on radio and television in many countries of the world. Famous music performers such as the Chieftans and the Clancy Brothers have revived interest in the traditional Irish music genre with a worldwide following, as have individual artists such as Mary Black, Martin Hayes, and Lillis Ó Laoire, not to mention the runaway success of shows such as *Riverdance*.

The musical instruments used in traditional Irish music include the bodhrán, the tin whistle, and the Uilleann pipes. Sessions held in pubs have a distinctive character especially with regard to the inclusion

of all musicians in a circle with shared leadership and decision making about which tunes will be played and the inclusion of musicians of all ages (see, further, Ó Laoire, 2005).

There are two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland: Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, comprising the 6 counties in the northeast, and the Republic of Ireland, comprising the other 26 counties and a sovereign entity in its own right. The term *Ulster*, one of the four regions of Ireland, is sometimes used for Northern Ireland but is somewhat confusing because three Ulster counties, Donegal, Cavan, and Monaghan, are part of the Republic. There are some 4.2 million people living in the Republic of Ireland, while together with Northern Ireland, the population count is around 6 million for the entire island.

When discussing music therapy in Ireland, it is regular practice not to distinguish between music therapy in Northern Ireland and music therapy in the Republic. For example, meetings of music therapists have been regularly held over many years,

¹Music and Health Research Group, University of Limerick, Ireland.

Address correspondence to: Professor Jane Edwards, Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, Foundation Building, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland; e-mail: jane.edwards@ul.ie.

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with participation of practitioners from all of Ireland whether held in Northern Ireland or the Republic, and students from the music therapy Master of Arts program attend supervised fieldwork placements with practitioners in both jurisdictions. As there are differences in the ways in which health and education are administered between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland,¹ not all experiences of development of programs and the steps taken in the development of the profession are shared across the island. However, mutual cooperation and shared interests support and foster ongoing relationships between practitioners throughout Ireland.

Professional Accreditation

One of the main differences between the experiences of practitioners in Northern Ireland and those in the Republic is governance of the profession. In the Republic, the Department of Health and Children, the Department of Education, and the Health Services Executive do not recognize the profession of music therapy. Music therapists are often employed by alternative means of funding than core service budgets and often work in sessional and more precarious positions than their allied health peers. By comparison, in the United Kingdom music therapy is governed through the Health Professions Council (HPC). Music therapists working in Northern Ireland, along with other arts therapists (the collective term used in the United Kingdom), are therefore registered and recognized under the same program as other allied health professionals.

Development of the Profession in the Republic

In 1992, an association was founded by therapists who worked and lived in Ireland but had achieved their professional qualifications in other countries. Their goal is to promote and support the development of the creative arts therapies. With more than 100 members, the Irish Association of Creative Arts Therapists (IACAT) provides a journal for its members and professional development opportunities, as well as support for the development of the creative arts therapies across the disciplines of music therapy, dance movement therapy, art therapy, and drama therapy. There are sole university courses

available in Ireland for each of these disciplines except dance movement therapy.

Qualified practitioners wishing to work in Northern Ireland need to be registered with the HPC and can apply for membership in the Association of Professional Music Therapists, which is the professional association in the United Kingdom. In the Republic, any person can describe him- or herself as a music therapist at the present time. However, it is not clear whether workplaces are employing people as music therapists who are not qualified. IACAT offers membership to qualified music therapists and is also developing a system of registration.

A music therapy group e-mail was established in November 2001 for qualified music therapists working and/or living on the island of Ireland. Members can send information to the e-mail group, and it is regularly subscribed with information about posts on offer, issues surrounding the development of music therapy, and notification of conferences and seminars.

There are also regular meetings of music therapists in various parts of Ireland. For example, the West Coast Music Therapy Group was formed by qualified music therapist Tommy Hayes in 2006 and meets three or four times annually for professional and peer support in various locations throughout the west coast of Ireland.

As there is no requirement for accreditation to practice, it is difficult to estimate exactly how many qualified music therapists work in Ireland. However, there are probably some 50 qualified music therapists currently providing therapy services throughout Ireland.

Master of Arts in Music Therapy, University of Limerick

Sited at the University of Limerick in the west of the Republic of Ireland, this Master of Arts program is currently the only way that a person can qualify as a music therapist in a university on the island of Ireland. At the time of its commencement, it was the only 2-year full-time program in music therapy in this part of Europe. The orientation of the program is psychodynamic and developmental, with each semester comprising (a) course work, including learning clinical improvisation, assessment, treatment methods, and evaluation; (b) supervised fieldwork; and (c) research study. Students must

undertake individual psychotherapy throughout the course, and in the second year of the program they attend a weekly experiential group (see further information at <http://www.ul.ie/~iwmc/programmes/mamt/index.html>).

The course was founded and developed by the director of the Irish World Academy, Professor Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, with his close colleague, and then PhD student, Dr. Helen Phelan. They gathered an expert team to develop the course, which included Dr. Tony Wigram (Denmark), Dr. Leslie Bunt (United Kingdom), and Dr. Kaja Jensen (United States). It was this group that advised that a 2-year program of study was needed.

Since 1998, the course has accepted 10 students into each study cohort. These students come from a wide variety of backgrounds, including recent music graduates; professional musicians long standing in the performance field; and professionals from the fields of social work, speech and language therapy, education, nursing, and youth work. The main criteria are relevant experience and high-level music skills, with less emphasis on formal qualifications in music, although the majority of applicants meet this criteria, and greater emphasis on the ability to use music flexibly in a range of contexts.

In 1999, I came to Limerick from the University of Queensland in Australia, where I had been full-time since 1993, to take up the role of music therapy course director in the Irish World Academy. I replaced Dr. Wendy Magee who was the inaugural director of the program. Before Dr. Magee started, Dr. Kaja Jensen from the United States had stepped in to teach the first autumn semester of the program in 1998.

Initially, I accepted a contract position while on leave from the University of Queensland, but it became apparent that moving to Ireland and filling the senior lecturer position offered would be a wonderful way to contribute to a developing professional community. The resonances and strengths of all that the first academic appointments achieved to get the program up and running in its first year are still felt, particularly with regard to developing the fieldwork placements, the establishment of the modules, and the creation of links in the university and wider community. The first student cohort especially benefited from exposure to the breadth of practices the three academic practitioners represented to them.

In the third year of the program, I returned to Australia for the autumn semester. Bent Jensen (Denmark) then took the leadership of the program

with Anne Steen Møller (Denmark). The next year, I took on the role of director of the Clinical Therapies Development Unit. This work required the formation of two new departments at the university: Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy. While working on this project, Jeanette Kennelly (Australia) taught the autumn semester, and Dr. Kat McFerran (Australia) taught the spring semester. A year-long sabbatical was then approved starting in Berlin at the University of the Arts hosted by Professor Mechthild Jahn-Langenberg, and then to Cambridge as a by-fellow of Churchill College and a visiting member of the Faculty of Music at the University of Cambridge. Vicky Abad (Australia) came in as course director for the Master of Arts program.

At the time of the commencement of the course, the resources only allowed an intake every 2 years. However, since 2007 an intake has been approved each year. This has allowed a further academic staff appointment, and Dr. Simon Gilbertson has been welcomed to the team, bringing a wealth of academic, musical, and clinical skills to share with his academic and practitioner colleagues and the students. In 2008, Dr. Gilbertson stepped up as the acting course director for one semester, and Alison Ledger has also been appointed at various times to serve most capably in teaching roles in the program.

While the Master of Arts program has continually developed and refined aspects of its structure and its conception, reflecting changes in music therapy in Ireland and internationally, it remains centered at an academy of wide-ranging vision, inspiration, and opportunity. The other programs offered at the Master of Arts level are in traditional Irish music performance, contemporary dance, classical strings, ritual chant and song, traditional Irish dance performance, community music, music education, ethnomusicology, and ethnochoreology. This rich intellectual and arts practice environment offers students a unique current and future network of colleagues and scholars with whom to experience community in a “creating the arts” environment.

Support for the development and refinement of the music therapy program has also been given by the external examiners, first Professor Tony Wigram (Denmark), then Professor Barbara Wheeler (United States), and currently Professor Susanne Metzner (Germany).

The research and PhD programs have been developed alongside the Master of Arts. Three PhD

students currently study with me: Alison Ledger, who is the Health Research Board Music Therapy Research Fellow; Andrea Intveen, who is the scientific assistant in music therapy at the University of the Arts in Berlin; and Arlene McCurtin, a lecturer in the Department of Speech and Language Therapy at the University of Limerick.

The music therapy program has well-developed links throughout the university. There is a music therapy module taught to final-year nursing students, the bachelor of arts in Irish music and dance performance students study a music psychology module in the fourth year of their degree, and ongoing links have been established with the new Graduate Medical School (GMS), including my role as chair of the advisory committee for the GMS.

All graduates of the Master of Arts in music therapy who have applied for registration with the HPC to date have been successful, and this allows them to work in all parts of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland. Some countries such as Canada recognize the HPC registration as equivalent, and so some graduates apply for and maintain HPC recognition even if they do not intend to work in the United Kingdom.

Conferences and Seminars

An important part of building the profession of music therapy in Ireland are public conferences and seminars. These serve to promote an understanding of music therapy to a wide range of practitioners and service managers. This work is often undertaken by small groups of dedicated practitioners, with participation from a wide cross-section of community and professional groups.

The first music therapy conference in Ireland was held at Our Lady's Hospital in Dublin on November 7, 1998. Titled *Sound & Silence—The Art & Science of Music Therapy*, it was organized and coordinated by Dr. Julie Sutton and Ruth Walsh, both qualified music therapists in Ireland. Keynote papers were presented by music therapist Jim Cosgrove, titled "Music, Metaphor and Movement: A Creative Conceptual Framework for Music Therapy Practice," and Dr. Michael Swallow, OBE,² titled "Brain and Emotions: A Key to the Therapeutic Value of Music?" Dr. Julie Sutton, Ruth Walsh, Úna McInerney, Judith Brereton, Annie Birken, and Celia Compton presented papers covering a wide range of music therapy

subject areas. A workshop was conducted by Martin Fahy titled "Music Playshop—Childhood Play and Links With Improvisation," and Trudi Carberry and Danusia Oslizlok led a workshop.

A further conference, *Music, Music Therapy and Trauma—A Creative Response to Trauma in the Community*, was held at the University of Ulster, Jordanstown, in November 2000. The Millennium Commission, via a Sustainable Communities Millennium Award received by Dr. Julie Sutton, provided financial backing for the event, which was organized by Dr. Sutton. The conference drew together experts working in the area of trauma from within Ireland, the United Kingdom, Bosnia, and South Africa. Keynote presentations were made by Dr. Marie Smyth, "The Role of Creativity in Healing and Recovering One's Power After Victimisation"; Dr. Mercédès Pavlicevic, "Fragile Rhythms: Music Therapy and the South African Context"; Louise Lang with Úna McInerney, "A Music Therapy Service in a Post-War Environment"; and Hilary Bracefield, "The Politics of Silence: The Northern Ireland Composer and the Troubles." Mathew Dixon, David Stewart, and Ruth Walsh also made presentations, and Karen Diamond and Brian Smith led a music-making workshop.

In 2005, I successfully applied for a European Science Foundation workshop grant with Dr. Lars Ole Bonde (Denmark/Norway) and Dr. Leslie Bunt (United Kingdom) to hold a meeting at the University of Limerick on the topic of music and health. A small group of participants from seven countries attended, including Dr. Tia DeNora (United Kingdom), Dr. Norma Daykin (United Kingdom), Dr. Brynjulf Stige (Norway), Dr. Joanne Loewy (United States), Dr. Jane Davidson (United Kingdom/Australia), Dr. Wendy Magee (United Kingdom), Dr. Susanne Metzner (Germany), Dr. Randi Rolvsjord (Norway), Dr. Trygve Aasgaard (Norway), Dr. Clare O'Callaghan (Australia), Alison Ledger (Ireland), Maeve Scahill (Ireland), Tommy Hayes (Ireland), Anne Olofsson (Sweden), and Hilary Moss (Ireland). This meeting also included a public presentation day attended by 100 local practitioners and students, with keynote addresses from Dr. Loewy, Dr. Stige, Dr. Davidson, and Dr. Daykin. The work and discussions of some of the participants in this event are available in an edited book (see Edwards, 2007).

In June 2009, the first meeting of the International Association for Music and Medicine (IAMM)

was held in Limerick, hosted by the Irish World Academy in association with the GMC, which I chaired. Twenty-three of the founding members of the IAMM attended this event. As part of the meeting, a public conference was held with research presentations from founding members including keynote addresses from Dr. Joanne Loewy and Dr. David Aldridge. Members presenting were from 11 countries, and more than 100 people from Germany, Ireland, the United Kingdom, and the United States attended the day, including local doctors and allied health professionals. During the meeting and in the days before and after the conference, presentations on the developments in the music therapy profession in Thailand, China, and Ireland were provided to the founding members. The other meeting time was given over to consideration of the role and aims of the new organization, including developing and approving the bylaws and membership procedures.

The Irish World Academy has regularly provided opportunities for professional development in music therapy for qualified music therapists through the annual *Leigheas an Cheoil* (Healing and Music) seminar series. Speakers have included Dr. Simon Gilbertson, Alison Ledger, Andrea Intveen, Dr. Joanne Loewy, Dr. Nicholas Cook, Maeve Scahill, Dr. Julie Sutton, Dr. David Aldridge, Dr. Helen Odell-Miller, Dr. Jane Edwards, John Billings, Dr. Anne Gaffney, Triona McCaffrey, Dr. Wendy Magee, and Elaine Streeter. Most of these events have also been open to the wider public.

Current Progress

At the present time, many practitioners in Ireland work in successful music therapy programs. The Milford Hospice and Extended Care Centre located at the gates of the University of Limerick employs two qualified music therapists in a highly successful program founded from early placements in the music therapy course. The National Rehabilitation Hospital in Dun Laoghaire began a music therapy program in 2008. The Mayo Mental Health Service employs a music therapist in a full-time capacity (see http://www.imt.ie/lifestyle/2006/12/music_therapy_hits_right_note.html).

Other notable local developments include work in disability services and special education (see <http://www.voices.no/authors/noone.php> and [\[www.voices.no/mainissues/mi40007000239.php\]\(http://www.voices.no/mainissues/mi40007000239.php\)\). Two music therapists are employed in the COPE Foundation in Cork, a service for people who have intellectual disability. There is also a full-time position in the service at St Joseph's, Charleville, and at Cheeverstown House and Cherry Orchard Hospital in Dublin. Many of these positions are held by qualified music therapists who graduated from the Limerick program. However, there are many returned Irish and English and German practitioners qualified from other countries' programs who work in Ireland.](http://</p>
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The Northern Ireland Music Therapy Trust was founded in 1990 and provides services to special education facilities, mainstream schools, and hospitals. Contact Youth, a youth suicide prevention service in Northern Ireland, also offers arts therapies, and two music therapists are currently employed.

The Music and Health Research Group at the University of Limerick was established to extend and focus the research potential of the music therapy expertise available on campus. It includes all music therapy staff and PhD students. Applications for research funding and high-impact publications are part of its remit of development. As the team has excellent links with a wide range of academic colleagues in fields outside of music therapy, this group will extend knowledge about the interactions between arts and health care as well as providing theoretical and practice-based elaborations of current and future actions in this field.

Future aspirations for the profession in Ireland include attaining membership in the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC). This has not been possible for a number of reasons to date. This has led to unfortunate consequences such as the exclusion of the University of Limerick program from lists of PhD programs in public presentations by EMTC representatives, as the organization only represents the members aligned with its group, rather than all of the countries of Europe.

The worldwide economic downturn has affected Ireland severely. Currently, there are no direct consequences to services of which I am aware. However, it is anticipated that unemployment will rise exponentially by the end of 2009. In addition, increasingly severe cuts are intended across public services. It is difficult in such an economic environment to promote a positive role for development work in music therapy. However, the enthusiasm and energy of the new graduates is

always inspiring, and many of the well-established programs and practitioners have survived harsh times before.

The future collaborations with the IAMM, the strong and growing relationship between the Irish World Academy and the GMS, and the growing music therapy expertise available in Ireland especially auger well for a developing and vibrant future.

Conclusion

The history and work in promoting and expanding music therapy in Ireland belongs to many different people for whom the profession as a whole owes a debt of gratitude. The music therapy community of Ireland has grown and been strengthened by the contribution of the new graduates, and the schools, hospitals, and community programs where they work have all benefited from their capacities and skills. If we imagine a stone gently dropped in a pond many decades ago creating undulations across the water, we begin to sense the ongoing development in music therapy in Ireland that continually ripples and widens.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. For example, in the Republic of Ireland multidisciplinary teamwork is relatively new compared to in the United Kingdom.
2. This acronym indicates the Order of the British Empire awarded to citizens of the United Kingdom for service excellence.

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Jane Edwards, PhD, RMT, is an associate professor at the University of Limerick, Ireland. She is the inaugural President of the International Association for Music and Medicine.