

*Commentary***In Memory of Dr. Helen Bonny (1921-2010)****Barbara Hesser<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>*Music and Performing Arts Professions, New York University, New York, NY, USA*

Dr. Helen Bonny was a mentor, colleague and friend to me, a relationship that began in the 1970's and lasted until the end of her life in May 2010. Helen was a pioneer in music therapy and, in her quiet way, she broke courageously from the traditional values defining the music therapy norms of her time. She was a fearless explorer of music and the healing potential of non-ordinary states of consciousness, and she persisted in these efforts throughout her life, even when there was disapproval and rejection from people in her profession who did not understand her work.

Helen Bonny always will be remembered professionally for creating the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM). This powerful and transformative use of music grew from Helen's deep personal exploration of the power of music in her own life and healing. A lifelong violinist, Helen's personal transformative musical peak experiences while playing the violin led to the development of a music therapy approach that uses music to help others explore alternative states of consciousness for psychological and spiritual growth.

Recently, listening to a video of Dr. Stanislov Grof speaking on "The Psychology of the Future," I was reminded again that Helen was present at the beginning of this important movement. She knew and developed relationships with many involved in the Transpersonal Movement, including Dr. Grof, with whom she worked as a music therapist at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center in the late 1960's during the last years of LSD psychotherapy research.

Helen's work is internationally recognized. Many throughout the world have trained in and practice the BMGIM. The Association for Music and Imagery (AMI) was formed in 1986 to maintain the integrity of the BMGIM and to support its trainers and practitioners. Numerous scholarly books and articles are available for those who would like to know more about the original work developed by Helen and

the adaptations that have grown over the years from her followers. Through my ongoing clinical practice of the BMGIM, I have come to a deeper understanding of the healing potential of music.

Personally, I am also most grateful to Helen for supporting my dedication to expanding the borders of what music therapy could be. She was devoted to the profession of music therapy and always was willing to dialogue with me about how to enrich and strengthen the field. I would turn to her to sound out my ideas about humanistic and transpersonal music psychotherapy. Even though it was physically difficult for her due to health issues that began in the late 1970's, Helen attended the World Symposium on Music Therapy at NYU in 1982, where a multidisciplinary group met for a week to discuss the power of music as therapy. I visited her in 1983 in her convalescence in Port Townsend, Washington, and it was there that she helped me to conceptualize and plan the Phoenicia Gathering, a small international retreat of humanistic and transpersonal music therapists that took place from 1985 -1992. Helen became a core participant of these yearly gatherings. In 1989, Helen, along with Carolyn Kenny and I, founded the Bonny Foundation, an Institute for Music-Centered Therapies, located in Newton, Kansas. This Institute was designed to further the explorations of music and consciousness in which we were all involved. These are but a few of the important and seminal events in music therapy that we have shared.

I have been privileged to know and work closely with Helen over these years. She is missed, but the support she provided to me and others, and the creative way she expanded the boundaries of music therapy, will continue forever to inspire us and to influence the theory and practice of music therapy.

**Biographical Statement**

Professor Hesser is the Director of Music Therapy Program at New York University. She is also the Director of the Nordoff-Robbins Center for Music Therapy at New York University. She has served the music therapy profession as President of the American Association of Music Therapy and was one of the founding representatives and officers of the World Federation of Music Therapy. She has taught and given workshops throughout the US and abroad. She is Vice President of Creative Arts As a Global Resource, Inc. In this capacity she is one of the directors of the Music as a Global Resource Initiative.

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