

Music & Imagery Therapy¹

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Receptive music therapy seems like the Cinderella of approaches in British music therapy even though at one time or another, most music therapists have used pre-recorded music in sessions with clients. There are few systematic tools to think about choosing appropriate music, its function, what techniques are effective, or what kind of framework to use to render the use of receptive music most productive.

Music and Imagery Therapy is a specialist intervention and exists as a post-qualifying training only offered in the UK by the *Integrative GIM Training Programme* (www.integrativegim.org). It is a stand-alone qualification and forms the first part of the full GIM training. The course has a long-standing association with the originator of the method Lisa Summers (Summers 2012, 2015), and the principal practitioners and trainers in the method Sumi Paik-Maier (Paik-Maier 2010), Erin Montgomery and Suzannah Scott-Moncrieff (Scott-Moncrieff, Beck, & Montgomery 2015).

What is Music & Imagery?

Music and imagery approaches developed out of Helen Bonny's pioneering work in the 1960s and 1970s (Bonny, 2002). Her method of receptive music therapy, *Guided Imagery and Music*, is considered the gold standard of receptive music therapy approaches. Lisa Summers, pupil and long-time collaborator of Bonny, conceived of *Music and Imagery Therapy* as falling on a continuum from *Supportive Music and Imagery* which focuses on developing and shoring up a client's inner supportive resources; through *Re-educative Music and Imagery* which focuses on a specific issue for the client and exploring it fully and creatively; to Bonny's *Guided Imagery and Music*, a deeply psychologically reconstructive approach where exploration of the client's inner world and imagery lead to profound therapeutic insight and changes.

Why Use Music *and* Imagery?

Receptive approaches developed from Guided Imagery and Music tend to use music as a conduit into a client's inner world. The inner world is more often than not experienced as a mixture of words, images, sensations, feelings, memories, and intuitions. The music acts to evoke, sustain, and contain these imagery experiences.

Where Does it Fit in with Traditional Music Therapy Approaches?

Interestingly, the approach itself could be even thought about as being manualised as there is a clear protocol to follow for effective practice. However, this is far from a behavioural-type intervention. The

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metaphorical vehicles you have to take for each part of the therapy journey are the same, but the route and the destination are unique to the individual traveller. It takes considerable skill to be able to guide the client through the prelude, funnel down to the most salient issue, choose appropriate music, and integrate the whole experience in the postlude.

The music needs to be chosen carefully for its function within the process. For *Supportive Music and Imagery*, the music needs to be short, simple, with few changes and little tension. *Re-Educative Music and Imagery* music is more complex, but still firmly bounded and clear. *Guided Imagery and Music* repertoire is usually drawn from complex art music, with greater sustained tension and evocative power.

Choosing the music is an interesting and important process. Often the music is thought about in terms of its 'energy' but obviously, issues around culture, class, and personal taste, have to be engaged with fully. The therapist needs to consider what is meaningful for the client, while still holding the client in the right emotional state, and while aiming to match qualities of the client's experience in the music.

The session falls into five sections:

- The Prelude

The prelude begins with openly talking about the client's concerns, previous sessions and the client's reflections on them are reviewed. The therapist invites the client to explore any positive experiences they have had - in the case of *Supportive Music & Imagery*, or any challenging experiences they have had - in the case of *Re-Educative Music & Imagery*.

- The Transition

The focus is gradually narrowed, and the client chooses one important memory or experience, whichever feels most pressing or emotionally potent. This is thought about more fully, but principally for its underlying feeling. The therapist then plays the client a selection of musical extracts related on an emotional and energy plane to the client's chosen focus. The client chooses the music which has a *good enough* fit or matches certain aspects of the experience.

- The Induction

The therapist invites the client to relax, close eyes, and take a few deep breaths to help centre and calm. The therapist restates the client's chosen focus using the client's words and description.

- The Music & Imagery

This is the heart of the music & imagery experience. Once the music begins, the client is invited to open eyes and create something intuitively about the experience most commonly through artwork, but potentially in any expressive creative arts modality. The same piece of music is played repeatedly until the client has finished.

- The Postlude

The experience of the music and artwork is explored. The therapist supports the client to focus and stay with the emotional core of the experience, helping the client to honour and retain it as an inner resource.

The client is encouraged to reinforce the positive experience at home with appropriate music, and call upon the resource for support between sessions as necessary.

Client Groups

Music and Imagery approaches can be quite flexible and work with a number of different client groups. Adaptations have been made to work with children in groups, and adults with mental health needs and trauma.

Supportive Music & Imagery is especially useful to clients who have experienced trauma as it can help them build up inner resources and strength, allowing them to feel regulated enough to begin the process of working through difficult memories without feeling overwhelmed or disassociated.

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Guided Imagery and Music and Music and Imagery Therapy: www.musictohealth.com
Creative Arts Therapy Activities for Children: www.catcorner.co.uk
General: www.therapistnetwork.org