



**Sound Health Network Convening -- Proceedings
Music Heals: How Music Improves Mental Well-Being
June 1, 2022
Bowes Center, San Francisco Conservatory of Music**

Overview

The Sound Health Network hosted a full-day event on June 1, 2022 at the Bowes Center of the San Francisco (SF) Conservatory of Music. Titled “Music Heals: How Music Improves Mental Well-Being,” the event explored the relationship between music and mental health by using a kaleidoscopic approach that included neuroscientists and other researchers, music therapists, musicians, and arts advocates, among others. The event was held during the COVID-19 pandemic and represented the first in-person gathering for many of the individuals who attended the meeting. The ~50 attendees were all individually selected and invited due to the significance and relevance of their work to the general topic of music and mental health. As described below, the agenda covered a wide range of themes. Apart from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), national organizations such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) played a vital role in the conversations that ensued. In addition to individual presentations and panel discussions, the event included musical performances and reflections from jazz violinist Regina Carter, Samora Pinderhughes of the Healing Project, and a large ensemble performance by SF Conservatory of Music students, featuring a composition written by Enrique Vargas based on brain electroencephalographic data of real-time musical composition. The daylong event culminated in a group dinner supported by One Mind.

Findings and Implications:

The presentations, panels, conversations and audiovisual experiences yielded many new insights and possible directions, including the following key lessons:

- **Music-based interventions, including music therapy, are remarkably varied and carefully tailored for specific mental health issues** and aspects of mental well-being.
- While much of the policy work has centered on finding ways to encourage health insurance companies to reimburse music therapy services and other music-based interventions, **many uninsured people would benefit greatly from these services and interventions**. Therefore, increased emphasis on community-based interventional models is an equally and critically important pathway to ensure increased and equitable access to services and programming.
- Stakeholders in the music and health space (researchers, practitioners, musicians and others) would do well to **continue refining music-based interventions, using rigorous research designs to build the evidence base, disseminating findings**

about these interventions to the general public, and collaborating with musicians and other artists in their common goal of using music to improve mental health and well-being.

Detailed Program

- Conference participants were welcomed for breakfast at the Bowes Center after completing symptom screenings for COVID-19. The morning sessions began with the Ukrainian national anthem sung by local Ukrainian musician Maria Tscherepenko, in recognition of the national trauma in Ukraine. This moving performance was followed by video welcome messages from Former NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins and soprano Renée Fleming, and in-person opening statements by Drs. Julene Johnson and Charles Limb (Co-Directors, Sound Health Network), Dr. Patricia Shaffer of the NEA, and Robert Van Leer of the Kennedy Center.
- The first morning panel, “Where It All Begins”, was moderated by Dr. Indre Viskontas, Director of Communications at the Sound Health Network. This panel focused on mental health challenges faced by children and adolescents, and included a discussion of the impact of music-based interventions and music therapy on youth mental health and development. Panelists were music therapists and researchers Dr. Kimberly Sena Moore, Dr. Deanna Hanson-Abromeit, Natalie Generally Kirk, and cognitive neuroscientists Dr. Assal Habibi and Dr. Miriam Lense. Dr. Habibi discussed her recent clinical trial involving the Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles and its *El Sistema*-inspired intervention, and outlined the positive impact this program has had on the social, emotional, and cognitive well-being of children from under-resourced communities. Dr. Deanna Hanson-Abromeit described a form of music therapy that has successfully helped children who have endured traumatic events regulate their emotions, while Natalie Generally Kirk discussed her work with youth in her capacity as owner of Small Steps, an organization that provides music therapy services to the Fulton County Public Schools in Georgia. Several of the participants, including Dr. Assal Habibi, Dr. Deanna Hanson-Abromeit, and Natalie Generally Kirk, were also scheduled to participate in the October 2022 Sound Health events at the Kennedy Center.
- Regina Carter, recently recognized as a 2023 NEA Jazz Master, is one of the most distinguished jazz violinists of our time. She honored the gathering with her presence and by participating in a segment entitled “The Musician’s Perspective,” where she explained how learning to improvise on the violin changed her life. She then played the blues for audience members and led them through a participatory rhythmic exercise that got everybody up and moving. Regina’s presentation and performance demonstrated the power of music to connect us regardless of our musical or cultural backgrounds; she explained how music is often a lifeline for people who struggle with mental health issues. Her presentation highlighted the importance of the work that research universities are undertaking to better understand the role of music in our lives. Regina was similarly scheduled to participate in the October 2022 Sound Health events at the Kennedy Center.
- Next, Jennifer Geiger, past president of the AMTA, and Barbara Else, Senior Advisor, Policy & Research at the AMTA, discussed the state of the field of music therapy from

the perspective of this national organization. They underlined the challenges of disseminating research findings and noted that music therapists are particularly interested in participating in and learning more about research pertaining to how music therapy might be used to help people with mental health and other health issues. This panel was then followed by an active question-and-answer session with audience participants, covering a wide range of topics about music therapy and mental health.

- Rounding out the morning was Jon Kaufman, the director of the film *Music Vets*, which details the experience of three military veterans living with mental health needs including post-traumatic stress disorder. In the film, these three veterans share their stories, emphasizing how music and music therapy aided their recovery from post-traumatic stress disorder. Kaufman gave an overview of the film, which had not yet premiered, and then played three excerpts for the attendees. The film excerpts were well-received, and the director took questions from the audience. *Music Vets* was scheduled to play in its entirety at the October 2022 Sound Health events at the Kennedy Center.
- After lunch, Dr. Julene Johnson introduced Dr. Elissa Epel from the UCSF Department of Psychiatry, who gave an overview of the state of the field and the role of music and arts therapy in addressing mental health issues. She shared the perspectives of clinicians and researchers from the academic medical field. Next, Samora Pinderhughes performed several songs that were released as part of the Healing Project, a multimedia installation on the use of music for mental health issues, specifically for individuals who have been incarcerated or otherwise marginalized. The installation was recently exhibited at the Yerba Buena Center for the Performing Arts in San Francisco.
- Pinderhughes then joined a panel entitled “Unquiet Minds: Music and Emotion,” moderated by Dr. Julene Johnson, along with music therapist and researcher Dr. Joke Bradt, psychiatrist Dr. Kevin Liou, and cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Petr Janata. The panel covered a broad range of topics pertaining to the neurobiology of emotions and the therapeutic role music plays for many individuals suffering from affective disorders and related mental health issues.
- Conservatory student Enrique Vargas, who is also a medical student at UC San Francisco School of Medicine, presented a musical performance of his recently-composed piece *Inkling*, played by a large ensemble of SF Conservatory of Music students. The piece was conducted by Jaco Wong and included videos of brainwaves synchronized to the composition. Notably, the music was composed using brain electroencephalographic data of real-time musical composition as the basis for musical theme development and also chronology, demonstrating another way in which scientific research might influence music delivery. Musicians surrounded the audience and provided an immersive and moving performance.
- The next panel focused on the use of music therapy to relieve pain and suffering. This panel was moderated by research scientist and SHN Co-Investigator Dr. Sheri Robb, and included music therapist researchers Dr. Maya Story, Sam Rodgers-Melnick, Dr. Deforia Lane, and physician researcher Dr. Matthew Bair. The panel explored the complexities of chronic pain, limitations of pharmacologic treatment, and research investigating uses of music to manage pain. A highlight of this session was Dr. Lane’s

personal story of how music helped her ailing mother and was central to her own journey in grieving. Dr. Lane's gift of storytelling through words and song evoked an emotional connection with the audience and was reminiscent of a presentation she delivered at the NIH prior to the development of the Sound Health Network. Drs. Story and Bair discussed comorbidities of pain including depression, anxiety, and trauma; their current trial investigating the use of personal music-listening and imagery to address chronic pain experienced by military veterans. Sam Rodgers-Melnick also described his research and clinical practice in pain management for individuals living with Sickle Cell Disease. His work includes songwriting and improvisation to address chronic pain. The audience enjoyed his demonstrated use of iPad technology to create a user-friendly musical interface allowing individuals to perform music and improvise with minimal musical experience.

- The final panel, called "Where We're Going: The Global Perspective," was moderated by Dr. Indre Viskontas, and included discussants Dr. Joy Allen (Berklee College of Music), Christopher Bailey (World Health Organization), and Susan Magsamen (Johns Hopkins International Arts + Mind Lab). This panel included a stirring presentation of Christopher Bailey's journey of ongoing vision loss and the life changes it sparked, together with broad views on future goals and issues facing the arts and health space.
- After the final panel, the group reassembled for a dinner sponsored by One Mind. Dr. Pushkar Joshi, One Mind's Chief Strategy and Science Officer, welcomed the group.
- In conclusion, there remain opportunities for improvement in assessing the effects of music-based interventions in mental health, especially given the breadth of such effects, and subjective factors related to one's reaction to different types of music. These challenges, and others, continue to affect the design of rigorous studies and appropriate outcome metrics related to music and mental health..

The Sound Health Network Leadership Team expresses its deep gratitude to all participants and sponsors of the event, including Renée Fleming, Berklee College of Music, and One Mind.