# Collaborating with the World Federation of Music Therapy

### Daphne Rickson

PhD (Music), MMusTher, MHealSc(MenH), LTCL

Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington; President Emerita, Music Therapy New Zealand

Correspondence: australianewzealand@wfmt.info

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## Introduction

This paper is based on the presentation I offered, on behalf of the [World Federation of Music Therapy (WFMT)[[1]](#footnote-1)](https://www.info/), to the Music Therapy New Zealand Symposium (Rickson, 2021). I wish to begin by declaring that a significant portion of the information given at the presentation, and in this paper, comes directly from the [WFMT website.](http://www.wfmt.info/) As Australia New Zealand Regional Liaison, I have the permission of the [WFMT Council](http://wfmt.info/leadership-2020-2023)[[2]](#footnote-2) to highlight aspects of WFMT’s work in this way.

## Purpose

The World Federation is a non-profit corporation organized under the laws of the state of North Carolina, USA. It was initially established in Genoa, Italy in 1985, by a group of therapists who had a vision for the global promotion of music therapy. Among the founding members were Rolando Benenzon (Argentina), Giovanna Mutti (Italy), Jacques Jost (France)/ Barbara Hesser (USA), Amelia Oldfield (UK), Ruth Bright (Australia), Heinrich Otto Moll (Germany), Rafael Colon (Puerto Rico), Clementina Nastari (Brazil), and Tadeusz Natanson (Poland).

The [WFMT Council](http://wfmt.info/leadership-2020-2023) is made up of a team of Officers, which includes the President, Past President, Secretary/Treasurer, and Executive Assistant, as well as Commissioners, Regional Liaisons, and the Assembly of Student Delegates. The Commissioners have expertise in the field of the commission they lead. These are [Clinical Practice, Education and Certification](http://wfmt.info/commission-education-certification-2020-2023),[[3]](#footnote-3) [Global Crises Intervention](http://wfmt.info/commission-global-crises-intervention-2020-2023),[[4]](#footnote-4) Publications, Public Relations, Research and Ethics, and World Congress organisation. Each Commissioner recruits further experts to support their work, and it is exciting that New Zealand Registered Music Therapists Penny Warren and Devin Brooks are currently members of the Education and Certification and [Global Crises Intervention](http://wfmt.info/commission-global-crises-intervention-2020-2023) Commissions respectively. The role of Regional Liaisons is to inform WFMT members about the latest developments in each of the Africa, Australia/New Zealand, Eastern Mediterranean, Europe, Latin America and Caribbean, North America, Southeast Asia, and Western Pacific regions. For example, as Australia New Zealand Liaison, I have maintained connections with national bodies (reporting to and from WFMT, Australian Music Therapy Association, and Music Therapy New Zealand); completed quarterly blogs for the WFMT website reporting on activities in our regions (Rickson, 2021); and provided an annual report.

In promoting music therapy throughout the world, the WFMT has several primary purposes. Firstly, it acts as the international umbrella organisation for the profession of music therapy to promote the exchange of information about global music therapy. Important functions include the stimulation of international collaborations among WFMT members and other related professional groups to promote and advise on the international education and training of music therapists; clinical practice standards in music therapy; and the integration of research and ethics into the practice of music therapy. The work involves sharing information on accreditation and licensing procedures with members; and supporting international research collaborations. Another core function, one that WFMT is perhaps most well-known for, is the coordination and promotion of the [World Congress of Music Therapy](http://wfmt.info/resource-centers/events-center/world-congress/)[[5]](#footnote-5) every three years. I’ll come back to this, and some of the other key functions – including the publication of the international music therapy journal, [*Music Therapy Today*](https://wfmt.info/music-therapy-today/)*.*

While the WFMT website currently suggests that the World Federation also aims to establish equivalency standards for a global music therapy certification, Council has agreed that this is not a viable goal, given the wide range of sociocultural contexts that music therapists live and work in. Council members have begun the process of removing this goal from the constitution and have introduced new initiatives such as the Diversity Equity and Inclusion committee, which I chair. The Diversity Equity and Inclusion group is a newly formed committee, not yet ratified as a *commission*, involving a group of eleven music therapists from around the world who are examining the WFMT values, the advantages and barriers that individuals experience in relation to the work of the WFMT, and ways to promote the inclusion of marginalised people. Multiple factors contribute to exclusion, and Council is committed to examining and addressing these issues in an ongoing way. An obvious example is that of language and the potential dominance of English to exclude people from non-English speaking countries. Translating our FAQ sheets and other resources into multiple languages is one small step we have been able to take towards increasing engagement, and we are continuing to transcribe materials and social media as we are able to access linguists to help.

## Publications

The [WFMT Publication Center](https://wfmt.info/resource-centers/publication-center)[[6]](#footnote-6) contains a wide variety of resources. Firstly, the Commissions prepare documents which are freely available on the website and likely to be extremely useful at various times, not only for Music Therapy New Zealand but also for individuals. For instance, the Research and Ethics Commission has prepared several documents to support music therapists who are interested in conducting and publishing research, including one on ethics and informed consent processes (WFMT, 2013). The Publication Center has many examples of music therapy throughout the world, including [Regional Information,](https://wfmt.info/resource-centers/publication-center/regional-information/)[[7]](#footnote-7) an [International Library of Music,](https://wfmt.info/resource-centers/publication-center/international-library-of-music/)[[8]](#footnote-8) and the [Soundboard Project.](https://wfmt.info/resource-centers/publication-center/soundboard)[[9]](#footnote-9)

Regional Information is provided by Regional Liaisons who share their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives on the status of music therapy in their region via video and FAQ sheets. The International Library of Music, initiated by the Clinical Practice Commission, is a media library which is building compilations of lists of songs, rhythms, and music that are well-known and commonly used in each of the eight regions of the WFMT. The material is selected by members of the WFMT Clinical Practice Commission and colleagues from each region and contains links to iTunes, audio, and video files, to assist music therapists in finding and choosing appropriate music for their clientele. The *Lullaby* category was selected for the first collection, but the goal has been to gather additional categories over time. Council is aware this section of the website needs work. For example, the Australia/New Zealand example of rhythm activities is presented by an American music therapist who does a good job of explaining and presenting tī rākau, a Māori stick game, but his American accent is uncomfortable in this context. It seems important to replace this with New Zealand content, preferably presented by Māori.

The Soundboard Project invites music therapists to submit sound files capturing therapeutic moments of their clinical work. The intention here is to learn about the healing sounds in music therapy from all traditions and cultures around the world. Music therapists can contribute a good quality audio file (maximum 3 minutes) of a great music therapy moment, with informed consent, and with a one sentence description of the content. The material is reviewed and, if deemed appropriate, is published on the website. Again, it would be valuable to have Māori and Pasifika input to this resource.

As noted earlier, the WFMT also publishes [*Music Therapy Today*](https://wfmt.info/music-therapy-today)*[[10]](#footnote-10)*, a bi-annual online journal, re-established in 2011 under the WFMT Leadership. *Music Therapy Today* disseminates current knowledge and information about music therapy education, clinical practice, and research to educators, clinicians, and researchers worldwide, in music therapy and related fields. Please read and draw on this valuable, free, online material, and contribute your own articles as and when you can – as well as contributing to the *New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy*!

## Further Resources

The [Resources](https://wfmt.info/resource-centers/) section of the WFMT website also contains information about Education, Events, and Jobs & Volunteering Center. In the Education section you will find information about the practice of music therapy, with examples of various music therapy approaches from around the world, as well as innovative and cutting-edge research. Currently, videos of all the spotlight sessions from the 2020 World Congress of Music Therapy are available here. So, this is a fantastic resource.

In the Events section, happenings such as [World Music Therapy Day](https://wfmt.info/wmtd)[[11]](#footnote-11) are highlighted. [World Music Therapy Day](https://wfmt.info/wmtd/) is held on 1st March each year, to celebrate and inform people worldwide about the practice of music therapy. This year Council facilitated the collection and sharing of photographs or very short video clips that, with informed consent, could be used to promote music therapy. They also coordinated a free to enter photo competition with members invited to submit photographs that represented music therapy (with advocacy and awareness in mind). Using the idea that “a picture is worth more than a thousand words” the photographs were deemed to be able to speak for themselves without any text. Some beautiful examples were submitted and published on the Federation’s [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/groups/65653187016)[[12]](#footnote-12). Council welcomed the suggestion from a New Zealand Registered Music Therapist that photographs would be accessible to more people if they included an audio image description. This is a good example of how members can collaborate with WFMT to enhance the work of our organisation.

## An Example of the Work of Commissions

The Global Crises Intervention Commission seeks to support music therapists affected by or responding to crises across the world, both natural and human-made, that result in trauma and stress. The Commission facilitates communication, coordination of services, and training among music therapists and maintains a collection of materials and information to use during current or ongoing disasters or traumatic situations. Members of the New Zealand music therapy community have been very grateful to this commission, which reached out with messages of sympathy and support following the Christchurch earthquakes, Canterbury Mosque shootings, and White Island eruption. So, naturally, the Aotearoa Crises Intervention Special Interest Group maintains strong links with this commission and collaborates whenever possible. It was rewarding to see Devin Brooks, as a member of both groups, contributing to the roundtable presentation at the World Congress of Music Therapy (July 2020).

##  Assembly of Student Delegates (ASD)

The WFMT [Assembly of Student Delegates (ASD)](https://wfmt.info/asd),[[13]](#footnote-13) seeks to promote the exchange of ideas and information among students by increasing global participation and cooperation, raising awareness of WFMT, and representing the student voice to the WFMT Council. The ASD educates students about WFMT, facilitates communication and networking among the global student population, recruits and grows student membership in WFMT, and provides a voice for students within WFMT. For example, ASD has developed information cards, publishes Window to the World blog posts, and has regularly hosted student events at the world congresses. ASD members are committed to establishing and maintaining contact with students and student organisations in each region. The student delegate for our region is Isaac Lizzet. If you are a student or know students who would be interested to talk or work with Isaac, he would be very pleased for you to make contact (email: australianewzealand.student@wfmt.info).

## The World Congress of Music Therapy

The World Congress of Music Therapy, held every three years, is a major undertaking and arguably the activity that WFMT is most well known for. Music therapy professionals and experts in related fields from around the world gather at the congress to share ideas, experiences, trends, and research outcomes. A WFMT organisational member, in conjunction with a local host, organises and runs the conference. WFMT Council determines the site of each congress following a bid process undertaken six years in advance, while attempting to circulate the location of the congresses among the eight regions. New Zealand has not yet been able to host a World Congress, but it is possible that collaborations with Australia will make that possible relatively soon. In fact, Australia won the bid for the 2023 World Congress, but unfortunately had to withdraw due to COVID risks; and MThNZ and Victoria University of Wellington had tentative plans to at least host pre-conference workshops or seminars, had it gone ahead.

## Celebrations and Awards

Council members enjoy opportunities to celebrate achievements and milestones. You can watch a beautiful example of the [media release shown at the 2020 World Congress](https://youtu.be/ySgv0AtuJtQ), celebrating the first [35 years of World Federation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySgv0AtuJtQ)[[14]](#footnote-14). Our pleasure in celebrating achievements is also reflected in the awards that are bestowed upon members. Since 2008, the Lifetime Membership Award has honoured an individual nominated and voted upon by Council who is deemed to have made significant contributions to the field of music therapy. In April 2011, the WFMT Council decided to extend the [WFMT Recognition Program](http://wfmt.info/wfmt-membership/wfmt-recognition-program-for-outstanding-contributions/)[[15]](#footnote-15) beyond the WFMT Lifetime Membership Award, now known as the Lifetime Achievement Award, to honour major contributions in education, practice, and research of music therapists and supporters around the world.

The awards include:

* Research/Special Projects Award, honouring a music therapist who has made a significant contribution to the development of the profession through a specific research study or scholarly project;
* Advocate of Music Therapy Award, honouring a person who has made major contributions to the promotion of music therapy in an area of the world where the profession is less established;
* Service Award, honouring a music therapist who provides significant service to the profession of music therapy through work related to and supporting growth of the WFMT; and
* Clinical Impact Award, honouring a music therapist who has had a long-term impact on advancing the knowledge and practice of music therapy within a specific clinical area or population through the publication or presentation of his or her work.

Lifetime Achievement Award recipients include: 2008, Dr Rolando Benenzon (Argentina); 2011, Dr David Aldridge (Germany); 2014, Dr Ruth Bright (Australia); and 2017, Dr Barbara Wheeler (USA).

## Membership

Dr Anita Swanson, WFMT President, recently reported that our enthusiastic, energetic team continues to work diligently to advance the profession of music therapy (World Federation of Music Therapy, 2021). Our website continues to post research interviews, country fact sheets, regional liaison blogs, commission chair videos and objectives, and student updates, and a recent journal issue published the abstracts of the 2020 World Congress.

Although not yet visible, a members-only section of the website has also been created. One of the first activities planned will be follow-up webinars on the themes of the World Congress Spotlight Session themes. These will provide continued discussion and learning opportunities for our members.

Music Therapy New Zealand has [organisational membership](https://wfmt.info/wfmt-membership/membership-application) of the WFMT, which in turn gives MThNZ members privileges within World Federation. [Individual membership is also available,](https://wfmt.info/wfmt-membership/membership-application) if you would like to support the work of the Federation.

WFMT holds a General Business Meeting at each World Congress, where members can address issues related to music therapy, approve policy proposals, and discuss the future directions of WFMT. Full organisational members can elect the WFMT leadership. WFMT members may serve on the established commissions and hold offices on the Council, and are encouraged to establish partnerships among member associations as a means of sharing resources and expertise and furthering innovative music therapy practice.

## Collaborate!

My final message is to connect, stay informed, contribute, participate, and make a difference. The WFMT Council uses online sources such as the [WFMT website](https://wfmt.info/), blog, podcasts, [videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCChlwddmkYF-aumo7G5rTnw), [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/groups/65653187016/), [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/world-federation-of-music-therapy/),[[16]](#footnote-16) [Twitter](https://twitter.com/WFMTinfo)[[17]](#footnote-17), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/worldfederationmusictherapy/),[[18]](#footnote-18) emails, and an annual report to keep members and others associated with music therapy informed. WFMT holds symposia, panels, and roundtables at major international conferences to inform others about global music therapy developments and the most recent projects in WFMT. Please get involved if you can. WFMT members are part of a worldwide network of music therapy clinicians, educators, researchers, those in training as music therapists, and people who are interested in our profession. If you are reading this, you are a member of our team, and we would like to work with you!

For further information, contact me at: australianewzealand@wfmt.info.

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1. <https://www.info> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://wfmt.info/leadership-2020-2023> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://wfmt.info/commission-education-certification-2020-2023> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [http://wfmt.info/commission-global-crises-intervention-2020-2023](http://wfmt.info/commission-global-crises-intervention-2020-2023/) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://wfmt.info/resource-centers/events-center/world-congress> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://wfmt.info/resource-centers/publication-center> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
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