# Book Review

# Music and Dementia: From Cognition to Therapy (2020)

Edited by Amee Baird, Sandra Garrido, & Jeanette Tamplin
(Oxford University Press)

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*Music and Dementia: From Cognition to Therapy*, edited by Australian researchers Amee Baird (clinical neuropsychologist), Sandra Garrido (music psychologist) and Jeanette Tamplin (music therapist), addresses a significant health issue affecting individuals, families and communities worldwide. My interest in this book arises from both professional and family experiences of dementia, also known as *mate wareware*. I am one of 80% of people in Aotearoa New Zealand who know or have known someone living with dementia (Alzheimer’s New Zealand, n.d.). This figure will only increase with the projected rise in the population of older people and in the prevalence of dementia in this country and internationally (Alzheimer’s New Zealand, 2017; Stats NZ - Tatauranga Aotearoa, 2020; World Health Organization, 2017). This book aims to resource everyone involved in dementia care, while also advocating further research.

The book is structured in three parts: (1) “Why music for people with dementia?”, (2) “Impact of music on cognition and emotion in people with dementia”, and (3) “Music therapy in dementia care”. In Part 1, the rationale for offering music experiences to people with dementia is presented via three perspectives. The introduction, by music therapist Amy Clements-Cortés, highlights a shift from a medical model towards holistic social care, and a continuum of practice, from recreational to therapeutic musicking, that values both receptive and active methods. Chapter 3 (Bracatisano and Thompson) discusses the “Therapeutic Music CapacitiesModel”, a framework with some ideas in common with Donora’s (2000) model of musical affordances. The intervening chapter, by Ghilain et al., focuses on neurological mechanisms, particularly rhythmic entrainment. This important chapter could have been edited for great accessibility for readers less familiar with neurological terms and functions.

Parts 2 and 3 focus respectively on music-based approaches and music therapy, each with several stimulating chapters describing evidence-based perspectives on practice. I wondered whether similar introductory sections could have been edited – for example, multiple references to the film Alive Inside (with inconsistent citation). A strength of these chapters is the discussion of relevant research. Additionally, Chapters 10 and 12 provide two systematic reviews of the literature, particularly useful for practitioners without database access.

The chapter that I most enjoyed focused on skill-sharing in the care of people with advanced dementia, by Hanne Mette Ridder and Julie Ørnholt Bøtker. Presented as a case study with commentary, this chapter acknowledges Kitwood’s (1997) influence on dementia care and champions collaborative and consultative practices, musical attunement, and relationships. This perspective resonates with Liz Wallace’s article in the present journal and the Enabling Good Lives (2023) framework for disabled people in New Zealand.

Becky Dowson and Orii McDermott’s chapter about the complex issue of assessment also references Kitwood’s person-centred care, while also valuing quantitative measures. The authors discuss the purpose, process, and presentation of assessment data, and provide an overview of common outcome measures. Acknowledging the unreliability of proxy reporting, they suggest methods such as photo elicitation to let people speak for themselves. When this is not possible, they stress that meaningful assessments require training and time.

The role and diversity of musicking in the social care of people with dementia is no surprise to us, as music therapists. The growing awareness of other professionals and the wider public presents both opportunities for us both to expand our services and to advocate safe uses of music in other contexts. In a rapidly changing field, keeping up with both medical and music-centred research is challenging. I hope that a future edition of this book will include a chapter on dementia choirs, such as Thompson’s (2020) inspiring research, and information about ongoing dementia studies, including Homeside (Baker et al., 2019), MIDDEL (Baker et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022), and Together in Sound (Cassidy, 2020; Molyneux et al., 2022). I would also welcome opportunities to learn about challenges and initiatives beyond the western contexts represented in this book. The implicit assumption that methods are universally applicable leaves me curious about other geographical and cultural contexts.

One word, used frequently throughout the book, made me pause to reflect on how we language our practices: *intervention*! I am often puzzled by the casual use of this term – in this book and in other music therapy writing – as a synonym for music experiences. I wonder whether this term is used intentionally or without thought about the literal meaning. From my perspective, “intervention” is philosophically incongruent with person-centred social care and music therapy approaches emphasising attunement, relationship, and consultation.

This book is both a theoretical and practical resource that expanded my knowledge of contemporary approaches. I was heartened by the links between theory, research, and practice, as well as the mainly accessible style. Consequently, I recommend this book for everyone seeking a greater understanding of music therapy for people living with dementia or aiming to incorporate music into their own practice.

*Music and Dementia* is available as a print or e-book. A copy is available in the Music Therapy New Zealand collection, hosted by the IHC library.[[1]](#footnote-1) The contents list and chapter abstracts are available on the publisher’s website.

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1. <https://www.ihc.org.nz/how-we-can-help/library> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)