

## **NWRPA Newsletter April 2018**

### **Psychodynamic Music Therapy: An Introduction**

**Rachel Swanick**

**Friday 13 April 2018**

Rachel Swanick gave us a clear, inspiring and thoughtful introduction to her work as a music therapist. Here is a summary of her presentation written by Frank Kelley.

Rachel is a senior clinical therapist for Chroma and is Artist in Residence at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. She has worked in many contexts including community mental health, recovery, special schools and hospitals. She is a mum and a human being. For more see her website <https://www.musictherapyhere.com/>

You can find out more about her work by googling **The Safety Net: Getting lost in the system.**

Music is integral to who we are. It is not tangible and disappears into the ether. Music allows us to understand ourselves and others and attune to clients in a way that is not possible with words. The power of music has always been with us. We have found prehistoric instruments and there are very old stories about the impact of music such as the way David played harp for King Saul.

Rachel is influenced by Irving Yalom and Donald Winnicott. From Winnicott she takes the idea of music being a space to play. She finds this concept particularly helpful in her work with attachment and trauma. She has also worked with therapeutic issues of autism, profound and multiple learning disabilities, neurological difficulties, dementia, premature babies and post partum care and palliative care.

The brain that engages with music is changed by music. Music links the two parts of the brain. For example there are people who stammer but can sing with great clarity and people with dementia who cannot understand spoken instructions but can understand instructions that are sung.

Music therapy in palliative care is not comforting but is attuned to clients' deeper feelings of grief. Attunement, containment and play are central concepts in music therapy. Daniel Stern, for example in *The interpersonal world of the infant* (1985), has written about affect attunement. Non verbal communications, like music, can provide containment for the infant's strongest feelings. These unbearable feelings are projected into the mother/therapist who can make sense of these experiences and then give them back to the child.

For Winnicott to play is to be in touch with our true selves and to be present in the moment. We feel safe enough to be creative and in music therapy children can describe their experiences without the fear of being reprimanded.

Rachel will also use cognitive behavioural therapy, role play and play with toys in her therapeutic work. This helps children develop self regulation and impulse control.

The internal sense of a musical pulse is part of internal emotional regulation. She will develop this with children through familiar songs and the psychodynamic influence of improvised music.

The Here and Now project at the Whitworth Gallery came about when Rachel responded to a request for a music therapist. She plays the piano in front of works of art and also encourages groups to improvise music in response to art. This art project led to the commission of four pieces of music by young composers in response to the art at the Gallery.

If you are interested you can take a tour of the Whitworth through music and art on 17 May 2018 at 6.30pm. Tickets are £11.80 and early bird £6.50. The music ensemble Psappa invites you on a musical adventure through the gallery, stopping off along the way to experience each new work performed live by world-class musicians. Go to: [www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/events/thursdaylates/](http://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/events/thursdaylates/)

As is our custom about confidentiality I have not summarised the engrossing videos Rachel showed of her work with children. However I can tell you that we ended this evening with a collective musical improvisation. This illustrated the themes of attunement and response in therapeutic work. The warmth and connectedness of this improvisation was the clearest way we had of saying **thank you to Rachel Swanick.**