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# University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



## Forty Years of Music that Heals

03.17.2014 | Fine Arts, Students, Campus and Community, Culture and Society

Music therapist Debbie Bates remembers the day her client died.

Bates, a 1996 University of Dayton graduate, had met the woman three months earlier when the patient entered hospice. While the medical staff helped address physical symptoms, Bates helped her and her family forge positive memories and revisit old ones: She assisted the woman and her husband in composing a song about their life together.

"I was there with her on the day she died, surrounded by her family," Bates said. "I saw her take her final breath while I was singing the song she had written."

Other moments in her career stand out. The man battling cancer for 14 years sharing an intimate connection through songs that were important to him and his wife. The patient who underwent two bone marrow transplants and expressed her ordeal through lyric writing. The patient who found new strength through music improvisation. The premature infants soothed with heartbeat lullabies.

Now a senior music therapist at the Cleveland Clinic, Bates is one of 240 alumni of the University of Dayton's music therapy program, which is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year.

Throughout those four decades, the program has partnered with more than 20 agencies in the Dayton area to serve healthcare needs and has attracted hundreds of students who want to work in a service profession while utilizing their passion and interest in music to help people.

Just two years after the program launched, students founded the University of Dayton Music Therapy Club, which has provided strong community service and advocacy throughout the years.

In 1986, Mary Beth Brown, then an adjunct faculty member and University of Dayton music therapy alumna, established Hands in Harmony, a sign language music ensemble that performs concerts and community service for individuals with hearing impairments.

And all students must spend a semester working with older adults with dementia at Bethany Village, preschoolers at Cleveland Elementary School in Dayton, and adults with addictions and other psychiatric disorders at Nova Behavioral Health.

"The residents here love it when the music therapy students come, because we can increase their sessions from once a week to twice a week," said Liz Crombie, Bethany Village music therapist and 2009 University of Dayton graduate.

The music therapy students will work with groups of 10 to 15 residents, addressing interpersonal skills, physical goals such as arm movement and cognitive goals such as recalling lyrics and reminiscing, Crombie said.

While the idea of music as a healing influence has been around since the time of ancient Greece, music therapy as a profession formally began in the early 20th century in military hospitals.

According to the American Music Therapy Association, community musicians of all types would visit veterans hospitals following WWI and WWII to play for the thousands of veterans who experienced both physical and emotional trauma. As the demand grew for more training, college programs began popping up in the 1940s and 1950s.

Music therapy gained a lot of attention recently for its role in the recovery of U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords. Diagnosed with a traumatic brain injury from a gunshot wound, Giffords struggled to form words while speaking. But when music would play, the words came fluently as she sang along, according to a 2011 ABC News story.

The American Music Therapy Association reports music therapy is also used to lessen effects of dementia, reduce asthma episodes, reduce pain, improve speech in people with Autism, improve sleep patterns and increase weight gain in premature infants, and increase motor function in people with Parkinson's.

"Music is in us in a way that oftentimes words or interaction are not," said Marilyn Sandness, professor emerita and former music therapy program coordinator (1974-98). "We all have an association with music from the time we're babies falling asleep to lullabies. Music is a significant part of life's big moments: cultural events, weddings, birthdays. It reaches us in our emotions. It can bring out responses sometimes when nothing else can."

Since its earliest days, the University of Dayton's music therapy program has thrived on a small but committed group of students. In 1973, a handful of music majors petitioned their department chair to add a music therapy program as the profession was in its early growth stages.

Following swiftly on the students' request, the University recruited Sandness to launch a music therapy program in the fall of 1974. At the time, Sandness was executive director of Greene County Mental Health Association and had become a registered music therapist a decade earlier.

"That first year, I was doing recruiting, interviewing, academic advising, supervising field work and teaching," Sandness said. "I enjoyed it all, but it was too much for one person, so I hired an adjunct professor to help out."

She led the program for 24 years, retiring as professor emerita in 1998 and handing the reins to Susan Gardstrom, who is the program coordinator to this day.

"I had been a clinician with adjudicated adolescents and students with special needs for about 10 years when Marilyn contacted me," said Gardstrom. "I had also done a fair amount of part-time teaching and decided to give it a go. I liked what I saw at Dayton."

During her tenure, Gardstrom added one full-time faculty member and a second adjunct professor. She expanded students' hands-on experiences, requiring them to complete five semesters of practica in clinical settings and doubling the required hours. She also added courses in American popular music, functional music skill development, improvisation, music and psychotherapy, and the process of referral, assessment, treatment, evaluation and termination.

"Our students graduate with a variety of distinctive skills and experiences that prepare them to become a clinician with a wide range of clientele," Gardstrom said.

And as the music therapy profession has changed over the years, students' options have increased. Once primarily a profession for hospitals and residential programs for persons with mental retardation, music therapists now work in schools, with older adults, people with addictions, behavioral problems, and trauma-related issues, and people with neurological disorders like stroke and Parkinson's disease, and even in wellness settings to promote healthy living.

"Innovation has always been part of music therapy," Gardstrom said. "As we recognize different needs, we find creative ways to meet those needs."

Much of this innovation operates within a common framework. Gardstrom said music therapists employ four basic methods with clients:

- Listening and engaging with music
- Re-creative methods, where clients perform or sing pre-composed music
- Composition, where clients write music or lyrics
- Improvisation, where clients generate original music in spontaneous fashion.

As the number of populations who benefit from music therapy continues to expand and how healthcare is provided and financed continues to change, the faculty and alumni of the University of Dayton's program are optimistic for the future.

"Music tells the story of our lives, it connects us, it reminds us of what it is to be human," Bates said. "For so many, especially in hospitals, healthcare is about what's wrong with you, but music therapy can highlight what's well with you. That can be very empowering to people who are struggling or feeling defeated."

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