

DEFORIA LANE. MUSIC THERAPIST

## Music's good for the soul – and the immune system, too

### BRADEN PHILLIPS

● Deforia Lane is resident director of music therapy at University Hospitals of Cleveland's Ireland Cancer Center in the US. Music therapy is defined as the systematic application of music in the treatment of the physiological and psychosocial aspects of an illness or disability. Lane received the first grant from the American Cancer Society to investigate the therapeutic effects of music on oncology patients, and is an internationally recognised expert in the field. She recently participated in the 2nd Congr s Internacional de M sica in Barcelona.

–Which kind of patients benefit from music therapy?

The reasons are usually severe pain, high anxiety, clinical depression, not coping very well with news, patients who are denying that they have a serious disease, or patients who know they are dying and would like to leave something behind. Those patients know that we compose songs with the patient to reflect their thoughts, their hopes, to leave with their loved ones. So obviously, they would be the people we try to see first.

–Did you have a music background then move into psychology?

I started with a degree in vocal performance, and when I went back to graduate school I heard of a profession called music therapy, so I took a course just to see what it was like. It completely enraptured me—I just thought, my desire to nurture, to help, to use my gift of music at the same time.

–What kind of music do you typically use?

Sometimes we can simply provide music of your choice, of your liking, and we are trained to be very collective in the number of instruments we play and the kind of repertoire that we have. If I'm with a 99-year-old Irish Catholic woman the first hour and a then an inner-city 25-year-old African male, I have to be equally prepared to use music with them. For the 99-year-old who is having problems with her Parkinson's disease, I'm aware that Rhythmic Auditory Stimulation can help her walk, and if I'm working with somebody who has stroke, even if she's from an aristocratic Arabian family, I'm aware that there are

techniques like Melodic Intonation Therapy that can make her talk again, and communicate. The music I use is very individualised to the patient, I usually use live music and not recorded, that's because you can maneuver the music to reach the goal. So music works not only from a social and building rapport standpoint, but also in the physiological, psychological healing of these patients.

–Do you participate as a singer?

Yes. I can give you an example. A woman who was very withdrawn and depressed. Her son saw me in the hall and said maybe you could just come and see my mother, she loves music and she hasn't been talking or eating. He said she loves classical music, so I walked up to her and took her by the hand and just said, "I'm in good company, I understand, because I love classical music too, I wonder if you would mind if I could sing something for you, and then I will leave." And she looked up at me and I said, "I'm just going to take that as a yes," because her eyes were looking right at me, "and I'm going to ask you to rate me on a scale of one to 10, because I've tried singing this before but I'd like some feedback. So all I'd like you to do at the end is to hold up fingers, for how well you thought this was executed." And what this does is to put her



Deforia Lane (left) speaking at recent Barcelona conference; right, working with two cancer patients, including an eight-year-old girl who wrote the words to her own song/Foto: Norbert Foto (left) and Bill West-The Shore



in the driver's seat – she's going to evaluate, not me. And I sang (Gershwin's) Summertime and not only were there tears, but she began to talk to me, and she just said "Beautiful, oh my," and then she began to reminisce about the last time she heard it. That was just simply used to open the window to someone. So yes, I love using my singing.

–What is the most miraculous music moment that you've had?

I can tell you one. We had a 20-year-old woman that was admitted to our hospital brain dead, but she was six and a half months pregnant. They decided that our ethics were to maintain her body on life sup-

I sang  
Summertime –  
not only were  
there tears, but  
she began to talk

port until the baby was able to be delivered by cesarean section. And they asked me if I would see the baby, as they wanted to provide some stimulation for that child as obviously the mother could not. So I went in and placed my hands on the lump on the mother's belly and sang and moved my hands over her belly,

just very gently touching, and I did He's Got the Whole World in His Hands just very quietly, and that baby began to dance under my hands. When she was lifted from the womb, there were no tears, just a small squeak. They took her to the intensive care unit and I would go up and see her. Infants have several things that show stress, their oxygenation levels starts to fall, they have splayed fingers, a tongue thrust, a scrunched face when they frown, they try to cry but very little can come out and I would go over, and I would bend down and start to sing that same song and she would go quiet.

–What sort of research have you done in the field?

I did a study on how music affects patients with cancer and their immune function, as the white blood cells are just wiped out through chemotherapy, so they are very susceptible to infection. When I'm with them and I see them reacting positively – smiling, talking more, being very open about things—I wondered whether this was an indication that something was happening physically. There is something in your saliva called Salivary Immuno Globulate A (IGA) and when you are healthy you have a high content of this. What I did was I took an experimental group and I gave them one half hour of music therapy and I took another group which I did not give music to, and took a pre and post sample of their saliva and those that had music therapy experienced a significant increase in IGA. Just one session.

## A profession in search of formal recognition

● Melissa Mercadal is director of the joint master's programme in music therapy between Universitat Pompeu Fabra and Universitat Ramon Llull. She says the application of music therapy in Europe in the medical arena has always been behind that of the US. In Spain, only Extremadura has made music therapy a recognised profession, allowing therapists in public schools to be paid with taxpayer funds.

"Music therapy is developing here, more people are recognising its benefits in a therapeutic setting, but there is still work to be done to get official recognition from the government," she said.

In Catalonia, music therapists currently work in schools and provide therapy, but they

are employed as teachers, not as therapists. There are also music therapists in special education schools, paid by parent associations. But there is one hospital in Catalonia that stands out for the integration of music therapy in its treatment – the children's wing at the Hospital Sant Joan de D u in Esplugues de Llobregat. It has three therapists working daily, paid for by private foundations. The only other such case of music therapy in a hospital context is Madrid's Hospital La Paz. Mercadal's Master's programme began in 2001 and has 16-20 students a year.

"To help get official recognition, we need unified criteria and to work together, which seems very hard in this country," she said.

