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The British Journal of Music Therapy - A 25 Year Retrospective

To mark 25 years of the *British Journal of Music Therapy* (BJMT) since the millenium in 2000, we have invited editors of the journal over the past quarter century to reflect on their time in this role and offer their thoughts about the music therapy profession. Their responses are presented here with minimal editing and without commentary as a contribution to the history of BJMT and its role in the music therapy profession. Exceptionally for BJMT, this article has not been peer-reviewed, but all authors have read each other's contributions and offered corrections of fact where needed. We are grateful to them for the time and effort they have put into responding to this initiative.

Each contributor was asked to reflect on the issues they faced during their time as editor, and to choose articles published under their editorship which they felt represented significant developments in practice or thinking in the profession. They were also invited to give their thoughts on the current and future role for BJMT. Articles are not referenced in the standard way but titles, authors, year of publication and BJMT issue numbers are given, with active links in the on-line edition of the journal.

We hope this consecutive sequence of historical perspectives, each individual but all linked by their involvement with the journal, will be of interest to readers whatever their stage of career or connection to music therapy. Readers may also want to compare this retrospective with one published ten years ago in BJMT ([‘Looking back:...’](#), 29/2, 2015) to which three of the current editors contributed. Perspectives change as both our own lives and our profession move on, and history is always a story of the present re-inventing the past.

A Brief History of the BJMT

We begin with a short history of the journal. In 2000 the *British Journal of Music Therapy* was already thirteen years old, Volume 1 having appeared in June 1987 as the *Journal of British Music Therapy*. It succeeded the journal of the British Society of Music Therapy (BSMT), first published in 1968 as a twice-yearly bulletin of the Society. Readers interested in

the history of BSMT can find records of the society in the London Metropolitan Archive (<https://search.lma.gov>).

In 1987 the functions of newsletter and journal were separated, with the journal becoming a joint publication of the BSMT and the Association of Professional Music Therapists (APMT), then the professional body. A professional editor was employed, and the journal continued twice yearly publication with volume numbering restarting with Volume 1 (1987). Eight years later the journal returned to its original title of the *British Journal of Music Therapy*, with volume numbering continuing uninterrupted from Volume 9/1 (1995). This change showed the journal as international in scope, while still British in editorship.

In 2000 music therapy had only recently become recognised as a profession by the then Council for Professions Supplementary to Medicine (CPSM), shortly to become the Health Professions Council, and later Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). There were approximately 600 members of the Association of Professional Music Therapists (APMT) and six training programmes (three in London and one each in Bristol, Cambridge and Cardiff) some still offering a one year PG Diploma. In 2002 another training had opened in Edinburgh and by 2007 all trainings had become two or three year Masters programmes. The two associations – BSMT and APMT – had begun negotiations to join together, and in 2012 the current British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT) was formed. The BJMT continued to be published, now as the professional journal of the BAMT.

Until 2015 the BJMT had been an in-house publication of its parent societies. This met the needs of professional members and about 100 library subscribers around the world. However, this limited the reach of the journal to a wider academic and international readership. In 2015 a contract was signed with Sage, an academic publisher with a large journal list to its name including many related health-care journals. All articles, including the backlist, were now indexed and searchable online and institutions could subscribe to the journal more easily alongside other Sage publications. At the same time, a new editorial structure was introduced with a team of co-editors rather than a single editor-in-chief.

In 2025, there are now over 1000 BAMT members receiving the journal as part of their membership, and over 10,000 subscriptions globally. Online access is now the norm, and BAMT took the decision to provide online only access for members from 2025 as part of a policy to reduce resource use. In 2024 there were over 80,000 downloads of BJMT articles globally, and this year the journal's Impact Factor (a measure of citations) reached a new high of 1.0 over two years. This compares well to the Impact Factor of similar journals such as *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy* (1.23), *Arts in Psychotherapy* (1.5) and *Psychology of Music* (1.6). There remains room for growth!

The BJMT remains a professional journal, international in scope and with a distinctive UK perspective on music therapy as a discipline and profession. What follows is the story of its development over the last 25 years told from the perspective of its editors. We want to thank them on behalf of our profession for their contribution to the continuing story of UK music therapy writing, research, and international collaboration.

1998-2001 – Straddling the Millenium

Gary Ansdell writes:

I felt a millennial wind on my cheeks during the few years I edited the Journal. A sense that something new was brewing, that a previous phase was closing and leading into something new and more self-critical, explorative, innovative. The later 1990s finalised decades of hard work by our pioneer colleagues to legitimate the music therapy profession in Britain, culminating in state registration status in 1997. Preparation for this professional achievement involved converting training courses to Masters level, which in turn required more explicit theory and research skills for a new generation of students. These various changes signalled both a professional arrival, but also a new freedom to dissent and develop. The profession could move from a cautiously emergent discipline/profession guarding a level of fragile consensus to a more critical and at times creatively disputatious one. A university librarian once told me that the 1999 editions 13(1) and 13(2) were the most stolen from the library (in the pre-digital age that is!). These contained Elaine Streeter's article '[Finding a Balance Between Psychological Thinking and Musical Awareness in Music Therapy Theory - A Psychoanalytic Perspective](#)' (13/1, 1999) and the following edition's four responses to her. Streeter was brave to explicitly state a view that most others only ventured privately at this time. Her article did a service to the discipline by instigating an international debate about the necessary separation between practice, theory, and notions of professional ethics. This debate, facilitated by the BJMT, signalled a maturity in the representation and conduct of disciplinary creativity and dialogue.

I've written at some length about this 'prequel' to the 2000 editions because when I re-read the articles from my three years as Editor in the years straddling the millennium I saw how those developments and events of the 1990s subsequently bore such rich fruit in these early years of the 2000s. There was a step-change in the discipline and profession at just this usefully symbolic millennial pivot.

The early 2000s were perhaps the first time our profession started to look critically at itself. Two research-based articles published in 2000 take a snap-shot of the profession in the late 90s. David Stewart converted a Masters thesis into his BJMT article '[The State of the UK Music Therapy Profession](#)' (14/1, 2000) in which he surveyed the 1997 APMT membership of 250, half of whom replied. He asked about employment, working models, and job satisfaction. A picture emerged of part-time work (though only 24% were self-employed),

mostly working with people with learning disabilities, concerned about professional identity and the uncertain boundaries of the profession. There was a worrying trend of drop-out in mid-career, and a precarious peer support structure. Satisfaction varied overall. Usefully, another article in the same journal looked at the same professional picture but from the perspective of 'outsider' researchers studying music therapy as representative of a newish health profession (Hills et al. [‘A Study of Burnout and Multidisciplinary Team-Working amongst Professional Music Therapists’](#), 14/1, 2000). A smaller sample of 151 again explored professional satisfaction and found less burnout in music therapists than in comparable health professions. This seemed dependent on levels of support which at that time (1998) was mostly based on multi-disciplinary teams. Ironically, at just this time the kind of music therapy teams within statutory services were perhaps at their peak, and just about to decline. Cut to 'now' and we find around 1013 music therapists registered with the HCPC (in 2023). More than 25 years have passed since these survey studies, and the profession has quadrupled in size. But we still hear similar concern about two of the issues raised back in 2000: colleagues dropping out in or before mid-career, and the still-ongoing problem of differentiating professional music therapy from related practices such as community music and music and health work.

Another strand of 'new' material in these early millennial editions of the BJMT concerns the practice/discipline axis: how we practice, with whom, and in relation to what ideas within an ever-shifting discipline. British music therapy was becoming less provincial as international perspectives fed in through BJMT articles. The late Mercédès Pavlicevic was British-trained but at this period living and working in South Africa. She brings an eclectic and imaginative perspective in her essay [‘A Child in Time and Health’](#) (15/1, 2001) urging us to free practice and theory from the dogmatic camps it had often settled into during the 1990s. Fraser Simpson in another article developed from a Masters thesis ([‘Speaking with clients: perspectives from Creative Music Therapy’](#), 14/2, 2000) tackles one of the 'old chestnuts' of British music therapy debate - to speak or not? His article usefully nuances this question through a qualitative research inquiry. Again, the sign of maturity in a discipline is when contentious issues are opened up and re-examined, not simply repeated.

Other colleagues during this period were also expanding practice, ideas, and research methods. James Robertson (2000) explored music therapy in school settings and the sometimes fluid boundaries between therapeutic and educational work ([‘An educational model for music therapy: the case for a continuum’](#), 14/1, 2000). His is probably the first model to suggest a continuum rather than a fixed boundary between traditions of practice. Leslie Bunt and colleagues (2000) write about practical, theoretical and research development in an area of relatively new practice for the UK in [‘Variations on a Theme: The evolution of a music therapy research programme at the Bristol Cancer Help Centre’](#) (14/2, 2000) mentioning rather quaintly in passing ‘the emerging concept of evidence-based practice’. They also make the rather novel move at that time of asking patients how they

experience music therapy! Perhaps the most influential practice-theory-research article published at this time by the BJMT was by the Norwegian music therapist Trygve Aasgaard with his article (based on his doctoral work at Aalborg University) '[A Suspiciously Cheerful Lady: A study of a song's life in the paediatric oncology ward, and beyond](#)' (14/2, 2000). This was innovative in many ways: bringing in a more culture-centred and ecological model of practice and thinking that was one of the roots of the Community Music Therapy movement in subsequent years. It also pioneered ethnographic methods, studying the distribution of a song alongside the illness career of the young lady. And lastly it brought back a vital theme to British music therapists - how music and music therapy often brings pleasure and joy to patients and all those around them. Challenging places need music therapy too!

A last article I want to mention stands in a category of its own but was equally pioneering at the time: Martin Lawes' '[Aesthetic experience and the healing process - the story of a therapist's rediscovery of music](#)' (15/1, 2001). This is a brave narrative of Lawes' own experience of the crucial place of music in his own recovery process - a theme very little touched upon at that time in public professional discourse. Yet it powerfully emphasises the truism that the helpful experiences we can share with our clients find their logic in similar ones that we ourselves experience through music and musicking. His message is as relevant to anyone training or practising today as it was in 2001.

I've not been able here to discuss every article that appeared in these years. But the thought that comes to mind is that whilst this material is both distinctly historical now (25 years and more), and not... Some of the problems are still very much still present; some of the creative fruits of the developments promoted in these articles are very much still influencing how we practice and think about our practice now. Reflecting from the view of history is important for a profession and discipline such as music therapy. The Journal us does a great favour in helping us to trace this professional trajectory. And as William Faulkner famously said: "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past".

2001-2005 – Difference in Unity (Part 1)

Julie Sutton writes about her first term as editor:

"Our need in every form is to become more and more sensitive to detail. Between one letter and another, between one word and another – even at top speed – there is always a tiny gap opening on silence, on nothingness"

(Brook 2019, p.57)

These words from the director Peter Brook echo much of what I was concerned with during my music therapy career, an aspect of which was leading the development of the BJMT during two separate terms. At work, I focused on listening in detail to different musical layers,

textures, and registers. This was along with the fine detail of musical motifs, timbre, pacing, and its progression during improvisations in collaboration with the infants, children, adolescents, adults and seniors I met along the way. In my listening as a psychoanalyst, I remain a music therapist. This is also how I hear words when constructing a written piece, and as an editor in my work with authors. I also believe in drawing from literature outside music therapy, as my editorials and publications – including this one - evidence. I think we have much to learn from those around us, as well as within our professional group.

My first term with the journal continued the work of my predecessor, Gary Ansdell, who brought the BJMT into a new era, including restructuring and broadening its scope. Editors influence journals in terms of their own style, and mine was different from Gary's, as my successors' differ from mine. This keeps the BJMT alive in terms of new phases of growth as it passes from editor to editor. Living in Northern Ireland during a time of politico-social turmoil of dangerous proportions, I also learned first-hand how difficult it can be to manage difference (and the passionate, sometimes defensive conflicts that come from this), and how important it is to appreciate one's own biases, restricting belief systems, and perhaps even more significantly, what it is that makes us anxious and instantly reactive. As an established therapist, I knew of the early history of the profession, and the professional splits and silos that occurred – and still do. I had become aware that new generations of therapists do well to inform themselves of the work of their professional ancestors, so that they become real people, rather than ghosts haunting us. I think our BJMT editors have this in mind with the current issue.

Some of the articles and essays that stay in my mind during that time reflect developments in music therapists' thinking and what could be publicly discussed. I began as I continued. I took up Gary's Interview Series, and in my editorial [‘The State of the Profession – Revisited’](#) (17/1, 2003) I remembered the first edition of the journal, then called the Journal of British Music Therapy (JBMT), published in 1987, where similar topics were being revisited. I suggested that we turn out towards Europe. I looked at revisiting, rethinking, reclaiming and reconstructing the past in the second issue that year, and began a new Interview Series with both a UK and European perspective.

As well as what were then traditional research reports, I included articles about evidence-based practice (or the term I prefer, practice-based evidence), and in 2005 the first systematic review published in the BJMT [\(‘Music Interventions in Oncology Settings’, Pothoulaki et al., 19/2, 2005\)](#), a valuable resource for future researchers. John Glyn's 2003 article [‘The New York Mining Disaster’](#) (17/2) detailed four and a half years of work, something music therapists may not always have the opportunity to do now. Helen Lunt's courageous writing about her journey through mental illness to working life, along with thoughtful responses, is another article I am proud of ([‘Journey through a barren landscape to practising music therapist’](#), 16/2, 2002). In addition, Tessa Watson's article [‘Steering a path through change: Observations on](#)

[the process of training'](#) (19/1, 2005) appeared with two views from past trainers – Alyson Carter's thoughts from 1993 ['And the question is...?'](#) (7/1, 1993) and Judith Webster's article ['Music Therapy training: A personal experience'](#) (2/2, 1998). Feedback suggested these kinds of explorations in different kinds of articles and essays were welcome, and a number of new authors were the result. Finally, the publication of a special edition that was available during the 2002 World Congress in Oxford helped spread the word about the profession across the world ([16/1](#), 2002).

2006-2009 – Challenging Voices

Simon Procter writes:

Shortly before my time at the BJMT, Community Music Therapy had burst prominently onto the scene, challenging the profession's narrowing view of itself. Strikingly, this had been articulated primarily in the UK, by UK practitioners, and addressing concerns particularly recognisable in the UK profession, but entirely outside the pages of the BJMT.

These tensions were finally given voice within the BJMT by Alison Barrington (['Challenging the profession'](#), 22/2, 2008), a significant figure (then as now) within the profession who eloquently expressed her misgivings about Community Music Therapy, and by the responses to her article. Nigel Hartley's article questioned whether music therapy was even any longer fit for purpose (['The arts in health and social care: is Music Therapy fit for purpose?'](#), 22/2, 2008) and was responded to in the following issue by Donald Wetherick (['A response to Nigel Hartley's article ...'](#), 23:1, 2009). All of this was helpfully framed by Hilary Moss's experience-led reflections on the interactions of music therapy and arts in health (['Reflections on Music Therapy and arts in health'](#), 22/2, 2008).

I remember particularly enjoying my second issue ([20/2](#)), because it was themed around a topic that was very live at the time – the nature of evidence, and in particular the roles of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in producing practically useful evidence. I felt it captured not only different sides of the argument but also the engagement between them. This grew out of a symposium convened by Gary Ansdell at the Nordoff Robbins London Centre; the key voices were those of Tony Wigram and Tia DeNora, with elaborations and examples provided by others both from the UK and internationally. It gave me an opportunity to interview the eminent psychiatrist Peter Tyrer; he has long been an enthusiastic advocate for music therapy, thanks to both his own experience of it on wards and his grasp of the inherent human value of music-making, but is also a prominent advocate of the need for “gold standard” research to provide evidence for psychiatric interventions such as music therapy.

I was also proud of the articles which could broadly be described as emerging from feminist or emancipatory viewpoints, including those from Randi Rolsvjord (['Whose power of music?'](#)

[A discussion on music and power relations in music therapy](#), 20/1, 2006), Carolyn Arnason ([‘Woman to woman: a music therapist’s experience of working with a physically challenged and non-verbal woman’](#), 20:1, 2006), Anthony Meadows ([‘Feminist perspectives in music therapy’](#), 22/1, 2008), Susan Hadley ([‘Beginning dialogues: A response to ‘Feminist perspectives...’](#), 22/1, 2008), and Toni Day and her team ([‘Beyond the therapy room: women’s experiences of ‘going public’ with song creations’](#), 23/1, 2009). The conversation has progressed significantly since then, but at the time it felt disruptive and important that these perspectives were being profiled in this way.

I remember Mercédès Pavlicevic commenting that the tiny group of people who did most of the writing about music therapy often had least hands-on experience of doing it; I really wanted to amplify practitioner voices. Julie Sutton and I ran occasional writing workshops to encourage UK music therapists (including those who were relatively recently qualified) to feel that their experience was worth documenting, and I was pleased that new music therapy voices emerged via publication in the journal – e.g. Steve Cobbett ([‘Playing at the boundaries:...’](#), 21/1, 2007; [‘Including the excluded:...’](#), 23/2, 2009), Neil Foster ([‘“Why can’t we be friends?”:...’](#), 21/1, 2007), Mario Eugster ([‘An investigation into time relationship in co-improvisation with children having epileptic fits’](#), 21/2, 2007), Lorna Bryce and Susannah Wettone ([‘Drawing and drumming:...’](#), 21/2, 2007), and Nicola Dunbar ([‘Quietenning the voices:...’](#), 23/2, 2009). Nowadays, in continuation of this, I always look forward to reading the winners of the Tony Wigram prize in the BJMT.

The profession has clearly made progress in the last 20 years. I strongly welcome the diversification of understandings of what music therapy can be for different people in different places at different times, including the need for therapists to be constantly flexible in what they are able to offer. The profession is at last thinking about culture and identity, sometimes in meaningful ways. It’s no longer seen as unethical to question being diagnosis-centred in mental health work, or to suggest that the people whom music therapists seek to serve should be seen as unique collaborators in the shared work of getting music therapy done and understood, rather than as replicable recipients of professional expertise.

And this is reflected in music therapy training courses too. Today I see less theoretical gatekeeping, more respect for the flexibility and innovation demonstrated by practitioners on the ground, as well as more evidence of pragmatism and skill development, doubtless driven by the need for graduates to gain and develop work.

The profession still seems to project a somewhat skewed image of itself – NHS work gets prominently profiled despite this being a small proportion of work, perhaps because this is where the clearest professional structures survive, along with higher salaries. There is still a peculiar sense of some areas of music therapy work being more “prestigious” than others, despite (or perhaps because of) the relatively few music therapists working in such fields. We need to showcase the substantial areas of work which tend to be under-represented not

only in academic literature but also in professional promotion – e.g. work with adults with learning disabilities – and it is always good to see such work featured in the BJMT.

The UK profession is often hailed abroad as a beacon of success – mostly because of the attainment of state registration around the turn of the century. Whilst this has unarguably conferred advantages on the profession and driven improvements in training, I do feel it has also artificially separated music therapists from other musicians who do (at least in some senses) inconveniently similar work with great skill – community musicians, music teachers, care workers who use music to impressive effect in their settings etc. I would argue that this separation sometimes leads to the profession lacking critical self-awareness and having difficulty seeing what it does through the eyes of the people it seeks to serve, or as part of a wider music-and-wellbeing landscape.

The BJMT has always had a challenging task. On the one hand, it seeks to wave the flag for UK-based practice in the wider world of music therapy, and on the other it strives to be a window on the world for UK-based music therapists. Being “owned” by a professional association can be something of a double-edged sword: the financial support is crucial, but such a journal is likely to be perceived (fairly or not) as reluctant to bite the hand that feeds it.

Prior to my editorship, interest had already been expressed in “giving” the journal to a major publisher, as has since happened. There are clear advantages to being part of a much larger operation but, whilst the internet generally makes access to research resources from across the world far easier than ever before, much of the BJMT is now hidden behind a publisher paywall for people who don’t work for universities or belong to BAMT. In contrast (and, let’s face it, in competition), there are now multiple genuinely open access journals which focus either exclusively or partially on music therapy and associated practices, often with particular slants which encourage critical conversations and the challenging of assumptions and authority. An obvious example of this is Voices (voices.no), with its self-described focus on “interdisciplinary dialogue and discussion about music, health, and social change”.

So, what could it mean to be a British journal in the online era? As a multi-nation entity, Britain seems to be becoming more politically devolved, more culturally diverse but also more at odds with itself. Could the BJMT reflect the multiplicity of ways in which this is manifested in the doing, researching and theorising of music therapy – not just in university departments, but on the ground in schools, care homes and community centres? Perhaps there is no one British music therapy anymore that needs reinforcing: perhaps old (and new) orthodoxies no longer need continual re-espousing.

I’m very fond of the BJMT, and I’d love to see it find a niche for itself which is genuinely distinctive, rooted in the UK profession but determinedly open-minded to the world, and shining a light on the diversity of grass-roots practice and service-level research initiatives in a way which offers a critical challenge to whatever normative positions are in vogue at the

time. In doing so, it will need to be nimble enough to be compelling to a broad readership composed not only of British music therapists, but crucially also of others here and abroad who do (and seek to develop their understanding and awareness of) adjacent musical work in rapidly changing times. It's a tall order, and I wish the current and future editors all the very best in this ever-challenging mission: I well remember what hard work editing the journal is, and I truly appreciate each issue that lands – no longer on my doormat, but now in my inbox.

2009-2012 – Difference in Unity (Part 2)

Julie Sutton writes about her second term as editor:

"Past and history are not the same thing. The past happened. It is composed of events that affected the self, some of which can be remembered, but most of what are outside memory altogether. History is a person's transformation of the past into a story which that person can tell himself or herself. Sometimes the story does indeed derive from the past, but ..[some of this] will be more like a myth."

(Bollas 2009, pp.30-31)

My second editorial term had a clear agenda, of re-branding the journal, resulting in how it looks today. I also restructured the editorial team. I continued to open up spaces for a range of views. Another conscious choice was to bring together various voices that may not have been heard, all of which were unique and different, with the understanding that good ideas last, but need to be revisited in contemporary times. Sometimes there really is nothing new under the sun, but we also need to view that sun from our current times.

While research articles are the essential bread and butter of a journal's publications, again I included a number of articles that were distinctly different. In 2010 Rosanne Tyas' account of ['A death in the family'](#) (24/1, 2010) invited us to share the experience of mourning for someone with a learning disability. In 2012, we published Christine Atkinson's moving essay on the client's love for their therapist (["Dare we speak of love?": An exploration of love within the therapeutic relationship'](#), 26/1, 2012). Both these authors remind us of the deeply personal investment every therapist makes in coming alongside the humanity in the experiences we share with others during our working lives.

This second BJMT term took place during the beginning of a developmental phase for UK music therapy, where there was a move to a different reach for our professional association, as well as a restructuring, under Stephen Sandford's stewardship, in collaboration with the sterling work that Angela Harrison had undertaken. The name of our professional organisation changed, from the Association of Professional Music Therapists (APMT) to the current identity: the British Association for Music Therapy (BAMT). For me, things felt solid, and it was

clear that positive, further changes in the professionalisation of the profession were underway. These modifications also looked to the past and acknowledged the hard work of our predecessors. Related to this, [‘A Dialogue with Prof. Tony Wigram:…’](#) (25/1, 2011) was prepared during the last months of his life. It remains a deeply meaningful, personal collaboration that was possible due to being the journal’s editor.

With this increasingly solid bedrock, another deliberate decision was a BJMT edition in 2012 that acknowledged the profession’s need to reconsider its position regarding our regulatory body, and learn from past mistakes ([26/2](#), 2012). This included what I believed was our failure to support colleagues who were the subject of official complaints, and acknowledged just how devastating this could be, both personally, and to the profession as a whole (in this case, the loss of a training programme). While individually we were supporting each other, we were not doing enough as a profession in this area. I introduced commentaries to lead articles to open up spaces for discussion. I also spoke openly how being registered with a regulatory body made it even more important to ensure we were members of the BAMT. Should the HPCP take up a complaint process, their responsibility was not to the therapist, but to the members of the public, and that we needed to know our professional organisation could and would step up.

I also published a number of international authors, asking them to comment on the profession in their local contexts, thus broadening the scope of collaboration for a ‘British’ Journal, encouraging us to be less insular, and feel more part of our nearby European community, as well as with those from further afar. Perhaps this was in part stimulated by my wondering about the journal’s title and how, like a passport, our pioneering colleagues in Northern Ireland might feel forgotten¹. Sometimes these things are difficult to talk about, and in relation to this, Tonnius Timmerman’s personal view of collective trauma in Germany remains a significant article ([‘Transgenerational interactions in music therapy’](#), 25/1, 2011).

Keen to encourage new writers, I instigated the Student Essay Prize in memory of Tony Wigram, our pioneer who did so much to bring the profession into a secure place. The first prize essay to appear was Rachel Bennett’s reflections on connecting theory and practice [‘Lighting the way:…’](#) (25/2, 2011). I am delighted that this innovation has continued under different editorships, and it is heartening to know that it would have been close to Tony’s heart, resonating with his unique gift for mentorship. I was keen that people felt opportunities were there to step into new areas. I made a point of inviting more recently qualified colleagues to provide review feedback about submitted articles, and deliberately included therapists who were not yet authors. Much of this kind of editorial work goes on quietly under each editorship, but it lays the ground for ensuring we are always in a state of becoming as a

¹ “Great Britain and Northern Ireland” appears on passports, not “UK”. I have always regretted that the Belfast conference had to be online, because it meant attendees missed out on experiencing the warm local welcome in a fully embodied way.

profession. However, it is also important not to throw the baby out with the bathwater and omit or reject our very experienced mentors. This would cause splits in the profession, and we are stronger when we work together, which includes acknowledging our generations.

I have had the privilege of watching the profession change across what is now more than four decades since I qualified. Many of these changes are welcome, such as having a protected title, the training programmes actively collaborating together via their committee, new specialisms, and the growth of research, theoretical and clinical publications. However, we also need to keep an eye out for where we are heading, in such challenging times, with heightened anxiety world-wide, where social media can have a malignant influence, and where complaints can become politicised rather than explored and thought about. It is far easier these days to be caught up in larger or big group dynamics, and our reactions to this can take us away from the core of our work: that very delicate, careful, detailed listening to others, and the collaboration and hard work we all need to do on ourselves personally and privately to keep this balance.

The BJMT has a very important role in steadying the professional ship, where we have the opportunity to share ideas and thoughts, and to publish them to provide a wider reach for discussion, and hopefully, respectful critique. It is a mark of professional adulthood to be able to disagree without falling out, or, if we fall out, to repair this. I believe the BJMT should also stand as a separate entity and that editorial teams remain free to move the journal forward, with only a lighter touch from advisory bodies, and certainly no interference about content. It is in this way that we show our trust in our colleagues to steer the public face of what music therapists do in the UK nationally and internationally. It should be free from politics, but able to respond to what is happening in the UK and how it is impacting every individual professional. With diversity comes responsibility to not only have our own voices, but to also listen to others. I am grateful to the editors for creating this space to view the journal in such an important way, by looking into our valuable archives.

A final thought that relates both to the work of a therapist and also that of a writer, from many decades ago:

"We rarely realise that there is a pre-knowledge within us while we wait for illumination."

Reik 1948, p.172

Reik reminds us of the professional knitting together of ourselves via reading the literature, or writing for publication, or for presentation, that includes a continuous re-integration of the past. It is, of course, the day-to-day bread and butter of the work of a music therapist, and part of keeping this work moving forward is not only our access to new writing, but our debt of gratitude to our ancestors.

2012-2024 – (Re)Digging the Opened Ground

Tessa Watson, Alison Barrington and Kay Sobey write:

*‘... between my finger and thumb, the squat pen rests, I’ll dig with it’
(Heaney, 2002 Digging in Opened Ground (34/1)).*

Tessa (Editor between 2012 – 2024) and Alison (Editor between 2012 – 2024) worked closely alongside Kay Sobey (Editor between 2012 – 2018), Philippa Derrington (Editor between 2018 - 2021), Emma Millard (Editor between 2021 – 2023) and Donald Wetherick (Editor from 2021 onwards). For all of us, working closely as an editorial team provided opportunities to edit and publish innovative and challenging submissions with collaborative support. Whilst each editor brought their own talents, Kay’s ability to offer sharp insights and clear, detailed editing was one of the many reasons she received the BAMT lifetime achievement award in 2018.

Of course, this is not the first time that editors have ‘looked back’ at the Journal. Hoskyns, Ansdell, Procter and Sutton took the opportunity to do so for the 20th anniversary ([‘Looking back:....’](#), 29/2, 2015) which followed on from a thorough content analysis of previous BJMT articles (Tsisis et al., [‘What does the past tell us?...’](#) 28/1, 2014).

Whilst it is not possible here to consider all the articles published, we found ourselves reflecting on the broader issues that flowed through the journal and caught our attention as editors. We spent time considering notions of the past, the present and the future and as Sobey wrote in one Editorial: ‘There are some recurring themes, developments and recapitulations, old debates that lie low for a while then re-emerge invigorated.’ ([‘Editorial’](#), 27/2, 2013:3). So, this is a review that looks both backwards and forwards.

Articles that have encouraged the readership to take a step back and consider where the profession is situated have been powerful reminders of the journey of music therapy in the UK. The inclusion of keynote speeches by Anna Maratos ([‘MTUK: Collaboration for the future:....’](#) 28/2, 2014), Alexia Quin ([‘Embedding innovation into the counterpoint of music therapy today:....’](#), 28/2, 2014) and Stephen Sandford ([‘Music Therapists marching, running and playing with the beat:....’](#), 30/2, 2016) given at the BAMT conferences provided a sense of invigoration and forward movement. Similarly, guest editors and invited contributors have shared their experiences with grace. Leslie Bunt, in an extended review of Kenneth Aigen’s *The Study of Music Therapy* (2014) took a deep, considered look at the profession ([‘Looking inside the profession with Kenneth Aigen’](#), 29/1, 2015) and Helen Odell-Miller gave much food for thought with her article on [‘The Role, function and identity of Music Therapists in the 21st century’](#) (30/1, 2016). This work was followed by a significant survey profiling the

music therapy workforce in the UK (Carr, Tsiris & Reigersberg [‘Understanding the present, revisioning the future:...’](#), 31/2, 2017). More recent thought-provoking papers that have reflected the changing music therapy profession in the UK have included Martin Lawes’ article [‘Trends of differentiation and integration in UK music therapy and the spectrum of music-centredness’](#) (35/1, 2021) and Donald Wetherick’s article [‘Gatekeeping and fence-making: Themes and discourses of musicianship in UK music therapy training’](#) (38/2, 2024). Stirring up discussion and discourse is a vital part of the work of the Journal.

Looking back has also included moments with heavy hearts. Obituaries of [Jean Eisler](#) (31/2, Jacqueline Robarts), [Mercedes Pavlicevic](#) (32/2, Gary Ansdell) and [Colwyn Trevarthan](#) (38/2, Jacqueline Robarts) all written by friends and colleagues are poignant moments for the BJMT. The introduction of the Tony Wigram Essay Prize in memory of another much loved and valued colleague gave opportunities for students and graduates at the beginning of their journey into music therapy writing. We would like to acknowledge everyone who submitted their writing for the Tony Wigram Essay Prize during our Editorship, and all those who won: Bethan Fitzsimons ([‘Approaching music therapy in a different country:...’](#), 30/2, 2016), Lucy Dindoyal ([‘In the therapist’s head and heart’:...’](#), 32/2, 2018), Ali Rowley ([‘Don’t forget your oxygen mask!...’](#), 35/1, 2021) and Alan Wells ([‘Finding a pathway through music therapy:...’](#), 37/2, 2023).

Explorations of the profession of music therapy have been balanced by articles across a broad range of practice and saw some writing about developing or emerging areas of practice and role including medical and intensive care, trauma, systemic work, domestic violence, brain injury, palliative care, eating disorders and bipolar disorder, and aspects such as note writing. One aspect of writing about music therapy is, to quote Gary Ansdell, ‘the Music Therapist’s dilemma’: the difficulty of conveying music therapy work in words (see [‘Music Therapist’s Dilemma’](#), 15/1, 2001). However, articles on music have included topics such as songwriting, (Bent, Wetherick and Carr, [‘Filling the void with melody’...’](#), 37/2, 2023), rock bands (Tuastad and Stige, [‘Music as a way out:...’](#), 32/1, 2018), silence, (Sutton, [‘Silences on the edge of dreams’](#), 37/2, 2023) and improvising as dreaming (Lawes, [‘On improvisation as dreaming...’](#), 34/1, 2020) and are keen reminders of the importance of our craft. We noticed during our time as Editors that the number of research articles increased, with the number of case studies diminishing. We often pondered why this might be the case, as case studies are such an important part of documenting the state of the art and are useful to so many practitioners. We encourage more descriptive and discursive writing too for the enjoyment and relevance to practitioners who can relate their reading specifically to their own practice.

During our Editorship BJMT included three special editions. Guest Editors Amelia Oldfield and Rachel Darnley-Smith headed up editions on music therapy with families ([31/1](#), 2017) and exploring interdisciplinary exchange ([33/2](#), 2019); both were fascinating editions that

allowed an area of work to be explored in depth. The need to reflect on cultural issues that surround music therapy work has been embedded within many articles, for example [Short](#) (28/1, 2014); [Radoje](#) (28/2, 2014); [Annesley](#) (28/2, 2014); [Laing](#) (29/2, 2015); [Tuastad and Stige](#) (32/1, 2018), [Roman](#) (30/1, 2016) and [Sands-Smith](#) (36/2, 2022). The Editors wanted to centralise this topic and thus the third special edition specifically focussed on issues around EDI. This issue ([36/1](#), 2022) provided a '... platform to hear more about important work happening in all areas of the profession' (Millard p.3). It included three significant articles; ['Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy as an Opportunity for Consciousness Raising in the Music Therapy Profession'](#) by Beth Pickard, ['Autism is a way of being'](#) by Hilary Davies, and Tara Roman's paper ['Developing a research approach to explore therapeutic relationships with children and young people with complex needs: A critical reflection'](#). As the Editorial team recognised that issues around EDI were requiring more space than could be afforded by one edition, the following year another edition had an EDI focus. BJMT edition [37/1](#) (2023) included an exploration of the accessibility of MA Music Therapy training by [Daryl Lindo](#), [Francis Myerscough's](#) article about (in)visibility and (in)audibility, and [Davina Vencatasamy's](#) reflections on racial issues within the music therapy profession with particular reference to Brexit.

Situating the service users at the heart of our work has become a welcome and important shift within articles. Pickard's paper (['A critical reflection on the Health and Care Professions Standards of Proficiency:...'](#), 34/2, 2020) is profoundly impactful as it offers an '... attempt to understand the perpetuation of medicalised perspectives in the profession and the potential friction between critical disability studies and music therapy' (p.82). We also recognise Roman (['Were they better today?'...](#), 30/1, 2016); Wilson (['Considering the ways music therapists are working...'](#), 32/1, 2018); and Annesley et al. (['Parents' perspectives on their children's music therapy:...'](#), 34/1, 2020) as three further papers that have specifically centralised the voices of service users in their writing.

So far, we have only commented on the articles, and only a small number of these - we urge you to re-visit past editions for much rich material of relevance to varied practice. However, there is much more to the BJMT and to the work that Editors undertake. Book reviews have been a crucial part of each edition, offering direction and useful summaries to readers in search of a book relevant to their practice. It is important to thank all who have accepted the opportunity (or perhaps the challenge!) to write these reviews. In the early Editions, TextWatch was another key part of the BJMT with John Strange presenting a thorough overview of current and relevant information. This service is likely to be considered entirely redundant now, when we all search for and access material almost exclusively online. However, in its time it was a most useful service for Music Therapists and we thank John Strange for this work.

An enjoyable part of the team's work in this period was to encourage new writers. The Editorial team delivered writing workshops during BAMT conferences and abroad. These have encouraged and provided practical advice to new authors; it's not always easy to know where to start if you want to write. The team also hosted an international journal meeting at the EMTC conference in Edinburgh (2022) where editors from around Europe shared developments, challenges and joys.

One significant change for BJMT during our time as Editors was the move to being online in 2016. Perhaps this was fitting for the year when the BAMT conference was titled 'Re-visioning our voice: Resourcing music therapy for contemporary needs.' The move online meant that the journal reached a more international readership and with that came quite an influx of international submissions (nearly always with a research focus) which frequently did not dovetail with a UK approach to music therapy. Within editorial team meetings we discussed what makes the journal *British*, a debate that we suggest should continue. As times change, there is still work to be done. How can the Editors be supported by an appropriate critical team? More inclusion of service users' voices is vital as are the voices of the diverse range of Music Therapists within the UK and abroad. Looking ahead we hope that the journal will continue to provide a high-quality journal for British music therapy whilst embracing and drawing upon new ways of narrating and reflecting upon work. And so we end our look back at our time as BJMT Editors with gratitude for all the authors, all the hours of reading and editing, and engaging with willing peer reviewers, the discussions, the encounters, and all the fun, and companionship that flowed during those twelve years.

And next year's words await another voice

Little Gidding, Four Quartets (Eliot 1944: 39)

Conclusion

As current editors we are delighted that contributors have offered not just their memories of editions past but also constructive critiques of the current state of the profession and the BJMT. Together with the recent BAMT survey of its publications, this retrospective helps prepare the ground for a new stage in the development of the journal. We look forward to another review in ten years time when we too may be able to reflect on articles as yet unpublished, and a profession that continues to grow and develop in creative and unexpected ways.

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Author Biographies

Professor Gary Ansdell is a music therapist, author and researcher. He is an honorary professor at Exeter University and an Associate of Nordoff & Robbins (UK) where he is convenor of the PhD programme. His latest book (with Tia DeNora) - *Caring for Music: Musical Life, Late Life* - will be published by Routledge in 2026.

Dr Julie Sutton is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Belfast, having retired from music therapy practice during the Covid lockdown in 2020. She is a past BAMT Trustee, Head of Training for Nordoff Robbins (London) and EMTC Vice President.

Dr Simon Procter is a music therapist and researcher and is currently Director of Converge and Professor of Creativity and Mental Health at York St John University. He was formerly Director of Education and Research at Nordoff and Robbins.

Tessa Watson is a music therapist and trainer. She is Associate Professor and Programme Leader for the MA Music Therapy at University of Roehampton, and an HCPC partner. Her current music therapy work is with Alexander Devine Children's Hospice Service. She is a founder of HENCoP (The Health Education Network for Co-Production) and has been an active committee member of both BAMT and EMTC. Tessa's most recent book (with Cathy Warner) - *Contemporary Issues in Music Therapy Training: A Resource for Trainees, Trainers and Practitioners* - was published by Routledge in 2025.

Dr Alison Barrington is a music therapist and trainer and an Honorary Member of the Institute of Mental Health Research at University of York. She has worked in the NHS promoting art, drama and music therapy.

Kay Sobey trained as a music therapist in 1985. She co-convened the Roehampton programme from 1990 until 2010 during which time the programme developed from Diploma to a degree at Masters level. Throughout she maintained some clinical work, mainly with young children and families. Kay contributed to the development of the profession through her work on BAMT committees. She was awarded the BAMT lifetime achievement award in 2018.

Dr Donald Wetherick is a trainer and music therapist, and a co-editor of BJMT. He teaches at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama London and works in adult mental health for East London NHS Foundation Trust.

