

Full-Length Article

An International Discourse on ‘Music and Medicine’Efthymios Papatzikis¹¹ Oslo Metropolitan University, Oslo, Norway**Abstract**

The 7th International Conference of the International Association for Music & Medicine was held on May 28 - 29, 2022. Meetings and presentations from Greek and international invited speakers took place in person and through live streaming May 28 to May 29, 2022. Additionally, a week of online-only presentations took place May 30 to June 3, 2022. Athens is one of the world's oldest cities, offering centuries-old history to be explored and enjoyed. According to Plato, one of the first schools of music education was founded by the people of Crete followed by the musical schools of Athens, where students were taught to sing and play the lyre. Many delegates from across the globe were honored to meet in this magical and historical city. Below, conference delegate Dr. Efthymios Papatzikis reviews and reflects upon some of the conference highlights.

Keywords: *IAMM, Conference, Music and Medicine*

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Since antiquity, music's role in addressing illness is noteworthy. Approximately, 35,000 years ago we find evidence of music being used in healing rituals [1], while much later, Pythagoras, in the 6th century BC, in Ancient Greece, has been historically considered to be one of the first to systematically employ music to treat disease [2]. In the same vein of practice, both Hippocrates – the father of medicine – and Aristotle, a few centuries later, used music as a vehicle to approach and treat bodily and psychological ailments. Of course, we are not short of examples in the years, decades, and centuries, that followed – showcasing the importance music has played, as a valuable tool to support and augment healing [3].

Fast forward to our contemporary time, and while not yet fully 'tamed' or understood at a precision level as perhaps other tools, or methodologies employed in a clinical context, music is still strongly infused and embedded in the practice of medicine, with a growing number of clinical and academic institutions significantly investing in its admitted 'power' and its rendering of evidence-based results. In this manner, practical follow-ups on its historical dynamics show music's efficacy that often supports pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions in improving health and well-being.

In this context, and in a continuous effort to convey knowledge and present the state-of-the-art of the Music and Medicine scientific field, the 7th International Conference of the International Association for Music and Medicine (I.A.M.M.) took place in Athens, establishing for seven full days the domain's beating heart in Greece. The conference was held between the 28th of May and the 3rd of June 2022 in a double hybrid format – with two days of physical presentations inclusive of online worldwide broadcasting and five days of online-only presentations with worldwide broadcasting. It was attended with undiminished interest by more than 400 delegates from all over the world.

During the Conference, four keynote speeches were presented by distinguished professionals and scholars, including Dr Athanasios Dritsas, Prof. John Ioannidis, and Profs. Joanne Loewy and Athanasios Fokas. These presentations covered the topics of the *Music's Role in Exercise, Research Reproducibility and Transparency in Music and Medicine, Integrative Therapies in Music and Music Therapy in Medicine*, as well as *Music and the Unconscious*, setting in this way a much-needed interdisciplinary scope on the content of the conference.

There also were three round tables, organized by esteemed scientists from many different parts of the world. The round tables' discussions ranged from initially bringing up the *Biology and Psychoanalysis on Music* topic, continued by elaborating the *Cosmic Harmony, Creation and Art* idea, while concluding with a more technical discussion on neuroscientific, multimodal (fMRI, fNIRS, EEG-ABR) approaches on how to study newborns in clinical contexts (*Music and Brain Studies*

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on Newborns). In total, more than 150 presentations and posters, eight workshops, eight Special Interest Groups and a Plenary Session populated the full week, covering multidisciplinary, multi-modal thematic content on how music lives or could live in the medical practice, and how its benefiting potential can be harvested in the clinical, psychological, neuro-rehabilitative and neuro-developmental contexts. Noteworthy also was the pre-conference neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) training, which brought music therapists, physicians, and clinicians together to partake in Tier I of the *First Sounds: Rhythm, Breath, and Lullaby*. This training focused on both the theoretical and practical aspects of music therapy in the NICU while delivering opportunities for participants to approach hands-on and observe the contextual parameters and biopsychological procedures taking place for pre-mature infants right at the hospital in the Helena Venizelou NICU.

Although the binary format of the conference was risky – in terms of organization – it deemed to be a wise choice in protecting public health from the risk of spreading COVID-19 coronavirus disease at this time. The mixture of optional live or virtual attendance seemingly allowed for provisions of inclusion, that many more delegates could access and enjoy the content of the conference, in the manner they chose, amidst a still slow aftermath of pandemic concerns. Of course, it seemed like a quite difficult task for the I.A.M.M team to bring into fruition. And for this, the conference Chairs, Thanassis Dritsas and Vera Brandes, along with the rest of the organization committee should be applauded. On the one hand, due to the intense experiential and interactive nature of all the previous conference needs they had to consider, and on the other hand, due to the task of juggling the high-level of technical requirements that were embedded in bringing to fruition such an extensive and complex conference structure. Despite any difficulties and challenges, the binary format seemed to work smoothly and better than expected as captured by the interest of the many delegates in attendance.

The extensive participation and worldwide inclusion certainly brought a feeling of content in the aftermath of the online part of the scientific gathering, too, realizing that even the most difficult part of the conference – the artistic activities – was successfully conveyed both on-site and online, respectively. The conference included two coffee concerts, one by the baroque violist, Hanna Pakkala, and a second by the violinist Katalin Kertész, as well as a fantastic concert demonstration on ancient Greek instruments by *Les Lyristes*. These performances, within the schedule, strategically seemed to link the past with the present, the divine with the orthological, the desired with the evidence-based knowledge, bringing in this way the worlds of music and medicine together in the best possible interdisciplinary manner and framework.

Like any other field of interdisciplinary science, music and medicine comprise a dynamic partnership between various professions, multi-faceted knowledge, and related practices. In this vein of understanding, during the proceedings, a particular emphasis was placed on the intersectional goals that musicians and physicians can achieve in this interdisciplinary scientific field to benefit patients. Thus, and as expected, the profound contribution of music therapy was communicated as a primary professional path in the field which successfully brings music into the medical practice. On this very basis, various manifestations of music therapy studies and projects were fervently presented, bringing to the fore, research on music-based interventions; for movement disorders; telehealth music and psychotherapy services; community music pedagogies and engagements in healthcare; on music-based practices in the NICU; assessment in music therapy; music's role to manage and soothe chronic pain; music's potential to provide quality time and a sense of well-being for patients with dementia or trauma – to name a few.

It should be also mentioned that particularly emphasized in the overall presentations and discussions was the need for constant vigilance and attention toward infusing more fundamental methodological and technical knowledge into the framework of music and medicine in professional practice. The assertion of studying more the fields of neuroscience, biology, pharmacology, psychology, psychiatry, and sociology in connection to music was accepted as of paramount importance. This is essential as we consider the emerging deep infiltration the growing field of music and medicine has been showcasing especially within the last few years in clinical, academic, and wider arenas such as within social contexts (i.e., seen as medical practice, medical education, or social contribution respectively). In this direction, the practical support of the official education institutions and states are growing in willingness, agreeing to be a fundamental factor of advancement and stability in the music and medical field. This is exemplary and will further allow for the establishment and continuance of more viable research projects, thematic pluralism, and dialogue in what needs to be achieved. It was also pointed out that recruitment of more interdisciplinary, yet methodologically clear specialization is needed to reach precision and sustainable medical outcomes.

Overall, the proceedings of the 7th I.A.M.M. International Conference helped to consolidate present themes, as it captured the experiences, concerns, new trends and knowledge that appear in the clinical, academic, and social contexts of the interdisciplinary framework of music and medicine. And in light of this, the presentations were approached and received as having a direct impact on the patients' and healthcare provider's everyday life, with healing expectations, intentions, and well-being. By this token, the impossibility of any secure

prediction for the future, and the dystopian age we live in, make scholarly efforts like this an extraordinary 'springboard' to step on for trying to advance the field's inclusion in society. As result, some new weight in the conference's benefiting oeuvre was assigned, following what was admittedly seen in general for the specific scientific field's contribution all over the world throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, too. As the President of the I.A.M.M. - Dr Suzanne Hanser - said, *"given the many challenges facing all of us around the world, we are most grateful that the in-person portion of this year's conference was able to take place here in Athens, Greece and that we could gather together at last. And now, as the world begins to emerge from the pandemic, I am convinced that I.A.M.M. has a significant role to play in bringing music and harmony more integrally into our lives. We are the people who apply music in the service of health, medicine, and wellbeing – we are the people who offer beauty and awe at times of uncertainty – we are the people who are committed to fill the lives of others with salubrious music. May we all combine our various professional backgrounds, cultures, abilities, and talents, as we explore opportunities to enhance creativity, communication, and wellbeing through music. We understand so well how music can serve as a conduit for healthier, more peaceful, and joyous living. Building on the diversity of our perspectives, specialties, and models within our global community, many of which were represented at this I.A.M.M. 2022 International Conference, I.A.M.M. members are in a position to participate in the new world order, whereby music and the arts will not simply come back, but become*

essential – bringing meaning, empathy, self-expression, togetherness, awe, and beauty to a post-COVID era. May we live this vision through our collaborations and collegueship."

Wanting to reach and study the proceedings of the 7th I.A.M.M International Conference in more detail, one should know that all presented material is hosted on the official I.A.M.M. website for two years since the conference's conclusion [4]. In the meantime, the entire Music and Medicine community awaits with a force of optimism and dedication the next official meet-up taking place in the next couple of years, to further enjoy and declare advancements in the field.

References

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