

## Chapter 7

# The Functions of Music in the Lives of Older People

Music reproduces for us the most intimate essence, the tempo and the energy, of our spiritual being; our tranquillity and our restlessness, our animation and our discouragement, our vitality and our weakness – all, in fact, of the fine shades of dynamic variation of our inner life.

Roger Sessions (Shapiro, 1978:198)

### Introduction

In this chapter the data are presented specifically in relation to how the participants use music in their lives to achieve desired outcomes. The functions of music are closely aligned with the meaning and perception of music. However, the focus of this chapter is concerned with how music is used and constructed by the informants to achieve personal objectives. The objectives may be as simple as engaging music to relieve loneliness, stress, depression, or to maintain a sense of 'meaningfulness'.

Music has multiple functions just as it has been demonstrated to have many meanings. This chapter shows how music functions as a stimulus, challenge, connection, entertainment and therapy. Also discussed in this chapter is the different ways music is used by the informants to facilitate, know, and express

spirituality. This includes the enhancement of spiritual and religious expression as both a private and communal function.

**Figure 7.1** summarises the different functions of music as identified by the informants. They include: well-being, connection, stimulus, time management, health and spirituality. The second column highlights the different ways that music facilitates the function. For example, informants use music as a specific function to improve or feel a sense of well-being. The ways well-being are experienced and can be enhanced by music include psychologically, physiologically and spiritually.

### **Music and well-being**

The previous two chapters have shown how music is perceived and experienced by the informants. The data have also demonstrated how music contributes to the informant's sense of well-being. Music for many informants affects their psychological and physiological state. It is not surprising that when people understand the meaning and potential of music that they use it to achieve desired outcomes. Music can function to produce a desired outcome by either listening or participating in the making of music. For example, to reduce stress, induce a feeling of relaxation, improve or enhance self esteem, maintain a sense of independence by providing choices in life, or it could be promoting and contributing to the feeling of 'meaningfulness' (as describe by Mildred in Chapter 6).

Figure 7.1: The functions of music in the lives of older people

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•Functions	•Effects
•Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Psychological</li> <li>•Physiological</li> <li>•Spiritual</li> </ul>
•Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Linking life styles</li> <li>•Family</li> <li>•Sharing with others</li> <li>•Beauty &amp; aesthetics</li> <li>•Soul, spirit, inner-self</li> <li>•Memory- associations</li> </ul>
•Stimulus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Intellectual</li> <li>•Challenging</li> <li>•Life-long learning</li> <li>•Discovery</li> <li>•Exhilaration</li> <li>•Excitement</li> </ul>
•Time Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Time management</li> <li>•Escapism</li> <li>•Entertainment</li> </ul>
•Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Physical</li> <li>•Cognitive</li> <li>•Distraction (Pain, loneliness, stress)</li> </ul>
•Spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Private/collective</li> <li>•Aesthetics</li> <li>•Expressing</li> <li>•Experiencing</li> <li>•Facilitating</li> </ul>

It is interesting to note that a physiological effect can occur simultaneously or follow a psychological change upon an individual. For example, a person who may be stressed can become relaxed by listening to music. Relaxation occurs as a combination of distraction and engagement by the individual, usually because they are doing something that he/she derives much joy and pleasure from. For most people, the experience of music is devoid of stress and results in a pleasurable occupation of listening or engagement, although a few informants stated that they became emotional when they listen to certain music because of its associations with particular people, places or events in their life. For example, for Zillah, music had a strong association with her late husband whom she nursed in his later life when he was suffering from dementia and Parkinson's disease. Music often reminded her of many memories both happy and sad. Music had become for her solace and company whenever she was alone.

*And I can listen to it now and become emotional, but, yes, it is my company now I'm on my own...So maybe our memories are triggered first by music in relationship to memory than to other things, so music is important.*

For Keith, Robert and Julie, music was used as a way of relaxing. By engaging or being immersed in music either by playing or listening, these older people could be distracted from stress and personal worries. This was expressed by the informants when they said:

*Just to be able to relax and listen to good music, just sort of drift off when you hear good music. (Keith)*

*I could be stressed, let's say, from some meeting or whatever, and I will come in and there are only two composers I can play, One is Mozart, it's usually Mozart, or the other is Bach. (Robert)*

*I certainly had done some good for myself because it is relaxing isn't it. Any worries you may have, any hang ups you may have at the time, you can get thoroughly immersed in music, especially performance, I mean for a while there's nothing to worry you. (Julie)*

For professional performers, the perception of stress and performing music publicly was often considered more of an adrenalin rush than a physical or emotion stress. Donald explained:

*...they say what about when you have a concert, before a concert and you're nervous. Well that's not stress, that's adrenalin because you walk on, start, and that's it.*

An example of how music provides a psychological or physiological effect was revealed in the informant's accounts of how they use music to help them sleep. In this case, music was used as a therapy function by the informants so that they could feel relaxed enough to fall asleep. Several informants, including Stan, Joan and Frank spoke of how they used music therapeutically to overcome their sense of sleep deprivation. For Stan, it was a case of playing a specialised tranquillity tape, for Joan it was a matter of being involved in music to the point of distraction from her problem of sleeplessness.

*I've got a tape of David Summers and it's a tranquillity tape, and at night I often put that on, ...and I'm usually asleep before it gets to the end of the first side, I'm gone. (Stan)*

*I can't get that degree of relaxation to go to sleep. So as with small children who've got a problem, you distract them don't you? So I realised that distracting was what I needed and so I have a little walkman that I put on and listen, and after a while I enjoy the listening and it takes my thoughts away from all the other things that are buzzing around and then I got to sleep it may*

*still be three quarters of an hour to and hour and I'm gradually relaxing and feeling sleepy. (Joan)*

For Frank, music is such a passion that he enjoyed hearing it prior to sleeping and this helped him to relax.

*I'm almost possessed by it, because I just love it. It's so important to me. I'll have it on day and night. I find it helpful to have a little bit on before going to sleep at night. I find it a calming thing.*

Music can function as a way of people feeling good about themselves and developing greater self-esteem and confidence. Several informants spoke of using music in this way. For some, music facilitated confidence and self-esteem in their schooling days, and for others provided status among their peers. For others, it has facilitated a sense of purpose and community contribution in their retirement years. For example, many of the informants who now work as programmers and presenters in community radio, or in the case of Don, who is a retired professional singer and now sings to entertain older citizens living in residential care.

For Robert, music was a talent that he discovered in his adolescent years. After being encouraged by a teacher to sing publicly in an eisteddfod, he soon realised that singing was something that he was good at and he consciously used it to build his confidence.

*...after a month, he (singing teacher) put me in an eisteddfod and I won it. I was absolutely amazed I didn't know what I did, but obviously someone saw that I had something there to offer and develop, and so that helped build my confidence. The more you do it (singing), the more confident you become.*

Eileen and Dennis both realised their musical ability when they were at school. They quickly learnt that music could be used as a way of gaining attention and recognition from teachers and other students. Whereas, for Don, music was a way of building self-esteem and gaining attention from others.

*Because I could play by ear, I can remember one morning for example, the person who was supposed to play the piano for the school assembly in the morning hadn't turned up and there was no music book for anything, but I found that I could play a hymn just by ear, and that gave me tremendous sort of kudos, but also a feeling oh! I can do that! Music helped provide a sense of self worth which sport didn't do. The school was very sport oriented too. You know the heroines were those who were in the first Lacrosse 15. (Eileen)*

*...this was something I was good at so therefore I must get at it and be better at it. Not that I really had to do very much work because it was very easy to be very much better than anybody else because nobody learnt to play the piano in those days, never learnt music. And if they did, then it was in a very peculiar way in our modern sense, anybody who could actually play properly was something quite extraordinary really. (Dennis)*

*Well, I was an only child and, as I say, I was no good at sports and I needed something to boost my self-esteem. It just made me feel ... oh, I don't like to use the word 'important' but I suppose I was one of those people that like get a little bit of attention and by singing to people you could get a bit of attention. (Don)*

Several informants spoke of how music served the function of providing choice in their life and contributing to the maintenance of independence. The informants felt that this was especially important in terms of their well-being as they grew older. Having choices and maintaining a degree of independence was something that many participants thought they would be denied if they were living in residential care. As Pam stated:

*I guess a lot (music) would be in my head, I hope. And when I'm even older and I'm in hospital, I hope that there is enough music in my brain to carry me through. I must have music every day and be able to choose what I want to listen to. I'd go crazy in a nursing home if there were no music! (Pam)*

The data also show that music is used by informants as a way of feeling useful and maintaining a sense of 'meaningfulness' in life. The example of Mildred has already been cited, along with John, Joan, Noreen, David, John, Julie and Phil who give their time to community music radio programming or music administration activities. Music provides them with ways of being purposefully occupied. Involvement in music activities was also viewed as a way of giving something back to other people, a way of sharing, and being engaged with something that they feel passionate about.

For Fred, music was a facilitator of pleasure and enjoyment that both he and others could share. Part of the sharing experience for Fred was the use of his skills and musical talent to provide pleasure for others. He also made the point that musical skills could provide the individual with a sense of satisfaction by either being engaged singularly, or when providing pleasure for others.

*...but it's something you've got and something you can do something with, and if you can make use of it, you're getting enjoyment yourself and possibly giving enjoyment to others.*

Whereas for Joan, music was important in being able to help others. This included helping people learn, feel well, or even experience a greater sense of spiritual expression. Music for Joan was largely about sharing her knowledge and talent with others.



*...well its just like with my radio program in terms of helping people. As a teacher I never thought of myself as a teacher, but an agent to help people learn. And that's how I feel about my programs, and that's how I feel about presenting music as part of the church service. Its a facilitation I think, its not an ego thing.*

While music therapy has become a specialist area of therapy and is used in a particular context, many informants consciously used music as a self type applied therapy. This occurred when the individual listened to, or was engaged in music making activities and consciously used music to help achieve a desired psychological and physiological outcome. This outcome could be many things, although the most common was distraction from pain, discomfort or stress. An example of this self-applied music therapy was Eileen with her eye surgery. The pain was a little more excruciating than she had expected because of the local anaesthetic. To overcome the stress and pain she internally sang songs to herself to be distracted from the ordeal.

*...for example, this eye operation, it was done under a local anaesthetic, and I was sort of singing songs and so on to myself, inwardly, because it was more painful than it should have been.*

Another example was Pam, who liked to listen to music when she was at the dentist and anticipated that she might experience pain or personal discomfort.

*If I'm at the dentist or the podiatrist that hurts, I think about music and I can endure. I mean it's not bad pain, but it's discomfort. It helps me in those situations too.*

For Joan, music was an important restoration therapy after she had her breakdown and was unable to concentrate or read. Music helped her restore her

peace of mind. It is interesting to note Joan's stamina to play Bach preludes at the piano, yet was drained of energy and concentration by all other activities.

*One of the things that I found about this breakdown was that I couldn't read. I couldn't stay focused, couldn't concentrate on reading. On the other hand if I chose to sit at the piano stool and play music that I really liked, like Bach's preludes or something like that, I could sit there for an hour. Now this is a very interesting phenomenon, and I think it's to do with the left and right hand hemisphere's of the brain. And it's almost as if it was the right hand side that had been over used, but the left hand side had been under used and that had been built up.*

Elizabeth commented on the use of music to achieve a feeling of equilibrium in her life. Music could provide relief and distraction when Elizabeth was feeling emotional and physical pain. It could also give her a feeling of inspiration and feeling well.

*I'm a pretty healthy lady, but if I'm sick or I've busted my toe or done something where there's like a sense of deep pain or a chronic pain, my reaction usually is to use music because I'm into self healing techniques and prayer. But to use a favourite sort of chord or to use some majestic sort of combination of musical notes that inspires me, and that does induce well feeling. So of course in effect, it's self applied music therapy.*

For other people, music could be applied as a way of helping and managing the care and well-being of others, such as those suffering from dementia or Parkinson's disease. This was the case with Marie and Zillah. Both women used music to help their husbands in their struggle with dementia and Parkinson's disease. Marie used music to accompany her husband's massage session and to help him relax, whereas Zillah spoke of music providing her ailing husband with a sense of reality, intimacy and physical stimulation. In these two particular cases,

music functioned as reality therapy by bringing back a sense normalcy for the person with dementia, and helping them to feel less agitated and confused.

*Yes, I play certain quiet pieces while I'm doing a bit of massage on my husband and that can put him to sleep. But you've got to be a bit careful what you play.*  
(Marie)

*...we danced a lot and remember the old tunes, and of course we shared them a lot in our later years, even if it meant dancing around the kitchen when we felt like it, you know...He had Parkinson's for six years and dementia for two... Well, it was very important to us, and especially to Gordon (husband). It helped so much getting through each day. I mean, there were times when he'd look at me and say, 'Where's my wife?' and I said, 'I'm right here.' And he said, 'Not you, the other one.' So, I mean, you could laugh at that, but basically then music moves that sort of on. Seeing him relate to music was also helped me to feel comfortable.* (Zillah)

### **Music as a means of connection**

Music facilitates people being able to share and connect with others in an easy and non-threatening way. This may be in terms of friendships, or the sharing of a pleasurable activity. Through music, people can foster and maintain friendships. For some informants, this connection was facilitated by belonging to a particular music group or association, while for others, it was through the direct sharing of music with friends or a partner.

Margot spoke of how music helped build close friendships. Through music she has established long-standing friendships and enjoyed the sharing of music via attending concerts, listening to music and talking about it with friends.

*Yes, there has been a big connection with a few, a very close bond, Bunty and I particularly. We have been to everything together. Pam and I have done a lot of music together.*

Music has also been important in Eileen's life because it was through music that she met her husband. She and Neville have enjoyed singing in choirs and continue to share the intimacy of playing chamber music together every Sunday afternoon. Music for them has been important in making friends with people who share similar interests.

*Yes, apart from the fact that that's how I met Neville. He may have told you we met in the University Choral Society. And singing in a Choir until I had an operation on my throat, which wrecked my singing, that was also an important part of me. ...I quite enjoy running the Church Choir and being with people and so on. I have other ways of meeting people as well, but music has always been an important way of being with others.*

Elizabeth spoke about the need to share the joy of music with friends. The conversation of music is likely to arise when she first meets people because she uses music to assess whether she will have much in common and whether there is the likelihood of an ongoing friendship.

*But basically it comes back to your sort of people, so that it's very important for my well-being to share my joy of music with other people. Now if they respond or there is even a tiny, tiny twinkling diamond right at the end of a dark passageway in my reactions to a person, I'll tend to ask a question about it. So that when I'm meeting people, it wouldn't be unusual for me in an appropriate time of the conversation to ask if they were musically inclined. If you said that to a 70 year old, if you say it to a 20 year old, you say "Oh yeah, what do you listen to?", so that I would seek for that when I'm meeting new people, and most of my immediate circle of friends are fairly musically developed I suppose is a good word for it.*

It is interesting to note that many of the informants felt that music was so important in their lives that their choice of partners was influenced by whether or not they were also interested in music. For example, Mildred when speaking about the importance of music, stated:

*Oh yes, yes. I wasn't going to marry a man who wasn't interested in music. He'd have to have those qualities. And I waited for the one, the young man who had a very lovely singing voice.*

For some informants, music is used as a way of connecting to a particular lifestyle. The type of music one engages is both a personal and a public statement of who the individual is. It can also reflect one's aspirations and life ideals to others. Elizabeth stated how she saw music as part of her soul and as a chosen lifestyle. Music effected how she thinks, how she interacts with other people, and how she feels. She explains:

*Because I see music as part of one's soul. If one loves music, it becomes part, not just of total lifestyle, but I think also of the way you think. And as a result of thinking, that does lead into action. And some people might be listening to records in the old days, or listening to tapes, or listening to CD's now, or going to concerts, or it might just simply be something that's a little bit more nebulous but is still part of reality and that is you feel and think about it. And if it gets to that level, yes it is an integral part of one's being.*

For some people, music facilitated a way of interpreting and reviewing one's life, as in the case of Bob. For him music reflected a sense of growth and maturity in his life. Music is more than experiencing simple pleasures. It was how one experienced life and philosophically thinks. Bob described this as follows:

*Music adds that extra aspect to life that ennobles life... In my life however, I wanted more from music because it had to reflect I thought my border way of looking at things. With a lot of men though, they just want... they just like music because it's a pleasurable outlook into their life. It's like sitting out in the sun, while ever the suns there, it's a pleasant day and then when the sun's not there, they move in. But that's probably as much as they like out of music, but as far as I'm concerned, music must be more than that to me... I think the most important thing is probably to realise that somebody my age it does reflect a growth process, a sense of maturity over a period of years.*

For June, the music she listened to reflected a desired lifestyle. She specifically chose music that provided tranquillity now that the family had left home. June suffered from cancer and regularly underwent chemotherapy treatment. Music helped her to feel calm and relaxed.

*...And yeah, they're the things I much prefer to listen to now, maybe because my life is quieter and it suits my lifestyle. I couldn't stand the noisy, boisterous music that we used to have when the children were young because our life was much more boisterous....Well, I meditate to music. I have meditation tapes. And even without the Meditation tapes, I meditate to the music I play out here, and possibly that's why I choose the music that I do now because it suits my meditation.*

Music is specifically used by many of the informants to connect them with beauty and a sense of aesthetics in their life. Several informants equated this concept of beauty with God, a sunset, a landscape, flowers or a beachscape. For some informants, music was an easily accessible way to achieve beauty in their lives that may not have been possible because of transport or limited mobility. For example, Noreen who was 90 years old and now no longer drives, or Fred who was 87 years old and was now confined to a chair.

*In fact, there was a stage where I used to go to Anglesea about every fortnight with a friend. We both loved music dearly. I need to see that sea and I need to see the country side. And I need to have a vision beyond suburbia. But at least I still have music.*

Maureen spoke of how she found music engaging and provided her life with beauty. She often was distracted by music and could sit for hours listening to it. Julie also spoke of the need for beauty in her life and that she found beauty in music. She described how the experience was cerebral and emotional, and like all beautiful things had the capacity to effect one's senses. This was described by Maureen and Julie when they said:

*If I put that (CD) on, I would probably sit here and really take that it and I would listen to it for its own beauty'. (Maureen)*

*I want beauty, and I want planned reason behind it that doesn't take over, doesn't become just cerebral it takes over from the beauty of the sound. I want music to still be, well something that makes me cry. I don't want to cry but I use that as a point. (Julie)*

Music connects people with their unique life history. Many of the informants spoke of how they used music to facilitate access to their past through memory association. Many informants spoke of how they could remember the songs that they were first taught, or the fact that certain music reminded them of their childhood, courting days, or parenting.

Music can act as a postcard from previous times and provided people like Noreen and others with distinct memories of people and places. For example, Noreen, when she heard music that reminded her of countries she has visited.

*Well, they (music CDs) remind me of places I've been where I've been very happy. England and Greece and Spain. You hear something you recall which you heard it at a certain time in Greece or something like that, so that you get a refreshment of your memory of what you were doing and the sights you were seeing, and the beauty of what you were seeing. And the music together sort of combining them. It reminds me of friends.*

Donald spoke about the same experience. He used music to mentally revisit times past. For example, through music he recalled people, events, concerts and student lessons he had taught over the years.

*You see, there is a direct link back to that to your whole life...You don't get lost in it, you can sit back and recall and while you're doing that everything else is eliminated...Now, I remember the first time I heard Lawrence Tibbet in person, this tall man with this wonderful voice. I can still hear it, I can still remember his program. And then there are others later on in life, when I got to London, I went to the opera in London and especially Covent Garden, you heard some of these fine European singers, you know. The first Edinburgh Festival, the Vienna Opera...all those wonderful names and I heard them. And that is still very vivid in my mind.*

Joan spoke of the importance of music and its memory associations in terms of how it significantly related to the 'warm spots' in people's lives. It is for this reason that Joan suggested that music should be seriously considered and used by those people who are caring for older people. This was especially important for those who may have lost their independence and right of choice because of their limited abilities and faculties.

*...oh yes what will give people pleasure because it relates to the warm spots of their life...and that sort of thing is recreating a time in their life, its very important that people who are older, who've got wrinkles, and are grey, and sometimes very limited in their abilities, be seen behind all that they are still the person they once were. They're not a different species, they've just got this*



*(age) added on the top and their feelings are the same and the music can awaken feelings. Like perfumes can too, because it acts on a different part of our physiology and our brain.*

### **Music as stimulus, challenge and life long learning**

Most of the informants stated that they used music as a form of stimulus in their lives. This could involve critically listening to music, analysing its structure and organisation, participating in the making or performance of music, or learning about the musicological aspects of composers, compositions, or musical history. As already stated in Chapter 6, in the case of John, music fulfilled a need to keep his mind active and alert. For others such as Bob, music fulfilled an intellectual stimulus, and he could sociologically analyse how life was lived during the times of the composers. Thus for Bob, music was also a way of understanding and being connected to the past. For Graham, music was an abstract way of thinking and a form of intellectual stimulus.

*Oh yes, it certainly must be an intellectual stimulus there because I mean it does represent something. I mean Mozart just didn't, well he probably did compose a lot of music just for the sake of paying a few bills, but most composers when they wrote music had something in mind, even if it just happened to be a bit of a chore. Beethoven particularly wrote a lot of his music because he was influenced by events. He also wanted to demonstrate how he felt music should go for the future, how the piano should be, because he had the one big advantage, had he probably lived a bit earlier, perhaps he mightn't have been so much influenced, perhaps if his music would have been different if he had good doctors of those times. Who thought of those? But no, there must be the intellectual stimulation there. (Bob)*

*I've always thought music has been, it's a bit self-contradictory in a way. But I've always thought of music as being the most abstract of art. Music is more*

*important in my life than say art, well I think it is. I think it's an intellectual thing for me. (Graham)*

For Julie, music provided a direct link with the past. She felt that she had a connection with composers and performers of the past. This was because of her tutoring and piano studies with people who came from a recognised lineage of renowned composers and performers. This she explained:

*...but its a connection, its like the sea...I'm quite lucky that I've actually learnt from Beethoven. Now that sounds really pompous doesn't it. The poor man is probably turning over in his grave, but we can trace it back through Ronald Farren-Price and Claudia Arrau who taught him, and I forget who taught Arrau. And it goes back to a student of Beethoven's. So you know that's rather special.*

Being engaged in music activities for many informants was an intellectual pursuit from which they derive pleasure and stimulation. This intellectual stimulus was largely because the nature of music performance never allowed two performances to be identically the same. There are obvious and sometimes very subtle changes in nuances of interpretation of a performance even when the musician is performing the same work. This concept of change, along with musicological study of composers and their works, had provided many informants with a stimulus and interest in furthering their own knowledge of music.

It was this difference that was often the stimulus for many of the informants. Donald highlighted this idea when he spoke of his passion for Mozart. At the age of 89 years he could always find something new in the compositions and performances by known works.

*Well, you listen to music to ... you listen to Mozart and even after playing something a dozen times you'll pick up something you haven't heard before in it, something new, you know? That's education, if you like to put it that way. Absolutely, intellectual stimulus... that's what it is, you're getting intellectual stimulus. But I put it this way, it's a continuation of the learning process. Life-long education. And, of course, it's a study where you can live to be 1000 and you could still learn something about it.*

Julie spoke of how music could have an evolving life because each performance was different. For this reason, Julie spoke of music as being the greatest of all the arts because it had life and was forever changing.

*... I consider music to be the greatest of the arts and I'm sure an artist would think art is the greatest of the arts but I can't say it strongly enough, music is forever changing, its alive, every time its performed its new and different, each interpretation it grows because its somebody else's idea and so it is. It's just alive!*

Music can provide a challenge for people to try something new or increase their technical skills. John thought that classical music was stimulating and challenging because:

*...it's a mixture of the unknown and the known and the expected and the unexpected.*

Challenge might be the reading of a score, or adapting and rearranging the music to suit one's own and other's technique and physical abilities. For others, the challenge might be the composing of a score, and the creativity required to work within a set framework of the performer's varying musical abilities. While for

others, it could be associated with the critical listening, or comprehension of the historical and musicological aspects of the music.

Joan spoke of how music provided a form of discovery and how she enjoyed learning new works and discovering composers that she has not previously studied or played.

*I enjoyed discovering music. It was always a great thrill to have a new piece or a new composer I suppose, and the challenge of creating the music from the dots on the page. I suppose I responded to what was being expressed by the composer and that was an opening up of the spirit I suppose, in many ways.*  
(Joan)

For James, (who was a non-musician), the stimulus and challenge came from learning more about the musicological aspects of the musical period, composer, the musical work, and the particular performance.

*Intellectually stimulating. I mean they'll challenge me about something "Do you know so and so symphony?" And I don't so I'll go and listen to it. They come to me they seem to think I know a bit about music so they keep coming to me "What would fit in after the Beethoven 5th and in between such and such?" That makes me think what work would go in there. So just talking to people with a comparable passion. And then Maureen and I go to quite a number of concerts and people around 3MBS will go to those concerts - "What did you think?" So are you beginning to feel the animated debate about that'*

Phil enjoyed the challenge of learning new works, and felt that such stimulation helped to keep his mind fresh and active.

*I do try and keep my mind fresh and I do try to learn new works, even though I don't have all that much brain allows me to.*

Whereas for Eileen, music could provide a challenge in terms of coping with a piece of piano music that tested her technique and required creative skill to overcome difficulties.

*...a challenge to do something new. When I was doing some work on a Mozart Sonata at the weekend that I hadn't ever played before, one I'd heard, and I just opened the book and flipped through until I saw something that I thought looked like something I could cope with, that's with arthritis, I can't play it. So it had to be something within the compass of my hand. And that sometimes makes me so mad when I can't play big chords any more that I used to be able to. But still, you just have to adapt that. You cheat, leaving out some of the notes. So that's a sort of challenge to do something new and something different.*

Music was often used as a time management function where people listened or took part in music activities. This was firstly because engaging in music activities was a pleasurable activity, and secondly, because it provided a fulfilling activity to occupy one's time. This was especially so when retirement provided an abundance of time in these older people's lives.

By either listening to music, attending a concert, or playing music for one's own pleasure, music could often alleviate loneliness and boredom. Several informants spoke of how music 'fills a void' in their life, and for many informants was the reason why they had music playing much of the time. Music could help people to deflect the onset of depression because it engaged people and distracted them from their daily activities.

For Morton, music functioned as company when he is alone. The same applied for Graham who stated that music was a comfort when he was alone.

*Well ... well, I suppose music can be a background for me for all of those things. One is never lonely with music. (Morton)*

*Sometimes it's just a sort of a void filler, but I suppose such in a way it's a comfort in that way. I like being by myself and I suppose when I'm sort of working in the study or whether I'm working outside or... and even if I'm just reading I will play music... If I am by myself I will play music as a comfort thing. (Graham)*

For Glenda, Julie and Flo, music filled the lonely silence. Glenda at times felt isolated from other people because she lived alone and missed emotional engagement with others. Music, however, helped her to feel emotional charged.

For example, when the informants reflected on this issue they said:

*Well my life generally is rather a lonely, you know you live alone and so you are isolated from a lot of things... Well it's very hard to describe. I mean you can keep yourself busy doing things... Music is always a tremendous help and very emotional. You know, I mean you hear beautiful music and wonderful concertos and wonderful Symphonies and it moves me deeply. (Glenda)*

*Its nice to have it in the background, it fills the gap, It's not a huge house but there are the odd occasions where I put it on because it fills the gap...It's not something I use as a crutch I hope, I just see it as an extra part of me that I'm very happy to have had. (Julie)*

*It breaks the silence. I can't stop in a room where there's silence, you know, no ... I'd have it on then, but I'm not there very much. (Flo)*

For other informants, music provided a distraction from mundane activities. It could accompany and compliment an activity so that it became less laborious and tiresome. Eileen described how music could relieve boredom and better frame her demeanour so that ironing was made a little more palatable. Marion also spoke of how music helped her to do the mundane house chores. Music in Bob's case provided an extra edge where an activity like walking was made more pleasurable.

*And if I'm stuck on something that I'm doing, or get bored with the housework, you know it's nice to go and sit down and play the piano for a bit, maybe something that I know thoroughly, which gets me to a better temper, with the ironing or everything. (Eileen)*

*Oh, well, I'm quite happy to say that if I'm at home and I'm feeling a little bit down, I will play music which, if I play the right sort of music, it really lifts my spirits... But while I'm at home, doing my mundane jobs, I'm dusting to the song. (Marion)*

*...there was nothing better than if you feel like going for a good walk, and you think: 'No, I want music to accompany how I feel'. Oh yes, it gives you a lift. It pulls you out of yourself'. (Bob)*

The experience of music can provide a form of escape from everyday life by allowing people to engage in a sense of fantasy and imagination. As Robert stated:

*...music that I hear, whether it be instrumental, orchestral, or opera or singing, it takes me to a certain place.*

One of the reasons why music provides a medium of escape and fantasy is because music is 'abstract'. It is an art form that allows people to engage with it in

diverse ways. Peter spoke about the power of music on the imagination. It is the dynamic force and particular contrived motives of a work like the Flying Dutchmen Overture of Wagner that could cause him to resurrect certain aspects of the imagination that had been suppressed for many years.

*... it (music) has these very powerful effects on the imagination. And a thing like the flying Dutchman overture appeals to the imagination in another way even if one were not to know the story behind it. The sheer force and power of the various motives and the way he treats them, he can't help but call up, normally buried aspects of the imagination so people see, have visions in their minds when they hear music other people think of personal relationships and all the rest of it and whatever it is it has the power to call up these normally buried things. I think, in that respect I suppose music helps one like literature I think it helps one to know something about one's self really, its a thing of self discovery isn't it?*

For Bob, listening to music was associated with fantasy and with free thought, which for him could take place even if he was only hearing the music internally.

*Well, if I don't necessary have music on, I can still conceive in my own mind perhaps some music how I'd like it to be scripted, how I would like to have it composed. It's probably very disjointed. It probably starts off with well... it probably starts off a little bit like Rachmaninoff Symphony, with certain chords which I imagine in my own mind reflect my own thoughts ...So all these times I've got these thoughts about composers and also too how I'd like to compose music, but it's purely just the thought process that goes through me... So while I can't do all those things, I can imagine my own mind that I can do these things. That can give me great pleasure. It's a bit of an ego trip but I find it a pleasurable ego trip when I don't necessarily have the wireless next to me.*

### **Music in the expression and experience of spirituality**

For the majority of informants, music played an important role in their experience of spirituality and applied to those people who identified as being religiously



oriented and those people who did not identify themselves as religious or spiritual. For this second group, music often expressed a sense of spirituality because of its association with beauty. Such an example was Bunty when she said:

*Well, I'm not a religious person, but I get a sort of high from it like some religious people do I think. It sends me into another world, a joyful world'; or Elizabeth when she says, '... I'm not religious but I'm spiritual. I'm religious too, but I mean I prefer to look at the wider concept, the spiritual part of being, rather than the 'churchianity' of religion.*

Music serves both public and private functions of spiritual expression. The public expression is most notably experienced in the liturgical role of most denominations and religious sects. Music is used to express ideals, religious beliefs, and promote a sense of the public and private dedication. Music can also facilitate a feeling of communal interaction and personal faith by engaging all people to easily participate either by singing or playing a musical instrument.

For John, music had the capacity to enrich a liturgy and help people to feel more spiritually in tune with God and each other.

*Well in the Anglican church, especially in the Eucharist, and if there weren't the music I'd feel that there was something missing. Some people may not find that so at a service, not so much, but music enriches the service, in religious life in general. And I think it helps people to relate to one another. That's why being in the choir, with the sense of comradeship and even if they're not in a choir, music relates to people in some way or other, life in general.*

Elizabeth stated how her singing and listening to hymnody and other sacred music had influenced her in her development of a finer appreciation of sacred music.

*I became fairly familiar with a lot of sacred religious music just simply through going to Church on a regular basis and I became very astute and very impassioned by some of the great hymns, the traditional hymns of the 17th, 18th century and later the 19th and 20th century. And I think that lead into an understanding and appreciation of finer sacred music which meant that as my own knowledge developed I became interested in areas such as Gregorian Chant.*

The use of music in a liturgy is to promote the devotion and spiritual expression of the people taking part in the service. This is facilitated by the communal singing of hymns, or by musicians either singing or playing musical instruments. For some informants, the performance of music in relation to liturgy and worship was part of their sharing and public expression of a 'God given gift'. This sharing also fulfilled a ministerial role within a liturgical context.

Owen described how he saw his role as cantor in a liturgical service as being a ministerial and leadership role that had an effect on the congregation listening to him sing. Eileen saw herself as having a God given talent for music and had a leadership role in her local church. John also conveyed the same sentiments as Owen and Eileen about his ministerial role as a musician in church. He gave special consideration to the music he chose for different liturgical seasons of the church. This was described by Owen, Eileen and John in their commentary about their ministerial roles when they said:

*I actually knew what they were singing — they were still praying — and I adopt that approach ... I'm not a bible basher, but I adopt that approach when I sing for a religious service. I sing as well as I can because I'm offering my voice. If I lead other people to sing, whether they sing well or better than I, or worse than I do, we're praying together, I believe that. It's pretty simple, but that's how I approach the singing at church. (Owen)*

*I find it hard to analyse. I guess the feeling that God has given me a gift in music, not being sort of goody-goody. Therefore I must make use of it, but you know, hooray! I've got a gift of music. How can I use it' (Eileen)*

*I look for special music for the Church's seasons - Pentecost and Lent etc...its part of my Ministerial role as a Church musician' (John)*

For other informants, music functioned as a private expression and experience of spirituality. As Maureen explained, 'you can have no religion, no faith, but you do have a sense of spirituality'. Such was the case with many of the informants where they had no commitment or religious association other than their experience through music. Thus, music provided a way of experiencing a personal sense of spiritual being that for many informants was only accessible through music.

In Pam's life, music fulfilled a spiritual need because it directly related to her sense of soul, spirit and mind. Through music, Pam could experience her concept of God and feel an intense pleasure of well-being and emotional satisfaction. Jane, however, stated that she did not have a religious side nor did she subscribe to any particular belief system. However, for Jane, it was through music that she could come to feel a sense of wonder and transcendence that she did not experience elsewhere in her life. She described music as being uplifting and spiritual. Frank, like other informants, stated that music had the capacity to go beyond words and fulfil an emotional and spiritual need. The following extracts provide an insight of the close association of music with one's personal sense of spirituality.

*My soul, my spirit, my inner self needs the music to fill me with joy, to fill me with wonder, to fill me with peace. If there's a God, I think that's God talking*

*to me. Um, it gives me intense pleasure and intense emotional satisfaction, so music contributes to my well-being. Without it, I don't know what I would do. Perhaps I'd sing, I don't know. But I can't sing well enough to satisfy. So the more music I get of the music that I love, the better I feel. It's stimulating for my brain. I think it gets me awake, thinking well, functioning well. (Pam)*

*I actually don't have let's say a religious side, but I find the music um... there is something very special about it, but it does bring a wonderment, which I don't normally have. Um... well I mean I don't have a religion as such. I don't have the belief system and I believe sort of probably in the 10 Commandments, this sort of thing, but that I don't know. But I think the music is a lifting experience. It's a spiritual experience, which does take you out onto another level. Let's put it that way, which nothing else. (Jane)*

*It's just very hard to put it into words because it's a sort of thing; music is a thing that's again one of its strengths in a way, that it's something that goes beyond words, I think. But it obviously, it does full fill a very strong, probably both emotional and spiritual need. It fills that void given that I don't have a religious grounding. (Frank)*

Bob described how listening to works of composers as Bach and Wagner can provide the listener with a sense of spiritual being and, at the same time, be spiritually enriched because it could stimulate particular feelings and emotions. James also conveyed this view when he spoke of how music was a creative process that reminded him of beauty which he associated with the concept of God. Peter stated that he found much of Beethoven's music to be spiritual and because of this felt that he was momentarily put in touch with feelings and a higher level of reality that he suspected was close to a sense of spirituality for him. For example:

*To listen to a beautiful Bach work, to even listen to say some of the marvellous music that Wagner wrote, there is a spirituality, a sort of... there's something*

*unreal or unearthly about the feeling that you get when you listen to that particular music. Yes I get a lot of spiritual thought. You can also be invigorated to think: look all that beautiful music! (Bob)*

*... well I think because of the creative process of music, I think it makes me believe that there is definitely another life. In that sense, I suppose I do believe in god and believe in the power of religion, and I think music reflects the beauty of god, god's creation. So yes from that point of view, it (music) appeals to the spiritual element of my being. (James)*

*I know that Beethoven's music, much of it is intensely spiritual, ...were one would have to say that I guess that it's truly religious music in that it seems to put us in touch momentarily with whatever the source of moral and physical reality is. I don't really like to talk about it because I don't know what the word spiritual means. (Peter)*

## **Conclusion**

Music has many important functions in the lives of the informants interviewed in this study. Music is used to serve particular needs and achieve psychological and physiological outcomes. These psychological and physiological needs of the informants largely centre on the maintenance of well-being and health.

Engaging in music activities can include either listening or making of music and this can facilitate ways of connection. This can include being connected to *self*, other people, places, times past, life history and/or relationships. Through music, people can come to understand their *self* and develop a better understanding of their identity. People can also feel connected with aspects of their life. Music easily triggers memories and associations within one's life and, through music, people are able to review and feel in touch with their past. As one informant

stated, music is often associated with the 'warm spots' of one's life, and therefore is a good way of older people positively reviewing their lived life.

For many informants, music functions as a stimulus. People enjoy the intellectual and cognitive stimulus that listening or taking part in music provides for them. Music by its nature is always changing and evolving and for this reason many people never tire of listening to, or performing the same music. Performances can always be stimulating because of interpretation, style, acoustics, ensemble and performer. Music can function as a challenge for many people because it provides them with an incentive to continue life long learning of new works, composers or musical periods, or challenging them to maintain instrumental technique that they have developed during their lifetime.

Another important function of music in the lives of the informants is spirituality. Music facilitates individuals feeling a sense of spirituality in their lives, even for those people who identified themselves as being agnostic. Through music people experience and express their public and private sense of spirituality. Music is an important part of communal religious expression. This is evident by its role in church liturgies and the amount of music composed purposely for religious devotion. Thus, music has an important role in maintaining and focussing religious devotion and religious fervour. Music facilitates people feeling a sense of spirituality and connection with a greater power.

## Chapter 8

# Discussion and Conclusion

The imagination that responds to music is personal and associative and logical, tinged with affect, tinged with bodily rhythm, tinged with dream, but concerned with a wealth of formulations for its wealth of wordless knowledge, its knowledge of emotional and organic experience, of vital impulse, balance, conflict, the ways of living and dying and feeling.

(Langer, 1957:244)

### Introduction

The aim of this study was to uncover the meaning of the experience of music in the lives of older. It was postulated by the researcher after reviewing the literature described in Chapter 2 that music can have significant meanings for older people. This study shows that music contributes to personal well-being, health, and spirituality. The research contributes to the literature by providing detailed personal accounts of the meaning of music in people's lives and how they use music to sustain well-being and quality of life.

The primary aim of the research was to explore the meaning of music in older people's lives through the narratives of people's perception and experience of music. The study also explored how music can be used to understand the psychosocial world and needs of the informants. The study contributes knowledge to:

- the meaning music holds for older people,
- how people experience and describe their perceptions of music,
- the different functions that music serve for people, and
- how people use music to achieve particular outcomes in their lives.

The first part of this chapter focuses on the discussion of the results and its contribution to the literature. The second part of the chapter highlights the implications of the data for practice, education and policy. This section also discusses the limitations of the present study and identifies areas for further research.

### **Contribution to knowledge**

The experience of music for the participants is individualistic and intensely personal. As Shepherd (1991:13) states, the meaning of music for people is 'located in its function as a social symbol'. This is because music provides the participants with ways of knowing and being in the world and understanding emotions, *self*, others, and spirituality. Thus, music can bring a person's life together in multifaceted ways. The meaning of music is closely related to how the participants develop their perceived sense of *self* and identity, experience emotions, communicate feelings and emotions to others, and ultimately use music as a medium to improve their perceived sense of well-being. It is the participant's narratives of the meaning of music that provide insights into how music merges the intellect, emotions, life experiences and spiritual *self* together as one. The study supports Nagler and Lee's (1999) findings that music and emotions are the key elements in connecting the mind, body and spirit of a person.

The study particularly shows that music, while having an objective component (that is, sounds that can be heard and measured on scientific instruments), also contains subjective significance and meaning for older people. Music facilitates ways for the participants to construct meaning in their lives. The meaning is different for each individual and is directly related to life experiences and



emotional needs. The study shows that understanding these subjective meanings and interpretations can shed important insights into how people live and interact in the world. More importantly, by studying the subjective experiences of the meaning of music we gain insights into the person's *self*. For example, this study has shown how music can connect older persons to people who may no longer be living, validate memories, give meaning to life, and facilitate a greater sense of spirituality.

The conceptual contribution of this study is that music is more than a therapeutic tool. It is a symbolic meaningful medium that can be used by both the older person and health professionals. For older people, it is possible to use it as a vehicle that provides continuity and meaning in their life. For health practitioners, it is an opportunity to use music to achieve what symbolic interactionists refer to as *verstehen* (understanding). By this, the researcher is suggesting that music can be a powerful symbol that health professionals and community workers can use to gain better understandings of the subjective experiences of older people. Music can also be used to connect older people to others and social life. It was not surprising, therefore, that participants made statements like 'music seriously affects our lives'. This is because music provides people with ways of knowing themselves, others and the world within which they live. Music is a powerful symbol for how people choose to live their life, assign meaning to experiences, and act and react to his or her world. The evidence of this is easily witnessed by how music is capable of triggering emotions and memories in people as described in Chapter 6.

The uniqueness of music to be used as a symbol is directly related to how a person assigns meaning according to his or her own unique lived experiences. Blacking

(1995) commented that music itself does not have extra musical meaning unless the experience already exists in the individual's mind. Jourdain (1997) suggests that when people bring their own life experiences into the context of the listening experience, it is music that idealises the emotions whether they be negative or positive. As a result, the music momentarily perfects a person's emotional life. This is because the meaning is not so much in the music but in he or she's responses to the world. Jourdain (1997:322) further states:

...music imparts dignity to experience that often is far from dignified. And by imparting pleasure even to negative emotions, music serves to justify sufferings large and small, assuring us that it has not all been for nothing.

In this study, music is shown to be closely related to the experience and understanding of emotions. The data confirms Juslin and Sloboda's (2001a) view that the primary reason for people engaging with music is for the emotional experience. The following statement is typical of the participant's explanations for why they are drawn to music. It demonstrates people's personal, emotional, social and aesthetic attraction to music.

*It's just incredible. I find it... I suppose it totally... emotional experience, when it's very, very good, and something very, very beautiful, and you've got a load of people involved in this getting to that. I just think it's um... one of the greatest experiences you can have. I think it's a very personal sort of thing though, in terms of how you feel about music. It's me! (Jane)*

Bruscia's (1989:8) states that the role of music as a therapeutic tool is:

...as an art it is concerned with subjectivity, individuality, creativity and beauty. As a science, it is concerned with objectivity, collectivity, replicability and truth, and as an interpersonal process, it is concerned

with empathy, intimacy, communication, reciprocal influence and role relationship.

These data show that the descriptions used by Bruscia to explain the role and function of music therapy also apply to the meaning and function of music for the participants in this study. Music for many people is about truth, understanding and developing one's identity, being able to communicate with others on a personal and emotional level, the sharing of intimacy within relationships, experiencing beauty, and expressing one's sense of spirituality.

The results of the study will now be discussed with specific reference to:

- *self* and identity,
- well-being and health,
- making connections, and
- beauty, abstraction and spirituality.

### **Identity and understanding of self**

The study has shown that music is an important part of the lives of people because it is through music that they can come to know and reflect upon their own personhood. Music provides ways for:

- defining and redefining their self identity,
- experiencing, knowing and understanding emotions,
- contemplating their sense of spirituality and place in the world, and
- experiencing and maintaining personal well-being.

Kenny (1999) notes that engagement in music activities can provide people's life experiences with another level and dimension of understanding. The study

confirms this proposition as Chapters 5 and 6 described how the participants use music as a symbol for defining their own sense of *self* and identity. Music is a symbolic representation of who the participants are and how they would like to be perceived by others. Through the medium of music the individual is able to meld the psyche, intellect and emotional *self* as one. As Nagler and Lee (1999: 35) state:

...The exploration of our inner world is more art than science. Music is an art form that allows for exploration of the inner world.

Music is more than entertainment for the participants. 'It is a way of thinking' and 'a way of living one's life'. This is not surprising given that the participants were introduced to music at an early age by a significant other. This was usually a parent, grandparent or teacher, and from that time on, music has been an important part of his or her life. The participants continued to develop their love of music throughout their lives. However, it is their retirement years that has allowed them more time to engage with music which had not always been possible in the past because of career and family priorities. For many participants, music has been a way of redefining their self-identity since retiring from full-time work. Music increasingly occupies much of their daily lives. This includes either being involved in listening or making music activities, or working as a volunteer in an area of music that satisfies a personal interest and makes use of their personal skills. For example, many of the participants work in community radio as broadcasters and programmers, others in music administration and concert development, and some continue to teach. This post-retirement occupation provides a focus in their life, maintains ongoing interests, facilitates them to socialise with others, and is a way of contributing to their community.

The meaning of music is directly associated with lived experience. It is the emotional context of these life experiences that provide meaning. Van Manen (1990) states that lived experience acquires meaning retrospectively and this study shows that music is a way for people to give meaning to their life. This is because particular music for the participants is associated with specific lived experiences. The data also support Ortiz's (1997) suggestion that in a person's memory many life experiences are related to music and Ansdell's (1995:140) commentary that 'musical memory establishes connections and resonances both within the ongoing piece and associatively within our long-term memory'. Jourdain's (1997) theory to explain this phenomenon is that music freezes images into recollections. When a person is stimulated by music the recollections are then released back into images. This allows older people to maintain contact with past experiences and to reminisce. In the words of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1919:618):

...music, when soft voices die vibrates in the memory.

Clair (1996) states that reminiscence can be used as a way to adapt to change, deal with stress and validate one's life. It can be a means of boosting self-esteem, evaluate quality of life and for people to draw upon their personal strengths. The study shows that when people listen to particular pieces of music they recall events and experiences in their life and also the emotions associated with these experiences. Music provides the participants with ways of maintaining touch with their past and validating their life and supports Kahn's (2000) findings that music can be a pivotal cause for many older people linking and reviewing their life stages.

Charon (2001) states that the lived world of an individual is symbolic and consists of what a person sees, thinks, shares and reacts to. This study describes how music is an integral part of the private and public *self* of the participants. Music is a way of expressing one's inner *self*. This can be expressed by the making of music such as singing or playing an instrument, or specifically choosing music that conveys the intensity of emotional feeling felt at any given time by the individual. The data support Kemp's (1997) view that when people choose to listen, perform or compose music, it becomes an expression of individuality, and as such, is a way of defining *self*. For example, when June spoke of playing the piano:

*...it would be expressing it for myself, not for other people. When I was playing the piano, I was expressing myself.*

Playing an instrument can also be a way of expressing one's *self* to others. Music is often used by the participants to convey their feelings and emotions to others. Music is perceived to be an expedient way of conveying feelings that is not always possible through language. This is demonstrated by an informant's statement when they say:

*...that's why I play for myself. I never wanted to perform. I never wanted to perform, never wanted to be um... I would want to perform if I wanted you to understand me. That's different! (Margot)*

This study provides evidence to suggest that the depth of the experience and meaning of music is not just reserved for highly educated people, trained musicians, or those who have a working knowledge of the rudiments of music. This defies the suggestion by Small (1996) and Juslin and Sloboda's (2001a) that music is mostly appreciated by those people who listen to it respectfully, and are educated in the musicological aspects of history, harmony, instrumentation and

form. An interesting observation by the researcher that emerged from the interview process and the participant's narratives is that the people who were the most articulate and gave the most detailed in-depth interviews about the experience of music were those who identified themselves as having little or no musical training. One explanation for this observation is that these participants are more drawn to the aesthetic value and emotional perspective of listening to music than being largely concerned with the intellectual and technical aspects of the music as would musicians. Another explanation might be that musicians use music and express themselves through music that they are less skilled in speaking about it. These non-musically trained participants, however, were intensely drawn to listening and knowing more about music and felt they provided a different perspective to the experience of music. Bob provided an explanation as follows:

*...but quite often the greatest joy or the greatest contribution comes from somebody who cannot play one bar of music, because that person can give an insight into music that an interpreter can't. An interpreter can only give what that interpreter feels at that particular time, whereas a person who is away from that does have the freedom to be able to reflect upon how the person feels about music at probably at any given time.*

The data expand on Shepherd's (1991:83) findings that music is more than an 'informationally closed mode of symbolism relevant only to emotive, vital, sentient experiences'. The results of the study show that the meaning of music for the participants goes beyond the individual's consciousness and is part of how he or she interacts and emotionally respond to *self* and others about him or her. This is reminiscent of Bateson's commentary (1973:436) about the mind when he said:

The individual mind is immanent but not only in the body. It is immanent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there

is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a sub-system. The larger Mind is immanent in the total interconnected social system.

The study supports the findings of DeNora (1999) that people specifically engage in music activities as a way of constructing their self-identity and understanding of *self*. Through music the participants are made more aware of *self*, and through music, are able to explore greater depths of emotion. The study also further supports the findings of (Ortiz, 1997:307) that music helps people to reach new heights of awareness and 'provides the guiding structure for inner, personal exploration'. Participants find a sense of *self* in music because it reflects their emotional state and serves intellectual needs. It is music that puts them in touch with their emotions, and it is through music that people make sense of feelings and emotions that they experience. 'It explains life and emotions. All this breaks down in music,' said one participant. For example, when Bob listens to music, it is to accompany his daily activities such as walking, to provide intellectual stimulus, find restoration when he is feeling tired or emotionally down, provide a spiritual lift, or to provide aesthetic beauty.

Blacking (1995) states that the primary function of music is to enhance the quality of individual experiences. The meaning of music is therefore, ultimately linked with the value and quality of a person's experience. Participants assign specific emotional significance to certain music because of the symbolic internal representation of the music and use music as a way of reviewing and keeping in touch with their past. This supports Davies' (1994) theory that the music acquires emotional significance from the context within which it is heard.



## Connection: self and others

An important finding of this study is that music provides ways for the participants to feel connected in a variety of ways. These include *self* and emotions as already discussed and being in touch with one's personal history that includes family, friends, and life experiences. This is seen by the participants as especially important as they age and experience loss. Music can also facilitate people reviewing their life as they age.

The study confirms the findings of Kahn (2000) that musical networks provide people with the experience of feeling accepted, valued, needed and belonging. It is for this reason that many participants enjoy their volunteer community work. Music gains importance and meaning in the participant's everyday life because it is an important medium for how people interact with other. One informant referred to music as the 'social glue' because it facilitates people coming together. It can provide opportunities for people to connect at a personal level and has an important role to play in the development, maintenance, and communication within relationships. As Bright (1997: 149) suggests, 'music is a common *raison d'etre* for groups to be established', and as this study demonstrates, for people to want to belong and engage in group activities. It is music that is often used as a litmus test for the participants in determining whether they have anything in common with people they meet. For many, it is music that brought them together with their spouse, and it was music that was cited as a criterion for considering the eligibility of a suitable partner in life.

Music has an important interpersonal social function for the sharing of feelings and emotions. For example, Neville and Eileen, like many other participants, met

through music, and today, music is still an important part of their relationship. This is because music is an enjoyable interpersonal activity and a way of sharing intimacy within their relationship. For some people, music is an essential way of communicating with others who have lost the ability to communicate effectively through language such as people suffering from Parkinson's disease, dementia, stroke and aphasia. Stewart (2000) states that communication can also be impaired when people lose the ability to articulate a response through gestures such as a nod or facial gesture. This can lead to people feeling isolated because family, friends and carers misinterpret the person. The participants spoke of the importance of music in being able to communicate with people for whom they were carers. Music can facilitate forms of communication and feelings of connection within relationships when loved ones no longer can express themselves through language.

Bonderik and Stogstad (1998) suggest that loneliness and depression for older people is usually the result of a person's social circle diminishing. This may be a result of a geographic move, death, or the move of the individual or friends into residential care. However, Bright (1997) and Wylie (1990) advocate that the music has the potential to make people feel less lonely and depressed and the data from this study strongly support this finding. The participants spoke of how they use music to overcome these feelings. As June stated, 'you are never alone when you are listening to music'. Participants use music as an accompaniment to their daily activities and it provides them with a feeling of contentment and security.

## **Well-being, therapy and health**

Kendig (1996) states that the consultation and empowerment of older people with regards to health has been neglected over the years. He believes that the sociology of ageing has not contributed much towards health promotion and that older people have not been consulted with regard to what they consider would contribute towards better health.

Chapters 6 and 7 discussed how music is central in helping participants maintain a sense of well-being and contributes to the subjective experience of good health. The study reaffirms a psychosocial perspective of good health and extends Sidell's (1995) findings that people can live with a disability or health related problem yet experience good health if their sense of well-being is also high. It is interesting to note that many participants felt that music was the key to them feeling a sense of well-being and good health, regardless of their particular personal medical condition. This was despite the fact that several participants live with ailments that include heart problems, cancer and varying degrees of frailty.

The data results question the biomedical view that an older person's experience of good health depends on the lack of any medical condition or disability (Kendig, 1996). The data show that well-being is the key to good health and successful ageing. By engaging in music activities that include either listening or making music, people can be distracted from focussing on their personal medical conditions and feel uplifted both physically and psychologically. The study adds weight to Bright's (1997) argument that '...if we feel well then we probably are well, or are at least able to live life on the basis of wellness, and not ill-ness'. Music can make people feel good about themselves.

Sidell (1995) states that holistic health assumes physical, social and mental well-being for the individual. However, good health and well-being depends on a person firstly, being able to make choices, and secondly, having a holistic approach to health and living. The participants believed that being independent and having choices contributed to their well-being and for many, is seen to provide choices in life. This can be either through personal listening, making music, or participating in group music activities with other people. It is interesting to note that many participants feared living in residential care facilities because it would mean the loss of music in their life. It would also mean the loss of personal choice and increased dependence on others.

While none of the participants identified as having taken part in formal music therapy sessions, all acknowledged that music was a type of self-therapy that they needed regularly to maintain their sense of psychological balance. Many participants also believed that music should be an essential form of therapy in residential care facilities. The data support the objective outcomes of music therapy as stated by the American Music Therapy Association (2002a) which include:

- memory recall that contributes to reminiscence and life satisfaction,
- positive changes in mood and emotional states,
- feeling of control and independence,
- awareness of self, environment,
- reduction of anxiety and stress for both older adult and carer,
- management of pain by non-pharmacological means,
- stimulation and interest in life,
- structure and increased motor ability,
- emotional intimacy with friends, partners and family, and
- opportunities for social interaction.

If music therapy is concerned with helping people to develop 'more appropriate and functional responses to the problems of living' (Sloboda and O'Neill, 2001:426), then the participants of this study provide further evidence that music contributes to quality of life, health, and the experience of well-being. The study supports the findings of Maranto (1993) and Ortiz (1997) that music can reduce a person's anxiety, stress levels, and increase a person's threshold for pain endurance. Music can contribute to a faster recovery period after a surgical procedure according to Kahn (2000) and many participants spoke of their need for music when convalescing from illness and intrusive medical procedures. One informant explained this as follows:

*...I know music must be either an extension of yourself or compliment how you feel. I've had a couple of illnesses, particularly bypass surgery and what was one of the first things they gave me when I came out because I was inclined to be a bit edgy, was Wagner, relaxed straight away... music came because all of a sudden I realised that that it could give me a lot more that would help me in my recovery. (Bob)*

The participants stated that they feel more 'whole', more 'in tune' and more 'competent' when they engage with music. Others spoke of music providing them with a sense of 'inner happiness', 'inner contentment' and 'inner peace'. These descriptions highlight the profound psychological impact that music has on the lives of the participants. The data are in keeping with Tippett's (1989:47) view that when people listen to music they are 'entire again, despite all the insecurity, incoherence, incompleteness and relativity of our everyday life'. For all the participants, music has the effect of restoring and rejuvenating their energy levels. This was especially important for the participants who tired easily or suffered from low energy levels. As Nagler and Lee (1999) suggest, music is used to

provide quality time in people's lives because it contributes to feelings of peacefulness and restoration.

The data support the findings of Bunt (1996) and Forman-Radl (1992) that music has a therapeutic value. While Forman-Radl specifically refers to music being used as a specialised function in the context of therapy and counselling, the study shows that people who identify as well and functional also benefit from engaging in music activities with similar outcomes as suggested by Forman-Radl. The participants use music:

- for emotional release,
- feeling connected with other people,
- feeling integrated and needed in society,
- contributing to society,
- feeling less isolated,
- helping people to feel more competent and able to undertake life's daily responsibilities,
- relaxation and reduction of stress,
- maintaining cognitive and physical functioning.
- structuring their time,
- maintaining a sense of personal and group identity,
- linking and reviewing life stages, and
- providing spiritual renewal and transcendental experiences.

The data also show that music can help people achieve optimal ageing. Powell (1998) suggests that for a person to achieve optimal ageing in life they need to:

- do regular exercise,
- be open to diverse experiences,
- develop ways to reduce stress levels,
- find ways to be cognitively stimulated, and
- develop and enjoy hobbies established earlier in life.

The study provides no evidence to support the theory of 'disengagement,' that people naturally withdraw or disengage from society as they age (Maddox & Wiley, 1976). Instead, the data confirm that people want to continue to engage with life. This supports the findings of Rowe and Kahn (1998) that people who continue to be active and engaged in life enjoy successful ageing. Baltes and Baltes (1990) define successful ageing as a process of selective optimisation where an older person will focus on doing what they can do and try to compensate for that which they cannot do. The participants in this study show that retirement and old age does not necessarily imply having a non-role in society, physically or cognitively slowing down, or less interaction with other people. This is evident by the life activities of participants who work as volunteers in the community and those who continue to regularly practice and play musical instruments. The study reinforces the theory of 'activity' (Rowland, 1991:195) advocating that successful ageing is closely linked with people maintaining life long activities and interests as they grow older. The study supports the recent findings of the World Health Organisation (2002) that argues for the maintenance of mental health and social connection in older people's lives.

Many participants spoke of using music as a self-therapy to help them to maintain musical skills such as singing or play a musical instrument. The secondary effect of this was the maintenance of muscle tone, increased cardiovascular strength and better respiratory functioning. The playing of an instrument requires energy and considerable exertion such as singing, or playing a wind, string, brass, or keyboard instrument. The study supports Kahn's (2000) findings that making music is beneficial to a person's health because it requires them to exercise large and smaller muscles of the body. Powell (1998) states that such exercise is

important for older people to maintain good cardiovascular condition, high blood sugar levels and cognitive functioning. Studies by Wenger (1996) show that even the most modest amounts of physical activity by older people can facilitate the improvement of cardiac capacity and lessen the potential of mortality.

### **Emotions: arousal and alignment**

The study provides evidence that music has the potential to help participants align patterns of emotions and structures of consciousness, and also increase levels of energy. The data confirm the findings of Stewart (1990) that music helps people to initiate movement in their mental states and can cue them towards feeling more positive about life. Many participants spoke of using music to make them feel more cheerful, more hopeful, more contented, and more relaxed and peaceful. Sloboda and O'Neill (2001:420) refer to this use of music as 'emotional self-regulation'. In the same way, music can also be a cathartic way of bringing about psychological movement in a person's mental state by putting them in touch with their emotions, such as, when the participants spoke of using music to work through personal grief.

The study documents that music for many older males provides them with legitimate ways of expressing and feeling emotions that culturally has not always been accepted by the society they live within. This is demonstrated by the fact that many of the male participants during their developmental years were stigmatised because of their interest in music by parents, friends and the teachers in their life. Music was considered a feminine preoccupation and not suitable for males. To be accepted meant that one also had to excel in sports. For some males this stigma still affects their life and became evident during the interview when



they found it difficult to talk about music and how it might relate to how they experience emotions and feelings.

According to Storr (1992), music allows people to structure time because it also allows emotions to be controlled and arousal to peak at a predetermined time. Music allows for a person to be engaged in another dimension of time, such as Bunty when she says: 'Well as I say, it's almost like a rapture, you know. You sort of float in heaven.' The data show that music provides relief from stress and daily pressures, and that participants consciously use music as a way of creating another mind space for themselves. Many also use music for a transcendental effect of music in their life. Sloboda (1989) explains this phenomenon as music arousing deep emotions within the individual, and at the same time being a distraction so that he or she is relieved of monotony, boredom or in some cases, depression. Jane provides an insight when she says:

*...it's transcendental? That's a word I was trying to look for. And it does take you above yourself. It does me. It's the only that does actually, for something... you know, there are few moments when you hear something that's really, really beautiful. And that does, yes. It does have that effect.*

The most common reason the participants gave for engaging in music activities is the emotional arousal that they feel when listening to music is. Many spoke of being moved to tears and listening to music for the sheer joy and beauty of the experience. Music has the capacity to calm, excite, thrill, entertain, and provide beauty in people's lives that often is not easily accessible through other ways. Others spoke of how they needed this experience much like an addiction. As Jourdain (1997:xvi) states:

When music transports us to the threshold of ecstasy, we behave almost like drug addicts as we listen again and again.

### **Stimulus, fantasy and motivation**

Kirkwood (2001) states that it is crucial for older people to continue to exercise their brain as much to sustain good health. Powell (1998) further suggests that one of the most important ways to maintain optimal aging is for older people to continue to function at the highest possible level. For Powell, and the participants of this study, optimal ageing means continuing to remain physically, cognitively, and socially active for as long as possible. Powell claims that many 'young-old' and some 'old-olds' have a remarkable capacity to restore themselves physically and mentally to earlier levels of functioning, and that often all they need is motivation and opportunity. This was clearly demonstrated by participants such as Donald, Mildred, Fred, Noreen who are all in their nineties and still physically and cognitively active. The data demonstrate that it is not only important to maintain one's mental functioning for as long as possible, but that engagement in music activities helps to maintain cognitive functioning as people grow older.

Music provides the participants with ways of being interested and motivated in life. It can also facilitate the feeling of usefulness, such as when the participants spoke of being motivated to do life's mundane chores when they listen to music. The data support the findings of Bunt (1996) and Maranto (1993) that when a person is either playing an instrument, listening to music, or composing music, all of their cognitive processes are to be engaged. The data highlight the cerebral processes associated with being engaged in music as focusing around feelings and emotions, social interaction, intellectual stimulus and the physicality of making music such as play an instrument. Music for the participants acts as a way of

slowing down the ageing process because it keeps people occupied, focused and, as one participant stated, gives him a more 'youthful outlook on life'. Powell (1998) states that it is not necessary to accept that cognitive functioning diminishes with age, and that older people need to find ways to maintain and facilitate activities of the mind. Thus, music directly contributes to well-being and health. The following extract shows how the participants perceive the role of music in facilitating continued cognitive functioning.

*...I listen to it for the intellectual content too, and I think I've had to work at it very hard, too. I mean I've had lessons and theory, and I can read a score, I suppose having played the piano a little bit helps with that. But I'm not a trained musician. I don't have a degree in music. So I've had to work very, very hard at it too. Probably harder than somebody who could read a score earlier than I could I've had to work a lot harder. But that gives you enormous intellectual satisfaction. I think if you've had to work very hard at it - cos like a lot of other things in life, I think with a lot of gifted people in any particular field, they might not appreciate the value of what they're doing, or able to do, or able to do as much as someone who has had to really slog hard to get there... And I do think it keeps the mind active... Obviously keeps the mind active, and I think that's the situation in my case, I don't think I'm slowing up and I don't think that the mind is getting more feeble. (James)*

While the study covered many aspects of the meaning of music in people's lives, it neither confirms or disproves the theories of Campbell (2001), Rose (1985) or Ostrander, Schroeder and Ostrander (1982) that music benefits learning. However, the data show that participants feel more alert and physically relaxed when they are engaged with music. The feeling of being 'more competent' and motivated were recurring themes in the stories of the informants. In this way, the study contributes to the literature on the function of music in people's lives

because it provides evidence that music can improve a person's capacity to feel competent in problem solve and making decisions.

Blacking (1995) stated that the essential quality of music is its ability to create another world of virtual time. For all the informants, music is a way of structuring time and it is music that they use to accompany their daily routines. Music can serve as a distraction and at the same time can create a congenial workspace within people's lives. Music can be a way of escaping the realities of the world and being drawn into a fantasy world. Music has the potential to stimulate imaginative thought. This is because the abstract nature of music allows the listener to engage at whatever level they so desire. Bunt (1996: 36) explains this process as one of transformations that takes the person to many different depths and heights because it 'is all richly imbued with private fantasies, dreams and symbols'.

Kemp (1997:22) states that the abstractive thought associated with participating in music activities and the ambiguity of music 'stretches people's imaginations and allows them to delve deeper into their sense of identity and well-being'. It is Kemp's assertion that particular personality types are especially drawn to being musicians and that 'by considering musician's personality and temperament we may well open up new ways of understanding their motivational drives, their single-mindedness, and their investment of so much of their self-concepts in music' (Kemp, 1997:25). This study demonstrates that music for the participants is very much part of developing a concept of *self* regardless of whether the person is musically trained or not. While the study did not consider the personality types of the participants, it would seem unlikely that one needs to be either neurotic,

stable, introverted, extraverted or psychotic to love and need music in his or her life as suggested by Kemp.

In summary, this study has discussed how music can structure ways of using time for the participants by providing ways of being challenged and stimulated. Music can be a means of discovering new works, satisfying intellectual curiosity and learning new material to play. All this contributes to a sense of well-being and provides meaning and purpose in life. The secondary effect is that it helps people to stay cognitively active and provides ways of exercising and maintaining technical skills.

### **Beauty, aesthetics, and spirituality**

For all the participants, music provides a sense of beauty that connects them with feelings of spirituality. This was an interesting concept given that many participants found it difficult to define what they meant by the term *spiritual*. For some participants, it is closely associated with a traditional experience and understanding of spirituality that is connected with a particular religious perspective, while for others participants, it is understood as a personal feeling of being in the world. Regardless of how participants defined spirituality, all felt that music is closely associated with beauty and that beauty itself is closely associated with spirituality. Many of the participants stated that they do not have a religious sense of spirituality in their lives, yet, when they engage with music they have a feeling of something that is non-worldly and beyond their everyday life experiences. One informant described this phenomenon as the witnessing and achievement of perfection in life

Jung (1958) states that a person can achieve psychic health and wholeness only after he or she has acknowledged being guided by an inner integrating factor that is independent of conscious intention. The study shows that music assists people in being more aware of their feelings of spirituality. The participants use music to provide them with a transcendental experience after which they can feel uplifted and elated. It is interesting to note Jordan's (1999) suggestion that people need time, solitude and self-reflection time to develop a sense of their own spirituality. The study demonstrates that music can facilitate time, space solitude and inspire self-reflection for people to feel in touch with their spiritual *self*.

Kenny (1996:120) defines beauty as that 'which is capable of moving us or striking a certain harmony' in people's lives and offers people a sense of coherence that comes from a sense of connection. The findings of this study confirm that music is used to facilitate the experience of beauty and spirituality in a person's life and provides direct ways for he or she to access beauty. The study shows this is especially important for the participants who are less mobile or unable to easily access other forms of beauty in their lives.

The research of Mackinlay (1997) shows that accessing the spiritual needs of older people is difficult. Often the spiritual needs of older people are only considered important the person is frail or living with a terminal condition. Bright (1997) reminds us that religious beliefs and practices are highly personal and though at times they might be considered controversial, most people perceive themselves as being something more than the physical. This is confirmed by the fact that all the participants felt music provides them with transcendental or spiritual experience. The results of this present study strongly suggest that music has a significant role

for both the independent older person and those living in residential care in terms of experiencing, contemplating and expressing spirituality in his or her life. The implications of this will now be discussed.

### **Implications for practitioners, practice, education**

The study showed that understanding the importance and meaning of music in the lives of older people has implications for health professionals, community workers, educators, and older people themselves. As music contributes significantly to a person's well-being and sense of health, it should be important for people working in the areas of gerontology to learn more about how music can facilitate a person in attaining and maintaining good positive ageing. Phillip (1994) reminds health professionals that if they want to help older people achieve wholeness and well-being then they should assess and measure the broad aspects of quality of life and the psychosocial needs of a person just as routinely as they might measure his or her blood pressure.

The experience of music in older people's lives presents them with choices and can facilitate independence. Music provides ways for people to sustain well-being and contributes to health and optimal ageing for all four groups suggested by Palmer (1989). These categories include those people who:

- are well and live independently,
- live in their own home or with a carer, but spend several days a week in a care program,
- live in their own home and receive community support, and those who are
- are dependent and living in residential care.

The results show that people use music as a way of measuring and maintaining a sense of good health. It is the participants who see themselves as responsible for their own health and well-being. This is in keeping with Nagler and Lee's (1999:63-64) concept of health when they state:

We are healthy when we take action towards health and the maintenance of it...Perhaps the greatest factor in precluding our maintenance of health is the belief that we can not change our current state of health.

If more older people understood the potential of something as easily accessible as music in their life they may be less inclined to readily accept intrusive medical interventions and opt for more self-therapies in dealing with day-to-day living. Music can provide older people with alternative solutions to everyday problems of stress and contribute to ways of dealing with pain management. Practitioners should begin to see the person as being an integral part of their diagnosis and solution process.

The study shows that it is possible for people to find their own solutions to the stresses of living in the world. Solutions do not always require medical interventions. For example, a person presenting with a condition that might at first be diagnosed as early stage dementia may in fact be the result of loss, loneliness or mild depression in their life. Such a person may not necessarily need a prescription but rather support and connection with other people. The study shows that music can assist people to share experiences and find social support. By being engaged in music activities a person can feel less isolated and be more stimulated, leaving the person to feel less anxious, inwardly focused and prone to depression (Kirkwood, 2001; Bright, 1997).



One of the most important implications of this study is that music can significantly contribute towards our understanding of another person's *personhood*. Kitwood (1997:3) describes *personhood* as the unique life experience of each person that is infinitely diversified and unique. It is a person's life experiences that are rich in feeling and emotion and part of their total subjectivity. Music can play a central role in helping people to better understand the psychosocial needs of others. Bright (1997:20) reminds health professionals of every discipline that:

...the challenge is to try to match our aims for any individual with the reality of his or her whole state of health, the state of being whole...Resources must be coupled with the right attitudes so that each person is seen as a person with unique needs of mind and spirit and not of body alone, a recognition that one size does not fit all.

If health professionals and community carers working in gerontology realised the potential of music they could be better placed to contribute significantly to improving and supporting older people's quality of life. This would especially apply for those people who no longer are able to express their needs and wants through words and gestures.

The study demonstrates that music has an important role in how people can better understand and contribute to the *personhood* of others and has important implications for all health professionals working in gerontological fields. Coulson and Ronaldson (1997) argue that the experience of *personhood* should include feeling a sense of: wholeness, being, peacefulness, joyfulness, contentment, self-esteem, social interaction, spiritual dimensions and cultural orientation. The results of this study show that music can contribute to older people achieving these objectives. The end result will be a feeling of positive ageing, well-being,

and better health status. Dunkle, Roberts and Haug (2001) state that successful aging centres around a person having a positive attitude towards life and experiencing well-being and good quality of life. This study supports the findings of Nagler and Lee (1999) that being in and around music people can live better, healthier and happier lives.

Music provides people with ways of finding meaning and purpose in life. The data show that music is important to people who live independently and identify as healthy. It supports the findings of Dunkle et al. (2001) that in addition to health, quality of life and well-being requires people to:

- feel independent,
- take part in useful kinds of productive activity,
- have a positive outlook for the future, and
- have a support network.

Through music, people can come to know others and better understand their sense *personhood*. This, of course, requires time and is something that is not easily achieved. However, the study shows that the subtleties of emotions and feelings can circumvent the need for language, giving people a unique way of sharing and understanding the *self* of others. This has implications for all health workers. Music can be used to help people living independently in the community as much as it can for those who live in residential aged care facilities. Nagler and Lee (1999) suggest that it is music that can best facilitate the human face of treatment for many people. This is because music can allow people to share feelings that often can be veiled by a screen of either indifference or professionalism.

Music as a *therapy* is concerned with directly helping people function better in the world, and should only be practised by trained professionals. At the same time, the study demonstrates the potential of music as a way of understanding and helping people who do not necessarily identify as requiring psychological or physiological help. Music is important to the healthy older person because it can facilitate the sustaining and improvement of quality of life. This is because music is an integral part of society and of one's personal life experience (Christie, 1992). This does not assume in any way that the role of the music therapist is lessened, nor that any untrained person with an interest in music can assume a therapist's role.

The study suggests that people who work in aged care need to be better informed of the potential of music to contribute to quality of life and well-being. If this were the case, there may be more alternatives to biomedical intervention and this could also lead to less dependency. Music provides people with choices and ways of maintaining self-esteem, which, in turn, makes people feel less dependent on others. Bright (1997) maintains that people can expect to find wholeness in later life if they can accept and adapt to change and enjoy life. This also challenges the stereotypes of an ageist society. The data show that successful ageing and the experience of well-being in older life require more than the usual good physical health and financial resources. Music has an important role in fulfilling and facilitating the needs of older people because it can help them to:

- maintain self esteem,
- maintain the right to make decisions,
- maintain interpersonal relationships,
- continue to feeling a sense of belonging,

- discover ways to deal with day to day stresses of living,
- continue to be emotionally and intellectually stimulated,
- be accepted by others, and
- continue to experience and expresses one's spiritual needs.

Understanding how music can facilitate the improvement of well-being and quality of life for others does not need training as music therapist. It requires people to have a sensitivity of other people's needs being prioritising these needs when caring for the person. People need to develop skills in initiating and administering specialised programs that include music as a focus. It requires the medical training programs for all health professionals and community workers to include units of study that focus on the contribution of music to quality of life, and the development of units that demonstrate how music can be incorporated into clinical practices. The study shows that community library programs and organisations could play a greater role in contributing to the well-being of older people by assigning financial resources to purchase and maintain listening libraries and resources.

The study also has implications for educators, media and older people. One only has to look at media advertising today to know that ageing is portrayed as a process that is undesirable. For example, consider the amount of cosmetics and surgical procedures that are marketed as being able to delay or lessen the ageing condition. The effect being that it marginalises older people and continues to support ageist stereotypes. If educators and the media focused on the positive aspects of ageing as demonstrated by this study they could bring about change by promoting a more positive and healthier image of ageing. This would help to diminish the ageist attitudes of society and those internalised by older people.

Powell (1998) states that older people need to avoid being both the victim and perpetrator of ageism. One way to do this is for older people to interact with others who have a positive outlook on life and get involved with other people and community groups who promote a positive outlook. Music, thus, can have a significant important role in the building of people's self image and self esteem as they age.

Langer (1989:92) postulates that ageism is linked with people having a 'premature cognitive commitment' or mindset to what it means to be old. This includes older people accepting ageing stereotypes that suggest growing older means being less cognitive active, becoming lonely, dependent, frail, and senile. Bright (1997) states the dangers of stereotypes is that they are believed to be universally applicable and when older people accepted them as true that there is little point in trying to make change. The present study shows that people can actively choose not to accept these stereotypes that are imposed by society through the media. As Langer (1989:92) states:

...we do not know how many more serene or exciting options for living one's life might be conjured up if our minds were open to them.

Bright (1997) states that the concept of ageism is not always evident in what people say, but rather in the subtleties of their actions towards others and often it is the result of what Langer (1989) refers to as mindless behaviour. An example of this was the experience of the researcher visiting a newly opened specialised dementia care unit in a metropolitan city. Upon being shown around the facility it was noted by the researcher that the same Streisand recording was played over and over and would seem to have been most unlikely to be the choice of the residents. The same mindless action applies to the choice of music for older

people by staff in residential care who are subjected to music that solely consists of songs from the turn of the century because people mindlessly think as one participant stated, 'they think this is what old folks like!'

Health professionals who use music in their clinical practice also need to take care that it is used mindfully so that it does not result in negative effects. Care needs to be taken so that the music that is being played for distraction and pain relief for the patient does not in the long term become psychologically associated with discomfort. One simple solution, might be to ask the client to bring to the consultation their own particular selection of music for listening. Another might be for them to choose music from a wide selection made available by the clinic. Providing people with choices empowers them and involves them in the treatment process that is in keeping with a *humanistic* approach to care (Bunt, 1996). The study shows music that is preferred and familiar to a person can better facilitate them feeling relaxed and manage pain and confirms the findings of Hekmat and Hertel (1993). The data support Clair's (1994:175) statement when she says:

People who are empowered to select their own music and use it in conjunction with relaxation and medication to effect changes in their own comfort levels respond positively to a situation in which they are otherwise helpless.

Data were presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 which illustrate that music is important in the lives of people who live independent and self-classified healthy lives. Music contributes and facilitates well-being through identity, emotions, connection and the experience and expression of spirituality. The study also implies that music has enormous benefits for people living in residential care.

Ideally, such residential facilities should employ music therapy specialists skilled in facilitating the needs of the residents. This has philosophical and funding implications for administrators and health practitioners which includes commitment to the program in terms of resources and staffing, and the providing of a holistic approach to health care for the individual.

Okun, Olding and Cohn (1990) strongly recommend that social activity, personal control, and providing opportunities for people to increase their knowledge and skills directly relates to well-being. This study directly shows that music can fulfil of these criteria and facilitate the maintenance and sustaining of well-being for the participants. Clair (1996:33) therefore, suggests that people working with people in aged care need to consider the establishment of activities that focus on:

- promoting social interaction with other people,
- providing people with opportunities to make decisions and manage choices,
- presenting opportunities for people to learn skills and information, and
- providing opportunities for people to discover novel ways to use personal resources.

### **Limitations of the study**

There are a number of limitations to the current study that need to be stated. These limitations do not lessened the importance of the results but should be considered for future research.

The first limitation is that the study is not representative of all older people. The study is biased towards people who identify as being passionate about music in

their life. The participants in the study were people referred to the researcher or who were specifically asked by the researcher to participate because of their interest in music. The sample of participants, therefore, is not meant to represent the average older person living in the community. As a result, the data and its implications are not generalisable to all older people.

Another limitation of the study is that it relies on the participant's retrospective accounts of the meaning and experience of music in their life. Thus, the narratives and descriptions of the participants are presented from a positive view of music and could be construed as offering a more subjective and romanticised view of how people use music. This does not mean that some participant's accounts are more or less valid than others. It merely suggests that the narratives in this study may be inclined to present a more affirming view of music than others because of how the sample has been recruited.

The study, while documenting the experience and use of music in the lives of the informants, does not provide in-depth descriptions or follow-up accounts of the meaning of music in specific situations of people's lives such as widowhood, illness, crisis, loss or grief. This is important because talking to people in such situations may offer rich descriptions of the use and value of music in very specific circumstances rather than general contexts.

Music is an important medium for human expression and communication (Bright, 1993; Davis, Gfeller, & Thaut, 1992) and exists in cultures remote, rural, tribal, urban, industrial and post-industrial (Pavlicevic, 1997). The literature shows that music is often thought of as a universal language purely because it is a



fundamental activity for all humanity (Storr, 1992). While the Australian society is multi-cultural, the study does not examine the difference between cultures nor attempts to uncover the subtleties of the experience of music for people whose identity is as being from non-Western backgrounds. This can be very important because cultures differ in terms of the importance they attach to oral traditions and how they use music in social and community activities. Music can also be studied as a social construct that allows us to make commentaries about values and norms over time and how these values and norms have influenced the individual. For example, people who formerly lived under communist regimes were often subjected to nationalistic music that reinforced certain communal values, or music that is now perceived as sexist or racist. It might be assumed that many of these people retain aspects of these values in their current lives. Thus, it would be useful to map out the music they see as significant influences in their lives and then to do a content analysis of the values underpinning such music.

Another limitation relates directly with the nature and process of conducting qualitative research. In the initial stages of the study the researcher undertook focus group interviews with both a homogeneous and a heterogeneous group. What is not certain from the data is the amount of group consensus that may have occurred within either focus group. Nor is it always possible to control the dominance of the conversation or influence of others by any one person in focus groups. However, with this in mind, the interviewer purposely tried to limit any one participant from dominating or controlling the flow of conversation during the group interviews. The most important function for the researcher was to facilitate open discussion and for the group to identify specific areas that gave insights into the meaning of music in their lives.

Finally, while this study specifically searched for the meaning of music in the lives of older people, it did not purposely seek out participants that were living independently and whose health status was good. However, all 52 participants in the study could be considered to have these characteristics. Thus, a limitation of the study is that it does not present the views of older people who may be dependent on others or living in residential care. The study also does not consider the perspectives of health professionals and community workers specialising in gerontology such as music therapists, physicians, nurses, administrators or carers.

### **Future research**

The present study shows the need for a longitudinal study that is representative of the general older population. Such research could build on the data of the current study. For example, a quantitative survey instrument could be developed from the various meanings and function categories of music identified in the present study and tested to show what percentage of older people use music in various ways in their life to sustain well-being and health. Such a study could then also ascertain differences in gender, age, ethnicity and social class, for example.

Another area of further research is to look at the ways people who work in geriatrics use music in their clinical and everyday care of older people. This could include music therapists, doctors, nurses, community workers and counsellors. The study could specifically look at how music is used for people who are independent and those who are dependent and to identify differences between these client groups. The study could also specifically examine how music contributes to a holistic and healthy view of ageing. The research might also investigate how music can be used to promote successful and healthy ageing as

opposed to being focused on diagnosis and curative intervention. By approaching people who participate in activities associated with the University of the Third Age or senior citizen clubs, a music program could be implemented to study the influence of music to well-being and health or its affect on social interaction. This program could also be easily implemented for people living in residential care and would provide a valuable insight into ways older people can maintain their sense of self-esteem, dignity and varying levels of independence.

Further research needs to address the cross-cultural effects of music in people's lives. Australia is a multicultural society and health professionals, community workers and educators need to have a better understanding of how music might be used to help, understand and service the needs of older people from different ethnic backgrounds. Again, this study could apply to people living independently and those living in residential care. This particular study could consider how different ethnic groups use music to promote positive and successful ageing in their communities. The study might also purposely research the experience of music for Indigenous Australians and also compare whether younger people use music in the same way as older people. For instance, do younger people use music as a self-applied therapy for stress and relaxation?

This study has specifically explored the meaning of music for older people. Future research should also look at the meaning of music for people of all ages and how music is used in their lives. The present study has shown that music is closely linked with how people understand and develop their *self* and identity. Future research might explore the place and importance of music in youth and popular culture. The study could provide important insights into some of the

psychosocial problems experienced by young people, such as the high incidence of youth suicide or the increasing use and dependency of drugs in society.

For many of the participants in the present study music allows them to feel more 'whole' and competent in life. Further studies might explore whether self-chosen music for people of all ages could improve a person's ability for problem solving and making decisions. This could have important implications for educators, community workers and health professionals. Music might not only improve a person's ability to learn as suggested by Campbell (2001; 2000), but also their potential for being more assertive and independent in dealing with changes in life.

While all of the above research suggestions build upon the current study, the possibilities of further research in the area of the meaning and function of music in lives of people is almost limitless. As Juslin and Sloboda (2001a) point out, there is a scarcity of research that adequately looks at the emotional meaning and function of music in people's lives. Further psychosocial musicological research needs to address these gaps in the literature. Also, more clinically controlled experimental studies designed to study the effect of music on lowering depression, loneliness, sadness, hopelessness and other such psychological states of mind are required.

## **Conclusion**

The experience of music is fluid and can have different meanings for people. The meaning and use of music in people's lives depends on their circumstances and psychological needs. Some people use music as a stimulant, others as a relaxant, some people seek beauty and spiritual fulfilment through music, while others use music to provide distraction from the realities of the world. For many people

music is about self-realisation and understanding of the world through symbolism or abstract thinking.

Music facilitates people to feel more connected within their lives and with the world about them. Music is experienced and used as a medium for the expression, communication and understanding of people's emotions. It can boost a person's self-esteem and sense of belonging. Through music people can both express and feel emotions that are not always expressible through language. Music provides people's lives with beauty and is a way of expressing and experiencing spirituality.

Music can be an intellectual stimulus. It can excite and motivate people. It can facilitate the management of time for people. It can also provide ways for people to continue being active and contributing members of the community.

According to the World Health Organisation (2002), how quality of life is perceived and addressed will be one of the greatest challenges for health professionals in this century. This study has shown how something as practical, basic and pleasurable as music can enrich the lives of older people. Music can be as powerful as the *magic pill* or as life saving as today's state of the art medical technology.