

A Journey In Song With Recovering Alcoholics

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Something that has long interested me is functionalism in music. Much as I love the sound and formal qualities of music, I am also interested to learn what functions music can have, and I still, foolishly perhaps, hope to see our society mature out of its determination to restrict culture to the entertainment pages of life. Among the many splendid musical memories I have from the Sixties, none stirs me more than the afternoon I stood with a group of maybe twenty students at the steps to the University of Houston library, locking arms and singing before a jeering crowd as we prepared to begin a march through the Fifth Ward

ghetto to downtown Houston, aimed to integrate the city's schools. The marchers numbered in the thousands by the time we got downtown, the schools were integrated, and the song, of course, was "We Shall Overcome."

This issue includes two articles on the use of music as a therapeutic tool. Drs. Gallant and Hall deal with two very different sorts of healing, but both of them demonstrate how powerful a tool music can be. We hope to offer more articles in this area in the future. Music is the food of more than love, after all!

—GWL

Introduction

As long as I can recall, my life was always enriched by the influence of music, whether at home, in school, in social gatherings or at church, whether it was Irish, Acadian, Altantic, country or gospel music. I am always amazed at the continuum between the science of helping others and the art of music. Our creative energies can be blended within the scientific domain, borrowing strategically from the arena of music and song.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the field of addiction and recovery. The fight for recovery has been waged by the internationally esteemed AA program, a non-professional service which ministers to the suffering alcoholic and which offers sobriety as an alternative to drinking. AA is governed by a simple philosophy, which has proven its effectiveness through the results of its work, as witnessed by countless number of families who have reaped its benefits. Neither academics, therapists nor pollsters were able to predict the monumental impact of the AA self-help movement with its spiritual philosophy.

In a similar vein, the helping professions advocate the enhancement of the whole person, physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, socially and artistically, and as such constitute an appropriate avenue for the exploration and integration of self-help philosophy, therapeutic counselling and music intervention. Challenging the spiritual within us, whether by means of religious, spiritual, gospel or folk music, gives credence to birth, mystery and aliveness, and within the context of Mallow's hierarchy of needs, to the ultimate process of self-actualization where one's potential is maximized (DuBois & Miley, 1992).

Like others, I have hypothesized that alcoholism is in part a spiritual illness and that there are spiritual factors entailed in the effectiveness of its treatment (Catanzaro, 1968; Gallant, 1992). The use of spirituality and emotional expression is impor-

tant to treatment and recovery, and the ability of music to generate hope and transcendence and to assist individuals to deal with forgiveness, acceptance and growth in their lives (Aldridge, 1995, Gallant, Holosko, Gorey & Lesiuk, 1997).

A Musical Journey With Recovering Alcoholics

Through my experience as a practitioner/educator in social work and my discovery of the use of music, several questions began to emerge: First, How might I experiment with music as an avenue for intervention? In an almost piecemeal fashion, as I listened intensely to the story of clients and as I pondered the depth of their pain and anguish, I strove to capture their journey through my own creative meandering with prose, music, poetry and song. Before I knew it, over a period of 12-15 years, I had composed over 65 songs and poems which reflected the lives of my clients and emphasized such themes as nature, love, forgiveness, mercy, compassion and ecology. Secondly, I delved into the question: How might these songs be helpful to recovering alcoholics and impact on addictive clients at the very fundamental point of their recovery journey?

It has always been my contention that deceit, self-illusion and egotism are at the root of one's inability to forgive and that these demonic elements are so entrenched within a person's psyche that they leave the person bereft of tools necessary to live life more fully and render a person recalcitrant to the spiritual energies which surround us in the ordinary events of everyday life. A lack of forgiveness is often at the root of our most entrenched battles. It became apparent to me that the power of sharing this music in the field of recovery was similar to the impact that sharing has for people in hospices who are dealing with cancer and who need each other for comfort, support and encouragement. When we can take off the protective "façade" or the veneer which shields us from unpleasant situations, and when