

## **Watsu® and Music Therapy- A re-encounter.**

This is an informal article based on the experiences of three professionals exploring the possibility of uniting two therapeutic methods – Watsu® and Music Therapy.

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### **Part 1-Barbara**

I discovered Watsu® at the Integrative Care Theories and Techniques specialization course at UNIFESP (2014), where I had the privilege of spending an entire day inside a pool discovering and feeling the benefits of Watsu®. During my first experience, I felt forgiveness, it was such a sacred moment and that day I decided I would learn more about Watsu® and become a practitioner, so soon after meeting Professor Antonio Maria Cardozo Acosta, the Watsu® concepts became part of my professional and personal life.

During a Watsu® session, when we are in a meditation state, we can feel the patient breathing, their body and characteristics, as well as their longings and needs, through stretching movements. From my personal experiences with patients, I realized I could work with Watsu® movements to release body tension, but that I could also work with sound elements during therapeutic interventions. These sound elements could be words explored in a spontaneous melody, a song from my personal repertoire or even the patient's name sung, through circular music movements, as a mantra chanted with one purpose: the well-being of that soul.

This restlessness and desire made me work on transferring my professional Music Therapy knowledge to the water environment. I contacted Maria Carolina, a great friend, Music Therapist and Percussionist, and after our first meeting, we decided to organize a Solidary Watsu® day for people with reduced mobility, since I really enjoy working with these patients and believe that they particularly enjoy unimaginable body freedom during Watsu®. The theme of our session was not only embracing and caring for those floating in the water, but also the relatives and companions who were waiting for them. Thanks to the group of Music Therapists that Maria Carolina got in touch with, we were able to set up two teams: the "Terrestrial" team that would welcome relatives and companions with a Music Therapy intervention and the "Water" team that would work with the Watsu® Practitioners in the water.

Through the sponsorship and support from the Latin American Watsu® Institute, represented by the Institute's President, Antonio Maria Cardozo Acosta, we were able to use the Natu Saúde facility, as well as all of the accessibility structure. We organized a 5-hour meeting with the volunteer Music Therapists, where the Watsu® concepts and history was introduced, emphasizing the importance of respect and presence while a unique person floats in your arms. We also explored the musical instruments that could be used during the experience, as well as the Music Therapy queues to create a "sound water atmosphere" during the sessions.

It is important to mention that Maria Carolina had already experienced two full Watsu® sessions and the Music Therapists were experiencing this method for the first time. Me and Maria Carolina explained to the Music Therapists that the sound intervention would not only reach the patients, but also the Watsu® practitioners. During the sessions, the Music Therapists should interact with each other and with the Watsu® practitioners to reach the patients carefully; establishing eye contact with the Watsu® practitioner to receive permission and observing the patient's expressions as they experience the receptive musical intervention. We thoroughly explored singing individually and collectively. We decided to sing the name of each patient during the session, with the purpose of embracing that soul, emphasizing the present moment, and through the gentle Watsu® movements, feeling the name's expansive sound characteristics. This is how the first Music Therapy Protocol for the session was created.

I personally experienced a feeling of gratitude during this event. I was thankful for everyone involved, especially Maria Carolina, the Music Therapists and Professor Antonio Maria Cardozo Acosta, as they embraced Watsu® and the entire event. During part of the time, I was organizing the event, welcoming families, accommodating them and helping with the wheelchair logistics; and during the rest of the time, I was in the pool as a Watsu® practitioner, that is when I realized how much this partnership enhances the relaxation benefits, as well as mental relaxation through the musical universe. The sound atmosphere created by the Music Therapists was extremely cozy and beautiful, making the water environment calm and serene, where the patient and Watsu® practitioner benefited from the intervention. However, the peak moment for me was when the Music Therapists explored the patients' names, because at that moment I realized that all of the restlessness I felt while initiating this project was real. Music Therapy during a Watsu® session has the ability to provide a full sound experience, as the patient receives the sound through their body, contacting their divine inner being with sound elements. Music Therapy is focused on beauty, motivated by the search for beauty and the purpose that it brings to life through music; and its primary mission is to help clients during their journey towards integrity, as mentioned by Bruscia in his book: *Defining Music Therapy*. (Bruscia, 2000)

During the first edition, we had 9 Watsu® sessions, and 6 participants in the waiting room. We had a variety of patients, from children to senior participants, with or without disabilities.

Here are some of the assessment statements we received after the Watsu® session:

*"It brought so much happiness, I never thought I'd be in a pool with my daughter like that, it was the best Christmas present I have ever received." (M.C.B. 48 years old –participated in the Watsu® session together with his daughter, A. J. that was 11 years old and visually impaired.)*

*"It was a very good experience. Music brought peace and tranquility. Going through this experience with my father in the pool receiving the same care as me was exciting. " (F.L.B. was 37 years old and paraplegic )*

*"Today was very beautiful, and I did not expect to listen to live music during the experience, the accessibility resources in the pool and bathrooms was also very important. It was really nice. " (T.C.S.C. 34 years old paraplegic)*

Mônica invited us to organize a second edition of the " Solidary Watsu® Day in Santos" with Music Therapy and support from the Latin American Watsu® Institute. We decided that the event would be open to residents in Santos. Once again, we received support and got the chance to use the Natu Saúde space where we gathered music therapists to deepen and expand our interactions during the intervention.

This time, the Music Therapists learned the movements in the basic Watsu® protocol; we briefly discussed the mechanics and benefits of the movements, in order to unite it with the musical universe in a broader manner. We chose three fundamental moments during the Watsu® session: the beginning (off the wall and the breathing dance and swing), the middle (quietness) and the end (returning to the wall). The Music Therapists structured and chose the musical elements for these three moments.

We had another session where we invited a family including a mother (55 years old), daughter (12 years old) and grandmother (70 years old) to experience the session, and gathered their feedback for subsequent discussion. Shortly after the discussions, we began an experience exploring singing and playing instruments in the water, where we had an unusual moment: we had an electric power shortage and experienced playing in the pool in the dark. It was definitely a very educational experience, as a musical intervention in the water with all of the music therapists together, with the sound of a violin and our voices, encountering our inner sounds together.

During the Solidary Watsu® Day in Santos, we had a smaller group of Music Therapists, so everyone participated during the entire period. I was in the water as a Watsu® practitioner during the entire time, but had the opportunity to interact while singing the names of the patients that I held. This experience made me reflect on how powerful singing in the water can be.

The sound elements chosen for the "three stages", for me personally, as a Watsu® Practitioner, made me strongly understand the therapeutic purpose of Music Therapy, as if I was also receiving that intervention together with the client and my role as a therapist was

being nourishing by the sound and the warm water. The silence represented a pause and a "centering" moment, where I clearly experienced the connection with the energy of that caring environment and respect for the body, which made me feel the patient's deep breathing becoming calm through the rhythm of silence. When the Music Therapists would go back to playing it was a gentle process, expanding the musical beauty even more. In the end, while taking the client back to the wall with the sound of the drum, touching his third eye, it seemed like the pulse of life with a renewed and structured vital energy.

Receiving affectionate hugs from everyone who attended and seeing the happy faces of my Watsu® and Music Therapist colleagues, made me value this partnership with Music Therapy and understand how much it can contribute, because it enhances the therapeutic effects of Watsu®, transforming it into a welcoming and safe environment so that the physical and mental relaxation may reestablish the vital energy of the patients.

## **Part 2 – Maria Carolina**

Writing this has made me face the difficult task of presenting the technical aspects of one of the most rewarding experiences during my career: the re-encounter of Watsu® and Music Therapy.

I met Barbara during the first week of classes in the Music Therapy undergraduate course; we were classmates entering this abstract and intense Music Therapy world. Meeting her was fundamental to make the journey safer and even more special, as she is now my great friend as well. After graduating, we continued our post-graduation studies, Barbara went on to studying integrative care where she discovered Watsu®, which to me is also an essential factor, because the way it transformed Barbara's life, already justifies the beauty and significance of this practice that I was also already able to experience (through her hands) before beginning this project. That first experience had a profound impact on me ever since.

During our conversations and reflections about the future of our careers the idea naturally came up, what would it be like to experience Music Therapy in a pool? The opportunity came soon after with the possibility of participating in the "Solidary Watsu® Day in São Paulo".

We then developed a series of experiments in a "study laboratory" coordinated by me and Barbara with volunteer interns from the Music Therapy course, to analyze, study and experience this interdisciplinary union possibility.

What would it be like to sing in the water? What about playing instruments? How would we guide our interventions together? Would it be interactive or receptive? What are our objectives and how would we justify them? Would they be in line with the Watsu® objectives?

These answers came naturally, as our studies together progressed and we perceived the common goals and conditions for the sessions, as well as being in the water and

experiencing both methods. This approach is not crucial for this unification process, but it was the path we chose for this project at the moment.

We know that the water environment enables communication connections that are quite different than those in a terrestrial environment, which is why I feel the need to quote one of the most important Music Therapy theorists, Rolando Benenzon as he discusses the concepts and importance of an water setting :

*"The water environment is perhaps the most stimulating of all settings for communication purposes. This setting has the power to transform the body into a real movement instrument ... "*

*"The water environment reminds us of our fetal period, encouraging a non-verbal and pre-verbal context." "The non-verbal context helps individuals reunite with their feelings, roots, ethnicity and history. Working in a non-verbal scenario means removing the dust from our memory. " (BENZON, rolling 2008)*

We realized that we were working within an augmentative level<sup>[ii]</sup> with Watsu®. We were supporting, amplifying and empowering the Watsu® practice, which is in direct contact with the patient. We were able to work through a Receptive Music Therapy approach, where our focus is musical listening and the soundscape transformations.

When some people hear "focus on musical listening" they may imagine the use of "ready" music in the process, but this was certainly not our approach, as we perceived water as an intermediate object, as a means of resonance and regression, and our presence producing music seemed essential.

Water makes the connections concrete, helping the communication become physical, through skin and movement, a literal immersion process. A unique opportunity to be in the same environment as the patient and experiment some of the same sensations, according to the ISO<sup>[ii]</sup> concept, which considers that my musical body rhythm should match the musical body rhythm of the patient. Connected and through an actual immersion, I can feel and become equal, in order to establish connections and open communication channels, contacting and overflowing internal content. It is worth mentioning that although Watsu® has many functional and physical rehabilitation objectives; our practice was based on the sensorial and psycho-music therapy possibilities that this experience provides, a regression environment providing deeper experiences, libido regression and psychic energy.

In order to achieve this, our initial guideline as therapists was: a Referential Improvisation - Bruscia, another important theoretical reference for this project, where it represents improvisations where music is produced spontaneously, based on a non-musical reference or theme; we were producing sound/music and using the bodies in the water as our music sheets, as our reference.

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<sup>[i]</sup>Bruscia, 2000

<sup>[ii]</sup>Benenzon, 2008

Some Music Therapists were in the pool and others sat at the edge, with their legs in the water, so that the connection could come from the liquid, and so that we could musically feel and express the sensations and feelings of the patients. According to Millecco, 2001 *"The therapist dedicates a song to the customer. This song will emerge naturally from the from the therapist's subjectivity based on his or her intention with the client and the importance of the moment experience by both of them. "Although we based the session on instrumental and vocal improvisations, I think the intention of this quote is that as we set a reference and become personally and musically dedicated to the patient, we establish subjective connections and promote internal releases, generating a therapeutic relationship and empathy.*

The music therapists in the water would get close to the patients and play lighter instruments, as well as vocalize and sing, which is why they needed to be inside the water and close, closing gaps and enhancing the practice, which was also benefiting the Watsu® practitioners. The music therapists sitting on the edge, played instruments with greater fluency (guitar, violin, flute) and could see the setting as a whole, the expanded music reference, providing a tone and rhythmic base <sup>[iii]</sup> for improvisation.

At first, this was the structure throughout the entire session.

The "peak" moment of the practice was chanting the patient's name, where the Music Therapists inside the pool created melodies for the names of the patients and chanted them, progressively, in a warm and close manner. Through this technique, we were establishing the patient's identity and strengthening the self, providing support

*"... it's a comparison between the sound of the mother's voice with the baby, and the sound of the therapist's voice. The mother's voice also represents the child's milk, filling, feeding and comforting. The therapist's voice and singing is part of the client's organizational field "*  
(CHAGAS, Marly 1990)

As we were promoting a regressive environment, this technique seemed necessary for the experience. The feedback from patients about this moment, highlighted its importance and impact.

This was our initial guideline at the laboratory and during the "Solidary Watsu® Day in São Paulo", however, as we became more mature after the first experience, we had the chance of organizing the "Solidary Watsu® Day in Santos", with Mônica.

We already had some experience and we were able to organize the session better. We established some protocols in order to better integrate specific Watsu® movements with improvisation, to enhance movements with the sound, and as we had only worked with this in a group, a systematic structure was required. We introduced a "bell" to represent the beginning and end of the session, as well as silence and the drum.

Silence, an important sound taboo, would represent the "Quiet" moment, after a smooth and recognition introduction. Silence is necessary to restructure and hold the patient:

*"A pause is one of the most important characteristics of our identity. The rhythm of the sounds and the relationship between sounds. This is why I define Music Therapy as the art of combining silence and pauses in order to create communication " (BENZON, Rolando s/d)*

The "support" moment or name chanting as previously mentioned took place naturally after the "Opening Doors - 1 and 2".

The drum would come in at the end of the session, when the Watsu® practitioners were preparing their patients to finish the experience, the drum followed in with a soft beat, that clearly represented heart beats;

*" As such, it represents homeostasis, or a controlled equilibrium, which is pleasurable, similar to the intrauterine experience with the maternal heartbeat. Just as with the fetus, the instinct gratification is immediate and does not delay, and the experience is that of a euphoric involvement of the self in its origins, in relation to time and matter. The beat provides security, stability, predictability and a reassurance that the instinctive forces, or energy, will not become overwhelming, or disappear. " (BRUSCIA, Kenneth 1987)*

This is how we achieved integration between movement, sound and intention, which is crucial to the full and positive experience. If Watsu® represents poems written in the water<sup>[iv]</sup>, we tried to provide a musical touch to these poems. It was amazing to see this exchange represent a new therapy possibility. I daresay that Watsu® and music therapy have been separated at birth.

Upon reading about the therapeutic effects of water-based practices, I came across an excerpt that in a very functional manner, talked about floating, and how water was supporting the body, counter-balancing the effects of gravity, the possibility of greater movement among joints, the effect of the heat for relaxation, contributing to the sensation of "weight relief". I believe this feeling goes far beyond the physical sphere, Watsu® and Music Therapy together, can reduce distances, relieve internal and emotional weight, and provide a feeling of lightness.

### **Part 3 – Mônica**

Upon entering the pool, I heard the sounds of those instruments and voices blending in to the beauty of the bodies moving, conducted smoothly through the water, and I felt such strong emotion. This was my first experience with these two amazing techniques joined together, Watsu® and Music Therapy, I knew this was an awesome unification and that I needed to be part of this moment. I could not hold back my tears and felt the love balsam filling each of my cells. My name is Mônica and I am a physiotherapist, my first experience with Watsu® was in 2003 when I started my career as a water physiotherapist, and as I discovered Watsu® In greater depth, I could see that it was another universe, where the give-and-take

relationship was mingled and the benefits were greater for both sides. I enrolled in courses and got to meet lots of special people during my journey, and during one of these moments I met Barbara. We became friends and co-workers and she was essential to help organize the first Solidary Watsu® Day in March 2015 in the city of Santos. I felt the need to give back to the universe, after all the positivity Watsu® had brought into my life and make more people access these feelings of love, care and affection, and this is what led me to start the project. During the first edition, we were four therapists and had 21 people participating during an intense day filled with positive energy exchanges, which was completely free. After experiencing the feeling of Music Therapy together with Watsu®, I knew it was a perfect marriage and that in my project I needed to share these moments.

So after long talks with Barbara defining what would be the best movements, which could be performed with everyone regardless of their limitations and remotely observed (we're in different cities) how Carol and Barbara carefully introduced Music Therapy in these movements, making sure that the work was based on the sound needs for every moment, we organized the second Solidary Watsu® Day in Santos with Music Therapy.

On 03/05/2016 we had the pleasure of working together, helping 24 people enjoy moments and unforgettable experiences. During every session four Watsu® practitioners were in the pool with people in their arms being taken by the sound waves produced by four Music Therapists.

Every sound would cause different feelings, the connection between Watsu® practitioners, their clients, and the musicians was noticeable everywhere, inside and outside the pool as a network of love surrounding the entire space. As a therapist I had the privilege to recognize the overflow of joy and satisfaction that my clients felt, when their name was "sung" something magical happened, it seemed that a new world was unveiling there, each new sound produced by each instrument and at every beat of the drum, my heart was overflowing with joy and gratitude for that moment and being able to facilitate access to this wonderful world. At the end of the session, participants were asked to write about the experience, here are some excerpts of what they wrote:

*"Wonderful! I'm light, calm and peaceful. Best experience of my life! "* (V.R.C. .25 years old)

*"... wonderful feeling of inner peace. It took me back to my childhood, to the womb. I felt like a free woman in the universe. Wonderful, I feel grateful ... "* (C.S. D, 45 years old)

*"I felt very comforted ... I thought I was in my mom's womb."* (L.T.S. 36 years old)

*"Light Body, light soul and light mind. Sensational. "* (M.C.C.P., 38 years old)

*"It's hard to explain with words such a feeling of love and gratitude, they are intense feelings and full of harmony, I'd say it is even spiritual! Amazing! "* (K.J., 34 years old)

*"I smiled for no reason. I felt myself. I thought how nice it would be for all of my loved ones to experience it. "* (R.F.A., 57 years old)



"No words ... It was the best experience in my life lately, I heard my heart beat, I left this world and went to another place. WONDERFUL I'm so relieved..." (V.G.S. 49 years old)

"Almost a spiritual experience ... The musical experience could be described as wonderful. " (S.F.D.O. 47 years old)

"A journey within. Impressive!" (J.R.C.F., 34 years old)

"I felt extremely loved. I felt important. But what touched me the most was remembering the time when my mother used to caress me on her lap ... I missed her so much through this wonderful feeling of being cared for. ... I cried during the session. The music was fantastic ... when they were singing my name I felt I could touch my identity and I believe all of that contributed to my self-acceptance. " (G.S., 29 years old)

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When remembering the experience, we are transported back to the universe of sensations that transformed use personally and professionally and helped us awaken our creative potential, as well as an opportunity for reconnection, for the practitioner and patient.

We feel honored to experience this journey with people that are so special and that we would like to thank here: Antonio Maria Cardozo Acosta, Caroline Laghetto, Verônica Lelis, Estela Cândido, Fernando Moucachen, Juliana Baltazar, Thiago Sievers, Danielle Quessada, Marcela Tinem, Marcos Vinicius. And of course we cannot forget to thank Harold Dull for Watsu® and the opportunity to share this experience with the world.

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<sup>[i]</sup> Bruscia, 2000

<sup>[ii]</sup> Benenzon, 2008

<sup>[iii]</sup> Bruscia, 2000

<sup>[iv]</sup> Dull, 2008

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