

## Participatory music making with people living with dementia

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**Disciplinary background A.** Background in music psychology: The potential therapeutic effects of music are wide ranging (MacDonald et al., 2012). Music has been shown to stimulate the brain (Trimble & Hesdorffer, 2017), promote social connections, and provide a channel for communicating emotions and intentions, and expressing individual identity (Hargreaves et al., 2017).

**Disciplinary background B.** Background in healthcare: People living with dementia can experience behavioural and psychological symptoms, often resulting in a lower quality of life for themselves and their caregivers (Cerejeira et al., 2012). In recent years there has been increased interest in music-based interventions that could alleviate some of these symptoms and improve quality of life.

### Abstract

The main aim of my talk is to give an introduction to my research, which explores the experiences and perspectives of experienced music therapists and community musicians who engage in participatory music practices with people living with dementia. Through my research I aim to bring about a deeper understanding of the benefits of active participation in music for people living with dementia, and also shed light on the challenges and rewards it can bring for the community musicians and music therapists who work with them.

Music has been shown to have a range of benefits for people living with dementia with evidence indicating that music can reduce symptoms such as agitation (Elliott & Gardner, 2016), depression and anxiety. Reported benefits also include improving quality of life and cognitive skills as well as promoting personhood and strengthening social connections. There is also evidence that memories of musical experiences are well preserved in comparison to other types of memories in people living with dementia (Jacobsen et al., 2015) raising the possibility that music can be used to trigger and reinforce memories in people who may be too severely affected by dementia to respond to other treatments. The use of music in dementia care is well established in the field of music therapy, and over the past ten to fifteen years there has also been an increase in the number of community musicians working with people living with dementia. My intention is to give an overview of the ways in which music therapists and community musicians are connecting with people living with dementia through participatory music practice. I will discuss how this work is reflected in the literature and present some initial findings from my research. This will increase our understanding of how music is being used to improve the wellbeing of people living with dementia, and of the experiences and perspectives of the practitioners who are delivering these interventions.

**Interdisciplinary implications.** By exploring the work of music therapists and community musicians who work with people with dementia, I will contribute to the field of music psychology by improving our understanding of how different approaches to music making can have an effect on people living with dementia. I will also contribute to the field of healthcare research by highlighting potentially effective non-pharmacological approaches to improving the lives of people living with dementia.

## References

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