

## **Music Therapy in the Age of Enlightenment**

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*As music therapists continue to discover more about the therapeutic powers of music, it is interesting now and then to look to the past in order to seek the roots of our contemporary practices. In this regard, the writings of eighteenth-century physicians are pivotal in the development of music therapy, for it was these individuals who first began to depend greatly upon scientific experimentation and observation to formulate their procedures. Representative of this stage in the history of music therapy are the findings of the renowned London physician Richard Brocklesby, the only doctor to write a treatise on music therapy in eighteenth-century England. The subjects treated by Brocklesby in his *Reflections on the Power of Music* (1749) include his musical remedies for the excesses of various emotions—particularly fear, excessive joy, and excessive sadness. He also discusses his musical remedies for diseases of the mind recognized in the eighteenth century—delirium, frenzy, melancholia, and maniacal cases. He considers music as well an aid to the elderly and to pregnant women. In short, Brocklesby provides a lively account of the curative powers of music as viewed in the mid-eighteenth century by an excellent medical mind.*

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The eighteenth century was a major turning point in the relationship of music to medicine because physicians for the first time began to rely heavily upon experimentation and observation in drawing their conclusions. The first music historian to document this eighteenth-century inclination was Charles Burney in his famous telling of Farinelli's performances curing the "total dejection of spirits" suffered by Philip V, King of Spain. Burney uses the very word "experimentation" in relating the story.

the Queen, who had in vain tried every common expedient that was likely to contribute to his recovery, determined that an ex-

periment should be made of the effects of Music upon the King her husband, who was extremely sensible to its charms. (Burney, 1789, p. 815)

Armen Carapetyan in his seminal overview of music and medicine from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century characterizes the eighteenth-century approach as follows: "A number of these writers reject the well-known legends and strive to establish a more plausible and scientific place for music in the cure of psychopathic cases and of nervous diseases" (Carapetyan, 1948, p. 146). In discussing the writings of Louis Roger in particular, a study he feels is typical of the better treatises of the eighteenth century, Carapetyan states:

[The second part] he begins with a brief review of the "history of iatric music." Much of it Roger considers as fable, and he complains that few authors have treated the subject *ex professo*. Even from among those who have so treated the subject there is not one who has given the results of prolonged observation and experiment. And Roger proposes to do that very thing. (Carapetyan, 1948, p. 147)

Ruth Boxberger, in assessing the therapeutic aspects of music from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, put it this way: "Music as therapy began to be examined more critically, and gradually the circumstances of its use are disclosed in special cases rather than as a part of the general theory and practice of medicine" (Boxberger, 1961, p. 163).

This new stage in the history of music therapy is captured well for us in the single book known to be written on this subject in eighteenth-century England, Richard Brocklesby's *Reflections on Ancient and Modern Music with the Application to the Cure of Disease*. Brocklesby (1722–1797), one of the outstanding physicians of late eighteenth-century London, published his 82 page treatise in London in 1749. It was also given the title *Reflections on the Power of Music*.

Brocklesby himself was very knowledgeable throughout his life about current medical theories and practices.<sup>1</sup> He started his med-

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<sup>1</sup> For fine discussions of eighteenth-century medical theories and practices, see Roy Porter's "The Eighteenth Century" (1995) and Cecilia C. Mettler's *History of Medicine* (1947).

ical studies at the University of Edinburgh in 1741 and transferred to the University of Leyden in 1743. Both universities had excellent reputations in the early eighteenth century for the study of medicine. He graduated from Leyden in 1745 and was elected to the Royal Society in 1747. He was nominated for membership by Richard Mead, then the most famous physician in London. Brocklesby was characterized in the minutes taken at his induction as “a gentleman well versed in natural, mathematical and medical knowledge” (Curran, 1962, p. 511). In 1754 he received a medical degree from Dublin and the Cambridge M.D. Brocklesby was especially well known for his generosity. He always took charity cases and even supported them financially. He was a friend of both Samuel Johnson and the statesman Edmund Burke.

In addition to his *Reflections on the Power of Music*, Brocklesby made one other significant contribution to medicine and public health through his writings. From 1758 to 1763, he served as Physician to the English Army during the Seven Years' War. His experiences in this war resulted in *Economical and Medical Observations . . . Tending to the Improvement of Military Hospitals and to the Cure of Camp Diseases* (as cited in Morton, 1983), “the best book of the century regarding military sanitation” (Morton, 1983, p. 278).

In terms of its layout, Brocklesby's *Reflections on the Power of Music* has a title page and then proceeds right into the first chapter. The titles of chapters are the following:

- CHAPTER I: Showing the Origin of Music, and How It Affects the Mind (pages 1–16)
- CHAPTER II: Of the Operation of Music on the Bodily Organs (pages 17–25)
- CHAPTER III: Of the Power of Music in Disorders of the Mind (pages 25–45)
- CHAPTER IV: Concerning Music in the Cure of Diseases, Compounded of Affections of the Body and Mind (pages 45–69)
- CHAPTER V: Of the Retardation of Old Age by the Application of Music. (pages 69–75)
- CHAPTER VI: Wherein Consists the Difference of Ancient and Modern Music (pages 76–82)

Brocklesby begins his *Reflections on the Power of Music* with his chief thesis: the further and more frequent application of music

will cure or mitigate various disorders. He adds that the Ancients (the early Greeks in particular) have recounted many instances of the curative powers of music, but examples are also available in his time. At the end of Chapter I, Brocklesby discusses how the mind is affected by music. He believes that "the mind has a faculty, or disposition, to be pleased, or displeased with certain airs, or systems of sounds" (Brocklesby, 1749, pp. 13–14). The cause, he holds, seems to depend upon the mind's liking of the greatest quantity of uniformity amidst the greatest degree of variety. Therefore, he concludes that the "most generally affecting compositions in music," are made up of consonant chords or, as Brocklesby puts it, "divers notes, whose vibrations regularly coincide with each other" (Brocklesby, 1749, p. 14). The degree of pleasure upon hearing notes varies from person to person. One other source of pleasure from musical compositions, Brocklesby adds, is their ability to imitate the sounds of nature. These sounds speak to everyone.

The bulk of Brocklesby's treatise is devoted to the passions/emotions and the diseases of the mind and how these can be affected by music. He begins these discussions with his prescription for health that reads:

To preserve perfect health of body, and a sound state of the animal nature in us, it is necessary that the superintending faculties of the mind be for the most part well-balanced, without an undue bias from any particular affection, which being too far strained, diminishes proportionably the vigour and constitution of the whole; for every turbulent passion of the mind is indicated by a peculiar alteration in some parts of the animal frame at that time. (Brocklesby, 1749, p. 26)

Generally, passions, he says, increase and become habitual.

Brocklesby further explains that "the most violent passions of the mind produce the most apparent alterations on the body" (Brocklesby, 1749, p. 29). According to Brocklesby, the violent passions that have been known to be allayed by music are fear, anger, grief, excessive joy, and enthusiasm in religion or love. He then discusses cases from both ancient and his own times in which music has been known to allay these passions.

Throughout this book, Brocklesby shows himself to be very knowledgeable about the writings of the early Greeks and Romans concerning the healing powers of music. He, in fact, relates dozens

of examples from these writings. More interesting here, however, are the cases that he cites from his own era. These show the Age of Enlightenment's new emphasis on experimentation and observation in the study of music's effects upon the human mind and body.

Concerning fear, Brocklesby explains:

Many soldiers have candidly owned to me that thoughts of meeting death in battle sometimes dampened their generous ardor to engage, until the martial trumpet and other warlike instruments had roused their sinking spirits, and inspired them afresh with hopes of victory or contempt of death. (Brocklesby, 1749, pp. 28–29)

For excessive joy, Brocklesby relates the experiment performed by John Stanley (1713–1786), London's eminent composer and organist. A child about two years old with musical parents became particularly gleeful one day upon hearing joyful music. This prompted Stanley and the child's father to try the effects of different kinds of music on the child. When chromatic and somber music was played, the child grew sad and melancholy. When joyful music was performed, the child's spirits rose very high. Brocklesby cautions, however, that music may not curb all unrestrained passions.

Brocklesby then discusses diseases that result from disturbances in the body: delirium, frenzy, melancholia, and maniacal cases. These occur, he says, when one's senses receive impulses from fluids modified from the alterations of internal parts. Brocklesby here is subscribing to the much accepted theory of Hermann Boerhaave (1668–1738), Professor of Medicine at the University of Leyden. Boerhaave believed that the body was made up of a series of vessels. Through these flowed vital body fluids, and it was the movement, obstruction or stagnation of these fluids that produced health or disease. "Animal spirits" were the fluids that flowed through the nerves, and these governed movement and sensation. Music, according to Brocklesby, put in proper order the irregular motion of the animal spirits.

Delirium, Brocklesby states, is the condition in which the mind is only attentive to the creatures of its own fancy. The best remedy for delirium is music, he says, "as it awakes the attention in the most agreeable manner, and relieves the anxious mind, by substituting a more agreeable series of images" (Brocklesby, 1749, pp. 48–49).

Frenzy, Brocklesby explains, is a disorder having all the symptoms of a delirium plus an acute fever. Music works well here also as a cure. To substantiate this, he tells of a case found in the records of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris in 1708.

A dancing master, after too much fatigue, fell ill of a fever, that in five days was accompanied with comatous symptoms, which afterwards changed into a mute frenzy, in which he continually strove to get out of bed, and threatened with his head and stern countenance all who opposed him, and in a sullen mood obstinately refused all remedies. In these circumstances Mr. de Mandajor proposed to try the power of music; and by his advice an acquaintance played such airs in audience of the patient, as he knew formerly were most agreeable; . . . when the patient heard the music, he raised himself with an agreeable surprise, and attempted to keep time with his hands, which being prevented by force, he continued nodding his head in expression of pleasure; . . . and after a quarter of an hour he fell into a deep sleep, and had, during his nap, a happy crisis. (Brocklesby, 1749, p. 61)

Brocklesby quotes Areteus, an ancient Greek, to emphasize the point that music is likely to work especially well on patients who had enjoyed music before their illnesses.

Melancholia is a disorder characterized by moping. Brocklesby attributes it to atmospheric conditions and the alterations they affect on the vessels of the brain. "This," says Brocklesby, "everyone experiences in himself from the difference discovered in his own temper and mind, between foul and fair weather, a hot or cold day" (Brocklesby, 1749, p. 51). Brocklesby had learned from a gentleman who had visited Gallipoli that its cure is music. Brocklesby states:

It is remarkable that different tunes affect different persons, but generally the briskest airs do most service to this melancholy people; and such is the power of music at the time, that they often fall a dancing upon hearing it, though before they could scarce speak, or be supposed capable of any degree of motion; and in this ecstatic way they continue until their former health of body and mind is restored. (Brocklesby, 1749, p. 60)

Maniacal cases, cases of institutionalized madness, says Brocklesby, are accompanied by, if not caused by, violent excesses or defects of the passions. Music can be employed here as well to good

purpose. In particular, music calms the wildly agitated affections and quiets the wanderings of the fancy so that the medicines administered will work more effectively.

Towards the end of *Reflections on the Power of Music*, Brocklesby addresses two other groups: the elderly and pregnant women. He believes that one of the chief duties of a physician is to prolong life, and he advocates the use of music to retard the aging process. Aging, he says, is caused by the dissipation of the animal spirits. The aim, therefore, should be to conserve the store of animal spirits, which is depleted by immoderate passions, pain, excessive evacuations, and the like. He advises all "to recreate their spirits every day with a piece of good music" (Brocklesby, 1749, p. 73). In closing, he quotes Shakespeare:

Sweet recreation barr'd, what doth ensue  
 But moody, moping, and dull melancholy  
 Akin to grim and comfortless despair  
 And at her heels a huge infectious troop  
 Of pale distemperatures and foes to life.  
 (Brocklesby, 1749, p. 73)

Brocklesby also recommends music for lifting the spirits and aiding in other ills of pregnant women and thereby helping much the unborn baby.

In his sixth and final chapter, Brocklesby compares ancient Greek music and the music of his day, recommending as modern examples George Frideric Handel's *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso* and *Acis and Galatea*. He believes that the healing power of Greek music derived from its simplicity. Brocklesby thinks that simple music appeals to the senses and does not overwhelm the mind by requiring it to make connections among a composition's parts. One who has a keen understanding of music would prefer, however, the complex and ornamented music of the eighteenth century. Sorting out the connections between a composition's parts appeals to the initiated's facility of reasoning and the mind's liking for the greatest unity amidst the greatest variety.

Of course, modern medical science views differently many of the elements that Brocklesby discusses concerning disorders and physiology. However, many of Brocklesby's ideas on music's curative powers, whether derived from his own observations or those of

other eighteenth-century physicians or musicians, remain sound to this day. We still believe that music can alter emotions, and we still advocate music's use among the elderly and pregnant women. Music does awaken attention, relieve the anxious mind, substitute more agreeable series of images, and aid medicine to work more effectively. Simple music often works best in treatment, but patients educated in music often respond better to more complex music, and particularly that known to them before their illnesses. The accuracy of Brocklesby's medical advice results in large part from the eighteenth century's new reliance upon experimentation and observation in drawing conclusions, the same method used today.

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