

Improvisation

Methods and Techniques for Music Therapy
Clinicians, Educators and Students

Tony Wigram

Foreword by Professor Kenneth Bruscia



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Improvisation

Methods and Techniques for Music Therapy Clinicians, Educators and Students

Tony Wigram



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Ethical Guideline

The therapeutic methods and techniques defined and described in this book are for use by qualified clinical music therapy practitioners and students in training who have completed or are undertaking recognized clinical training.

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Contents

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF CD EXAMPLES

Foreword	13
Preface	19
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	21
Chapter 1 Introduction	23
1.1 Origins	23
1.2 Teaching improvisation skills	27
1.3 Learning piano improvisation skills	30
1.4 Improvisation in music therapy: A process	34
1.5 Musical elements – the language of musical expression	35
1.6 Defining musical improvisation and clinical improvisation	36
Chapter 2 Basic Concepts in Improvisation	39
2.1 Musical techniques and therapeutic methods	39
2.2 Creative simplicity as a starting point	40
2.3 Play rules and 'givens'	41
2.4 Clinical application – the therapy process	42
2.5 Summary	43
Chapter 3 Musical Techniques	45
3.1 Basic piano improvisation techniques	45
3.2 Pulsed and non-pulsed playing	51
3.3 Chordal improvisation	58
3.4 Melodic improvisation – melodic dialogues	61
3.5 Chord and melody improvisation	65
3.6 Dissonant improvisation	66
3.7 Atonal melodic dialogue improvisation	70

3.8	Playing in 6ths and 3rds, tonic triads, 1st and 2nd inversions	70			
3.9	Playing in and out of meter	74			
3.10	Accompanying techniques	78			
3.11	Summary and conclusion	80			
Chapter 4	Basic Therapeutic Methods and Skills	81			
4.1	Mirroring, imitating and copying	82			
4.2	Matching	83			
4.3	Empathic improvisation and reflecting	89			
4.4	Grounding, holding and containing	91			
4.5	Dialoguing	97			
4.6	Accompanying	106			
4.7	Summary and integration	109			
Chapter 5	Advanced Therapeutic Methods: Extemporizing and Frameworking	113			
	Introduction	113			
5.1	Extemporizing	113			
5.2	Frameworking	117			
5.3	Jazz frameworks	121			
5.4	Spanish and Latin American frameworks	125			
5.5	Modal frameworks	130			
5.6	Summary	133			
Chapter 6	Transitions: In Improvisation and Therapy	139			
6.1	Definition of transitions	140			
6.2	'Seductive' transitions	142			
6.3	Limbo transitions	144			
6.4	Overlap transitions	154			
6.5	Alternative frameworks for transition techniques	157			
6.6	Summary	160			
Chapter 7	Thematic Improvisation	161			
	Introduction	161			
7.1	The concept of 'theme' or 'leitmotif'	161			
7.2	Rhythmic thematic improvisation	165			
7.3	Melodic thematic improvisation	167			
7.4	Thematic improvisation incorporating musical techniques and therapeutic methods	171			
7.5	Conclusion	178			
Chapter 8	Group Improvisation	181			
8.1	Warm-up techniques	183			
8.2	Play rules, themes, media and structure – the foundations of improvisation	194			
8.3	Concrete, abstract and emotional themes	201			
8.4	Thematic improvisation, musical form, transference and counter-transference	203			
Chapter 9	Two Different Methods for Analyzing and Reporting Improvised Music	209			
	Introduction	209			
9.1	Analysis of music for a musical purpose	210			
9.2	Analysis of music for a therapeutic purpose	216			
9.3	Statistical analysis issues using the Improvisation Assessment Profiles	225			
9.4	General conclusion	227			
	Bibliography	229			
	Subject Index	233			
	Author Index	237			
	List of Tables				
2.1	MUSIC – a process	42			
4.1	Structured matching exercises	88			
6.1	Simple transitions	140			
6.2	Complex overlap transition	154			
6.3	Complex overlap transition exercise 1	156			
6.4	Complex overlap transition exercise 2	156			
6.5	Complex overlap transition exercise 3	156			
6.6	Complex overlap transition exercise 4	156			
6.7	Complex overlap transition exercise 5	156			
6.8	Exercise for making a transition	157			
6.9	Stories with transitions: 3 examples	158			
7.1	The Don'ts!	164			
7.2	Practice examples for musical and therapeutic process	177			
8.1	Warm-up techniques	184			
8.2	Techniques and dynamics of improvisational music therapy	197			

8.3	Sonata form as a metaphor in therapy	204
9.1	A Structural Model for Music Analysis (SMMA)	211
9.2	Potentials in Stimulatory and Sedative Music (PSSM)	215
9.3	Data gathering in assessment and evaluation	217
9.4	IAP autonomy profile	218
9.5	IAP variability profile	218
9.6	Event Based Analysis (EBA) raw score sheet	222
9.7	Summary IAP for a 5-year-old boy with language delay	223
9.8	Summary IAP for an 11-year-old boy with classical autism	224

List of Figures

3.1	Example of 1-note improvisation	46
3.2	Example of 2-note improvisation	48
3.3	Example of not using tonic triads	51
3.4	Example of 3-note improvisation (dissonant/atonal)	52
3.5	3-note atonal improvisation – E, F, D#	54
3.6	4-note tonal and atonal improvisation examples	57
3.7	Shimmer effect using F major 2nd inversion to A major 1st inversion	59
3.8	Arpeggio/broken chord effect	60
3.9	Melody improvisation in D minor	61
3.10	Melody improvisation – atonal in left hand	62
3.11	Tonal and modal melody dialogue	63
3.12	4–5 octave apart melody – special effect	65
3.13	Two-chord improvisation (F7 to G7) Recitative leading to meter	67
3.14	Dissonant harmonic-melodic music	69
3.15	Atonal melody dialogue improvisation	71
3.16	6ths and 3rds improvisation with tonal bass	73
3.17	1st inversion, 2nd inversion and tonic triad improvisation	75
3.18	Meter, lack of meter, in chords, 6ths and inverted chord improvisations	76
3.19	Two-chord accompanying in different patterns and styles	79
4.1	Musical closeness in mirroring	83
4.2	Musical connections in matching	84
4.3	Matching: client on bongos, therapist on conga	85
4.4	Matching: client on xylophone, therapist on metallophone	86
4.5	Matching: client on metallophone, therapist on piano	87

4.6	Two separate circles	89
4.7	Rhythmic grounding	92
4.8	Tonal grounding	94
4.9	Combined rhythmic and tonal grounding	96
4.10	Dialoguing	101
4.11	Conversational dialogue	103
4.12	3/4 and 4/4 accompaniment style	107
5.1	Melodic extemporization using 'Greensleeves'	116
5.2	Framework 1: Atonal walking bass	122
5.3	Tonal jazz framework example 1	124
5.4	Tonal jazz framework example 2	125
5.5	Tonal jazz framework example 3	126
5.6	Two-chord Spanish improvisation	129
5.7	Spanish scale	130
5.8	Two Spanish scales used for the chords in Figure 5.6 and CD50	130
5.9	Spanish improvisation	131
5.10	Some Spanish rhythmic figures	132
5.11	Ionian (major), Dorian and Aeolian scales and two pentatonic scales	133
5.12	Modal frameworking	134
5.13	Tonal framework for 1-note improvisation (David Wigram)	137
6.1	Paint chart – dark to light	142
6.2	Repeated note limbo	145
6.3	Held chord and note limbo	146
6.4	Repeated melodic fragment limbo	148
6.5	Rocking octave limbo	150
7.1	Examples of themes	162
7.2	Examples of thematic production in clients	166
7.3	Examples of themes for melodic development	168
7.4	Melodic improvisation	169
7.5	Melody with rhythm, meter and inherent harmony	173
7.6	Chordal and pentatonic	174
7.7	Rhythmic theme – bongos	175

presented earlier need to be incorporated into later methods. In teaching, I have found myself writing out a 'reminder list' of earlier methods and techniques, to ensure that the acquisition of skills does not get lost as the process becomes more complex. What to expect can be summarized briefly as follows:

Chapter 3 looks at basic piano improvisation techniques (many of which are adaptable to other instruments), starting with simple exercises and developing to musical skills that have more relevance in clinical application.

Chapter 4 defines and describes some of the most useful basic therapeutic methods, such as mirroring, matching, reflecting, grounding, dialoguing and accompanying, where the musical techniques are given a therapeutic direction or objective.

Chapter 5 begins to explore more advanced improvisational techniques, both for use in music making generally and for the purpose of therapeutic interventions. Extemporizing and the development of musical frameworks in improvisation are introduced here.

Chapter 6 introduces the use of transitions in improvisational music making, presenting and illustrating different types of transition, and explaining why they are so important in therapy.

Chapter 7 introduces the concept of thematic improvisation, where a small theme or 'leitmotif' containing rhythmic and melodic characteristics is used as a basis for developing an improvisation. Rhythmic and melodic forms of thematic improvisation are exemplified, and the influence of transference and counter-transference is discussed.

Chapter 8 presents some ideas for group improvisation, either using instruments alone or in combination with piano. Some of the author's ideas for 'warm-ups' are described in detail, following which improvisational frameworks are explained, giving a format of elements that can be drawn on to promote group process. Concrete, abstract and emotional themes are introduced here.

Chapter 9 presents two specific models of musical analysis that can be used in music therapy for describing or analysing the music in improvisations. This final chapter is intended to provide just two models that have been developed to look at and document the material that emerges in improvised music making, and identify either musical or therapeutic salience.

CHAPTER 3

Musical Techniques

3.1 Basic piano improvisation techniques

This chapter will present and describe a series of improvisational exercises that I use to promote and develop creative improvisation on the piano. The ideas can be taken and adapted to other instruments. The exercises are just as useful for people who have absolutely no training at all in playing the piano as for people who have studied piano, reached Grade 8 and are playing Beethoven Sonatas. The exercises are illustrated with notated examples in the text, some of which give a 'starting pattern' from which to begin. There will be examples of most of these musical techniques on the CD that comes with the book.

In order to develop our skills of improvising we find out most by listening to what we do. It often sounds very different when you listen to an improvisation that you have recorded compared with what you were aware of when you were actually participating or playing. It is a very good idea when trying out these exercises to record something you do and then listen to the sound you have made.

1-note and 2-note improvisations

The starting point I always take with improvisation is to *limit the material*. I notice a common mistake is the novice improviser's assumption that the more notes used – on a piano, guitar, xylophone or any other instrument – the more exciting and creative will be the improvisation. Actually, this often leads in another direction – into the land of chaos and over-production. My first challenge to any new improviser (or even someone quite experienced) is to be able to improvise creatively using only one tone, as exemplified in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 shows six systems of musical notation for piano improvisation. The first system is marked *pp* (pianissimo) and features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system is marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *ff* (fortissimo). The third system is marked *p* (piano), *mp* (mezzo-piano), *mf*, *f* (forte), and *ff*. The fourth system is marked *rit.* (ritardando) and *mp a tempo*. The fifth system is marked *accel.* (accelerando). The sixth system is marked *staccato* and features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Figure 3.1: Example of 1-note improvisation

Figure 3.2 shows six systems of musical notation for piano improvisation. The first system is marked *rit.* (ritardando). The second system is marked *cresc.* (crescendo) and *ff*. The third system is marked *dim.* (diminuendo). The fourth system is marked *mp* (mezzo-piano). The fifth system is marked *staccato* and features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The sixth system is marked *staccato* and features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Figure 3.2: Example of 2-note improvisation. This page contains six systems of musical notation for piano. The first system is labeled 'Piano' and features a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It includes dynamic markings *sfz* and *p*. The subsequent five systems are labeled 'Pno' and feature a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one sharp (F#). These systems include dynamic markings *pp*, *fff*, and *mf*. The notation consists of various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests, illustrating improvisation techniques.

Figure 3.2: Example of 2-note improvisation

This page contains six systems of musical notation for piano, continuing the example from page 48. The first system is labeled 'Pno' and features a grand staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The second system is also labeled 'Pno' and includes the marking *legato*. The third system is labeled 'Pno' and includes dynamic markings *p* and *pp*. The fourth system is labeled 'Pno' and includes the marking *cresc.*. The fifth system is labeled 'Pno' and includes the marking *ff*. The sixth system is labeled 'Pno' and includes the marking *f*. The notation continues with various rhythmic patterns and rests, illustrating improvisation techniques.

Exercise: Pick one note on the piano – for example E \flat (a black note is easier to use for this exercise) and play it gently without giving any pulse to it at all. At first I suggest playing this note anywhere you like on the piano with differing timbre, accent, sustain and duration, listening closely to the sound. For example, play as deep as possible on the keyboard and then very high. Establish a tempo with your left hand on E \flat below middle C and then start to play a rhythm that matches the tempo with your right hand. Bring it to a conclusion after about two minutes.

CD Example 1: 1-note improvisation

2-note improvisation develops the idea, and it is a good idea to experiment with both tonal intervals (for example 3rds, 4ths, 5ths, 6ths) and also the more dissonant and atonal intervals (2nds and 7ths).

Exercise: Choose two notes and use a play rule of playing them anywhere you like on the piano but only those two notes. Again, it is better to use black notes (for example F \sharp and C \sharp) because it is easier to be accurate when playing faster.

In the musical example given (Figure 3.2) I have tried to illustrate how exciting a 2-note improvisation can actually look. Setting the smallest note value at a demi-semi-quaver on the Sibelius notation system (as with the 1-note improvisation) there are periods of thick texture, even with two notes, when using those two notes all over the keyboard, and also moments of quite thin, sparse texture with pauses (spaces) in the music, indicating a more open texture. The score is metered in common time, but the tied notes indicate that this is non-pulsed music.

There is an example of how to start this using a 5th/4th interval on the CD.

CD Example 2: 2-note improvisation

3-note improvisations

As soon as more than two notes are used, more complex harmony can be created and the suggestions of melody begin to emerge more strongly. It's a good idea to try this with a number of different combinations. To start with, it's important *not* to use a tonic triad either in the root position, first or second inversion. Instead, use a combination of three notes where either one can create a cadence effect or where the notes will create either dissonant or atonal harmony. Again the play rule here is to play these three notes anywhere on the keyboard in order to build up a creative improvisation with limited material.

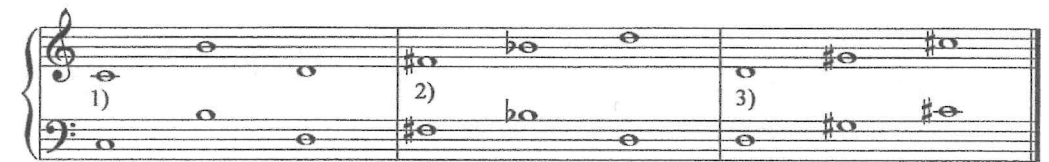


Figure 3.3: Example of not using tonic triads

In the 3-note improvisations it's important to remember not to play all three notes at the same time *all of the time*. Doing so will often create a consistently dissonant or atonal effect throughout and will prevent you from using the inherent harmonies where just two notes followed by two different notes are employed. This is particularly noticeable in the following example (CD3) where a cadence effect of dominant tonic is created.

CD Example 3: 3-note improvisation – cadence effect

In this 3-note improvisation, the cadence created is a perfect cadence where F (C and F) and the use of G (in combination with C) creates a dominant to tonic effect. Using only two notes of the selected three at any one time in the music can establish a sense of key, and cadence. This example also uses the G/F major second to establish some dissonance in the improvisation.

Figure 3.4 shows how these three notes in combination together create a dissonant effect (C \sharp , G \sharp , D). In fact when two alone are played (G \sharp and C \sharp) we have a perfect 5th. However, D in combination with either of these two notes is dissonant. Again, remember to use the notes in combinations of two as well as all three simultaneously.

The next example (Figure 3.5) provides an extremely dissonant/atonal effect of a 3-note improvisation, combining a minor 2nd (E and F) with a minor 7th (F and D \sharp). Bunched together, these notes produce a very dissonant chord but placed apart they produce a more open feeling. It is important to incorporate all the other elements of staccato/legato, soft/loud, etc., to explore fully the improvisational possibilities.

3.2 Pulsed and non-pulsed playing

At this point, before going through any more musical techniques with notated or recorded examples, I want to introduce the very important aspect of pulse and tempo in the improvised music. Pulse plays a very significant and influential part in improvised music making. For a start, it can dominate and obstruct the creative process. Musicians and improvisers who are very 'pulse-bound' are noticeable, because some part of their body, typically a nodding head or a tapping foot, is often emphasizing the

Lento

Piano *ppp*

Pno

Pno

Pno *accel.*

Pno *f*

Pno *allegro*

Pno *f*

Pno *sfz* *marcato*

The musical score on page 52 consists of six systems. The first system is for Piano, marked *Lento* and *ppp*. The second and third systems are for Pno. The fourth system is for Pno with an *accel.* marking. The fifth system is for Pno with an *f* marking. The sixth system is for Pno with an *allegro* tempo marking and an *f* dynamic. The seventh system is for Pno with an *sfz* marking and an *marcato* tempo marking.

Figure 3.4: Example of 3-note improvisation (dissonant/atonal)

Pno

Pno *fff* *pp rit.*

Pno *Lento* *ppp*

Pno

Pno

Pno *f* *ff* *fff*

The musical score on page 53 consists of six systems. The first system is for Pno. The second system is for Pno with *fff* and *pp rit.* markings. The third system is for Pno with a *Lento* tempo marking and a *ppp* dynamic. The fourth system is for Pno. The fifth system is for Pno. The sixth system is for Pno with *f*, *ff*, and *fff* dynamics.

Allegretto

Piano *pp*

Pno

Pno *mf* *f*

Pno *sfz*

Pno *Rit.*

Pno *pp accel. - poco a poco*

Figure 3.5: 3-note atonal improvisation – E, F, D#

Pno *f*

Pno *marcato*

Pno *f* *pp*

Pno *mp* *f*

Pno *p*

Pno *ppp*

pulse in which they are 'imprisoned'. The result is that the music becomes controlled by the pulse, and by the tempo of the pulse, and sometimes that tempo never changes, nor does the improviser break out of pulsed music.

Conversely, one can also experience playing together with someone where their playing style is so random, uncoordinated or vague that there is a significant absence of pulse, and consequently an absence of any sense of stability in their music. Music therapy pioneers argued that the pulse of music was akin to the pulse of life, and that people with disabilities, affective disorders, illnesses and mental disturbance often had 'lost' a sense of pulse and tempo in their daily life, reflected in their music making (Alvin 1975). Consequently it was the role of the music therapist, through improvisation, either to break up and disturb rigid pulses, or to establish a stable pulse where one did not exist, depending on the needs of the client. However, treat the value of consistent pulse and tempi with a degree of caution as, from a purely musical point of view, the driving force of a stable pulse can also prevent the improviser from stopping to think, pausing, slowing down or speeding up, and allowing there to be flexibility in the music.

In the next exercises, I recommend applying 'pulse...no pulse' as part of the exercise, so as to get into practice right from the beginning at going in and out of pulse in improvised music making. I also recommend working with different speeds of pulse, as well as abandoning pulse completely, in many of the following musical techniques and therapeutic methods to develop flexibility in this aspect of the musical dynamic. An example of a pulsed then non-pulsed music, CD3 uses the atonal and dissonant three notes from Figure 3.5 to demonstrate the need for tempo and pulse flexibility.

CD Example 4: 3-note improv: dissonant/atonal – including pulsed and non-pulsed sections

In later sections of this chapter where chord and melody improvisation is introduced, the non-pulsed 'recitative' style will be the starting point, and further on, in Chapter 6, the ability to make and use transitions will also demonstrate the importance of letting go of potentially rigid tempos and pulses.

4-note improvisations

Choosing four notes to play anywhere on the piano gives one a lot of options, and also allows greater harmonic potential and flexibility. With four specific notes, you can start to build up a harmonic foundation, placing a melody on top (or below) and, with enough variability in style and dynamic, create a complex piece of music.

Exercise: I would suggest using a variety of 4-note clusters, to develop both tonally-based, dissonant and atonal harmonic frames. Figure 3.6 gives four distinct and varied 4-note clusters to use for practice. Try an improvisation using each of these in turn, always remembering the following guidelines:

- Make sure there are sections where you just use two or three of the notes.
- Try using these four notes just as chords.
- Try using these four notes for melodic-rhythmic improvisation.
- Try using these notes as an ostinato, with a melodic improvisation above them.
- Try using two notes for a harmonic ground (i.e. C and G as a drone) and improvise melody above them.
- Make sure you play with and without a pulse for periods of time.

Explore the harmonic possibilities in each case, and notice both the logical harmonic modulations (i.e. in Fig.6, Example 4, going from E \flat major to C minor) – relative major to relative minor) and the inharmonic modulations (Fig.6, Example 1, going from D minor or major to E \flat minor or major).

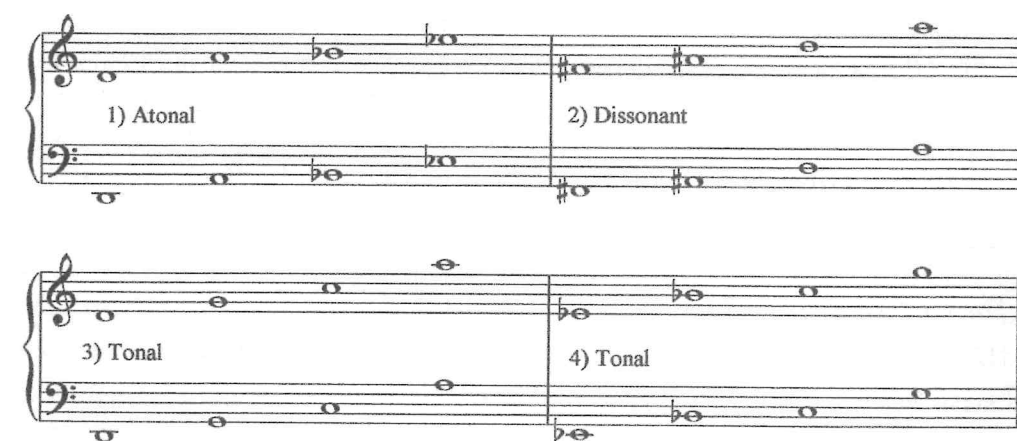


Figure 3.6: 4-note tonal and atonal improvisation examples

This next CD example gives a demonstration of the use of four notes in an improvisation also employing the presence and absence of meter.

CD Example 5: 4-note improvisation with variability of meter.

3.3 Chordal improvisation

Improvising on a favourite chord or key is another good way of limiting the material in order to practise creative improvisation. The effects of keys can be very different: for example it is often commented that A major is a bright, cheerful sound while G \flat major creates a more mellow, soft effect. Consequently, composers have used different keys in their works with this effect in mind, and the bright gay quality of Mozart's A major Piano Concerto K488 is very clear when contrasted, for example, with the Beethoven Piano Sonata 26 in A \flat major. Beethoven used keys in a very special way in his only opera, *Fidelio*, to represent themes such as triumph, despair or freedom in the music. An example of chordal improvisation is demonstrated on CD6, which also introduces what I will call 'shimmer effects' and arpeggio/broken chord effects. They can also be used as accompanying motifs, and will be discussed in 3.10.

CD Example 6: Chord improvisation G \flat major

Exercise: Using this concept, choose different keys to practise creating different feelings. Choose a tonic triad chord – for example G \flat major – and use only these notes in the improvisation. Do not use the scale of the key, just the chord notes wherever they are on the piano (G \flat , B \flat , D \flat). Practise creating rhythmic, pulsed improvisation contrasting with non-pulsed improvisation and ensure that you practise using the full range of the piano in as many different and creative ways as you can. This idea is very useful in clinical work where one wants to provide types of accompaniment which will be explained in a later section. Make sure you explore the chord in all its different positions: root position, 1st inversion and 2nd inversion.

'Shimmer' effect

This is really a fast, rocking 3rd/4th in the right hand with the same in the left hand. Played softly and very fast, it creates a special effect.

Exercise: Try it using two different chords, first creating a shimmer in F major 2nd inversion and then changing to A major 1st inversion, beginning high up in the piano, and then moving down. At first, try this exercise for a short time to avoid cramp. Maintaining a relaxed wrist and fingers will help avoid cramp that comes from overtension. This exercise is notated in the first four bars of figure 3.7. When moving to the A major 1st inversion chord the rocking transfers easily by using the same fingers and changing only two notes in both hands. From bars 5–9, further modulations extend the idea.



Figure 3.7: Shimmer effect using F major 2nd inversion to A major 1st inversion

CD Example 7 gives a demonstration of the shimmer effect, also using variation in dynamic and, towards the end, the position of the shimmer chords in the register of the piano. The example begins with just F major 2nd inversion going to A major 1st inversion, but then extends to other chords using the same effect.

CD Example 7: Shimmer effect

Arpeggio/broken chord effect

This is altogether less 'painful' than the shimmer effect! Find another chord you like, and explore both with pulsed and with non-pulsed music arpeggios and broken chords. Again, it can be easier to do this on the black keys for greater accuracy at faster speeds.

The example on CD8 uses E \flat minor because it is just black notes and can allow greater accuracy, But it goes on to develop through other keys to give an illustration of how this works.

CD Example 8: Arpeggio solidus broken chord E \flat minor

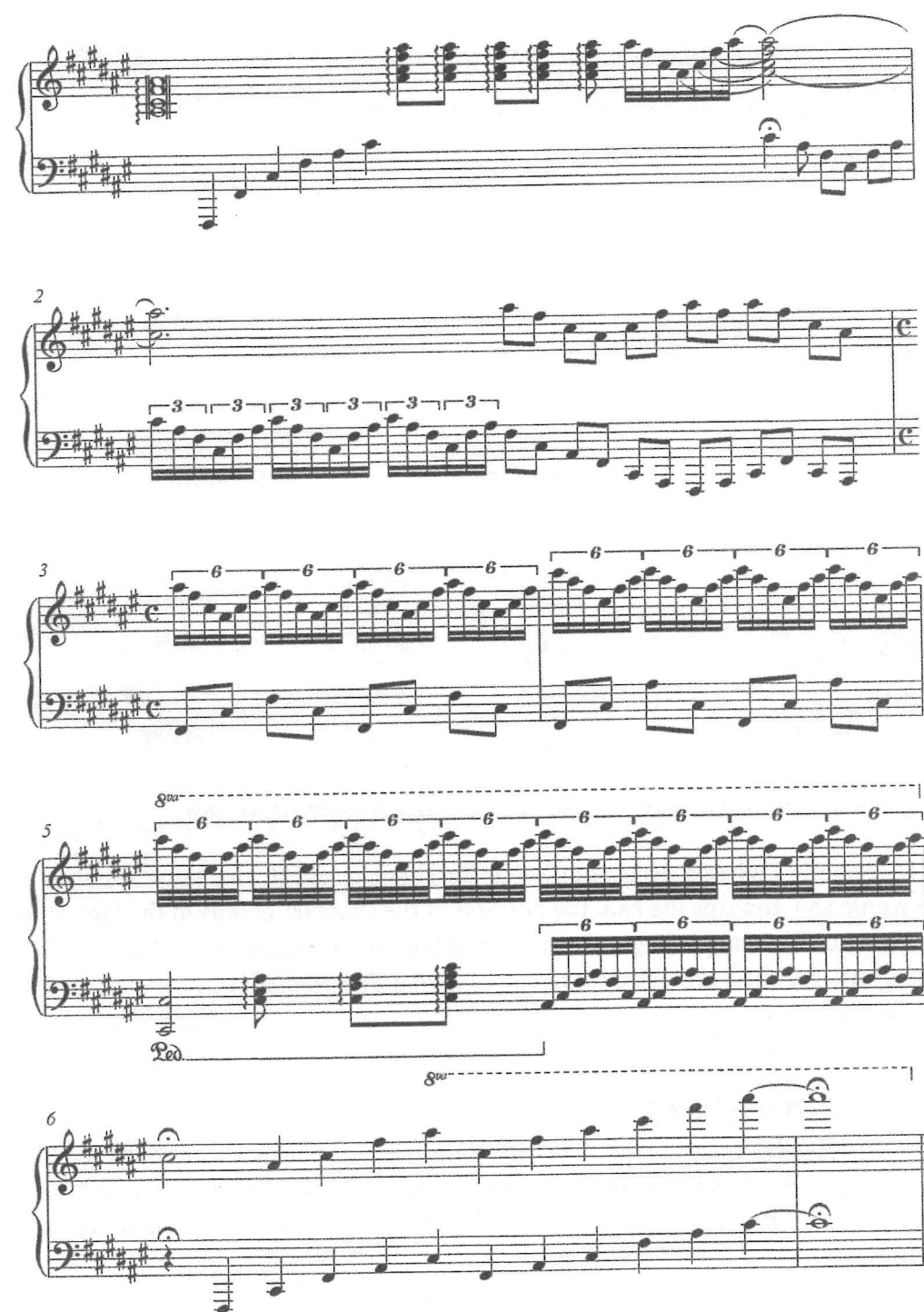


Figure 3.8: Arpeggio/broken chord effect

3.4 Melodic improvisation – melodic dialogues

This technique is designed to develop the spontaneous creation of melody in improvisation. Good melodies have certain essential components. Quite often they contain some direction to the melody, repeated phrases and even some sense of harmony within the melody. In clinical work, clients present who create melody, but the way they play might represent aspects of their own pathological problem. For example, a client will create a melody which has no sense of direction and which just rambles from one note to another without any sense of phrasing or structure. Another example is a client who jumps from one note to another with no sense of step-wise motion, or who lacks a melodic frame that provides any sense of stability or consistency.

Exercise: To develop skills in melodic improvisation, first of all practise creating a melody that has a simple harmonic idea within a tonal frame, and with some repeated patterns in it. Select a key, such as D minor, and start improvising a simple melodic idea with your right hand. Practise repeating phrases, make sure there is some sense of harmonic direction in the music (for example, going to the dominant and then returning to the tonic) and at first develop a predictable direction in the melody.

Figure 3.9 gives an example of a simple melody improvisation using some predictable and logical melodic sequences, so that the melody demonstrates a sense of direction and coherence. I have excluded any harmony from this, and left the meter rather ambiguous. At this point, I am trying to exemplify the idea of working purely with melodic patterns.



Figure 3.9: Melody improvisation in D minor

Exercise: Left-hand melody. The left hand frequently gets relegated to a very stereotyped role, and improvisational skill using the left hand to make melody is also valuable. This time don't play in a specific key, but develop an atonal melody in your left hand. While atonal melodies may feel freer than tonal ones, where there are some expectations in the implied harmonic structure and direction of the melody, they can also sound chaotic and directionless, unless some repeated phrases, figures and patterns are included to give the melody a sense of structure and coherence (perhaps even occasional predictability). To add variation to the exercise, try playing alternatively legato and staccato, i.e. in a pulsed, 4/4 rhythm, do 4 bars legato and 4 bars staccato. Figure 3.10 gives an example of an atonal melody in the left hand.



Figure 3.10: Atonal melody improvisation – left hand

Melody dialogues

Melody dialogues can be very useful in therapy interaction as they can represent conversational experiences in music. Practising on the piano with both hands can be done in a specific way where one hand plays while the other hand holds a note, then the other hand takes over the melody while the first hand holds a note. Hence though the

hands are not playing simultaneously to start with, the music resembles a conversational dialogue between the two hands. Be sure that the phrases do not completely match (by using variation in phrase length) and that some staccato, volume, tempo changes and other variations can creep in.

Figure 3.11 gives an example of melody dialogue, and as a further exercise try using this example as a starting point, extending the improvised dialogue in this style. Note that the melody is rather predictable, tonal, with step-wise and small interval movement, stable rhythm and pulse, and no major dynamic variations.



Figure 3.11: Tonal and modal melody dialogue

CD9 gives a demonstration of a melody dialogue, beginning in F major and then modulating, using melody fragments, extending the ideas and using sequences.

CD Example 9: Tonal melody dialogue improvisation

Initially, it is suitable to develop a melody dialogue without the complications of having to remember key signatures (sharps and flats), so using A minor or C major is a good starting point, if one is aiming for atonal and harmonic idea. The main purpose here is to develop a balanced dialogue between two hands and to develop one's skill at creating matching phrases and answering phrases. Matching phrases can also be played (for variation) in inversion.

Exercise: Practise different types of dialogues on their own at first and then try an improvisation where you mix together the matching phrases, answering phrases and mirroring or inverting phrases between hands. Also remember to vary the phrase lengths in the right hand/left hand dialogue. Start to include accents in the music, and the dialogue will start to sound more like a conversation (as can be heard in CD Example 9).

Melody doubling

An interesting idea, often used in films to create a certain atmosphere, is playing the same melody phrases in both hands simultaneously but four to five octaves apart on the piano. I call this *melody doubling* as the effect is of doubling a melody in another register.

Exercise: Start a simple melody in the left hand in the lower half of the bass section of the piano and play the same melody simultaneously in the right hand high up near the top range of the piano. Try it slowly and softly at first, gradually introducing dynamic, rhythm and tempo to the improvisation. Keep it simple to begin with, and then develop the complexity of the melody when you feel confident that you can play the same thing simultaneously with both hands. An illustration is given in Figure 3.12.

The example on the CD (CD10) gives a demonstration of the type of effect that can be achieved with melody doubling. When playing with both hands far apart, slow, step-wise (perhaps chromatic) music with occasional short pauses is a good way to begin in order to achieve accuracy in melody doubling.

CD Example 10: Melody 4–5 octaves apart



Figure 3.12: 4–5 octave apart melody – special effect

3.5 Chord and melody improvisation

This technique is based on a combination of chords in one hand and melody in the other, which so typically provides a musical frame for songs or pieces. To establish a simple and straightforward foundation begin with a two-chord improvisation in the left hand. Use a 'recitative' style in order to avoid getting stuck in a pulse. The objective here is to establish a two-chord frame (in either the left hand or the right hand), with an improvised melody in the opposite hand without a pulse, where the development of a melody within a tonal frame is practised.

Exercise: Figure 3.13 provides a sequence of tonal chords which lead through a logical modulatory sequence. For this exercise use the first two chords only, at first, to provide the harmonic ground for the chord and melody improvisation. Take these first two chords and work out a diatonic improvisation on the white keys of the piano alone (as demonstrated in Figure 3.13) improvising a melody above the chords. When using the 'recitative' style of improvising, the trick is to make sure that when you change the chord the harmony of the melody logically falls on the right note at the point of change.

Adding meter and pulse

In the example given (Figure 3.13 and CD 11), after a period of recitative, the material develops into a meter, with a slow, stable pulse (bar 8). It is still important to remember that as soon as a pulse is introduced, especially when it is framed with a common time meter, the improvisation should initially stay legato and very moderato in character, in order that the improviser has time to think and modify the improvisation as it continues.

Exercise: At first, practise the recitative style illustrated on the CD and in the music. Subsequently, establishing a simple 4-4 pulse on the chords and then improvising the melody to those chords is a good way to develop the idea within tempo. Subsequently (CD 11), switching the chords to the right hand while the left hand has to produce the melody is a good challenge for your right brain/left brain flexibility!

CD Example 11: Two chord improvisation – recitative (chords in right hand then in left hand)

3.6 Dissonant improvisation

Dissonance is described generally as a discordant combination of sounds, and musically is a style that is founded in tonality, but includes certain intervals (seconds, sevenths, diminished and augmented intervals) that give the chords and harmony a dissonant quality. *Dissonant music* is also characterized by incongruence or discrepancy in the musical harmony (Collins English Dictionary 1993). In order to clarify differences at this stage, *atonal music* is defined as music that has no established key, whereas *dissonant music* has a sense of key, and a harmonic framework. *Tonal music* is music that is defined as having or relating to tone: utilizing the diatonic system and having an established key.

In clinical music therapy, it is often relevant and empathic to create a dissonant frame to a client's music to reflect certain aspects of the feelings that might be underpinning or underlying the expressive communication within the music. Harmonically tonal music may not be effective empathically with the client's disturbed or upset feelings and dissonance can serve a very useful function in the same way as atonal music can break free of any types of harmonic or structured rules. Dissonance is useful where a client is perhaps playing random melodic material either on a piano, xylophone or another type of melodic instrument, and the therapist can create a dissonant harmonic frame for the client's music.

Figure 3.13: Two-chord improvisation (F7 to G7) Recitative leading to meter, continued on next page

Figure 3.13: Two-chord improvisation (F7 to G7) Recitative leading to meter, continued

Figure 14 offers a technique for practising this using the piano. The left hand can give a dissonant harmonic frame that is basically grounded in C major with the augmented fourth included in the chord. Melody can then be improvised above it in a different key, such as E major or D major. This juxtaposition of one key upon another is an effective way to achieve a dissonant effect within a conventional harmonic frame. A fine example to practise is playing a song or a piece using one key for the accompaniment and another key for the melody.

Exercise: Practise playing 'Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star' in C major harmony on the left hand, while playing the tune in C sharp major on right hand! Once you have mastered how it goes, try placing the melody two octaves higher than the harmony!

Figure 3.14: Dissonant harmonic-melodic music

This isn't just for fun, as it creates an interesting dynamic, especially when working with children who can be amused and intrigued by hearing tunes that are distorted by employing dissonance in this way. So the easiest way to develop a dissonant style of playing is by taking a harmonic frame and then adding dissonant intervals into the harmonic frame such as seconds, sevenths and augmented fourths.

3.7 Atonal melodic dialogue improvisation

As I described earlier, atonal improvisation is where no particular key is specified and the music appears to be totally ungrounded harmonically. There still needs to be some stability in the melodic style, with repeated ideas, motifs, phrases and rhythmic patterns. Atonal music can be experienced as a chaotic and even frightening medium by some, while others find it a free and creative style of play. This is essentially its value as a therapeutic tool, offering an opportunity for musical participation to all where musical skill and knowledge is not a prerequisite, and where the musical relationship can be an equal-term relationship. It offers the opportunity to explore and balance structure and freedom in music therapy treatment, which has been a theme of mine in previous articles (Wigram 1995b, 2002a).

A simple way of beginning an atonal style of improvisation is through melodic dialogue, only this time play with your right hand on the black notes and your left hand on the white notes. Playing with the hands in juxtaposition increases the atonal feel to the music, and develops a feeling of the melodies intertwining with each other. When the hands are further apart, one's sense of harmonic structure in the musical brain tends to start separating out the tonal and atonal effects, and it sounds more dissonant than atonal.

Exercise: To start an atonal melody dialogue, begin playing melody phrases with the left hand on the white notes, and then pause with the left hand while the right hand joins in on the black notes. Use plenty of seconds and sevenths in the melodic idea to accentuate the idea of atonal music. After two or three exchanges of phrases, practise in juxtaposition, and then play with both hands simultaneously to develop the dialogue into a duet.

The example on the CD (CD12) demonstrates the idea, illustrating the closeness and intertwined effect of right hand-left hand interaction in this dialogue leading to a duet.

CD Example 12: Atonal melody dialogue

Figure 3.15: Atonal melody dialogue improvisation

3.8 Playing in 6ths and 3rds, tonic triads, 1st and 2nd inversions

Tonal structure can be very supportive, grounding, stabilizing and structuring in improvisation. Simple techniques that are easily mastered but produce quite a complex effect are valuable tools in therapy. This section explains how to apply a technique

$\text{♩} = 68$ Andante

The musical score is written for piano (Piano/Pno) in 4/4 time, with a tempo of 68 beats per minute (Andante). It consists of six systems of two staves each. The music is characterized by a dialogue between the right and left hands, using black and white notes to create an atonal effect. The score includes various dynamics: *mf* (mezzo-forte), *accel.* (accelerando), *rit.* (ritardando), *pp* (pianissimo), *sfz* (sforzando), *f* (forte), and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The piece concludes with a final cadence marked *pp*.

Figure 3.15: Atonal melody dialogue improvisation

where the position and distance between fingers in the right hand using thumb and fifth finger for sixths, and thumb and third finger for fourths is 'fixed', and attention can be given to phrasing, melodic direction and musical dialogue.

6ths and 3rds

The first technique to develop, using the piano, for giving a tonal melodic accompaniment or support to a client's music is the use of 6ths or 3rds on the piano. It is a simple, harmonic and also melodic way to provide a supportive framework to a client improvising on percussion or instruments or xylophones and metallophones.

Exercise: Establish a tonal centre or a tonal ground in the bass of the piano, using a repetitive pattern of three octaves. For a ground in the major (again using just the white notes of the piano) C-F-G...C-F-G in slow octaves provides the harmonic ground. For the relative minor, use A-D-E...A-D-E.

In the right hand start to play using just the interval of the 6th, solely on the white notes and using a step-wise direction in the melody line, to create a melodic and harmonic effect. It's useful if the moment when the octave changes in the left hand matches in a harmonically (modulatory) congruent way with the 'melody' that is being improvised using 6ths in the right hand. Develop this further using 3rds in the right hand, and by extending the left hand octave improvisation beyond a tonic, dominant subdominant sequence. Figure 3.16 gives an illustration of this technique, bringing in triplet rhythms in the melody which, together with the effects of 6ths and 3rds, gives a gentle, Mexican/Latin American feel to the music.

CD Example 13 gives a demonstration of moving in 6ths and 3rds, using an octave ground bass. This is also an example of the use of rubato in music, where the effect of slowing and stretching the music perhaps provides a wistful, sentimental effect. It is another example of the importance of including other musical elements and aspects when employing a specific musical technique.

CD Example 13: 6ths and 3rds improvisation

Tonic triads, 1st and 2nd inversions

The technique of 6ths and 3rds described above can be developed using triad chords in different inversions.

The musical score for Figure 3.16 is written for piano in 4/4 time, marked Andante. It consists of five systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef).
 - System 1: The left hand plays a slow, repetitive octave pattern of C-F-G in the major key. The right hand plays a melody of 6th intervals (C-G, D-A, E-B, F-C, G-D, A-E, B-F, C-G) in a legato *mp* (mezzo-piano) texture.
 - System 2: The left hand continues the octave pattern. The right hand continues with 6th intervals.
 - System 3: The left hand continues the octave pattern. The right hand introduces a triplet rhythm in the melody, marked with a '3' over a bracket. The tempo is marked *rubato*.
 - System 4: The left hand continues the octave pattern. The right hand continues with 6th intervals. Dynamics change to *f* (forte) and then *p* (piano).
 - System 5: The left hand continues the octave pattern. The right hand continues with 6th intervals. Dynamics change to *pp* (pianissimo) and then *ppp* (pianississimo).
 The score concludes with a double bar line.

Figure 3.16: 6ths and 3rds improvisation with tonal bass

Exercise: Use the same bass idea of three octaves, tonic, dominant, sub-dominant (C-G-F), and the relative minor using A-D-E. This time, instead of playing just the sixth, add the third in to form the 6/3, or 1st inversion chord in your right hand.

When this has become confident, extend this idea by forming your hand into the position of the 6/4, or 2nd inversion chord. Each time, play using a step-wise movement, with a slightly stronger pressure in your little finger to accentuate a melody. Finally, try using the whole tonic triad chord plus the octave. Practise an improvisation using these chords. It's very good for accompanying and supporting playing where a client is randomly playing melodies on a xylophone or another piano. These three options (1st inversion, 2nd inversion and tonic triad plus octave) are exemplified in Figure 3.17, and the CD Example 14.

CD Example 14: 1st inversion, 2nd inversion and tonic triad plus octave chordal improvisation with relative major to relative minor tonal ground

3.9 Playing in and out of meter

Having written earlier about the significant effect of pulse and tempo on improvised music, I would also like to explain the relevance and power of meter. Not only do we find the need to ground our improvised music in a stable pulse, with or without changes in tempo, but meter is often present in the rhythm and tempo of the music. Meter can act as a valuable 'anchor' in defining the structure of the music, but it can also function as a musical 'prison', where the presence of strong beats confirmed by regular accentuation establishes a fixed pattern.

The common meters, such as 4/4, 3/4, 2/4, provide clear accents in the music. Compound time, with meters such as 6/8, 9/8 or 6/4 offer different possibilities for strong beats, and irregular meters, such as 5/4 or 7/8, give us a sense of structure with either a syncopated or cross rhythmic effect. Another of the values of providing an established meter is that it allows the development of syncopated playing with unexpected and irregular accents.

Figure 3.18 shows the different meters, and goes on to introduce a chordal improvisation that develops into using 6ths, 1st and 2nd inversions. The example shows the changing meters in the musical material, interspersed with sections that sustain the pulse, but have abandoned the meter. This illustrates how flexible rhythmic music can be, especially when one also remembers to incorporate rubato, accelerandos and ritardandos.

$\text{♩} = 80$ Andante

Figure 3.17: 1st inversion, 2nd inversion and tonic triad plus octave chordal improvisation with relative major to relative minor tonal ground

$\text{♩} = 88$ *Andante*

Piano *mp*

Pno

$\text{♩} = 96$

Pno

$\text{♩} = 160$

Pno

rit..
No meter

Pno

rit..
a tempo

Pno

f

Pno

Figure 3.18: Meter, lack of meter, in chords, 6ths and inverted chord improvisations

Pno *mp* *p* *mf*

Pno

f

Pno

no meter *mp*

Pno

Pno

3.10 Accompanying techniques

Accompanying techniques are very useful in therapy and quite often involve providing some type of chordal harmonic framework to what a client may be doing. This is building on the previous section of two-chord with extended modulations (cycle of fifths) improvisations, and is where one starts to use style to vary the accompaniment in order to support or influence a melodic or rhythmic production in a client's music. Accompanying is a musical technique and also a therapeutic method, so I will introduce it in this chapter as a technique, and then refer to it again in the next chapter for its value in therapy.

Simple accompaniment examples using a two-chord harmony are demonstrated in Figure 3.19, which shows how this simple frame can develop through different accompanying styles. The examples of accompanying using the two chords are made by varying texture, rhythmic patterns, meter and style. The left hand tends to provide a grounding 'dominant/tonic' octave or note, while the right hand varies in style. To begin with, the right hand plays the two chords in crotchets (1), quavers (2), followed by Latin American rhythmic patterns (3) and (4). Arpeggios (5) and off-beat chords (6) are followed by a change of meter to 6/8 (7) and (8). Returning to common time with syncopation is introduced by accents (9) and rests in the music (10), and the examples finish with simple broken chords (11).

Exercise: Imagine a client is playing randomly on a metallophone using one beater to create some melodic phrases and it is the therapist's decision to try to support this with an accompaniment.

These techniques are also demonstrated on the CD (CD15), which illustrates how this can work in practice and the way in which the accompanist begins with a recitative style, followed by establishing some rhythmic ground and then developing a rhythmic figure to support the accompaniment.

CD Example 15: Piano accompanying a metallophone

Percussion instruments are also very good for providing accompaniment and, to move away from the piano for a moment, CD16 gives an example of the usefulness of the drum (played with hands) in providing a supportive accompaniment to someone playing on a xylophone.

CD Example 16: Drum accompanying a xylophone

Figure 3.19: Two-chord accompanying in different patterns and styles, continued on next page



Figure 3.19: Two-chord accompanying in different patterns and styles, continued

3.1.1 Summary and conclusion

These are a selection of useful techniques with which to begin practising in order to create building blocks for the therapeutic methods that follow. Creativity and flexibility are the primary objectives, and are important factors in developing improvisation that will become musically interesting and therapeutically effective. The most common problem in improvisation is that people find themselves getting stuck in a particular idea and forget all the potential musical variables that can be introduced and deployed to develop the creativity of the improvisation, particularly changes in tempo and changes in volume. Therefore in all the above exercises it is essential to introduce variability of the musical elements in order to add colour, expressivity and meaning to the concrete technique as it is being developed.

Basic Therapeutic Methods and Skills

There are many different therapeutic methods that are applied in music therapy when using improvisation. Bruscia (1987, p.533) began with a description of 64 'clinical techniques' and with the increasing volume of published literature on music therapy over the last 12 years, further techniques and methods used in therapy have been reported (Coddington 2000, 2002; Pedersen 2002; Staum 2000; Wigram and Bonde 2002; Wigram and De Backer 1999a, 1999b; Wigram, Pedersen and Bonde 2002).

Therapy methods can either be used intentionally (or intuitively) in therapy work with clients or they can be the objects of analysis when reflecting on a period of free-flowing improvisation to explore what was actually happening. It is not usual for music therapists to pre-plan exactly the method they might use, unless they are working in an activity-based model, or with a structured assessment procedure. In improvisational music therapy, particularly, the model requires an adaptive and flexible response to the way the client begins to make music. There can be a certain degree of planning based on the assessment that has taken place and an estimation of the client's needs and the objectives of therapy that will promote certain techniques above others. However, it is more typical that improvisational music making occurs, and within that music making intuitive judgements about therapeutic method are made based on the 'here and now' experience. Music therapists don't remain exclusively attached to one musical technique or therapeutic method for a set period of time, and might fluctuate between a number of different methods (as well as musical techniques) over the course of a single improvisation.

This chapter presents, discusses and exemplifies certain specific methods that are commonly used in music therapy, in order to provide methods within which the musical techniques that have been described in the previous chapter can be applied.

It is very useful to practise these techniques together with another person, first of all playing the experience and subsequently responding to the musical production of another. Each technique will include a musical illustration, complemented by an example on the CD.

4.1 Mirroring, imitating and copying

Mirroring and *imitating* are frequently used as empathic techniques where the music therapist intends to give a message to the client that they are meeting them exactly at their level and attempting to achieve synchronicity with the client. Bruscia has described the technique of mirroring as 'synchronising – doing what the client is doing at the same time'. I define mirroring in a similar way but with a slightly broader explanation, in order to suggest to clinical practice that mirroring involves more than just musical behaviour:

Mirroring: Doing exactly what the client is doing musically, expressively and through body language at the same time as the client is doing it. The client will then see his or her own behaviour in the therapist's behaviour.

This can only be achieved musically, where the client's music is both simple enough and predictable enough for the therapist to anticipate how to mirror exactly what the client is doing. This also applies to the physical behaviour of the client. In order for the mirror to be exact, the therapist may also need to pay attention to using a very similar instrument as the client in order to achieve a mirrored response. However, it is possible to accomplish mirroring by using a different instrument. Example 17 on the CD gives an illustration where the therapist can use the piano almost as a drum while the client plays on a drum.

CD17: Mirroring – client on drum + therapist on piano

'Close enough' mirroring is a technique where the therapist is doing almost exactly the same as the client but due to technical reasons cannot copy exactly. For example, this would work very well where the client is randomly playing notes on a metallophone and the therapist mirrors that by playing as near an imitation as possible at the same time, achieving the direction of the melody and the general contour of the melody without necessarily matching exact notes.

Conceptually, we can see the identities of the participants in mirroring (client and therapist) in a very symbiotic relationship, where they become fused and undivided. Figure 4.1 illustrates the place of the therapist and client inside two circles where the integration of one circle into another represents the closeness of the material.

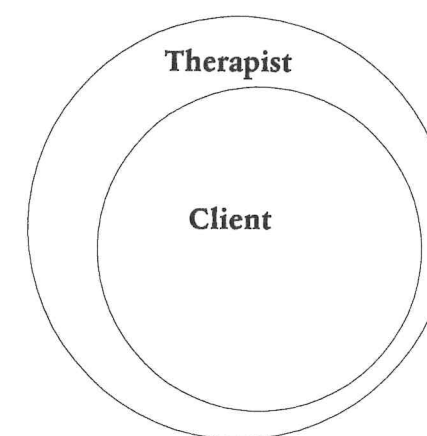


Figure 4.1: Musical closeness in mirroring

Imitating or copying are also empathic methods of improvisation and imitating has been defined by Bruscia as 'echoing or reproducing a client's response after the response has been completed'. This relies on the client leaving spaces in the music for the therapist to imitate what he or she is doing. It should be used quite specifically, and caution needs to be exercised as imitating or copying a client's production might appear as though you were either teasing or patronizing the client. While mirroring and copying are relatively simple methods, they can also be quite confronting to a client, and can be risks, for example, with clients with paranoia or thought disorder for whom this method may excite irrational fears. This approach needs to be used sensitively and appropriately. Nevertheless, it is a therapeutic strategy to help a client to be aware that musically you are echoing and confirming what they have done.

4.2 Matching

I regard *matching* is one of the most valuable of all the improvisational methods that can be applied in therapy. It is, in my approach, a typical starting point to work together with the client musically, from which a number of other therapeutic strategies or methods emerge. It is also an empathic method, as the music produced by the therapist in response to the client confirms and validates their playing and their emotional expression.

I have defined the term to be quite inclusive:

Matching: Improvising music that is compatible, matches or fits in with the client's style of playing while maintaining the same tempo, dynamic, texture, quality and complexity of other musical elements (Wigram 1999a).

To achieve a 'match' in musical terms means that the therapist's music is not identical to the client's, but is the same in style and quality. Therefore the client experiences that the therapist's music 'fits together and matches' his or her own production.

Conceptually, we can begin to see the two separate identities of the participants (client and therapist) in their musical relationship, where they are together, congruent and matched musically, but with some individual differences that show emerging separateness. Figure 4.2 shows two circles separating, representing the matched material but separating identities of the therapist and client.

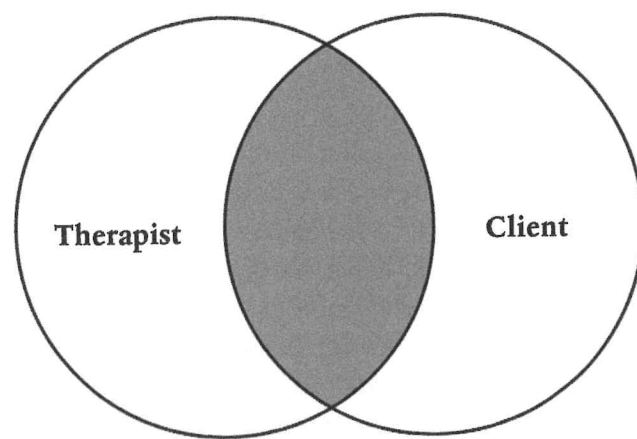


Figure 4.2: Musical connections in matching

Bruscia does not include matching as a term, but incorporates the idea into a definition of reflecting. Pavlicevic (1997) has referred to it in her book *Music Therapy in Context* giving a different conceptual understanding. She thinks of matching as 'partial mirroring where, for example, the client plays a definite and predictable musical pattern, and the therapist mirrors some, but not all, of the rhythmic components' (p.126).

My experience and use of matching in therapy is more as an equal, complementary style of playing together, as illustrated in Figures 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5, and demonstrated in CD18, CD19 and CD20. The CD examples start with the 'client' playing, and show how the therapist joins in, matching the music of the client. In the first examples (Figure 4.3 and CD18) the rhythmic style of the client is revealed as short, quite stable rhythmic patterns in a regular pulse. As the improvisation develops, the

Figure 4.3: Matching: client on bongos, therapist on conga

Client - xylophone

Therapist - bass metalophone

2

client

Therapist

3

client

Therapist

7

client

Therapist

10

client

Therapist

Figure 4.4: Matching: client on xylophone, therapist on metallophone

Adagio

Therapist - piano

Client - Metallophone

Therapist

Client

Figure 4.5: Matching – client on metallophone, therapist on piano

style changes with a loss of any sense of pulse in the client's playing, and the therapist can be heard to adapt and sustain matching.

CD Example 18: Matching – client on bongos, therapist on djembe

In the next examples (Figure 4.4 and CD19) melodic matching is illustrated. Here the emphasis is on style of the melody, in particular phrase lengths, step-wise or large interval movement and tonality. The client's material changes as the example goes on, and the therapist can also be heard to adapt to this change.

CD Example 19: Matching – client and therapist on melodic instruments

Finally, Figure 4.5, CD 20 gives an example where the therapist (piano) uses chords to match with a client (metallophone) who is playing sustained, two-tone sounds, without any sense of rhythmic or harmonic direction. In the therapeutic process of matching it is very important to stay true to the client's music, and not attempt to modify, change or manipulate. At this stage of therapeutic intervention, using the matching method, therapeutic directions or 'solutions' are not the primary objective, and may emerge later. The engagement, close to the tradition and goal of client centred therapy, is to offer 'unconditional positive regard' in the form of acceptance and matching.

CD Example 20: Client on xylophone, therapist on piano

Matching exercises

The CD has two examples of a person playing that provide an opportunity to practise the therapeutic method of matching. The first part of the process in matching is to listen to and analyse the musical components of a client's production, also taking into account their level of expression in their body and their face. However, as these examples are presented on CD, the latter information is not available and one needs solely to consider the musical elements.

Table 4.1 identifies the musical elements for these two examples in order to clarify the type of music the therapist should produce to match and empathize with the client's material.

Table 4.1 Structured matching exercises				
Example	Style	Rhythm	Dynamic	Tonality
1 (CD21)	Folk	4/4 regular	Soft and slow	Pentatonic
2 (CD22)	Jazzy	Irregular	Wide range	Atonal

4.3 Empathic improvisation and reflecting

Mirroring, copying and matching involve a more technical exercise of creating a musically congruent response to the client, attending primarily to the balance and salience of musical elements, as well as body language and expression. *Empathic improvisation* and *reflecting* require a response that is more specifically connected to the emotional state of the client.

Empathic improvisation

This is difficult to illustrate in a book or on a CD. It involves a therapeutic method that was first applied by Juliette Alvin where, typically at the beginning of a session, she would play (on her cello) an improvisation that empathically complemented the client's 'way of being'. In practice this means taking into account the client's body posture, facial expression, attitude on this particular day and previous knowledge of their personality and characteristics, and playing something to them that reflects a musical interpretation of their own way of being at that moment. It was intended by Alvin as a very empathic technique, not attempting in any way to change the client's feelings or behaviour, but simply to play them to the client without any hidden manipulation of their feelings. If a client comes into the therapy room agitated and upset, this mood can easily be incorporated into an empathic improvisation; the therapist is not trying to ameliorate or reduce the degree of distress which the client is currently experiencing but merely to play it back to them as a supportive and empathic confirmation.

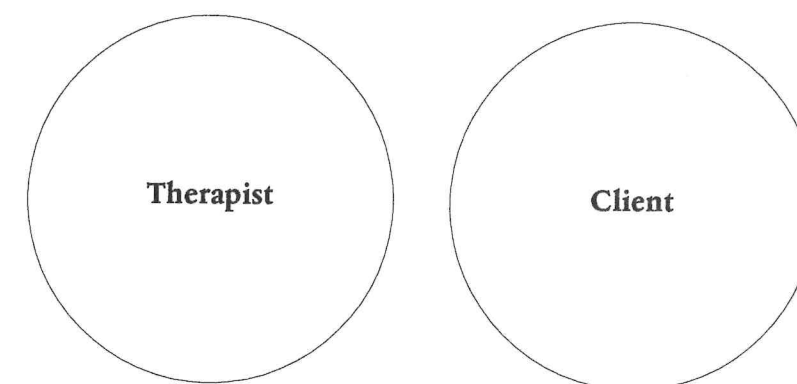


Figure 4.6 Two separate circles, representing separate musical identities, but with emotional empathy

Reflecting

This technique is well documented in Bruscia's 64 techniques and he defines it as 'Matching the moods, attitudes, or feelings exhibited by the client' (Bruscia 1987, p.540)

In reflecting, unlike mirroring, copying or matching, the therapist's music might be quite different from the client's as the purpose of this therapeutic technique is to understand and reflect back the client's mood at that moment, rather than be a more technical reflection of their music. However, there needs to be congruence in mood or emotional expression between the therapist's music and the client's music otherwise the method would cease to have any empathic effect.

Conceptually, we can see two separate identities of the participants in reflecting (client and therapist), in a relationship where they are separated musically, yet still congruent emotionally. Figure 4.6 illustrates the separation of the therapist and client circles.

CD23 demonstrates a client playing in a random, rather directionless rhythm on percussion instruments (drum and cymbal). Note that the therapist allows a short time to pass before beginning to reflect musically and empathically. This is an important part of the process:

Listen to the client's music before giving a response.

I frequently find myself reminding students in training and therapists under supervision that reflecting on your experience of the client's music is essential to be sensitive in response. There are sometimes patterns or characteristics that can help both in deciding the therapeutic method of response and the musical 'style'. The response the therapist gives in CD23 reflects the aimless and random style of the client's playing, using melody and harmony.

CD Example 23: Reflecting example 1 – therapist on piano, client on drums and cymbal

In the next example, the client presents a very different picture while playing the piano. Feelings of anger and frustration are present in the sharp, bunched chords the client is playing. There is an underlying sense of pulse, with accents and sudden changes in dynamics to reinforce the apparent irritation of the client. The therapist reflects these feelings with a melodic line on the xylophone.

CD Example 24: Reflecting example 2 – therapist on xylophone, client on piano

Two exercises are now presented on the CD, with the client playing piano in the first and temple blocks in the second. While these examples do not allow the reader to understand the actual emotional state or feelings exhibited by the client,

they can be used by imagining what they could be, based on the music that is presented and trying to find a way to frame a response that is an empathic reflection of the music.

Exercise: Using CD25 and CD26, listen to each example for a few seconds, establishing in your mind the possible emotional state or mood of the music ('client'), and then allow your own emotional state to be affected by the music you are listening to. When you have become sensitive to the mood or emotion present in the music you are listening to, and your own emotional reaction to it, begin to play that emotional reaction on another instrument, reflecting the feelings that are present in the music, and present in yourself.

CD Example 25: Reflecting exercise 1 – client on piano

CD Example 26: Reflecting exercise 2 – client on temple blocks

4.4 Grounding, holding and containing

Grounding, holding and containing are all therapeutic methods that are extremely useful when applied with clients who have a very random or floating way of playing, and way of being. It is helpful where the client appears or sounds unconnected to their music, or the music lacks any stability, direction or intentionality. I have defined the process of grounding as:

Grounding: Creating a stable, containing music that can act as an 'anchor' to the client's music.

Examples of specific musical techniques that can be used in grounding include:

- strong octaves or fifths in the bass of the piano;
- steady pulsed beats on a bass drum;
- strong chords of a stable tonal nature using typically dominant and tonic chords;
- a simple ostinato.

Rhythmic grounding

Rhythmic grounding is a very useful way of providing a foundation to something the client is doing. Bruscia defines it as 'Keeping a basic beat or providing a rhythmic foundation for the client's own improvising' (Bruscia 1987).

Client - Bongo

Therapist - Bass drum

2

Client

Therapist

3

Client

Therapist

4

Client

Therapist

5

Client

Therapist

Fig 4.7: Rhythmic grounding – client and therapist on bongos and bass drum

An important aspect of rhythmic grounding is that it is not necessary to impose a meter on the client's rhythmic musical production. In fact, it can be quite constraining and directive to take the client's musical production and establish a specific meter such as 4/4 or 3/4 for what they are doing. Music can be pulsed but meterless, and quite often becomes more dynamic by the variable use of accentuation within a stable pulse. Another important aspect is to intervene with a stable and secure melodic or rhythmic pattern, quite often limiting your playing where a client's playing is rather full and complex. The process of limiting in the therapist's music is to provide a stable and understandable ground, and avoid adding to the potentially chaotic complexity of the client's improvisation (Figure 4.7).

CD27 is an example of a client playing randomly on the xylophone, where the therapist then joins in on a drum and establishes a rhythmic ground to the client's music. You will hear the client begin to 'entrain' to the therapist's rhythmic ground and stabilize his or her own music accordingly.

CD Example 27: Example of rhythmic grounding – client on xylophone, therapist on a drum

Exercise: The next example on the CD (CD28) is a person playing a xylophone. Try to listen for any rhythmic patterns in the person's music, and then introduce a rhythmic ground. Remember, the faster or more complex the client's music, the more stable and limited must be the musical ground of the therapist. As this is an exercise requiring you to play with a CD example, potential for the person playing on the CD to 'adapt' to the therapist's grounding is clearly not expected. However it is a good exercise to practise finding ways of developing *matching into grounding*.

CD Example 28: Rhythmic grounding exercise client on xylophone

Tonal grounding

Tonal grounding is a process where one establishes a tonal bass which acts as a foundation or 'anchor' to the client's music if it is predominantly melodic or harmonic and is wandering around. I define this as:

Tonal grounding: Providing an octave, fifth or harmonic chord in the bass that is congruent with, and tonally grounding for, the client's music.

Bruscia defines this as tonal centring – 'providing a tonal centre, scale, or harmonic ground' (Bruscia 1987, p.535).

Client - Metallophone

Therapist - keyboard

2

Client

Therapist

3

Client

Therapist

4

Client

Therapist

5

Client

Therapist

Figure 4.8: Example of tonal grounding – client on metallophone and therapist on piano

The musical example (Figure 4.8) illustrates this; a client plays a rather random, directionless melody on a metallophone which develops into repetitive patterns of falling thirds. The therapist intervenes with a tonal ground on the piano.

CD Example 29: Example of tonal grounding – client on glockenspiel, therapist on piano

Exercise: CD30 provides an exercise where a person plays music on a piano and as a duet partner you can work in the bass to provide some tonal centre for this. The technique involves analysing the type of music the person is playing and seeing if it falls within a key, or if a ground tone could be used as a tonal centre. For example, if the client is playing mainly the white notes of the piano, A minor, D minor and C major could be used as keys to provide a tonal centre. If the client is playing on the black notes, E flat minor and F sharp major can be used as the keys to provide the tonal centre (pentatonic).

CD Example 30: Tonal grounding – moving from diatonic to pentatonic

Harmonic grounding

Tonal grounding can be extended to *harmonic grounding*. This tends to involve either tonal harmonies (as in the two-chord improvisation) or pentatonic harmonies. As an extension to the use of fifths and octaves for tonal grounding, try using the CD30 exercise to engage with harmonic grounding.

Combined tonal and rhythmic grounding

Rhythmic grounding and *tonal grounding* can be combined to establish an even more secure musical foundation for a client. A good example of this would be to use a drone bass accompaniment figure to provide such a combined grounding foundation (Figure 4.9). The style could be given a 6/8 Celtic flavour by some suggestions from the therapist in the accompaniment, and then the harmonic ground can be enhanced with chordal structures (CD31).

CD 31 shows how the therapist maintains stability in the piano.

CD Example 31: Combined rhythmic and tonal grounding – client on piano, therapist also on piano

Holding and containing

Holding and containing are quite similar therapeutic methods. Basically, I employ holding as a therapeutic method and process where one provides a musical anchor to

Figure 4.9: Combined rhythmic and tonal grounding – client on piano and therapist on piano ground, even when there are mismatches in the harmony between the client's 'jumping around' melody and the drone ground

a client who is ungrounded in his or her playing and whose music is random and without direction. Consequently techniques such as tonal grounding/tonal centring are going to be helpful in order to provide that anchor. It works well to use simple harmonic accompaniments as a holding 'tool' where the use of sustained sounds without attempts at interactive or dynamic music making provides the containing frame. The therapist's music would typically be slow, sustained and very stable. However, at the same time it doesn't have to force a pulse or a meter on the client for it to be good enough music for holding. Therefore I define holding as:

Holding: Providing a musical 'anchor' and container for the client's music making, using rhythmic or tonal grounding techniques.

Bruscia offers a different definition of holding, one that is more expanded to include the wider concept of the 'musical background', and also includes the concept that the technique contains the feelings of the client: 'as the client improvises, providing a musical background that resonates the client's feelings while containing them' (Bruscia 1987, p.536)

Containing implies a different process where the client's music is quite chaotic and may also be quite loud. Therapeutically, the client needs to be allowed to be chaotic, noisy, exaggerated (a good example would be an out-of-control child having a 'musical/emotional' tantrum). The therapist provides a musical container for the client's music, playing strongly and confidently enough to be heard by the client. One musical idea that can work well in therapy is to play at opposite ends of the piano with strong, stable octaves (CD32). Many other types of music could act as a container for the client's music, but it needs to be structured music that provides a pattern.

CD Example 32: Containing: Chaotic music contained by the therapist – client on cymbals, drums and xylophone, therapist on piano

4.5 Dialoguing

Music is a marvellous medium for engaging in different types of conversation or dialogue between two or more people. It is even possible, of course, to have a dialogue with oneself musically! I have not found a definition for *Dialoguing* in its application in music therapy as either a musical technique or a therapeutic method, although there are terms that describe some of the processes involved in making or developing a dialogue. I define dialoguing in the following way:

Dialoguing: A process where therapist and client/clients communicate through their musical play.

There are two main forms of dialogue, which I define as follows:

Turn-taking dialogues: Making music together where the therapist or client(s) in a variety of ways, musical or gestural, can cue each other to take turns. This 'turn-taking' style of dialogue requires one or other to pause in their playing and give space to each other.

Continuous 'free-floating' dialogues: Making music in a continuous musical dialogic exchange – a free-floating dialogue. Here participants (therapist(s) and client(s)) play more or less continuously and simultaneously. In their playing musical ideas and dynamics are heard and responded to, but without pause in the musical process.

To liken a dialogue to a conversation is probably the nearest and most understandable way of describing this process. Consequently, one can imagine that just as in a conversation, there are a number of ways in which the dialogue can progress:

1. Therapist and client(s) take turns to play, taking over immediately from each other.
2. Therapist and client(s) take turns to play with pauses in between 'statements'.
3. Therapist or client(s) interrupt each other.
4. Therapist and client(s) 'play at the same time' (talk at the same time) as each other.
5. Client(s) make(s) long statements; therapist gives 'grunt' or 'ah-ha' responses of very short phrases.
6. The therapist's musical style in the dialogue is very empathic (similar) to the style of the client(s) (or vice versa).
7. The therapist's playing in the dialogue is very oppositional/confrontational to the client(s) (or vice versa).

Ways to promote dialogue

Musical dialogues don't necessarily occur automatically or naturally in improvisational music making. In fact, some clients find it extremely difficult to engage in dialogues, either because they can't follow or respond to normal turn-taking exchanges (typical in autistic clients), or because they talk so much that they don't stop for long enough to listen to what somebody else has got to say (this can be typical in clients with Asperger's syndrome).

Before explaining more specific techniques for promoting dialogue, there are two clearly defined therapeutic techniques proposed by Bruscia that can be utilized:

Interjecting – waiting for a space in the client's music and filling in the gap.

Making spaces – leaving spaces within one's own improvising for the client to interject his/her own materials (Bruscia 1987, p.535).

Using these two methods naturally leads one into dialoguing and initiates the 'conversation' or 'argument' style of improvisational music making, where the playing together becomes directly communicative. Many clients may not understand or pick up the signals that help nurture dialoguing, and this can be helped through modelling. Modelling is a method that can be applied to many of the previously described musical and therapeutic techniques, and many of those yet to be discussed. Bruscia's definition of modelling is:

Modelling – presenting or demonstrating something for the client to imitate (1987, p.535).

This provides us with a quite specific (and clearly directive) method which is most useful where that type of direction is needed. I would like to suggest an extended and broader definition here in order to explain that something more than purely imitating occurs:

Modelling: Playing and demonstrating something in a way that encourages the client to imitate, match or extend some musical ideas.

In the music making that goes on in music therapy there are subtle or obvious ways of promoting the initiation, development and progression of a dialogue. These involve either musical cues or gestural cues.

Musical cues

- Harmonic cues: indicating that you are coming to the end of some musical 'statement' by playing either a perfect or plagal cadence (or even an interrupted cadence). The harmonic modulation in a musical statement can also sound like a question.
- Rhythmic cues: playing a rhythmic pattern that closes, following which it is obvious that there is a space or playing a rhythmic pattern that is symmetrical and therefore gives a clear indication of closure (also allowing space for a client to play next).
- Melodic cues: playing in ascending phrase, a phrase that indicates the end of a pattern, etc.

- **Dynamic and timbre cues:** there are many types of dynamic cues that could indicate a space for developing a dialogue. Accents help to establish a punctuation point; making a crescendo on a phrase to a climax indicates a point of stopping; making an accelerando to a point of stopping also indicates a pause which allows a space for somebody to say something; staccato playing following some legato playing may also indicate something coming to a conclusion.

Gestural cues

Given that musical cues can be rather subtle and are not necessarily attended to, especially by clients who enjoy making a lot of noise and playing continuously, it may be necessary to model the dialogue idea through giving a gesture. The idea is to indicate a space where you would like the client to start playing (or continue playing) on their own in order to develop the dialogue. Therefore you can introduce some of the following ideas:

- Show you have stopped playing in some way, by taking your hands from the instrument or 'freezing' at the instrument so that you are not moving at all and looking as if you are waiting for the client to stop before you can play again (very effective with children when they catch on to the idea as it gives them a strong sense of being 'in control'!)
- Turn to look at the client and take your hands off the instrument.
- Use eye referencing to indicate that you are going to play and then eye reference the instrument to encourage the client to play.
- Point and indicate whose turn it is to play.
- Use physical prompts, either to encourage somebody to start playing, or to encourage them to stop playing:

Starting to play:

- nudging behind the elbow;
- supporting under the elbow;
- supporting under the wrist;
- taking a hand and helping a client to play.

(This is a graduated list of responses from a very gentle prompt to a hand-over-hand modelling.)

Client - Xylophone

Therapist - Congas

2

Client

Therapist

3

Client

Therapist

4

Client

Therapist

5

Client

Therapist

Figure 4.10: Example of Dialoguing – client on xylophone, therapist on congas

Stopping playing:

- putting the hand out in a stop position;
- reaching over and almost touching the hand of the client;
- reaching over and holding the beater or instrument that the client is using to play for a short time;
- reaching over and stopping the client playing physically by holding their hand; taking an instrument away while you interject a short phrase and then handing the instrument back.

(This is a graduated list ranging from gestural cues to physical direction.)

Figure 4.10 illustrates an emerging dialogue beginning with a client playing on a xylophone, without pulse, and shows how the therapist gently interjects, makes spaces for the client, then uses rhythmic patterns to develop the dialogue.

CD Example 33: Dialoguing 1– client on metallophone, therapist on xylophone

The techniques described above range from subtly to strongly directive. Direction in some form is sometimes necessary in order to build up, through modelling, the process of musical dialoguing or turn-taking. I am often asked how one can develop communicative musical dialogue with clients who have perseverative and repetitive playing, who seem to be unable or unwilling to leave any space in their musical production to allow a dialogue to develop. The ideas described above are typical in the techniques I have found helpful to model, initiate and develop dialogue. However, one also needs to take into consideration the instrument chosen and the physical playing style. Clients who play repetitive pulses on drums may do so because the motor movement (also described as sensory motoric playing) is what they are interested in doing, and there is little or no musical or communicative intentionality. All the above techniques may prove futile in the face of such playing, and changing instruments may be the best way to break down obsessive patterns of playing and introduce dialogue.

Phrasing, interrupting, pausing and talking at the same time

Having begun to develop dialogue, the patterns that emerge can sound more and more like a conversation when attention is paid to phrasing, interrupting, pausing and talking at the same time. Phrase lengths vary – especially where one person is doing most of the talking, and the other is merely acknowledging or confirming with an ‘uh-huh’ response. So, in musical dialogue, these patterns of conversation can increasingly represent the prosody and phrasing of speech, with accents, inflec-

The figure displays four systems of musical notation, each consisting of a Vibraphone (Vib.) staff and a Marimba (Mar.) staff. The notation illustrates a conversational dialogue between the two instruments. The first system shows the Vibraphone playing a melodic line starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic, while the Marimba remains silent. The second system shows the Marimba entering with a melodic line, also starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic, while the Vibraphone is silent. The third system shows both instruments playing; the Marimba has a forte (*f*) dynamic marking, and the Vibraphone plays a melodic line. The fourth system shows the Marimba playing a melodic line with a crescendo hairpin, while the Vibraphone is silent. The notation uses various musical symbols including notes, rests, and dynamic markings to represent the interaction.

Figure 4.11: Example of conversational dialogue using variable phrasing, continued on next page

The figure shows four systems of musical notation for a vibraphone (Vib.) and maracas (Mar.). Each system represents a short exchange between the two instruments. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, accidentals, and dynamic markings such as *f*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, and *ff*. Slurs are used to indicate phrasing. The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Figure 4.11: Example of conversational dialogue using variable phrasing, continued

tion, interruptions and sometimes even talking at the same time. In the process of dialoguing – whether through a rhythmic or a melodic exchange – the potentials of varied phrasing will add significantly to the communicative character of the dialogue.

Figure 4.11 illustrates this, and CD Example 34 shows how all the dynamic aspects of interpersonal communication can be present in a musical dialogue. Given that music therapy is a medium through which ‘communication’ takes place through musical exchange, dialoguing is a very important and valuable technique to support and engage a client.

In the real world, communication and dialogue between people can frequently turn into a heated debate, perhaps even an argument. Polite turn-taking gives way to interrupting, increasing accents, ‘rude’ sounds, shouting, losing tempers – everything a good healthy argument should have! CD34 illustrates the musical dynamic of dialogue that becomes an argument, and as music therapy allows people to say something in music (in an argument) that would be unacceptable in words, this is a valuable tool in therapy work to draw out emotional attitude and affect.

CD Example 34: Dialoguing 2: Conversations and arguments! Therapist on xylophone, client on African split drum and djembe

Continuous ‘free floating’ dialogues

When working with clients who play quite continuously, repetitively, perhaps even obsessively, and have difficulty in stopping to listen, the therapist’s option is to try to promote or engage with the second type of dialogue method described above – the continuous ‘free-floating’ dialogue. Here, the therapist can listen to and echo musical ideas, themes, motifs and dynamic patterns of the client, attempting to build up a dialogue of musical ideas within an ongoing improvisation.

It cannot be compared with a conventional conversation, where turn-taking is a typical element. In the free-floating dialogue, the musical genre of opera is represented, where two (or more) people can be simultaneously contributing to an exchange, sometimes singing about two different things at the same time, yet with a necessary musical connection through melody or harmony. It happens frequently in improvisations, and this kind of instantaneous reciprocity and shared understanding builds up between client(s) and therapist, and acts as a framework for communicative experiences. The subtlety of this type of interaction is such that it is not always possible to be aware of how it is happening while it is going on, and only with later audio or video analysis can one recognize the presence of a subtle and developing dialogue. CD35 gives an example of just such a dialogue, where the therapist uses

the xylophone to match, and then dialogues with a client's continuous playing on a drum.

CD Example 35: Dialoguing 3: continuous 'free-floating' dialogue – therapist on piano, client on xylophone

4.6 Accompanying

Accompanying is one of the most useful and important of the supportive techniques in improvisational music therapy. I often recommend its use when one has established a framework for clients to use or where a client is particularly autonomous and wants to take a soloist's role in the music making.

I define the therapeutic method of accompanying as:

Accompanying: Providing a rhythmic, harmonic or melodic accompaniment to the client's music that lies dynamically underneath the client's music, giving them a role as a soloist (Wigram 2000b).

Accompanying is a frequently used method for joining in with a client's music where the message one is giving is of support and empathy. The definition refers specifically to the idea that the music lies 'dynamically underneath', and this typifies the quality of 'accompanying' and gives it strength as a supportive music. If the client plays *f* then the accompaniment is going to be *mf*. If the client plays above middle C in the tonal range, the accompaniment can be placed lower, although it is possible to work with a bass lead and an accompaniment in the higher register.

Accompaniment style music, certainly on the piano, needs to have certain characteristics:

- to be simple and repetitious;
- to be a short rhythmic or harmonic sequence that is sustained;
- to continue in a stable way despite some changes in the client's music;
- to be sensitive to pauses or small developments in the client's music.

Typically, accompaniments can be (either tonal or atonal) um-cha-cha (3/4 waltz) style or um-cha-um-cha (2/4 and 4/4 common time) style. Figure 4.12 gives us an example of this type of accompaniment, in both a tonal and an atonal frame.

However, there are also some important other types of accompaniment. The 2-chord improvisation that was exemplified in Chapter 3 is a good sequence to use for an accompanying style, as is the Spanish 2–8-chord sequences that will be explained in Chapter 6 under frameworking techniques.

$\text{♩} = 108$

The figure shows six staves of piano accompaniment. The first two staves are in 3/4 time, and the last four are in 4/4 time. The notation includes various dynamics (p, mf, f, rit., accel.) and articulations (accents, slurs). The key signature is one sharp (F#).

Figure 4.12: Example of 3/4 and 4/4 accompaniment style using tonal and atonal frame, continued on next page

Figure 4.12 shows four systems of musical notation for piano accompaniment. The first system is marked 'Pno' and 'f' with a tempo of 120. The second system is marked 'Pno' and 'ff'. The third system is marked 'Pno' and 'rit.' with a 'p' dynamic at the end. The fourth system is marked 'Pno' and shows empty staves.

Figure 4.12: Example of 3/4 and 4/4 accompaniment style using tonal and atonal frame, continued

CD36 gives an illustration of a client starting to play randomly on a xylophone and glockenspiel while the therapist introduces an accompaniment style using (at first) two chords to support it, then developing some accompaniment effects.

CD Example 36: Accompanying – client on xylophone and glockenspiel, therapist on piano

Most of these accompaniment methods can be equally effective on guitar or other harmonic instruments (harmonica, accordion, autoharp, organ, synthesizer). Purely rhythmic accompaniments can also be generated, and are especially effective in providing a supportive frame. The most important characteristic of this therapeutic method to remember is your supportive role, allowing the client to take the lead, playing more softly, with stability and repetitious motifs of figures, and perhaps with a thinner, sparser texture.

Exercises: Try making different types of accompaniments to the following styles of playing using the examples on the CD with which to work:

CD Example 37: Accompaniment exercise 1 – a wandering treble melody by a client on a piano where they play first of all only on the white keys and secondly only on the black keys

CD Example 38: Accompaniment exercise 2 – a client playing an accented, rhythmic and pulsed melody on xylophone and metallophone, that breaks out of meter halfway through

CD Example 39: Accompaniment exercise 3 – a client playing some rhythmic patterns on a drum

In all three exercises try formulating accompaniments using different instruments such as piano, guitar or drums/percussion.

4.7 Summary and integration

These are some basic therapeutic methods that need to be practised in order to acquire both the technical and therapeutic skills to use them. As can be seen, they start to incorporate the musical techniques that are adapted to fit the intention of the method. The exercises suggested in Chapters 3 and 4 are designed to allow the reader a chance to practise these methods using either piano or other instruments. Many of these musical techniques and therapeutic methods will be revisited in later chapters because improvisation is not undertaken with clients through isolated methods, but through a sequence (sometimes fast-moving) of different methods and musical techniques.

The last part of this chapter is therefore concerned with the integration and sequential process of linking together these methods to illustrate how one can move through a therapeutic sequence of events with a client. As has been stated earlier, *matching* is a logical and empathic place to start with a client. However, in therapy we don't approach our clients with some predetermined plan of intervention, at least not in improvisational music therapy. The spontaneous experience, adapting and responding on a moment-by-moment basis to the interactive process, requires us to maintain a free-flowing flexibility in the application of therapeutic method.

The last example, illustrated only as audio example CD40, shows how one might move through three or more methods in an improvisational interaction with a client.

Matching → Accompanying → Dialoguing → Containing → Matching

The client is playing a xylophone, and begins with rhythmic, melodic fragments. The therapist matches, and the engagement begins. As the client grows more confident, the therapist takes the role of accompanist. A little further on, the therapist takes an initiative by making spaces and interjecting, and introduces the idea of dialoguing. The client works with this, but as the dialogue builds up dynamically to an argument, the therapist adapts to a containing approach. As the client's music loses some of its intensity and energy, the therapist follows and returns to a final empathic section of matching.

CD Example 40: Example of integrating therapeutic method and musical technique

So far, the techniques and methods recommended for both practising and developing within an improvisational model for use in clinical work have concentrated on identifying specific techniques using musical parameters and therapeutic method. Most of the examples and the exercises recommended have involved a form of improvisation where the music is spontaneously created, using some simple play rules.

Frequently, when working with musical material, one wants to develop a style of improvisation that fits something that the client may be doing or to create a particular type of musical frame for some specific purpose. I call this method of work 'frameworking'. In addition, we are constantly faced with the need to find ways of making changes in the music, making a transition from playing in one way to playing in another way. The development of these transitions is a critical part of music therapy skills (and in fact is used very widely by musicians, composers and others to connect together different types of music).

In order to move to the next stage of the process of developing improvisation skills, I will describe and give examples of both frameworking and transitions and then explain a number of exercises that can be used to develop these methods.