

# The attraction of the guitar as an instrument of motivation, preference, and choice for use with clients in music therapy: A review of the literature

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## Abstract

The guitar has been referred to as both one of the principal instruments in music therapy and an instrument of motivation, preference, and choice, partly because clients may express preference for the guitar or seem attracted to or motivated by it. In this article, an examination of the literature is made to determine how the guitar has been reportedly used in clinical music therapy settings. English-language sources were searched both electronically and by hand, and were only included if the criteria of client preference for, attraction to, choice of, or motivation towards guitar was discussed. The search yielded a total of 64 sources representing a 40-year period (1966–2005). The total number of sources for each of the age categories included: children, 19; adolescents, 18; adults, 23; and seniors, 4. Within each age range, sources are reviewed by special need areas, with the areas ordered alphabetically. Finally, sources within these need areas are reviewed in chronological order of publication. A conclusion section summarizes the findings in three broad areas. These include the increased use of guitar as reported across the 40-year period, the shift in the percentage of age ranges with whom music therapists are using guitar by decade of review, and the relationship between client populations and need-related focuses across the four age ranges.

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The attractiveness of musical sounds and instruments to clients with a wide variety of special needs has been described as an essential aspect of successfully involving them in both music therapy experiences and therapeutic relationships with the clinician (Bruscia, 1987; Bunt & Hoskyns, 2002; Crowe, 2004; Gfeller, 2000; Hanser, 1999; Nordoff & Robbins, 1983, 1985; Tyson, 1981). Often, it is the creative and carefully selected use of these instruments and sounds which allow clients to be successful in music therapy when they have not enjoyed success in and through other treatment modalities (Borczone, 2004; Krout, 2006).

Music therapy clinicians have made available to them a wide selection and choice of instruments to use in their work with clients of varying ages and needs. Of these, and in addition to the piano, the guitar has been referred to as one of the principal and essential instruments in music therapy (Kennedy, 2001, 2003; Krout, 2003), and as an instrument of choice for both therapists and clients (Romanowski, 2003). In fact, it has even been described as indispensable (Primadei, 2004). The recognized importance of the guitar in music therapy is not a new phenomenon. Over 40 years ago, the first issue of first volume of the *Journal of Music Therapy* featured an article highlighting the guitar as amongst the favorite instrument choices of institutionalized children with severe emotional needs (Wilson, 1964).

Although the vital role of the guitar in music therapy is well-established, it may be insightful to consider what it is about the guitar itself that may make it an instrument of choice. Specifically, what about the guitar is attractive to

clients in terms of their being motivated by and through it? In this article, consideration is given to the attraction to and preference for the guitar with clients in music therapy.

## Method

A review of the extant literature through 2005 was conducted to determine how the guitar has been used in music therapy settings as an instrument of attractiveness and motivation for clients in four age ranges—children, adolescents, adults, and seniors. Within age ranges, sources are then discussed and grouped together into common need areas.

In the review, English-language journals and other sources were searched both electronically and by hand. First, the Second Edition of the *American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) Research CD-ROM (2004)* was searched using the keyword “guitar.” The CD-ROM contains all full text articles, columns, and reviews published in the *Journal of Music Therapy* (1964–2003), and the journals *Music Therapy Perspectives* (1982–1984, 1986–2003), and *Music Therapy* (1981–1996).

Next, English-language music therapy journals and sources were searched electronically using the EBSCO Host interface, which includes access to Academic Search Premier, MEDLINE, PsycARTICLES, PsychINFO, and Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale (RILM) Abstracts of Music Literature. These services abstract articles in the following music therapy and related journals: *Arts in Psychotherapy*, *Australian Journal of Music Therapy*, *Canadian Journal of Music Therapy*, *International Journal of Arts Medicine*, *Journal of Music Therapy*, *Journal of the Association for Music and Imagery*, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, *Music Education Research*, *Music Therapy*, *Music Therapy Perspectives*, *New Zealand Journal of Music Therapy*, *Nordic Journal of Music Therapy*, *Psychology of Music*, and *UPDATE: Applications of Research in Music Education*. It should be noted that PsychINFO also abstracts dissertations, and includes citations from Dissertation Abstracts International. CAIRSS, a bibliographic database of music research literature that includes music therapy and music medicine, was also searched. With all of these databases, the keyword “guitar” was again used in searching. The Digital Dissertations database was also searched separately using the keyword “guitar.”

An electronic search was also undertaken of additional databases that abstract articles from journals and other sources in which music therapists might publish. These databases included ERIC and Ingenta. In addition to searching dissertations via PsychINFO, dissertations and theses were also searched using the databases available on-line from Music Therapy World, The University of Melbourne (Australia), and Temple University, using the keyword “guitar.” The on-line journal *Music Therapy Today* and the website VOICES: A World Forum for Music Therapy were also searched using the term “guitar.” Abstracts from *The British Journal of Music Therapy* published between 1987 and 2005 were searched using the keyword “guitar” via the website for the British Society for Music Therapy. Published proceedings of music therapy conferences and world congresses were also searched electronically and by hand if they were available to the authors.

Finally, music therapy books, book chapters and monographs were searched by hand if the word “guitar” was included in the title of the book, monograph, or book chapter, or if the word guitar was included in the subject index at the end of the book. All issues of the *Annual Journal of the New Zealand Society for Music Therapy* (published between 1987 and 2002) were also searched by hand.

## Results

The searching of the above databases and sources yielded 64 items published between 1966 and 2005. This review included those sources that specifically discuss client motivation, preference, or attraction to the guitar and identified a trained music therapist as being involved in the study. It excluded sources for which motivation, preference, or attraction to guitar was not a key aspect of the study or the clinical outcomes for the clients. It also excluded those that did not involve a trained music therapist.

Table 1 lists these in alphabetical order. The date of publication, nature of the source (journal, book chapter, book, thesis, etc.), and client age category are also listed in the table. The total number of sources for each of the age categories included: children, 19; adolescents, 18; adults, 23; and seniors, 4. Following are discussions of how guitar has been used in clinical situations as reported with these four age-based populations, beginning with children. Within each age range, sources are reviewed by special need areas, with the areas ordered alphabetically. Finally, sources within these need areas are reviewed in chronological order of publication.

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