

New Horizons: Graduate Music Therapy Studies in Québec, Canada

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### Abstract

The year 2011 marks the start of a new era for music therapy in the province of Québec with the official launch of its first and only graduate music therapy program. This program, situated at Concordia University in the heart of the city of Montréal, is described, along with its development, its purpose, its role in the changing landscape of music therapy in Québec, and its defining characteristics. Future ramifications for music therapy at Concordia University and in Québec and the rest of Canada are outlined.

*Keywords:* music therapy education, Canada, Concordia University

## New Horizons: Graduate Music Therapy Education in Québec, Canada

The year 2011 marks the start of a new era for music therapy in the province of Québec with the official launch of its first and only graduate music therapy program. Situated at [Concordia University](#) in the heart of Montréal - one of Québec's most vibrant cultural cities, this new graduate music therapy program holds much promise. The province of Québec has a longstanding reputation within Canada for its strong and active music therapy community. This community, with its rich history under the capable leadership of the Association québécoise de musicothérapie ([AQM](#)), has long awaited a graduate music therapy program within Québec – a program which would meet Québec's unique needs and which could contribute significantly to the advancement of the profession in terms of education, practice, theory, and research.

At the same time as the establishment of its first graduate music therapy program, Québec also finds itself in a unique position. Unlike the prevalent model in the rest of Canada and the United States where music therapy training commences at the undergraduate level, music therapy education and training in Québec is now only at the graduate level. As of 2011, Concordia University now provides the only music therapy education and training in Québec, and it is at the graduate level only. As a result, the music therapy landscape in Québec is changing dramatically.

In light of these momentous changes in Québec music therapy, I would like to take the opportunity to provide an introduction to Concordia's new graduate music program. In this column I will outline the development of the program, its unique nature, details of its mission, and its curriculum, as well as future aspirations.

### **Our Beginnings**

It is not an understatement that Québec's first graduate music therapy program was long awaited. In fact, efforts had been underway on the part of many for more than 20 years to establish such a program. It was not, however, until 2008 that true progress began; it was at that point that Concordia University made the commitment to fund a permanent tenured position to secure someone who would design the program, facilitate the program approval process, oversee music therapy facilities renovations, and then later to teach within the program. When I was hired at this point, the timing was fortuitous. It was clear at this time that there would be no undergraduate music therapy programs in Québec, and there would be no music therapy program in Québec other than that at Concordia University. While others who came before me worked on a graduate music therapy program development, the timing was such that I was allowed an unparalleled opportunity to re-invent the program design such that it reflected the new and unique nature of the Québec music therapy scene; I was allowed the opportunity to design a program for Québec's future needs. I also had the opportunity to work with other creative arts therapies faculty to hand pick the other two tenure-track music therapy faculty who would join me to serve on Concordia's Music Therapy program faculty team; the skills in music therapy, collaboration, and collegiality of such a team are critical to the success of growing any new graduate program. In July 2009, Dr. Guylaine Vaillancourt joined Concordia's music therapy faculty team. Her expertise, enthusiasm, and commitment contributed immensely to the program, as did her longstanding connections to the Québec music therapy community; her work was pivotal in establishing the essential clinical placements. In July 2011, Dr. Laurel Young was the third and final full-time member of the Music Therapy team to join us at Concordia. Between the three of us, we have a great diversity of education and experiences in music therapy theory, practice, and research. There are places of convergence and others of divergence, but above all

there is an overarching acceptance of diversity and a delight in making connections and collaborations across differences. These form the basis for a hallmark of Concordia's music therapy program.

While three tenure-track faculty make up the core of the music therapy program team, ultimate success in growing the program is not possible without the support of a cadre of others within the community – part-time and limited-term faculty, as well as site supervisors, all of whom give immensely of their time and expertise. To date, this teaching cadre has included Marianne Bargiel, Nicola Oddy, and Alpha Woodward; the cadre of site supervisors has included music therapists and other professionals in the community who possess a wealth of clinical experience. Their numbers and role will grow as the program grows. Their gifts to our students cannot be overstated.

### **Our Purpose**

The fundamental purpose in developing graduate music therapy studies at Concordia University was to complement the already existing programs of art and drama therapy in the Creative Arts Therapies Department by adding a third much needed professional program in music therapy. This program would enrich the offerings at Concordia and, more importantly, meet a critical societal desire and need for a home-grown graduate music therapy program in Québec. In designing Concordia's music therapy graduate studies, the intent was to create a site for excellence in teaching and learning, in the preparation of qualified professionals, in clinical practice, and in research. Because of Concordia's unique responsibility as the only university offering music therapy in Québec, its graduate music therapy studies had to serve a two-fold purpose: 1) to provide graduate level preparation for entry into the music therapy profession, including accreditation to practice; and 2) to provide advanced professional education in music

therapy practice and research. As a result, Concordia's music therapy graduate studies include two separate graduate degree programs –the Graduate Certificate in Music Therapy and the Master of Arts in Creative Arts Therapies, Music Therapy Option. Each program is distinct, but both are approved by the Canadian Association for Music Therapy ([CAMT](#)) and both are intended to foster in students a strong sense of ethical and social responsibility within a culturally-diverse world. Detailed information about each of the programs will be provided shortly, but first attention will be focused in the section which follows on the defining characteristics common to both which make Concordia's graduate music therapy studies unique in Québec, the rest of Canada, and further afield.

### **Our Essence**

Concordia's graduate music therapy programs are unique in Canada in their situation within a creative arts therapies department. Students have the opportunity for cross-pollination of ideas and experiences with those from the various creative arts therapies. Taking interdisciplinary creative arts therapies courses in addition to core music therapy courses, our music therapy students have formal opportunities to learn from and with faculty and students in such areas as art therapy, drama therapy, and dance therapy. They also have informal opportunities for making connections, dialoguing, learning, and exploring research collaborations.

That Concordia, and therefore Québec, provides music therapy education only at the graduate level is also a distinguishing feature in Canada, as well as the United States. This means that those at Concordia preparing for entry level into the music therapy profession already possess an undergraduate degree with all the necessary education and training in music and psychology prior to commencing music therapy studies; it also means that they also possess a

degree of maturity and experience only to be expected at the graduate level. Concordia's master's degree in music therapy truly represents advanced professional education and training as it is restricted to those who already are accredited or board certified music therapists. As a result, students in this program are experienced clinical practitioners who gather together at Concordia to advance their knowledge in music therapy practice and research.

Concordia University is uniquely prepared within North America to meet the music therapy career aspirations of both English-speaking and French-speaking students. While Concordia is an English university, it is situated within Québec, a province with French as its official language. Because of Québec law, but more importantly because of an understanding of our responsibility as the only university offering music therapy studies in Québec, we are committed to providing for the needs of French speakers and English speakers alike. While courses are taught in English, many of the faculty are bilingual and classroom discussion can take place in both English and French. Concordia also provides special services to assist French-speaking students make the transition to an English-speaking university. Furthermore, students may submit all written work in either English or French, at their discretion. Perhaps more importantly, Concordia students have the option of selecting their clinical placements from among English-language environments, French-language environments, or bilingual environments.

While not unique to Concordia, it is a hallmark of its graduate music therapy program that it embraces eclecticism. The music therapy faculty bring a wealth of diverse experiences and expertise. Some of their work is rooted in the Quebec music therapy tradition, while other work is at the forefront of such current international trends as Community Music Therapy, and Feminist Music Therapy. All encompass an understanding of the diversity of our clientele and

the rich benefits that diverse practices bring to our profession and to our clients. Our students are encouraged to find their own voices – ones which best meet the unique needs and interest of students and clients alike. Additionally, our students are encouraged to understand their responsibility to the profession and their community as well as to their clients. As faculty, we hope to make this clear through our words and actions. Guylaine Vaillancourt is Past-President of the CAMT, while Laurel Young currently serves as CAMT Vice-President and I serve as Vice-President Elect of the American Music Therapy Association ([AMTA](#)). As well for Guylaine and me, social justice work has long been part of our work and our lives.

Another hallmark of Concordia University's music therapy programs is the nature of our clinical training. For practicum and internship alike, students work at placements in the Montréal area with the direct support and supervision of Concordia's music therapy faculty, all of whom are skilled clinicians with a wealth of experience and expertise.

I cannot speak about the unique features of Concordia University without mentioning that it is situated in the heart of [Montréal](#). With a population of 3.8 million people, the city of Montréal is one of North America's most dynamic and culturally rich cities. Opportunities for culturally-diverse creative experiences and pursuits are unparalleled.

### **Our Programs**

As indicated earlier, Concordia's graduate music therapy studies comprise two separate degree programs: the Graduate Certificate in Music Therapy and the Master of Arts in Creative Arts Therapies, Music Therapy Option. Both are approved by Concordia University, the ministry of education, and the CAMT. Both provide intensive mentor-apprentice music therapy education and therefore admissions are restricted to 12 students per program per year. General



information about each follows, while complete details may be found at:

<http://creativeartstherapies.concordia.ca>

### **Graduate Certificate in Music Therapy**

Concordia's Graduate Certificate in Music Therapy is a 1-year (12-month), 21-credit program which prepares students for careers in music therapy. This program includes 1,200 hours of supervised music therapy clinical experience (practicum plus internship) and leads to eligibility to apply for accreditation in Canada with the CAMT and eligibility to take the board of exams with the Certification Board for Music Therapists ([CBMT](#)) for certification in the United States. The program includes both music therapy and creative arts therapies coursework.

Students graduate from this program only once they have completed their CAMT accreditation application portfolio.

### **Master of Arts in Creative Arts Therapies, Music Therapy Option**

Concordia's MA in Creative Arts Therapies, Music Therapy Option provides advanced professional education and training in music therapy for those who are already accredited or certified music therapists. It is designed to prepare graduates for careers in advanced clinical practice and research, as well as for futures in higher education. The program comprises two academic terms of coursework followed by supervised work on an independent research project. Students graduate from this program only once they have completed advanced clinical music therapy training and an original research project.

### **Our Future: Concordia University & Québec Working Together for Music Therapy**

While taking a period of 3 years since my appointment in 2008, the graduate music therapy programs at Concordia University are now fully established and fully approved with the complete complement of full-time music therapy faculty. Our first cohort of students graduated

from the Graduate Certificate in Music Therapy in fall of 2010; graduation of our first cohort from the Master of Arts in Creative Arts Therapies, Music Therapy Option is anticipated for fall of 2011.



**Dr. Curtis, Dr. Vaillancourt, and the First Cohort of Graduates from the Graduate Certificate in Music Therapy at Concordia University**

With graduate music therapy education now fully established in Québec, the music therapy landscape here has dramatically changed and holds much promise to continue to do so as the future unfolds. The most immediate impact lies in the creation of a place and space for music therapy study which is home grown, meeting the distinct needs and interests of Québec society. With its unique defining characteristics, however, Concordia University's graduate music therapy program is also already attracting students internationally, serving to further enrich the Québec landscape with cultural diversity. Longer term impact will evolve out of the music therapy research and practice of Concordia's faculty and students. Ultimately, the greatest impact lies in the commitment of Concordia faculty and alumni, current and future, to the music therapy profession, the clients, and the community. The potential is considerable for Concordia faculty and alumni, working hand in hand with the rest of the Québec music therapy community to promote music therapy to ensure increased access to music therapy for those who can benefit

from it and to ensure best practices rooted in excellent research. Given the nature of Concordia's faculty and students, I look to a future where this impact will be local, national, and global.