A New Music Therapist's Relationship to Music: A Heuristic Self-Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

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Cordon E. Purcell

Although there is frequent mention in the music therapy literature concerning the importance of a therapist's relationship to music, there is little specific guidance on how to examine and cultivate this relationship. A relationship to music can be created through participation in various musical activities, selection of various instruments to play, and one's interaction with music. The purpose of this research was to reflect upon and examine my relationship to music throughout various musical stages of my life. Despite participating in musical activities and taking music lessons from a young age, I never felt that I had a personal relationship to music outside of my music therapist identity. To examine this, Moustakas' method of heuristic self-inquiry was realized to include Bruscia's life-story improvisation and Neuman's levels of open, axial, and selective coding. I separated my life into three stages, improvised on each stage, and reflected on these improvisations in a journal. This journal was coded to identify three main themes that reflected my relationship to music during my musical development: family, motivations, and making music together. The creative synthesis of this research was presented in a zine. Implications for my own person clinical work and self-care, as well as for training, clinical work, and future self-inquiries in the field of music therapy are discussed.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Significance of the Inquiry

Music therapy is a field that promotes self-transformation as a clinical outcome for clients and clinicians (Aigen, 1993). Therefore, it seems logical that music therapists would also engage in their own self-transformation processes – not only to develop an understanding of the client's experience (i.e., empathy skills) but also to maintain the level of self-care and self-awareness that is necessary to be an effective therapist (Bruscia, 1998; Camilleri, 2001; Canadian Association for Music Therapy [CAMT], 1999; Hill, 2014; Wheeler, Shultis & Polen, 2005). There is, however, a limited amount of music therapy literature that examines the therapist's own reflexive processes (McCaffrey, 2013) despite the fact that notable music therapy researchers and educators stress the need for self-reflexivity (Bruscia, 1998; Camilleri, 2001; Evans & McPherson, 2015; Hesser, 2014; Pellitteri, 2009; Scheiby, 2014; Wheeler Shultis & Polen, 2005). Several authors further suggest that music therapists need to explore their relationship to music because it can be helpful to their own clinical work and help them to understand the full therapeutic power of music (Hesser, 2001). Music therapists need to also act as a model for clients (Bruscia, 1998; Hill, 2014) who have their own musical identities and assumptions (Young, 2016).

Relationship to the Topic

I have never considered myself to be a musician even though I have taken piano lessons since the age of 10, have taken voice lessons since the age of 14, and have participated in choirs, ensembles, and musical theatre. For most of my adult life, my musical development and identity has been linked to the process of becoming a music therapist. While completing my undergraduate degree in music therapy (2011-2016), I always considered my music as part of my emerging therapist identity and not as a separate entity. In examining the literature noted previously, I came to realize that I needed to explore my own musical identity. This research helped me to uncover aspects of my relationship to music that I had not yet discovered, or that I had been resistant to explore.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study was to examine my relationship to music and reflect upon how this may affect my clinical work.

The Research Question

The primary research question was established as: What is my relationship to music and how might this affect my music therapy practice?

Assumptions and Delimitations

I assumed that I had a relationship to music outside of my music therapist identity, and I assumed that this relationship was important to my practice as a music therapist.

Definitions

For the purpose of the research, *music identity* is defined as "the therapist's past experiences with music, ongoing relationship to music, musical knowledge, skills, abilities, preferences, and insecurities" (Bruscia, 1998 p. 167). A *relationship to music* can include how someone interacts with music, which activities they participate in, and which instruments they choose to play (Wheeler, Shultis, & Polen, 2005). *Music therapy practice* is defined as "the discipline in which credentialed professionals [Music Therapist Accredited] (MTA) use music purposefully within therapeutic relationships to support development, health, and well-being" (CAMT, 2016).

Chapter Summary

This thesis has been organized into five chapters. The first chapter describes the purpose of the study, the research question, and the position of myself as a researcher. The second chapter reviews literature related to a client's and a therapist's relationship to music, therapeutic relationships to mediums as discussed in other creative arts therapies, and self-inquiry in music therapy. The third chapter outlines my method of data collection and analysis in this heuristic self-inquiry. The fourth chapter includes the results of my data analysis. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the results and presents my creative synthesis of the research. This chapter also includes recommendations for future research and education.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The Development of a Relationship to Music

A relationship to music is cultivated throughout life. It starts in infancy and can develop, change, and grow through one's interaction with music, in which musical activities they participate, and which instruments they choose to play (Wheeler, Shultis, & Polen, 2005). Yehuda (2013) explores how babies are exposed to what Lecourt (1990) calls a "sonorous bath." (Yehuda, 2013, p. 158). Babies are introduced to musical elements such as silence, sound, melody, and timbre early in their life. This "bath" is shared between families and loved ones and becomes an important part of one's culture. Sharing in these sounds can facilitate a nurturing relationship and a feeling of belonging (Yehuda, 2013). When children first start the individualization process, one of the first methods of separation is choosing to listen to music that differs from that of their family (Ruud, 1997). This separation, and the reaction of family and friends, can create different associations with songs and genres of music. Through navigating their relationships to others, the child also begins to navigate their relationship to themselves and to music. As identity is formed and an adolescent begins to separate between their inner and outer worlds, there is often a sense of performance. Ruud (1997) sees this performance as an expression of musical identity. Through performing, listening to, and talking about music, the adolescent is performing their sense of self and their musical identity.

There are many different aspects of one's relationship to music. These include musicianship, musical identity, and how one interacts with music. Someone who plays music often acquires skills related to musicality and musicianship. Ansdell (2012) defines musicianship as a cultivated relationship to music that is built through engagement in community and history, and by musical actions that take place in society. Bruscia (1998) uses the term musical self in a similar way, noting that it includes "the therapist's past experiences with music, ongoing relationship to music, musical knowledge, skills, abilities, preferences, and insecurities" (p. 147). This definition can be extended to anyone who enjoys and/or participates in music. Yehuda (2013) also believes that staying in close contact with one's own musical styles, as well as unfamiliar styles, can help in the discovery of the musical self.

Bruscia (2012) discusses how people experiencing an existential crisis use music; they often use it as an active distraction. Their crisis, similar to the journey of finding one's musical identity, will only end when the individual accepts music as it is and for all that it has to offer. This acceptance will strengthen the relationship to music and it will become "more authentic and autonomous" (p. 1052). Not only does this acceptance strengthen the relationship, it also provides the individual with more meaningful access to music. These experiences are then internalized and become a part of one's music identity and musical self.

The Client's Relationship to Music

The use of music is the identifying feature of music therapy (Darrow, Johnson, Ghetti, & Achey, 2001), so it is very important that music therapists focus on this aspect of their client's life at some point during the assessment period. Knowledge about a client's relationship to music can provide the music therapist with ideas about safe experiences and appropriate ways to engage the client in music (Bruscia, 2012; Rolvsjord, 2012). The music therapist can base the experiences in which they choose to engage the client depending on factors such as their vocational and recreational use of music, their preferences and dislikes, their musical skills, and what needs are filled by the music (Bruscia, 2012). These experiences can be both receptive and active, as the relationship is engaged during both (Aigen, 2012). Rolvsjord (2012) cautions music therapists about the dangers of not knowing their client's relationship to music, as it can damage a healthy relationship by introducing music in a therapeutic context.

The Nordoff-Robbins concept of the music child captures the therapeutic belief that everyone has a relationship to music in some way (Aigen, 2008). Nordoff and Robbins believed that everybody has a musical self that allows them to respond to music. The music child is "the individualized musicality inborn in every child… the uniquely musical significance of each child's musical significance" (in Aigen et al., 2008, p. 64). Gold (2012) believes that this concept of music child captures how music therapists see clients and themselves, and expresses how therapists look for hidden resources, both musical and non-musical, that clients can use in their life. In acknowledging that each client has a relationship to music, the therapist must also address their own relationship.

The Therapist's Relationship to Music

There is a substantial amount of music therapy literature that explores the importance of the therapist's relationship to music (Bruscia, 1998; Isenberg-Grzeda, 1988; Turry, 2001; Yehuda, 2013), but very little to date on how to cultivate or understand this relationship. Turry (2001) discusses how to work with this relationship when training a Nordoff-Robbins music therapist. He suggests allowing trainees to be in the music without the need for explanation. This allows the trainee to explore "their relationship to music, and their relationship to others through musical interaction" (p. 650). Allowing trainees to make music during supervision also helps facilitate this relationship in terms of an awareness of music as an agent of change.

After training, professional music therapists are expected to understand their relationship to music and how it interacts in the clinical process. Isenberg-Grzeda (1988) notes that a music therapist's relationship to music can affect the way music is used as a tool in assessment and treatment. Bruscia (1998) believes that the therapist must engage this relationship in order to facilitate the therapeutic alliance within musical contexts. The use of music in both assessment and strengthening the therapeutic alliance, therefore, relies substantially on the therapist's awareness of this relationship.

Bruscia (1998) also discusses how this relationship can change as the therapist grows in skill and competency. When music therapists realize that they are using some forms or styles of music more frequently than others, they are advised to examine their relationship to music to fully understand why. Only after learning the reason can the therapist begin to learn new skills and styles in which they feel uncomfortable. Through learning these new skills and techniques, the therapist's relationship to music changes. This change in musical relationship can also affect the therapist's relationship with their clients.

Yehuda (2013), in a paper on musical authenticity, identifies how important it is for the therapist to be aware of their musical biases, likes, and dislikes. These are all related to one's relationship to music (Bruscia, 1998). Yehuda (2013) defines musical authenticity as a "professional musician's motivation to identify music for which there is a feeling of emotional belonging and deep mental affinity" (p. 149). This applies to therapeutic contexts as well. When a therapist sings, plays, or listens to music with which they have a relationship, they are working through this musical authenticity. It is essential

for music therapists to be aware of this. Yehuda (2013) quotes music therapist, Yair, who discusses the importance of being connected to one's own music, because being "detached from his own musical heritage and alienated from 'his own sounds' had negatively impacted his ability to create" (pp. 164-165). This disconnection can cause problems within the therapeutic alliance, where the therapist may be unable to provide the support and experiences the client may need (Yehuda, 2013).

Other Creative Arts Therapies

Across the creative arts therapies as a whole, there is a discussion surrounding the therapist's use of the arts outside of the clinical setting (Cahn, 2000; Orkibi, 2012). Cahn (2000) suggests that art therapy students both learn therapeutic skills by observing professional therapists and spending time in the studio working on their own art. This allows them to grow into "practitioners who are grounded in their own art process" (p. 181). Orkibi (2012) found that, when surveying 76 graduate art and drama therapy students, very few of the students took part in their own artistic experiences outside of school. This is something Orkibi (2012) deemed "regretful," (p. 431) as a lot of the students felt that their relationship to arts and creativity had changed during their education.

Rubin (1999) discussed the difficulty of consolidating both the artist and therapist identities, and how this can be very difficult in art therapies. Bruscia (1987) also discusses this divide, explaining that the professional "dual identity" of artist and therapist stems from the concern and debate of "whether creative arts therapists are trained to be artists who carry out therapy or therapists who use the arts" (in Orkibi, 2012 p. 428).

Self-Inquiry in Music Therapy Research

Music therapy as a field promotes self-transformation, (Aigen, 1993) so self-inquiry lends itself well to music therapy research although the literature does not fully reflect this. McCaffrey (2013) discusses the lack of "self in therapy" research (p. 307). Aigen (1993) suggests that there could be more qualitative music therapy research, as music therapy and qualitative research follow the same process of responding to feelings and human responses, and are both driven by change.

Wheeler (1999) explored why she enjoyed working with children with severe disabilities in a self-inquiry research study. She found, while reflecting on the research, that it was not self-indulgent but was in fact important, both for the field of and research in music therapy. Through sharing the research she hoped to pass on not only her insight, but to also provide "a point of departure for other music therapists to gain insight into their own work" (p. 75). Borgal (2015) discussed the application of the heuristic self-inquiry, commenting that "the intent of heuristic self-inquiry is not to discover generalizable truths but rather to create a comprehensive and honest depiction of one's own subjective experience" (p. 18).

Music therapy research is expanding to include more qualitative perspectives, including self-inquiry; perhaps because "music enables and nudges forward the process of increased self-awareness, as well as reflecting it step by step" (Camilleri, 2001, p. 81). Gold (2012) maintains that research into music therapy is beginning to focus again on "what keeps music therapy together" (p. 104). He observes that this kind of research calls for greater awareness and introspection into the "human aspects of music therapy" (p. 104). Adams (2006) also offers the view that self-reflexivity is a large part of self-identity in current society.

Although there is some music therapy literature concerning the development of a relationship to music (Ansdell, 2012; Bruscia, 1998; Bruscia, 2012; Lecourt, 1990; Ruud, 1997; Yehuda, 2013), most is focused on the client (Aigen, 2012; Aigen et. al., 2008; Bruscia, 2012; Gold, 2012; Rolvsjord, 2012). There is little on the development and maintenance of the therapist's relationship (Bruscia, 1998; Isenberg-Grzeda, 1988; Turry, 2001; Yehuda, 2013). Through examination of a parallel discussion in other creative arts therapies (Cahn, 2000; Orkibi, 2012), it is clear that there is a lack of literature relating to a therapist's relationship with their art. This gap in the literature, along with the small amount of self-inquiry research in music therapy, represents space for further research on these topics.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Design

This study was a heuristic self-inquiry, in keeping with what was first outlined by Clark Moustakas (1990) as a process "essential in investigations of human experience" (p. 9). Moustakas first used heuristic inquiry when studying human experiences of loneliness. He describes the self as being present through all forms of discovery. Therefore, this method is a most appropriate design for inquiry in which the researcher is the sole participant. Heuristic inquiry was determined to be an effective methodology to study the research question chosen for the current research as it allows for self-analysis, personal growth, and in-depth discovery into the meaning of a relationship to music and its clinical implications.

Moustakas (1990) outlined six stages of heuristic inquiry. These stages, initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis, were used throughout the research to impose structure over the thesis as well as to organize the data collection and analysis procedures. Each stage was realized in accordance with elements of reflective and creative self-inquiries described by Bruscia (1998).

I was the sole participant in this heuristic self-inquiry.

Materials

The materials used in this study included a self-reflection journal, a recording application, an iPad with a microphone, and recordings of my improvisations.

Delimitations

In order to adhere to the constraints of a master's thesis timeline and scope, I delimited the data collection period to three recording and three listening sessions within a period of 7 weeks, whereas a deeper self-discovery journey could have taken significantly longer.

The data collection phases in this study were based on Bruscia's (1998) life-story improvisation. Bruscia suggests using at least six musical stages during this activity. To delimit the amount of data I could collect during the data collection period, I separated my life into three stages.

Data Collection Procedures

The first three phases outlined by Moustakas (1990) were realized to suit the research question. These phases, initial engagement, immersion, and incubation, all served the purpose of investigation and are outlined below.

Initial engagement. Heuristic inquiry begins with a research topic about which the researcher is intensely passionate. During the initial engagement phase, I used self-engagement in the topic to develop a question. This phase was realized through the creation of a research question, dialogue between the music therapy faculty and myself, a review of the literature, and the realization of the research process. This stage of research took place over 6 months.

Immersion. The immersion stage starts when the researcher begins "to live [the research question] and grow in knowledge and understanding of it" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 26). The researcher allows themselves to think about the research question at any time during their day, and in any setting. To realize this stage in the current research, I adapted Bruscia's (1998) life story improvisation exercise:

> Divide your life into stages or periods (at least 6). A stage can be any period in which you had a particular identity, exhibited a certain trait or behavior, lived under specific circumstances, had a particular goal or problem, and so on. Give each stage a name or title. Create an improvisation that describes each stage and your experiences during that stage. Tape-record each improvisation, with each one in chronological order on the final tape. (p. 154)

I separated my life into three significant developmental stages which I titled Early Stages, Finding My Voice, and Finding My Place, so as to delimit the amount of data I would collect. In response to each stage, I improvised for 15-20 minutes, creating three different recordings. These improvisations were on the guitar as I did not have access to a piano; all included vocal work. After these improvisations I reflected on my relationship to music during these stages, and how this may have developed over the course of the stage.

After the music for the three significant stages was recorded and a day had passed since recording the final stage, I listened to each recording three times. While listening to these recordings, I reflected upon how each stage affected my relationship to music in both positive and negative ways and how these could be influencing my clinical work. I asked myself two questions: "What was my relationship to music during this period of

my life?" and "How does this affect my work as a music therapist?" I wrote all of my answers and reflections in my journal.

In keeping with Moustakas' (1990) belief that, in the immersion stage, "virtually anything connected with the question becomes raw material for immersion" (p. 26), I kept a journal with me at all times. I used this journal to record thoughts and ideas I had about my current relationship to music as well as dreams and experiences that I had during this phase.

Incubation. Incubation involves the researcher removing themselves from the intensity of data collection and investigation of the research topic. Moustakas (1990) emphasizes the importance of the incubation phase to allow the researcher to intuit responses and interpretations of the data without actively seeking them out. During the incubation period, I took a 2-week break from the inquiry. During this period I did not participate in improvisations or reflections.

Data Analysis Procedures

The final three phases, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis, were realized to reflect and include the data analysis procedures.

Illumination. Illumination is the phase in which new, hidden, or misunderstood data is brought forth (Moustakas, 1990). During this stage, my data analysis began. I analyzed the self-reflection journal used after my improvisations and to record thoughts, feelings, and other sources of data. Using Neuman's (2006) first phase of coding analysis, I re-read the journals three times and began open-coding them for themes. I responded to words, phrases, or paragraphs with thematic words I felt suited the passage. I read the journal over to ensure my themes reflected the passages to which they were assigned. Thus, new themes were realized in the data, illuminating connections that may not have been previously made. This phase took place over 3 days.

Explication. During this stage of data analysis, the researcher delves further into the data illuminated in the previous step. This phase is used to understand the themes created previously. To do this, I used Neuman's (2006) second phase of axial coding. I analyzed all of the themes that emerged during open coding and combined themes that were similar in nature. Once I determined the new themes and maintained those related to the research question, I completed Neuman's (2006) final phase of selective coding. I

chose phrases that represented the data present in each theme. This phase was completed over 4 days.

Creative Synthesis. The final phase of the data analysis process is creative synthesis, in which the researcher uses the themes and data and puts them into a creative project or synthesis. During this phase, I synthesized the data by creating a zine. A zine (pronounced *zeen*) is an independent publication made by individuals for the expression of diverse voices and activism, or distribution of art, storytelling, and creativity (Art Gallery of Ontario, 2008; Holdaway, 2004). A zine is an effective way to present accessible data and synthesize the findings and feelings I discovered throughout the process of data collection and analysis, and is in line with my values as a music therapist and researcher. I also transcribed improvisations from each of my three life phases as a way to express the differences between the life stages.

Validity

When evaluating the validity of a heuristic self-inquiry, Moustakas (1990) asks if the description of the experience presents the meanings and essence of this experience. This can only be answered correctly when the process is rigorous. Throughout the research process, I maintained a high level of self-reflexivity, both while collecting and analyzing the data. Throughout the coding process, I made an effort to bracket my assumptions and preconceptions about my relationship to music. I regularly re-visited the raw data to ensure I was accurately interpreting the results. Through rigorous attention to validity throughout the study, I addressed ethical concerns related to truthful presentation of the data. Finally, I kept in dialogue with my supervisor throughout the process to further clarify and organize both my research and my writing.

Evaluation

This research study was conducted with the intent that it would be evaluated using Stige's EPICURE model (Stige, Malterud, & Midtgarden, 2009). This method of qualitative evaluation provides an agenda with which to assess research. The seven main categories with which to evaluate the research are: engagement with the research topic, processing of the data, interpretation and finding meaning, critique of myself, usefulness of the research, relevance to the field, and ethical obligations. Throughout the data collection, analysis, and writing of this research I worked rigorously with the intent that

the reader would find that I was fully engaged in the research and topic of inquiry, that the processing of the data and interpretations of the results fully reflected the research question, and that I engaged in self-critique throughout the process. Finally, the intent of this inquiry was to be useful and relevant to the readers themselves as consumers of research, to music therapy practitioners, and to the field in general.

Chapter 4. Results

This chapter presents the results from my explication phase of data collection. The first section of the chapter includes my analysis of the journal entries, with a discussion of each phase and the themes that were illuminated during analysis. The second half of the chapter includes a discussion of the changes I noted in my improvisations. Although none of these changes were included in my final explication themes, the changes were relevant to my progress through the stages, and reflect my relationship to music during each phase.

An Examination of the Journals

After completing the incubation period, I revisited the data and began examining my journals and improvisations for themes and changes. Through the explication phase of research, which included axial and selective coding, three main themes emerged. These themes were Family, Motivations, and Making Music Together.

The theme of Family was only present in the first phase of my life, but through examining the data I found it was very influential during this time. During the axial coding phase, the themes of family influence in music and making music with family members were combined. The second theme, Motivations, contained both positive and negative motivations to learn and continue in music. These included receiving praise from others, wanting praise, wanting to be the best at something, ease, confidence, and positive reinforcement. The final theme, Making Music Together, was present throughout all of the phases. During axial coding themes of choir and singing or making music together were combined.

Following guidelines outlined in Bruscia's book *The Dynamics of Psychotherapy* (1998), I separated my life into three stages and named them The Early Stages, Finding My Voice, and Finding My Place. In order to fully understand my relationship to music, each stage needed to be examined. Quotations from my journal are presented in *italics.* These are used throughout to aid in understanding the results in the data.

Phase 1: The Early Stages. This phase contains my musical development from the age 0-13. This is a large span of years, but my musical development was focused mainly on beginnings. I started to learn music in school, started piano lessons, started to sing with my grandmother (nanny), and music started to become a part of my identity.

My relationship to music during this stage was based on influence from family members, motivations such as praise and ease, and my enjoyment of singing with others.

Theme 1: Family. As mentioned previously, this is the only phase in which the theme of family was present. This theme is still included in the results because throughout this stage I was beginning to grow and learn in music, and my family had considerable influence on this development. The first experiences I had with music were with my family. *Some of my earliest memories of music are my dad playing guitar and us singing Neil Young songs together.* We would sing during bath time, when the power was out, and while camping. We would even request songs from him and buy him guitar books of our preferred music. I can still feel this influence today, as I have a connection with the music of Neil Young.

I also shared many musical experiences with my grandmother (nanny). From a young age, whenever I started to sing, I was always told that I had *my nanny's voice,* almost as if it had been this special gift that was passed down to me. I began to sing in the choir with my nanny and aunt, and enjoyed our time together. We would sing in church services, funerals, and holidays. Even though my nanny had relationships with all of her grandchildren, this was something that was special to the two of us, something that she did not have with my brother or my cousins. It was *my own little space. Certainly feels like I have a connection with nanny because of singing and career choices (choir director) which is special because she doesn't have that with anyone else.*

Music education literature often discusses the role of family in music learning, indicating that families with musical skills and enjoyment often pass their experiences on to younger generations (Hallam et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2003; Pitts & Davidson, 2000; Zdzinski, 1996) My special relationship with my nanny and the experiences with my father were both factors that contributed to the development of my relationship to music, the effects of which are still felt today.

Theme 2: Motivations. There were many different motivations during this phase of my life. This motivation really began when I started piano lessons and when I started singing in public. *I was always good at music. I learned fast, didn't have to practice much, and people always told me how good I was.* I always had an easy time learning the notes and memorizing my songs on the piano. I could sing along easily with a lot of the

songs on the radio. I liked music because *it was easy and I was good at it.* Growing up, I only really enjoyed things that I was good at, and music was no different. During this stage I did not feel threatened by the talents of others, but was still motivated by my ease and confidence in music.

After I began playing for people outside of my immediate family I began to receive praise; *people always told me how good I was.* I would receive praise from teachers, family members, friends, and would often hear of people talking about my musical talent with my parents. This had a large effect on my relationship to music because *at this time it* [was] *based on praise and ease.* It was great to receive compliments for something that I liked doing and for something that came more easily than school or sports.

When I started performing alone it was for the same reasons, I wanted *to show people how good I was and to get praised.* I do not remember ever enjoying solo performances during this stage of my life, but I remember doing it anyway. *I think part of me wanted them* (friends, family, and strangers) *to say "Wow Cordon, that was really good." or something like that.*

Theme 3: Making Music Together. During my early years in music, before I started taking formal lessons, the majority of my musical experiences were with other people. As mentioned previously, some of these experiences were with family members. However, there were also many experiences with friends once I joined school choirs. I first joined choir in senior kindergarten and enjoyed it so much that I stayed in choirs throughout my academic career. I enjoyed singing, *but unless I was singing with other people I didn't love it.* I would make my friends join the choirs with me so I was never alone.

Being in choir became a large part of my life at school and was one aspect of my emerging identity. It combined my love for music with a low-pressure environment in which I could have fun and not feel that I was the center of attention. *Looking back, the pressure to be amazing (the best) wasn't there when I was in choir.* During a time when adolescents are concerned with building social identities and images (Thomas, 2015), choir gave me a place to be myself without fearing the judgement of others.

Phase 2: Finding my Voice. This phase took place throughout my high school education (age 14-18). During this phase I started to take voice lessons, started to sing more solos both in choir and in music festivals, and joined musical theatre. My relationship to music during this stage continued to be grounded in motivations such as praise, ease, and being the best, as well as singing with others both in musical theatre and in choir.

Theme 2: Motivations. During this phase, the need for praise in my musical learning increased. I always felt the need to *be the best* and almost felt that others' musical abilities were challenging to my identity. A large part of my decision to perform was that I felt it was the best way to receive recognition in the form of scoring better than others, receiving compliments, or being told that family members received compliments on my voice and musical abilities. I joined musical theatre at my high school and was also provided with a lot of praise and positive reinforcement. *It really paired my love of music to people telling me how great I was at it.* This gave me a lot of confidence in my musical abilities and in myself.

During this phase I not only found my singing voice, or my musical voice, but I also found my identity and my confidence. I was no longer afraid to speak up in class, to answer questions, and to speak my mind in groups of people with whom I would normally keep quiet. I began to speak up for myself and started to realize that I had a voice that could be heard by peers, teachers, and others. A lot of this comfort grew out of my confidence in music.

In their research, Hallam et al. (2016) discussed the differences between motivation and aspirations, noting that, in line with other research on the topic, (Costa-Gioma, Flowers, & Sasake, 2005; McPherson & Renwick, 2001) support from family and friends, as well as positive reinforcement from a music instructor, can all contribute to the motivation for music learning. This aligns with my personal reflections of wanting support and praise from family, friends, peers, and teachers.

Theme 3: Making Music Together. When I started high school I had already begun singing in the choir. During this phase, being in choir continued to be a significant aspect of my identity, both musically and within the school. The same was true of musical theatre. I started and maintained friendships through musical theatre and enjoyed

singing with my friends in concerts, festivals, and musicals. These activities gave me the freedom to explore my range, start experimenting harmonically, and begin to learn matching and blending techniques. *I loved singing and adding harmony to songs.* I became one of the stronger members of the choir, and even though this afforded me with a lot of motivations mentioned previously, it also compelled me to help others and to teach them in music.

Through helping younger choir members, I first considered a career in music. I knew that I did not want to perform, but I also knew that I loved teaching, sharing, and helping in music. This, in turn, led me to music therapy. When I discovered music therapy I was considering many different career options, some that did not include music. When music therapy was first explained to me I knew that it paired my love of music with my love of helping and teaching. I began to change my academic and career goals and planned to study music therapy at the University of Windsor.

Phase 3: Finding my Place. This phase encompasses all of my time in post-secondary education (18-24). I began my music therapy studies at the University of Windsor in 2011, completed my internship, graduated, and received my MTA (music therapist accredited) status in 2016. During these 5 years, my relationship to music grew and changed exponentially, as did my identity as a music therapist. In 2016, I also began my master's degree. This phase ended at the beginning of my incubation period. My relationship to music moved fully towards making music with others, both in and out of music therapy sessions. My enjoyment of music was no longer motivated by praise, positive reinforcement, or being the best.

Theme 2: Motivations. During this phase, my musical experiences became less motivated by praise and being the best. *I stopped singing to be better than people. Realistically, this probably started to separate itself because I wasn't nearly as good as a lot of the people there.* Even so, the unattainable title of "best" was not something that drove me to sing. I discovered an enjoyment of recreationally making music with friends and other students outside of a performance setting. In my journal I called this *jamming.* I would play guitar, egg shakers, and sing with friends, roommates, and other music students on a regular basis through my 4 years of undergraduate studies. I enjoyed these experiences, and *the most amazing thing was that I wasn't nervous. Like, at all. I have no*

memory of ever being afraid to make music with these people. In turn, these people became my roommates and some of my best friends during my time in Windsor. Therefore, my motivations to make music really combined with my love of making music with others.

Theme 3: Making Music Together. I reflected in my journal that, through jamming, I learned how to make mistakes in music, something that I have struggled with, because *just making music for fun was so rewarding and it let me learn to have fun and mess up and still love it.* This was an experience I did not have prior to starting my music therapy studies. This experience of jamming also related to my music therapy experiences and the techniques I was learning about in my classes. However, while improvising and reflecting on this experience, jamming with my friends was seen as a separate and enjoyable thing. *I think singing with other people, MT* [music therapy] *related or not, is a great source of joy for me. Probably one of the reasons I picked MT.*

As well as making music with friends, I also sang in the University Singers, an open choir that includes students from music and other faculties. This was the first time I was in a choir with more than 15 people that always sang in four parts. I enjoyed the challenge as well as the experience of making such beautiful and rich sounding music. *I got chills with that choir that I never got singing alone before.* I had the experience of singing solos and working with amazing conductors and musicians. These experiences became very important to me. *I didn't know how much I loved choir until I started to miss choir.* Throughout my master's training I did not join a choir. I was directing a community choir, but found myself missing the experience of singing with so many others. I was surprised at *how much my heart filled with joy when I knew I could join* and sing in a choir again. *I think that maybe music my "music for me" is really music with others outside of a therapeutic context.*

How Does This Affect my Work as a Music Therapist?. While reflecting on my relationship to music, I also journaled about my work as a music therapist, and how this relationship, as realized through the research, has affected it. Several of these reflections related directly to Theme 2 and Theme 3 in my research.

Theme 2: Motivations. While reflecting on being the best at something and the ease I found in making music, I wrote about how this could positively affect my work as

a music therapist today. *Well, it at least means that I'm good at music and have a strong confidence and basis in music.* I am comfortable learning and singing new songs, learn quickly, and am able to prepare preferred music for my client before our next session. This is a skill I have found useful, as I am able to quickly create a relationship based on learning and sharing a client's preferred music and favourite songs.

I also discovered motivations for my work through exploring my relationship to music. *I was super confident in my musical abilities (even if I needed reassurance a lot) but I also became more confident.* This experience of finding myself, my voice, and my confidence in music affects my clinical choices, motivations, and even preferences every day. I hope to provide experiences that empower, build confidence, and inspire clients to use find their voice in music, because it helped me to do so.

Theme 3: Making Music Together. Throughout my journal, I reflected on how my enjoyment of making music with others could affect my work as a music therapist. Most of my reflections were similar, *it's easy and enjoyable to make music with other people.* The idea of my comfort, confidence, and enjoyment in playing with others was echoed throughout the phases, and my reflections concluded with *I'm ready to join in with others, I'm ready to share my music with someone else, and I am so ready to share my joy in that.*

Other than ease, joy, and confidence, I also reflected on my own self-care through music. Throughout my music therapy training, the importance of musical self-care was always emphasized. This can be best described by Ruud (2010) as "when music is a part of the technologies of self we use to define and perform health." (p.1733) I always struggled to do that for myself in music, but through reflecting on my improvisations and relationship to music I came to a new conclusion: *I will be a better MT because I've found that taking time to make music for myself really comes in the way of joining a choir. So I'm ready to take that next step in the direction of musical self-care and health.*

An Examination of the Improvisations

While reflecting on my improvisations, I noted changes and themes in the music as well as discussed my life and relationship to music during that stage. Lyrics from the improvisations are included in Chapter 5.

My improvisation for The Early Stages was the most simple. I used simple melodies, harmonies, and used only simple vowels and closed mouth sounds instead of words. *No words - a lot of closed mouth or simple vowels - ooh aah.* The opening of the improvisation was singing up the *scale degrees over tonic ground - very basic - kept referring to my simple beginnings.* The improvisation ended with a simple improvisation over the chords of Amazing Grace, a reference to my time singing in church choirs.

The improvisation for Finding My Voice began *higher than last improv.* I continued to use simple vowels and closed mouth sounds, but I also added words, *I found my voice.* In this improvisation I began to explore my range, singing using *bigger jumps* and in a *higher register.* I ended the improvisations with a *big high note on "ooh", still kind of closed off.* My growing confidence in my voice, both singing and speaking, was translated throughout the improvisation.

Finally, during my improvisation for Finding My Place, I noted how easy and enjoyable it was to make music. I started this recording with words, *"I found my way."* I still used some closed vowels, but most of the improvisation contained words, more so than the previous two. I noted that I started to use *more words as I become more comfortable in music.* When I did use simple vowels, they were much more open and the sound carried much farther. While listening back to all of the improvisations, I indicated in my journal that I could hear *how much my voice has grown over the years, and you can almost hear how much more confident I am singing too.* Finally, I noted that I embraced my soprano voice by including *the most high notes in this one.* The final improvisation fully reflected how comfortable I am using my voice, and how much enjoyment I get from it.

Chapter 5. Discussion

In this final chapter, I discuss my creative synthesis, outline the zine, as well as discuss the lyrics to some of the songs I created during my improvisations. I outline the limitations of my methodology and of this study. Finally, I consider the implications of this research, including personal, clinical, education, and research.

Creative Synthesis

As mentioned previously, for my creative synthesis I created a zine, a short, handmade magazine (Art Gallery of Ontario, 2008; Holdaway, 2004). While I was completing the illumination and explication phases of data analysis, I discovered that creating a zine was, I felt, the best way to synthesize my data, research, and the process in a creative way. Creating a zine also allows the data to be easily disseminated to the public, something I as a therapist, artist, and researcher believe in deeply. The zine outlines all chapters in this thesis along with results, ideas, comments, thoughts, pictures, music, and art that I felt fully represented my relationship to music and my journey through the research. The zine can be found with the thesis in the Concordia University Spectrum Research Repository.

While listening back to my improvisations, I also felt that it was important to transcribe some of the melodies and songs I created, as they represent different changes that took place throughout the three stages of my life. In my improvisation for The Early Years, there were no lyrics as the improvisation was very simple. One of the melodies was transcribed, and contained stepwise motion in the melody and very strong tonic grounding (see Appendix A for transcription).

The improvisation for Finding My Voice, the second stage, had one song that contained words. This was the second song in the improvisation. It contained bigger jumps and was sung in a higher register than improvisations in the previous stage. As this stage was about finding my voice, both musically and in my life, that was the focus of the song (see Appendix B for transcription).

I Found My Voice

I found my voice. I found my voice. I found my voice. I found my voice. You're not gonna take it away, oh no, you're not gonna take it away. Life gets hard sometimes but I

found my voice, you're not gonna take it away. Life gets hard sometimes but I found my voice, so you're not going to take it away.

No no no, you're not gonna take it away from me, no no no. You're not gonna get it away from me.

You may try but I know, I know my voice is mine. You're gonna listen to the things I have to say. You're not gonna take away my voice. You gotta listen to all the things I've got to say. You can't take away my voice. You're not gonna take away my voice.

No no no, you're not gonna take it away from me, no no no. You're not gonna get it away from me.

I found my voice. I found my voice. I found my voice. I found my voice. You're not gonna take it away.

You're gonna listen to what I've got to say. I know what I've got to say is very important, it has value. So you're gonna listen to what I've got to say. When I say stop you're gonna stop cuz I say. When I say "hey" you're gonna say "hey." Mmmm.

You better listen cuz I'm gonna start to use my voice more often. I found my voice and you bet you're gonna hear it. You're gonna hear my voice above the crowd, You're gonna hear my voice above the crowd, It's not gonna get lost in the crown no more. You're gonna hear my voice coming out of my head, You're gonna hear my voice, gonna hear what I said, You're gonna hear my voice coming right out of my head. I'm not gonna let nobody do no talking, Nobody's gonna do no talking for me no more, It's just me.

I found my voice. I found my voice, I found my voice. I found my voice, I found my voice, I found my voice.

And it has to say…I am smart, my friends love me, I have an okay family. I'm very smart, I can do whatever I want to in my life. I'm very smart and you can't devalue me and everything that I want to say. You gotta to listen to me. I found my voice. I found my voice.

In the third improvisation I reflected on my time in post-secondary education. One prominent aspect of my relationship to music during this stage, as mentioned previously, was jamming with my friends and roommates. This was reflected in one song

during my final improvisation. During this song I talked at length about the enjoyment that came from singing with these people, and I included references to places we used to visit and songs that we used to sing together (see Appendix C for a transcription).

Happiness is With You

Happiness is singing with you, happiness is singing with you. Happiness is Thursday nights and happiness is the Green Bean and happiness is singing with you.

Da da da da da. Da da da da da da. Ooh. Da da da da da. Da da da da da da. Ooh.

Happiness is singing ooh, happiness is playing ooh, happiness is 4 am and having class the next day. Happiness is jamming ooh, happiness is eating brownies and drinking Italian Soda in the basement of the Green Bean.

Da da da da da. Da da da da da da. Ooh. Da da da da da. Da da da da da da. Ooh.

Happiness is singing with you, One Love and Imogen Heap, singing Adele and Taylor Swift, singing… what's the name of that band? and Say Anything. Happiness is playing along with you, guitar, bass, and piano, and always egg shakers, 4 part harmony, but usually 2-part harmony.

Da da da da da. Da da da da da da. Ooh. Da da da da da. Da da da da da da. Ooh.

One love, one heart, let's get together and be as one. One love, one heart, let's get together and be alright. La la la la la la, La la la la la la. La la la oooh

Da da da da da. Da da da da da da. Ooh. Da da da da da. Da da da da da da. Ooh.

Happiness is singing with you

The lyrics and melodies to these songs are also included in the zine.

Limitations

A heuristic self-inquiry is a qualitative research method that does not result in generalizable outcomes. This may be considered a limitation of the study, but as Borgal

(2015) explains, “the intent of heuristic self-inquiry is not to discover generalizable truths but rather to create a comprehensive and honest depiction of one’s own subjective experience” (p. 18). This is useful for examining arts related topics, and for studying intensely personal subjects (Hunt, 2016). Such subjective examination is useful for adding depth to the qualitative literature, and for acting as examples of self-reflexivity.

The time-frame in which this study was completed represents another limitation. As a master's thesis, the research had to be completed within time constraints determined by university deadlines. The amount of self-reflection and immersion might have been greater had there been more time allowed for such an exploration. This being the first research study I have completed, it is possible that through learning the research process and participating in deep self-reflection, I misunderstood my reflections in my journals, or that I misinterpreted my writings.

Implications

There are several implications that this research can have for my personal and clinical work, as well as for music therapy education and future research.

Personal and Clinical. As mentioned previously, this research helped me to discover new musical tools that I can use for self-care and enjoyment of music. I will no longer need to feel guilty about not enjoying making music by myself as I perceive others do. This research has helped me to understand my enjoyment of making music with others and has inspired me to spend personal time in a choir. Joining a choir will also help me be a better clinician. I am now able to practice weekly musical self-care in the form of singing with others, practicing music, challenging my voice, and creating beautiful music.

My work as a music therapist may also be affected by the results of this research. I now have a better understanding of my motivations for choosing this field and a better understanding of my musical biases and preferences. Through self-reflection and inquiry I can confidently say that my enjoyment of making music with others is the reason behind my confidence in my work, and not because it is something that I found I was good at, or that was easy for me. I am now ready to meet and join my clients in the music.

Finally, this research may inspire other music therapists to look at their relationship to music in a deeper way. It may bring them to explore their motivations for their work, as well as provide a concise outline of the process I found to be effective.

Future Research. This research adds to the "self in therapy" literature, (McCaffrey, 2013, p.307) but it also leaves space for further self-inquiries. There is opportunity for more in-depth research of one's relationship to music, something needed as there is very little on this topic in the music therapy or music education literature. It also creates a space for individuals of diverse backgrounds and abilities to examine their relationship to music and its effects on their practice. Finally, this process can be modified for work with clients who may wish to understand their relationship to music through the creation of a life-review, a song cycle, or simply improvisation that leads to a deeper understanding of themselves in music.

Conclusion

Throughout the research process, I was continually surprised. I was afraid that, through deep self-reflection, improvisation, and inquiry, I would find my only motivation for becoming a music therapist and for spending so much time in music was that I was good at it. I was worried that, since it was easy for me, I decided to use music as a tool without having a deeper connection. I was surprised to find that my enjoyment of making music with others was present in every life stage. I was surprised how heavily influenced I was by making music with family members in the early years of my life. I was surprised that the theme of motivations, praise, ease, and being the best were not present in my final stage. This research reinvigorated my love of making music with others, and provides me with comfort and confidence to move forward into my life as a professional music therapist.

My belief that I did not have a relationship to music was wrong; this research has shown me that. It helped me to discover the true meaning of this relationship, which has also aided in creating a meaningful musical outlet for self-care. I am grateful that I have the opportunity to continue to make music with others both within the therapeutic relationship and in my personal life.

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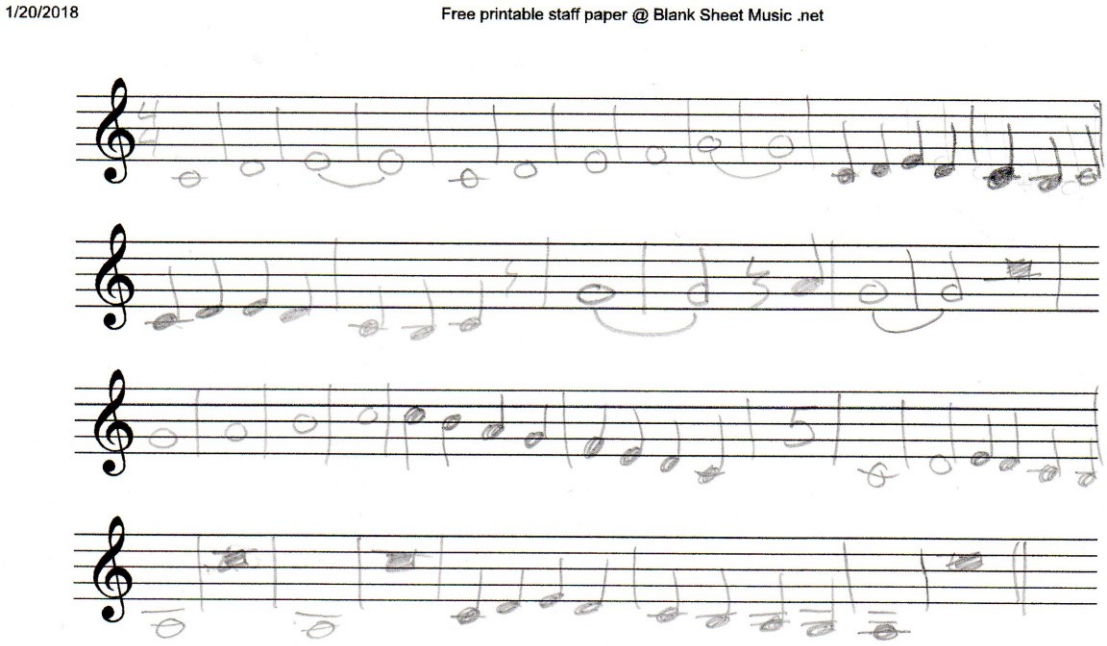
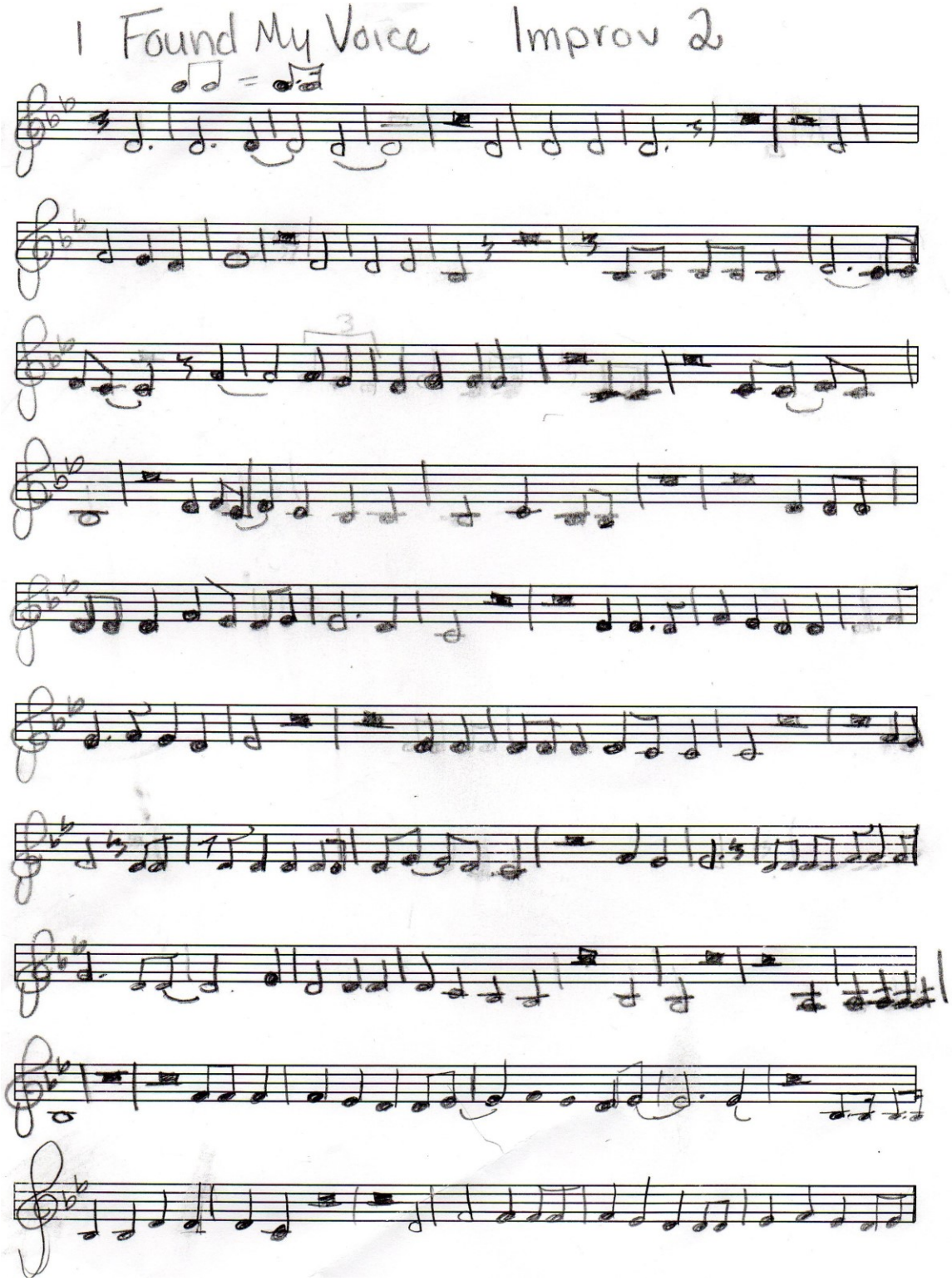
Appendix A

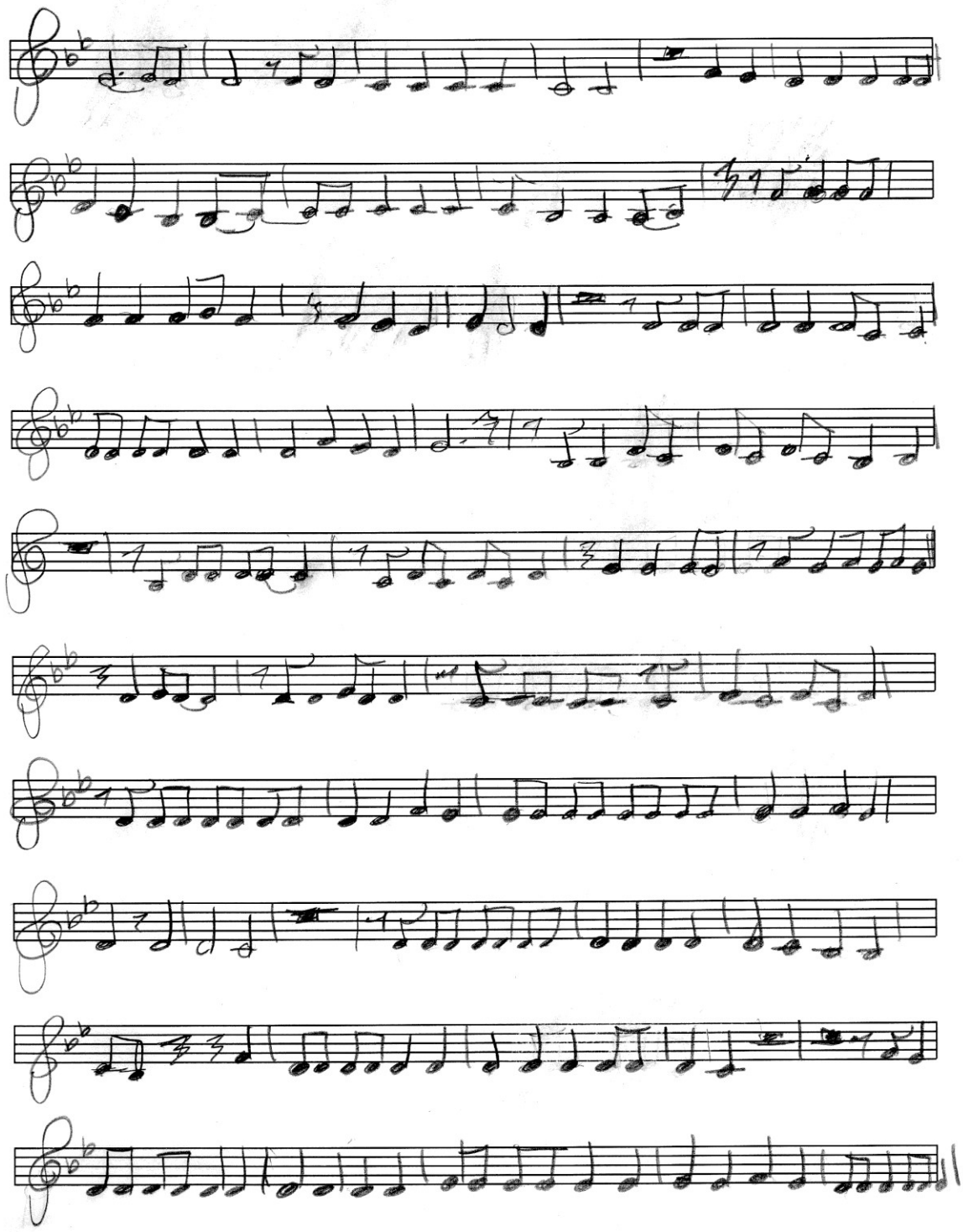
The Early Years Improvisation Transcription

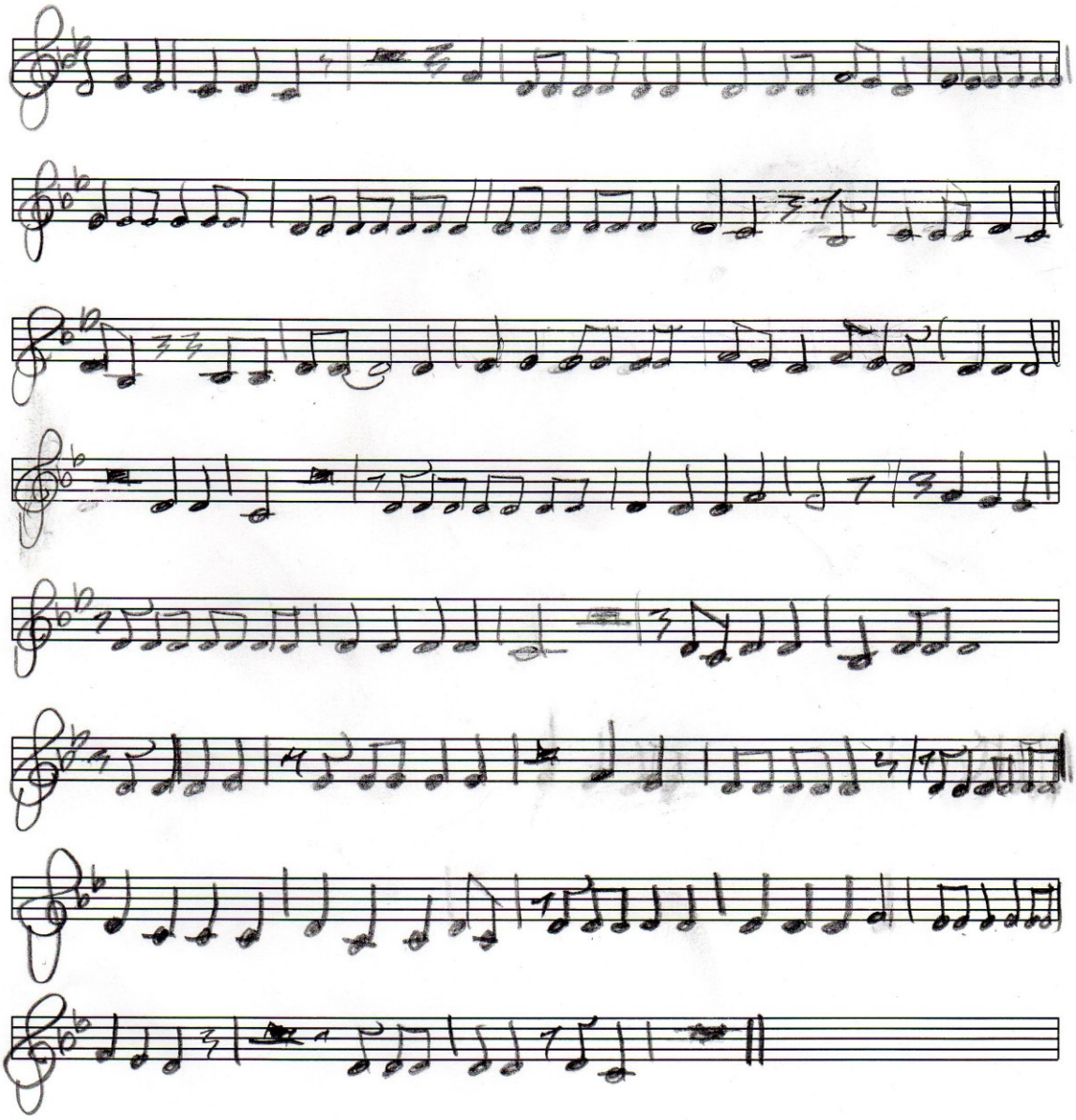


Appendix B

I Found My Voice Transcription

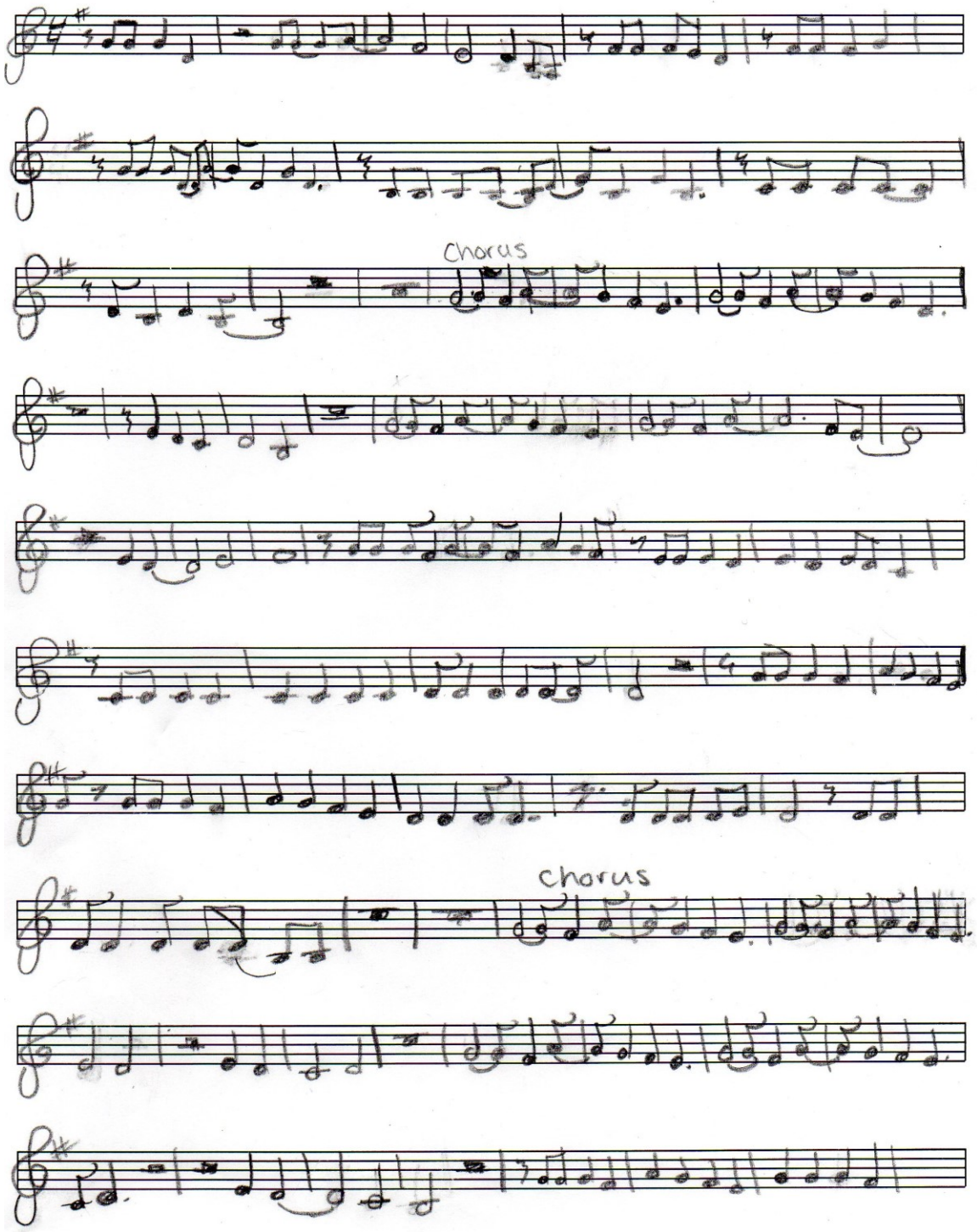


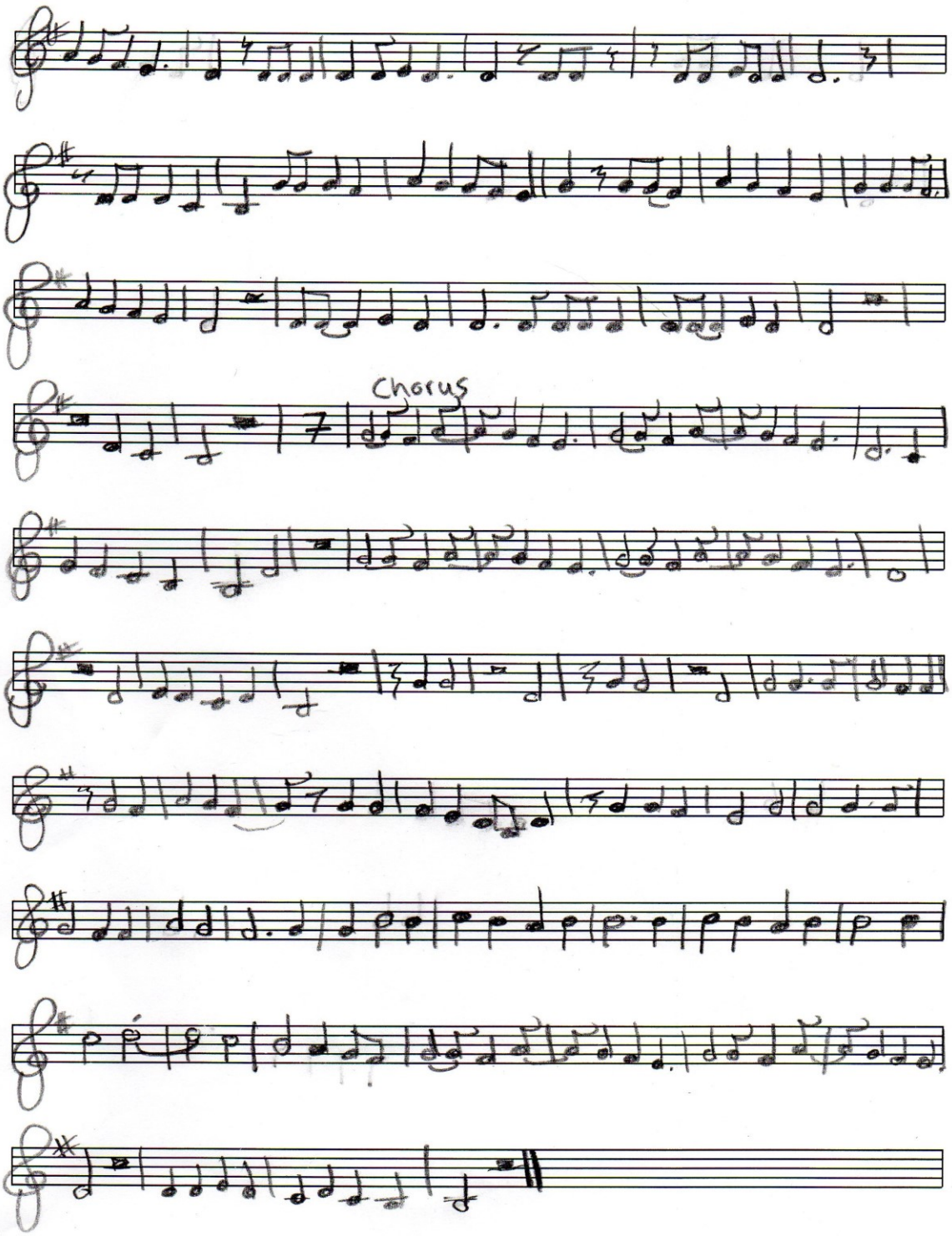




Appendix C

Happiness is With You Transcription




Chorus