

Towards a Philosophy of Music Therapy in the Digital Age

Nwolisa, Marcellinus Ikechukwu

Rome, Italy

*Corresponding Author: Nwolisa, Marcellinus Ikechukwu

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23383968>

Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>Music therapy has gained increasing recognition as a non-pharmacological approach to promoting mental health, emotional well-being, and human flourishing. At the same time, advances in digital technologies, including tele-music therapy, artificial intelligence, mobile health applications, and other digital therapeutics, have transformed the ways in which therapeutic musical interventions are delivered and experienced. Despite growing empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of music therapy, its philosophical foundations remain insufficiently explored, particularly within technology-mediated environments. Adopting philosophical and theoretical methods, this research developed a philosophical understanding of music therapy in the digital age by integrating contemporary empirical research with insights from pragmatism, phenomenology, existential philosophy, narrative theory, and an Igbo conception of relational personhood. Drawing on the works of William James, John Dewey, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Paul Ricoeur, this research argues that music therapy should be understood not merely as a clinical technique for symptom reduction but as a meaningful human practice that promotes self-understanding, relational connectedness, identity reconstruction, and flourishing. The article further proposes the Relational Theory of Musical Healing, which interprets healing as the restoration and strengthening of meaningful relationships with oneself, others, community, and sources of purpose. While digital technologies expand access to therapeutic resources, they also raise important concerns regarding authenticity, embodiment, emotional manipulation, and the commodification of healing. The research concludes that music therapy reveals healing to be an existential and relational achievement and that the future of digital therapeutic practice depends on preserving the human dimensions of meaning, connection, and flourishing.</i> Keywords: Music therapy; digital age; relational healing; tele-therapy; pragmatism.
Received: 09-08-2026	
Accepted: 19-09-2026	
Published: 15-10-2026	
Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited. Citation: Nwolisa, Marcellinus Ikechukwu. (2026). Towards a philosophy of music therapy in the digital age. UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(10), 103-112.	

Introduction

In the words of Modeme (2025), “Health challenges are common occurrences to human existence, in consideration of this, it can be argued that no human society can exist without health challenges. Health challenges can appear in diverse ways such as physical, social, emotional, spiritual and traumatic” (p. 107). Of all the health challenges, mental health challenges are the most worrisome. They have become a major concern in contemporary society, with increasing number of individuals experiencing anxiety, depression, stress of any kind, loneliness, and emotional distress. Factors like the death of a beloved one, rapid social change, heart - break from a loved one, terminal and chronic health issues, marriage crisis, personal religious crisis,

economic uncertainty, and technological transformation and so on, have intensified these challenges, prompting healthcare practitioners and researchers to explore complementary approaches that support psychological/mental well-being beyond conventional pharmacological interventions. Among such approaches, music therapy has gained growing recognition because of its capacity to engage emotional, cognitive, social, and physiological dimensions of human experience at the same time. The connection between music and healing is deeply rooted in human history. Nwankpa and Okunade (2018) noted that:

The mysterious power of music in its ability to influence and shape man's mental and physical wellbeing, morals and character, as well as their feelings or passion calls for a rethink of the nature of music. The inherent diversities in musical modes, associated lyrical contents, as well as rhythms, melody, harmony and, vocal and instrumental colours have the capacity to depress, stabilize or excite the listener (p. 46)

Across cultures, music has long been used in religious rituals, communal ceremonies, and therapeutic practices to provide comfort and alleviate suffering. Contemporary researches increasingly support these traditional insights. Noda and Noda (2025) for instance, argue that music activates neural systems associated with emotion, memory, cognition, and social interaction, while Pradeep et al. (2026) demonstrate that musical engagement contributes to emotional regulation, stress reduction, and social bonding. These findings show that music is not merely a source of entertainment but also a meaningful resource for promoting psychological well-being. The growing acceptance of music therapy within healthcare settings reflects this therapeutic potential. Empirical studies have equally shown that music-based interventions can improve mental health outcomes across diverse populations. For example, Thompson et al. (2024) found that music therapy reduced distress and enhanced well-being among individuals living with dementia, while Chen et al. (2025) reported significant reductions in chronic pain and depression among patients receiving music-based interventions. Beyond clinical settings, Sanfilippo et al. (2021) observed that musical engagement supports emotional well-being and social connectedness, while Raja et al. (2025) documented improvements in cognitive functioning, resilience, and quality of life among older adults. Taken together, these studies demonstrate that music possesses therapeutic capacities that extend far beyond aesthetic enjoyment.

At the same time, the context of music therapy has changed significantly with the emergence of digital technologies. Streaming platforms (such as youtube, spotify, tiktok, audiomack, mdundo and so on), mobile applications, wearable devices, artificial intelligence systems, and telehealth services have expanded opportunities for therapeutic engagement beyond traditional face-to-face encounters. Individuals can now access personalized playlists, remote therapy sessions, and digital wellness platforms designed to support emotional health. According to Leschallier De Lisle et al. (2024), music-based digital applications are becoming increasingly important within contemporary mental healthcare, while Wei and He (2026) highlight the growing role of artificial intelligence in personalizing therapeutic musical interventions.

These developments have created new opportunities for accessibility and innovation. Digital technologies make

therapeutic resources available to individuals who might otherwise lack access to conventional healthcare services, while AI-assisted systems offer possibilities for increasingly personalized interventions. Nevertheless, they also raise important philosophical questions. Although existing research largely focuses on the effectiveness of music therapy and digital therapeutic tools, less attention has been devoted to understanding the meaning of healing within technology-mediated environments. Questions concerning human presence, interpersonal connection, authenticity, and the role of technology in therapeutic relationships remain insufficiently developed. Such concerns reveal the limitations of purely empirical approaches to music therapy. While clinical studies can demonstrate reductions in anxiety, depression, or stress, they cannot fully explain why music possesses therapeutic significance or how healing is experienced by individuals. Healing often involves processes of self-understanding, emotional integration, identity reconstruction, and the search for meaning- dimensions that extend beyond the scope of clinical measurement and invite philosophical reflection.

This research therefore develops a philosophical understanding of music therapy in the digital age by integrating contemporary empirical research with insights from pragmatism, phenomenology, existential philosophy, and narrative theory. Drawing on the philosophical insights of William James, John Dewey, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Paul Ricoeur, the research argues that music therapy should be understood not merely as a technique for symptom management but as a meaningful human practice that promotes well-being, strengthens relationships, emotional stability and supports human flourishing.

This research therefore makes four principal contributions to the philosophy of music therapy. First, it develops an integrative philosophical framework by bringing together pragmatism, phenomenology, existential philosophy, and narrative theory. Second, it proposes the Relational Theory of Musical Healing as a novel account of how music promotes well-being and flourishing. Third, it extends contemporary discussions by incorporating an Igbo conception of relational personhood. Finally, it examines the opportunities and challenges created by digital technologies for the future of therapeutic practice.

Conceptual Clarifications

Music

Music is a universal feature of human existence that transcends cultural, linguistic, and geographical boundaries. It is a universal form of expression, which cuts across every race, gender, religious sect, country, culture

and tribe. And throughout history, music has served religious, social, educational, and therapeutic purposes, making it one of humanity's most enduring forms of expression. Betchwars (2016) opines that music expresses thoughts, feelings, emotions and religion in a most profound way that words alone cannot do justice to. Beyond entertainment, music influences emotions, thoughts, memories, relationship with the divine as well as the interpersonal relationships, thereby shaping how individuals experience and interpret the world around them. On a similar note, de Rosen (2014) observes that music relates to religion, and both trigger man's transcendency and ensure order. Contemporary researches of Noda and Noda (2025) and Pradeep et al. (2026) suggest that music functions not merely as an artistic product but as a meaningful human experience capable of influencing psychological well-being.

The therapeutic significance of music arises largely from its ability to engage emotional and experiential dimensions of life. Individuals frequently use music to express their feelings, process memories, and construct personal meaning. Consequently, music may be understood as a medium through which people interpret their experiences, strengthen social connections, and cultivate well-being. This broader role forms the foundation for understanding music therapy as more than a clinical intervention.

Music Therapy

Numerous life challenges, beginning with psychological problems such as anxiety and fear, depression and despair, hormonal imbalance, feelings of irritability, dementia, stress, difficulty in concentration etc; and vagaries of health concerns, such as heart problems, weakened immune systems and other numerous terminal illnesses can affect anyone. No one is above such challenges. However, finding effective ways to life sustenance is extremely essential to promoting overall well-being of an individual. A potentially effective strategy is music therapy, a discipline that uses music's therapeutic qualities to address social, cognitive, and emotional needs (Chatterjee, 2024).

The word *therapy* derives from the ancient Greek term *therapeia* “θεραπεία”, (which originally meant service, care, attendance, or healing; and from the verb *therapeuein* “θεραπεύειν”, (meaning "to attend to," "to care for," "to serve," or "to heal"). In classical Greek thought, *therapeia* referred not only to medical treatment but also to forms of care directed towards the body, the soul, and one's way of life. (Liddell & Scott, 1996). From this etymological perspective, music therapy may be understood as a form of therapeutic care through which music becomes a medium for healing, restoration, and human flourishing. Music here, becomes a form of alternative medicine, utilizes the inherent mood-enhancing properties of music to promote

mental health and overall well-being (Vandana et al., 2025). This therapeutic approach encompasses goal-oriented activities such as the playing of musical instrument to the patient, songwriting, chanting of calming songs, dancing (vagaries of body movement) using music for every description and receptive approaches like listening to music, as well as responding to it.

Contrary to ordinary music listening, music therapy is directed towards specific therapeutic outcomes. Its purpose is not merely enjoyment but the promotion of healing, growth, adaptation, and improved quality of life. Empirical studies increasingly demonstrate its effectiveness across diverse populations and healthcare settings. For example, a study by Chanda and Levitin (2013), discovered that listening to music can improve the activity of brain regions involved in stress response, leading to decreased levels of cortisol, a hormone associated with stress. Chen et al. (2025) found that music therapy significantly reduced chronic pain and depressive symptoms among patients experiencing long-term health conditions. In the same line of thought, Thompson et al. (2024) reported that music therapy improved well-being and reduced distress among individuals living with dementia. Yet, for William & Sidis (2025), Music therapy has been embraced by patients and has been reported to support emotion processing and affect regulation indicating its potential usefulness as a treatment for trauma related disorders. Although many studies focus on measurable outcomes, the significance of music therapy extends beyond symptom reduction. Music often facilitates emotional expression, strengthens interpersonal relationships, and supports personal growth.

Human Well-Being and Human Flourishing

Well-being is a positive state of mind and body experienced by any individual and any given society. According to World Health Organization (2021), “Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose.” Well-being generally could be referred to as positive psychological functioning, emotional balance and stability, social connectedness, and life satisfaction. Human flourishing on the other hand, is the highest form of well-being. It encompasses a broader vision of living well, involving the realization of human capacities, meaningful relationships, and purposeful engagement with life. It involves more than the absence of illness. It concerns the ability to live meaningfully, maintain supportive relationships, and develop one's capacities despite life's challenges. Vanderweele (2017) describes flourishing as a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good. Such a state, could also be referred to as complete human well-being which according to him, is a broader concept than psychological well-being. Music therapy becomes

significant because it supports these broader dimensions of well-being, helping individuals live meaningful life by reconnecting with themselves, reconnecting with others, and their communities. In this sense, healing is not merely the removal of suffering but the restoration of meaningful participation in communal life.

Music therapy contributes to these goals by engaging multiple dimensions of human experience simultaneously as seen in Noda and Noda (2025) and Pradeep et al. (2026), who found that music promotes emotional regulation, social bonding, and mental well-being, particularly among young people. Chanda and Levitin (2013) on their own part, demonstrate that music regulates mood and stress arousal in individual, and as well promotes sound physical and psychological health and well-being both within and outside clinical settings.

Pragmatism and the Therapeutic Value of Experience

A philosophical understanding of music therapy may begin with pragmatism, particularly the works of William James and John Dewey. In *Pragmatism*, James (1907) argued that ideas derive significance from their effects on lived experience. That is to say that the meaning attached to any concept lies in the concrete, observable and indeed, practical difference it makes in life. Pragmatism evaluates ideas and practices according to their practical consequences in human life. From this perspective, the value of music lies not merely in its artistic qualities and aesthetic appreciation but in its capacity to improve well-being and contribute to meaningful *cum* practical human experiences. Applied to music therapy still, this suggests that music is therapeutically valuable because it promotes practical emotional stability, tangible resilience, and observable psychological well-being in an individual. Contemporary researches of Chen et al. (2025) and Thompson et al. (2024) demonstrate that music possesses practical value (such as, healing and restoration) beyond entertainment.

Dewey (1929) on his part, argued that ideas are tools for solving problems; that is, when our actions guided by ideas produce meaningful and experiential consequences thereby improving human life. Human beings learn, adapt, and heal through active engagement with their environments. Music therapy reflects this principle because therapeutic change emerges through participation in meaningful musical experiences rather than passive exposure to sound. Whether individuals listen, sing, compose, or perform a piece of music, they engage in experiences capable of reshaping emotions, relationships, and self-understanding. Music becomes significant because it helps individuals cope with suffering, mental/emotional stress and improve the quality of their lives.

Phenomenology and the Lived Experience of Healing

Developed by Edmund Husserl (1970), phenomenology examines lived experience by suspending presuppositions, and describing intentional acts of one's consciousness, thereby revealing essential structures that encompass meaning in everyday human experience. While pragmatism focuses on practical outcomes, phenomenology emphasizes lived experience. This perspective is particularly relevant to music therapy because healing cannot be understood solely through clinical measurements, but as an experiential process. Reductions in anxiety or depression are important, but they do not fully capture what individuals experience during therapeutic encounters. Individuals do not simply hear sounds; they experience memories, emotions, relationships, and life meanings associated with those sounds.

Consequently, the therapeutic value of music depends not only on its acoustic properties but also on the meanings people attach to their musical experiences. This insight helps to explain why music frequently evokes powerful emotional responses. A song may restore forgotten memories, provide comfort during grief, or create feelings of hope during difficult circumstances. This is supported by the findings of Noda and Noda (2025) and Pradeep et al. (2026). Music's essence, music form and practical context should be functional, relevant and inclusive, making music an indispensable tool of cultural interaction, avenue for education and learning, as well as one's self awareness in the society. This research is supported by Wanderi (2019).

Embodiment and Musical Healing

In music, rhythm influences the listener and triggers body movement, melodies evoke emotional responses, and musical patterns often synchronize with breathing and other physiological processes. Individuals frequently respond to music through bodily actions such as swaying of the body, tapping of feet, nodding of head in accordance to the rhythm, rhythmic clapping of hands, humming, spontaneous joining in the singing, or changes in muscular tension. These reactions demonstrate that music engages the whole person rather than merely communicating information to the mind; because human beings experience the world not as detached minds but through living bodies that feel, move, breathe, and interact with their surroundings.

The therapeutic significance of music is closely tied to this embodied dimension. Emotional distress and mental illness are often expressed through bodily experiences such as tension/fear, fatigue, restlessness/irritability, deep-rooted anger, despair, discomfort and so on. But through music listening, singing, or rhythmic participation, music therapy

can promote relaxation, emotional release, and a renewed whole sense of balance.

Existential Healing and Human Flourishing

According to Martin Heidegger (1962), human beings are meaning-seeking creatures who must continually navigate through uncertainty, confusion, vulnerability, guilt and anxiety. Many forms of psychological distress involve not only clinical symptoms but also deeper questions concerning identity, purpose, and belonging. Within this context, thus, music therapy can be understood as an existential resource. Music often provides comfort during grief, hope during despair, and connection during isolation. Rather than eliminating suffering entirely, it helps individuals respond to and navigate through life's challenges in meaningful ways.

This is also supported by studies of Noda and Noda (2025) and Pradeep et al. (2026). From an existential perspective, thus, healing is not simply the absence of distress but the capacity to live meaningfully and authentically despite man's life of survivalistic struggle and life's uncertainties. Music therapy contributes to this process by eliciting and supporting hope, emotional stability, resilience, inner strength and authentic engagement with oneself and with others.

Narrative Identity and Therapeutic Transformation

Ricoeur (1992) argued that individuals make sense of their lives through narratives. In other words, human understanding, for him, emerges through interpretation. Personal identity is not fixed but continually shaped through the stories people tell about themselves and their experiences. The thought of suffering and death sends cold shivers down the spine; and as a result, often disrupts these narratives. Illness, trauma, grief, pain and emotional distress can challenge previously established understandings of selfhood. Healing therefore involves more than symptom reduction; it frequently requires the reconstruction of personal meaning. Music possesses these unique capacities to support this therapeutic process because it communicates emotions and memories that may be difficult to express through ordinary language. Researches of Thompson et al. (2024) and Raja et al. (2025) illustrate this relationship. These findings suggest that music helps individuals maintain meaningful connections with their identities and relationships even in the face of significant challenges. Ricoeur's perspective highlights healing as a process of reinterpretation and renewal. Through listening to music, music performance, songwriting, and other forms of musical engagement, individuals can revisit past experiences, engage present emotions, and imagine future possibilities. Music therapy

thus becomes a medium through which personal narratives are reconstructed and transformed.

Music as a Medium of Meaning

One way of understanding this, is to distinguish between language and music. Language is designed to convey meanings, while music is structured on melody and harmony meant to evoke emotions and elicit social connection. Language primarily explains and describes experience, whereas music often enables experience to be felt, expressed, and shared. Emotions that resist ordinary verbal expression frequently find articulation through melody, rhythm, and performance. This helps to explain why Sanfilippo et al. (2021) found that musical engagement supports emotional expression and psychological well-being in ways that transcend conventional communication.

The therapeutic value of music therefore lies not only in its ability to regulate emotions but also in its capacity to induce and sustain meaning, and hitherto, meaningful existence. A familiar song, a shared performance, or a melody associated with significant life experiences can strengthen belonging, hope, and self-understanding. Music therapy is therefore best understood as a practice of meaning-making through which individuals interpret experience, reconstruct identity, and cultivate flourishing.

Relational Theory of Musical Healing

While empirical research demonstrates the effectiveness of music in reducing anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional distress, the deeper significance of music therapy lies in its capacity to restore and strengthen relationships. Drawing upon insights from pragmatism, phenomenology, existential philosophy, and narrative theory, this research proposes the *Relational Theory of Musical Healing* as a framework for understanding the unique therapeutic power of music in both traditional and digital environments. The central claim of this theory is that healing occurs through the restoration, creation, and strengthening of meaningful relationships. No man is an island. Human beings are inherently relational creatures whose well-being depends not only on biological health but also on their connections with themselves, relationship with other persons, their communities, and the wider world. Psychological suffering frequently involves some form of relational disruption. Anxiety may weaken one's relationship with the future, depression may distort one's relationship with oneself, trauma may damage trust in others, and social isolation may sever connections with community. Healing therefore involves more than symptom reduction; it requires the reconstruction of relationships that support meaningful living.

Within this context, music functions as a uniquely relational medium, connecting individuals to their emotions,

memories, identities, and aspirations. Shared musical experiences foster empathy, cooperation, communication, and sense of belonging. Whether through communal singing, face-to-face therapeutic sessions, concerts halls, or digital interactions, music generates spaces in which individuals encounter one another in meaningful ways. This view is strongly supported by Ansdell (2002) who argues for the acknowledgement of a broader practice of music therapy, which he regarded as community music therapy. And even in the face of digital therapeutics, technology remains a medium rather than the source of healing itself. The effectiveness of digital interventions ultimately depends on their ability to preserve and enhance meaningful relationships.

An Igbo Philosophical Perspective on Music Therapy

Within the Igbo worldview, the human person is fundamentally relational. Personhood is not understood as an isolated or self-sufficient reality but as something constituted through relationships with family, community, nature, and the wider moral and spiritual order. Hence, the popular Igbo sayings: *so m adina* (I dare not live alone), *igwebuike* (unity is power), *ofu osisi anaghi eme ohia* (a tree does not make a forest), *nwanne amaka* (the beauty of brotherhood), *onye aghana nwanne ya* (do not forsake/leave the brotherhood), *mmekorita bu uto nwanne* (communal relationship is the beauty of brotherhood) and so on, have been some of the Igbo philosophies of life. Consequently, human flourishing depends not merely on individual achievement but on the quality of one's participation within networks of interconnected existence.

This relational understanding of personhood finds philosophical expression in the works of several contemporary African thinkers. Iroegbu (1995) argues that being is fundamentally relational and that authentic existence emerges through meaningful participation in the community of persons. Similarly, Asouzu (2007) maintains that reality is characterized by complementary relationships in which all beings exist as mutually dependent components of a larger whole. Building on this insight, Chimakonam (2021) emphasizes the conversational and relational character of human existence, arguing that knowledge, identity, and meaning emerge through ongoing interaction rather than isolated reflection. Despite their differences, these thinkers converge on the view that relationality is a fundamental feature of human life. Thus, if human beings are relational by nature, then suffering may be interpreted as a disruption of relationships. Emotional distress, loneliness, anxiety, trauma, and depression frequently involve forms of disconnection from oneself, from others, from community, or from sources of meaning. Healing therefore requires more than symptom reduction; it requires the restoration of relational harmony. Music has

traditionally played an important role in sustaining such harmony.

In many Igbo cultural settings, music accompanies rites of passage, festivals, religious observances, storytelling, communal labour, celebrations, and mourning rituals. These activities are rarely individualistic. Rather, they involve collective participation through singing, dancing, drumming, and responsive interaction. Brian et al., (1959) had long affirmed this view, that “the social significance of African music is perhaps the most obvious advertisement of its integrity and true value: for a musical tradition which is so alive and which so permeates a race must surely be a genuine and true art.” Music functions as a medium through which persons encounter one another, express shared values, preserve collective memory, and strengthen communal bonds. Its significance therefore extends beyond aesthetic enjoyment to include social integration and emotional support.

Music Therapy in the Digital Age

The digital revolution has transformed healthcare services, and music therapy is not exempt from this transformation. While traditional music therapy has historically relied on face-to-face interactions between therapists and clients (usually in homes, in the community, old - people's units, rehabilitation centres, residential care, and different hospitals and clinics etc), contemporary digital technologies have expanded therapeutic possibilities beyond conventional clinical settings.

Technologies such as telehealth platforms, mobile applications, wearable devices, streaming services, artificial intelligence, and other digital therapeutics have created new opportunities for delivering healthcare interventions beyond traditional clinical environments. These developments have increased access to therapeutic resources while simultaneously redefining how healing is experienced and delivered. One of the most significant developments in this area is the emergence of tele-music therapy, which enables therapeutic sessions to be conducted remotely through digital communication technologies. This telehealth music therapy, which describes remote synchronous music therapy delivery, became prominent in 2020 due to the impact of COVID-19, radically changing many music therapists' clinical and research practices (Clements - Cortés et al., 2021).

The growing use of music-based digital therapeutics has further expanded these possibilities. According to Venkatesan et al. (2026), digital therapeutics integrate evidence-based therapeutic interventions with digital technologies to address mental health conditions such as anxiety, stress, and depression. Within this background, music is increasingly used not simply as entertainment but

as a structured therapeutic tool. Mobile applications now provide guided relaxation exercises, mood regulation programs, and personalized listening experiences designed to support psychological well-being. These developments illustrate how technology can extend therapeutic support beyond scheduled clinical encounters into everyday life.

Artificial intelligence represents another important development in contemporary music therapy. Advances in machine learning and data analytics have made it possible to design systems capable of adapting musical interventions to individual emotional and psychological states. Wei and He (2026) argue that AI-assisted music therapy can enhance personalization by analyzing user responses and recommending music that aligns with specific therapeutic goals. Similarly, Jiao (2025) highlights the potential of combining music therapy with AI-driven biofeedback technologies, allowing interventions to respond dynamically to physiological and emotional changes. These innovations suggest that digital technologies may contribute to more individualized forms of therapeutic care.

These developments now replace or supplement traditional face-to-face care, expanding access to medical support, rehabilitation and indeed, all therapeutic processes, regardless of physical distance. These technologies function as tools that enhance accessibility, personalization, and continuity of therapeutic engagement. Music therapy has increasingly benefited from such developments. This is supported by researches of Leschallier De Lisle et al. (2024) and Wei and He (2026). At the same time, they raise concerns regarding privacy, technological dependence, unequal access, and the preservation of meaningful human relationships.

Research Findings

Music Therapy and Mental Health

Vagaries of research consistently show that music-based interventions can reduce anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional distress while enhancing emotional regulation and social functioning. Unlike many therapeutic approaches that rely primarily on verbal communication, music engages emotional and cognitive processes simultaneously, creating opportunities for expression and healing that may be difficult to achieve through language alone. The findings of Rebecchini (2021) buttress that music therapy resulted into tremendous improvement in the mental health of patients diagnosed with mental disorders. Those of Chen et al. (2025), Thompson et al. (2024) and Raja et al. (2025) suggest that music therapy contributes to mental health not only by reducing distress but also by strengthening emotional resilience and social connectedness.

Neuroplasticity and the Therapeutic Effects of Music

Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to reorganize itself in response to experience. It refers to the brain's capacity to rewire its neural connections, enabling it to adapt and function in ways that differ from its prior state (wikipedia). Musical engagement stimulates neural systems associated with emotion, memory, attention, reward processing, and social interaction, thereby influencing both psychological and physiological functioning. This is supported by the findings of Zaatari et al., (2023) who observe that music brings about structural and functional changes in the brain, thereby inducing social bonding, cognitive abilities, and language processing. This tallies to that of Noda and Noda (2025), who opined that music promotes neuroplastic changes that support emotional regulation and resilience. Repeated musical experiences can strengthen neural pathways associated with positive emotional responses while reducing the impact of stress-related processes. Such findings help explain why music therapy produces benefits that often extend beyond immediate emotional relief.

Music, Social Connection, and Emotional Resilience

Music therapy is particularly valuable because it creates opportunities for interpersonal connection through shared musical activities such as listening, singing, performance, and composition. These activities foster empathy, cooperation, and emotional expression while reducing feelings of isolation. Ansdell (2002) had long proposed the idea of community music therapy, which is geared towards communal relationship. The findings of Pradeep et al. (2026) and Thompson et al. (2024) indicate that music supports healing not only at the individual level but also through the restoration of social connections. In an era characterized by increasing social fragmentation and digital mediation, these relational benefits become especially significant. Music provides a shared space through which individuals can experience connection, understanding, and community, all of which contribute to emotional well-being.

Music Therapy and Quality of Life

The significance of music therapy extends beyond symptom management to broader questions of quality of life and human flourishing. While reductions in anxiety and depression are important outcomes, healing ultimately concerns the ability to live meaningfully, maintain relationships, and participate fully in life. Studies by Raja et al. (2025) and Sanfilippo et al. (2021) demonstrate that music-based interventions enhance emotional well-being, social participation, and overall quality of life. These benefits suggest that music therapy supports dimensions of human flourishing that cannot be captured solely through clinical measurements. Through music, individuals may

rediscover creativity, strengthen relationships, process difficult emotions, and reconnect with sources of meaning and purpose.

Challenges of Music Therapy in The Digital Age

Despite these opportunities, the increasing reliance on technology raises important concerns. One challenge involves the potential reduction of direct human interaction within therapeutic relationships. Traditional music therapy often derives much of its effectiveness from interpersonal engagement, empathy, and the therapeutic alliance established between practitioner and client. While digital platforms can facilitate communication, they may not fully replicate the depth of human presence that characterizes face-to-face encounters. Consequently, questions arise regarding whether technology-mediated interventions can provide the same relational benefits as conventional therapeutic practices.

Ethical considerations also deserve attention. Digital music therapy frequently relies on the collection and analysis of personal data, including emotional responses, behavioral patterns, and health-related information. While such data can improve personalization, it also raises concerns regarding privacy, consent, and data security. Furthermore, algorithmic systems may reflect biases embedded within their design, potentially influencing the accessibility and effectiveness of therapeutic interventions. To ensure ethical responsibility therefore remains a crucial challenge for the future development of digital music therapy.

Digital Inequality is yet another concern. Although technology has the potential to expand access to care, not all individuals possess equal access to internet connectivity, digital devices, or technological literacy. Consequently, some populations may remain excluded from the benefits of digital therapeutic innovations. The promise of technology-mediated healing can only be fully realized if issues of accessibility and inclusion are addressed alongside technological advancement.

These challenges should neither obscure nor undermine the significant opportunities presented by digital innovation. Rather, they reveal the complexity of therapeutic practice in a digital age, and therefore highlight the need for a balanced approach that recognizes both the strengths and limitations of technology-mediated healing. Music can heal, but it can also manipulate. Technology can expand access to care, but it can also commodify human experience. Artificial intelligence can personalize interventions, yet it may raise questions concerning authenticity and human creativity. The challenge for contemporary music therapy is therefore not simply to adopt new technologies but to ensure that these technologies serve genuinely human purposes.

Future Directions for Research and Recommendations

The philosophical framework developed in this work opens several promising directions for future research. First, the rapid integration of artificial intelligence into therapeutic practice requires deeper investigation. Second, greater attention should be devoted to African philosophies of healing and well-being. Exploring concepts such as relational personhood, communal harmony, and indigenous understandings of health may provide alternative perspectives capable of enriching contemporary therapeutic theory and practice. Third, the expansion of digital therapeutics presents important opportunities for interdisciplinary research. As mobile applications, wearable technologies, and virtual therapeutic environments become increasingly common, scholars must evaluate not only their clinical effectiveness but also their implications for human relationships, embodiment, and meaningful experience.

Conclusion

This work has examined music therapy from both empirical and philosophical perspectives, arguing that its significance extends beyond symptom reduction to encompass meaning-making, self-understanding, relational connectedness, and human flourishing. Anchoring on pragmatism, phenomenology, existential philosophy, narrative theory, and an Igbo conception of relational personhood, it has shown that music therapy is best understood as a multidimensional practice that supports human well-being through the restoration of meaningful relationships and indeed, one's integration in one's community. The Relational Theory of Musical Healing proposed in this work provides an integrative framework for understanding this process. Healing is interpreted not merely as the elimination of distress but as the recovery of relational harmony with oneself, others, community, embodiment, and sources of purpose. Music becomes therapeutic because it facilitates these forms of reconnection, enabling targeted individuals to cultivate resilience, reconstruct identity, inner strength, mental energy and recover meaning in the face of life's challenges.

Although digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, telehealth, and digital therapeutics have expanded access to music-based interventions, healing remains fundamentally human in character. Music therapy reveals that healing is not merely a medical process but an existential and relational achievement. In an age increasingly shaped by digital mediation, music continues to serve as a uniquely human medium through which persons restore harmony, reconnect with others, and cultivate flourishing. The future of music therapy therefore lies not in replacing human care with technology but in using technology to deepen the

possibilities of authentic human healing and meaningful human existence.

References

1. Ansdell, G. (2002). Community Music Therapy & The Winds of Change. *Voices: A World Forum for Music Therapy*, vol. 2 (2). <https://doi.org/10.15845/voices.v2i2.83>
2. Asouzu, I. I. (2007). *Ibuanyidanda: New complementary ontology beyond world-immanence, ethnocentric reduction and impositions*. Lit Verlag.
3. Betchwars, H. (2016). The desire for music and its importance in religion. *Music and Religion podcast series (unpublished)*. Retrieved, from <https://pages.stolaf.edu/musicandreligion/2016/09/18>.
4. Brian, K., Basil, B., James, M., Blacking, J (1959) Reviews of Jones, A.M. African music, Oxford. *African Music: Journal of the African Music society*, vol. 2 pp. 84-89. <https://doi.org/10.21504/amj.v2i2.595>.
5. Chanda, M. L., & Levitin, D. J. (2013). The Neurochemistry of Music. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 17 (4), 179 - 193. DOI: 10.1016/j.tics.2013.02.007
6. Chatterjee, D. (2024). The Role of Music Therapy in Stress Reduction. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)*, Vol. 6 (2), 1 - 5 DOI: 10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i02.18873
7. Chen, S., Yuan, Q., Wang, C., Ye, J., & Yang, L. (2025). The effect of music therapy for patients with chronic pain: Systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMC Psychology*, 13, Article 455. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02643-x>
8. Chimakonam, J. O. (2021). *Ezumezu: A system of logic for African philosophy and studies*. Springer.
9. Clements - Cortés, A., Mercandal - Brotons, M., Alcantara Silva, T. R., & Vianna Moreira, S. (2021). Telehealth Music Therapy for Persons with dementia and/or Caregivers. *Music & Medicine*, 13 (3), 206 -210. <https://doi.org/10.47513/mmd.v13i3.821>
10. de Rosen, L. (2014). Music and religion in D.A. Leeming, Madden Kathryn, Marlan Stanton (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of psychology and religion*. New York: Springer (2010), pp 1156-1160. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4614-6086-2-447.
11. Dewey, J. (1929). *The quest for certainty: A study of the relation of knowledge and action*. Minton, Balch & Company.
12. Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Harper & Row.
13. Husserl, E. (1970). *The crisis of European sciences and transcendental phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenological philosophy* (D. Carr, Trans.). Northwestern University Press.
14. Iroegbu, P. (1995). *Metaphysics: The Kpim of philosophy*. International Universities Press.
15. Jiao, D. (2025). Advancing personalized digital therapeutics: Integrating music therapy, brainwave entrainment methods, and AI-driven biofeedback. *Frontiers in Digital Health*, 7, Article 1552396. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fdgth.2025.1552396>
16. Leschallier De Lisle, G., Oudin, A., Bourla, A., Ferreri, F., & Mouchabac, S. (2024). Musicotherapy mobile applications: What level of evidence and potential role in psychiatric care? A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 15, Article 1366575. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2024.1366575>
17. Modeme, E. R. (2025). Music Therapy and Quality of Life of the Elderly. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Educational Research (IJMER)*, 8 (4), 107 - 115. <https://iigdpublishers.com>
18. Nazaruddin, M. A., & Mahfudzi, A. (2025). Bridging gaps in mental health care through music therapy: A narrative review. *Harmonia: Journal of Music and Arts*, 3(3), 141-155.
19. Nwankpa, O. N., & Okunade, A. A. (2018). Rethinking Music, its Potency and Change. *African Musicology Online*, 8 (1), 45 - 63. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58721/amo.v8i1.18>
20. Noda, Y., & Noda, T. (2025). The influence of music on mental health through neuroplasticity: Mechanisms, clinical implications, and contextual perspectives. *Brain Sciences*, 15(11), 1248. <https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci15111248>
21. Pradeep, K., Nishanth, A., Lalmohan, P., Alexander, L. M., & Rajalakshmi, S. A. (2026). The neuroesthetics of music as an alternative model for enhancing youth mental wellbeing. *Frontiers in Child and Adolescent*

Psychiatry, 4, Article 1721717.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/frcha.2025.1721717>

22. Raja, S., Barry, C., Upadhyay, R., Alash, R., O'Raghallaigh, M., Hayes, R., & Romero-Ortuno, R. (2025). Harmonious ageing: A narrative review music therapy in the biomedical literature. *European Geriatric Medicine*, 16(3), 461-472. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41999-024-01146-z>
23. Rebecchini, L. (2021). Music, Mental Health, and Immunity. *Brain, Behavior, & Immunity - Health*, vol. 18, 1 - 6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbih.2021.100374>
24. Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as another* (K. Blamey, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
25. Sanfilippo, K. R. M., Stewart, L., & Glover, V. (2021). How music may support perinatal mental health: An overview. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 24, 831-839. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-021-01178-5>
26. Thompson, N., Odell-Miller, H., Underwood, B. R., Wolverson, E., & Hsu, M.-H. (2024). How and why music therapy reduces distress and improves well-being in advanced dementia care: A realist review. *Nature Mental Health*, 2(12), 1532-1542. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44220-024-00342-x>
27. Vandana, V., Gopalan, K. R., Stephen, A., Vezhaventhan, D., Teajashwini, A., Yasana, W.S., & Sivaswamy, M. (2025). Music Therapy as a Viable Alternative Medicine for Improving Psychological Well-being. *Journal of Pioneering Medical Sciences*, Vol. 14 (3), 7 - 20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47310/jpms2025140302>
28. Vanderweele, T. J. (2017). On the Promotion of Human Flourishing. *PNAS*, vol. 114 (31), 8148-8156. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1702996114>
29. Venkatesan, T., Demetriou, A. M., Hempel, A., & Bowling, D. L. (2026). A scoping review

of music-based digital therapeutics for stress, anxiety, and depression. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 20, Article 1602004. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2026.1602004>

30. Wanderi, J. (2019). Effects of Capitalism and mass culture on the diminution of African music practice among the Kenyan youth. *African Musicology online*, vol. 9, (2), 151-172. <https://doi.org/10.58721/amo.v9i2.36>
31. Wei, Q., & He, W. (2026). The application of AI-assisted music therapy tools in mental health interventions. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 17, Article 1741463. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1741463>
32. William, J. (1907). *Pragmatism: A new name for some old ways of thinking*. Longmans, Green & Co.
33. William, J., & Sidis, A. E. (2025). Music Therapy for Psychological Trauma: A Theoretical Integrative Review. *The Arts in Psychotherapy* 96 (2025) 102369. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2025.102369>
34. Zaatar, M. T., Alhakim, K., Enayeh, M., & Tamer, R. (2023). The Transformative Power of Music: Insights into Neuroplasticity, Health and Disease. *Brain, Behavior, & Immunity - Health*, vol. 35, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbih.2023.100716>

ENCYCLOPEDIAS AND DICTIONARIES

35. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/neuroplasticity>
36. Liddell, H. G., & Scott, R. (1996). *A Greek-English lexicon*. Oxford University Press.
37. World Health Organization. (2021). *Health Promotion Glossary of Terms*. <https://www.who.int>