

Tony Wigram

On June 24, Tony Wigram, professor of Music Therapy at Aalborg University, died at the age of 57, after a year with a growing brain tumor. In this article, several of the people who were close to Tony have written about his influence on the music therapy programme, on research and on Danish music therapy.



Tony as a teacher

Ulla Ladegaard Jacobsen masters in Music Therapy, summer 2011. One of the last students to have had the pleasure of Tony's teaching. Contact: ullalaja@gmail.com

Translation: Ingrid Irgens-Møller

We are in the middle of a class, and Tony is standing explaining something. He is serious and engaged in the subject, but when a music student pops his head in the door, to see if the room is occupied, Tony starts jumping around like a monkey, waving his arms wildly and saying funny noises. The music student immediately shuts the door again – and Tony goes back to explaining, as serious and engaged as before.

Tony was a teacher with a great sense of humour. In a second he could move from seriousness to humour, surprise us and lift the mood of the class. At the same time, he was 100% present, as if what we were doing was the most important thing in the world. I felt significant in his classes.

He was able to create a safe atmosphere in

class, by always emphasizing the positive aspect of what we did. He saw our potential, so that I, as a student, felt that I had played well, no matter what I played! A valuable sense of self-confidence for a future music therapist.

Despite his great musical talent, Tony wasn't self-important, and when he sat down at the piano, it was because he was inspired by the the music or by the clinical potential. It was clear that he cared very much for his clients and their needs, and it was fantastic for me to see how this shone through in all of his teaching

Tonys influence on the music therapy programme

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Tony received his position at Aalborg University in 1992 and taught in the music therapy programme until his much too early death this year. His great professional integrity combined with his teaching skills left their mark on the programme in three areas in particular: clinical improvisation, music therapy assessment, and international literature and research.

When Tony arrived in Aalborg, he already had many years of clinical experience, first at Harperbury Hospital, working with children, youth and adults with severe functional limitations, and later at Harper House Children's Service, which is a hospital unit specialising in diagnosis for children with complex neurological disorders (see fact box). Tony kept his position at Harper House along with his fulltime position in the music therapy programme, and the continual teamwork with other professions made Tony razor-sharp at articulating which client needs can be met by music therapy in particular.

This focus was very present in Tony's teaching. But at the same time, he had a unique ability to teach how knowledge of a client's needs can be translated into music therapy practice. That is, which musical parameters and improvisational methods the student needs to focus on, to achieve the specific music therapy goals, and, for example, how to change the character of the music in

a predictable, gradual, abrupt or humourous-surprising way, while playing with the client.

These skills are the essence of "Clinical Group Music Therapy Skills", the course Tony developed for the programme. This course takes place in the middle of the programme (5.-6. semester) and is an eye-opener for many students, as they attempt to translate theory of clients' needs into practical skills. At the same time, the course helps students to move their focus from the client/student perspective to the therapist/professional perspective, which is fundamental for the rest of the educational programme.

In 2006, when it became necessary to discontinue all individual instruction in the music therapy programme (because of financial cutbacks at the university), Tony came to the rescue again. As the head of the study board, I (Ulla) saw how the idea of admitting applicants with different main instruments was very quickly accepted and transformed into two new courses, called "Improvisational Skills on Main Instrument" (2.-3. semester) and "Clinical Improvisational Skills on Main Instrument" (7.-8. semester). At the same time, the students' abilities to perform repertoire was maintained in the course, "Repertoire & Performance" (1.-2. semester). In all three of the courses, Tony not only contributed to the content, but did all the teaching he possibly could, in order to transform the



curriculum into solid professional courses. Adding of course his great musical talent and wholehearted enjoyment of others' musicality.

Tony followed through with his innovative ideas by gradually handing the courses over to the next generation of teachers. This was done with professional as well as pedagogical and psychological insight; I (Karin) witnessed, for example, how he generously shared his experience and knowledge of processes in "Clinical Group Music Therapy Skills", which is a course where students often suffer from performance anxiety.

As a natural continuation of his clinical experience, Tony introduced assessment as an academic discipline in the music therapy programme. Tony's integrated way of thinking and working was apparent here as well, because without a focus on assessment it is difficult to determine precise therapeutic goals for the client, much less document changes caused by the music therapy. As a direct consequence of inspiration from Tony, assessment is the focus of the current research of several Danish PhD students.

Another very visible result of Tony's ability to juxtapose theory and practice is found in his four method textbooks on, respectively, improvisation, songwriting, receptive meth-

ods and microanalysis. They are written/edited in an exemplarily clear fashion, contain many concrete examples, techniques and therapeutic reflections in relation to different client issues and are, of course, a permanent part of the programme's curriculum.

Of course Tony also contributed with his great international perspective on literature and research, as well as personal acquaintances with many of the authors. And he literally brought the literature to Denmark in his car. At the beginning of each semester his office was full of stacks of textbooks. Next to his microwave, large English biscuit tins, string lights and kitschy porcelain figures, the students could find their professor, have a talk with him and buy a stack of books to take home with them.

Tony was not only an inspiring and knowledgeable teacher; he was also what you could call, paraphrasing 'client-centred therapist', a student-centred professor. This was the case with new students in the first semester as well as PhD students. Generously sharing his extensive knowledge, helping others on their way and sharing their joy at success was Tony's hallmark.

But now the string lights are turned off, and Tony is greatly missed.

Tony's influence on Danish music therapy

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I was very pleased when I heard that the new professor in the music therapy programme in the 1990s had many years of experience with children and youth with functional limitations, including those within the autism spectrum. An area that, in my opinion, didn't have high status in the music therapy community at that time.

I was present at Tony Wigram's inaugural lecture in 1998. What I especially remember from the lecture is a triangle that Tony drew to depict how a music therapist achieves musical contact with a child with autism. After this initial contact, it became possible to work with the relationship between the child and music therapist. Tony also emphasized that he used the expression, "child with autism" instead of "autistic child". And his reason for this was that behind the autism there always is an individual, with their own personality not defined by the autism.

Later I had the opportunity to participate in a course where Tony taught us the use of Bruscia's IAP. Here Tony pointed out again and again how important it is for music therapists to use the music as documentation, and in interdisciplinary teamwork to explain how we can see the child's competencies or difficulties in the music. In this way, we reinforce being our own profession with our own professional terms, rather than using the terms and parameters of other professional disciplines.

Tony was a key note speaker at the second Danish Music Therapy Conference in 2003. His lecture was built around a video recording of an assessment session with a boy in music therapy. We saw short excerpts, as examples of Tony's theories about music therapy for children with autism.

The professor I saw in all of these situations had extensive theoretical knowledge, and at the same time, I saw many examples of his talent as a music therapist for this client group.

I had the pleasure, together with 20 some other music therapists, of upgrading my music therapy degree in a course over two years at Aalborg University. Here I was taught by engaged, competent and well-prepared teachers from the music therapy programme. Tony was among them, and one of his courses was, "Advanced Clinical Keyboard Improvisation". Tony's improvisation models were the basis of our training in matching, grounding and imitation, and the lessons often led to discussions of concrete client examples.

A word that can sum up my experiences with Tony is timing. In his position at Aalborg University, Tony was in the right place at the right time. One day he could teach piano with nodding dogs placed humourously on the grand piano, and the next day he could wear a suit and tie to deliver a well-prepared lecture on music therapy at a big autism conference in

Herning. He could ask razor-sharp questions about a case and an hour later laugh with students at lunch break.

Tony has inspired me to develop, understand, document and enjoy music therapy

with children and youth with functional limitations.

It is a great sorrow for me that this source of inspiration and this great man no longer is with us.

Fact box: Tony Wigram

by Inge Nygaard Pedersen & Lars Ole Bonde

- Music therapy degree from Juliette Alvin's programme at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London 1974, after receiving bachelor's degrees in music and psychology.
- Head music therapist at Harperbury Hospital 1974-76, and later at Harper House Children's Service.
- PhD from London University on vibroacoustic therapy, based on research done at St. George's Medical School.
- Clinical specialties were the autism spectrum, Rett's Syndrome and the physiological effects of sound and music.
- Associate professor in music therapy at Aalborg University (DK) from 1992, full professor from 1998.
- Head of the international doctoral programme in music therapy at Aalborg University from 1997.
- Part time professorship at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge and honorary professor in the Conservatorium of Music at Melbourne University (AUS).
- President of the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC) 1990-95 and president of the World Federation of Music Therapy (WFMT) 1996-99.
- Head of the "International Consortium of Nine Universities with Doctoral and Research Programs in Music Therapy" since 2008.
- Award from The Danish Council for Independent Research / Humanities for a dynamic research environment, 2007. Grant from the same council for 11 million Danish kroner for future mobility PhD stipends 2010.
- Associate editor of Nordic Journal of Music Therapy.
- Extensive publications, among others: *The Art and Science of Music Therapy* (1995), *Music, Vibration and Health* (1997), *Clinical Applications of Music Therapy in Developmental Disability, Paediatrics, Neurology and Psychiatry* (1999), *A Comprehensive Guide to Music Therapy* (2002) *Improvisation* (2004), *Songwriting* (2005), *Receptive Methods in Music Therapy* (2006), *Microanalysis* (2007).

Tony's influence on the music therapy doctoral programme

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The first important initiatives to establish international collaboration in music therapy research were taken in 1995 by Inge Nygaard Pedersen, Lars Ole Bonde and Tony Wigram. In 1997 Tony was given the task of leading, developing and creating a doctoral programme. The faculty of humanities granted the necessary resources, so that the first five PhD students could be enrolled.

Under Tony's leadership of the doctoral programme, the number of PhD students grew from the initial 5, to 10 in 2001 and 25 in 2010. As early as 1998, two German music therapists from the doctoral programme defended their dissertations, and two years later the next two music therapists received their PhDs. Since then, dissertations have been produced in a steady stream; 1-3 a year. In 2010, 22 PhD students finished and defended their dissertations, and Tony was either the primary or secondary supervisor for about half of them. It is a well-known phenomenon in the humanities, that many PhD students either drop out at some point, or aren't able to finish their dissertation within the time limit of 3 years (or 6 years for a part-time student). The high rate of completion and influx of students in the music therapy doctoral programme is noteworthy, and one could ask, what is the secret behind this success? Before I try to answer that question, I must add that doctoral

programmes in music therapy have now been established throughout the world, so a doctoral programme is nothing unusual in itself. But the number of music therapy researchers is! At this time there is no doctoral programme anywhere in the world with as many PhD students doing research in music therapy.

Part of the reason for this success could be finances. Educating researchers costs money, and Tony helped many a grant application get accepted. He helped get large grants from the Danish Council for Independent Research and Forskeruddannelsesrådet (research education council of the Ministry of Science). This gave him not only the opportunity to obtain funding for PhD and post doc research, but also for training PhD supervisors. A staff of PhD supervisors, who have the right professional competencies, is an important element of quality assurance. But Tony didn't stop there. He inspired the supervisors to create professional networks among themselves, so that they could challenge and inspire each other, and thus further strengthen the quality of the research. Opportunities for collaboration also grew within the university in Aalborg. From having been the only one, Tony's doctoral school became part of a larger programme, along with 4 other schools in the Doctoral School of the Humanities. Tony's work was quite an inspiration for colleagues in the fac-

ulty of humanities, and here he also initiated courses for supervisors, as well as an ethics board to ensure high ethical standards in research for the whole faculty.

At the same time that Tony was establishing the doctoral programme, he was head of the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC) and the World Federation for Music Therapy (WFMT). This strengthened his international network even more, and made it possible to attract the most professionally competent researchers from the whole world. In this way, the biannual PhD courses in Aalborg Øst became a global gathering place, where music therapy research was discussed at a very high level. The courses were run on Aalborg University's problem-based principles of learning. The students were not only passively 'fed' expert knowledge, but were expected to be active as experts in each their own field, presenting their own research to the other PhD students and invited researchers. Tony allowed plenty of time for discussion and feedback, which made for an atmosphere of intense and highly relevant professionalism, requiring a high degree of involvement from the students.

This involvement, which was expected of the students, was greatly acknowledged by Tony. He was committed to every PhD student and studied their research thoroughly, whether or not he was their supervisor. He created many small rituals and events in the PhD courses that strengthened the feeling of cohesion in the group and created an open atmosphere. Other research milieus have been described as cold, with researchers keeping their cards close to their chests. Tony created the opposite; an environment where researchers and PhD students shared their knowledge and experience with each other, and invited others

to learn from their own mistakes. Building an open and trusting environment calls for a special talent, which Tony owned to a very great degree. The courses were built on a special humour, with quirky jokes and wonderfully twisted explanations, Tony's personal music selections, and, finally, delicious, pampering cooking in his flat on H.C. Andersens Street, as the end of each course. The strong sense of community and teamwork made new PhD students feel at home very quickly, and it is apparent that former PhD students from Aalborg University continue their close collaboration, when you see the teams behind new research projects around the world.

I see the secret to Tony's success in his ability to integrate and improvise, on all possible levels. Tony was a clinician and a musician, and he was able to explain and clarify the professional dimensions of his work. He didn't just put on a video, and tell his students to watch how a music therapist works. He brought the students onto the scene themselves, and, in the same way, he engaged his PhD students in working with detail and precision, reflecting on and describing all the necessary steps and aspects of their research. This professional thoroughness was integrated with human warmth and caring, British humour of highest quality and musical equilibrium. Tony was like a magnet, attracting good synergy.

It is a privilege to have worked with Tony, and his enormous drive was so convincing, that we, who are left behind, still can throw ourselves into the slipstream and in this way hopefully carry on Tony's many activities and works, if we succeed in taking care of all that he inspired and initiated.

Tony as a friend and colleague

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Tony was an integrated mix of a systematicist and an eccentric. Tony's office wasn't just your ordinary office. He loved string lights, gadgets, etc. and there were a lot of them – things he had bought himself, and gifts from friends around the world. The door was almost always open, and, especially in the morning, English romantic choir music poured out of it and into the hallway. One of the walls was one giant bookcase, where Tony had saved everything – EVERYTHING – from his 19 years in Denmark. It was all arranged systematically – even party songs and jokes for the PhD courses had their own folders!

Tony was always very generous in sharing knowledge and experience, but also in bringing cake, biscuits, chocolate, wine and other good things to meetings. Tony also loved to cook dinner for a group of colleagues or PhD students and often prepared the meals late at night.

Tony's sense of humour was unsurpassed, and he had a positive influence on the mood in every situation. In the music therapy community he was called "the lighthouse" – someone who really towered above and shed light in many different countries, so that others could find their way through the music therapy jungle, clinically as well as in research.

Tony started his career in the music

therapy programme at Aalborg University in autumn of 1992 as associate professor. He had been 'discovered' by Hanne Mette Kortegaard, who was a research fellow at that time, through her participation in the European Music Therapy Confederation (EMTC). She quickly had the rest of us convinced that Tony was the right person to supplement the music therapy programme in Aalborg, and we headhunted him. He was easily persuaded. On June 11, 1992, he wrote a letter to HMK with many questions about the new job. In the end of the letter, he wrote: "... my brain is beginning to run out of thoughts at the moment but I guess I will have a few more questions in due course. Forgive me if I am a little bit demanding of all sorts of information, it is part of my personality disorder!" And yes: Tony was demanding about information, but that was one of the fantastic things about him; even if he was somewhere else in the world (often for several weeks), he was always prepared to the tee and ready, as soon as he walked in the door in Aalborg.

Tony never forced his ideas on others, even though new ideas flowed from him in a constant stream. He listened and completely respected the way things were done in the programme, and then he gradually introduced new elements, creating a more integrated and cohesive programme. He had incredible mu-

sical talent, and brought the music therapy community in Aalborg a musical 'vitamin booster' when he arrived and throughout all of his years in the programme.

Tony was extremely diligent in his own research, and published many high-quality, important textbooks in music therapy, as well as co-authoring quite a few books, and many articles and chapters of books. Tony always took care to publish something with his PhD students, as well as books and articles with colleagues from many other countries. Tony's work day sometimes lasted 24 hours, with power naps now and then, but he was always well-prepared and ready for any kind of professional discussion.

When we were cleaning Tony's office after his death, we found a questionnaire he had filled out in October 2009. It was his contribution to Aalborg University's survey on the psychosocial working environment at the university. A list of statements were rated on a 5 point Likert scale from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree". Tony "strongly agreed" with almost all of the statements about job satisfaction, teaching and teamwork with colleagues. Time for research and administrative duties were the only areas in which he was less satisfied. The impression is of a person, who had found his niche – the right man at the right place, at

the right time. *"We have a really excellent working group built up over many years. We rarely argue, and have very good interactions"*, he writes, and we agree. But there is also another side of the picture. In the questionnaire, Tony assesses his health as poor, and feels that work takes so much time and energy, that it influences his private life. He writes, *"The most important improvement could be the development of my ability to say 'no'!"* Unfortunately he never learned that, and his humour and energy probably made us blind to the personal cost of his busy travelling life. He gave so much to everyone, from first year students to young researchers, to his colleagues, not only small thoughtful gifts for any occasion, but above all, by giving his time, his energy and his involvement. Tony was also a wonderful friend - he understood the meaning of dialogue; could really listen as well as talk. And when he sat down at the piano, it was always a party.

Tony will be missed and remembered, and his commitment and energy will leave their mark far into the future, on many levels. Those of us who have been his close friends and colleagues through almost 19 years are grateful to have known him and to have been deeply inspired and enriched by our friendship with him.

In *Voices 11(3) November* Lars Ole Bonde, Cheryl Dileo and Denise Grocke have collected an overview of all that Tony has written, as well as articles on the different aspects of Tony's professional life. www.voices.no