

## **Active Music Making and Wellness**

Copyright © July 1999

-By Dr. Alicia Ann Clair and Karl T. Bruhn

Active music making and its role in wellness is receiving much attention around the country. So, why all the interest? First of all, people are demanding more than the absence of disease to be well. They also want reduced illness risk, managed stress, better energy, daily enjoyment, personal development, satisfying relationships, and feelings of belonging. Second, active music making provides the opportunities to help achieve wellness in these ways.

A three-year research undertaking called the Music Making and Wellness Research Project found that anxiety, depression and loneliness scores decreased in a group of older adults taking wellness-enhanced keyboard lessons. Though this research was complex, it is based on two very practical components that are readily available to virtually every one in daily life, making music and doing simple music based, wellness exercises. So why is this combination successful? Active music making can powerfully influence people's thoughts and feelings; and, it differs from passive music listening in several ways.

First, music making expands mental abilities that are essential to good mental function, while music listening allows minds to wander. Second, active music making can help provide relief from daily stressors by directing focus and awareness of the whole person; and, music based wellness exercises can provide practical ways to learn to manage stress. All of this can contribute to feeling better both emotionally and physically, and can lead to motivation to continue involvement. Though passive music listening provides some diversion from stressors, it cannot afford the success and the self-esteem that can come from actually making music. This success leads to positive self-regard and good self-care that are essential to well-being.

An additional consideration for health and wellness through music is the positive use of time. Active music making can help structure time, both while playing and while planning a daily schedule. It helps making time meaningful and purposeful. Also, active music making provides opportunities to declare individual interests and preferences, to express strong emotions, to display individuality and flare, to derive feelings of worth, and to have something to anticipate. While passive listening provides some of these outcomes, making music goes beyond the boundaries of prerecorded sounds to unique and personal expressions and communications. Through lessons and formal or informal performances, making music gives a sense of belonging, of being important, and of having a vital part in the community.

Today, science is just beginning to prove what has been known since ancient time, that music can contribute greatly to life quality. The benefits of making music are remarkable, and the opportunities to use it to contribute to health and wellness are available to virtually everyone.

Dr. Alicia Ann Clair is Director of Music Therapy, University of Kansas.  
Karl Bruhn serves as presidential advisor to the American Music Therapy Association.