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Tribute to Carolyn Kenny

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This piece is based on the Preface to *Music & Life in the Field of Play: An Anthology* that was published in 2006, with permission from Barcelona Publishers.

My thoughts about Carolyn Kenny as a human being and as a scholar were best encapsulated by a preface that I wrote for an anthology of her writings, *Music and Life in the Field of Play* (Kenny, 2006). Although music exists in time, Carolyn always emphasized to me that, for her, the primary way of understanding music was through spatial metaphors—music created and transformed space. Similarly, a text is something that exists in time—we experience someone’s writings the way that we experience music: through the flow of time. In reconsidering this preface it strikes me that my introduction to Carolyn’s work was a spatial one: Carolyn’s words created a place to be—a home—for music therapists concerned with the more perennial aspects of our work. It was this quality of her writing that I chose to write about.

It is because the essence of Carolyn’s being was the source of her scholarly work, that a piece written about her writing, could also be the clearest tribute to her as a person. The remainder of this tribute is a very slightly edited version of the preface from her book. I hope that it entices you, the reader of this tribute, to visit Carolyn’s writings on your intellectual excursions. I promise you that it will be a rewarding journey.

Welcome, come in, come inhabit this space. You may think that you are beginning a book, but you are entering a place, a space, an environment inhabited by complex, contemporary ideas and ancient wisdom, a place created by a comprehensive intellect and a warm heart, a region where you will find your thinking stimulated and ancient feelings stirred that you didn’t know existed within you. The writings of Carolyn Kenny embody all of these things.

Lists. Categories. Carolyn will be the first to say that these things are overrated as products of scholarly work. However, sometimes categories are useful, not in defining a person or her work, but in suggesting the scope of her interests and influence. The breadth of Carolyn’s work is overwhelming in all of its scholarly roots and applications

In her writings she has applied the following *domains of inquiry* to music therapy: philosophy of science, qualitative research, anthropology, religious studies, ritual studies, and aesthetics. The following *schools of thought* or *theoretical perspectives* have been used as tools in Carolyn’s writings: systems thinking, field theory, ecological perspectives, phenomenology, ritual criticism, and narrative. In music therapy, she has been at the forefront of developments in qualitative research, general theory, and music-centered theory.

More importantly to Carolyn, I’m sure, are the values that permeate her writings. These are things that she believes in deeply and that motivate, inform, and guide her work. Rather than skim through this list, take even a moment to consider each one,

because it is a significant achievement in life to establish a professional academic career with these values at the center of one's being. And perhaps Carolyn has been able to be so uniquely successful at it because the idea of establishing a career has never been her agenda. It has been to live a personal and professional life guided by these values. These are themes that constantly emerge in her writings: Connection, Relation, Interdependence, Respect for All People, Respect for Nature, Cultural Sensitivity, Exploration, The Role of Context, Caring for the Community, The Self in Relation to Community, and last, Integration. That is, the Integration of research, theory, and practice; the academic and the practical; the intellectual, affective, sensory, physical, and spiritual; the aesthetic and the scientific, and the ancient and the modern. Parsing, separation, and categorization are alien to Carolyn's writing. Establishing integration, connection, and relation in the service of beautifying the world is her agenda.

Carolyn has always been there for me in the sense of repeatedly carving out intellectual territories that I found myself pursuing. In 1983 I was a master's student in music therapy working on my thesis. I was dissatisfied with the existing rationales for music therapy practice that originated in psychology and psychotherapy and I wanted to write about how through music therapy the modern world was rediscovering the ancient purpose for which music was created. Carolyn's work *The Mythic Artery: The Magic of Music Therapy* was the only publication in this area. A few years later I took up doctoral studies at New York University because of my interest in qualitative research. Carolyn's PhD dissertation *The Field of Play* was there as a guiding light, serving as the first English language qualitative study in music therapy. In 1991 I wrote an article examining the connection between a reverence for nature and music therapy practice. Carolyn's writings were again the only place I found similar sentiments. And in the late 1990s I began working on the idea of a more general, integrative theory in music therapy that could bring together psychological, music-centered, and ritual-based thinking. Yet again, I found support in Carolyn's writings for this project, both in its specifics and in its general premise.

I am certain that this pattern of discovery has been followed by countless other music therapy students and professionals. Carolyn does not have a clinical method or facility that carries her name, and she is not identified with any single way of practicing music therapy. Her writings span many different books, journals, and scholarly areas of publication. Her ideas can be applied within many different clinical approaches. The contribution of people like her can get overlooked because there is no one overtly carrying her flag. That is why this book is so important. It gathers in one place the writings and thinking of a unique and seminal figure in music therapy. And it does so in a way that the connections among them can be established and Carolyn's body of work can be seen in both its coherence and imaginative variety.

I would like to include one example of Carolyn's words in this preface to whet your appetite for what awaits you in this book. It is from the work *Keeping the World in Balance* and it really cuts to the heart of her beliefs:

Thought and language, along with the arts, are expressions that can help to fulfill the Navajo responsibility to beautify the Earth. For the Navajo, beautifying the Earth is a moral obligation and the essential goal of one's life if one is to lead a good life. For the Navajo, beautifying the Earth means keeping the world in balance. (p. 165)

Through her life and work, Carolyn Kenny has both beautified the Earth and helped to keep music therapy in balance. I am confident that the readers of this book will find themselves similarly transformed.

References

Kenny, C. (2006). *Music and life in the field of play: An anthology*. Gilsum, NH: Barcelona.