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## **The Meaning that Five Music Teachers Ascribe to Their Lived Experiences of Music and Imagery Sessions during the COVID-19 Pandemic: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

The COVID-19 pandemic had, and still has, an influence on everybody's well-being, including that of music teachers. The search for meaning in life and purpose for music teachers became even more compelling throughout this trying time. This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) explores the multiple meanings that five self-employed music teachers who were diagnosed with the coronavirus ascribed to their lived experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions. MI is a receptive music therapy method, which involves listening to music for therapeutic benefits. Five music teachers, who fitted the inclusion criteria, attended four individual MI sessions. Each teacher participated in a semi-structured interview after the sessions. The collected data were

transcribed, analyzed, and coded. Themes that emerged included emotional experiences, spiritual experiences, personal growth and empowerment. Findings indicate that meaning in life during a pandemic can be re-established through the application of MI sessions.

### **Research Context**

What is the meaning that music teachers, who were diagnosed with COVID-19, ascribe to their lived experiences of Music and Imagery (MI) sessions? This was the driving question behind this study. MI is a creative and supportive therapy method and its effect on music teachers during a pandemic has not been researched before.

The impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the general well-being of people has been widely explored. Increased levels of stress (Khan et al., 2020), anxiety symptoms (Sommer et al., 2021) and psychotic symptoms in response to confinement and limited interaction (Allé & Berntsen, 2021) were reported during COVID-19. Physical problems also occurred because of the pandemic. Sleeping patterns were interrupted (Altena et al., 2020) and problematic eating habits were also reported (Ammar et al., 2020). Music teachers have often had difficulties with stress because of a lack of support, and despite this, they are expected to take on extra responsibilities such as public performances (Salvador et al., 2019). Burnout (Shaw, 2016) and experiences of being undervalued (Allen, 2014) have also been identified in research associated with the profession of being a music teacher. Past research has reported the experiences of music teachers feeling isolated and lonely (Burwell, et al., 2017, resembling general circumstances during the pandemic.

The pandemic has exacerbated the conditions described in the preceding paragraph for music teachers. This was especially noticeable when music teachers were not able to teach face-to-face (Daubney & Fautley, 2021) due to the risk of the virus being spread with the close contact between teacher and student (De Bruin, 2021). This continued even after schools were re-opened. Self-employed music teachers who were diagnosed with the virus had to cope with the added stress of not being able to teach at all, thus suffering not only a loss of income but also risking losing some of their students while they were physically ill or recuperating. Teachers need to be healthy, both physically and mentally, to do their job effectively (Roffey, 2012).

Music-making is described as an explorative activity that includes engaging with sound qualities and accessing emotions, memories and meaning. Høffding and Schiavio (2021) note that a strong uniting bond can be created between people “through their engagement in music-making” (p. 812). The positive influences that music has on people (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010) include enhancement of positive mood, reduction of stress and anxiety, and facilitating social bonding (Granot et al., 2021). Research has also shown music to be helpful in improving the quality of life across various populations (Jerling & Heyns, 2020). Music

education is also recognized for its inspirational influence and ability to provide meaningful experiences for students (Cape, 2012). Such meaningful music experiences and engagement can have a positive influence on the expression of identity, relationships, and achievement of the students, even in later life (Cape, 2012). A literature review, more specifically focused on artists and performers, showed that music-making contributed positively to self-care (Willis et al., 2019). Studies have shown that music also had a positive impact on COVID-19 pandemic-related health and well-being issues. A survey across 11 countries explored the positive self-connection and enjoyment cultivated through music during the pandemic (Granot et al., 2021). Eleven musicians took part in a South African study which showed that music helped them connect with others and cope in their own lives, and gave them hope (Van der Merwe et al., 2021).

Although music teachers in various settings have been involved in earlier research studies by Chong and Kim (2010), Furman and Steele (1982) and Gu and Hwang (2019), these studies focused on the students and not the teachers. Recently the focus in research has shifted to include the impact of the pandemic on music teachers. For example, the well-being of music teachers in Hong Kong was scrutinized by Cheng and Lam (2021). Findings included reports of stress, anxiety and fear being experienced by the 120 music teachers who participated in the study. The impact that teaching music online had on both students and music teachers in Australia was studied by Joseph and Lennox (2021). Although it was found that both students and music teachers were resilient, there was no question that the new situation was challenging for them, especially as far as personal connections were concerned. Similarly, music teachers admitted that useful new technological skills were acquired because of the need for online teaching, but at the same time they found it to be very time consuming, and needed support from their institutions (Biasutti et al., 2022). Another study which explored the adaptations that music teachers and their students had to make regarding their relationships during the pandemic (Antonini Philippe et al., 2020), also highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships, especially within the dyad between one student and the teacher.

A vast array of research findings is available on how teachers could adapt to the new way of teaching music. Thorgersen and Mars (2021) discussed how music teachers collaborated online to solve educational problems, asking and answering questions, and sharing material. They even asked whether the pandemic might not be “the mother of invention” (p. 235). Regular check-ins with students, finding different ways to ensure connection between students, and reminding students how important their self-care was, were some of the ideas that Hall (2022) put forward. However, during the pandemic many music teachers were concerned about their future as music teachers (Overland, 2020). In a phenomenological study, first-year music teachers reported experiences of disconnection, a sense of missing out, feelings of being overwhelmed and a concern about their well-being as a result of the pandemic (Frey-Clark et al., 2023). Nevertheless, to my knowledge, no studies were conducted where the improvement of self-employed music teachers’ well-being and self-care

were the focus of the research investigation, especially teachers who had lived through the pandemic. Earlier IPA studies have been conducted in music therapy (Young, 2012; Lee & McFerran, 2015; Venkatarangam, 2021), but none of them focused on the lived experiences of music teachers using the Music and Imagery (MI) therapy method.

Music and imagery (MI) forms part of the Continuum Model of Guided Music and Imagery method. The other method in this model is the Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music (BMGIM) (Summer, 2020). Whilst the Bonny Method makes use of pre-selected music programs, consisting mostly of Western classical music (Bonny, 2001), an MI session focuses on one piece of music, which is repeated during the session. One unique aspect of this method is that the participant chooses the music collaboratively with the therapist, and the music can also be from the client's own music pool or playlist (Summer, 2020). The uniqueness of this study lies in the fact that it is the first to explore the meaning that five music teachers in South Africa ascribe to their lived experiences of MI sessions. It is also the first time that the use and meaning of MI as a therapeutic intervention for music teachers during a pandemic are investigated. This study can provide new insights into the experience of music teachers, music students and music therapists regarding the usefulness and value of MI sessions in difficult circumstances as well as for personal growth. Researchers who are interested in this field can also draw on the findings that emerged from this study in further research regarding music and well-being.

### ***Method***

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research approach which focuses on the meaning that participants ascribe to their lived experiences of a specific phenomenon (Smith et al., 2021). This is an appropriate approach for this study as I wanted to find out what the meaning was that each participant ascribed to their experiences of MI. IPA draws on three particular theoretical perspectives: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2021). Phenomenology refers to the perceptions, feelings, thoughts and meaning making of the participant regarding a lived experience (Wheeler & Bruscia, 2016). In this study I wanted to hear participants' experiences as they described them. Hermeneutics, particularly double hermeneutics, refers both to the participants' and the researcher's interpretation of the experience. This means that there is a cyclical involvement with the interpretation of the semi-structured interviews (Finlay, 2011) where the researcher makes sense of how the participants make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2021). Idiography refers to the uniqueness of each individual's experience (Smith et al., 2021). This was ensured in this study as each case was analyzed separately before a cross-case analysis was conducted.

The music teachers in this study were invited to participate through purposive sampling. This means that volunteers who fit the criteria were invited to participate (Durrheim, 2006). In this case, music teachers in South Africa who were diagnosed with COVID-19 and had suffered a loss of income as a result their illness were recruited through a social media post, and through

snowball sampling, where one interested person speaks to another about participating (Durrheim, 2006). However, one of the criteria was that potential participants had to be fully recovered and healthy enough to attend the MI sessions. Five participants who showed an interest in participating in this study were included. In IPA a small sample size is a prerequisite because this enhances the depth of the study (Smith, 2004).

The Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the North-West University in South Africa granted clearance for this study (Ethics number: NWU-00959-22-A7). Only after this study received ethical approval were the participants invited to take part. Informed consent forms were signed by all participants.

In this study I personally conducted the MI sessions, collected the data during the subsequent semi-structured in-depth interviews and took responsibility for the analysis. I was acutely aware of the responsibilities I bore as both researcher and therapist (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2001). An awareness of my own bias was also important, and I had to remain reflexive about (within) my dual role (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I constantly made notes in the margin about my own feelings and interpretations and discussed them in clinical supervision. Furthermore, having 22 years of experience as music teacher, I knew that I could engage with the participants in a sympathetic, informed, and respectful way, and that this would assist with my own meaning-making of the data (Bruscia, 2016).

The most important data-collection strategy in IPA is semi-structured in-depth interviews (Smith et al., 2021). Images may also be included in the data (Bartoli, 2020). Drawing is an integral part of MI sessions (Summer, 2015) so participants' drawings were referred to during the interviews. After a series of four one-to-one MI sessions, each of the five participants was interviewed in a relaxed conversational style. Open-ended questions were used to guide the conversation (Smith et al., 2021) with the purpose of evoking memories, descriptions, thoughts and opinions, and values and feelings about their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Some of the questions were anchored in the observations I made during the sessions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The data from the five interviews were transcribed and entered into ATLAS.ti 23 together with the drawings that were created during the sessions. Data were read and re-read, then analyzed and coded according to the first two steps of the IPA data analysis process suggested by Smith et al. (2021). Steps 3 and 4 entailed the creation of themes, and to ensure that various perspectives were taken into account, the drawings were included in this process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Each interview was coded separately. This can be described as the idiographic process, which is expected in IPA. Only then was the cross-case analysis conducted, which is/are steps 5 and 6.

Further validity was ensured by including negative case analysis. This meant that codes and categories that seemed to be contrary to the majority of participants' quotations were not ignored but included in the findings. Participants were kept up to date after the data collection and they were asked for feedback throughout the process. Credibility was thus ensured

through regular member checking and prolonged involvement with participants. Rich data were obtained and enough direct quotes from participants used to substantiate the findings. This is standard practice in IPA (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, several independent research colleagues read the transcriptions and evaluated the data-analysis process, which contributed to the integrity of this study.

### ***Findings***

This study provided me with insights that coincided with my personal experience, namely that MI sessions can provide participants with better self-insight, opportunities for growth and spiritual or transcendental experiences, which in turn can help in times of distress such as the pandemic. A healthy coping strategy would include regular self-care sessions to which music can contribute to a significant extent. The five participants, who will each be introduced briefly below, each chose a pseudonym for this study to ensure anonymity.

#### *Billie Holiday*

Billie described herself as a music-mad person. She said she lives “in music”. Music makes her happy. She believes she is non-pretentious with both feet on the ground and explained that her first priority is her husband and two children. However, she is quick to add that she loves to teach music: “Music defines me”. The experiential statements from analyzing Billie’s data included both challenging and positive emotions, growth and empowerment, spirituality and the supernatural, and transformation.

#### *Chopin*

I have known Chopin for more than twenty years, as we used to teach music at neighboring schools. However, we had lost contact as we moved to different towns. Chopin was very open when he described himself as a 42-year-old gay person who loves music. He also loves to connect with people. He added that he is happy with who he is, and although his life is complicated, he is content. Chopin is certain that music chose him, and teaching music is one of the reasons that he is still alive today. Chopin’s data analysis includes contradictory experiential statements such as lightness and vulnerability, and there are also indications of using music for self-care, transcendence and enhancing spirituality.

#### *Liszt*

Liszt was the oldest participant at 65. However, she is still teaching and described herself as a successful teacher. She teaches both piano and harp. Although she originally planned to become a performer, and still performs whenever she can, she said that she feels that teaching music is her life. This was a conscious decision and her experience during the COVID-19 pandemic made her even more grateful for the opportunity, as she realized that every day is a gift, and there are no guarantees. Through Liszt’s interview, the experiential statements that

emerged were mindfulness, music as a transformational mechanism, empowerment, and connections.

### *Schumann*

Schumann had a near-death experience after her diagnosis of being infected with the Coronavirus during the COVID-19 pandemic. After two years she still had to go for regular check-ups for her heart. Schumann said that she always knew she wanted to be a teacher. She admitted that teaching music was not necessarily what she had in mind initially, but that she found teaching music was the right choice for her. If she was not a music teacher, she would have been involved with music in other ways. The experiential statements that were present in Schumann's data provided insight into her difficult journey. They included self-knowledge, self-care, vulnerability, surrender and inner peace.

### *Wolf*

Wolf grew up in a musical family where her mother was a music teacher. During her career as a music teacher, she was a passionate choir director for 30 years. Wolf struck me as a positive person and an idealist. She said she always wants to make things whole and happy, and it is a character trait of hers to always ask others what she can do for them. Because she is such a giving person, she has often been disappointed and frustrated. The experiential statements that were revealed from her analysis showed her need for self-care, as they included freedom in creativity, inner needs fulfilled through music, release and letting go, and perspective and self-insight.

### *Group Experiential Themes*

In the cross-case analysis, four group experiential themes emerged. These themes give an in-depth view of what the five participants' lived experiences entailed during MI sessions:

- 1) Experiencing personal growth and empowerment;
- 2) Experiencing positive emotions;
- 3) Experiencing challenging emotions; and
- 4) Spiritual experiences.

The cross-case analysis revealed that experiencing both challenging and positive emotions can lead to personal growth and empowerment among participants. Experiences of personal growth and empowerment contribute to having spiritual experiences.

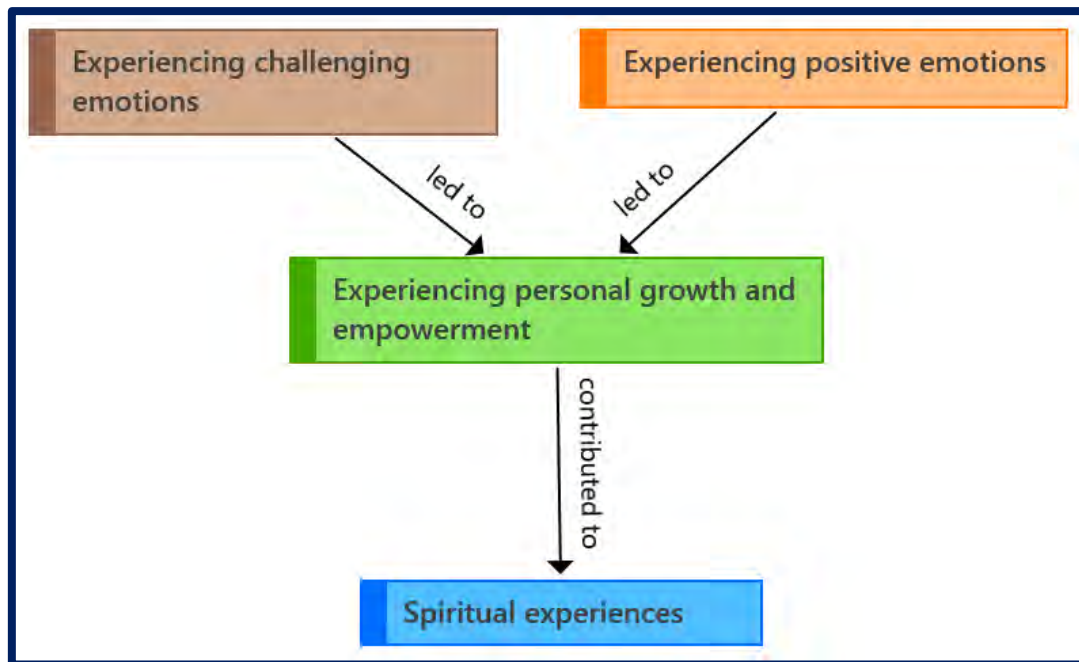


Figure 1. The four group experiential themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis.

*First group experiential theme: Experiencing challenging emotions*

Three out of the five participants experienced challenging emotions during the MI sessions. For Chopin, it was difficult to trust others, and memories about his difficult childhood came up during the therapy sessions. He said: “Part of me would prefer NOT to discuss it, because it is so personal. And how does one quantify the feeling in words? Because the feeling that I got is what is near to my heart.”

For both Billie and Schumann, the challenging emotions were related to the pandemic. Billie found it difficult to cry during the pandemic and she also felt trapped. She cried during the MI process and said that she was not able to mourn her uncle whom she had lost during COVID-19, but during the MI session she was able to allow the tears to flow: “The fact that I could not cry about him... I thought I did not have that grief about the loss. That came loose just now. Gee, this is amazing stuff.”

Schumann was not used to showing emotions, and while she was healthy again, she felt guilty if she would complain. She also experienced resistance to the therapy and found it difficult to open up. Her struggle with difficult emotions was noticeable during the music listening as she often covered her face and cried. She also spoke about being scared and feeling guilty, especially when she referred to her own recovery, whilst so many other people were less fortunate.

In my role as therapist, I was amazed at participants’ sincere vulnerability and deep experiences in the music. It took me by surprise every time and there was a certain amount of



transference as I felt vulnerable with them. These experiences with participants reminded me of how much respect we should have for each other as human beings, as well as for this process which allows for this kind of openness and sharing without feeling judged. The MI sessions provided an opportunity to allow difficult emotions to come to the fore without judgement. It was clear that music was the driving force for this outlet. The participants felt safe to cry and/or to talk about their difficult emotions. Apart from the experiences of difficult emotions, participants also expressed how they experienced positive emotions during MI sessions.

*Second group experiential theme: Experiencing positive emotions*

Four of the five participants experienced positive emotions during the MI sessions. Chopin and Billie could also identify inner strengths, e.g., hope and optimism within themselves. Whilst Billie said she felt trapped in an earlier comment, this had shifted. She had various descriptive words to express her positive emotions: “Not stifling, very safe, very nice, very contained, very free.”

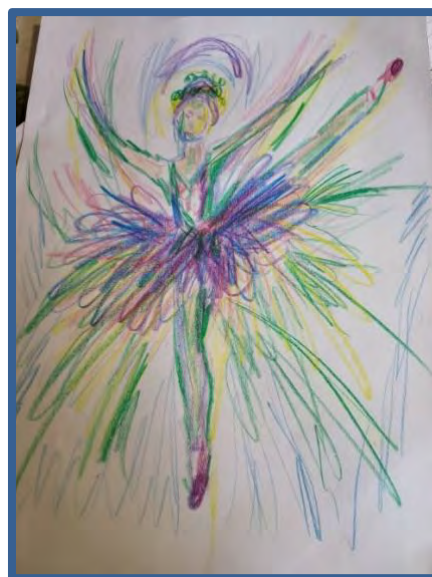
Chopin and Wolf both mentioned that they felt light and energized. Chopin was able to really immerse himself in the music: “Ooooh, I’m crying! I feel light as a feather. It is just beautiful! There is so much hope in this piece of music”. He also said that he wanted to do dance therapy and move with the music. Wolf put a lot of emphasis on the fact that she felt free and not judged during the drawing process: “I took a color and I started. It just burst out of me. I knew which colors I wanted to use. Each color of the pastels spoke to me and, uhm, it was interesting. I mean the chalk pastels is such a mess, but it is so therapeutic to just blend. It came immediately. I felt safe, and then you can do anything.”

Both Wolf and Liszt could access their inner child in the process and relive fond memories. Wolf said that she struggled to access her inner child, and that she needed to have more fun. When she drew a happy picture, remembering herself as a little girl, she wanted to see the sunshine and the beauty (See Figure 2): “I always want to see something warm. So, the flame is warm, and emotional. I can breathe deeper; I can relax, and I don't have to think while I look into the fire. It's all so simple.”



*Figure 2.* Wolf's 'happy childhood' image. Note. This image was drawn to the music: Leveleleven: Nordic Polska.

Liszt also drew a childhood memory which was brought up by the music. Although this was a memory of a dream that she never fulfilled, it made her feel gratitude: "I always wanted to be a ballerina so badly, but my parents could not afford it. And this piece of music feels like it gives me energy, life, excitement" (See Figure 3).



*Figure 3.* Liszt's 'ballerina'. Note. This image was drawn to the music: Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto, third movement (Rondo).

Music during the MI sessions gave participants the freedom to express their memories and their positive emotions. From their feedback, it was clear that they felt light, happy, and energized. The drawing whilst listening to carefully chosen music was therapeutic.

Positive emotions as defined by Frederickson (2010), include joy, gratitude, serenity, inspiration, hope, love, awe, amusement, interest and a sense of pride. Many of these were reflected in the data of this theme. I felt privileged that participants engaged with these sessions. Witnessing how they allowed themselves to be in the moment, I also experienced a deep sense of gratitude. I also wondered if Liszt was not perhaps, in a sense, fulfilling her dream in her imagination through her image.

*Third group experiential theme: Experiencing personal growth and empowerment*

Experiences of personal growth and empowerment emerged from all the participants' data analyses. Personal experiential themes that emerged include growth and empowerment, using music for self-care, growth and empowerment, self-knowledge, perspective and insight, and the fulfilment of inner needs through the music.

Billie and Liszt both experienced empowerment that helped them grow in their personal lives. Billie found that one of the sessions led to a revelation for her life journey: "I'm in one direction now, and now [I make a] 180-degree summersault, backtracking. I need to move [in] another way. And I know that's now the path I need to take"! (See Figure 4). Liszt also became aware of the power of the music and how it contributed to her becoming more honest and authentic: "And life is stressful, but there is always hope."



*Figure 4. Billie's '180-degree turn' Note. This image was drawn to the music: Chaka Kahn: I'm every woman.*

In Wolf's case, the experience of how music could fulfil needs within her was very empowering. She felt that music could fulfil her emotional needs, her need to feel safe, and her need to connect with God and nature. It also gave her a new perspective and insight into her own needs: "I realized that I must guard my heart. It is a 'sound mind' decision! Like having a dog that you love, but he eats your stuff, stuff that you also love!! You must balance this. I need to stand my ground and know what I have to offer."

In this group experiential theme, both Chopin and Schumann realized their need for self-care and the role that music could play in taking better care of themselves. Chopin realized that he knew exactly what music he needed, and that listening to music could 'recharge' his personal

'battery'. He did not even have to put any effort in: "But when I listen to this music... It is my time. I don't have to do anything. The music plays, I don't even have to play."

Schumann also knew what music she needed, and she was even brave enough to say that with well-known music she was the one leading, whilst with unknown music the music was the leader: "If you want something out of the session, then I would say go with the unknown music, because the music you know keeps you in your comfort zone". Although the levels of personal growth and empowerment differed between participants, it was unmistakably present in the data. In the cases of Billie and Wolf, feeling stronger and having more confidence arose. Schumann and Chopin were both empowered by their insight that music could help them grow, and Liszt got to a place of hope and self-acceptance.

Traits such as bravery, a love of learning, perseverance, perspective, self-regulation, hope and wisdom are all present in the list of 24 character strengths described by Peterson and Seligman (2004). To observe participants acknowledging these characteristics through the sessions made me realize how powerful this method is. It was almost tangible. As therapist I felt that I have grown, and as researcher I felt even more convinced that this phenomenon is worth researching within the clinical environment.

#### *Fourth group experiential theme: Spiritual experiences*

Spiritual experiences were also noted in the data of all five participants. Spirituality was a theme for Billie and Chopin. Transcendence was a theme emerging in both Wolf and Chopin's data, and transformation was a theme for both Liszt and Billie. Schumann's theme of inner peace with a category of connecting with God also fits into this group experiential theme (See Figure 5).



*Figure 5. Schumann's representation of transcendence* Note. This image was drawn to the music: Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto in D, Op. 35, first movement.

Billie spoke about a heightened spiritual awareness and transformation that occurred in her process. She claimed that it changed her future and that she experienced this renewed spiritual awareness as humbling. It has given her confidence that was real, and it was refreshing to her: “But I experienced it in the here and the now and I could trust my experience. It’s not something I read in a book, that somebody made up. It’s my LIVED EXPERIENCE. And that gives me confidence to connect with people.”

Liszt realized that her experience with COVID-19 had a detrimental effect on her and that she had so much to be grateful for. She noted that through her involvement with the music there was a transformation for her, even in a piece of music. She described Dring’s music (Trio for flute, oboe and piano, the first movement: Allegro con Brio) as “symbolic”, and she added that “the transposition is transformative” (See Figure 6).



*Figure 6. Liszt’s ‘acceptance’ Note. This image was drawn to the music: Dring: Trio for flute oboe and piano first movement Allegro con brio.*

Chopin had an experience of transcendence more than once during the process. One example was when we listened to J.S. Bach’s St Matthew’s Passion part 1: “I could fly. I can leave my body behind. I am not fixed to the earth. Bach’s music does this for me. It is unbelievable. Oooh, it’s spacious up there and the earth is 5 billion years away from the space. It is the space that music opens up for me. No gravity, no rules of our lives are applicable in that space” (See Figure 7). Chopin would also cry during listening, and sometimes a full repetition of the piece of music was necessary to give him enough time to come back to the ‘here and now.’





Figure 7. Chopin's drawing Note. This image was drawn to the music: J. S. Bach: St Matthew's -Passion BWV 244 First section (Chorus 1 & 2).

Wolf also mentioned transcendence after we had listened to *O Magnum Mysterium* by Lauridsen. She said that she left the earth and “went up into the heavenlies”: “Listen, when you look at clouds, it detaches you from this earth, from the ‘little foxes’ [referring to Song of Solomon 2:15] and you can actually go... You transcend into a next dimension and that is what happened to me” (See Figure 8).

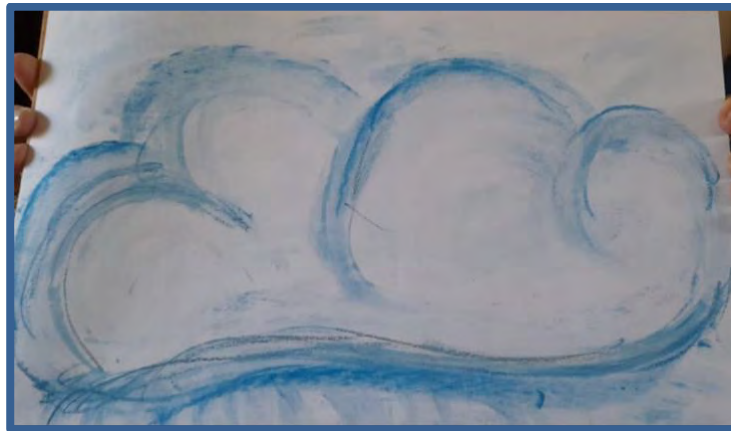


Figure 8. Wolf's representation of transcendence Note. This image was drawn to the music: Lauridsen: O Magnum Mysterium

Schumann relates her experience of inner peace directly to her COVID-19 experience. Whilst listening to the first movement of Tchaikovsky's violin concerto in D, she drew in colorful circles (Figure 5), explaining afterwards how, whilst listening she relived this moment: “I was part of this rolling clouds. It was me and it was not me. A kind of out-of-body experience, and then I heard a voice saying clearly ‘Everyone is going to be just fine’. And it was so fantastic, so strange, but with so much relief.”

The last virtue in Peterson and Seligman's (2004) classification of strengths, is transcendence. The strengths which are grouped under this virtue include appreciation of

beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality. Some of these character strengths were already noticed in earlier themes. They are grouped together under the umbrella of transcendence because all of them give meaning to individual's lives because they allow individuals to experience connections to the greater universe (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). As therapist and researcher, I humbly noticed these extraordinary changes during MI sessions, although the depth in which participants lived through spiritual experiences differed. Schumann's surrender led to the most touching spiritual moments where she could experience inner peace, and experience gratitude for her survival of the COVID-19 diagnosis and also realise the importance of being in touch with God and oneself. Billie's process of growth, self-acceptance and transformation took place literally in front of my eyes. For me, these sessions were as valuable as they were for the participants.

The data showed that through the music each participant could experience either transcendence, transformation, or a deep inner peace. Each participant became aware of something bigger than themselves through the music. This was a very humbling experience to become part of.

Some of the personal experiential themes and categories could possibly fit into more than one group experiential theme. Deciding where it fitted best became clear after feedback from each participant. Table 1 summarises the cross-case analysis, containing the personal experiential themes and the group experiential themes.

**Table 1**

*Cross-case analysis*

Group Experiential Themes	Personal Experiential Themes				
	Billie Holiday's experiential statements & categories	Chopin's experiential statements & categories	Liszt's experiential statements & categories	Schumann's experiential statements & categories	Wolf's Experiential statements & categories
1. Experiencing challenging emotions	Challenging emotions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not being able to cry</li> <li>• Feeling anxious</li> <li>• Feeling trapped</li> <li>• Self-criticism</li> </ul>	Vulnerability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to trust</li> <li>• Open up to old hurt and pain</li> </ul>		Vulnerability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not used to showing emotions</li> <li>• Feeling guilty</li> </ul> Surrender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experiences of resistance to let go</li> <li>• Letting go</li> </ul>	
	“Initially I felt very anxious, suddenly as if this little box was never going to move, I feel I am being smothered, as if someone pushes me down to smother me, as if somebody with an ice-cold hand presses on my stomach. ALWAYS when I try to reach my potential, there is always something that holds me back. I relate it back to a more powerful woman who is going to smother me, I don't know why, I am working on it. And then when I tried to get out of the room, there appeared locks and locks as if I can't come out”.	“But it is a choice I made. Actually, the music made the choice for me. So, I decided it would not be awkward. That is the choice of an adult. I chose what I wanted, and the experience was so important that I would not allow anything to stand in my way to get it”.		“It is actually that thing of breaking through the resistance. It is on a different level when you do not feel confident to draw. If you are through it and you start, it is really quite nice... I could relax and surrender to doing it. When I allowed myself to GO THERE, it was really very nice! The process was good”.	
	Positive emotions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling optimistic</li> <li>• Feeling happy</li> <li>• Feeling light</li> </ul>	Lightness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling light</li> <li>• Feeling energized</li> </ul>	Mindfulness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being in the moment</li> <li>• Reliving fond memories</li> </ul>		Freedom in creativity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Therapeutic</li> <li>• Less judgement</li> <li>• Feeling good</li> </ul>
	“SUDDENLY, there came hundreds of lights, this color, (points to her drawing) indigo	“In this interlude, I can focus on the music, and it rejuvenates me, and I can	“What I have realized is that I was able to be in the moment. Now at this	“This work, it takes my brain away completely. Afterwards I feel incredible.	



**Personal Experiential Themes**

<p><b>2. Experiencing positive emotions</b></p>	<p>blue butterflies into the tunnel, and they lift me out of the tunnel and pulled me out and allow me to play with the light and the clouds and these butterflies changed color, and they held me and I could not believe how it changed from the absolute darkness to this absolute freedom! There is movement forward, with great excitement, almost like what's coming next? I don't know, there is a pattern and there is order there. And the question of what's coming next makes me feel very excited, optimistic, very excited, optimistic".</p>	<p>go back to my work. My battery is fuller than before, and I can go on. I do not always have to DO.... In the music, the DOING falls away. I don't have to DO... I normally do many things at the same time to get through the work. But when I listen to this music... It is my time. I don't have to do anything. The music plays, I don't even have to play".</p>	<p>moment, in the moment. I am here now. It is difficult for me to live in the moment, because my head goes to lots of places, but these therapy sessions, it was nice to just be in the moment".</p>	<p>I feel light and even if there is something frightening that I have seen, it's okay, so that's good I know after sessions, I come back refreshed and unburdened. I show my people my pictures, and I love sharing and they can also see what they want, and I don't need to say anything".</p>	
<p><b>3. Experiencing personal growth and empowerment</b></p>	<p>Growth and empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of choice</li> <li>• Own potential</li> <li>• Trusting the process</li> </ul>	<p>Using music for self-care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music is a tool for improving self-care</li> </ul>	<p>Empowerment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power of the music</li> <li>• Becoming honest and authentic</li> </ul>	<p>Self-knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linked to knowledge of music</li> </ul> <p>Self-care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being hard on herself</li> </ul>	<p>Perspective and Insight</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realizing the value of looking from a different perspective</li> </ul> <p>Inner needs fulfilled through music</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music helps to fulfil emotional needs</li> <li>• Music helps to fulfil needs to connect to nature and God</li> <li>• Music fulfils the need to feel safe</li> </ul>
	<p>"I decided and I felt I could be completely myself. [In the past] I would have found a way to back off and I'm facing resistance now, but I am empowered, and I am convinced, and I trust! I know it will shift"!</p>	<p>"I think that I have realized that if I.... to always remind myself how powerful music is... and if I am in a dark place, to actually go and say to myself you know, I actually know that that piece of music can help me. And to do it actually! Because it is a resource</p>	<p>"What I have realized that I thought I knew what is going on in my heart and my mind. And then the music plays, and you start drawing and then you start to see oh, I did not realize that this is actually how I feel. That preconceived idea, and here comes the music and then.... other</p>	<p>"And remember that I have said to you that music for me is very closely linked to my emotional state of being. It touches me deeply emotionally. When I was in the hospital and I was sick with COVID-19, I did not listen to any music,</p>	<p>"Music is just the soul of...you cannot not be connected. Each piece of music had its purpose for emotional connection. Each one was pretty highly intense for me. It has brought healing. It has definitely brought healing in a place where I did not</p>

**Personal Experiential Themes**

	that is available. I don't even have to go and look for it".	things come up. You think you're doing okay and then...mmmmm".	I could not. I didn't want to. Music is a trigger for me".	even realize there was a scar or something hurting".	
	<p>Spirituality and the supernatural</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Physical sensations</li> <li>• Spiritual awareness</li> </ul> <p>Transformation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Releasing stuckness</li> <li>• Changing the future</li> <li>• Humbling experience</li> </ul>	<p>Spirituality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship with God</li> <li>• Knowing</li> <li>• Hope</li> </ul> <p>Transcendence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimate connection with the music</li> <li>• Out of body experiences</li> <li>• Emotional experiences</li> </ul>	<p>Music as a transformational mechanism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power of music</li> <li>• Realization of the importance of life</li> </ul> <p>Connections</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music connects to other art forms</li> <li>• Music connecting to emotions</li> <li>• Music connects to significant others</li> <li>• Music connects to self</li> </ul>	<p>Inner peace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling safe</li> <li>• A sense of belonging</li> <li>• Connection with God</li> </ul> <p>Release and letting go</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Releasing emotions</li> <li>• Transcendence</li> </ul>	
<b>4. Spiritual experiences</b>	<p>"TRUST my physical sensations, not fear them, not run away from them, but TRUST them, like engulf, I would say, everything that happens around me...Uhm, definitely a spiritual dimension [too] and that is so nice because you have this physical sensation but it is also spiritual so it's uhm, it's the most wonderful holistic experience and you know when people say holistic they mean okay just don't take pills. It's more than that. I love taking the spiritual dimension into account".</p>	<p>"That same feeling of escaping from my body to heaven. That is what Bach does to me. It takes over. It is so free and a nice feeling, I am not in my body. How can you describe it. It is as if I am a balloon and all of a sudden there is helium in the balloon. Gravity does not play a role, but I can't look down and say I am 20 meters above the earth. There is nothing. The only thing there is, is the feeling because the music takes over".</p>	<p>"There was so much energy! It felt as if I could take off from the earth, the transposition is transformative. There is a tangible core in the purple (ballerina image), in the gut. I became Van Gogh while I drew. I did not realize that the connection between visual art and music, how important it is the music and the drawing, although I have been doing both for as long as I live, how important it was to stimulate and enhance emotions, yes for sure. How did I not realize? I never grasped that one must do this. Yes, I am a little, wow, overwhelmed..."</p>	<p>"This kind of drawing is not because I like doodling, but it is all I can do. When I was in the near-death experience, and they shocked my heart during Covid-19, I was sedated, and this (she points at the drawing) is what I experienced. I was part of this rolling clouds. It was me and it was not me. A kind of out-of-body experience, and then I heard a voice saying clearly 'Everyone is going to be just fine'. And it was so fantastic, so strange, but with so much relief".</p>	<p>"I did not want to be part of this world, as it is challenging and stressful, so in the music I left that and went up into the heavenly's. First, I drew the cloud and then at the bottom I just mused with the pastels, and I thought okay this is rain starting. And I thought okay maybe I am going to cry now for a bit of release. That cloud that I drew, it was a prophetic drawing. I wanted to be taken away from this world and into the mysterious, so for me it was wonderful!"</p>

## Discussion

### *Experiencing challenging emotions*

Challenging emotions have been experienced during MI sessions before. Anger (Angulo et al., 2021; Kang, 2017), confusion (Story, 2018), fear and disconnection (Paik-Maier, 2017) have been described in the literature. Sadness and feelings of being overwhelmed were also noted by Karastatira (2021). In this study the need to show emotions of sadness was seen in Billie and Schumann's data. Schumann and Chopin both felt vulnerable during their processes. MI sessions allowed for a safe space for participants to show and experience challenging emotions without feeling judged. Similarly, participants could share their experiences of positive emotions.

### *Experiencing positive emotions*

Acceptance experienced as a positive emotion has been noted by Story and Beck (2017) as well as Paik-Maier (2017). In the present study Wolf said how she felt free from judgement. Feeling excitement and joy, similar to the data from Billie in this study, was observed in Karastatira's (2021) study with adolescents during MI sessions. Both Wolf and Liszt experienced positive memories, which strengthened them. Positive memories have also been recorded by Dimiceli-Mitran (2020), Story (2018) and Summer (2011). Paik-Maier (2010, 2013, 2017) referred to positive memories being stirred by music for clients in three different studies. MI has at its core the purpose of resourcing the individual by allowing them to find their inner strengths (Summer, 2015). A review of the literature (in review) suggests this is being achieved in the MI method.

### *Personal growth and empowerment*

Personal growth and empowerment were evident in all the participants' cases in the present study. This echoes a previous study by Paik-Maier (2017) in which her client described how she could steer in any direction that she chose. Summer (2011) also described her client as feeling empowered and being hopeful, open, and contented. The MI method allows for this growth and feelings of empowerment. One of the reasons is that clients can choose the music for their processes (Scott-Moncrieff, 2021).

### *Spiritual experiences*

Dimiceli-Mitran (2020) described experiencing the music as liberating, and Hearn's (2010) reported her client experience as transformative and transpersonal. Previous studies also showed how music can stimulate different ways to communicate, which is transformational (Story, 2018; Paik-Maier, 2017). Lui (2021) had a client saying: "Music touches my heart. As if it's taking me on an amazing and adventurous journey". In the present study all the participants reported some form of spiritual experience, e.g., spiritual awareness (Billie and

Schumann), transcendent experiences (Chopin and Wolf) and transformational awareness, realizing the importance of life (Liszt). Music in MI sessions thus serves as a catalyst for transformational experiences.

### **Conclusion**

In the present study it was evident that all five participants had meaningful lived experiences during MI sessions. All the participants are self-employed music teachers in South Africa who were diagnosed with COVID-19 during the pandemic. Although many of the personal experiential statements that were identified in the analysis of each teacher's case were similar, the meaning that each of them ascribed to their lived experiences of the MI sessions was different.

Billie's sessions brought to the forefront her difficulty with self-esteem in her workplace stemming from a long-standing, almost traumatic belief that she is not good enough. Although our first session focused on emotional release after experiencing loss during the pandemic, the long-term outcome was an overall deepened self-belief, improved self-esteem and an optimism strengthened enough to change direction in her teaching career. This will bring new meaning into her life.

Chopin's sessions highlighted his feelings of isolation due to the pandemic. He realized that he was in dire need of self-care. In finding the tools to take better care of himself, he will be able to be a healthier and more caring teacher. His process was thus meaningful on a personal level which will have a positive effect on others around him.

Schumann had a near-death experience whilst she had the virus and she understood that she had unresolved trauma due to this experience. She had recovered and felt guilty to admit that she still had to work through the trauma. Similar to Chopin, her realization during the MI process was that self-care would be beneficial not only to herself, but also to her young daughter and her students; this insight contributed hugely to her renewed meaning making. Both Liszt and Wolf are nearing the end of their teaching careers. Yet the MI sessions added meaning to their lives by giving them fresh ideas for teaching and for their personal lives. They were contemplating the value of having their students draw in response to the music pieces that they are playing. Liszt ascribed new realization and meaning to the connection between the different art forms. Wolf realized how she could give a different meaning to music listening if she afforded herself the freedom to draw images at the same time.

*Implications for music teachers*

The findings of this study show that all the music teachers who participated benefited from the MI process. Because MI uses music as the tool for increased well-being, and the teachers' own music can be chosen for sessions, it is a good fit for music teachers. It is imperative that the self-care of music teachers be enhanced, and there is no doubt that improving their own well-being will contribute to strengthening their capacity as teachers as well as bolstering their relationships with their students.

There is scope for further research in using MI sessions to help music teachers cope and grow. This kind of study could be replicated using processes that run for more than just four sessions. Similar research could be conducted with music teachers from other countries and schools, and in other creative arts subjects. It would also be important to explore the experiences of music teachers from different cultural backgrounds. Positive psychological constructs such as courage, perseverance, kindness, love of learning and many more could also be the focus points for further research. The MI method is strength-building, and this study paves the way for further research into this field.

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### About the Author

Petra Jerling is a certified music psychotherapist in private practice in South Africa (Music and Well-being). Her passion for teaching music has sparked her interest in psychology and

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