

Interview with André FERTIER, musician composer, music therapist, expert in cultural accessibility, artistic and inclusive cultural policy. Music therapy researcher for people with autism, cerebrosplinal handicap, people in comas, and Alzheimer's patients. Composer of stage music, World music and songwriter performing pop/rock songs; creator of functional sound spaces.

André can you tell me...

1/ What is music for you?

I think music exists when any sound structure is considered music, either by its composer, by a listener or a group of listeners, or by a performer or group of performers. The music can be produced by human beings, animals - birds, whales -, and various elements of nature, of the universe, such as the sea, wind, rivers, dunes, stars, what Plato called the music of spheres, which interests many scientists today. In fact, I believe that music exists from the moment that individuals attribute to certain sound phenomena a musical character that can be a source of very different emotions. The notion of music will therefore depend on individuals, social groups, cultures and even generations and eras.

2/ What are your favorite musics and are there music that is totally foreign to you?

I am attracted to music from every corner of the planet, all styles and all eras. On the other hand some creations will touch me very intensely, but they can be in categories and origins very contrasting, classic, rock/ pop, ethnic or other. Examples include the prelude to Heitor Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas brasileiras* No. 5 for soprano and 8 cellos, the song *Don't-let me misunderstood* (the original version sung by Eric Burdon with the band The animals, and the vocal rhythmic jousts of the Inuits. I don't usually know why. Sometimes I know that the cause is to be found in memories that are associated with these musics, but sometimes it is very different processes. And then I could ask myself the question in terms of my own musical creations which are very diverse. I think the ones I prefer are the ones whose origin of inspiration escapes me completely.

As to whether music would seem foreign to me, the answer would be no. Foreign in the sense of not feeling anything, it is difficult for me because the range of possible feelings is so vast and it all depends on the circumstances. I may want to hear songs, infantilizing, "stupid" music, for moments of lightness and deep and poignant works at other times. If the notion of foreigner is in the sense rather foreign, like a country that we do not know, in this case I would always have an instinct of curiosity and desire to discover and tame these unknowns.

3/ How did you come to music and what practical music did you?

How did I come to music or how did the music come to me? In my childhood and early adolescence, I did not bathe in any music for various reasons that would take too long to develop here. On the other hand, I have bathed, through unspoken, implicit, and therefore very powerful messages in the idea that music is essential to life, with multiple dimensions that make the greatness of Humanity. My mother had learned to play the piano, classical music, but I didn't hear her play until she retired and I was already in my thirties. My father had started playing the violin, but I never heard him play a note. My brother and sisters have never had musical practices. These repressed things my parents experienced may have played a central role in my desire to live music

and live professionally from it. Psychoanalysis could shed light on this subject as to my past, my present and my future...

Until the age of 15, I did not know television at home, only radio, but with very little musical listening. From the point of view of my cultural origins, having been born and raised in France, in the Poitou, without contempt for this region, I always had the unpleasant feeling of not having real cultural roots in terms of music and dance. But it probably motivated me all the more to embark on the paths of world music.

Without neglecting what I could perceive during my "uterine crossing", then what I practiced and discovered at the babbling stage, the music came to me around the age of ten through some musical dreams. I remember that I didn't know what it was, but I could hear the whole orchestration. Then from 15/16 years old, I was fed abundantly by the culture of the Anglo-Saxon wave, Jimmy Hendrix, Otis Redding, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Led Zeppelin and so many others, especially since I made two trips to England. I had my first guitar at 16 years after practicing on those of friends. What also brought me to music was related to sexuality, playing guitar, singing are certain assets for encounters and conquests.

I really immersed myself in music when touched by a visual impairment that arose when I was 15 and a half years old, the result of Leber's optic neuropathy, which caused me an almost absence of central vision, but preserved peripheral vision, I was placed as a resident at the National Institute of Blind Youth in Paris, where I stayed three years while going to Buffon High School in an ordinary environment. In this very special place, teleported two centuries back, what a contrast in the middle of the revolution of May 68! I was like in a bubble somewhat medieval that I perceived like a prison, out of time, knowing at the same time escapes on the barricades. But in this extraordinary world, world of the blind, with 360 residents at the time, a dormitory with 40 beds, toilets without doors, collective showers, a dirty and gloomy environment that families had no right to discover, forced to stay in the entrance box, music was everywhere and saving. At the time this institution offered exceptional possibilities musically, in terms of teaching and especially for me the possibility almost at all hours of the day and night to let free playing pianos, guitars and also, for some of us, to have access to organs including one of the most prestigious in the world. In this period, I developed some knowledge in music theory, harmony, my abilities on instruments, and at the same time my ideas of creations. I still had a rather self-taught background, and all my life until today I took piano, guitar, percussion lessons over more or less short periods, and singing in various styles, classical, variety, western, oriental, without interruption.

At the age of 19 I started working professionally in the artistic field, accompanying singers, singing myself, composing stage music including the Maldoror Opera, and I played a lot on tour with the rock fiction band "Morange and Fertier" and produced several world music records with my band Clivage.

4/ What brought you to music therapy?

Several questions and encounters led me to music therapy. I've always been interested in a very "carnal" approach to sound, singing and instruments. I had a rather intensive introduction to yoga which also led me to question our body in the universe, body and mind and especially in singing practices related to yoga. Friends made me meet Alfred Tomatis and I had several times opportunities of exchanges with him. As a composer of music for theater, I discovered and lived during the times of creation, rehearsals and representations the close links between music, the sound environment and all the palettes of emotions involved; I was already

there, in the middle of very interesting processes for a future music therapist. I also think about my stays in North Africa, during tours. I stayed for almost a year in Morocco, several months in Tunis and Algeria and I was made aware of healing practices mobilizing music and dances, I think especially of gnawas.

When I decided to stop a life of touring, a psychologist friend, Dr. Mauricette Lemerrier offered me to think about setting up music therapy workshops for autistic children and adolescents. We started these activities in 1981 in the department of Dr. Paule Cabrol, at the Psychiatric Hospital of Fleury les Aubrais which later became the Loiret Department Hospital Georges Daumézon. In order to equip myself with more complete skills I was accepted in training of the DU (University Diploma) of music therapy that you had just created at the University of Paris VII.

5/ What is your experience with music therapy?

I have developed the design and animation of music therapy activities in Fleury les Aubrais, Orleans and Paris in various hospitals and specialized centers for children and adults suffering from a wide variety of pathologies, psychosis, autism, head trauma, addictions and psychosocial disorders, as well as elderly people with Alzheimer's. I was fortunate enough to practice what I consider to be really music therapy practices, i.e. paramedical practices, with indications, therapeutic objectives, management protocols, regular evaluations, always working as a team, even in cases where I was animating the sessions alone. I have benefited from a very strong involvement of the heads of departments and various members of the teams, on the creation and development of these activities, child psychiatrists, neurosurgeons, psychologists, speech therapists, nurses, educators and nursing assistants and could have encounters with families. I emphasize these aspects of my career, because I find too often and with regret, that the "so-called" practices of art therapies are often in fact activities of occupational animation with something like a "varnish" of art therapies for publicity. I have essentially implemented active music therapy practices, in individual and group settings combining receptive dimensions through the use of broadcast sound spaces. I have also designed many sound spaces for relaxation practices, receptive and active music therapy, personal development.

In view of my experiences in music therapy, what I would like to convey is that the most possible value compared to other therapeutic practices such as psychomotricity, speech therapy, physiotherapy, psychotherapy, etc. is that it offers this possibility of intense sharing moments that can be very driving in processes that allow for significant improvements in health state. It offers this possibility, beyond the "patient/therapist status" that endures, not to remain in the experience of this dimension. Sometimes it is even possible to place the patient in the center. I have fabulous memories of sessions that illustrate this approach. A young woman, in her bed, emerging from a coma during a neurosurgery session, in the presence of members of her family, began to impulse a rhythm by scraping a tambourine with her fingertips, which allowed me to support her rhythmic desire with various instruments, to get her to amplify her gestures, and then to train the members of her family present to integrate into this dynamic with maracas. And in steps, it was this patient who took this small group to dance by clapping their hands, welded by the very sustained rhythm that she gradually began to produce. I could also mention in this same idea, a woman of Cambodian origin, very introverted, suffering from cerebrolesions. During a session involving two speech therapists and a physiotherapist, instead of asking her to reproduce instructions on instruments or by voice, I proposed her to teach us typical gestures of Cambodian dances, with hands and then the whole body, and then to teach us the song that was associated with it. It was fabulous. Finally, in the field of autism, I also think of many cases, people who refused any musical instrument, any

body contact, any dance. Starting from the body or vocal stereotypes of these patients, so starting from their universes, their rhythmic investments, finally, it was possible to open them on musical practice, dance, singing and access to verbal language for some of them. This added-value of the possible sharing of moments via music can be a major asset.

6/ Has the practice of music therapy changed your relationship with music?

Even though I am invested in computer-assisted music, I believe that music therapy has strengthened me in my carnal approach to sound, in my questions about trance music, both in listening and in creation, in my reflections on what I have called sound somesthesia, the perception of sounds through general somesthesia and not through the auditory system. Music therapy has pushed me into my desire to go beyond cultural barriers while recognizing the exceptional riches of all cultures and the interest of mobilizing them. It also led me to pay attention to the quality of communication between musicians which, finally, can often be less intense than what we can sometimes live and observe in active music therapy session, even with patients emerging from coma! Another point on which my investment in music therapy has changed my relationship with music is that it has led me to become aware of the cultural and artistic exclusions and discriminations suffered by sick and disabled people of all ages. I came from the world of culture, I had the pleasure of being able to access teachings, shows, how could I not have wondered about taking care of children and adults in music therapy without worrying about the frequent impossibility for them to access it? How can we not question the relevance, the coherence of such care with the maintenance for these people of these exclusions? I have not been able to have a look that would reduce people in care to their illness and/or disability, and I have therefore asked myself questions about the accessibility of musical practices and, more generally, about cultural rights, including the right of all to be able to participate freely in cultural life. This access should not be confused with access to art therapy care. (1)

7/ Have you met psychoanalysis on your way? (People, concepts...) What did it do for you (or not!)?

I took a few courses at university in psychology, but I didn't really have a solid education and I never felt the need to follow a psychoanalysis; On the other hand, in the 70s I had the opportunity, through friends, to live a few weeks of internships of what was called "bioenergy", carried by the currents of thought stemming from the reflections of Alexander Lowen and Wilhelm Reich. The analytical dimension of their work is based on Freud's work in reference to the economic dimension of his first topic. These approaches have made me aware of the transference and counter-transference dynamics very important to know in a practice of music therapy.

Even if I don't have a psychoanalytical training, concepts of this domain have nurtured and helped me in some practices and realizations.

- The "Moi-peau", a psychoanalytic concept of Didier Anzieu, this feeling of being a unified person, distinct from the rest of the phenomena, is based on the skin. It interested me because it allows to offer a greater place to the body which was for some until then the "poor parent" of psychoanalysis.
- The concept of "sound envelope" that you have largely supported by his side. Personally, I really like the term "sound bath" which refers us to what I have called "sono somesthesia" and which plays a key role in our relationship to music in both cultural and therapeutic practices.

- The concept of "thalassale regression" supported by the psychoanalyst and neurologist Sandor Ferenczi to evoke the existence, in humans, of the impulse desire to return to the primitive ocean interested me a lot and anyway I have used sound spaces based on sea noises, and also of an intrauterine sound environment.

- The concept of "group illusion" created by Didier Anzieu which can be useful in the face of dimensions, fusion sensations, communion that can lead to confusions between statutes and impressions, during artistic events, concerts, yoga sessions, music therapy, even political meetings.

- The concept of "transitional object and spaces" by Donald Winnicott that interests me in reflections on the use of sound objects and even immaterial sound substances especially in singing.

What would you like to emphasize in conclusion?

It seems to me quite unavoidable, as a singer, musician, composer as well as music therapist, to engage in multidisciplinary reflections and approaches; the psychoanalyses opens many windows and horizons, but we also need anthropology, sociology, neurosciences and as far as I'm concerned, ethology has brought me a lot for my involvement in the field of music therapy, because by studying how animals use sound, we learn a lot about ourselves.

- (1) Knowing André for many years, I can testify to the strength of his commitment to the associations and ministerial bodies concerned in the defence of the "right for culture" in all its forms, for people with disabilities and/or diseases, and this not without significant results.

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Functional music on Amazon, Deezer etc.

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