

## MUSIC THERAPY FOR SINGERS: EMOTIONAL UPDATE PROCESSES



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### Abstract

This paper presents a study focused on music therapy with musicians, specifically, on the use of the singing voice as a therapeutic tool. Although there has been previous research on music therapy with musicians, there is little literature addressing work with professional singers. The objective of this study is to contribute to the literature of the discipline, providing information on music therapy conducted with music professionals from a vocal perspective. The scientific literature related to the application of music therapy with singing voice in the self-realization process of a professional singer has been reviewed, analyzing the theoretical foundations of music therapy, the methods and techniques used. The methods used and the activities carried out in the music therapy sessions are described, and the results obtained are presented, which show positive effects on the personal development of the participant. The conclusions highlight the contribution of this work to an under-researched area pointing out the need for more precise evaluation methods and future research in this little-explored field is suggested.

**Keywords:** Vocal music therapy, self-realization, professional singer, humanistic therapy, personal development.

### BACKGROUND

"This is just a seed that will one day blossom.  
That he will look for a thousand colors to be able to combine  
And with its new nuances, enrich, preserve,  
And complete the beauty of this musical garden." C.M.

Music therapy work with musicians is something that has been previously investigated by several professionals from various approaches (Lee, 1996, 2003; Bruscia, 2014; Ponce de León y Olmo, 2017; Gontijo et al. (2020); Muñoz Cano (2022); López Calvache, 2013; among others). In any case, the literature found regarding other research topics is relatively scarce, and even more so, the work done with a professional singer. This work is a contribution to the music-therapeutic literature on music therapy performed by music professionals from the vocal point of view. It joins other studies carried out with professional musicians and aims to complement this information from a more specific point of view where the vocal will be explored in depth since both the music therapist in training and the participant are professional singers. It is for this reason that this study is relevant, as it provides data on the work with music therapy focused on the singing voice, in addition to having the purpose of deepening the self-realization and personal development of a professional singer.

This study and the work with the participant are based on three basic pillars: the process of emotional actualization and self-realization through music therapy, the role of music and particularly the voice in this process, and music therapy work with professional musicians.

### **Towards a Definition of Self-Actualization**

Different psychological currents have widely studied the concept of self-actualization, and it has become a fundamental theme in the understanding of human development and psychological well-being. Self-actualization refers to the process of personal development in which one seeks to reach one's full potential and satisfaction in different areas of life. For singers, self-actualization can also involve developing their vocal ability and emotional connection to their music, fulfilling their career, and contributing to society through their art. Self-actualization is a fundamental concept in humanistic psychology and has been studied and developed by various authors.

For Maslow (1968), self-actualization is the innate tendency of human beings to realize their potential to achieve fulfillment and satisfaction in their lives. For Rogers (1968), self-actualization is an ongoing process of personal growth that occurs through self-determination and unconditional acceptance of oneself.

The importance of the concept of self-realization lies in its quality as a basic need of every human being, and its search can be an engine for the realization of personal goals.

In Rogers' (1981) client-centered therapy, self-actualization is one of the main therapeutic goals. The therapist aims to help the patient achieve self-actualization, which involves becoming the person she is capable of being. To achieve this, the therapist must create a therapeutic environment that facilitates the patient's self-discovery and self-development (Fontgalland, 2012). The goal is for the patient to learn to trust their own experience and to trust themselves to reach their full potential.

As the patient delves deeper into their inner world, they learn to identify and express their needs and desires more clearly. This allows you to make decisions and actions that are in line with your true self and personal values, leading to a greater sense of self-actualization. In therapy based on Maslow's theory (1968), self-realization is the main goal of the therapeutic process. The therapist aims to help the patient achieve self-actualization through the exploration and development of basic human needs. The goal is for the patient to learn how to meet their needs healthily and effectively, which will allow them to reach their full potential. (Fontgalland, 2012)

### **Humanistic Theory of Music Therapy**

Humanistic theory in music therapy is based on the idea that each individual has a unique and valuable potential for growth

and change. This approach focuses on the patient and their needs, and the therapist is considered to be a facilitator in the therapeutic process rather than an expert directing the treatment.

Music therapy uses both active and receptive methods to achieve different therapeutic goals. Active methods involve the patient in music production, while receptive methods involve listening to or responding to the music being played. Improvisation, re-creation, and musical composition are active methods that can help foster emotional expression and improve communication and social interaction (Castrillón, 2017). Receptive methods, on the other hand, involve listening to and responding to music and can be helpful in reducing anxiety and promoting introspection (Torres, 2008).

As for the voice as a therapeutic tool, it is not only considered a means for artistic expression but also as a way of accessing the emotional and personal dimensions of the individual. The voice is an expressive resource that is intimately linked to the identity and history of each person, which makes it a tool of great value in the approach to various psychological and emotional disorders (Torrado, 2022).

There are multiple techniques, such as improvised singing, which is useful in music therapy to help patients release repressed emotions and increase their emotional self-awareness (Cabrera, n.d.); voice therapy, which is a technique used in music therapy and focuses on vocal training and rehabilitation to help patients improve their vocal and communicative ability. (Morante, 2001), embodied voice work, which uses expressive, non-verbal singing and improvisation and works on the development of human potential through improvisation and a mindfulness and listening exercise (Sokolov, 2021), vocal psychotherapy that uses the voice as a therapeutic tool for self-reflection, emotional expression, and personal transformation, through the exploration of the participant's relationship with their voice, vocal expression, and the facilities or blockages that may be present (Austin, 2016).

The use of the voice in music therapy is a powerful tool that can help patients in the process of self-actualization. Techniques involving the voice can improve communication, self-esteem, and emotional connection (Gamella-González, 2023).

### **Benefits of Music Therapy for Professional Musicians**

Music therapy can offer numerous benefits to professional musicians in terms of mental health and emotional well-being, which in turn can improve their musical performance and job satisfaction. According to a study conducted by Gontijo et al. (2020), music therapy brings benefits to professional musicians in the work of creativity and spontaneity, resulting in the enhancement of their self-esteem and musical performance. It can offer

multiple benefits to professional musicians, including reduced stress and anxiety (Muñoz Cano, 2022), depression and expressive exploration (Lee, 1996), improved concentration, attention, and interpersonal relationships, increased job satisfaction, and self-efficacy (Castilla, 2022). These benefits can improve musicians' emotional and mental well-being and, in turn, improve their musical performance and job satisfaction.

In the case of professional singers, music therapy can be a valuable tool for improving professional practice and emotional and mental well-being. However, as mentioned above, the literature on this subject is very scarce. It gives reason to think that it is a topic on which there is still much research to be done and on which important contributions can be made for the development and future research on this specific topic.

### Objectives

The main objective of this study is to provide the music therapy literature with a unique case study that addresses topics that have already been researched but do so by combining elements that have not been addressed following the parameters analyzed in it.

In addition to this main objective, there are other secondary but no less important objectives, which are to systematize and record in a document the knowledge acquired in the practice of music therapy sessions carried out by a music therapist in training who is a professional singer for a participant who is also a professional singer, to know and review the existing literature on music therapy with musicians and the gaps that may exist in it and to generate a future projection for the future of music therapy. I work as a music therapist for the trainee student.

## MATERIALS AND METHOD

### Participant

Participant AA is a 33-year-old woman who currently has no physical, psychological, or mental pathologies. She has a great interest and curiosity in starting a music therapy process since she is a professional musician in the area of singing and has the desire to deepen her personal development. A couple of years ago, he had complicated medical problems that led to depression, which was treated by a psychiatrist who, at the time, prescribed medication (Fluoxetine) that he has been gradually stopping. At the time he started treatment with music therapy, he took the minimum dose supervised by his doctor in order to stop it definitively.

As soon as the music therapy sessions are proposed to the participant, she is asked what aspects she would like to work on in the music therapy sessions. She states that her main interest is personal exploration through music and finding something different from her previous experiences that can provide her with

tools to understand better and fit in with her environment. One of her big concerns is job stability, as she usually works in production in different countries in Europe and cities in Spain, and she would like to find a more stable job that will allow her to settle in a city and stop traveling so much. As stated in the objectives of the case study, the exploration and emotional expression through music was addressed with AA, as both the client and the therapist in training are professional singers. A vocal work that had previous experience was carried out and was deepened by both.

We sought to take advantage of this known and explored terrain to find new approaches from the work with the breath connected to the relaxation, visualization, interpretation, and expression of the sung voice in order to be able to explore the inner and emotional world of AA from a very familiar tool such as the voice. The participant has also studied percussion and played drums. This also allows you to work from a rhythmic point of view and do different physical and physical work than you do with your voice from tools that are also familiar to you. Work was also done with instruments such as the guitar, piano, and traditional Colombian instruments and airs, since AA has a wide background in the traditional music of her country and it is something that stirs emotions and childhood memories in her.

### Objectives

The long-term goal of the participant is to be able to enjoy music as an effective and pleasurable space for emotional work, self-knowledge, and personal development. The therapeutic objectives are to express emotions and mood through music, to improve the relationship and well-being of the client with her environment and with herself, and to work on body awareness. Breathing and relaxation through singing.

### Materials & Activities

For this study, a total of 15 one-hour sessions were carried out, with a variable frequency given the difficulty of the patient's time availability, trying to have two sessions a week, except for problems already mentioned, and in no case a frequency of less than one session per week. Although each session responded to the needs that arose at each moment, a common practice in humanistic music therapy (Bruscia, 2014), all sessions have a basic structure that is described below: all sessions begin and end with the completion of the Mood Assessment Scale (EVEA).T

his tool allows you to know the effect that the session has had on AA's mood. In the first sessions, there was a small verbal exchange of how the client was doing and how she was feeling that day. This had to be eliminated for reasons of competence and responsibility of the therapist-in-training. Then, we entered a phase of relaxation that worked either with breathing exerci-



ses, with listening to music proposed by the therapist in training or chosen by the participant, or with visualization exercises. This selection varied according to AA's needs. It consisted of a phase of preparation for the session, where she could relax her body and mind, leave the worries and worries of the day-to-day, and be able to be calm and focused on working musically on that exploration that was sought with the music therapy sessions. This was followed by a phase of musical intervention that was approached with different techniques through different activities that are narrated below. At the end of each of the sessions, the trainee therapist completed the registration form to record the musical and therapeutic data worked on during the session and recorded the observations of the session in a diary.

### Procedure

For the intervention design of this study, a previous study of the characteristics of the participant, the purposes of this intervention, and her musical skills and tastes has been carried out. This study has focused on the work with the singing voice precisely because of the profession of the participant and that of the therapist, and we wanted to take advantage of the benefits of the singing voice in self-exploration for this study that focuses on the deepening of personal development and the self-realization of AA.

From this first session, we begin to work with the sung voice, focusing mainly on vowels. After a phase of conversation, there is a phase of re-laxation through breathing and listening to music proposed by AA or by the therapist in training. Then we work on emotional exploration where, based on sound, we connect with images and emotions and seek to dive into the inner world of AA to recognize the feelings that arise and the way in which we express them with singing. This is also done with humming, which works from vibration. There is also songwriting with the voice of AA and the bass drum accompanying the singing. It seeks to investigate the things, places, emotions, and people that are important to AA through the lyrics of the song and the solo and duet singing with the therapist in training. In this emotional exploration, the difficulty that AA has in manifesting the emotion of sadness is evident, and therefore, this becomes a target to be treated.

From the fifth session onwards, the emphasis is on musical language rather than verbal language. The next ones had to be done online because the participant had to travel. In addition to this, AA had health problems that affected her vocal folds, and it was not possible to continue with the singing part. Sessions were then held with body percussion and percussion with everyday objects (jars, glasses, pens). This new way of working made AA relax a lot when it came to improvising because, as she said, being a singer, she tended to judge herself and not allow her voice to come out freely out of fear and because of

the habit of permanent self-evaluation that she does in her professional work. A lot of work was done on improvisation with percussion and the evocation of important memories in AA's life. A new goal was then established, which was to ensure that AA could sing in a way that forgot self-censorship and that it could enjoy singing and everything that could arise through it, not only therapeutically but also interpretatively.

So, in the following sessions, work began to be done to resume the use of the voice. Little by little, the voice was incorporated. In the last sessions of the therapeutic process, there was a work focused on the interpretation of songs solo and in duo with the therapist in training and AA, who showed great enjoyment in making music with the therapist. It should be mentioned that AA began to use music in her day-to-day life to reach states of calm in moments before making important decisions or having complicated conversations, and this shows that the activities carried out in the sessions were effective and replicated by her in her day-to-day life. In the last session, there was an evaluation of the whole process with AA. The moods and activities carried out were re-called, and AA said that she was able to take elements from the sessions to connect with them differently with her day-to-day, especially with Colombian music, and this has made her want to make closer contact with this music again and use it to reconnect with herself.

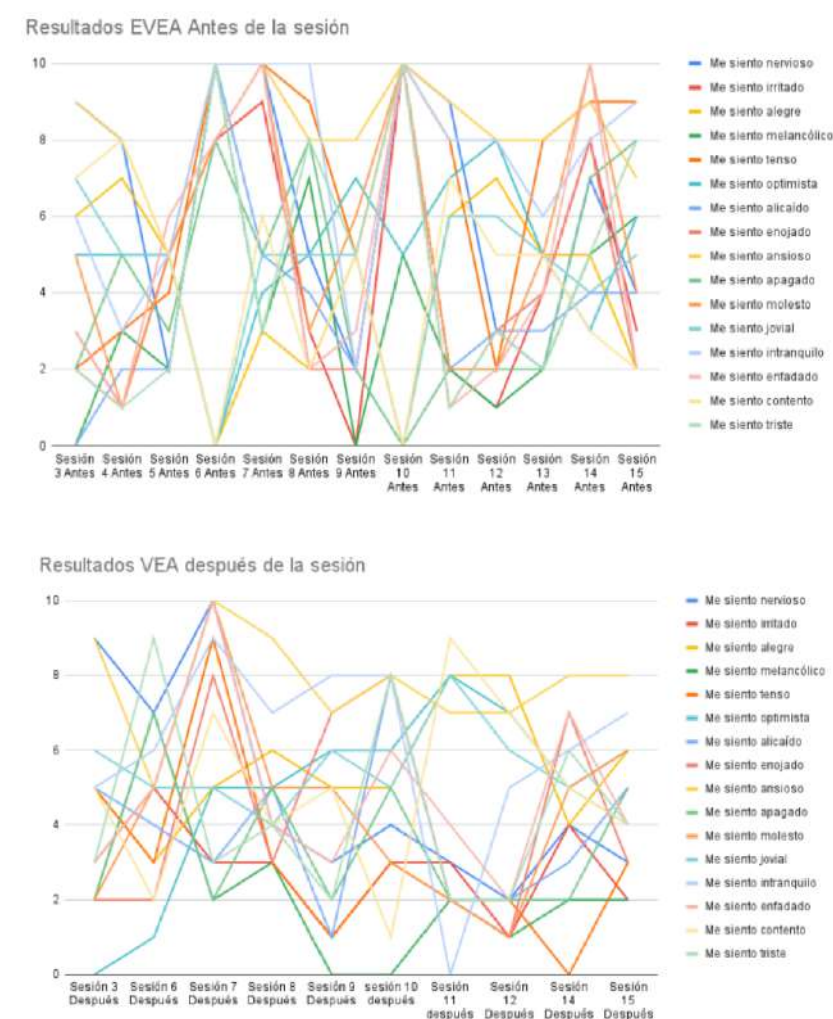
### Analysis of results

EVEA Questionnaire (Figure 1): The comparative analysis reveals, firstly, that there is a qualitative difference in the nature of the emotions experienced before and after each music therapy session, especially with regard to emotions such as anxiety or anger. These differences become more prominent as the sessions progress, suggesting that the training acquired during the previous sessions contributes positively to the results obtained in the subsequent music therapy sessions. This observation underscores the importance and effectiveness of the music-based therapeutic approach in influencing participants' emotions. The results indicate that music therapy not only has an immediate impact on the feelings experienced after each session but also generates progressive learning in emotional regulation as the treatment progresses. This positive development suggests that the techniques and strategies employed during the Music therapy has a cumulative and beneficial effect on the emotional well-being of participants.

Log sheets (Figure 2): A line chart is presented that represents in points the data recorded throughout the different sessions. These points allow you to observe trends and patterns over time. In addition, trend lines have also been plotted to help infer how the data would behave should the sessions continue in the future. In terms of the degree of participation, both the dots and the trend line show a high degree of consistent involvement over time. The same happens with the emotional and

**Figure 1.**

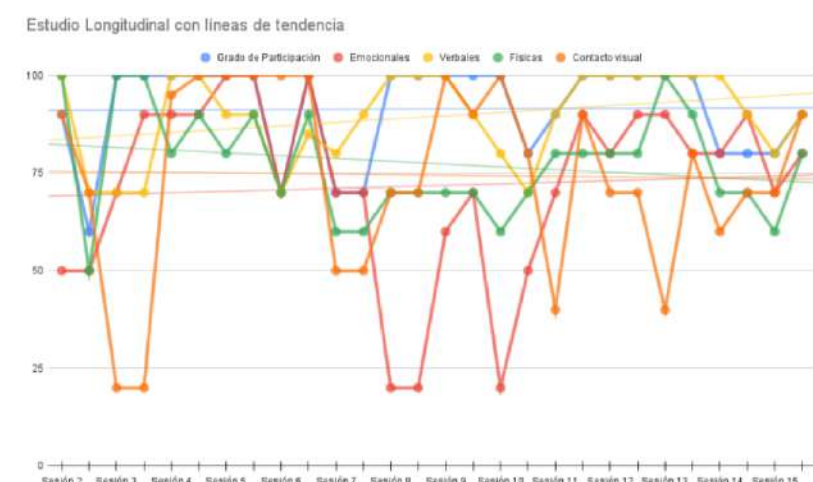
Pre- and post-session benchmarking



Note: comparative pre-test and post-test relationship of VEA results in the sessions. Own elaboration.

**Figure 2.**

Study of registration sheets



Note: Relationship between Degree of participation, emotional management, verbal and physical interactions, and eye contact. Own elaboration

eye contact variables. Still, in this case, the trend line shows a slight upward inclination, which may suggest that, with more sessions, greater training would cause a progressive improvement in the patient's attention and relaxation. Which helps explain the downward trend in physical variables. Regarding the verbal variables, despite the fact that in the comparative analysis, there is a tendency to decrease between the beginning and the end of the session, probably due to greater relaxation, in the analysis throughout the process, there is a pronounced upward trend, which would indicate that with the progress of the sessions, The patient is more able to express herself verbally.

## RESULTS

The approach of music therapy, based on humanistic psychology focused on the client and self-realization, has proven to be effective for AA and has opened a door for the participant in the face of her restlessness and interest in deepening her personal development. The use of music as a therapeutic tool has allowed her to explore and express emotions, improve her relationship with her environment and with herself, and work on her self-knowledge and self-exploration. Through therapeutic singing, the participant has achieved a deep connection with her body, focusing on breathing, relaxation, and vocal expression.

This has contributed to her self-recognition and given her new tools to enjoy singing more expressively and therapeutically. This was a way to approach her craft from another perspective: in music therapy sessions, singing is a channel through which AA expresses, explores, and everything is valid; anything goes. This is a great luxury that cannot be given in singing class sessions, and for her, it was a great personal discovery and a very powerful tool for self-exploration. Music therapy has provided a safe and judgment-free space for the participant, allowing her to explore her emotions and important memories. The trusting environment created by the therapist-in-training has facilitated AA's personal growth and contributed to her emotional well-being.

Finally, it can be stated that the participant has found benefits both personally and professionally through music therapy. In addition to her quest for self-actualization and personal development, AA has discovered the therapeutic effects that music can have on her profession as a singer.

Although the case study focuses on a single participant, AA, the results obtained may be useful in understanding the potential benefits of vocal music therapy in professional singers facing emotional challenges and seeking further personal development.

## DISCUSSION

The present case study is based on the principles of humanistic psychology. It goes hand in hand with the studies and work do-

ne by Rogers (1959) and Maslow (1968) in terms of transcending basic needs and undertaking a mature search for potentialities as a person, as this was the primary goal of AA. It can be said that the work of these two psychologists was a fundamental guide for the approach and design of the sessions of this study.

Regarding the music therapeutic approach, it can be said that Bruscia's work with respect to music as a form of self-expression and self-exploration was also very revealing for the roadmap of the sessions carried out since music was the means to help connect the patient with her emotions, her sensations, memories, and personal relationships. Passive and active methods were used, and the use of other arts, such as drawing, was also used in the sessions, based on studies such as those of Eizaguirre and Company (2015).

Regarding the voice used therapeutically, the present study had the particularity that the participant was a professional singer. If compared to studies done on people who are not professional singers, such as those by Sokolov (2021), and Austin (2016), there is a more fluid effect on the process because you sing in an unsuspecting way and without professionally judging what you are doing.

Regarding music therapy sessions for professional musicians or singers, this work focuses on a more emotional approach and in the context of personal search. It is closer to the studies carried out by Lee (1996), who surveyed the emotional exploration of a pianist in palliative care.

As can be seen, the present case study is based on previous works and studies and has been nourished by them to define the route of the process and the therapy sessions. However, it has also focused on vocal practice due to the characteristics of both the participant and the therapist. It can serve as a complement to other studies that deal with vocal music therapy and the work on personal development carried out by other studies but with different characteristics.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the present study has managed to reflect the positive effects of vocal music therapy on a professional singer in terms of personal development and self-realization, approached from a humanistic music therapy approach. It represents a relevant contribution to a subject that has not been explored in depth. Although the results obtained cannot be generalized due to the specificity of the study, its novel nature and the specific information collected may be useful for other researchers interested in this field.

The entire therapeutic process represented uncharted territory for the therapist in training. It marked the beginning of a path that is just beginning and that, as mentioned in the introduction to this study, is "the seed" that seeks to blossom in a

"musical garden." Therefore, the objective of generating a future projection for the work as a music therapist of the therapist in training and author of this study has been fulfilled. It also stands out for its specificity and its relevance to fill the existing gaps in the bibliography on this subject. Undoubtedly, it offers available input that can benefit other researchers and professionals interested in vocal music therapy and its impact on the personal development and self-realization of professional singers.

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A group of young people, mostly women, are seated in a room, likely a music rehearsal space. They are all wearing black clothing and holding sheet music. They are looking towards the front of the room, suggesting they are participating in a rehearsal or a lesson. The room has a wooden floor and a plain wall in the background.

# MUSIC THERAPY TRANSFORM ENVIRONMENTS PROFESSIONALS