**Transcript of “The Mobile Music Therapist”: RNZ Concert Three to Seven with Bryan Crump, broadcast on 10th April 2024.**

Bryan:

Today is the first day of music therapy week in Aotearoa and my guest today is Emily Hunt, director of the Little Music[al] Caravan, which she takes around the Porirua and Kāpiti districts dispensing music therapy to children. These days she also has a permanent base; a Therapy Hub in Mana, I spoke to Emily earlier about her work and how she got into it. But I began by asking her what she was treating, what is she providing therapy for?

Emily:

So broadly speaking, music therapy is the use of music to support growth and development in a range of areas. And we usually talk about those areas being non-musical areas. So those areas might be things like emotional expression, sensory and emotional regulation, social connection. It might be about communication and language development and at the Little Musical Caravan, we are particularly child-led and strength-based. We work with a neuro-affirming and disability-positive lens. So we do quite a bit of identity work.

Bryan:

What's identity work, Emily?

Emily:

Oh, so identity work is really about developing a person's sense of self. So that could be about developing a sense of agency and control over life. It could also be a bit about celebrating minority groups. So for instance, Rainbow Youth. It could also be about developing a sense of a person's neurodiversity and celebrating that with them. It's really a kind of part of identity formation for these young people.

Bryan:

Why did you choose to focus on children?

Emily:

Oh, so for me, personally, I love to work with children. I've worked with children for most of my life, and I have four children of my own. I was a music educator before I was a music therapist. And I'm really quite passionate about inclusion. Music therapists work with people across the age range, but I've chosen specifically to work with children.

Bryan:

Why did you make the change from a music educator to a music therapist?

Emily:

Oh, gosh, that's a good question. There were several things that led me to music therapy. But what pushed me to make the change was that I felt I could make more difference to people as a music therapist than I could as a music educator. I worked with quite a few kids who had disabilities or were neurodiverse as a music teacher. But music therapy is just a whole other way of working, and a whole other way of helping those kids to grow and develop as individuals.

Bryan:

As an educator what were you specializing in, if anything. Were you a pianist? Was it an instrument or was it singing?

Emily:

Oh, yeah. So I was I was an itinerant music teacher. I taught piano and singing, and also a little bit of harp as well. And I ran some Kodály based music education programs. Those are large group programs that I ran for preschools and a local primary school.

Bryan:

Sorry, Kodály?

Emily:

Kodály, yep.

Bryan:

Is that… as in the Hungarian composer, and musicologist.

Emily:

Yeah, there's a method of music education, based on his work, and that's what I trained in.

Bryan:

Oh, I didn't know that. This is, this is a bit off topic. But I'm curious. What's the basis of Kodály's approach to music education.

Emily:

So the idea is that music is for everyone and Kodály used folk music to teach musical principles. And what's really interesting is that a lot of the folk music has, had very similar elements. So the dropped third is is something that you find in a lot of children's nursery rhymes like…

Bryan:

La la la la la, la (singing: so so mi la so mi/ 5 5 3 6 5 3)

Emily

Yeah, that exactly that. Yeah.

Bryan:

Whatever that might end up being. Yeah, but it's the dropped third.

Emily:

Yeah, so it might be “I’m the king of the castle” (singing: so so mi so la mi so/ 5 5 3 5 6 5 3) So there are certain elements that were kind of universal across the different folk traditions then.

Musical interlude: *Allegro Marcato* from *Children’s Dances* by Zoltán Kodály, played by Jenó Jandó

Bryan:

Did you find Emily as an educator as a teacher, itinerant teacher, was it a frustration that you couldn't do more? Or was it a discovery that hey, this is not just teaching kids musical skills, this is helping them out in other ways.

Emily:

So probably the biggest thing that made the switch for me was discovering that my own kids were neurodiverse and as I got to understand a little bit more about things like sensory needs and realize that actually, I was probably neurodiverse myself. That was the thing that really made the difference for me, and understanding that actually, music can access things like sensory regulation in a quite unique way.

Bryan:

How does your neurodiversity manifest itself?

Emily:

So I have some challenges with sensory processing and my family are a whole flavour of different diagnoses. Yeah. So we're a really interesting bunch of people, very quirky.

Bryan:

Did you think that what music was, in a way had already been helping you and you hadn't realized it?

Emily:

Without a doubt. So as a, as a teen myself, when it was difficult for me to perhaps interact socially with my peers, music provided a really solid grounding and enabled me to exist in a in a large group situation as well where it would be very difficult otherwise.

Bryan:

What's in the caravan, Emily?

Emily:

So the caravan is a bubble. It's packed full of instruments. It's also got toys. It's got sensory tools. It's a quiet little haven that you can hide away in.

Bryan:

Where did you get it? It looks like a classic old New Zealand. This is kind of like the caravan people used to go away on holidays for in the 70s and 60s. Where'd you get that from?

Emily:

Very much. So it actually was built in 1960 and it was being used as a nature library before I bought it, and we’ve renovated it. It's just had a repaint now, what are we four years on? And we towed it back from Waihi Beach would have been the Christmas of 2020.

Bryan:

Why a caravan? I'm thinking you could have done this in another way. Your answer to a previous question. What is in the caravan? You said it's a bubble. And that gives me a clue. Is this a space that you're taking with you? Not just a place to store the instruments or to interact with the kids but as a space that is safe for them?

Emily

You're absolutely right there, Bryan. That's exactly what I'm trying to do with the caravan. There's a practical element in that everything is accessible. Schools don't need to provide an additional space for me to be able to do the music therapy. But there is also there's also definitely an element, it's like a teardrop shape. So inside we kept all of the ribs so that you've got that that sense of a curve over the top of it, and it does just create that kind of sensory bubble. So spaces are really important for music therapy. We want our kids to feel safe.

Bryan:

Why is the curvature important?

Emily:

Oh, so it's that feeling of containment that that grounding. It's like a bubble.

Bryan:

Does a square room not do that?

Emily:

I don't think it does it in the same way as this particular little caravan does. It was, it was exactly what I was looking for. Yeah.

Bryan:

Well, it's just interesting because you know, I'm imagining a neurodiverse kid struggling and everyone's thinking well why? What's wrong? I kind of don't get this. In most classrooms. You're surrounded you're in a box, you know? You're literally in a box. It's all square, isn't it? So, so the design even of a space is important, as well as its acoustic?

Emily:

Yes, I think so. Definitely. And certainly some of the big learning environments that you see in schools now can be quite challenging for our neurodiverse kids.

Bryan:

This is what the trend, it's not the first time it's happened. This trend towards open plan classrooms because I remember that back in the 70s.

Emily:

Yeah, yeah, definitely. And providing those withdrawal spaces for our kids is a really important part of helping them to feel safe to learn.

Bryan:

How far do you travel with the caravan?

Emily:

Oh, so we are based in Porirua. But I do travel up the coast, as far as Paraparaumu, once a week and I've also travelled down as far as Newlands in towards Wellington.

Bryan:

When did you open the Mana Therapy Hub.

Emily:

So we just passed our one year anniversary here. I originally set up a little pop-up space in central Porirua, would have been the year before, because COVID was wreaking havoc on my access to my preschoolers, so I needed a space to be able to see them. And that pop-up was so successful that I decided actually I’d look for a larger space and found the Therapy Hub, which is actually quite a sizable building, and I'm letting the rooms out to other therapists. So it's creating a really nice opportunity to connect in with other therapists from other disciplines.

Bryan:

I was speaking to Emily Hunt. She's the director of the Little Music[al] Caravan, mobile music therapy service, but these days she also has a permanent base in Mana, the Therapy Hub. How does that complement what you do, the Hub, complement what you do in the caravan.

Emily:

The Hub provides our base. It's where the caravan goes in and out from. We also have a large music room here. Which means that we can provide music therapy services to kids, teens and young adults that we perhaps couldn't manage to get to in the caravan. And it gives us a little bit more flexibility as well.

Bryan:

What is it that you're trying to do when you're giving a child or an adult music therapy?

Emily:

I take a quite specific line in that I try to be neuro-affirming and disability-positive. So I'm not working from a medical model of deficit. I'm working very much from a strengths-based approach, which sees people very much as individuals with opportunities for, for growth and to find themselves a little bit as well.

Bryan:

Which sounds like you hope that after somebody has had therapy with you that they are more comfortable in their own skin, that they may be more confident at expressing themselves and more able to cope with whatever the world might be throwing at them.

Emily:

Yes, that's very much what we would hope to be able to achieve. Sometimes we work with people for a very short time. For example, if somebody is experiencing emotional distress, it might be that that's just a short piece of work for us to help them process whatever's causing the distress, and then to be able to build up their confidence and their resilience and move on with their lives. Or it might be that we walk alongside that young person for a longer period of time. It just depends really on what that person needs.

Bryan:

Why might music help a person with this? Say rather than having a therapist, which might explain rationally you don't have to worry about anything? Or why don't know some kind of pharmaceutical solution, antidepressant whatever some medicine, what is music doing? That helps people to feel more comfortable in their own skin to accept who they are, to feel more confident about expressing themselves and to be able to cope with the world around.

Emily:

So music is quite uniquely placed to be able to help people. I do believe that we are all innately musical and that goes way back even as a mother and infant with that that dance very early in life there’s a kind of musicality to those initial interactions. So I think there's an element there of music being a very accessible tool then. And you don't need to use words when you're making music. So you can use music to express yourself emotionally. You can use music to communicate when words are difficult to find or perhaps…

Bryan:

Words can be overpowering sometimes, can't they?

Emily:

Yes, absolutely.

Bryan:

Or, and this could be counterintuitive, I mean they can be overpowering and blunt at the same time.

Emily:

Yes, yes, words can be tricky. But then we can also use words in positive ways as well. One of the things that we do quite a lot of is song-writing. And that might be making parodies for existing songs or it might be improvising and creating new lyrics. And that can be quite powerful people discovering something about themselves that perhaps they didn't know before.

Bryan:

So, Emily, the caravan and the Hub together. How long have you been working as a therapist now? Just in the Mana/ Porirua area?

Emily:

I have been a music therapist since 2019. So that brings me up to five years. Yeah.

Bryan:

So a relatively short time, and maybe too short a time to ask this question, but I am curious, and that is do you think the mental health of our children is, is there more need? That's what I'm trying to say actually more need? Now for what you're doing? And there was say five years ago.

Emily:

I would say that the pandemic had a massive impact on people's mental health generally. We're just kind of coming out of that in some ways now, but certainly we're getting a lot of referrals through and also for our younger kids that maybe didn't get the opportunity to, to socialize with playgroups in that period. So I think there'll be a period of adjustment whilst we kind of work through the impact of COVID-19. Yeah.

Bryan:

How many mums and dads do you come into contact with, or guardians, could also do with a bit of music therapy?

Emily:

Yeah, absolutely. And sometimes we do do family therapy work as well. Music’s a great way to connect. It just provides so many possibilities.

Bryan:

Can you imagine a world without music Emily? Well, if you can, is that some kind of hell?

Emily:

I would hate a world without music. It would be a very dull place.

Bryan:

An impossible place for me. I can't imagine I mean, I honestly don't know if I would want to exist. Well, if I mean, if you didn't even know that what you never had, maybe you could cope but once I got hooked into music, and so much a part of my life. I'm not a therapist, but I can't live without it.

Emily:

Hmmm. It gives richness to life, doesn't it?

Bryan:

What's your own music therapy?

Emily:

My own music therapy? Oh, gosh. I, I tend to play piano actually. When I need some time for myself.

Bryan:

Any pieces in particular?

Emily:

Things like some Beethoven, some Debussy, perhaps. I quite lean into some of the French stuff as well. I really like some, the Gabriel Grovlez music. Yeah.

Bryan:

The theme of music therapy week this year is looking back moving forward and I guess that’s an acknowledgement of the history of the profession. And I thought it'd be interested to hear your thoughts on who you owe a greatest debt to, in terms of who's influenced you and your approach to what you do now.

Emily:

There's probably two people. One was a singing teacher. When I was in my teens who worked at what was then a special school where I grew up and she organized a concert with the young people there. And when I grew up, unfortunately, disabled people were often segregated from their peers. So it was really the first time that I'd come across people that were different. And it really was quite an eye opener. And I've carried that with me, yeah, for my whole life. And the other person would probably be one of my research supervisors, Carolyn Shaw, who's really quite a remarkable person. And it was really through contact with her that I was able to start working through my own visible and hidden disabilities and to come to understand my identity as a music therapist, through that.

Bryan:

Have you got plans to grow the Hub? Maybe get another caravan?

Emily:

(Laughs.} Oh, it I think I just need to stabilize things first! I’m the kind of person that tends to have these big ideas and then jump before I've totally thought it through. But I've got a team that works with me now so anything is possible.

Bryan:

Emily, it's been lovely talking with you. Thanks so much for your time today.

Emily:

Thanks for having me on.

Musical interlude: *Le Pastour* from *L’Almanach aux Images* by Gabriel Grovlez, played by Pater Katin.

Bryan:

Music by Gabriel Grovlez the shepherd [Le Pastour] from L’Almanach aux Images. Peter Katin was the pianist. And before that, you heard me talking with the music therapist, Emily Hunt, who runs a music therapy Hub in Mana, but also dispenses medicine via her mobile music therapy caravan around the Porirua and Kāpiti districts. And in between the start and the end of the interview. We played a bit of music by Zoltán Kodály his Allegro Marcato from his Children's Dances played by Jenó Jandó on the piano.