

# TRIBUTES TO PROF MERCÉDÈS PAVLICEVIC (1955 - 2018)

By Prof Gary Ansdell

[This piece is a more detailed version of an address given at Mercédès' funeral on 25 June 2018.

It is also being published in VOICES.]

About six weeks ago I was sitting with Mercédès and she said:

"I want you to talk at my funeral ... about my work...". She paused...

"But it's not just work, because it's been my life too...". And after a further pause she came up with the right word - "It's endeavour - that's it!" Endeavour - what we strive for, struggle with, dedicate our energy and attention to...

Actually, endeavour was everything in Mercédès' life apart from her equal dedication to family and friends...

"But don't just give them a list of achievements ... BORING!... and don't go on longer than 4 minutes!".

So these were my orders (not for the first time!). A tall order... How the hell to summarise Mercédès' endeavour of 40 years in 4 minutes?

So I threw back the challenge: "We've got to find the nub of it all... what image comes to mind?".

Through the fog of the morphine this came quick as a flash:

"I'm at home in Joburg in 1976... I'm practising Bach on the piano, and close by Soweto is burning. My sister and her boyfriend are out there manning the barricades... whilst I'm in here practising Bach. I'm feeling guilty, useless, but at that time activism isn't my thing".

Here's the nub of the next 40 years' endeavour: a powerful but simple question Mercédès asked herself:

What's the use of music and the arts in times and situations of trouble, challenge, stress, struggle?

Mercédès lived this question through her endeavour: training as a music therapist in London, doing music therapy with so many people, researching a pioneering doctoral thesis, writing and editing 7 books and endless articles, talking at endless conferences... Then setting up the first music therapy training in Africa,



Mercédès at the open research day 'Musical Wellbeing'  
(20 June 2012, London)

battling on academic committees, training music therapists, supervising doctoral students in London... painting pictures, doing conflict transformation work in the Lebanon recently... I could go on and on... [Oh dear, this is the boring list of achievements I was told not to do!].

So back to the nub of it: What was the truth that she pursued through all this endeavour? ("Truths, plural, please dear!" I was corrected).

Mercédès cared about ideas, so we should also care for her ideas as we remember her now. These developed directly from her practical work, which we could divide into two phases:

The first phase begins with her early work as a music therapist in Scotland when she worked with people with chronic schizophrenia who seldom communicated verbally and seemed so isolated. But when Mercédès played music with them she found how much they actually communicated of themselves musically. Did their music sound flat or florid? Quiet or loud?

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Smooth or rough? Bursting with energy, or fading away?

A lightbulb moment came for Mercédès when she discovered the new theory about non-verbal communication the developmental psychologists Colwyn Trevarthen and Daniel Stern were developing then. They were studying early communication between mother and infant and seeing just how musical it is...whilst Mercédès was finding how her schizophrenic patients were reverting to nonverbal musical communication when words had failed them.

Mercédès was soon studying with Colwyn Trevarthen for her doctoral research, and developed her own theory of non-verbal communication through music - which she called 'dynamic form'. We communicate ourselves musically - through feelingful forms that are dynamic, ever-changing. As someone once said, music sounds how emotions feel - both within and between us. The mature version of this theory is now known as 'communicative musicality'.

The therapy lies in how client and therapist read each other's dynamic forms through musicking and then create a shared musically dynamic form, which helps free-up people and their expressive communication.

Mercédès' practical and theoretical work in this area was ground-breaking and led to an output of articles, books, conference presentations and teaching. Music therapists still say to me that only after reading her books did they understand for the first time what they were really doing!

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But this was just Phase One of her innovation! Fast-forward now to Phase 2, when Mercédès has moved back to South Africa in the 1990s and is leading the first music therapy training programme in Africa at Pretoria University. Here the traditional Western model of music therapy jars against the culture and context there, and this inspires Mercédès to get thinking again, and tinkering with her ideas. By this time she

and I are joyfully thinking-together over early email systems.... asking some thorny questions:

Is the idea of communicative musicality enough of a guide for doing music therapy in Africa? Is the Western practice of the private therapy room for an individual client enough? In short our answer was 'no' to both of these questions, and from our thinking - along with an international group of music therapists - we eventually come up with a new approach: Community Music Therapy, which actively links the private and public, the intimate and the performative within music therapy. This idea has been doing quite well internationally over the last nearly 20 years, and Mercédès was a crucial architect of this significant shift of thinking.

The connection between Mercédès' early and late work is that you need the craft and knowledge of how to cultivate musical intimacy in order to help create broader musical community. The two phases of her endeavour join together the continuum of how music can help people in times of trouble...

I hope you see now how Mercédès found an answer to that question that had bothered her when playing Bach whilst Soweto was burning - What's the use of music and the arts in times and situations of trouble, challenge, stress, struggle?

She could say with confidence: Yes, music and the arts are important in times of trouble: in traditional, or more radical forms of therapy; in social and political action; in the everyday life of any community. Mercédès' work helps to explain how this is so...

Music and the arts stir us up, shift us around, challenge us, unstick us. When we get static they're dynamic; when we get too fluid they offer form; when we get isolated they join us together; when we get too earth-bound they lift us, when we get too pompous they remind us that fun and joy are crucial.

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But this truth reaches further than just talk about the goodness of the arts. It also says something important about our lives, for we are all 'dynamic forms': We quicken, we come together as people, we transform constantly, we fall apart, we still.

Mercédès was a dynamic form if there ever was one! Her favourite words: energy, combust, fizz ... her main put-downs: dull, boring, limp, no energy... or that non-verbal flick of the wrist many of us know well... meaning anything from 'who knows?' to 'piss off!'.

She was often energetic, sometime spiky, but also gentle and smooth, intimate and social. She was usually ready to stir up and disrupt... but also to elegantly and skillfully put things together and smooth things out... to coax the best out of people or situations... to nurture courage, boldness, faith, love...

The fruit of Mercédès' endeavour is becoming clear, and is our gift from her: an influential legacy of thinking and practice for music therapy, and beyond music therapy... but also a life-lesson for us all:

Stir it up... get moving... be bold... share your energy... be naughty sometimes and shake things up... but also... create beauty together, party, believe in people, cherish each other...

And also... know when to leave, know how to let go - with dignity and grace.

Good Endeavour, Mercédès!

# A TRIBUTE TO MERCÉDÈS

By Dr Simon Procter

Much more than a music therapist, Mercédès was a thinking music activist who brought passion, eloquence and discipline to bear within all she did. She was passionate about people and what life had to offer people, and hence also passionately committed to supporting those who were displaced, disadvantaged or discriminated against. She steadfastly opposed restrictions on how people should think, act or feel whilst simultaneously holding them to account for their thinking, actions and even feelings.

She loved not only music but all things aesthetic and creative. She was probably the most well-read and well-travelled person I have ever met, but she was no dilettante – she expected people (including herself) to work to understand each other's traditions, perspectives and cultures, especially where this might be difficult. She could integrate thinking from both African and Western traditions precisely because she had spent so much time working within both to find understanding.

Multilingual and at home around the world, she scorned simplistic thinking (in just one language or from one cultural perspective). Her publications are so widely read thanks to her ability to address different audiences, whether in writing or in person. Her supervision of doctoral students and her relationships with her colleagues were so valuable because they combined relentless challenge with relentless spurring on to be courageous.

Mercédès expected the maximum of everyone. She went to great lengths to encourage students to express themselves, to allow their true motivations to come through in their writing, but at the same time she would shoot down a weak argument or tendentious claim with the raising of an eyebrow.

Mercédès refused to be trammelled by conventions – accepted definitions might be interesting but were certainly not to be accepted.

Likewise, music had broad boundaries for her and was inseparable from other forms of creativity and collaboration. This enabled her to challenge both established thinking and habitual practice. And yet her pragmatism meant she would work tirelessly within imperfect systems to make things better for people who needed them to be better.

Recently I worked closely with Mercédès on our Erasmus Plus programme focusing on musical support for migrant populations – something that she felt passionately about. For her, music, broadly conceived, practically done and critically considered, was a means of intervention in the injustices of the world. In this she has inspired a multitude of people, not just within music therapy and not just in the UK, but far beyond both, and her influence is immense.

And yet as eminent as she was, Mercédès was essentially a collaborator: her working (and close friendships) with both Gary Ansdell and Rachel Verney not only reverberated across music therapy, but shaped the organisation Nordoff Robbins as it is today.

I frequently sought her advice. If Mercédès had proofread this, she would have pointed out how many words I was wasting, questioned whether I had really communicated what I meant to and ultimately told me to ditch the hagiography. But this once, I will go against her counsel.

# A TRIBUTE TO MERCÉDÈS

## By Phoene Cave

Mercédès was about connection and relationship and communication and therefore it is very difficult for me to write of anything other than those things when I think of her. These are personal thoughts and memories.

We kept in vague touch after we both left Nordoff Robbins, but whenever we spoke or met, it felt like only the day before - straight back into whatever subject attracted us at the time.

I have a passion and enthusiasm for life and it was such a great joy to meet another who was the same and who I could be completely myself with - that says much of her warmth and openness if she liked and trusted you.

Towards the last 6 months of her life we kept in radio contact through WhatsApp voice messages, images and audio recordings. I didn't even know WhatsApp audio messages were possible and I know I have those still, just a cheery "hello cherie thinking of you, how's things" friendly call as we 'checked in'.

I was blessed to be able to speak with her the week before her death to tell her I loved her very much but still I can't quite believe she is not here, which makes this a slightly incoherent if heartfelt memorial.

My resounding memory is her laughter and how much we giggled together (when we gave ourselves the opportunity to stop working so blooming hard).

I worked in Music Services and she in Research at Nordoff Robbins. There was never a sense of division between our senior management and middle management roles - we were simply two women who needed to get away from our desks (more often than we actually did) and walked at lunchtime in Hampstead Heath.

She used to come to the Community Choir I set up there when she could and her presence was always a pleasure, (except when she was distracted or started to get bossy!)

We both ended up working briefly (on different days) in a female prison, after another beautiful music therapist, Helen Leith, died too young of cancer.

It was wonderful to have another who understood the complexity and challenge of that work - it was 'hardcore' but a great learning and something we both felt humbled by i.e. to be alongside complex women who had endured a great deal. Some were also quite unhinged and thankfully our joint sense of humour helped us debrief.

Her writings of course have inspired me and my bookshelf is full of her wisdom in that respect. I loved working with her as she cut through all the crap and called a spade a spade. Sometimes challenging to be on the receiving end but in so many ways, it was just a much more simple and straightforward communication.

My heart breaks for her dear wife Mary - a love so warm and strong is rare. I remember when they met and Mercédès' joy at that union. I feel so incredibly lucky to have known her and can only pass on my deepest wishes of love and healing to her family and loved ones.

I hope I continue to hear her laughter continuing to ring for a long time yet.

# A TRIBUTE TO MERCÉDÈS

By Nicky (Nicolette) O'Neill

Mercédès first day at Nordoff Robbins London Centre in her new teaching role on the NR course in 1995 is etched on my mind, as is her response to me. She was at a desk head down, in discussion with Helen Patey. I was doing an ice cream run to the shop as it was a very hot day and that's what we did at Nordoff Robbins in those days! I thought I'd introduce myself and offer her one too. She looked me up and down with a withering look and declined my offer!! Soon after that we became firm friends and then she became my housemate during her twice/year teaching visits. On the other end from the ice cream experience, she became the easiest, warmest and most committed presence within my home. As well as instigating a structure and clarity to our living, including a wash day and no housework for her!! She turned it from a new house into a home, scattering it with her colourful and interesting debris! : Newspapers, books, painting, ingredients for Lebanese food, etc .

Our often weekly life at work (Nordoff Robbins) also overlapped for over 20 years. I was and am an enthusiastic clinician and she loved researching and making a difference to the work. As a Saturday therapy team we were lucky enough to work with her and her team on several occasions.

In 2002 she ever so patiently and diligently guided me through my Masters upgrade. Like so many of us 'more practical' therapists she opened up a whole new world of reading, writing, critiquing and researching. She enriched and opened my world in so many ways. This included our lengthy and in depth knowledge and meeting of each others' families and the detailed supporting and enjoying of each others' chequered love lives!

The most recent work opportunity we shared together started last June 2017, when we were able to employ her as supervisor for an

Oxleas research project. Leana Crookes and I would visit her sweet and colourful house for our allotted hour every few weeks, working on a project re: 2 year olds with complex needs (Toucan project). Working with her again in such an intense and time limited project, had an added poignancy for me, as I knew this would be our last piece of work together. I would often observe her working with Leana as the researcher (I was the clinician researcher), getting vicarious pleasure at witnessing their intelligent, lively, and challenging but so gentle interactions.

In one of my last personal visits to see her, I was granted an audience of over 2 hours! A length of time I would have taken for granted years ago. During and afterwards I knew this was the last lengthy chat we would have and relished it. We did not talk about when she was gone apart from on that occasion me asking the awkward question 'who will be my supervisor when you are not here!' The retort was 'I'm not gone yet. And I still want to be involved with the publication'. She bounced the



Nordoff Robbins Symposium, New York 2002

question of 'who' back to me. I came up with a couple of names, which were dismissed with that inimitable hand wave, until she landed on a colleague who actually gave birth just before she died.

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I will end with a passage from Michael Quoist (1963), which gave me comfort with her death. It is about time, of which she could give so generously when needed:

*You who are beyond time, Lord, you smile to see us fighting it*

*And you know what you are doing*

*You make no mistakes in your distribution of time to men*

*You give each one time to do what you want him to do*

*But we must not lose time*

*Waste time*

*Kill time,*

*For time is a gift that you give us*

*But a perishable gift*

*A gift that does not keep*



World Music Therapy Congress, Oxford

By Dr Stuart Wood



[after Schnittke]

# A TRIBUTE TO MERCÉDÈS

By Dr Neta Spiro,  
Dr Giorgos Tsirir, Camilla  
Farrant and Tamar File

Mercédès, our dear colleague, mentor and friend, died on 4th June 2018.

Music therapist, musician, artist, reader, traveller, researcher, professor... (and the list goes on!) ... Mercédès was many things to so many people in different parts of the world. This multiplicity reflects the richness of Mercédès' personality, talents, interests and work.

Ten years after her music therapy training in London in 1980-81, Mercédès completed her PhD at the Department of Psychology, University of Edinburgh with Colwyn Trevarthen. Entitled "Music in communication: Improvisation in music therapy", this was the first PhD awarded to a Nordoff-Robbins-trained music therapist internationally, and the first to a female music therapist in the UK. Alongside her research, Mercédès remained an active music therapy practitioner and educator throughout her career.

In 1999 she co-instituted South Africa's first accredited music therapy training programme at the University of Pretoria and led it until 2006. She then returned to London to lead the Research Team at Nordoff Robbins. In addition to her role as Director of Research, Mercédès' contribution to the establishment of the MPhil/PhD Research degree programme and of the Research Ethics Committee within Nordoff Robbins were vital.

But it was as members of the research team – as well as in other capacities and roles – that we had the privilege of working with her. Mercédès was passionate and totally committed to practice-led research and this featured in all her endeavours. Her approach was also characterised by sensitivity to all those who are involved in, and touched by, music therapy.

Mercédès posed challenging, yet fundamental questions and highlighted complexity. She questioned assumptions and was prepared to learn from those around her within and beyond music therapy. The inclusion of Neta, as a music psychology researcher, in the Research Team was a reflection of Mercédès' commitment to working with people with expertise in other disciplines. Her interest in interdisciplinary dialogue was also reflected in her appointment as an honorary research associate at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London as well as in the establishment of the Nordoff Robbins research events. Inviting people from different disciplines and organisations was at the heart of these events (Photograph 1). The adventures around research questions, foci and methodologies that debates at these events brought up wouldn't have been possible without Mercédès' respectful and honest, yet provocative, attitude.



Mercédès at the open research day 'Musical Wellbeing'  
(20 June 2012, London)

A key contribution of Mercédès' work lies in her sensitivity and attention to people and their sociocultural contexts. This sensitivity was reflected in the research culture of Nordoff Robbins that she built together with Gary Ansdell and other colleagues. Fuelled by intellectual curiosity and generosity, Mercédès encouraged people to ask questions and reflect on their work. There was no ivory tower research for her – she strove to take the long view and the broad view: to pick up what was important in the world around her and ensure she was ready to be part of this world. This involved

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not only responding to current developments in the field, but also instigating new directions in music therapy practice, theory and research. Mercédès challenged her colleagues and encouraged them to have vigorous discussions. She was particularly eager to support and motivate young practitioner-researchers to enter into research life. She could see the potential in each individual and helped each one to play to their strengths.

Mercédès published with a sensitivity not only to what interested her, but also to what was needed by her colleagues and the professional community more broadly, including books about how to do research and service evaluation, and how to do so ethically. A detailed list of Mercédès' publications and presentations can be found in the Nordoff Robbins Academic and Research Review (1980-2015):

[www.nordoff-robbins.org.uk/academic-review](http://www.nordoff-robbins.org.uk/academic-review)

Mercédès co-authored her last two books with Giorgos and Camilla, and with Tamar's quiet and steady support. Focusing on service evaluation and research ethics respectively, these books were launched at the 2014 BAMT conference in Birmingham (Photograph 2).



Photograph 2: Launching of books at the 2014 BAMT conference

After resigning from her post as Director of Research in 2015, Mercédès carried on as a PhD supervisor at Nordoff Robbins and made a

significant contribution as the Chair of Nordoff Robbins International. Until the final months of her battle with cancer, she also worked tirelessly on the Music And Resilience Support (MARS) project; an Erasmus+ Programme aiming to offer training in psycho-social music intervention within under-resourced, deprived and marginalised communities. In honour of her enormous contribution to this project, the resulting online course has been dedicated to her (<http://www.musicandresilience.net/mars-online-course>). The focus of the MARS project reflects Mercédès' lifelong commitment to working with marginalised communities in different cultural contexts which included her collaboration with MusicWorks in South Africa.



Photo: Celebrating our birthdays in 2012

In addition to hard work, Mercédès knew how to have fun! Long walks on Hampstead Heath and lunch conversations ranging from politics to food recipes were part of daily life with Mercédès. An annual highlight was the joint celebration of our team's Spring birthdays (Photograph 3). Music was at the heart of Mercédès work and fun, and work with Mercédès included playing music all together.

Undoubtedly, Mercédès was a pioneer in the field. She was a bold and highly informed voice in music therapy research. The determination, enthusiasm, curiosity and integrity that she brought to all her work are her living legacy.

We miss you Mercédès.

# A TRIBUTE TO MERCÉDÈS

By Claire Flower

Mercédès.

Some people just seep into your life in such a way that you can't pinpoint the time you first heard about, or met the person. I feel like that about Mercédès. I can't remember what I first read of hers, although I vividly recall being curled up in a chair back in 1997 devouring 'Music Therapy in Context', scribbling notes as I read. And when did we first meet? Who knows, but I do look back on the time she came to my house to interview me for her 'Intimate Notes' book. She, and my young daughter fixed each other with equally beady eyes as we tried to talk music therapy!

Her writing, ideas, and person have woven right through my own life as a music therapist. In recent years, having her as my main PhD supervisor brought us into much closer contact. Mercédès was one of the main reasons I started my PhD. Her thinking and writing 'fitted' with me, but there was plenty of difference between us too, allowing for a creative, and stretching knot-tiness. And certainly no room for complacency in the process. Whenever we talked, whatever I was presenting, I always had the sense that she was looking for something more from me. That isn't to say she was necessarily dissatisfied with what was there, but rather that she had a belief that I, and we, could go further in our thinking, be bolder, be more critical, push it all that bit more. I had it in me if, as she frequently said, I could 'go for it!' If she was one of the reasons I started this doctoral journey, then she is most certainly one of the reasons I'm finishing it too. So for all the prods, pokes, carrots and sticks along the way, all delivered in inimitable Mercédès fashion, I am deeply thankful.

In writing this, I've kept returning in my mind to discussions of literature and poetry that we had over the years, exchanging ideas of good reads, interesting authors, and poems we loved. One stanza of a Gerard Manley Hopkins poem which we shared keeps making its presence felt, so I end with it here. But first (of course, Prof), some context. In discussion at a Phd seminar we, as students, and perhaps even the tutors, had all been merrily embracing a new idea as though it was the next best thing. I forget what it was now, but I do remember Mercédès chipping in pretty sharply to say she didn't agree at all, we were being swallowed up in 'groupthink', and what had happened to our capacity for critical thinking! It was a forceful demand not to neaten the world into the shape we imagined, but rather to ask the difficult questions, allow for some wildness, and be prepared to be awkward. For me, that's the task now, and the best way to take on what she gave me.

*What would the world be, once bereft  
Of wet and of wildness? Let them be left,  
O let them be left, wildness and wet;  
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.*

# A TRIBUTE TO MERCÉDÈS

By Prof Tia de Nora

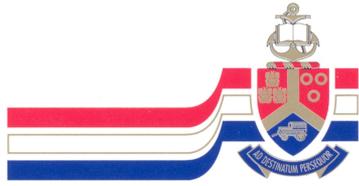
Mercédès inspired so many of us, her colleagues and her friends. She seemed to float a few centimetres above the inessential. You got the impression she had better things to do than obsess about highfalutin theory as a kind of game. But at the same time, she knew that practice could only be of use if it was also intelligent. These qualities are rare. Maybe her focus derived from her ability to create, because Mercédès was creative on so many different levels.

For me, as a colleague, what inspired was her description of music's 'magical moments' – and, characteristically, the term came from the people she worked with; it was not imposed. By this she meant, as most readers already know, peak or optimal times in music when people become highly attuned, 'propelled within a highly fluid musical groove'. Mercédès described, lucidly, how that propulsion transcended difference, redirected impulse, recontextualised circumstance, and, perhaps most importantly, drew people together where other things had failed. Her analysis of these moments and their role as pivotal agents of change, and her insistence that the mechanics of this process could be examined was exceptional. And yet, although Mercédès wrote about 'magic', and although this was extraordinary, her work and her life, to the extent that I knew it, was anti-theatrical, entirely grounded, and in a sense a paeon to the ordinary. It revealed magic's genesis in human practice, produced from concrete and concerted activity, and within reach of anyone.

I am lucky enough also to have experienced a good number of 'magic' moments of friendship with Mercédès. There were the protracted correspondences between her and 'YKW' (an apple tree at the bottom of my garden in Exeter where once she pitched a tent and camped during a symposium on conflict resolution). It was always a joy to receive one of Mercédès hand-painted cards. It was empowering to observe her in action snorting dismissal, as only

Mercédès could, of a silly idea – and there were ample occasions for observing this over the thirteen years I knew her. It was thrilling to be offered an illicit dram passed around in the Wet, Wet, Wet Library after a day-long workshop and before a picnic on the Heath. Her last personal/professional communication to me, Simon Procter and Gary Ansdell was about the PhD students that she supervised at Nordoff Robbins (and which I would be stepping in to help with). She was a professional to the end, in her inimitable way. After a series of terse instructions, she wrote, 'This is all a great relief. Thank you so much and above all, enjoy yourselves! Mercédès'. Mercédès Pavlicivec remains utterly alive in my memory and I know she always will.

Exeter June 2018



University of Pretoria

The music therapy unit at the University of Pretoria and the community of music therapists in South Africa deeply mourn the passing of Prof. Mèrседés Pavlicevic. Mèrседés co-founded the music therapy training programme at the University along with Kobie Swart in 1999. A rigorous, strong foundation was built upon which the profession of music therapy now stands. We honour Mèrседés for her astute leadership and vision, her brilliance, creativity and wisdom, her formidable presence, her kind, genuine interest in everyone she met and for her resolute belief in the power of music. Rest in peace Mèrседés. You will be profoundly missed.

The attached photo taken from the music therapy showcase, celebrating the 15t anniversary of Mt at the University of Pretoria accompanied the text.

