

# Interview with Dr. Petra Kern – Pt. 1

## ***Tell us a little about who you are and how you got to where you are right now.***

I am Dr. Petra Kern. I am a music therapist, researcher, educator, and researcher, and I am the president of the World Federation of Music Therapy. I am also very hands-on with the AMTA student organization. I also lead the Early Childhood Network, and I have the Early Childhood News Letter, which will be an online magazine next year. I have a music therapy consulting business in Santa Barbara, California. I travel a lot. This last year, I was in Brazil, China, Canada, and San Diego. How did I get there? I think it's the passion for the profession that always drives me to do what is needed. But I also had a lot of mentors who gave me the challenges I needed to grow as a professional and as a person, and I think there were many, many people in the field who said, "Petra, why do you do this?" Or "Petra, why don't you do that?" And at first, I thought I didn't have the capabilities to do them, but then you find that they probably know you better than you know yourself. So that's how I got there. A lot of people just thought that I could do things, and I enjoyed the challenge.

## ***What is the World Federation of Music Therapy, and what does the organization do?***

The World Federation of Music Therapy is an international organization, and we bring together music therapy associations and individuals who are interested in developing and promoting music therapy globally. So it's beyond the United States, and we promote the exchange of information relating to clinical practice, research, and education. We discuss accreditation and ethics, and we encourage international collaboration between the different music therapy associations and individuals. We support the recognition of music therapy as a profession in various countries, and we develop and implement projects to monitor current trends and common challenges we face as music therapists in the field. We also organize the World Congress on Music Therapy, which I will talk about more in a bit. As the president, I run the council, which includes 18 people from around the world. The vision of the WFMT is to improve the health and well-being of individuals and populations through music interventions worldwide. On a daily basis, I communicate and answer a lot of questions. Since I was elected in August of 2008, I have answered 2,663 emails! That means there is a lot of global interest in music therapy, and people's questions are really diverse. Sometimes its music therapy students wanting to do an exchange program, sometimes professionals say they want to start a national organization, and sometimes people have questions about credentials. I have even had parents looking for music therapy services. My favorite part is to do new projects and to collaborate with people around the world. It's not uncommon that on a day like today, I will get an email from India, Australia, Italy, and Korea.

## ***How do members of the WFMT meet?***

We meet face to face every three years at the World Conference on Music Therapy, and

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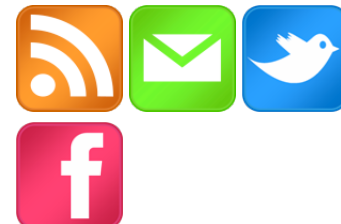
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we also try to meet annually at major conferences. This year, we met in San Diego at the AMTA national conference, and next year we will be in Spain for the European Congress of Music Therapy, and then in Asia for the World Congress. When we cannot meet face to face, we use Skype and email.

***Who are the members of the WFMT, and how does one become a member?***

We mainly have organizational members. For example, AMTA is a member of the WFMT, as well are other national organizations around the globe. So we are kind of an umbrella organization, under which other national organizations fall. We currently have 22 countries represented: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Columbia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Republic of Macedonia, Singapore, Spain, Uruguay, United Kingdom, and United States. So as you can guess, many languages are represented, which can be challenging at times.

***The World Conference of Music Therapy is coming up in Seoul, Korea. What is significant about this conference?***

Well first of all, it is significant because it is the first time the WFMT has decided to hold the conference in an Asian country. We have many colleagues from Asian countries, and we want to respect and honor them by holding the conference in Seoul. The topic, then, is Music Therapy in Eastern and Western Philosophy. We know about our western philosophies, and the Asian cultures have a long tradition of music and so forth, so we want to learn their methods of doing music therapy. We also want to understand their music, traditions, and values. While there have been small conferences that westerners have participated in, this is the first big event that will give us a look into Asian culture.

***Will something like this be affordable for someone in the United States to attend?***

***Where can I find more information?***

Absolutely! We did our best to keep registration fees low, so professional registration is only \$200 and student registration is \$100. With flights, it shouldn't cost much more than the national conference. I have to give kudos to Dr. Choi, the organizer of the World Congress, who worked very hard to reduce costs by getting sponsors. You can find more information on the WFMT website, which is [www.wfmt.info](http://www.wfmt.info). There is also a preliminary World Congress website, which is [www.musictherapy2011.org](http://www.musictherapy2011.org).

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# Interview with Dr. Petra Kern – Pt. 2

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## ***Changing directions a little bit here, how are academic programs for music therapy different around the globe?***

Well, all in all, it is not so different. Formal training in music therapy began in the United States about 60 years ago, and many who have received formal training have been trained here in the United States. When people went back to their home countries, they took what they learned back with them, and therefore the approaches are fairly similar. Even much of the same vocabulary is used. One of the main differences is the repertoire used. There are also differences in theoretical frameworks. For example, in my home country of Germany, it is very much a psychoanalytic and psychotherapeutic approach. Of course, Freud, Jung, and Adler were our neighbors, so the country's tradition influences the theoretical framework used in therapy. Often, we assume that more ancient cultures will use more traditional music in therapy, with lots of drumming as such. But we also have to remember that many of them grew up with The Beatles and other popular music we grew up with here.

## ***Are there any differences in populations served? Or are music therapists around the world serving pretty much the same populations with the same needs?***

For the most part, they are pretty much the same. But we do see populations pop up. Lately, there has been a lot of crisis intervention, such as with the earthquakes in China. If there are needs, colleagues are trying to find new ways to serve the clients. In China, music therapists developed an approach to meet those needs, which are different than needs that we experience here in the United States. It's all about the needs, but it is also regulated by the government. That can determine whether music therapists are working more in schools or in medical settings.

## ***With an international organization, I imagine communication can be quite difficult. How important is global communication to the field of music therapy, and how can we promote it?***

It's very important that we develop global communication for many reasons. We are living in a global world. People are living in different countries, and people are serving people from different cultures and countries. We have to find ways to promote global communication. The social networks, like Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, help a lot. I think it's also important to have students participating in exchange programs, and also to support international publications. We know about a lot of the publications written in English, but there are many other publications, especially by our Latin American colleagues, that are written in Spanish. So we don't know anything about them, simply because we don't have access to them. Translating these would help us know what is going on at an international level. The world congresses have been successful in promoting global communication, and this something we need to continue.

## ***How would a student go about looking into an exchange program?***

Well, there are currently some pathways open. Many universities have relations with colleges and universities abroad, and if they have a music therapy program, it is usually

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possible to do an exchange. It is currently easier for an international student to come to the United States, because classes and degrees earned here are usually transferrable. An American student might be able to go to another country, but degrees and credits are not likely to transfer. It may seem like a financial loss, but traveling and living in another country is highly educational. The experiences may even be more valuable than the courses you take at the university. There is interest in opening more pathways for exchange students, and we continue to work toward this. It's not an easy task, but we need to make it so that one can earn credits while studying abroad.

I often get emails saying, "I am traveling through Europe, can you put me in contact with some music therapists?" In this way, I can put people in contact so they can meet up and spend some days, or do some observations, or have a jam session or something. It doesn't necessarily benefit your coursework, but you broaden your horizons.

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# Interview with Dr. Petra Kern – Pt. 3

## ***What strategies can one implement to overcome language and other cultural barriers?***

Americans are very lucky, because they speak English. English is used all over the world, and learning this language can open up a lot of doors. For those who already speak English, I encourage you to learn another language, so that you can experience what it is like to be unable to express yourself. It will help you be more empathic to those who are unable to communicate. Language is much easier face to face, because you can read the nonverbal language, the gestures and so forth. These are not always the same, though, because gestures mean different things in different parts of the world.

Cultural barriers can be overcome by just connecting with people from different cultures and exchanging ideas and ways of living. Travel to other countries, and listen to music from other countries. Read the news from other countries, and get another perspective. I have learned that there is not one truth around the world, so what is right in this country is not right in another country.

I can understand, though, why Americans do not travel abroad as much. You have everything here. Mountains, the ocean, tropical areas...everything you need. You don't need to travel to another country for a vacation. But I still think it's valuable to do that, to experience not knowing the language, and needing to figure out transportation, and eating food you've never seen before. You learn to adapt and be flexible.

***Music Therapy as a formal discipline in the United States is only 50 or 60 years old, and it is even younger in other parts of the world. It's important that as the field grows here in the United States, it also grows in other elsewhere. We need to be learning from each other as we all figure this out together.***

Yes, and that is what we are seeing. Many of our Asian students are going back to their home countries and practicing music therapy. In Korea, there are now about eight music therapy programs. They have 600 members in the Korean Association of Music Therapy. Japan has over 6,000 members, including psychologists and medical doctors, and over 1,000 credentialed music therapists. Music Therapy is rapidly growing all over the world, because people are going places, or going home, and establishing it there. There are places where it is not developed, but we are starting to see conferences in places like India and Thailand.

Now I speak as a researcher and an educator: we need more research! We need to be able to back it up and provide the evidence in order to make our profession strong and prosper. This is a message to my generation and the next generation of music therapists to make a science out of our profession. Yes, it is already a science, but we often fall into the category of "emerging practice", and that is because we just don't have enough data. That being said, research needs to be priority so that we can honestly and ethically tell

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