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Enhancing Health, Balance and Emotions through **MUSIC**

BY MICHELLE WAHL

The world is complicated and fast-paced, often leaving us struggling to make sense of it all. Our stress-filled lives can leave us a bundle of nerves by the end of the day. Most of us have ways of coping, some healthier than others, but perhaps if we looked back to our childhoods, we can remember one thing that always brought great comfort to our lives – music. Many of us enjoy music in our everyday lives already. In fact, we listen to music so often, we don't even think about how it benefits us. Yet who can't recall a favorite dance song from the 80s? A tune that gets us fired up when we exercise? Or the song that meant most to us when we fell in love? We sing lullabies and nursery rhymes to our children to get a particular response. Yet we often forget what impact music can have in our lives today. Now, this age-old activity is becoming a new age modality in the health industry through music therapy.

Music therapy is the clinical use of music intervention to accomplish an individualized goal. Music therapists begin by using musical responses to assess a patient's emotional wellbeing, physical health, social functioning, communication abilities and cognitive skills. Music treatment may include any one or combination of receptive music listening, lyric discussion, music imagery, learning through music making, and even song writing.

Nearly everyone can benefit from the use of music. The Music Therapy Center in San Diego provides treatment for children (80 percent who have autism), and elderly patients by developing personalized goals. For example, music therapy helps the elderly improve mental faculties and is often used in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease and other age related conditions. An 80-year-old woman struggling to make connections may find that listening to songs from the 1930s improves memory by bringing back fond memories. According to the American Music Therapy Association,

“Music affects our entire psyche and body. Music compliments our strengths and enhances our weaknesses by stimulating the part of the brain that normally doesn't get used, and relaxing the part that is over stimulated, says Mira Costa College Music Professor.”

music is used with the elderly to increase or maintain their levels of physical, mental, and social/emotional functioning. The sensory and intellectual stimulation of music can help maintain a person's quality of life.

The most obvious goals of music therapy are realization, stress reduction, expressing emotions, developing social skills and improving academics. In hospitals, music is used to alleviate pain, elevate a patient's mood and even eliminate depression.

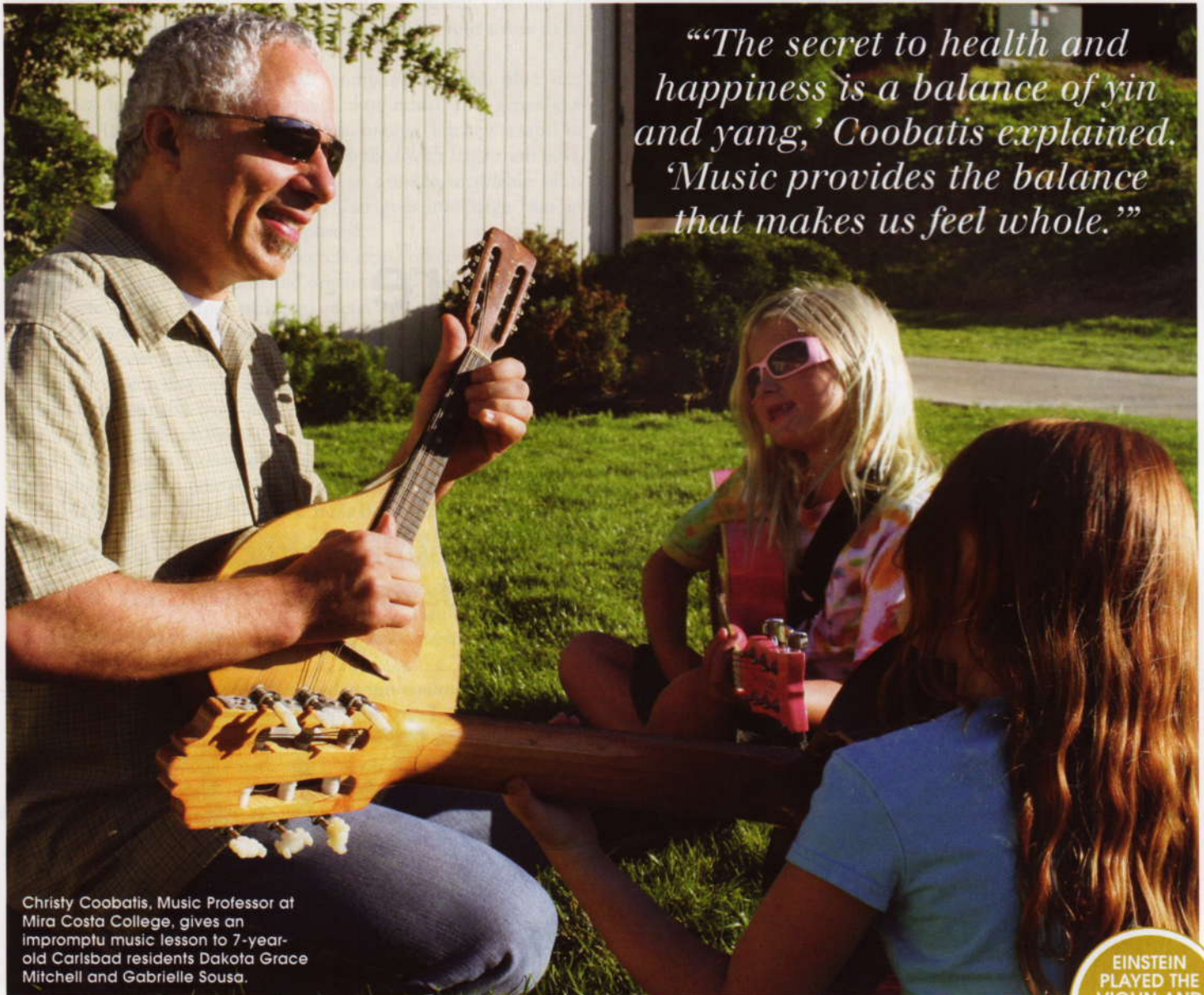
In schools, music learning is used to strengthen non-musical areas such as communication skills and physical coordination skills, which are important for daily life. Music helps students to memorize and sequence events.

Music is an entity to express emotions and communicate. We all prefer various styles of music based on our life experiences, individual preferences and our circumstances. Yet the music we prefer is often also the music we need.

Our moods can be enhanced and modified by the music we choose. We use energetic music when we exercise to increase energy and stamina. Music can help decrease muscle tension and increase relaxation when used during stress relief activities such as yoga or guided imagery. It can induce sleep in most everyone from babies to baby boomers. And it creates a balance in life by developing a positive focus, a more optimistic outlook as you leave worries behind listening to rhythms that touch your soul.

According to Julie Guy, M.M., MT-BC, NMT, a San Diego Music Therapist, “It's amazing how much music can do. Music utilizes both the left and right hemisphere of our brain, creating a profound effect.”

“Music affects our entire psyche and body,” adds Christy Coobatis, Music Professor at Mira Costa College. “Music compliments our strengths and enhances our weaknesses by



“The secret to health and happiness is a balance of yin and yang,” Coobatis explained. “Music provides the balance that makes us feel whole.”

Christy Coobatis, Music Professor at Mira Costa College, gives an impromptu music lesson to 7-year-old Carlsbad residents Dakota Grace Mitchell and Gabrielle Sousa.

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stimulating the part of the brain that normally doesn't get used, and relaxing the part that is over stimulated.”

Research has shown that music with a strong beat creates sharper concentration and more alert thinking. Your breathing and heart rate are altered by the responses to the faster or slower beat of music, which counteracts the damage of chronic stress and promotes wellbeing and relaxation. Each person has an imprint from early life that determines our body's rhythm. Our comfort with music is tied to the vibrations per second we hear as it mimics our natural imprints from early memories.

Humans gravitate towards calming sounds from early childhood. If your mother was calming, and you experienced a tranquil sea in the womb, you gravitate towards sounds that mimic these memories. The result of a more energetic or tumultuous mother is a person who seeks stronger beats. It is important to note there is no

“correct” type of music, rather that genres can be utilized to meet your particular need. Each individual preference appeals to emotional needs of the present yet are tied to the past. We tend to like the music that reflects our memories.

“What we think about is who we become,” said Guy. “The ancient Greeks believed in moderation, health and balance. Your health is your greatest asset and using music can help restore balance. Music is the tail and string on the kite that keeps us anchored to something we know or long for, and it keeps us connected to who we are meant to be.

“The secret to health and happiness is a balance of yin and yang,” Coobatis explained. “Music provides the balance that makes us feel whole.” **B**