

MUSIC THERAPY IN THE TEACHINGS OF IBN SINA

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Abstract

This article explores the therapeutic role of music in the teachings of Abu Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna), a preeminent physician and philosopher of the Islamic Golden Age. Known primarily for his monumental works in medicine and metaphysics, Ibn Sina was also among the earliest thinkers to articulate a detailed theory of music therapy. Through his writings—particularly *The Canon of Medicine* and *Kitab al-Shifa*—he explained how sound and melody influence the human psyche, restore emotional balance, and support physical health. This article analyzes Ibn Sina's views on the psychophysiological effects of music, its application in medical treatment, and its enduring relevance in modern music therapy.

Keywords: Ibn Sina, Avicenna, music therapy, Canon of Medicine, psychology, sound healing, maqam, emotional health, Islamic medicine.

Introduction

In ancient and medieval civilizations, music was not merely regarded as entertainment but as a powerful force capable of influencing the mind, body, and soul. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, Abu Ali Ibn Sina (980–1037) stands out as a scholar who systematized the understanding of music's healing potential. A master of diverse sciences, Ibn Sina did not treat music as an isolated discipline but integrated it into broader medical and philosophical thought.

Music therapy, as conceptualized by Ibn Sina, emerges from a holistic view of the human being—where mental, emotional, and physiological dimensions are interdependent. In this context, music serves not only as a medium for aesthetic experience but also as a clinical and pedagogical tool.

Theoretical Foundations of Music Therapy in Ibn Sina's Work

In The Canon of Medicine, Ibn Sina famously wrote:

“Only a sound soul guarantees bodily health.”

He viewed emotions as fundamental to physical well-being and considered music a powerful regulator of emotional states. Drawing from earlier Greek and Islamic sources, he classified music as a mathematical science with practical implications for therapy, pedagogy, and ethics.

Ibn Sina's theory of music therapy rests on the idea that the **humors (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile)** must remain in balance. Emotions such as grief, fear, joy, and anger disturb this equilibrium, and music—when appropriately selected—can restore harmony within the body and the soul.

Applications of Music in Medical Practice

Ibn Sina's writings demonstrate an early recognition of **psychosomatic medicine**. He recommended musical exposure in the following contexts:

- **Pediatric care:** For infants, he prescribed a dual method: gentle rocking to support physical development, and soothing lullabies to nurture the psyche.
- **Mental illness:** He described specific maqams (musical modes) and rhythmic patterns for patients suffering from melancholy, anxiety, or insomnia.
- **Cardiovascular conditions:** Slow, regular rhythms were said to stabilize the heartbeat and relax the nervous system.
- **Emotional distress:** Music was seen as a safe method for calming agitation or elevating mood during grief.

He was particularly attuned to the **individualized nature of treatment**, stating that music should be matched to a person's **temperament (mizaj)**, much like herbs or dietary prescriptions.

Music, Psychology, and Education

Ibn Sina argued that music should be integrated into **moral and intellectual development**, especially for children. He believed that:

- Exposure to appropriate music enhances **emotional intelligence**.
- Musical training develops **focus, memory, and ethical sensibility**.
- Melodies can foster **empathy** and a sense of **cosmic harmony**.

Importantly, he warned against excessive or dissonant music, arguing that it could disturb mental order and degrade character—a notion increasingly echoed in

modern psychology's concern with media overstimulation and emotional desensitization.

Musical Instruments and Therapeutic Functions

In *Kitab al-Shifa*, Ibn Sina offered detailed descriptions of musical instruments and their effects. He ranked them based on their acoustic similarity to the **human voice**, which he believed to be the most expressive and therapeutic medium. His preferred instrument was the **ghijjak**, followed by the 'ūd, qanun, and nay.

Instruments were not merely tools for music-making but **extensions of the human spirit**, each suited to different therapeutic goals:

- **Strings** for emotional resonance and spiritual elevation
- **Winds** for breath control and calmness
- **Percussion** for energy stimulation or rhythmic balance

Legacy and Modern Relevance

Ibn Sina's vision of music therapy prefigures many contemporary practices:

- **Personalized therapy:** Matching musical stimuli to patient profiles
- **Neurological research:** Studying rhythm's effect on heart rate, breathing, and brain waves
- **Holistic healing:** Integrating music with physical and psychological treatment

His ideas influenced both **Islamic scholars** (e.g., Safiuddin Urmawi, Zakariya al-Razi) and **European thinkers**, especially during the translation movements in Spain and Italy. Today, the **World Federation of Music Therapy (WFMT)** defines music therapy in terms that mirror Ibn Sina's integrated model of medicine, ethics, and art.

Conclusion

Abu Ali Ibn Sina's contributions to music therapy reflect the depth of his understanding of the human being as a psycho-physical entity. Long before the establishment of modern psychology or neuroscience, he articulated a framework in which music plays a key role in health, education, and emotional regulation. His therapeutic applications of music—especially within *The Canon of Medicine* and *Kitab al-Shifa*—represent a sophisticated synthesis of science, philosophy, and art. In today's era of integrative medicine and cognitive therapy, Ibn Sina's

insights remain remarkably relevant, offering inspiration for scholars, clinicians, and educators alike.

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