

Musical interventions to help treat depression

[Health & Medicine](#), [Mental Health](#)



Music is a powerful tool. It is a pan-cultural language that predates all other forms of communication. It is a mnemonic device that can trigger a cascade of memories that may have otherwise been lost. It is a catalyst for inducing intense, peak emotional states by engaging specific neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, which then regulates one's mood. It can even be used as an aphrodisiac, as engaging with music stimulates one's limbic system, which is the area of the brain responsible for arousal. So powerful is music, that it is even used in a clinical setting to treat mental and even physical illnesses and disabilities through a process known as music therapy. Music therapy is the medical practice of using musical interventions to achieve specific goals, communicated between a client and a certified music therapist. Music is a healer, and has been for thousands of years, as depicted in scriptures and writings from ancient civilizations in Egypt and Rome. It wasn't until the early 1900's that music was developed into a formally recognized medical practice. During WWI and WWII, there was an unprecedented amount of men and women being admitted into hospitals for PTSD, depression, and other severely debilitating, traumatic war injuries. Nurses and doctors would often play music throughout the wards in an attempt to alleviate this suffering. By doing this, somewhat casually even, they observed the profound effect that music had on patient's psychological, cognitive and emotional states. Since then, universities and colleges have been developing the idea of music therapy into an evidence-based treatment that is practice all over the world, which is governed by the National Association for Music Therapy (NAMT). Music therapy is a blissfully simple concept, and I feel that if basic treatments were more readily available, more people would be inclined to

experiment with its process. It may be that music therapy is still considered, by the layman, an experimental form of treatment. Or maybe it has simply not gained enough traction in the medical community, shadowed by common psychological practices. Regardless, I firmly believe that if music therapy was made to be more accessible to the public, many in need would reap its benefits. It is with this in mind that I am proposing to develop a mobile-phone application that brings the magic of music therapy into the hands of everyday people. The application, which would be named SongBird, would be a condensed, user friendly introduction to music therapy. The app would require the user to fill in some personal details, such as age, general health, wellbeing, and overall goals. After processing this information, the application would develop a program tailored to your needs. To better understand what the application can do for its users, I think it's important to explain how music therapy combats various mental illnesses and conditions. For the purpose of this proposal, I will focus on how SongBird will use musical interventions to help treat one of the most common mental illnesses – depression.

One in five people fall victim to depression at some point in their lives. It can be a crippling illness, one that many people do not recover from. Luckily, many forms of treatment exist to tackle depression, one of which being music therapy. In the context of SongBird, there will be two types of therapy; active and passive. Active music therapy requires the patient to interact with music in some form. When engaging in active therapy in SongBird, the user will be directed to an interface that is rich in flowing, tranquil patterns, that will help to mirror their desired mood. The user will then wear earphones,

and enter a form of guided meditation. A peaceful, calming composition will begin to play, and the user will have full control of its sonic direction. The application will allow the user to navigate the harmony of by scrolling left or right, and control the dynamics and speed by scrolling up or down. This active participation is the same type of involvement that is encouraged at one on one music therapy sessions. Studies by the British National Institute For Health Research have shown that this creative, interactive outlet can help to reduce depressive symptoms and actually increase a patient's involvement in work and relationships. Passive music therapy is, as the name suggests, a far less involved process, in fact it is more like a guided mediation. When selecting passive therapy for depression, the user will again be taken to a colorful, calming interface. Wearing earphones, the user will begin to listen to a composition. This composition will follow the form of a classical piece. Studies have shown that listening to classical music promotes the secretion of dopamine, which is the hormone responsible for our mood. This enhanced gene activity could be due to the complexity of the harmony and melodic activity, forcing the brain to engage with the music in order to digest it fully. Users will be able to define the length of a session, and will answer questions on how effective the session was. Questions like “was the piece too slow?” or “did you feel the music was too dark” will allow the application to collect user data and tailor the next session to their musical taste.

The features laid out describe one facet of SongBird, and of course there will be a multitude of packs suited to different conditions such as Alzheimer, anxiety and stress. So at this point it's important to explain how SongBird

will turn a profit. Like most self-help applications, we will be subscription based with a new user promotion to draw in customers. Subscribers will pay \$4.99/month, which is enough to turn a profit whilst still being lower than a Spotify subscription, for example. Obviously the application will have an international reach thanks to technological globalization, but HQ will be based in the UK. Simply because I understand the UK music scene and I plan to establish the company house there. Furthermore, as grim as it may seem, suicide is the leading cause of death for young men in the UK. Mental illness is an epidemic in Britain, so being based in the UK, surrounded by this suffering, might help SongBird to better understand the needs of its users. We will use social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to promote SongBird, to target a younger demographic, and use flyers and radio ads to target older consumers across the UK.

SongBird will be set up as a partnership. There were several reasons for this, one in particular that will be made clear later in this proposal. The fundamental purpose of this business is to create profit, and though I may have the enthusiasm and ideas, any start up needs a business savvy input, and startup capital. This is why I plan to start SongBird with my business partner Michael Atema. Michael has studied marketing and finance, has over ten years of experience working in the music industry and is willing to invest in the start-up. I feel his contribution will be invaluable to the project.

I hope that the proposal I have detailed catches the readers' interest. I do believe that SongBird will be a success. Headspace has shown us that there

is a demand for so called ' self-help' applications, and I feel that a music therapy app could bring a lot of peace, and joy, into people's lives.

Music truly is unique amongst our art forms. It is our most primitive form of expression, and the only form of expression that is consumed by one sense alone. Humans are extremely socially developed, yet intrinsically emotionally complicated creatures. We often feel things that we cannot understand, nor can we convey to others. This can often leave us in a place where we have no medium for processing and understanding how we feel. It is in this void, a place where words fail, that music speaks.