

# Where words may fail, music heals in crisis

*A UH music professor calls it a powerful tool to help deal with the impact of the terror attacks*

By Helen Altonn

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The healing power of music has spread across the United States since Sept. 11 with songs such as "God Bless America," "America the Beautiful" and "This Land Is Your Land" played on radio and television and in gatherings, services and community events.

Arthur Harvey, an assistant professor of music at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, notes the effect of music in an article he sent to National Music Education Magazine to help parents and teachers understand the therapeutic value of music in times of crisis.

"Parents and music educators have a powerful tool in music to help students, and themselves, deal with the mental and emotional impact of the recent terrorist attacks upon our country," he wrote. "Feelings and emotions that defy words are often best expressed and communicated through the language of music."

Harvey uses four words to describe how music can be used to help "a nation in mourning and shock" and change mental and physical responses of people of all ages: in, out, up and down.

Music has the power to get into people's minds and bodies, help them let out their feelings, lift up their spirits and calm stress levels, Harvey explained.

In an interview, Harvey said that for most of the 42 years in

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his profession, he has taught music and used it for health care and in a church-related position — Harvey is musical director at Calvary-by-the-Sea Lutheran Church and has students in performing arts at Calvary.

He has worked over the years with special-needs children and adults, and with teachers of special-education students and adults in vocational rehabilitation.

Every Monday for nearly 10 years, he has played the piano at Leahi Hospital for patients with disabilities and debilitating diseases.

"We sing to activate communication skills and reinforce memory from the past," he said.

Music is helpful in many ways for education and mental and physical healing, Harvey said. It can be used to increase or reactivate motor skills and increase attention and redevelop speech to make the brain respond better, he said.

He worked five years for the medical school at the University of Louisville in Kentucky, developing a program to use music as an adjunct to medicine to reduce illnesses.

Music is important in therapy for increasing language skills, he said. If a person cannot speak because of a brain injury, for example, "When they chant it or sing it, like an opera, it's able to reactivate speech patterns that sometimes are hindered."

Music also provides social benefits in rehabilitation and therapy, Harvey said. "That happens when you play percussion instruments, or other instruments, in a cooperative thing."

Singing, sometimes enhances respiratory strength, which helps speech therapy, he said.

At Leahi Hospital, Harvey has patients use sticks, triangles, tambourines and other percussion instruments, and they sing Hawaiian songs and familiar songs from past years.

For people who do not have normal speech and motor skills, "Music provides a therapeutic way to express feelings or release emotions, which sometimes is very cathartic," he said.

Troubled people often are frustrated and cannot say what is bothering them, but the music matches or mirrors their moods, he said.

Harvey went to Japan this week for a presentation on "The Therapeutic Power of Music" at an international conference. He was on a panel Oct. 13 at the annual Brain Injury Association of Hawaii conference at the state Capitol auditorium.

Writing for parents and music educators about the mental and emotional impact of the terrorist attacks, he said, "I believe that we need to acknowledge and utilize music's therapeutic and helping power to help make our schools, homes and nation an emotionally, physically and spiritually healthier place."