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# GWU Music Professor Shares Insights on Benefits of Music Therapy

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Office of University  
Communications

June 22, 2017

## *Dr. Mark Cole Evaluates Positive Effects of Music for Memory Recovery*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – If a tune has ever transported you back to a specific time and place from your past, you may already be aware of the powerful tie between music and memories. One Gardner-Webb University professor recently shared insights on the benefits of music therapy for people battling memory disorders, including dementia and Alzheimer's.

“Music provides a valuable set of constructs to help people of any age increase their capacity for memory and awareness,” shared Dr. Mark Cole, GWU Assistant Professor of Music Education and Director of Bands. “Dementia and Alzheimer's breaks the neural connections between left brain and right brain functions, and music can help reconnect them again.”

Cole said he first became interested in the subject of music and memory after observing the continuing abilities of long-term musicians. “I noticed that many professional athletes dealt with physical limitations after a certain age, but musical abilities and fine motor skills didn't appear to diminish with age,” Cole explained. “Symphony musicians and conductors can play well into their 70s and 80s and be just as effective as they were when they started.”

After investigating the way music affects the brain, he discovered that people with early exposure to and involvement in music actively used more areas of the brain. “Musicians have to be both left-brained and right-brained,” he said. “When you learn to play an instrument or sing, and you're reading music at the same time, those two functions require both hemispheres of the brain to be engaged at once.”

When repeatedly exposed to music, neuropathways begin to form connections in the brain, and they typically stay in place even after the music has ended. “It's almost like building a road system,” Cole reflected. “Until the roads completely crumble, which is kind of what happens with dementia and Alzheimer's. The studies are showing that people with Alzheimer's are recognizing music from the part of their past they can still remember, and it tends to help push them past the regression point and actually become cognizant of things that are more in the present day. So it seems to be helping.”

Music therapy, he believes, can act as a prevention tool to assist in emotional health and memory disorders. “If nothing else, the argument is very strong for including music as a large part of your life from as early on as possible,” he offered. “Especially if there is the most remote possibility that it could fend off those types of memory disorders.”

Listen to the full [WGWG.org](http://WGWG.org) interview with Dr. Mark Cole:

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