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Keeping the Dream Alive: Profiles of Three Early Twentieth Century Music Therapists

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Abstract

Until 1900, music therapy clinical practice in the United States was limited to a few isolated occurrences. The most significant of these events happened during the last 25 years of the nineteenth century, and, although important historically, did little to promote the growth and development of music therapy as the United States entered the twentieth century. During the first years of the twentieth century, music therapy clinical practice was more vigorously promoted than ever before, due mostly to the efforts of three women music educators/therapists who flourished during this time. Eva Augusta Vescelius, Isa Maud Ilsen, and Harriet Ayer Seymour were strong-willed individuals who developed interesting personal philosophies concerning the use of music in therapy, practiced what they advocated (unlike many of the people writing about music therapy at the time), and each, in her career, established music therapy organizations devoted to treating the physically and mentally ill with music. Although none left a lasting legacy, all should be recognized as twentieth century pioneers in music therapy.

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