



Participants at an Arts Memory Café dance and enjoy music from guest musicians. The Arts Memory Café is hosted by ADAW on the third Thursday of each month at the Madison Museum of Contemporary Art.

Let There Be Music

BY JENNIFER BAUER, REBECCA SPINDLER & HEIDI MORRISON

The transformative power of music and art are recognized ways to stay connected to people with Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. It awakens emotions that may have been hidden beneath the disease. While few studies with control groups have occurred to prove the positive effects, anecdotal evidence abounds.

In 2013, the State of Wisconsin began the Music & MemorySM pilot program, providing iPods and personalized playlists to nursing homes residents, and educating staff on best practices for the program. While a scientific study to document the effects is still underway, early evidence indicates improved quality of life and a reduction

in falls and antipsychotic medication use. Caregivers also report residents appearing happier and more relaxed, even tapping and clapping in time to the music. The program has expanded to include assisted-living communities and even an in-home program to support caregivers caring for loved ones with dementia.

Over the past six years, more education and training has occurred regarding Music & Memory—the word is out! A family caregiver shared, "My initial experience with music therapy was during an activity with my mom at her memory care unit. I was amazed and astonished when the group began singing along to the music and knowing

the words, with a person playing a guitar and harmonica. Everyone seemed so happy, and it didn't really matter what their quality of singing was."

In conjunction with Music & Memory, the Madison New Horizons Band—part of the New Horizons International Music Organization—is the second-oldest New Horizons band in the world. Multiple Madison New Horizons Bands offer an opportunity for seniors who enjoy making music to reach a like-minded community of people. Players of all levels are welcome, and the bands practice at varying performance difficulties. New Horizons' members are a support for one another. Many participants no longer

drive themselves. One band member remembers a time when not being able to drive almost got in the way of his participation. "A few months back, our organization put out a request—could anyone give me a ride? I had three offers!"

Playing a musical instrument has many positive effects on cognition. Reading music challenges the mind, and recall can also be improved by practice. Playing a musical instrument can improve physical endurance as well. One band member says, "I was told by my doctor that due to my blowing of my saxophones—tenor and alto—and singing with the band, my lungs [are] much better than any 85-year-old. I remember the words to the songs I sing, and I can really blow my horn! The Horizons band is a top priority in my husband's and my busy lives."

At Memory Cafés—a socially safe space for those with memory loss and their caregivers—Alzheimer's & Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin (ADAW) frequently invites guest musicians to perform. One who was greatly impacted by sharing his music says, "When playing songs from the 1940s, '50s, '60s, it's incredible how so many in attendance know the words and music to so many. Their eyes light up and there's actual beauty in their smiles. Also, the movement of their feet and the actions of their hands tell me they are enjoying the moment."

Janet Wiegel, ADAW dementia outreach specialist for Columbia and Sauk Counties, adds, "It's such a joy to see folks perk up as they recognize a familiar rhyme they may not have heard for 30 years but still remember. Rhyme and rhythm are stored in the right hippocampus, which is usually not as affected by dementia diseases. Music, rhyme, rhythm, beat, color, and emotional memories are stored there also, and these skills last longer into the disease."

How can you incorporate these therapies into your journey with dementia? It can



Participants experience a drum circle at a Memory Café in Prairie du Chien. The Memory Café is hosted by ADAW on the third Tuesday of each month at Hoffman Hall in Prairie du Chien.

be as simple as singing the person's favorite songs or listening to a recording together. Try to incorporate music from young adulthood or sing-along favorites, like camp songs. You can also tailor music or an activity to the time of day or mood you're trying to enhance, including meal time. Noreen Kralapp, ADAW dementia outreach specialist for Dane County, says, "Music can help people with Alzheimer's engage and focus at meal time and make dining a positive experience."

Music can be a release when language and speech are not available, helping people with dementia remain connected with the world around them and feeling that they contribute something of value. It just may open up new avenues and reawaken experiences for you and your loved one.

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Photographs provided by Alzheimer's & Dementia Alliance of Wisconsin.

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