Campbell credits music as well as psychotherapy with helping her to move on with her life. And now, through HerCastleGlock.com, the blog Campbell co-founded with her sister, Chantel, she is able to continue incorporating music into her life on a regular basis. “I could never imagine my life without singing or creating, talking about or listening to music.”

The powerful effect music has had on Campbell’s life is a relatable narrative. Music serves as a form of therapy for many or, as Toronto-based creative director Talya Macado says, “ends up being a soundtrack to our lives.” Just think of the times you have used music to help change your mood or state of mind. You turn on Kanye West’s “Power” while going for a run, play Adele’s “Someone Like You” to get through a heartbreak or put on Mozart’s “Piano Concerto No. 25” to help you focus while you’re working.

Dreysh Safa, a Toronto-based music marketing consultant, creates mood-based playlists because she sees music as a form of escapism. “If you’re working on something, or even if you’re cleaning, you’re kind of always in your head...so music helps you organize your thoughts,” she says. “For me, I love David Bowie’s ‘Frumious’; it begins playing the night before...I will sometimes fast-forward to there just to feel it in my chest because I’m like, ‘Oh, I need this release.’

While creating your own playlists can be therapeutic, professionals have been using music to treat emotional and physical issues since the mid-1900s, when psychotherapists used it in their practices. In the 1970s, the first music therapy college training program was created in the United States, and by the mid-’80s, Canadian music therapists began to offer their unique services to treat emotional trauma.

“A lot of people intrinsically understand that music can be used to impact their mood,” says Elizabeth Mitchell, a registered psychotherapist and accredited music therapist who works at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont., and Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, Ont. “Music therapy helps in that and is simply a more intentional process, conducted under the direction of a therapist.”

A session can involve a therapist and a client creating a playlist that is designed for that person’s specific issues. “It may be designed to impact a particular mood, like depression or anxiety,” says Mitchell, adding that she listens to a calming playlist when going to the dentist. “Or maybe it’s for a specific purpose, like help someone when they’re tempted to use a substance or are struggling to fall asleep at night.”

Music can also be used in a more clinical sense, often based on a client’s mood. Music therapists work with their clients to curate lists based on a concept known as the iso-principle. This technique involves the therapist matching music with the client’s current mood and physical state of the client and then presenting new music to incrementally or gradually encourage the desired change. For example, if a client is feeling sad, the playlist may begin with Coldplay’s “Fix You” to express how the client is feeling. “The sadness is there, but the client is engaging with the music. ‘The Children’s Dog Days Are Over’ to encourage motivation and a feeling of hope. ‘If someone is feeling depressed and they’d like to feel happier or more calm and grounded, sometimes it’s more helpful to start the playlist with a song that validates their sadness,’” says Mitchell. “Then you work with the patient to incrementally change their mood by choosing songs that are a bit less sad, a little happier or calmer.”

But music therapy isn’t just about listening to prescribed music, explains Mitchell, adding that the experience is much more interactive. Sessions can involve a therapist and client making improvisational music together on instruments such as a piano, a guitar or a single drum or writing songs. But it goes far beyond a person banging on a drum to express their anger. Andrea Lamont, the senior registered music therapist at the Toronto Rehabilitation Institute in Toronto, says music therapists often work with people who have difficulty speaking or have lost their ability to speak. She says she often uses music, especially in the form of the iso-principle, to help improve speech and help someone when they’re tempted to use a substance or are struggling to fall asleep at night.

For Mitchell, it’s about two people listening to each other, responding to what they’re feeling. “The improvised music often has a lot of parallels to a conversation—it just doesn’t have to contain words,” she explains. Lamont has also found that playing a lot of timeless qualities to certain music that can really pull people together and make them feel like they’re connected and it’s part of something. We need that, socially.