**Music as Therapy or Weapon (Depression & Anxiety)**

Kurt Cobain and Ian Curtis; two of the most celebrated musicians ever and both tormented by depression. In 2018 alone depression has played a part in the deaths of many musicians, including, Chester Bennington, Chris Cornell, Tim, 'Avicii' Bergling, and Scott Hutchinson. The latter’s final interactions on social media leave a haunting image:

“Be so good to everyone you love. It’s not a given. I’m so annoyed that it’s not. I didn’t live by that standard and it kills me. Please hug your loved ones.

I’m away now. Thanks.”

Some of the biggest stars in the industry have discussed their own mental health issues. Lady Gaga admits she takes daily medication for her depression. Zayn Malik cancelled shows over his crippling anxiety, and even Adele has been open about suffering panic attacks on stage.

A 2016 study by “Help Musicians UK” found that those involved in the music industry were three times more likely to suffer depression than members of the general public.

Of the 2,211 surveyed, 68.5% declared to having depressive periods, and 71.1% to anxiety issues.

I, myself, have suffered from depression for most of my life. It’s a debilitating illness that has often left me feeling like a recluse as I dread being in people’s company due to the fear of feeling I have nothing to add to the conversation. At the end of 2017 I decided to retire early from my DJ career as I could no longer endure the constant anxiety that would build up inside me before a gig. Sometimes I wonder how I ever managed to spend thirteen years as a DJ in busy London nightspots, as well as four years broadcasting from a radio studio to thousands of listeners across five counties of Ireland.

Therefore, it is with a sense of irony, that, after an introduction portraying the music business in such a dark light, the subject I have chosen to put forward is the case for how music therapy can aid in the battle against depression and anxiety.

The *American Music Therapy Association* describes the concept of Music Therapy as:

“Music Therapy is the clinical and evidence-based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program.

Music therapy interventions can be designed to”:

* Promote Wellness
* Manage Stress
* Alleviate Pain
* Express Feelings
* Enhance Memory
* Improve Communication
* Promote Physical Rehabilitation

In an editorial in *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, Michael Crawford argues his case on why he feels that music therapy is so beneficial. He explains that music enables us to interact with others, provides a sense of pleasure and meaningfulness, and the physicality of movement to music helps to avert depression.

Music therapy works by using tempo, harmony, timbre, and melody to stimulate the brain. The therapist tailors a plan to each patient’s individual needs. This can vary from listening to relaxing music in order to slow the heart rate, to actively playing music and exploring the physical benefits this can provide to the patient.

John Powell writes in his book, “Why You Love Music”, that music breaks the vicious cycle of depression. It emits a positive change in mood by rising the levels of serotonin and dopamine in the system.

Mr Powell cites a case study carried out by psychologist, Susan Hanser, where three groups of elderly depressants were given an eight-week test. The first group performed various mental and physical techniques relating, in some way, to music of their choice. Group two were not as interactive with Ms Hanser and were given music suggested to them. Finally, group three did not take any active part at all. Unsurprisingly, the latter group showed no signs of improvement in their mental state, but the first two groups displayed a major improvement with some of their ending test scores being closer to a person who did not suffer from depression whatsoever.

British neurologist and author of “*Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*”, Oliver Sacks, is quoted as saying:

“Music can lift us out of depression or move us to tears – it is a remedy, a tonic, orange juice for the ear. But for many of my neurological patients, music is even more – it can provide access, even when no medication can, to movement, to speech, to life. For them, music is not a luxury, but a necessity.”

Another study by Finnish researchers and published in the *British Journal of Psychiatrists* in 2011, calculated the depression scores of seventy-nine people between the ages of 18-50. Split into two, both groups were given counselling, antidepressants, and psychotherapy sessions; the only difference being that one group were also given music therapy sessions for one hour, every two weeks.

The findings showed that the group who were given the music therapy course displayed a greater improvement with regards to their depressive state.

Many therapists believe that music has the ability to “heal the soul”. In particular, ‘happy’ music, such as salsa, bluegrass, and reggae. Talking of reggae, the legendary Bob Marley once said:

“One good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain.”

This point has proven to be the case by researchers at the *University of Utah Pain Research Center*. A study was carried out on one hundred and forty-three people in which they were given electric shocks whilst engaged in various music tasks. The results showed that music “provided meaningful intellectual and emotional engagement to help reduce pain.” In a surprise to the authors’ preconceptions about their test, the study also showed that the more anxious the person, the more they engaged with the task.

I began by outlining the high rate of mental illness that exists in the music industry and the pressure artists feel. I also queried how I spent so long in a career that, for much of that time, made me feel incredibly anxious myself. I would, however, probably have to argue the case that music has in fact been my therapy for all these years of suffering with anxiety and depression. It wasn’t the music that made me anxious at those gigs, it was the music that pulled me out of a depressive state for a few hours every night and brought me the amazing buzz and adrenaline rush of performing. I can’t imagine my life without music, it’s the best therapy there is for the mind and the soul.

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