Gary White, David Stuart, and Elyn Aviva, Music in Our World: An Active-Listening Approach (McGraw-Hill, 2001), pp. 31-36.

Physical Responses

Determined in part by the norms of your society and the patterns you picked up from adults when you were a child, **physical responses** to music are wide-ranging and include both subtle and obvious effects.

Watusi dance, Rwanda
Super Stock

Many of our physical responses to music are quite obvious. We dance, march, tap our feet, and move or sway to certain kinds of music. It is easy to observe an infant's physical response to music, even though that response may be uncoordinated. Babies will become quite active, moving their arms and legs when lively music is played. This kind of physical response to music is innate. We respond in spite of ourselves and often without being aware. For example, we may not realize that we are tapping our feet in time with music.

Latin music dance concert, New York City
Hazel Hankin/Stock Boston

Other physical responses are less obvious. When soothing music is played, we relax and become quiet. (Studies have found that cattle produce more milk when soothing music is played to them, and surgery patients recovered faster if soothing music was played during the surgery.) We respond to music that is interesting to us with increased attention and a generally increased level of physical tension. In addition, we respond to some music with an increase or decrease of tension that may not be apparent to others but which we can clearly recognize once our attention is directed to it.

Studies have also found other physical responses to music, such as changes in heart rate, respiration, and brain-wave patterns. These subtler effects are determined, for the most part, by the degree to which the listener is familiar with the style of the music. You are not likely to respond to music in an unfamiliar style in the same way as to music you have much experience with.

Emotional Responses

Music is capable of arousing strong **emotional responses.** What are these emotions? We have seen lists that include anger, anxiety, awe, despair, enthusiasm, excitement, fear, love, joy, frustration, gratitude, grief, happiness, hope, hate, hopelessness, passion, pleasure, pride, sadness, and sorrow—to name a few. There are innumerable shades and combinations of these emotions.

It is not uncommon to see an audience moved to tears by the power of music. Patriotic and martial music has long been known to inspire emotional reactions in troops and citizens. Consider the emotional reaction of winners at the Olympic Games as they stand on the platform to receive their medals and then hear their national anthem played in their honor: they almost always weep. Or consider the surge of emotion felt by students at a sports event when they hear their school song. Music therapists draw on the emotional and physical power of music to improve the well-being of their clients. Music therapy is now practiced in hundreds of hospitals and rehabilitation centers. Protest singers around the world have also drawn upon the emotional power of music to rouse people to action against perceived injustice.

The emotions we feel while listening to music are determined in part by the nature of the music, of course, but even more by our individual associations and experiences with the particular style and the piece itself. For example, a piece of music you associate with a particular event such as a wedding, a funeral, or your first date will carry an emotional meaning for you that is quite different from the emotion it arouses in someone else.

Music that is totally unlike anything you have heard before is unlikely to elicit the same emotional reaction from you as it would from a person steeped in the traditions of that music. Music that is pleasing to the ears of younger listeners may be jarring or irritating to their parents—and vice versa. Thus, your emotional responses are unlikely to be in total agreement with those of other listeners, and it is not possible to assign a single emotion to a piece of music. Nevertheless, the power of music to evoke emotional responses is undeniable.

Indian classical dancer
Lindsay Hebberd/Corbis

Lauryn Hill performs at music video awards
Reuters Newmedia/Corbis

Native American children
Lindsay Hebberd/Corbis

Cognitive Responses

Cognitive responses are a result of our thinking about music. When we listen to a specific piece of music, we often think of what we know

about the performers, the composers, the instruments, or the setting and purpose. This knowledge can be both formal and informal.

Your informal knowledge of familiar music was acquired by your direct experiences with the music. Informal knowledge might consist of recognition of the piece or recognition of the same performer in a new piece, or a set of expectations about how a piece in a given style will sound. Since this knowledge was gained informally, you may have difficulty verbalizing it.

You may have added formal understanding to that informal knowledge by reading about the music. You may be unable to verbalize what you understand informally about a piece of music, but formal knowledge is acquired verbally (by reading, hearing a lecture, etc.) and can be talked about. For instance, you may have learned something about the given piece of music, such as biographical details about the composer (e.g., Beethoven was deaf later in life), or the history of the song (a Beatles' piece performed by many different groups), or the reputation of the performers (for example, the mystique of The Grateful Dead's concerts). This is formal understanding, and you can think about and discuss these details with others.

For music that is totally unfamiliar, you will have neither formal nor informal knowledge. As a result, your cognitive response may be curiosity or lack of interest. In this case, formal knowledge will greatly enhance your cognitive response. You will be able to think about what you are listening to and become a more active listener.

One of the goals of this course is to increase your formal knowledge about both familiar and unfamiliar music by providing information about the pieces you will study and also by providing cultural and social background.

Spiritual Responses

The word *spiritual* often brings religion to mind. However, there is a distinct difference between religion and spirituality. Broadly speaking, *religion* refers to structures, creeds, sacred texts, church buildings—the whole organized establishment that maintains a particular faith community. *Spirituality,* on the other hand, refers to personal experience of a particular kind—personal experience connected with transcendent values, with deepest meaning, with whatever you find most important in your life.

If you are a member of a religious faith, many of your most important values are likely to reflect the tenets of your religious community. However, some of your deeply held values may go beyond those tenets to include, for example, concern for the environment or concern for social justice, even if your faith community does not have teachings pertaining to those concerns. If you are not a mem-

Church choir singing
Nathan Benn/Corbis

ber of any religious community, you may still have deeply held spiritual values that are the result of your social background and cultural experience. You may have had a kind of spiritual experience on a wilderness backpacking trip or in shared community with others.

Some music has the power to connect with your transcendent values. We say that such music is "uplifting." It transports us to other dimensions of experience in ways that go beyond a simple emotional response. The power of music to move us in that way has long been recognized by religious organizations, which use music precisely because of its power to "lift us up" spiritually.

Even more than physical, emotional, or cognitive responses, **spiritual responses** depend on intimate experience with the cultural context of the music. Your spiritual response to a given piece of music is likely to be unlike that of another person because of your unique background and experiences. This will be true even if the other person shares your culture and even has similar religious convictions.

For example, the Hispanic Christian hymn *De Colores* speaks deeply and directly to the experience of Hispanic Christians. For traditional Puerto Rican–American Catholics, for example, the piece speaks to their social, economic, and spiritual connection to the land—as well as to God's promise to be present to God's people, as demonstrated by the rainbow. *De Colores* is now included in many Protestant hymnals and is often sung by Anglo Christians.

***De Colores* (first verse)**

De colores, de colores se visten los campos en la primavera.	All the colors, yes, the colors we see in the springtime with all of its flowers.
De colores, de colores son los pajaritos que vienen de a fuera.	All the colors, when the sunlight shines out through a rift in the cloud and it showers.
De colores, de colores es al arco iris que vemos lucir.	All the colors, as a rainbow appears when a storm cloud is touched by the sun.
Y por eso los grandes amores de muchos colores me gustan a mi.	All the colors abound for the whole world around and for everyone under the sun.

Source: English version by David Arkin, Hodgin Press. In *Singing the Living Tradition,* the Unitarian Universalist Hymnal (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 305.

(Literal translation: In colors, in colors the fields bloom in spring. In colors, in colors the little birds fly from afar. In colors, in colors the rainbow arcs so clearly. And for this reason, these great loves of many colors are pleasing to me.)

However, it will not move a non-Hispanic in quite the same way it would a member of the Hispanic community, simply because of cultural differences—differences in language, differences in response to the issues surrounding skin color in our society, and differences in musical background and taste.