

Music: A Melodic Linkage to the Human Psyche

Imagine you are driving down the highway listening to your favorite smooth jazz playlist, and out of nowhere, *Numb* by Linkin Park starts playing. Would your mood shift to match that of the more hardcore tunes provided by the late Chester Bennington? Most would agree that the overall mood of the drive would at least somewhat shift to reflect the edgier tone of the music; this is because there is something special about music that separates its melodic tones from the other noises that we are exposed to in our daily lives, where instead of simply hearing a sound, our brains sync with the canorous pattern and exhibit a unique emotional response to it. This response was further explored through a study conducted by Terrence Hays and Victor Minichiello of the University of New England, who qualitatively identified six psychological dimensions that are fulfilled when listening to music: linking, life events, sharing and connecting, wellbeing, therapeutic benefits, escapism, and spirituality.^[1] Dating back as far as Ancient Greece, this unique psychological impact that music generates has been given attention. The Ancient Greeks established their ideas on how music impacted human behavior through what is now referred to as *The Doctrine of Ethos*. From this set of principles, they believed that music greatly contributed to the formation of one's character, and saw it as a means of conveying ethical and moral attitudes. In fact, it was believed that even the type of instrument that was played had an impact on the shaping of one's morals. People who played the aulos were viewed harshly, as degenerates, whereas those playing the kithara were believed to have improved their moral character as a result.^{[3][4]} In Aristotle's *Politics*, he further argues of the impact music has on one's character, asserting that "rhythms, too, have a character, some of rest, others of motion; and of the latter some have a more vulgar, others a nobler, movement."^[2] The influence that these properties have on us stem from how we relate our emotions to these different characteristics, and the strength of these emotional connections demonstrates the power music has over the mind as a result. For this reason,

Aristotle proceeded to stress that “we cannot afford to neglect the use of it in education,” where its ability to impact the development of one’s character must be used responsibly to avoid negative influence. Like Aristotle, the Roman philosopher Boethius was concerned with the functions that music served, but observed our relationship with music from a different (more mathematical) approach. He envisioned a way of understanding music beginning with the simplest man made instruments rising towards a conception of order and divine harmony throughout the universe, from which he categorized this into three separate classifications: Musica Mundana (Music of the Spheres / Celestial Harmony), Musica Humana (Music of the Human Body, Soul and Spiritual Harmony), and Musica Instrumentalis (Music of the Instruments). “Music is related not only to speculation but to morality as well, for nothing is more consistent with human nature than to be soothed by sweet modes or disturbed by their opposites... the whole Universe is united by musical concord,”^[5] claimed Boethius, who essentially viewed morality through music on a spectrum proportional to the harmonic properties of a specific melody, as the universe revolves around harmonic/spherical properties, and thus, converging towards these properties is “right” by nature.

I agree with the concept that morality is heavily impacted by music. Like many, I was introduced to music at a very young age; however, as I have found throughout the years, the music I was around most was quite different from what most of my peers listened to. Growing up, my parents both enjoyed listening to eccentric subgenres of Metal music, typically what I would call a mixture of Space Metal (Sci-Fi vibe) and Symphonic Metal (Involving an orchestra). Thus, songs by artists like Dream Theater, Symphony X, and most important (to myself), Ayreon, had a huge influence on my upbringing. I recall having an increased interest in mathematics and science following any exposure to Space Metal, which I would say even impacted my decision to become an engineer later in life. Whenever I feel a lack of motivation in the pursuit of my path as an engineer, I use Space Metal,

specifically the album *Universal Migrator Part 1: The Dream Sequencer* by Ayreon, as both encouragement, as well as a reminder of who I am. This heavily ties into the aforementioned philosophy that music does impact the development of one's character, as I truly believe that without my exposure to this abnormal subgenre of metal, I would not have felt enough of an inclination to mathematics and science as part of my character to advance to a point where it has become not just an interest, but my purpose. Space Metal gives me a feeling of inspiration with regards to the concept of innovation, similar to how smooth jazz may provide a feeling of comfort and relaxation to many others. As someone with a brain plagued by angst stemming from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, I have found binaural beats to greatly reduce anxiety in times of mild distress. This odd effect brought by binaural beats is often called "The 110 Hz Phenomena,"^[6] as this resonance would then allow enhanced right brain activity (The right brain is responsible for our artistic, poetic, sensual, spiritual, imaginative and innovative abilities). In contrast, when I listen to more "hardcore" metal and rap music, I tend to feel more angry and/or reckless; it is often argued that this music doesn't directly produce these emotions, but rather amplifies these feelings. However, when I go to the gym to lift weights, I am typically in a relaxed mood beforehand, and use these music genres (Artists like Linkin Park and YG) to shift my mood to a more angered state, which effectively encourages me to pump out a few reps in response.

As you can see, music is truly incredible in how much influence it can have on the human mind. While not everyone responds the same way to specific genres and songs, music, since its earliest traces of exploration dating as far back as Ancient Greece, its impact on psychology has been apparent. Indeed, its influence varies, but I have felt the power of music on my character firsthand, to a point where even my career has been shaped around it. Many may not even realize how much control music has over us, but nonetheless, it is there with us, through both the good and the bad, music always triumphs.

References

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