**Homework Assignment 1**

**Asking the Right Questions**

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**Case Study from FiveThirtyEight website – Breaking Music down To Its Genes**

This is my opinion of the author’s treatment of the case study “Breaking Music down To Its Genes,” posted on the FiveThirtyEight website at <http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/breaking-music-down-to-its-genes/>. The case study is the work of Nolan Gasser, chief musicologist for Pandora and architect of the Music Genome Project for Pandora®, to collectively define a piece of music from its individual criteria, [individual genes]. A music genome is basically a standardized framework of music analyses. It allows you to take stock of every important attribute of a piece of music: melody, harmony, rhythm, form, instrumentation, etc. A genome has to fully and properly code any song in that species of music. There are between 150 and 400 genes per genome. Currently, there are over a million songs analyzed by Pandora, none of which would be possible without the Music Genome Project (Gasser, 2015).

**Is the author asking the right question?**

Ironically, the author ask the question, “How do we make use of that information to make our lives better?” It is here that he changes his focus. He states, “There is a field of study based on the belief that music can make our lives’ healthier, especially when something goes wrong.” Gasser is now working with a leading cancer treatment hospital to create an algorithm that identifies the ideal music to treat cancer ailments like fatigue, pain, anxiety, nauseous. His approach was to first, read through the literature on the use of music therapy. He observed what had a positive effect was a slow heartbeat-pace tempo, constant-harmony, lyrically and sustained melody, and occasionally burst of rhythmic energy. He composed from the active expression of hundreds of genes, defining a mix of counterpoint with improvisation, the light texture of a string quartet, with the percussive thunder of piano and drums; resulting Classical harmonies with a Rock groove. For his first exercise, he reverse-engineered the genome to compose an original work that can have a positive, salutary effect. He calls it the “Wellness Suite.” He made use of several genomes, most notably Classical, Pop Rock, and Jazz. The best pieces strive to a reach an apotheosis (climax) from a gradual unwinding (buildup) (Gasser, 2015).

**That seems to be the best question?**

“How do we make use of that information to make our lives better?” said the author. Gasser’s Music Genome Project continues to be very successful for Pandora® and probably provides economic reward. But I sense that Gasser is not working on Pandora® as much since his work with therapeutic music for cancer treatment. I believe there is a better benefit of his work to help people with music through the difficult times of fighting a terminal illness. And maybe it is genuinely therapeutic for their medical condition. I believe and he believes that it is a higher calling. My only recommendation would be for him to continue and advance his work as much as possible.

# References

Gasser, N. (2015, May 20). *Breaking Music Down To Its Genes.* Retrieved from FiveThirtyEight-Science: http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/breaking-music-down-to-its-genes/