

Pan pipes, pinot noir and productivity: the hidden power of music

Level: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. Talk to a partner or in small groups. Write all the music genres you can think of in the box.

b. Scan the article to see which music genres are mentioned there. Add the ones you haven't added before.

c. Which of the music genres in the box do you think would be appropriate as background music in the following places and situations?

- an upmarket hotel spa
- a café that serves teas and lunches
- a gym
- a supermarket
- a fast-fashion clothes shop
- when you are on hold while calling customer services

2 Short discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- What song sounds like strawberries?
- What music makes you think of bitter lemons?
- Are you a musical person?

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3 Key words

a. Write the correct words from the wordpool next to the definitions below. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

agitation

concourse

distracting

distress

lingering

lullaby

lush

productivity

soothing

sufferer

1. luxurious, rich, sensuous _____
2. a relaxing song that helps a young child go to sleep _____
3. someone who has a particular problem or disease _____
4. a feeling of being worried or upset _____
5. a feeling that you have when you are very unhappy, worried, or upset

6. staying somewhere longer than necessary _____
7. a large area in a railway station, where people can walk _____
8. making you feel more calm and relaxed, and less nervous, worried, or upset

9. the rate at which goods are produced, especially in relation to the time, money, and workers needed to produce them _____
10. preventing you from concentrating on something _____

b. Use some of the key words above to complete these sentences.

1. Let's meet on the _____ at 10 am and get on the 10:20 train.
2. The factory has to increase its _____ by ten per cent next year.
3. He walked up and down the room in _____.
4. This spring has been very difficult for allergy _____.
5. I find it too _____ to work with the television on.
6. I enjoy _____ over breakfast and reading the online news.

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What song sounds like strawberries? Can the right playlist relieve pain? And why does classical music make us spend money? An interesting new show tries to answer all these questions and more

Stephen Moss

24 October, 2022

- 1 A new exhibition at Manchester's Science and Industry Museum is asking visitors to match certain types of music with tastes. Does this sound sweet, sour, bitter, salty?
- 2 At first, I don't want to make my selections. I don't want to look silly in front of curator Steven Leech. But then something magical happens: the screechy music suddenly makes me think of bitter lemons and the lush sounds make me see strawberries.
- 3 "The exhibition is about the way music affects our bodies and minds, and drives us to innovate, create and share," says Leech. "We found that most people, unless they played an instrument or could read music, felt 'unmusical'. They forgot that there is music everywhere and that it is so central in our culture." He wants to show that almost everyone is musical and has an emotional response to what they hear.
- 4 One exhibit shows how a lullaby has certain musical qualities that are felt by everyone. Co-curator Emily Scott-Dearing says cultural conditioning is important, too. "In western music, there are associations between major keys and happiness, and minor keys and sadness," she explains, "but that is not universal across all music systems."
- 5 Music's ability to relax us is well known and Turn It Up looks at ways it is used for medical purposes – for example, to treat dementia sufferers. A study of group music-therapy sessions in care homes found that music helped reduce patients' agitation and distress, so they could take fewer drugs.
- 6 Music also affects us in other ways. Playing generic French or German music in supermarket wine aisles can increase the amount of wine supermarkets sell from those countries.
- 7 Other research suggests playing classical music in shops makes people spend more money. Playing classical music rather than muzak or pop in a café can increase sales by 20%. Another study has shown that classical music encourages shoppers to buy luxury items, whereas country music encourages more everyday, functional purchases.
- 8 Fast music, meanwhile, makes you shop more quickly. That also explains why tunes by marching bands are sometimes played at London's Waterloo station – to stop commuters lingering on the concourse. Underground stations also play soothing music to encourage calm behaviour in situations that can become stressful.
- 9 Can listening to music help you sleep well? Familiarity is important, Leech explains. "If music makes you feel more comfortable and takes you to a different place, it can help you go to sleep," he says.
- 10 Memory is another part of the show. The BBC radio programme Desert Island Discs shows that every week, playing the pieces that have become signposts in a person's life.
- 11 Turn It Up tries to answer many questions. What music, for instance, is best for a call centre to use while callers are on hold? Pleasant tunes without words that feel like they have no beginning and no end – callers don't like to be reminded of the time they have to wait. One experiment showed that they were more likely to wait if the music was an instrumental version of 'Yesterday', rather than the version with Paul McCartney singing it. His version made callers pay attention.
- 12 So does listening to music while we work help or hinder productivity? The answer depends on what you are doing: it helps with mechanical tasks but is distracting if you are carrying out complex cognitive tasks.
- 13 And what is the safest music to listen to while driving? Heavy metal. No, I'm just joking – ballads are best.

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4 Understanding the article

a. Are these statements True or False according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Turn It Up is the title of a new study published by Oxford University.
2. The author was asked to say which music he thought of when he smelt strawberries and lemons.
3. Certain types of music are felt by everyone in the world the same way.
4. All the people interviewed around the world said that minor keys make them sad and major keys make them feel happy.
5. Music can help people with dementia so that they do not have to take any drugs.
6. Music that we know well can help us get to sleep.
7. Music will slow down the productivity of people who do mentally complex work.
8. Heavy metal is the best type of music to play while driving your car.

5 Key language

a. Match the word pairs and find them in the article to check your answers. Look up the meaning of any you do not know.

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. cultural | a. purposes |
| 2. medical | b. hold |
| 3. care | c. items |
| 4. luxury | d. conditioning |
| 5. marching | e. tasks |
| 6. underground | f. stations |
| 7. on | g. version |
| 8. instrumental | h. homes |
| 9. pay | i. bands |
| 10. mechanical | j. attention |

b. Now use the word pairs to talk about the article.

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6 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- What type of music do you like to listen to while you are driving?
- Should teenagers be allowed to listen to music while they do their homework?
- Is music ever played at your workplace? How does this affect the way you work?
- In what other ways does music affect people or animals?

7 In your own words

a. 'Desert Island Discs' is a BBC Radio 4 programme, which each week asks an interviewee which eight pieces of music they would take with them to a desert island. The presenter then asks them which song or piece of music they would save if a big wave came to wash them all away.

Imagine you are a guest on this show. Write the names of eight songs or pieces of music, including the artists that perform them, that are important to you and that you would like to have with you on a desert island.

Work in pairs and interview each other. Find out which music your partner would not want to live without, and why.