

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

Level: Advanced

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 these if you hadn't already thought of them.

c. Which of the music genres you listed 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. Then read the article to find out how it addresses these topics.

- What song sounds like strawberries?
- Can the right playlist relieve pain?
- Why does classical music make us spend money?

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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.

adversely	agitation	aisle	dissonance	encapsulate
lingering	lullaby	lush	reluctant	rendition
ridicule	soporific	subliminally	ubiquity	utilitarian

1. not willing to do something _____
2. remarks or behaviour intended to make someone or something seem silly by making fun of them in an unkind way _____
3. luxuriant, rich, opulent, lavish, sensuous _____
4. when something is present everywhere _____
5. a relaxing song that helps a young child go to sleep _____
6. in a negative way _____
7. an unpleasant sound created when musical notes played together are not in harmony

8. a feeling of being worried or upset _____
9. a passage between rows of seats, for example in a church, theatre, or plane, or between the shelves of a supermarket _____
10. when something influences you in a way that may affect you even though you do not notice or think about it _____
11. designed to be useful rather than attractive _____
12. staying somewhere longer than necessary _____
13. making you want to sleep _____
14. express something in a short, clear form that gives the most important facts or ideas

15. a particular way of performing a song, poem, piece of music, etc. _____

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

1. All their furniture seemed rather _____ and not at all stylish.
2. His health was _____ affected by the cold, damp climate.
3. This letter is short, but it _____ the parents' concerns.
4. The new supermarket has three _____ purely for biscuits and sweets.
5. She was _____ to leave before she knew everything would be alright.
6. I enjoy _____ over breakfast and reading the online news.
7. Her old-fashioned ideas risk making her an object of _____.
8. He paced up and down the room in _____.

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

Stephen Moss

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- 1 I'm always happy to talk about my taste in music, but what about the taste of music? 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 Initially, I am reluctant to make my selections, fearing ridicule in front of curator Steven Leech. But then something magical happens: the screechy music does indeed suddenly bring to mind bitter lemons and the lush sounds do conjure up strawberries.
- 3 This new exhibition, Turn It Up, takes the research being done into the effects of music at universities across the world and tries to make it accessible to a general audience.
- 4 "The exhibition is about the way music affects our bodies and minds, and drives us to innovate, create and share," says Leech. "We did some audience testing and found that the majority of the people, unless they played an instrument or could read music, felt 'unmusical' – ignoring the ubiquity of music in their lives and its centrality in our culture." He aims to show that in fact almost everyone is musical and has an emotional response to what they hear.
- 5 One exhibit demonstrates that a lullaby has certain musical qualities that are universally felt. Conversely, our brains are programmed to react adversely to dissonance. But co-curator Emily Scott-Dearing insists cultural conditioning plays a part, 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."
- 6 Music's ability to relax us is well attested – Classic FM has built its entire marketing pitch around it – and Turn It Up looks at ways it is used for medical purposes, not least to treat dementia sufferers. "Manchester Camerata has a project called Music in Mind, which runs group music-therapy sessions in care homes," says Scott-Dearing, "and there was a study that found a significant reduction in medication use." Music was taking the place of drugs in reducing agitation and distress among patients.
- 7 Music has other measurable effects on us. One study has shown that supermarkets playing generic French or German music in their wine aisles – think accordions and oompah bands – affects the amount of wine they sell from those countries. Consumers don't have to know what they are listening to; they subliminally absorb the musical message and buy accordingly.
- 8 Other research suggests playing classical music in commercial environments makes consumers spend more money. "We have value associations that we put on music," says Scott-Dearing, "and classical music is seen as high end." Professor Adrian North has demonstrated that playing classical music rather than muzak or pop in a café can boost sales by 20%. Another study has shown that classical music encourages shoppers to buy luxury items, whereas country music prompts more utilitarian purchases.
- 9 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 boost commuter well-being and encourage calm behaviour in situations that can become stressful.
- 10 Can listening to music combat insomnia? Music to fall asleep to doesn't have to be soporific, Leech explains; familiarity can be more important. "If music makes you feel more comfortable and takes you to a different place, it can get you more prepared for sleep," he says.

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- 11 Memory is another key theme of the show. Sometimes music triggers personal memories that become more important than the sound itself. Desert Island Discs demonstrates that week in, week out, playing the pieces that have become signposts in a person's life. And that we set such store by the music played at the funerals of loved ones is no accident: it can encapsulate an attitude to life.
- 12 Turn It Up tries to answer many questions. Some are broad and quasi-philosophical. How does the brain process music? Why does it trigger memory? Why does it make us dance? Others are more practical.
- 13 What music, for instance, is best for a call centre to use while callers are on hold? Pleasant tunes without lyrics that appear to have no beginning and no end – callers don't like to be reminded of the passage of time while they are hanging on. One experiment showed that they were more likely to stay on the line if the music was a version of 'Yesterday' played on pan pipes, rather than the version with Paul McCartney singing it. His much-loved rendition made callers too attentive; zombification is the key here.
- 14 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.
- 15 And what is the safest music to listen to while driving? Heavy metal, surprisingly. 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. Stephen Leech 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. Regardless of where they live or how they grew up, people around the world feel the effect of minor and major keys in the same way.

b. Find the information in the article.

1. In what ways has music been shown to help people in care homes?
2. What kind of music helps us sleep?
3. Why do many people spend ages deciding what music to play at a funeral?
4. What examples are given of how retailers use music?

5 Key language

a. Find phrases that fit with the meanings.

1. make something appear as if by magic (paragraph 2)
2. think that something is very important (paragraph 11)
3. not end a phone call (paragraph 13)

b. Now use the phrases in sentences of your own about topics unrelated to the article.

6 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- What type of music do you like to listen to when you are driving?
- Should students listen to music while they do their homework?
- Is music ever played at your workplace? How does this affect the way you work?
- What other effects have you noticed music having on people or animals?

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7 In your own words

- a. Desert Island Discs is a long-running 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 being a guest on this show. Write the names of eight songs or pieces of music, including the artist, that are important to you and that you would like to have with you if you were stranded on a desert island.

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