

## 10 Magical Effects Music Has On the Mind

Music has many unexpected and positive effects on us as people. Great music can transform an ordinary day into something magical, even spiritual. It can provide solace, release and strong sensations. But music's influence spreads further still: right up from our genetic code, through our thoughts and bodies and out into how we relate in groups.

So what, more specifically, can research tell us ('cause research is right!)?

### 1. Improve verbal IQ

Practising the piano won't just improve your musical abilities, it can also improve your visual and verbal skills. A study of 8 to 11-year-olds found that children who have extra-curricular music classes, develop higher verbal IQ and visual abilities in comparison to those with no musical training. This shows the benefits of learning an instrument are not purely musical, but extend into cognition and visual perception.

### 2. Feeling the chills

Have you ever felt chills down your spine while listening to music? According to a study in 2010 (that is pretty recent!) over 90% of us have these spine tickling and stimulating experiences. How much you feel, though, depends on your personality. People who are high in one of the five universal personality dimensions called 'openness to experience', are likely to feel the most chills while listening to music. In the study, people high in openness to experience were more likely played a musical instrument, and more likely rated music as important to them.

### 3. Active listening increases your level of happiness

If you're not feeling the chills, perhaps you should try a little harder. A recent study (in 2013!) contradicts the old advice that actively *trying* to feel happier is useless. Participants in this study who listened to upbeat classical compositions by Aaron Copland, while actively trying to feel happier, felt their moods lift more than those who passively listened to the music. Thus: if you engage with

music, rather than allowing it to wash over you, gives the experience extra emotional power.

#### **4. Singing together brings us together**

Since music is often a social activity, making it together can help bring us together. A recent study of almost one thousand Finnish pupils (that's a lot!) who took part in extended music classes, found they reported higher satisfaction at school in almost every area, even those not related to the music classes themselves. So people find it very satisfying to make music in a group (like in the ERYO) and even makes people like each other more.

#### **5. Music treats heart disease**

...or at least it can help with the stress and anxiety associated with having treatment for coronary heart disease. A summary 23 studies covering almost 1,500 participants found that listening to music reduced heart rate, blood pressure and anxiety in heart disease patients (anyone at this stage NOT listening to music??)

#### **6. Why sad music lifts you up**

'Mood management' is the number one reason people love music. And, all music fans know that music can have a cathartic effect. It helps you to release pent up feelings (like people show in a not so very good way in road rage incidents). But, it's still odd that, for some people, sad music can, under the right circumstances, improve their mood. Why?

According to another very recent study in 2013, sad music is enjoyable because it creates an interesting mix of emotions; some negative, some positive. Crucially, we perceive the negative emotions in the music, but don't feel them strongly.

#### **7. Seeing happy faces**

Music may make you feel different, but as little as 15 seconds of music can change the way you judge the emotions on other people's faces as well. SO music cannot only make you *feel* better but it also influences your perception

positively. Wow! (have you turned on your music yet??). Researchers found that a quick blast of happy music made participants perceive other's faces as happier. The same was true for a snatch of sad music. The biggest effect was seen when people looked at faces with a neutral expression. So: people projected the mood of the music they were listening to onto other people's faces.

## **8. The colour of music**

Music naturally makes people think of certain colours (noticed this before??). Across different cultures, people pair particular types of music with particular colours. People from both Mexico and the US showed remarkable similarities in connecting duller, darker colours with sadder pieces of music and lighter, more vivid colours with happier music (makes sense ....). These music-to-colour associations were seen because of the emotional content of the music.

## **9. Could music bring back your vision?**

In 60% of people who have a stroke, the visual areas of the brain are affected. This leads to something called 'visual neglect': the patient loses awareness of objects on the opposite side to where the brain has been damaged. However, studies have found, when patients listen to their favourite music, some of their visual attention is restored (unbelievable isn't it?). So, music can be an important tool in rehabilitation for stroke patients.

## **10. Babies are born to dance!**

And lastly: Infants as young as five-months-old respond rhythmically to music and seem to find it more interesting than speech. In a study in 2010 babies spontaneously danced to all different types of music, and those that were most in time also smiled the most. Maybe music really is in our genes!

(Adapted from <http://www.spring.org.uk/>. Downloaded 25 February 2014)