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Christ is Alive!

Where do we find Him in Music?

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What and Where is Music?

Dictionary explains: Music is a vocal or instrumental sound (or both) combined in such a way as to produce beauty of form, harmony, and expression of emotion.

Even though we are constantly exposed to music in our daily lives, we don't actually think about what it is. So, what exactly is music? I believe we all have different definitions about that and we all are right!

Music is essential to many of our lives. We listen to it when waking up, while in transit, at work, and with our friends. For many, music is like a constant companion. It can bring us joy and motivate us, but also it will accompany us through difficult times, and alleviate, calm down our worries and stress.

Music is much more than an entertainment. It has been a feature of every known human society. Many psychologists today make the argument that music predated language. Primitive tribes and religious practices have used music to reach enlightened states for thousands of years, and already what is registered, Pythagoras used music to heal different psychological and physical illnesses. We find many different researches how music influences our brain, or why we choose this and not that kind of music.

Music is Everywhere, but as a simple vibration is unseen by the human eye! Yet, it exists for everybody, and every even little child know the sound of music.

What Music does to you?

From a simple, lonely melody to a complicated symphony, sometimes it feels like music can speak directly to your heart, in a language that you don't know, but your emotions understand. It can facilitate a deeply rich emotional experience, alter perception and consciousness, and induce ecstatic states of being.

I did a short research: majority of asked people said – music gives them goosebumps, relaxation, transportations to a different world. Listening or expressing Music is a meeting with something which transcends us, which comes from out there, or from within us, but often it is beyond our understanding. Music touches the deepest part of your inner person, that's why listening to music you can be deeply emotional. If this is not your kind of music, you are rather upset and easily getting a headache, or you take it as a noise.

And that's because music is a language. The language of emotion created for us at the very beginning. And I mean that literally. Music has structure, progression and syntax -- just like language. The brain even processes musical syntax using the same area it uses to process language syntax. Next time you hear someone speaking emotionally, listen to the acoustic characteristics

of their voice -- they'll mirror music of the same emotion: fast, loud and high for excitement and happiness, slower and softer for melancholy, etc.

So, if music is a language, how does it convey its meaning? After all, it doesn't have any words, does it? At the very basic, physical level, loud and fast noises excite us more than slow quiet ones because our brain-stem is tuned to attend to these kinds of noises in the environment. Certain chords sound pleasant because of how we divide tones into different pitches: harmonically simple, consonant chords, like majors, are easy to do this for, but harmonically complex chords, like tritones, are harder to distinguish and so we find them dissonant. But these automatic brain mechanisms are only the beginning of how we read meaning into music.

Much of the emotional significance that we find in music comes from our own life experience: whilst still in the cradle we learn to associate the music we hear with the emotional environment we hear it in -- so a mother's lullaby might imprint us with calm memories for major keys, whilst a lover's lament in A minor would remind us of breakups and ex-girlfriends. Although it wasn't always this way around: After all, western cultures have a very different appreciation of dissonance to Arabic music, or to Indian ragas.

But we don't just sense the emotions in music; we feel those emotions too. How? How can it force us to actually feel the same way? One possibility is that once we've understood what the emotional content of the music is, it activates a population of brain cells called mirror neurons. These cells mentally simulate behaviours that we perceive in the world around us, which helps us with social understanding and empathy. In this case they allow us to empathize with the emotion of the music, triggering the same emotions in us by activating the limbic system -- the emotion hub of the brain.

Some of our most powerful responses to music come from expectation, tension, then resolution. But calculating something that complex requires much more of our brain's vast processing power. Humans are expert predictors -- we are always trying to figure what's going to happen next and why. As we listen to music, our brains are continuously trying to guess what's coming up, based on what we've just heard and on our experience of music over our lives. You can even see the moment we've realized the meaning in the music by a spike in the recorded electrical activity across the brain. Our brains try to calculate what's coming next, and to judge the accuracy of those predictions we use the brain's reward system -- dopamine. A correct guess gets a little pleasurable puff of dopamine, an incorrect guess gets nothing, and an unexpected, pleasurable resolution gets a great big burst! You know the thrill you get at a particularly beautiful musical moment? That chill that runs across your skin? You can predict when you'll feel that from a rush of dopamine to the nucleus accumbens -- a key node in the reward system. The nucleus accumbens then triggers the physical response that you feel, by activating the autonomic nervous system. This is what science says about music.

So why did we become the musical species? No other animal does this. This is an evolutionary question that flummoxed Darwin and is still argued about today. It might be a great and lucky accident -- a happy quirk of our brain's development that it can appreciate this complex integration of sound waves. Or maybe there is something more. Music is exceptionally good at provoking emotion -- far more than language. People with autism can have great problems perceiving emotion but can have their limbic systems activated through music. Communication of our emotional worlds, through music, could be as important for social cohesion as communication about the physical world is through language. It has been suggested that before music and before language, there was one mixture of the two -- musilanguage -- that sounded across the savannah. That musilanguage split and specialized into two different forms of communication -- one for ideas, one for emotion. Whatever the reason is, our ancestors have been playing music for longer than any of us knew -- recently a bone flute was found near the Danube in Germany, from over 40,000 years ago. Music is in our blood, our bones and our brains.

Some people tend to think they have no talents nor ability to learn or perform music. They call themselves or we call them musically deaf, hopeless 😊 . But I am here to tell you that there is no such thing. Otherwise those people would never like music, never use it in their lives and never enjoy attending a concert. Unfortunately, this is how we are brought up, trained or used to a culture where we divide people for those who can and those who can't. If a beautiful teenager hears constantly from her parents that she is ugly, useless and stupid, no matter how beautiful, creative and mature she is, she would always believe what she was told at the certain age. Not everyone should be a trained musician, 😊 no, there is already too many of us, but at least everyone deserves to enjoy music, and singing or playing instruments from time to time, because it is a gift from God to be used.

There is a beautiful saying we cannot forget about: Music in us is a God's sparkle.

Music and the Bible

There are plenty examples of music being used in the Bible, not only in Psalms. From the Old Testament let me share only two not very well-known examples:

1 Samuel Chapter 16

The verses told the story of King Saul who had become tormented by depression, which is beautifully called - a feeling of melancholy. Saul's servants suggested that they find a musician who could play for him to soothe his psyche. One of the servants suggested a young man named David who he heard was a skilled musician. "And it happened that whenever the spirit of melancholy from God was upon Saul, David would take the lyre (harp) and play it. Saul would then feel relieved and the spirit of melancholy would depart from him" (1 Samuel, 16:23).

Thus, before David became a great warrior and King, he was first a music therapist. He was curing King Saul from his depression with the harp/lyre, which can be played upbeat and rhythmically, we might assume that the music David played was soft and gentle, which is suitable for the harp/lyre. There is even scientific evidence from the past several years to show how sad music can be consoling and soothing.

Dr. Jonna Vuoskoski at Oxford has found similar results. And Dr. David Huron at Ohio State University provides a compelling neurobiological hypothesis on why sad music is soothing. He suggests that for some, when listening to sad music, the hormone prolactin produces feelings of tranquillity and calmness, and emits a consoling and soothing effect. It is released in 'psychic' tears of both happiness and sadness, it is released during nursing, after sexual intercourse, and when we feel empathy for someone who is sad. Huron says that the acoustic features of sad music "emulate" the features of sad speech, and that these musical cues may evoke feelings of tenderness or sadness which sends a signal for prolactin to be released.

Second example from the Old Testament, but more explored by the Apocrypha and some legends, actually predating King David is the account of the 7-year-old Serach Bat Asher (a wise daughter of Asher, the son of Jacob), who took Jacob out of a 22-year depression by playing/singing a melody repeatedly while he was praying; (There are two mentions of Serach in the Torah. The first is in Genesis, 46:17, in a passage that begins "These are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his descendants, who came to Egypt," and continues to mention all of Jacob's sons, his daughter Dinah, his grandsons, and one granddaughter—Serach. The passage reads "The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beri'ah, with Serach their sister." This sentence is repeated later in the Hebrew Bible in Chronicles, 1 Chronicles 7:30. One would suppose that, since the Torah mentions 53 grandsons and only one granddaughter, she was a person of significance. The second time Serach is mentioned is in the Book of Numbers, 26:46, in the listing of Israelites who escaped from Egypt, where it simply says, "And the name of the daughter of Asher was Serach." Since Serach is mentioned both as Jacob's granddaughter and also as one of the people who escaped from Egypt 210 years later, Serach is often referred to as the oldest woman in the Torah. A number of midrashim have been written about Serach, whose affection she won by her remarkable piety and virtue. The best known of the midrashim about her tells of how she was the first to inform Jacob that his son Joseph was still alive. Fearing that the news would be too much of a shock for the old man, however, she informs Jacob while he is praying, and sings in rhyme that Joseph is "alive and living in Egypt, and has two sons, Menassah and Ephraim." (Egypt in Hebrew is Mitzrayim, which rhymes with Ephraim.) In return, Jacob blesses her, saying "May you live forever and never die.")

In the New Testament we read:

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. / Colossians 3:16/

Without Music there was no worship. This is the essence of praising the Lord. Unfortunately, joyful singing and dancing disappeared for some time from the church history, but Reformation brought it back...

Music and the Reformation

The birth of congregational singing

Martin Luther (1483-1548) was not only a theologian and a reformer, he was also a musician and a composer.

He said: *Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world. Because he who sings, prays twice* /St Augustin/, and while singing you are not able to fight /Paulina Hlawiczka/

In the reform of the liturgy, he gave community singing a renewed role. At that time only the trained musicians and clergy trained in music could sing in church. The congregation was silenced.

When Luther studied in Eisenach, he had music lessons along with dance and singing -so did Melanchthon and many of his contemporaries. He learned to distinguish between the different musical genres.

Luther's new idea was to transcribe folk melodies or pub rude songs! He harmonised them and added the new and religious words. He also wrote new melodies on psalms in everyday words. He wanted all to have access not only to God's grace and salvation, but to music as well!

"I always loved music," Luther said. "Whoever has skill in this art, is of a good temperament, fitted for all things. We must teach music in schools; a schoolmaster ought to have skill in music, or I would not regard him; neither should we ordain young men to preachers, unless they have been well exercised in music." Martin himself was a passionate singer, a tenor. The Meistersinger of Nuremberg, Hans Sachs, called him the "Nightingale of Wittenberg". This bird of the Reformation can be recognised by his songs, like the people of the church.

This is why he called his first hymn book, published in 1529 in Wittenberg, "parish song book". This is programmatic. It is the people of the parish that shall sing, not only the clergy or the employed singers, he said. Many others contributed to this program – Luther himself wrote a modestly small number of songs. Not even 40 of his hymns have survived. And not all of Luther's poems are overly elegant. Some rhymes are rather doggerel: "Your wife shall be in your house / like a vine full of grapes, / and your children around your table / like oil plants, healthy and fresh." One might argue about these images. The titles of the songs are sometimes rather rough: "What do you, enemy Herod, fear much" This does not come fluently over the lips. But in those cases, he

wanted to be clear, easy and digestible to the nation, which could not read, but only learning from listening at that time.

Oddly enough in his first liturgy, entitled *Formula Missae* (1523), Luther advocated the continued presence of Latin chant, arguing it would encourage the young students to learn Latin. But for the congregations he set about translating chants from Latin into German nearly 40 new hymns.

Many of Luther's hymns have survived, among which *Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott* (A mighty Fortress is our God), or *Christ lag in Todesbanden* (Christ lay in death's bondage).

They are still in use in their simple harmony, but the themes were taken up in great polyphonies, those by Johann-Sebastian Bach being the most impressive.

"Notes make the text come alive", Luther said, and no composer has been a more perfect conduit of the word of God than JS Bach. Lutheran teachings and chorales are infused in Bach's cantatas, masses and Passions. Felix Mendelssohn was also a Lutheran and responsible for reviving Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. His *Reformation Symphony* commemorates the 300th anniversary of the *Augsburg Confession* (the final and written act of the reformation of the church). After Schumann's death, Brahms found consolation in the Lutheran Bible, from which he adapted the text for *A German Requiem*.

Counter-Reformation went against almost all proclamations of the Reformation, but Music. Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525 – 1594) left hundreds of compositions, including 105 masses, 68 offertories, at least 140 madrigals and more than 300 motets. In addition, there are at least 72 hymns, 35 magnificats, 11 litanies, and four or five sets of lamentations. The *Gloria* melody from a Palestrina's *Magnificat Tertii Toni* (1591) is widely used today in the resurrection hymn tune and was sung then by the people of the church. His attitude toward madrigals was somewhat enigmatic: whereas in the preface to his collection of *Canticum canticorum* (*Song of Songs*) motets (1584) he renounced the setting of profane texts, only two years later he was back in print with *Book II* of his secular madrigals (some of these being among the finest compositions in the medium). He published just two collections of madrigals with profane texts, one in 1555 and another in 1586. The other two collections were spiritual madrigals, a genre beloved by the proponents of the Counter-Reformation. Palestrina's masses show how his compositional style developed over time. His *Missa sine nomine* seems to have been particularly attractive to Johann Sebastian Bach, who studied and performed it while writing the *Mass in B minor*. Most of Palestrina's masses appeared in thirteen volumes printed between 1554 and 1601, the last seven published after his death.

What type of music is closer to God?

Do the angels in heaven play Mozart, who for some was/is a god himself? This is what the Protestant theologian Karl Barth assumed. Many others favoured Johann Sebastian Bach, who was

a Lutheran cantor. In heaven, they guess, choir pieces are sung, accompanied by timpani and trumpets. Martin Luther would probably have had his doubts. He did not like timpani and trumpets and called them "heavenly battle cries", a terrible "shouting to the honour of God". He also did not favour organ pipes very much and said that "they scream and shout", however Lutheran Church uses the organ music widely and still. He even excluded strings from the heavenly orchestra. Martin Luther was strong and shouting in words, but in music, he preferred a gentle, polyphonic instrument. He loved, and played, the lute – and he had the Revelation of St. John on his side, where the angels sing new songs accompanied by a similar kind of stringed instruments: harps (Revelation 5:8 f).

(...) Music (...) A manifestation of the highest energy — not at all abstract, but without an object, energy in a void, in pure ether — where else in the universe does such a thing appear? We (...) use it every day without much idea of the metaphysical. But here you have it, such music is energy itself, yet not as idea, rather in its actuality. I call your attention to the fact that is almost the definition of God. Imitatio Dei — I am surprised it is not forbidden. /T Mann, Doctor Faustus 1947/

(Imitation of God is the religious precept of Man finding salvation by attempting to realize his concept of supreme being. The Christian disciple is told to imitate God on several occasions. Matthew 5:48 states, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." Luke 6:36 states, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." In Ephesians 5, they are told by Paul to "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children". The believer is also advised to follow the ways of Jesus, notably in 1 Corinthians 11:1: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." In the Anglo-Saxon tradition Imitatio Dei is widely accepted, whereas the Lutheran tradition prefers to talk of conformitas (in German Nachfolge) instead of Nachahmung (imitation), because Jesus was singular and cannot and need not be imitated, but followed.)

God created music not only as a sound (however all the dictionaries say so). Music is a process of creating a sound but also the process of receiving a sound, which we call – listening.

The first duty of love is to listen. /Paul Tillich/

Paul Tillich, a great theologian and academic, but also somebody who understood human doubts and darkness, says that sometimes we need to find a new language to speak about the Church, the God and the religion. And maybe it could be, or it is, Music. Sometimes we need to withdraw from calling our God – god, to enter fully and properly a dialog with somebody, who did not yet experience His Grace. We may be so used to the religious language in our lives, that we don't see how much we put off those who don't know if they are or are not the believers yet. As church people, we may scare or patronize those non-church people unconsciously. Perhaps leaving our comfort zone and hear/listen to the languages of others would enrich ourselves. Then we would be more open to absorb this other language/way of speaking/way of understanding the world, to have better dialog, to be accepted for a dialog. And for others not to be afraid of us.

Perhaps God anticipated our failing in communication and gave us Music instead. But without listening there is no Music. And possibly for God the listening in Music is most important, not only His listening of course, but ours.

How do you share It?

The healing powers of music are vast, and we see evidence dating back thousands of years of how music has been used therapeutically. Indeed, there are accounts of music therapy in Judaism and other traditions including Sufism and Hinduism that may even predate King David. In the thousands of years since then, music has co-evolved with the human brain, and people have been intuitively using music as a self-therapy and therapy for others. Thus, our brains are hardwired to experience music as a therapeutic agent, and it should be the mission not only of today's musicians, music therapists and psychologists, but teachers, church ministers, leaders, and its members, to continue to master the use of this healing modality, that began thousands of years ago.

It is only annoying - if you do not want to call it pleasing - that in music - at least in music - there are things for which there is no real characterizing epithet in the whole realm of language, nor any combination of adjectives; you cannot find an adequate name for the mind, the posture, the gesture of this theme. Because there is a lot of gestures in it.
/T Mann, Doctor Faustus/

Something unconditional. There is God...

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