

The Psychology of Music

By Alex Taft



You know how there's that one scientific study where plants grew quicker if they grew while classical music was being played? There are apparently a lot of other studies like that one, but instead of being about plants, they're about humans! It turns out that the exact types of music can have a lot to do with the psychological effects music has on us.

Different types of music can make us happier, angrier, more relaxed, sadder, and more. For example, in a California study conducted by a team of biologists, research directors, and professors of management, it was found that listening to classical music reduces anxiety and depression, whereas with grunge rock music, it was found that subjects of the study experienced "significant increases in hostility, fatigue, sadness, and tension" (McCraty et. al 5). The reason for this effect, the researchers explain, could be because of the angsty or generally angry sound heightening levels of the stress hormone cortisol, as well as other adrenal steroids, which produces a momentary sort of "high" followed by negative effects (McCraty et. al 8). It's just such a fascinating concept that the music you listen to at a given time can actually have a notable effect on your overall mood; not because of some magic spell that the music has cast on you, but because of natural reactions to different sounds from the human body. As more results come out from studies similar to the one presented above, the possibility of music being used to help people therapeutically has been increasingly tossed around. A study by a large team of social workers, medical professors, psychologists, and music and art theorists was launched to further explore this concept, and it was discovered that "Music therapy

seems to reduce depressive symptoms and anxiety, and helps to improve functioning (e.g., maintaining involvement in jobs, activities, and relationships)” (Aalbers et. al). Findings such as this have made music therapy something used more and more frequently by psychologists to treat patients, as some music has been known to cause the human brain to “produce strong physical signs of pleasure, such as goosebumps, when it hears powerful music” (What is music). Only time will tell whether the expansion of musical psychological treatment revolutionizes therapy as we know it; so while we wait to find out, just sit back and turn on some good, brain-activating jams.