



Music to My Ears

*How to Use Music
to Improve Your Mood,
Memory, Intelligence,
and Overall Health*

Melodious tunes can not only soothe a stressed spirit, but also enhance everything from your concentration to your coordination, your immunity to your memory. Composer **Erwin Nanasi** explains how to harness the power of music.



One day a stranger was passing by a village church when suddenly he stopped. The sound of music was drifting through the windows, and he quietly stepped inside to listen. The church organist was struggling through a piece written by Felix Mendelssohn. When he finished, the stranger approached the organist and politely requested if he could play a piece. The organist vehemently refused, saying, “No one is allowed to play this organ except me!”

After much pleading, the organist finally conceded. The stranger seated himself, adjusted the stops, and began to play the very same piece. But now a wonderful, harmonious sound, moving and melodious, filled the church. In amazement and awe, the organist asked who he was. “I am Felix Mendelssohn, the composer” was the humble reply.

In the hands of the right person, music can become a masterpiece—something to uplift and inspire. That’s why it is so important to learn to identify and appreciate music that can improve your state of mind and enhance a sense of well-being.

How Music Affects Us

Good music stimulates the intellect and the emotion, appeals to ethics and aesthetics, and evokes appreciation for beauty and excellence. The influence of music therapy has been used for centuries. It was known in ancient Egypt and Assyria. Even Greek philosophers such as Plato, Homer, and Aristotle recognized the principles of how music can have positive effects on body and mind. Similarly, a prime example of music therapy is the biblical story of King Saul, who would call for the harpist David to play soothing music to help calm him down when he was upset or troubled.

Music regulates mood, something the media industry understands well. Why doesn’t the music of Hollywood movies have to be changed when the movies are translated into foreign languages? Because music crosses cultural lines, and universally the brain and body respond to the perceived sensation the same. The music bed triggers our bodily responses before—and to a greater extent—than the lyrics do.



Listen to This

Not sure how to select health-enhancing music? Try these suggestions from a music therapy expert:

FOR PHYSICAL ENERGY	FOR STRENGTH AND COURAGE	FOR RELAXATION	FOR CLEAR THINKING	FOR LEARNING
<p>SOUSA <i>Stars and Stripes Forever</i></p> <p>BEETHOVEN <i>Turkish March</i></p> <p>ANDERSON <i>Bugler's Holiday</i></p> <p>CLARKE <i>Trumpet Voluntary</i></p>	<p>STEFFE <i>Battle Hymn of the Republic</i></p> <p>ELGAR <i>Pomp and Circumstance, March No. 1</i></p> <p>BRAHMS <i>Symphony No. 2, Final Movement</i></p> <p>KEY <i>Star-Spangled Banner</i></p>	<p>BRUCH <i>Scottish Fantasy</i></p> <p>KREISLER <i>Humoresque</i></p> <p>COPELAND <i>Appalachian Spring</i></p> <p>MANTOVANI <i>Strings</i></p>	<p>BACH <i>Brandenburg Concertos</i></p> <p>SOUNDTRACK <i>Born Free</i></p> <p>TELEMANN <i>Concerto for Three Violins and Orchestra</i></p> <p>BRAHMS <i>Violin Concerto</i></p>	<p>HANDEL <i>Concerto No. 1 in F</i></p> <p>VIVALDI <i>Winter from The Four Seasons</i></p> <p>BACH <i>Harpisichord Concerto in F Minor</i></p> <p>TELEMANN <i>Double Fantasia in G Minor for Flute and Strings</i></p>

EXCERPTED FROM *THE LOST ART OF THINKING*, NEIL NEDLEY, M.D. (NEDLEY PUBLISHING)

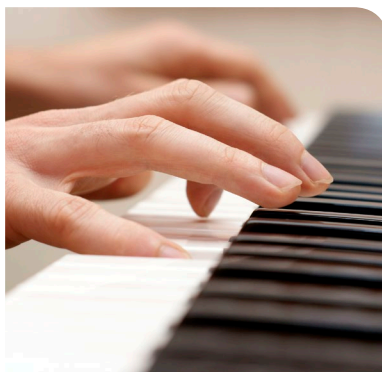
Music as Medicine

Music therapy for patients with major depressive disorders has been shown to significantly decrease the levels of the stress hormone cortisol, leading to improved mood and cognitive functioning. A study of depressed adolescents also found that the right kind of music was able to shift activity from the right frontal lobe to the left, a phenomenon associated with positive effect and mood.

Music therapy has also been shown to improve memory, performance, motor skills, coordination, concentration, and attention; and it can boost immunity, reduce blood pressure and stress levels, and enhance intelligence and learning.

Changing Your Musical Diet

Just because you may not enjoy eating apples doesn't mean they aren't good for you. In fact, just as fruits and vegetables offer optimal nourishment for the body, so does certain music offer optimal nourishment for the brain. Even if you aren't sure you're going to like the music, try it out—just as you would try a healthful food that is good for you. Choose uplifting, balanced, harmonious music that works with your body's natural rhythms, and you will be pleased at how your thinking ability and mental health are enhanced.



MUSIC 101

Want to be a discerning listener? Consider these elements of music when making musical selections:

TIMBRE

Isn't it amazing that you can recognize differences in a loved one's voice, whether they are happy or sad? Even over the phone when they say "hello" we can immediately tell if they have a cold or if the phone has bad reception.

This unique tone quality, or tone color that every individual on this planet has, regardless of pitch and loudness, is referred to as timbre. So it's not just *what* we say, but also *how* we say it. In music, if you play the same note on a piano and on a guitar, each note will have its own timbre.

LOUDNESS

The cochlea, or auditory portion of the inner ear, has 16,000 hair cells. The brain can interpret loudness from the number of activated hair cells. Be careful with the volume, because damaged hair cells cannot be reversed and thus account for most hearing losses. Exposure to extreme noise can also result in poor judgment, confusion, and disorientation.

Prolonged and repeated exposure above 85 decibels produces hearing loss. To put that into perspective, a normal conversation is 60 decibels, a busy street corner is 80 decibels, and a rock concert at close range is 140 decibels.

No matter how joyful the noise is around you, if it's too loud (so loud that you cannot talk over it), it's not good for you.

PITCH AND MELODY

We hear a wide range of sounds, but we hear those sounds best that have frequencies in a range corresponding to that of the human voice. The melody of a song should not be static or overly repetitive (thus creating a hypnotic effect), but rather melodious, mellow-toned, and simple yet interesting, like a storyline with ascending and descending melodic contours.



Questions to Ask When Selecting *Music*

HARMONY

Something peculiar to humankind is our ability to simultaneously combine musical notes, which creates chords that we call harmony. We can create consonant harmonies, a combination of notes that sound stable, harmonious, and pleasant to most people. Or we can create dissonant or discordant harmonies, a combination of notes that are often perceived as clashing, harsh, or unpleasant. Harmonies and chord extensions have a special pleasing effect when used in a balance of dissonant sounds resolving in consonant harmony.

RHYTHM AND TEMPO

I got rhythm, I got music—right? Well, yes and no. Rhythm is essential and can be understood as the motor, the energy, or the beat of the music—something you can walk, clap, or tap your foot to. It's necessary, but you don't want it louder than your own voice. Straight rhythms (march-type rhythms) are preferred, while syncopations and offbeats should be used as a compository tool, rather than having a perpetual overemphasis on them. These go against the natural rhythm of the body (and nature) and will lead the body to synchronize with the new rhythm, which is particularly detrimental to the goal of achieving peak mental performance.

The use of syncopations should be used like salt for a good meal: it flavors when used in moderation, but you don't want the cap of the shaker to fall off. The healthiest, most beautiful balance resounds when the rhythm is less prominent than the melody and harmony. Upbeat is not always uplifting. Since the human heart and many other organs of the body function in steady, unsyncopated rhythms, it's a good recommendation to listen to music that has unsyncopated rhythms in a tempo that is close to the heart-beat. ¶

"A man should hear, a little music, read a little poetry, and see a fine picture every day of his life, in order, that worldly cares may not obliterate the sense of the beautiful which God has implanted in the human soul."

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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■ Is there a healthy balance between the melody, harmony, and rhythm of this music? Or is one element (such as rhythm) overshadowing all the rest?

■ Does this music feature a storyline-type melody with a beginning, climax, and ending? Or does it create a hypnotic effect by focusing on one or two notes? (For example, some music lacks an ending, while other music is so repetitive as to be hypnotic.)

■ Are the words to this music ennobling and uplifting, or is it focused on the dark side of life?

■ What is the intended and frequently achieved effect of this type of music? War or peace? Hate or love? Tranquility or agitation? Fidelity or infidelity?

■ Is this music being played too loudly?

■ Was the composer of this music in a drugged, demented, or mentally unstable state when they wrote it? Considering that music affects the emotions: if the composers or performers were in a psychotic state, what can I expect as a listener?

■ Is this music primarily harmonious, or clashing and discordant?

■ Does it move along without being hysterically fast or draggingly slow?

■ Is there some sense of order and organization to the music that leaves me with a sense of order and peace, or is it jerky and unpredictable?