

Exploring conversations under the idea of how music affects our relationships, whether that be one-on-one or within a whole community and culture. We can try to understand how music can effectively portray emotions like a language. We can strengthen the theory that music is a crucial element in building relationships within communities. By comparing different musical cultures, from the traditional to the modern, we can understand the importance of music.

Exploration of Music in Society

Ethnomusicology is the study of music from all over the world. The main focus is on what music means to the culture and society, with background studies of how it affects regions politically. The Society for Ethnomusicology defines it as a highly interdisciplinary subject. Individuals working in the field may have training in music, cultural anthropology, folklore, performance studies, dance, area studies, cultural studies, gender studies, race or ethnic studies, or other fields in the humanities and social sciences. Some experts prefer the term “anthropology of music,” learning and analysing the musical structure and theory of various cultures. Although the umbrella of ethnomusicology is very broad and the studies range immensely, all ethnomusicologists share a coherent foundation to all of their methods and approaches in their studies. A more scientific approach to ethnomusicology is to understand how music is affecting our brains, and what is actually happening that draws people together.

The Science Behind Music in the Brain

Music is the strongest form of language because of its ability to be heard by anyone with auditory perception (Ludden). It can cross all borders of race, nationality, and culture. Because of our brains' ability to compose subconscious structure and order to a sequence of sounds, we can create an entirely new system of meaning to songs. The appreciation of music is tied to the ability to process its underlying structure of predictability. The ability to predict what will occur next in the song releases a small amount of dopamine when the prediction is correct, in turn “satisfying” your brain (Mohana). Skilled composers manipulate the emotion within a song by knowing what their audience's expectations are, and controlling when those expectations will and will not be met. Successful manipulation is what elicits the chills that are part of any moving song. According to Psych Central on Music & How It Impacts Your Brain, Emotions, music appears to be similar to features of language, more rooted in the primitive brain structures that are involved in motivation, reward and emotion. The brain synchronizes neural oscillators with the pulse of the music through cerebellum activation our brains' start to predict when the next strong beat will occur. The natural response to ‘groove’ is mainly unconscious; it is processed first through the cerebellum and amygdala rather than the frontal lobes (Mohana). Music involves subtle violations of timing and, because we know through experience that music is not threatening, these violations are ultimately identified by the frontal lobes as a source of pleasure. The expectation builds anticipation, which, when met, results in the reward reaction. More than any other stimulus, music has the ability to conjure up images and feelings that need not necessarily be directly reflected in memory which is why music is such an important tool in storytelling and education.

Music's Importance within Communities

Timothy Rice, an ethnomusicologist and professor at UCLA has been studying Bulgaria's culture and relationship to music over the past 15 years. He spent many years studying and living alongside some traditional Bulgarian communities, learning and analyzing the importance of music to the culture. He found that they tell stories within the songs, unlike many other cultures like the West African Ashanti tribe where stories are told as if someone is reading a book, with music and song playing in the background. The stories within the songs are almost always from a woman's point of view, telling stories of women's lives and experiences. No matter how odd they seem, they are always true stories. The women sing in every occasion because they are always

doing something with their hands like cooking, taking care of children, or sewing traditional clothing, they sing in every occasion. Never having time to practice or play instruments, women became the best singers within the culture. The songs are a way of recording stories and information and because they are sung so much they do not need to write them down. The music brings the community together in many ways, the women sing, the men play instruments, and the children dance. Along with entertainment it is an extremely impactful tool of education engaging the children in many ways.

The American and European culture of music has changed drastically in the last two decades. From band-tees and cassette tapes to posters and music videos, the appreciation of pop culture and music has a huge influence on human relationships. By simply experiencing and listening to music with someone at the same time, stronger relationships are built through the emotion created within the sound. Although the lifestyle surrounding music and pop culture today is vastly different from those of traditional communities the impact that music has is extremely important. The subconscious connections of emotions to personal experiences humans make when a song can successfully portray an emotion is the core of how music strengthens our relationships. The connections made can vary from a sole listener and the artist to an entire audience together. Despite the cultures surrounding all music are very diverse and forever changing, the importance and effect it has on people is still powerful and remarkably life altering.

Works Cited

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