

Improve Your Health with Music

Written by Margit Resch

Monday, 15 February 2021 08:26



We, the Fripp Island Friends of Music, are thrilled to have the opportunity to brag about our role in your health, even if we couldn't bring you the wonderful concerts this season that you have been enjoying for decades in our Community Centre—all because of the devilish virus.

"Wait a minute," you may ask, "FIFOM concerts play a role in my health"? Yes, indeed, the music we bring to you—all music, in fact— plays a role in your health. The elements of music—melody, rhythm, articulation, tempo, harmony, the characteristics of various instruments and voices, and, last but not least, the lyrics—impact both your physical and your mental health. Musicians have long known that: "I think music in itself is healing," said the piano man and singer Billy Joel.

No doubt, you listen to music in your home, especially these days, because you know the beneficial effect it has on your body and on your mood. Don't you feel like dancing when you hear a Piazzolla tango, a Strauss waltz, or an early Beatles rock and roll song? Don't you want to march when you hear a Sousa tune? And don't you do your aerobic exercises with much more enthusiasm and vigor to a lively, rhythmic beat like that of the BTS'? Not just your grand baby tends to go to sleep over a lullaby; you may, too. Moving or relaxing your body in concert with the character of the tune are not the only physical effects of music. Stimulating, speedy pieces increase your heart rate, respiration and blood pressure, while a slow tempo and pauses in the jingle decrease the rate of these bodily functions.

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Bob Marley sang years ago: “One good thing about music: When it hits you, you feel no pain.” That wisdom rang true to some British medical researchers. They conducted trials with some 7000 people who had surgery, and they found out that patients who listened to music after the surgical procedure, especially self-chosen music, felt less pain and anxiety, were less likely to need pain medication and recovered faster, compared to those who did not listen to music, who preferred reading or watching TV. Why? We don’t know for sure yet, but it seems that music triggers the release of opioids—the body’s natural pain relievers.

I am sure you, too, have often experienced the strong impact of music on your mental state of being. You know that it can relieve the stress of a demanding work day after you get home, diminish the trauma over a family conflict or over a romantic relationship going south. You know music can lessen anxiety about a challenging job requirement or your worry about that pesky driving test you have to take because you forgot to renew your driver’s license before it expired. The emotional pain reliever induced by music is called dopamine, a mood enhancing chemical produced in the brain, which, by the way, is now also used in the treatment of depression.

Music might elicit an emotional response: joy if the song reminds you of the first dance with your new husband at your wedding, or sadness if the melody embodies the loss of a loved one. It also has the power to awaken a memory of a long-forgotten experience. Maybe Beethoven’s Ode to Joy reminds you of meeting Pat Conroy during intermission when you attended a concert at USCB where the 9th Symphony was played. Or a certain drumming sequence might bring up images of the Busy Bee Band & Honeybees marching in the 111th Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena that you and your family watched live in 2000 and that you had not thought of in two decades.

Do you find yourself singing along occasionally? Some lyrics are bursting with wisdom or humor or personal meaning, which is why you probably committed them to memory, and they still make you laugh, they still ring true, they still touch your mind and heart. They are still meaningful. Maybe some of the Beatles’ lyrics, like:

“Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be. Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.”

“And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make.”

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“We all wanna change the world.”

“Life goes on within you or without you.”

The explicit and implicit meanings rendered just by the prepositions “within” and “without” always make me shiver and laugh at the same time. Forgive me for only quoting the Beatles. I saw them in Hamburg in 1961 and danced right in front of them, and I still listen to their songs every morning. Meaningful, indeed.

It is not surprising, then, that music is used more and more in physical and psychological therapy, and that it is amazingly effective, even curative.

I have to admit that music can also have the opposite effect on your health, that it can be a not so royal pain. Like when you have to stop at an interminable red light next to a sedan packed with teenagers who have their radio turned up so loud that you can hear it through your closed windows, and the drum beat of their muzak makes your car shake. Or when your almost deaf neighbors sit on their porch listening to ancient popular ditties you really dislike, blaring across the entire neighborhood, making you so angry you are tempted to call 911.

We, the Fripp Island Friends of Music, hope to be able to realize our goal for this year: to continue our concert series and bring you, again, music that imparts the healing power of joy and comfort; and, let's not forget, to resume our Beaufort community comradeship at our post-concert gatherings with the musicians, enhanced by the wonderful hors d'oeuvres from Harold's Catering—yet another healing power.

Above: Canadian ensemble Sultans of String played a Fripp Island Friends of Music concert in January of 2019. The Friends look forward to bringing live music back to the island soon.