

Why Do We Feel Such a Powerful Connection to Music?

“Emotions are contagious.”

Daniel Goleman, researcher of emotional intelligence

Why do 97% of human beings feel a connection to music? How can we hear a song and be transported to a specific place and time in our lives? How is it possible for music to powerfully affect our emotions?

The answer is... our brain. The human brain is specifically wired for music. Research on music and its effects on the brain is extensive and abundant.

Whole brain

- Neuroscientists’ research on the effects of music involving MRI technology charts the blood flow to various areas of the brain while listening to music. Findings indicate that the whole brain is involved.

Patterns and predictions

- The brain likes patterns; music is structured with rhythmic and harmonic patterns. The brain feels at ease when it can predict what happens next – probably based on survival instincts. Music provides anticipation and resolution through techniques like tension and release and chord progressions.

Dopamine

- When experiencing music, dopamine is released in our brain. Known as the “happy drug,” dopamine causes us to feel pleasure and gives us a sense of well-being.

Emotional contagion

- This is when people experience the same emotions as others around them through a shared experience like a symphony concert.

When students attend the Des Moines Symphony’s youth concerts, they experience all the effects of prediction and resolution and the release of dopamine in a communal setting. They have the special opportunity to develop a feeling of connection to other people as well as to the music.

This year's musical selections lend themselves well to connection with your students. The lesson plans were developed to highlight these ideas. From program music with Hamlin's *Symphony on a Stick* to structure and rhythms in Rossini's *Overture to William Tell* and movie music with Williams' *Harry's Wondrous World*, students will be engaged with the music of this year's concert.

I hope you enjoy teaching and preparing your students for the youth concert. The music will be an avenue for connection for your students, with brain as well as social connections. Enjoy this rare opportunity for musical connection!

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Resources

The Scientific Mystery of Why Humans Love Music
Resnick, Brian. Feb. 4, 2016
Vox.com`

Why Do We Love Music?
Zatorre, Robert. Nov. 1, 2018
NIH Nationalinstitutesofhealth.gov