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## Music Therapy

### Exploring The Impact Of Melody and Key As Part Of Music Therapy Alexander Tentser, Ph.D.<sup>1,2</sup>, Anna Gendler, MFA<sup>1,3,4</sup>

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When we remember the music and impression it made on us, even though it could have been years ago, first of all, we tend to remember the melody. So, what is the melody? At the simplest level melody is a musical pattern made of different pitches which are meaningfully organized. However, melody may have completely different emotional and even intellectual meaning and impact if even one pitch in a melody is changed. If you change the key signature of a melody, a completely different emotional perspective can be created. Try this: go out to the internet and select two different performers singing or playing the same song. What are the differences in how you perceive the music? Do you like one better than another? Does one make you happier and another version sad?

Now, let's compare two different pieces of music in the key of D. One is in D minor and one in D major. Here are the two examples:

Listen carefully to the "Melody" from the opera "Orpheus" by Ch. W. Gluck. It is a melancholic, sad piece associated with the loss of the lover forever. It is composed in the key of D minor.

Next, listen to the “Ode to Joy” from Beethoven’s Choral Symphony #9. It is an exuberant, joyous piece calling for united humanity. It is loud and boisterous in the choral sections. This piece is composed in D Major. Again, while both are in the key of D, they have difference because one is in a major key: buoyant, bright and often triumphant. And the other is in the minor key: mournful, sorrowful and poignant. These very different sounds can create a difference which may have a profound effect on human psyche. Certain emotions evoke memories and inevitably stimulate thought process which, if used correctly, could have positive physical and mental benefit for a listener.

Composers create sound patterns which can move slowly or quickly depending on the basic idea of the music. Melody is aided by harmony, which create reach reverberation and harmonics between the important bass notes and a treble melody. The harmony could consist of even two notes, but they must be heard simultaneously and be spaced out. If two notes are located too close on a musical scale, the harmonic effect will be greatly diminished. The combination of harmonics and sound patterns are called acoustics. The laws governing acoustics and the emotions they evoked were discovered in Ancient Greece. Pythagoras, studied the properties of harmonics and developed the mathematic ratios of various intervals (distances between two pitches). This allowed musicians to go deeper into the emotionally evocative experiences which they created and which are used commonly today when melodies and harmonies are created.

In Western music history, a pivotal moment arrived when the instruments were tuned according to the well-tempered system. This newly developed system allowed musicians to divide the scale into 12 semitones (pitches), and base scales (musical patterns) on them. Therefore, 12 major and 12 minor keys were used freely for musical activity. Majors and minors, which are specifically organized music pitch patterns, became the foundation of the musical creativity in the West. The other name we use for them is “modes”. In the East,

different modes, or scales are used for composition. Try listening to different modes and styles of music. What mode or style of music do you think creates the greatest emotional response for you? What mode or style of music creates the strongest link to your memories? What music do you feel creates the greatest healing for yourself? And what music do you just like to listen to?

J. S. Bach, one of the greatest composers of the Baroque era (1600 – 1750) created two sets of 24 Preludes and Fugues in each key to demonstrate their expressive qualities. He started in the key of C Major and C minor, then moved a half step up to C Sharp Major and C Sharp Minor, eventually reaching B Major and B minor. This is the greatest compendium of music and of the keys and their expressive qualities even today. His pieces in C Major may express serenity and peacefulness. They can also be majestic and exulted. But the pieces in C minor are often dramatic, and even tragic. Listen, for example, to other classical composers in Beethoven's Symphony #5, Mozart's Piano Concerto in C minor, Handel's "Water Music" or Mozart's Overture to "The Marriage of Figaro". These pieces represent a spectrum of keys and emotions. See if you can identify what is to you the most interesting music of this group.

Certain keys really stand out in musical creativity. For example, F minor is a key of religious contemplation and meditation, F Sharp minor could be a key of grief. B minor has tremendous expressive qualities, as was demonstrated by J. S. Bach in his superlative B Minor Mass. The pieces in G Major can be very transparent and filled with air and light, but the pieces in G minor are often dramatic and conflicted.

If you choose to listen to classical music, you will notice that the music of Bach is much denser than the Music of Mozart. The Baroque era gradually gave way to Classical era in music (1770 – 1825). This period is represented by the three greatest composers - Joseph Haydn, W. A. Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven. Mozart was one of the greatest melodist in musical history. One will never forget his Symphony #40 in G minor, even if you listen to it

only once. His comic opera “The Marriage of Figaro” is one of the greatest sources of joy in Western Art.

Often, we describe certain musical patterns by the words associated with painting rather than music. We call them “colorful” and may even assign certain definite colors to them. In fact, the so-called “Impressionistic” period in music is associated with the similar movement in painting, primarily in France. The greatest composers of that era, Debussy, and Ravel, found inspiration in natural phenomena. Debussy was fascinated with water, listen for example to his “Reflections in the Water” for piano and the symphonic poem “La Mer” (The Sea). In compositions created by Debussy, certain evocative melodic and harmonic patterns are often associated with meditative observance of nature. In this respect, he was a pioneer in this field. Much of therapeutic music used for relaxation used by modern humans originated over a hundred years ago in France. Listen for example to the beginning of the ballet “Daphnis and Chloe” by Ravel. The "colors" of the music are also linked to different timbres of the instruments. Listen to the beautiful sound of oboe in the second movement of the Symphony in C by Bizet then compare it to the sound of clarinet in Mozart's Clarinet Concerto. Harmonic musical language is based on the principle of tension and resolution. When both are present, the musical piece, which contains lots of information, syncs perfectly well with our human energetic field. How do these pieces effect you emotionally? If you tried to give them colors, what colors would they be?

In all of these pieces we have the lushness of string instruments which are often contrasted by percussive sounds of drums. Within the string section there are divisions into high and low instruments. Both string, woodwind and brass sections of the orchestra rank from high to low pitches. In this way they are similar to human voices in a choir. Notice what you like and what you do not. Do you like the sound of pop music and not classical? Do you like Jazz and are not fond of rap? Do you like new age music and prefer pieces with nature

sounds? Notice what uplifts you and what makes you sad. Notice what gives you the feeling of joy when you listen and what makes you feel peaceful.

Therapeutic music for relaxation and meditation is often centered in one key, for example, A Major. Generally, this kind of music has a natural flow and is not rigidly structured like the art music. However, more structured pieces, primarily composed in Baroque and Classical era, are also extremely valuable for therapeutic purposes. Pieces composed by Bach, for example, raise the energy up, cleaning our energetic field, and reestablishing natural balance in our organism. Listen for example, Preludes and Fugues from the Well-Tempered Klavier in C, D, E, G, and A Majors. One of the most supreme examples of this kind of music, which also happened to be one of the greatest pieces of music ever composed is Mozart's last Symphony #41, the "Jupiter". It has a perfect balance of all elements found in music creativity, intellectual and emotional.

Begin your journey discovering music that nurtures your soul, your spirit and your body with discovery. Try music with different melodies. Try music with lots of different key signatures. Discover pieces that support personal emotional responses. Discover pieces that help you to remember cherished events. Pay attention to the harmonics and the colors of the music that you are experiencing and put together a list of pieces that you find are most satisfying. Music is available everywhere around you. Let yourself go on a voyage of discovery!

**Bio:**

Dr. Alexander Tentser and his wife Anna Gendler are extraordinary musicians located in the greater Tucson, AZ area. Both academics, their many years of professional performance provides deep depth in the beauty of their music. They are available for both concert performances and advanced teaching. For more information on upcoming performances and rates please contact: [aatentser@msm.com](mailto:aatentser@msm.com)

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