

EDITORIAL

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Editorial for “Music and Well-Being” special issue of PWB

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The influence of music on our well-being is profound. Music is reported to be one of the most powerful means for inducing powerful positive emotions with its influence staying strong irrespective of culture and across time. Neurologically, listening to enjoyable music has been found to stimulate the release of dopamine in an evolutionarily ancient part of the brain, the striatum. Not only is dopamine released during peak pleasure moments of a piece, but also in the anticipatory phase leading up to this peak – this is consistent with other primary and secondary reward stimuli such as food, sex and amphetamines (Salimpoor et al. 2013). While music itself is not essential for survival, the hedonic effects of music have been explained through a number of mechanisms including visual imagery, rhythmic entrainment, expectancy-related arousal, emotional contagion, and triggering of autobiographical memories (Juslin 2013). Some of these mechanisms emerge very early developmentally – for instance, very young infants will physically entrain to music (Zentner and Eerola 2010– suggesting at least part of our emotional response to music is quite primitive and fundamental. Fortunately excessive music listening is less likely to induce adverse outcomes unlike many other addictive behaviours (e.g., drug addiction, over eating), and is therefore generally regarded as a ‘safe’ means of enhancing hedonic well-being.

Music’s impact on well-being, however, extends beyond pleasurable experiences. We also use music in ways that impact on eudaimonic well-being – we use music to enhance social connection and cohesiveness, to offer solace and comfort in the absence of social support, to experience a sense of accomplishment (e.g., via persistent rehearsal, or via aesthetic appreciation of a piece), to become effortlessly absorbed or in ‘flow’ with the music, to attain a deeper sense of meaning or perspective in life, or transcend the everyday with a peak or spiritual musical experience (Gabrielsson 2011; Lamont 2011; Lonsdale and North 2011; Rentfrow 2012). Music routinely enhances well-being through these multiple routes, which notably mirror current theoretical perspectives on well-being published in the positive psychology literature (e.g., Seligman 2011). Even uses of music which appear to challenge our wellbeing, such as intense listening to sad music when feeling depressed, have been found to produce feelings of pleasure (Taruffi and Koelsch 2014), and may be an adaptive means of emotion regulation such that, in the long-term, this strategy may be beneficial for well-being (Chin and Rickard 2014; van den Tol and Edwards 2014).

Given the depth of music’s potential impact on wellbeing, it is surprising that there has been minimal attempt to frame the body of research on music and its emotional,

social, intellectual and spiritual effects within a positive health context. The fields of music therapy and music medicine appear by definition to be rooted in the utilization of music (either with or without a practitioner) to alleviate pain, illness or distress. Music psychology contains substantive evidence of positive effects of music via emotional pleasure, social connections, intellectual appreciation or spiritual meaning, but these are rarely interpreted within a well-being context, or applied to promotion of positive health or flourishing rather than alleviation of illness. This neglect in the scientific literature has begun to be addressed via several excellent recent initiatives, including the recent 2013 Oxford volume on *“Music, Health and Well-being”* (edited by Raymond Macdonald and colleagues) and an important 2011 *Frontiers in Psychology* review on *“Music, neuroscience and the psychology of well-being: A precis”* by Adam Croom. Several conferences have also offered symposia or themes on music and well-being from a positive psychology or health perspective. In 2013, the inaugural Australian Music and Psychology Society (AMPS) Conference was held, with the primary theme of *“Music, mind and health”*. In a productive collaboration between AMPS and Springer-Open, we are pleased to present this Special issue highlighting *“Music and Well-Being”*.

This Special Issue contains a collection of papers reflecting the breadth of this emerging focus on music and wellbeing. Jane Davidson and Renita Almeida in their paper on *“An exploratory study of the impact of group singing activities on lucidity, energy, focus, mood and relaxation for persons with dementia and their caregivers”* describe how well-being indices – such as positive mood, focus and relaxation – are enhanced by a structured group singing program in dementia sufferers and their carers without the typical focus on alleviation of negative symptoms of this condition. Suvi Saarikallio, Jonna Vuoskoski and Geoff Luck (*“Adolescents’ expression and perception of emotion in music reflects their broader abilities of emotional communication”*) report how use of music by adolescents (specifically their expression and perception of emotions through music) is associated with their broader social-emotional behaviour. For instance, they report that adolescents’ capacity for empathy is related to their expression and perception of negative emotions in music. Margaret Osborne, Don Greene and Don Immel (*“Managing performance anxiety and improving mental skills in conservatoire students through performance psychology training: a pilot study”*) explore a positive skills training program for elite music students, showing it has benefits on both preventing performance anxiety but also promoting positive health indices such as confidence, courage and resilience.

In their paper titled *“Contextualized music listening: Playlists and the Mehrabian and Russell model”*, Amanda Krause and Adrian North revisit classification of emotional experiences of music according to current dimensional models of emotion. Importantly, they utilize a range of everyday contexts to provide additional insight into how selection of music is not always best described by the traditional ‘arousal-valence’ model of emotion description, showing also how context moderates selection. Finally, TanChyuan Chin and myself (*“Beyond positive and negative trait affect: Flourishing through music engagement”*) explore how using music for cognitive and emotional regulation predicts flourishing in life, an effect at least partially explained by the use of cognitive reappraisal strategies.

In addition to five full papers from this conference, two lead papers were invited to reflect different perspectives on this topic. In *“Musical improvisation and health: A*

review”, Wilson and Macdonald propose that musical improvisation can promote well-being beyond the typical therapeutic setting, offering a compelling argument that improvisation can benefit all. In the first of its kind, a novel model is proposed to explain these effects mediated by processes such as absorption and non-verbal and creative interaction. In their piece “*What can't music do? Shedding different kinds of light on music and health enquiries*”, Tia DeNora and Gary Ansdell investigate how an understanding of the health benefits of engaging with music is expanded by viewing health-care through the lens of ‘flourishing’ rather than the more traditional benefits of interventions on health (i.e., ‘health’ vs ‘illness’). Within this paper, we see again the case that the value of music for well-being is broad, and can occur through social relatedness, accomplishment, personal and social identity and physical engagement.

In this selection of papers, the reader gains an insight into the many ways that engaging with music can be beneficial for both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. The consistent theme is that musical activity promotes positive functioning in *all* types of people, whether this be in the short-term or long-term. This Special Issue represents one of several recent initiatives to interpret research in music psychology and music therapy from a more predominantly positive health perspective. The *Psychology of Well-Being* anticipates the rewards of many more similar publications in the future and we are pleased to showcase some of these works in this issue.

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