

Exploring the Meditative and Healing Aspects With Classical Music

By

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Much has been written about the therapeutic qualities of classical music. Whether we are talking about Mozart Babies, the psychological application of Classical music toward healing mental health patients, the enrichment of seniors living in some form of restricted 'isolation', physiological uses, or restful responses similar to meditation etc. there can be little doubt that music is more than capable of rejuvenation, rehabilitation and restoring individuals in a variety of ways.

From my own firsthand experience, I was reaffirmed through the first days of our son's time here in this life. He was born with an aortic defect that required immediate surgical repair, the day after birth. Once he stabilized from the surgery and was moved to a pediatrics ICU, the nurses were keen to chat with me about my musical background and activity. As we had inundated Leo with music from conception whether with my live piano playing (i.e. mainly Mozart, Chopin, and Bach) or recorded Classical Music, he had been lovingly surrounded with it. The nurses suggested we bring a tablet or iPad in and set up a playlist for him so he would feel comfortable, particularly during the night hours when one of us was not at his bedside. Having done so, we returned the next day to see the nurses beaming as we entered, telling us how the entire pediatric ICU ward had collectively been at peace, sleeping well with many fewer than the normal disruptions. Meanwhile, our son continued his struggle, rejecting nourishment. We added more soothing classical music during the daytime, while he napped even when we were present. It wasn't long thereafter that he began to thrive and 14 days after birth we joyfully brought him home!

Classical music is often viewed as being difficult to understand/comprehend, too complicated, too angst driven, too over-the-top emotionally, or just too 'boring' and somber. To draw again from my own experience as a traditional classical piano recitalist, I found myself looking to add more non-traditional dimensions to my performing repertoire. While playing the traditional repertoire that typically is virtuosic, I felt a strong need to inject segments into my concerts that tapped into both my personal meditative / musical experiences as well as provided something similar for my listeners. Through this added dimension, I provided welcome contrast, the result being my recitals took on more depth, meaning and emotional range.

The fact is classical music does require mindfulness to have its true impact upon the listener. That 'mindfulness' is really a state of listening that is foreground or attentive listening. The kind of listening that ideally has minimal if any distractions, can be done in one session, and most importantly is led by a commitment to have one's mind progressively settle into a state of deep awareness and fully engaged listening.

Just what is 'fully engaged' listening? Merriam-Webster defines hearing as the "process, function, or power of perceiving sound; specifically: the special sense by which tones are received as stimuli." Active listening, on the other hand, requires attention, attitude, and adjustment. Primarily one has "**to pay attention to sound**; to hear something with thoughtful attention; and to give consideration." Becoming an active listener whilst attempting to have a meditative experience may seem like an oxymoron. But it's not! One of the most critical attitudes needed for this to succeed within you is to defer judgement. Judgement will interfere with your processes, and block mindfulness. So, for the music to have its fully restorative effect we must relax, let our thoughts and emotions go along with deferring judgement. My best recommendation is to defer judgement until after your meditative listening experience. Reflect, redirect, refine and reengage again next session.

Now, on to some general guidelines for mindful, holistic listening.

The formula is simple as follows:

- 1) Choose solo piano, guitar, or harp music for best effect
- 2) Pandora, YouTube, Spotify etc.... all have collections of similar selections, or relaxation / "spa" genre channels
- 3) Use headphones / earbuds
- 4) Eliminate environmental distractions
- 5) Start with a 20'-30' session
- 6) Recline or sit quietly with eyes closed
- 7) Let the sound vibrate around you
- 8) Let your mind 'go' with the sounds and your thoughts and reactions come and go naturally just as we do in meditation
- 9) If you doze off, you needed the rest

In closing, many feel that experiencing Classical music of any type, requires some pre-education etc. Ideally yes, but it truly is not necessary. I have found that people become hooked on the experience when they shed all preconceived notions and opinions about Classical Music, and simply generate their own qualitative experience. So, I strongly suggest you reserve your curiosity and research for a later time. This can include reading about the composer, the music, the era it was written within etc...All readily available on the internet.

Do remember, when we form our own experiences and opinions rather than succumb to the ideas of others, our experience(s) will be both invaluable and uniquely our own.

I wish you many restorative listening experiences.

Allan Fuller*

Suggested Listening

- J.S. Bach: Air from the Goldberg Variations
- Mozart: Adagio in B minor: Sonata K. 332 in F major, Movement II
- Schubert: Impromptu Op.90 No. 3 in G-flat Major
- Chopin: Nocturne in G minor Op. 37, No. 1,
- Liszt: Consolations 1-4, S. 172
- Faure: Romance sans paroles Op. 17 No. 3 / Nocturne No. 4 in E-flat Major, Op. 37
- Debussy: Preludes Bk. 1 No, 1,2,4,7,8, 10, Nocturne, Arabesque No. 2, Reverie, Clair de lune
- Ravel: Valley of the Bells (from Mirrors), Pavane for une infante defunte
- Grieg: Nocturne Op. 54, No. 4
- Mompou: Musica Callada, Bks 1-4

Suggested Reading

Musicophilia: The Healing Power of Music, by Oliver Sachs

<https://www.oliversacks.com/books-by-oliver-sacks/musicophilia/>

In Tune: Music as the Bridge to Mindfulness, by Richard Wolf

<https://www.richardwolf.net/in-tune>

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