

# Music: The Psychological Factor

[http://library.thinkquest.org/C001507/psychological\\_factor.php3?tqskip1=1&tqtime=1021](http://library.thinkquest.org/C001507/psychological_factor.php3?tqskip1=1&tqtime=1021)

Recently, Sarah, a nineteen year old college student, went into her local electronic store thinking that perhaps today was the day that she would buy that MiniDisc (MD) player that she had been promising herself for some time. While looking through the portable player section, Sarah was only faintly aware of the **upbeat** pop music playing in the background. After walking out of the electronic store, Sarah decided that perhaps spending two hundred dollars on a top-of-the-line MiniDisc player and sixty dollars on accessories was a tad too much money, considering her limited college budget. However, Sarah realized that she was already too attached to her machine. Besides, as far as Sarah knew, she was the only one of her friends who had Sarah McLachlan's *Mirrorball* album on MD. This scene might seem to touch the border of fiction. However, this is not a fictitious scene.

Why did the music affect Sarah's purchasing decisions and why does it affect other people's purchasing decisions? There are several answers to these questions. First, music affects our moods, which, in turn, changes how we interact with our environment; when we listen to classical music, we feel sophisticated, and more financially secure than if we had no music or if we listened to easy listening music. Therefore, since music can change our mood from, say, a slightly depressed state to an energetic one, in turn, this can make us feel more expansive than we felt when we were down. Sequentially, when we feel sophisticated or rich, we will stick our neck out further. Furthermore, if the music playing in a store is too slow, or if music is absent, customers will often get bored with the store and simply leave because the store holds no attraction for them. Consequently, this is why the store manager played the **upbeat** pop music while Sarah shopped at his store, because he knew that he would be able to entice more money from her. Secondly, we, as humans, and especially those of us who live in countries like the United States, have been conditioned over the years by our environment to feel or act in certain ways towards specific types of music. Generally speaking, when BMW, which produces relatively expensive automobiles, wants to sell its 740il cars, it will, in a radio or T.V. commercial, have the car being driven around with classical music in the background. In contrast, Ford Motor Company, when selling its Mustangs, uses **upbeat** popular music. This is why we associate classical music with the finer things in life and pop music with the more ordinary things in life. Finally, depending on the music, we might feel aroused by it. Some middle-aged people are stimulated to buy things if the music that is being played is of a '60s-style composition, music they remember from their youth.

Similarly, teenagers might feel more enthusiastic if they hear Mariah Carey than classical music.

However, when it comes to the human body, generally speaking, biological stimuli drive the body and mind to do something. This can be observed at a distance or at a personal level every day. At a distance or maybe even a personal level, we see others or we ourselves get tired of our jobs or tired of where we live. Multiple things may cause the reason for this loss of interest; however, the lack of biological stimuli is a leading factor for this loss of interest. On another level, the lack of interest in our sexual lives depends greatly on biological stimuli. This is no less true for when we go shopping, especially, when it comes to high-end purchases. When Sarah was shopping at that electronic store, it could have been the fact that she was young and she had more energy for what she was doing, or it could have been the fact that she had desired a MiniDisc player for a long time that drove her to buy the machine. However, what probably drove Sarah the most was the fact that her brain, specifically the right side of her brain, was stimulated by the **upbeat** music to turn on the gene which produces a **enzyme** called **serotonin** which, is the "happiness" **enzyme** of the brain. Once that gene was told to produce **serotonin**, the level of **serotonin** in her brain rose, which induced Sarah to think that she was happy and secure, which in turn drove her to buy the desired item.

---

What kind of music is this? Whoever wrote it must have left himself behind at one point to dig the piano notes out of the earth and gather the artificial harmonics of the violins from heaven. The tonality of this music has no mechanical purpose. It is there to **transport** us towards something that has never been heard before.

-- Wolfgang Sandner's comments on Arvo Pärt's *Tabula rasa*

---

The unfortunate thing about this matter of psychology in music is that it seems that all of the mystery of why we as humans react to music in different ways has been unearthed. However, for those romantics, take heart. A great deal of the mystery still remains. For instance, science still does not know why a speech can have very little effect on the mind, while vocal music can make people go wild. Science still does not know why classical music can turn on the imagination. There are other things that science does not know. However, we do know that music affects the mind. Everyday people like Sarah are a testimony to that. But for now, we can still savor the mysterious side of psychology in music.