

**A sermon offered by Robbie Kohn**  
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Music is such an integral part of our lives. How can it not be spiritual?

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A few years ago I worked at a job that I spent about three hours a day in stuck in traffic. We all know how bad the traffic is in the Boston area. But fortunately for me, I carry my MP3 player with about 3000 songs on it almost everywhere I go.

While listening to music one of those traffic-weary days, I thought about how music relates to emotions. Some songs trigger memories. This is similar to how smells trigger memories – your grandmother’s cakes and cookies, your mom’s meatloaf, or your favorite pizza.

When I hear an old, familiar song, I am instantly transported back in time...

Listening to The Beatles reminds me of the dance routines my best friend Mary and I created to the song, *8 Days a Week*. Remember that one? We practiced every day for months. We thought we were good enough to win Star Search, if ever we had the opportunity.

Beach Boys songs, like *Help Me Rhonda*, take me back to hanging out at the town pool. At that time, I was timid and awkwardly shy, and my opinion of pesky boys was just about to change.

Up until the age of about 15 or so, my older brother, Peter, and I were sworn enemies. We bonded over Pink Floyd’s *Ummagumma* album, which was probably the strangest album I had ever heard, let alone the strangest title for an album. Peter took me to my first concert and watched over me so that I didn’t get into trouble. I was 16 and it was my first, live concert. How thrilling it was to see and hear a rock band performing live... and loudly!

Now, I am dancing to Santana’s *Black Magic Woman* at my impromptu high school graduation party. The beach sand is still warm on my bare feet. I am with a boy I dated off and on through high school. We laugh and talk about where our future might take us. We didn’t know then, and I barely know now.

When I hear *Your Time Is Gonna Come* by Led Zeppelin, I am with friends in Harold’s 1969 Camaro. We are all singing along to the 8-track as we cruise aimlessly around town in Harold’s car. This was our attempt to ease the boredom of living in a small town with nothing to do on a Saturday night.

Music reminds me of love and relationships. I think of weddings I’ve attended. Newlyweds dancing their first dance to a special song that means something special to them.

I remember my mom and dad dancing and laughing to music by Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash, and Hank Williams. Sadly, this is the only memory I have of them being happy together.

Music from the 80s reminds me of one of the best times in my life – and also one of the saddest. I had friends who became a family to me after losing first my father, and then too soon afterwards, my mother.

We shared almost every Saturday night together on the beach, enjoying ocean sounds intermingled with music and conversations. We were bound together by friendship as well as sadness when one of our friends, Tim, committed suicide. Sometimes music from that time period brings tears to my eyes. But most of all, I remember how close we were and how music helped heal the loss of our friend.

Maya Angelou said,

*"Music was my refuge. I could crawl into a space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness."*

Oh yes, I can relate to that.

Music has brought me joy and happiness, and even laugh-out-loud funny. Like my husband, Brian, "jumping" the car in time to *If I Had a Million Dollars*. Or on road trips when we both sing loudly, and sometimes very badly, to old and familiar songs.

I usually wake up with a song in my head that haunts me all day long. Some people call this an annoying ear bug, but I really don't mind it. I sometimes play a new song I like over and over so that it's integrated into my collection of song friends, because songs truly have been friends during my life.

Music consoled me when a love relationship failed ... a friend said goodbye... and when I lost a loved one. Listening to music is comforting – every note and lyric a replication of my pain – eventually pulling me away from the darkness and into the light. That pain, of course, has long since faded into experience. I can listen to these songs again and remember them without feeling sad – ever thankful that I survived.

<Interlude: Cyndi Lauper's *True Colors*>

For thousands of years people have sung and created music together. Music is found in every known culture, past and present. In 2009, a 35,000 year old flute was discovered in a cave in Germany! Isn't that amazing? Although it's the oldest musical instrument ever found, thousands of other instruments have been found in all cultures of our world.

In times when most people couldn't read, hymns were used to teach scriptures from the Bible. Songs are a way of repeating important things we want to remember. Singing hymns helped people remember the lessons they were taught.

Music is used to ease work burdens. Slaves sang songs while picking cotton and performing other work for their masters. The military uses music and songs to keep soldiers' spirits high. Studies show that if you listen to music while exercising, you exercise longer and harder. So, if you hate exercising or even cleaning, you may want to give it a try.

Dr. John Diamond, an author and physician of holistic medicine, says that the function of music since its beginning is the spiritual uplifting of the listener so that his or her life energy is enhanced by the experience.

Dr. Diamond contends that music is primarily a property of the right hemisphere of the brain. When an individual becomes stressed, an imbalance occurs between the two hemispheres of the brain. Listening to music rebalances the left and right hemispheres.

Music contains mathematical ratios that make up the whole cosmos. There are numerous studies on the connection between music and learning math. This is called the "Mozart effect". The claim is that exposure to certain types of music very early in life can lead to improved test scores on math.

Many of my software programmer friends swear that listening to music while they code improves their concentration. They are excellent programmers, so I'll not question it.

But, music is a lot more than notes conforming to mathematical patterns and formulas. Music is exhilarating because of the intricacies of the patterns that occur. Whether or not these patterns resemble math has no significance to many musicians. More often than not, musicians are inclined to practice music because of the wonders and awe that they feel for music, even if they are not aware of the math that's in music.

The author, T. S. Eliot, speaking about peak experience in his book, *The Four Quartets*, says,

*"... music heard so deeply that it isn't heard at all, but you are the music while the music lasts."*

You are the music. That means you vibrate with the music. And even though you might just be thinking of some flute music or piano music that you're listening to, it's the music of the universe that you are vibrating to.

It's the music to which this whole cosmic dance dances. It flows through you – that's your religious moment. And in that moment you know that you are one with all. You are the music while the music lasts.

Music can take us away from ourselves; it is a power beyond ourselves. Musicians know this and experience this frequently while performing. May I suggest that your eyes while listening to music? Let Roald's music transport you to a peaceful place beyond yourself.

<Interlude: Roald plays a beautiful piece of music>

Music is used in healing. Music therapy began in 20th century America when musicians played for World War I and II veterans as they recovered from war and emotional wounds in hospitals. There is scientific research to back up the idea that music has healing properties. One study conducted at McGill University in Montreal in 2013 shows that music has anti-anxiety properties.

Another study found music was associated with higher levels of an anti-body linked to immunity. My niece, Rachel, has chosen to use her musical talents and her caring to study music therapy at Montclair State University in New Jersey. I am so proud of her.

The brain's reward center responds to music. It releases the chemical dopamine, which is associated with pleasure. Music can also help with the development of language skills, and the identification and expression of emotions, which are challenges in autism. Alzheimer's patients, like my Uncle Wallace, may still recognize songs of their youth or respond emotionally to music. Music is also used in elderly care settings to calm or stimulate residents.

Music creates a bond... a feeling of connected-ness. Listening to music puts us in harmony with creation.

Music can make us feel happy or sad. It can soothe or energize us. It unquestionably affects our emotions.

We tend to listen to music that reflects our mood. When we're happy, we listen to upbeat music. And when we are sad, we listen to slower, moving songs. When we're angry or frustrated, we listen to darker music with heavy guitar, drums and vocals that reflect our level of anger.

Kacey Storm writes in her poem, *Music of My Life*:

*The music takes my soul*

*Takes it through the wind, and around the trees*

*As the earth turns slowly*

*Each song makes me wonder what really goes on while I'm asleep.*

*As a disco ball shines through my dreams*

*I wish I was awake, as the music plays*

*And wish instead of school, I'd get to party and dance all day.*

*As one song makes you move, and happy*

*The other makes you cry, and sappy.*

*Each song with its own act,*

*Life reacts back*

*It's hard to believe a song, is more than just a song*

*You could lose your soul, regain it again*

*Each feeling fills you full*

*As each tune tells you what to do*

Music is certainly spiritual. It reaches out and touches everyone – aware or not. Music brings light to dark, pain to joy. It varies in style and genre, but music brings a message to all those who listen.

That message is believe. Believe that it's okay... Believe that the pain will pass... Believe the rain will go away... Believe that you can be who and whatever you want to be... Believe that being different is a blessing... Believe that you are who you are and that there is no one better...

Blessed be.

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