

Why do fast songs make us want to dance?

By Cricket Media, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.17.19

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Image 1. Beyoncé performs on stage in 2013 during "The Mrs. Carter Show World Tour." Top performers like Beyoncé use body language to convey the emotions in their music. Studies show that viewers can pick up on these feelings, even with the sound turned all the way down. Photo: Kevin Mazur via Getty Images.

Picture a scene from a movie. A young girl is in a big, old house. The house is dark and spooky. The girl is alone.

Pretend you were making this movie. What music would you pick for this scene?

Now picture a different scene. A boy has lost his puppy. Finally, he finds the puppy again. Both the boy and the puppy are very happy. The boy starts to cry.

Would you pick the same song for both scenes? Probably not. Different songs make us feel different things. A song might go with the happy puppy moment. But it would seem silly in a scary movie.

People Respond To Music In Different Ways

Emotions are how people feel about things. Sometimes you feel happy or sad. Other times you may feel angry or afraid. These are all emotions. Music can make us feel all of them and more.

People respond to music in their minds. But that is not all. Their bodies respond to music, too. Fast music speeds up your heartbeat. It gets you ready for dancing. Slow songs do the opposite. They make you feel more relaxed.

A Few Seconds To Figure Out A Song's Emotion

Music can also express emotions directly. Scientists have done studies on this. The studies show that listeners are very good at figuring out the emotion that goes with a song. For example, they know if the song is trying to make them happy or sad. They can tell if it wants them to dance. Maybe it even wants them to feel scared! People do not even have to listen to the whole song. They can figure it out from just a few seconds of music.

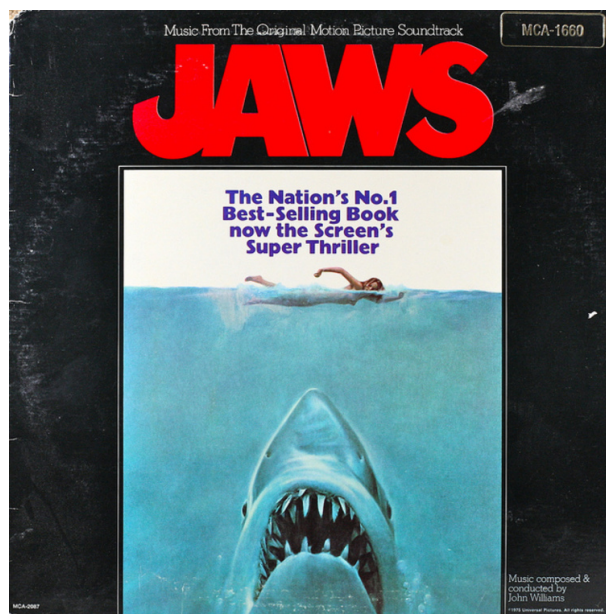
For example, a high note can mean excitement. A low note can make you feel worried. Slow music can make you feel thoughtful. Fast beats get you ready for something fun.

Rock Stars Show Emotion

The musical performance can be important, too. When the best rock stars perform, we feel their happiness and sadness. Over millions of years, parts of our brains have developed to echo the feelings we see in others. This is called empathy. It means we share others' feelings. We know what they are feeling. And we feel it, too.

Scientists say the part of the brain that feels empathy is hard at work when we watch a singer on stage. In one experiment, people watched a rock star's performance. The sound was turned all the way down. They could not hear the music. Yet they still knew which feeling the rock star wanted to express. They could tell just by watching.

We choose our favorite songs based on how they make us feel. And the songs we choose are part of what makes us special. They make up the soundtrack of our lives. It is just like in a movie!



Quiz

- 1 What does the author of this article want to explain?
- (A) why different music can make us feel emotions
 - (B) which musical performances are interesting
 - (C) how people react to movies that are scary
 - (D) what scientists are doing to study the brain
- 2 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-4].
- Which sentence from the section shows the author's purpose for writing?
- (A) Picture a scene from a movie.
 - (B) Pretend you were making this movie.
 - (C) Both the boy and the puppy are very happy.
 - (D) Different songs make us feel different things.
- 3 Read the section "People Respond To Music In Different Ways."
- Which detail shows HOW people respond to slow songs?
- (A) Sometimes you feel happy or sad.
 - (B) Other times you may feel angry or afraid.
 - (C) It gets you ready for dancing.
 - (D) They make you feel more relaxed.
- 4 Read the section "Rock Stars Show Emotion."
- What is a reason WHY we feel emotion when watching someone perform?
- (A) We are able to hear what they are saying even if it is quiet.
 - (B) Our brains help us know what feelings we see in others.
 - (C) We choose our favorite songs based on how they make us feel.
 - (D) Our lives are made up of songs we think are special.