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## Music as Image: Sound and Language

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"The octave formed a circle and gave our noble earth it's form."

Pythagoras

### Introduction

Throughout the centuries, various thinkers have laboriously sought to define music, in it's entirety, within the realms of the rational mind, to no avail. Because music is not as confined to the material world as is some of the other arts and sciences, it's definition has been the subject of much controversy. It has been said that music is a tonal analogue of emotive life, isomorphic in sound yet representative in symbol. [1](#)

Arthur Schopenhauer establishes the nature of music as "imitative" of the world but unlike other arts it remains a mystery because of it's ambiguous nature and inexplicable power in influencing the listener. Paradoxically music can be separated from it's own components or mediums, (sound, symbol), for definition without much debate yet cannot be defined as a whole without controversy. Similar to the blind men examining the elephant, each one basing his interpretation on a fragment of the whole, theorists could not agree on the definition of music as a whole.

Schopenhauer compares the effect of music as more powerful and penetrating than that of the other arts because "they copy the Ideas whereas music copies the Will itself whose objectivity the Ideas are". He further adds "they (other arts) speak only of shadows, but it (music) speaks of the thing itself." [2](#)

The debate continues as to whether music is simply a means of expression for ideas and emotions or whether it is a distinct way of thinking, in it's own right, through which such elements may pass.

In this paper we shall examine the correlation's between music, math and astronomy from Ancient Greek theories as well as our New Age philosophy in defense for the latter; music being a distinct way of thinking.

## Theories of the Cosmos in Antiquity

Pythagoras of Samos, (5-6 century B.C.): A Greek philosopher and mathematician who founded a religious and philosophical society in Italy. Pythagoreans practiced vegetarianism, believed in reincarnation and based their beliefs on astronomy and geometry as well as music. Pythagoras is credited with having discovered a correlation between the ratio of musical intervals and the ratios of celestial bodies. His followers saw these ratios as governing forces in the cosmos. He also developed complex theorems on right angles, triangles and cubes. In Plato's *TIMAEUS* (400 B.C.), again, a relationship between the motion of the spheres and music is mentioned. Plato grades them according to the tones on the musical scale. Later a new connection is presented by the Greeks in that there are eight discs plus the surrounding globe. [3](#)

This tradition of musical thought flourished throughout antiquity and was transmitted into the Middle Ages by Boethius (c.480 - c.524) who, while imprisoned, translated and commented on many of Aristotle's treatises. These became the major source of medieval education in the liberal arts. [4](#)

Music in the early Middle Ages was practically inseparable from religion. As Christianity spread throughout the world, music continued to serve as the expression of religious thought as well as a medium of worship.

When secularist appeals began to invade the late Middle Ages, music broke away from the constraints that had been imposed upon it by the church. By the fifteenth century, the humanist artists returned to the Greek and Roman models for inspiration. [5](#) This return, combined with newly acquired skills, knowledge and experience, clearly depicts the evolving ebb and flow within our very nature and opened the door for even further development.

The desire to affect the world, to exercise will and to give expression to the passions of the soul are the constant factors that followed music alongside its adaptations to humankind throughout history. Today, the esoteric/rock music presently at the top of the charts hints at the revival of the ancient Greek theories regarding the relationship between music and the cosmos. [6](#)

Music's therapeutic potential is also being researched in the light of these correlations. Although they are of ancient origin, the National Associations for Music Therapy both in Canada and in the United States are no more than 55 years young. Recent findings pertinent to music therapy may be found under the corresponding subject headings.

If you learn music, you'll learn history.  
If you learn music, you'll learn mathematics.  
if you learn music, you'll learn most all there is to learn

Edgar Cayce

## Consonance and Dissonance

The earliest categorization of consonance and dissonance was made by Pythagoras. A dissonance is any combination of musical tones not in a state of repose (consonance). This is subjective to the listener and/or composer and produces the feeling that movement or resolution toward the consonant state is required.

"Dr. Howard Hanson, Director of the Rochester Eastman School of Music points out that

practically all of Western music consists of consonances variously interspersed with dissonances. This theory being dual in nature reflects the very core of our existence; the heartbeat, the ebb and flow of the tide, etc.. Dr. Hanson also states, "throughout musical history the dissonances have shown a tendency to crowd the consonances out...a pleasing vitamin in music is consonance. When composers wish to ennoble, invigorate and inspire their listeners, they depend heavily upon consonances...when composers wish to disturb their listeners, make them weep, sigh, or foam at the mouth, they do it with dissonances." [7](#)

Leibnitz, the great seventeenth-century mathematician, wrote "...Although the soul is not aware of this counting, it nevertheless feels the effect, that is, consonance produces a pleasant sensation, dissonance an unpleasant one, as the natural consequence." [8](#)

It is interesting that Leibnitz would refer to the mass of cells situated in the cerebral cortex of the brain "the soul" .He also states that it (the soul) it is not aware of this counting. It seems that the "soul" or sub-conscious mind has it's own way of interpreting music (undetected by the rational mind), as Hanson, Leibnitz and McLaughlin have discovered. Yet, if we can agree that consonance and dissonance do produce typical (common) sensations, then we may be able to explore other effects that commonly occur in direct response to musical input. Collective research may be the mean through which these subjective stimuli may be studied and defined.

## **New Age Philosophy**

New Age is the art, science and religion for the triune spirit of man. Spiritual scientists recognize that our bodies resemble our environment in that both derive from vibrations or sound patterns. Aristotle conceived of music as including astronomy. Plato defined music as "moral law". When employed in conjunction with the science of the stars, a phase of healing will be practiced that will be worth of the wisdom taught in the ancient Temples of Light.

The Yogis believe that seven principles govern our existence. English terms being substituted for Sanscrit words are as follows: 1-Physical Body, 2-Astral Body, 3-Vital Force, 4-Instinctive or (Subconscious)-Mind, 5-Intellect, 6-Spiritual-Mind, 7-Spirit. [9](#)

In her book, THE WHEELS OF LIFE, Anoeda Judith compiles a table of corresponding elements for the seven chakras (energy centers of the body). Along with it's Sanscrit name, location and function, Anoeda lists the energy state (i.e. chakra 1=solid, 2=liquid, etc.) for each chakra. The physical, psychological and emotive associations are also listed as well as their corresponding colours (7), glands, planets, vowels, verbs, geometries, and much more. [10](#)

Terrance McLaughlin discovered an interesting association between music and colour by applying a Pythagorean theory in taking the ratio of both colour and light frequencies and corresponding them to it's typical base ('c = red). [11](#)

The results that followed the exploitation of these codes on plant life, children, the physically and psychologically ill, etc. have proven that application of a cosmic understanding of music is beneficial to the professional helper and well as the client and/or patient involved. [12](#)

## **Music Therapy**

Dr. Altschuler of Detroit experimented with patients in the Chicago Hospital for the Insane by applying some of these New Age concepts for healing. He reported that the influence of music is centered in the lower brain which is not affected by mental derangement. Spiritual scientists acknowledge that this is the feminine brain center, seat of the subconscious mind.

**13**

His reports show that music can bypass the language barrier in the Intellect and penetrate directly to the root of the disorder. His patients are progressively recovering from various psychological disorders while undergoing this type of treatment.

Terrance McLaughlin, in his book *MUSIC AND COMMUNICATION*, points out the association between tonal structures we call music and the forms of human feelings. Tracing the path followed by the musical thought when it leaves the cochlea or labyrinth, sheds light on the behavior of the brain as the message is fed into it and gives us some clues as to the nature of the effects which music produces. He goes on to explain how new methods of composition, such as the computer programming of music can fully exploit harmonic and melodic tension as well as tone-colour to perceive their effect on bodily and mental activities. **14**

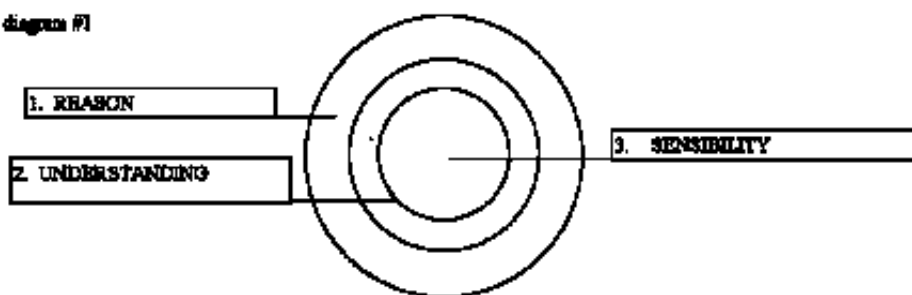
Music's therapeutic effects have come a long way over the past fifty years. Nevertheless, collective research from scientists in both the spiritual and natural worlds is imperative in maximizing music's healing power. This is because music, belonging to the cosmos, effects every aspect of our existence and needs to be examined accordingly.

**Sub-conscious over Intellect**

Going back to Yogi philosophy, we can clearly see the existence of three levels of consciousness, as was believed by Freud and many others. However, they are often misunderstood, especially by the Intellect which seems to be the focal point of the majority of the people in our present Age.

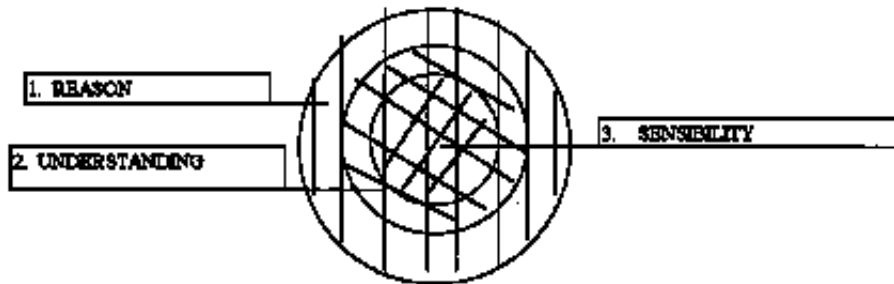
William Barrett explains this misinterpretation in his book *DEATH OF THE SOUL*. **15** We would think that each level of consciousness is layered on upon the other, thus implying that we must pass through one in order to get to the next. Barret shows us that they are not floors added one to another but concentric circles, the larger enclosing the smaller: (1. Reason, 2. Understanding, and 3. Sensibility)

Diagram #1



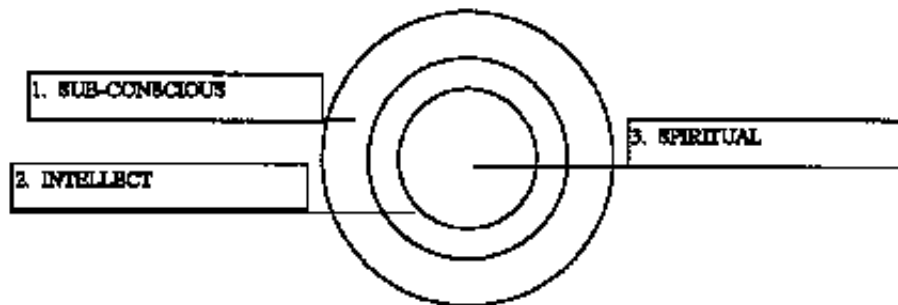
He goes on to explain how each one may be penetrated by the larger. Although the middle and inner circles are penetrated by the larger ones, they do not necessarily "know" from whence the information originated.:

Diagram #2



I believe that this theory is useful in understanding the nature of the sub-conscious, conscious and spiritual minds. The first position belonging to the Sub-Conscious mind, the second to the Intellect and the third to the Spiritual:

diagram #3



"I feel, I know and I believe, therefore I am."  
Yvie Levant

This would explain what Leibnitz meant when he said "the soul counts without being aware..". Because music has been said to effect the emotions,(sub-conscious mind), and is not subject to the Intellect for interpretation, it 's affect upon the individual is extreme, penetrating every level of consciousness and consequently influencing our behavioral patterns.. This also proves Dr. Altschuler's therapy with the mentally ill.

Consequently, music bears an advantage over any other source of communication (but equal to subliminal or hypnotic suggestions). When faced with obstacles within the Intellect, suggestions that are subject to individual skepticism cannot penetrate beyond learned behaviour. Music however, achieves a response is, in fact, pure, free of any preconceived notions and in most cases, inexplicable.

## Time

I was standing in line at the bank one day when a song playing in the background caught my attention...

This particular song acted as a time machine. I was immediately transported back to the year 1973, walking down Rosemount blvd. with a high school friend. I struggled to remember her name and, to no avail, began to think about how we mysteriously lose touch with people now

and again.

As I arrived in the past, with the knowledge that I possess today, I began analyzing the situation in the attempts to solve the puzzle. In what felt like an hour, all of two minutes had elapsed as I discovered a behavioral pattern within my relationships that needed correcting. The file that had been left open for 23 years was now dealt with and became an integral and healthy part of my present life.

Because we are creatures belonging to the cosmos, the universe provides us with exactly what we need to become attuned with it or 'whole'. We are equipped with a three-fold mind that receives, stores and retrieves information (files). This mind also decides as to which files will be open, unresolved and/or put aside for future reference.

Circumstance is the external factor, stimulating or prompting the mind's decisions with regard to these files. Ignoring this process may cause the division of the self which is not conducive to a healthy, wholesome, existence. On the other hand, by becoming more aware of the nature of this external stimulus, we rediscover our 'response - ability' and open ourselves to a whole new world of choices and opportunities for growth.

Music is merely one of the 'triggers' used by the cosmos in prompting the mind to respond. Extensive research in this field may yield an understanding of the universal "score" or collective course. Time is the only constant factor within the framework of our existence. It does not naturally break up or divide itself into separate parts. It is only our own perception of time that is fragmented. A common reason why people ignore these triggers is their perception of time. They do not see the past as anything but past, gone, beyond hope or help. By incorporating past, present and future concepts into the continuity of time we may discover that circumstance is not merely circumstance nor is coincidence merely coincidence. The continuity of time and experience is the elementary truth for healing and wholeness of being.

## **The Future**

As we approach the turn of the millennium, some of us may find ourselves re-examining our position only to find an endless number of answers to our questions, varying in form and degree of truth. While our ball of confusion continues it's seemingly aimless spin around the sun, others have altogether ceased to bother with any logical explanation for their conduct let alone question our collective course and/or condition. This leaves some of us in terror as we witness the gradual extinction of consciousness (in the collective sense), while the rest of us escape into a hypnotic state of indifferent existence.

Living in an age where money and data rule, the majority of us invest most of our time and energy juggling facts and figures. This leaves little room for any hope beyond personal gratification in the here and now. Rapidly advancing technology however, serves as one mere reminder that we do possess an extremely potent ability to develop collectively, Yet constant war and destruction contradict this truth in brutal demonstration of our animalistic nature. In his book "One", Richard Bach depicts the possibility of resolving political conflicts in the future by having nations compete for victory within an Olympic Games type structure. Good idea. Will we?

All of us our communicators while some are healers, teachers, prophets and the list goes on, but dare we ask to what end? Why the constant conflict/abuse between mind and body, man and woman, parent and child, nation and nation?

Our nucleus 'senses' a tragic end despite our noble efforts and sub-consciously beckons for help beyond it's jurisdiction (control). **16** Surely, this help is arriving in the form of a 'collective consciousness' which dwells among us even now (beyond the intellect). **17** Intuitive, sensitive and magnificently contagious, this consciousness is weeding out the roots of our disease. **18**

Increasing numbers of organizations have (subconsciously) joined hands with this force and presently work through their recovery under various names. **19** They experience a grieving process similar to that of a death of a love done, only greater. Feeling and/or acting enraged, distressed, in denial, attempting to rectify or remedy the seemingly inevitable end of our chapter, they sometimes behave irrationally but these ones are the pioneers of the coming Age.

These enlightened ones do experience stigma as do many inexplicable truths nevertheless, I believe that this process will continue to spread itself and be recognized for it's spirit of peace, love and equality. Rising above any race, creed, religion or lack of religion, this non-judgmental Spirit will encompass our planet , unify, preserve and enhance our present existence.

We must not try to control others during this process for 'IT' has it's own way of dealing with those who lack understanding. We can only be grateful for those who do understand. We must simply agree to disagree with the others and employ non-violent competitions for situations which demand leadership. After all, if the universe is on our side, how can we possibly lose?

## **Conclusion**

Let's imagine for a moment that we were the Creator. How would we communicate to a species of such diversity? With so many languages, so many dialects, some illiterate, others insane...what medium could we possibly employ? It would have to be music. We need not have an outstanding IQ. to receive music nor do we need to possess the understanding of the language to receive. Studies have shown that music, connected to the scientific, spiritual and socio/political worlds, has the power to influence the sub-conscious mind and effectively influence behavioral patterns.

Irregardless of how it has been interpreted and/or exploited, music bears all the qualities of a separate entity that carries with it a message for all to hear and understand and despite the medium, music demands a recipient and a response.

If we examine music from an historical perspective, we shall discover that music has accompanied humans throughout the Ages, consoling every tragedy, and celebrating every triumph. While comforting the distressed, it dances with the exhilarated. Omnipresent? Bearing the characteristics of a divine entity, it carries the blame of one as well. Some believe music has been amid the very sources of conflict such as the generation gap, etc., nay, music simply mirrors that which is already happening.

Music has been analyzed, discussed and debated over and over ever since the beginning of time yet humans can't seem to grasp its meaning. It is only by faith that we may embrace the infinite, as is the case with music.

Although our perception of music has undergone enormous change alongside the development of humankind, it's attributes have undoubtedly remained the same...

Music: Mysteriously powerful, moving and breathing (impressing, expressing), interdependent,

impartial, pliable yet constant, reflective and most importantly; demanding that we acknowledge its example and attune ourselves with the universe.

"I will bring the blind by a way that they have not known;  
I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

Isaiah, The Prophet. Chapter 42:16

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## Footnotes

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  2. Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Ideas, p.282
  3. Meyer-Baer, Music of the Spheres (1970), ch. 1
  4. Grolier Encyclopedia for P.C. (Boethius)
  5. Seaton, Ideas and Styles in the Western Musical Tradition, Ch. 5-6
  6. Chart Magazine, monthly feature (dec.95), New Wax
  7. Corinne Heline, Music The Keynote of Human Evolution (1965) p.130
  8. Terrance McLaughlin, Music and Communication, p.22
  9. Yogi Ramacharaka, Yogi Philosophy, p.6
  10. Anodea Judith, Wheels of Life, p.46
  11. Music and Communication, Terrance McLaughlin (1970), p.71-72
  12. Corinne Heline, Music the Keynote of Human Evolution p.100-144
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  15. William Barrett, THE DEATH OF THE SOUL (1986), p.86
  16. Corinne Heline, Music The Keynote (1965), p.126-128
  17. Iannis Xenakis, Arts/Sciences: Alloys (1983) p. 31
  18. Howes, Man, Mind and Music (1948) p.94-98
  19. All twelve-step groups and the Higher Power consciousness.
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