

JJ J.

Pisgah Forest, NC

Vinyl Prints

Hard and soft ground copper etching as well as aquatint

I did research on the connection between music and emotion for my final paper so for my final project I chose to do prints of four albums I have very strong emotional connections to. The albums I chose reflect and evoke a variety of feelings for me, some positive and some more sad. In my prints I used sandpaper of different grit to create different textures and made other alterations to my prints making them slightly different from the original album cover art. The colors I chose to print with each match the specific feelings I have listening to the album. I struggle to find just the right words to describe those feelings, so I find color a helpful tool in portraying them. I put the name of each album and the artist name on each color swatch and hope you find as much feeling in the music as I do.



“I’m High Off The Music
My Heads In The Clouds”



JJ

The Oxbow School

OS46

Author's Note: This paper is a short dive into the connection between music and emotion. I chose to look into this topic because of how greatly music impacts my life and feelings. This paper looks into the questions: What makes us want to dance? How does music connect people? What makes live music so important? How can musical experiences be manipulated by drugs? And do we need music to live?

Many people love making, playing, and listening to music. In my experience, people enjoy playing and listening to music because of how strong the feelings they get from it can be. The title of this paper is a line from the song 'Outcast' by a hip/hop and rap artist NF. I chose this for my title because I relate to the line. It puts into words a feeling I felt was indescribable. Music can make people feel many things and make us feel those things very strongly, and because of this I wanted to look into the connection between music and emotion. I feel music very strongly so some of my research is digging into my feelings and analyzing, as well as interviewing people who make music and who feel very strongly through music. Music is very important to many cultures and cultural traditions, so I also looked into that and how music connects people. I looked into how our experiences with music can be manipulated so our emotions are stronger, more tangible, or felt in different ways. Finally, I looked at how important music is to our lives. Music is something I am very passionate about so this topic is very important to me.

The first question I wanted to answer was: what makes us want to dance? People have essentially been dancing and singing as long as we have been around. The rhythm in music makes us want to move as the rhythmic beats and movements release dopamine which then sends reward and pleasure signals in our brains. A study from the University of Oxford showed that when people danced in sync in groups, they developed a closer bond because their individual sense of self was

blurred by moving together in a group. Dancing in a group releases endorphins which heighten people's pain tolerance and helps them continue to dance for a longer period of time. However, dancing alone can also bring a feeling of liberation and power, releasing endorphins and dopamine. Dancing in groups and individually is also done in many cultural and religious settings. These dances are done to show gratitude, praise, and many more things as well as bring people together. Many of these dances are associated with specific music that evokes special feelings for people who dance to it. When dancing, whether alone or with people, I feel the music flowing around and through me making me want to move. It makes me feel happy and alive.

After analyzing how music makes people want to dance, I wanted to find how music connects people. As previously stated, dance is one way music connects people who are physically together, but music can connect people who are in different states, or even countries. Oftentimes, people with similar music tastes and/or favorite music artists are closer friends and can even have a better understanding of each other. There are online communities built off of the shared love of music as well such as online fan clubs like Cavetown's Discord. Those online communities can come together at concerts and festivals. On the same token, concerts and festivals are a very tangible way to connect with people who have similar music tastes and who feel music strongly, especially live music. Live music is great for forming connections and dancing because you can feed off the energy of the entire crowd and the artist(s). In an interview with Woody Platt of the Steep Canyon Rangers, he said "music connects people in so many ways ... music can break down language barriers, music can break down political differences. The love of music in all its forms brings joy and togetherness with our society." I love meeting and connecting with people through music because I know we share a strong interest and most likely similar feelings; even if we have differences, there is something important that brings us together.

I continued to take a deeper look into live music and found that it is very important not only to fans and their experience with music, but it is also often the artist's livelihood as artists can't often make a proper living off of streams. Live music, as stated, is very important for connecting people and often helps people feel music stronger because they can feed off others' feelings and energy. In another interview with John Felty of Mountain Song Productions, I asked why he feels festivals and live music are important. He said, "Live music takes you out of your routine, the grind of daily life and elevates you to a higher place whether you're aware of it or not. It's a celebration. It's also unique to every individual as we all experience art in a personal way." Festivals attract people for different reasons which can bring people who might not meet each other through a concert together. Festivals are more diverse in people you can meet because not everyone has the same connecting factor, but they are still all there together. The excitement and rarity of live music, depending on your access to it, brings stronger feelings to it because it is something that you can't access all the time like you can with Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon Music, etc. I asked Benji Myles, known on streaming platforms as Happy To Help, why he listens to and writes music. "I listen to music because it is the only constant in my life, ... the meaning of the song might change as you as a person change, but the music itself will never change ... there's also a level of developing emotions that comes with listening to music, sometimes when you think you're the only person who feels this way or thinks these things you'll find a song or someone saying they feel and think the same way" He said he makes music "because I can make a song sound exactly how I'm feeling at the time of writing it, bringing the emotions or experience to life again" I asked him about the effect he sees his music has on live crowds and he said: "I think the effect I've seen my music have on people is more so a feeling of relatability. Most of my music has the same general set up of being really really blatant and then getting more metaphorical as

the song goes on so it allows people to gather many different meanings behind it.” I love concerts and festivals because it is a chance to meet people that I have something so important to me in common with and to meet people who feel similarly to me. I also love the feeling of dancing with all the people around me even if I don't know them; feeling their energy and excitement is exhilarating and seeing the artist makes it such a grounding yet out of body experience because of all the emotions I feel.

Sometimes people at live music events take drugs to enhance their experience. Some drugs can make your feelings more tangible or visual and some can help you to just focus on the music and how it makes you feel, but it's different for each person. The enhancement of music and emotion through drugs is not as easy to find hard research on because it is such a unique experience for each person. In talking with some people about how drugs have enhanced their musical experiences, some said it helped some people focus more on the music and the emotions they felt. Others said they felt more emotional listening to songs and chose to listen to sad songs because it felt like a good way to release sad feelings. Some people liked to listen to more electronic songs or peppy songs as it gave them a more out of self, out of world feeling that could take them away from their current ‘real world’ situation. You do not need drugs to feel music strongly, but it can strengthen the experience for some people. I like to be able to just focus on the songs and more strongly feel the beat. By focusing on every part of the song I feel more connected to the song and as though I can feel the full experience of it rather than passively listening to it.

Finally, I explored the question “do we need music to live?” because if music is so important to some people and evokes such strong feelings then we must need it to live, right? In reading some articles I found that music is not necessary for our survival, but is an advancement that makes our lives better so we keep it around. If you talk to many music artists and listeners you

will get a very different answer. Music is a vital part of our lives and something we couldn't live without. Many people struggle to put their feelings into words so they use songs, making music vital to our communication and understanding of other people. Music releases endorphins and dopamine which heightens pain tolerance and makes us more happy which all extend people's life span according to a Harvard paper.

Music is something very important to me and something I have very strong emotions and feelings connected to. Through my research and interviews I found that I am truly not alone in this. Some people feel stronger connections to music because of the memories and feelings they hold and the connections made through it. Music releases endorphins and dopamine and also makes space for valuable connections and a deeper understanding of people. Music is powerful and emotional and so important to so many people.

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