

**Why Live Music Is Desired**

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**Abstract**

This study investigates why someone would spend a great deal of money to see live music performed by examining the psychophysiological impact live music has on people. Six research journals were analyzed regarding the motivation behind live music, comparisons of recorded music and live music, and effects music has on listener's bodies. According to these journals, music has a healing effect that can reduce anxiety and depression, it can connect us to one another, increasing social engagement and can improve overall mood. The familiarity of songs at a live concert may increase entrainment, or ability to synchronize movements with an external auditory stimulus, and many audience members say that cost does not influence their decisions to attend concerts. This research is important in understanding live music and concert setting experiences physically and psychologically, and providing insight into particular reasons behind the multi-billion-dollar music industry.

### **Why Live Music Is Desired**

In the Youtube Short Film “From The Ashes [Part 1]”, concert fans were asked how many NEEDTOBREATHE shows they had been to. Responses were overwhelming, with some concertgoers saying they had been to over sixty shows! NEEDTOBREATHE, a southern rock band from South Carolina, attracts over thousands of fans to their shows during tour, selling out the biggest venues all over the United States. Live music is such a desired event that attendees will spend hundreds, if not thousands of dollars on concert tickets a year. Why do concertgoers still attend many concerts even with the rising cost of tickets? The physiological effects, connection with others, and production crews creating the aesthetic environment for listeners all impacts the way we perceive live music, and creates an environment that is desired time and time again.

#### *The Studies of Live Music Versus Recorded Music*

Taylor Swift, pop music’s most loved artist on the radio currently, is selling tickets to her shows for over \$1,000. Her shows are selling out night after night, and regardless of the price, audience members are still buying tickets, merchandise, and many other things in support of her music. What happens at Swift’s shows that embark listeners to spend enormous amounts of money on tickets? If you look out into the crowd, you will see the audience moving with the beat. Moving to the beat of music is culturally ubiquitous (Swarbrick et al., 2019). That is why Swarbrick and other professors used head movement to track concert engagement in listeners. They used a live show versus a recorded show of the same exact music to determine how fans and neutral listeners engage with music. In the songs that were known by listeners, greater head movement was experienced, suggesting that familiarity with the songs excites the listener

because of possible micro-timing deviations, and beat predictability. In the songs that were unknown and new, head movement was not as great. In the recorded music show, head movement was not as vigorous as in the live concert. Swarbrick et al. (2019) stated that a survey found that some listeners' strongest musical experiences took place at live events. This contributes to their findings that head movements in the live concert were more vigorous because of the increased anticipation and connection with the artists. When music unfolds in an organic, unpredictable way, it can create anticipation, unlike a recording where the music stays the same every time. Artists improvisation or modifications made to music when played live is "interesting and hard to capture fully in a recording" (Brown & Knox, 2017). The listeners in the audience also have a way to change the way the performer plays in a live show, depending on how they react to the song being played. Knowing the songs being played can affect the movements of audience members because familiarity can increase enjoyment of the performers music. This can lead to the performer playing at a faster tempo, different rhythmic improvisation, or different instrumentation. When there is a new way that the music is being played, it creates a sense of excitement for what song they will be playing, how they will play it, the tempo it will be played at, or the way it will unfold possibly with new solos or ways it is sung. This all contributes to the way that music is perceived in the audience, and creates stimulation for something exciting that listeners can look forward to. The study also states that the majority of the audience members at the shows reported that "cost does not influence their decisions to attend concerts" (Swarbrick et al., 2019).

When audience's anticipation is built before the show, this can create more engagement in listeners at the show, increasing the likelihood that they will desire to come back to the show again. The performer is not the only one who creates anticipation, however. Cluley (2009)

interviewed eleven concert promoters in the United Kingdom who stated that their events are seen as “aesthetics projects, often considering the organization of their gigs as artwork equal in value to the music that is performed.” Meaning that concert promoters, and equally, everyone that works backstage, can make an experience for the audience. This is because they book the venues, promote the show, construct respect and status for the band, get audience members to buy tickets by marketing and social media, and create a great environment for the show to happen in. Even the audience members attracted can become an integral part of the show. When a bad experience happens to a member of the audience because of another audience member, they can be turned off for the rest of the show, not engaged in the music, and distracted by the interaction with this person. We could then say that concert promoters are part of the show, since they bring an experience to audience members. This way of thinking goes hand in hand with Christopher Small’s idea of musiking. This idea of musiking means to take part in a performance in any capacity, whether that means performing, listening, rehearsing, practicing, composing, or dancing. Small even extends the meaning to “what the person is doing who takes the tickets at the door or the hefty men who shift the piano and the drums” and states that they are contributing to the musical performance (Paynter et al., 2020, p. 237). Without everyone musiking, the concert would not be experienced the same.

In the early 2000’s, the recording industry was declining because of the use of ways to get recorded music for free, such as Napster, leading to the rise of live music. The boom for live music grew during a time when mass-media, TV, and computer and phone screens started to take over people’s lives. Holt (2020) states in his book *Everyone Loves Live Music: A Theory of Performance Institutions* that “screen fatigue and fragmentation of the media landscape created a need for in-person social experiences” (p. 15). With the media covering music festivals and

concerts in large frequencies, it gave audience members enthusiasm for live music, and created a barrier between the audience members and the artist. In Hodges book *Music in The Human Experience: An Introduction to Music Psychology*, he states that in 2010, the average 8- to 18-year-old watches “more than four hours (4h 29m) of media” along with listening to more than two hours of radio, CDs, or MP3s per day (p. 326). All of this consumption of media can cause a divide between the media consumed and the outside world, causing people to desire social experiences and concerts and live music to look desired on screen.

### *Music Makes Us Feel Better*

How does music make us feel? Can music change our mood, improve our depression and anxiety, or energize us? In one study by Bailey, cancer patients listened to live music or a recorded version of the same songs. It was discovered that the group that had the live music presentation felt less tense and anxious, and more vigorous, and they showed more physical change than did the group that listened to recorded music (Bailey, 1983). In fact, the human element provided by the player provided an energizing element to the patients. Recordings, because of their non-human aspects, do not have as much effectiveness on the patients. Hodges describes how Alzheimer’s patients who received four weeks of music therapy had increases of melatonin, norepinephrine, and epinephrine levels (p. 299). Children with cerebral palsy showed improvements after participating in music activities, patients with Parkinson’s disease experienced improvement after being rhythmically entrained by beat matching during exercises, and individuals with autism clinical ratings improved after 60-minute music therapy sessions (Hodges, 2019, p. 299-301). Clearly, music changes the way listeners think and feel, and can have lasting effects on patients and listeners.

*Music Connects Us to One Another*

To be at a concert with like-minded people, engaging in social interaction in a great atmosphere is one of the reasons I love going to concerts. This sort of atmosphere at a concert relies on unrepeatability, exclusivity of the event, which is another reason why people desire to attend concerts. Engagement with the artist is not the only engagement had. There are fans loaded into the stadium or festival that are also experiencing the concert, and being social with the audience members as the excitement of the concert arises. Brown and Knox (2017) stated in their research article that one of the main values of a “live music experience is sharing the experience with others”. They found four main reasons for live music attendance: experience, engagement, novelty, and practicality. Concert attendees use these four main aspects to determine why and when they will go to a show. R. Bennett describes that some fans develop a tangible identity to the groups at the concert, and this may keep them engaged and obligated to attending live concerts. Alternatively, adults that moved together in synchronized movements showed greater levels of trust, expressed liking each other more, and remembered more about each other (Swarbrick et al., 2019). These movements result in more enjoyment of music, and more powerful concert experiences. This stems from our connection between our auditory and motor cortices, where oscillatory activity happens. According to Swarbrick, the predictability of the beat can lead to synchronizing movements with the music, otherwise known as entrainment. This affiliate social engagement leads to a greater experience at the concert, and more desire to attend again, no matter the cost. Another proponent for concert attendance is seeing an artist “in the flesh” or getting to meet the band (Brown & Knox, 2017). Meeting your favorite artist can be an overwhelming and exciting time, one that encourages consumers to buy the VIP or Backstage Pass tickets, which tend to cost extra and are a selling point for the band to make more money.

This aspect has been given more weight by superstars in the recent years. Whether it is the artists last time performing, or they are performing with a group for one time only, often this may make consumers of music feel obligated to attend these types of concerts. Seeing artists perform with other artists may never happen again, driving desire to attend a concert. Brown and Knox also state that this may account for fans paying “increasing sums of money for concert tickets.” Again, the novelty aspect is a driving force because concerts only have limited amounts of tickets, unlike recorded music that can always be reproduced. The fear of missing out on a once in a lifetime, or historical event is something that the marketing and promotion teams can capitalize on to get people to come to shows, as well. No one wants to miss their favorite artist performing new songs, or performing with other like-minded musicians.

In conclusion, the aspects of live music can hardly ever be replicated in recordings. The atmosphere, production and aesthetic made by concert promoters and musicians alike, and audience engagement with the band and with others supports this argument. Music makes audience members feel differently by decreasing anxiety and depression, and increasing vigor. Furthermore, music can make someone happy or joyful, sad, energetic, or even obligation. “Live performances are so much different from studio recordings. Recorded music seems lifeless compared to the drive and atmosphere you feel at a gig” (Brown & Knox, 2017). Because of this reason, and many others that have yet to be discovered, people will attend live music, concerts, and festivals and pay large amounts of money to do so.



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