

# What's on your surgeon's playlist?

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Credit: Wikipedia.

Music and medicine are deeply connected. But is operating to music a good idea? And, if so, what kind of music should theatre staff be listening to?

In the Christmas issue of *The BMJ*, surgeons at the University Hospital of Wales examine the intertwined history of music and healing, and suggest tunes for surgeons and theatre staff to play - and to avoid - during operations.

As early as 4000 BC, "hallelujah to the healer" was played as part payment for medicinal services, while the ancient Greeks identified Apollo as the father of both [healing](#) and music. More recently, studies have shown beneficial calming and even pain relieving effects of music

for patients having surgery.

But does music strike a chord with the surgeon and the theatre staff? It is certainly commonplace, being played 62-72% of time in theatre, and most often chosen by the leading surgeon, write the authors.

Around 80% of theatre staff report that music benefits communication between team members, reducing anxiety levels and improving efficiency. Music also appears to enhance surgical performance by increasing task focus, particularly among surgeons who listen to music regularly.

They suggest tracks such as Stayin' Alive by the Bee Gees, Smooth Operator by Sade ("a must for all theatre mix-tapes"), Comfortably Numb by Pink Floyd, and Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go by Wham ("best played in recovery").

Songs best avoided include Another One Bites the Dust by Queen, Everybody Hurts by REM, and Scar Tissue by Red Hot Chilli Peppers ("plastic [surgeons](#) should avoid this at all cost").

Critics argue that music "consumes cognitive bandwidth, reduces vigilance, impairs communication, and proves a distraction when anaesthetic problems are encountered," say the authors. "We, however, embrace [music](#) in the operating theatre whenever the situation allows it."

Do you think your surgical playlist is the perfect one? Share yours in a rapid response (with a spotify link, or just a list), and see what others are listening to at [bmj.com/playlists](#). We'll collate all of them together on our spotify account the-bmj - follow us to hear them all.

A second article, written by a duet of father (medical writer) and son (medical student) finds that doctors are frequently mentioned in pop

lyrics. But the way they are portrayed is not very flattering to the profession.

Only around a third of songs show doctors as carer or healer, and most of these lyrics relate to a metaphorical role in curing love sickness and broken hearts (as in the Rolling Stones' Dear Doctor).

Just as frequently, doctors are portrayed as having unprofessional relationships with patients, often of a sexual nature. In partial defence of the profession, these relationships (real or imaginary) are sometimes initiated by patients. In Goodness Gracious Me, Sophia Loren and Peter Sellers experience a charming misunderstanding along these lines.

But at other times the relationship is far less innocent and doctors take the lead. Little is left to the imagination in Lady Doctor by Graham Parker and the Rumour, or in Fairport Convention's Doctor of Physick.

And then there are songs (from the USA) which show doctors as money-grabbing. And a few suggest they deal in illicit drugs. This is inferred in the Beatles' Dr Robert but is most graphically seen in Dr Feelgood's Down at the Doctors.

Doctors play a uniquely intimate part in all our lives. For many of us, their skills and commitment are life saving. But, overall, popular songs show scant sympathy for the profession. An exception is Bob Dylan's Motorpsycho Nightmare in which the singer is accused of being a travelling salesman. "No," he says, "I'm a doctor, and it's true. I'm a clean cut kid, and I been to college too."

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