

Sad music moves those who are empathetic

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(HealthDay)—Many people find sad music relaxing but to those who are very empathetic, exposure to melancholic melodies is an intense but positive and deeply moving experience, according to a new study.

Researchers in Finland and England found that [people's](#) personalities could help predict their response to [music](#).

The researchers noted that their findings could affect [music therapy](#) and rehabilitation techniques.

For the study, the researchers asked 101 women and men between 20 and 67 years old to listen to an unfamiliar piece of sad, instrumental music and describe their emotional reaction to what they heard. Their response to the music was classified into one of three main groups: feeling relaxed, feeling moved and feeling anxious.

Those who felt moved described their experience as very sad but also intense and enjoyable, according to the study, which was published on Sept. 15 in *Frontiers in Psychology*.

"It has previously been known that people experience paradoxical pleasure when engaging with tragic art, but this seems to be more pronounced in those who have a heightened ability to engage with other people's emotions," lead researcher Tuomas Eerola said in a journal news release. He is a professor of [music cognition](#) at Durham University in England.

"Conversely, people with low empathy do not report feeling moved after listening to sad music," he added.

The researchers noted that the participants' personalities helped predict which people would have an emotional response to the music. Those who were empathetic and more sensitive to how others feel often reported strong positive emotions and being moved by the sad instrumental piece.

"By using unfamiliar, instrumental sad music in our experiment, we were

able to rule out most other possible sources of emotion such as specific memories and lyrics. Thus, participants' emotional responses must have been brought about by the music itself," said study co-author Jonna Vuoskoski from the University of Oxford.

"The fact that highly empathic listeners felt more moved by the [sad music](#) suggests that they were able to immerse themselves into the feelings expressed by the music through a form of empathy," she said.

Katie Overy is director of the Institute for Music in Human and Social Development at Reid School of Music at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. She said, "This fascinating, original study takes us a step closer to understanding how feelings of sadness can be shared, experienced and released in an intimate way through music."

Overy, who was not involved in the study, added: "The findings also demonstrate the extent to which music can be conceived of as a social signal—even simple musical sounds represent human action and emotion, which other humans can understand."

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics provides more on [music and mood](#).

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