

“Music Causes Emotion”: A Reasoned Critique

Vladimir J. Konečni*

Department of Psychology, University of California, San Diego, USA.

Abstract

The Opinion Article critically comments on the ubiquitous contemporary notion that *music causes emotion*, which is often expressed, both in scientific articles and in pop culture, with few, if any, qualifications or provisos. This view typically tends to rely on studies executed with less than rigorous methodology and ignores contrary research findings, and the opinions of past and contemporary skeptics among musicians, musicologists, and music psychologists. The prevalence of the notion appears to be related to the unsurpassed commercial dissemination of music (very broadly defined), and to *emotivism*, a quasi-culturological stance that insists on the insertion of emotion, feeling, and “sensitivity” – often at the expense of reason and narrative evidence – into every segment of human behavior, especially in the arts and the media.

Keywords: Music and emotion; Music causes emotion; Critique of music and emotion; Emotivism; Anti-emotivism; “Crazy Sexy Cool” music festival; Psychology of music

In the past quarter of a century, there has been an avalanche of claims centered on the notion that *music causes emotion*. The sources vary from self-help and pop-psychology pamphlets to reputable journals and 1,000-page handbooks compiled by premier science publishers. The claims are often very generally phrased to refer to all and any music, and to emotions essentially identical to the basic psychobiological ones, such as anger, sadness, fear, and joy. Virtually never do these numerous sources clearly state something simple and almost certainly true – that “*not all music causes emotion in all people, under all*

***Corresponding author:** Vladimir J. Konečni, Department of Psychology, University of California, San Diego, USA; E-mail: vkonecni@ucsd.edu

Received September 29, 2015; **Accepted** October 05, 2015; **Published** October 07, 2015

Citation: Konečni VJ (2015) “Music Causes Emotion”: A Reasoned Critique. *J Biomusic Eng* 3: 108. doi:[10.4172/2090-2719.1000108](https://doi.org/10.4172/2090-2719.1000108)

Copyright: © 2015 Konečni VJ. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

2. Kone ni VJ (2012) Composers' creative process: The role of life-events, emotion and reason. In D. J. Hargreaves, D. E. Miell, R. A. R. MacDonald (Eds.), *Musical imaginations: Multidisciplinary perspectives on creativity, performance, and perception*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
3. Kone ni VJ (2008) Does music induce emotion? A theoretical and methodological analysis. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 2: 115-129.
4. Kone ni VJ (2013) A critique of emotivism in aesthetic accounts of visual art and music. *Philosophy Today* 57: 388-400.