

Why and How Does Music Bring us Pleasure?

**Prof. Katrina Skewes McFerran (University of Melbourne) –
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Abstract

Many people report that music brings them pleasure. Some describe music as their daily vitamin pill or even their best friend. Formal surveys, such as the United Nations' World Happiness Report, highlight engagement with arts and culture, including music, as a significant factor influencing life satisfaction. Similar findings are reported in the longitudinal survey of the German Socio-Economic Panel. Beyond self-reporting, brain imaging studies have demonstrated that music activates multiple neural networks, including those associated with reward processing. These networks are thought to be responsible for mediating pleasurable responses to musical stimuli.

In this presentation, Professor McFerran will explore why and how music can bring us pleasure by examining people who have lost the ability to enjoy previously pleasurable activities, a symptom known as anhedonia. She will report on an intensive music-based intervention that has led to reconnection with pleasure, exploring what might be required for the neurological pathways to be re-activated, using examples from case studies. The importance of easily accessible, regular, and intentional musical engagement will be emphasised.

The significance of pleasure for human flourishing will be discussed, with emphasis on both hedonic (pleasure-based) and eudaimonic (meaning-based) dimensions of well-being. The role of musical pleasure will be presented as a non-pharmacological approach to addressing languishing, a state of low well-being.



Vita

Katrina McFerran, PhD | RMT | RGIMT ist Professorin für Musiktherapie und Direktorin der Creative Arts and Music Therapy Research Unit an der University of Melbourne in Australien. Sie verfügt über 25 Jahre Erfahrung in der Erforschung von Musik und Wohlbefinden und hat dazu umfangreich publiziert.