

Meditate with Music

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Musically speaking.

Music has an incredible power to move us in ways that have been experienced down through the generations. It can make us laugh or cry, happy or sad. It can even make us think, which is always an incredible and inspiring thing. Incredible isn't it that your brain can convert the sound waves that your ears intercept into something that has such power to move us.

I love listening to music, but something incredible happens when you mix music and meditation, it becomes a very powerful combination that has the power to change your life. That is a pretty bold statement but being a person who enjoys combining them I can speak from experience.

Meditation can mean a lot of different things to different people. What I mean when I say meditation with music is where you put the music on and listen to it. Really listen. The sort of listening I am talking about is focusing the whole of your attention on it, nothing is happening in your life while you are doing this. No bills need to be paid. No one is bugging you to mow the lawns. There are no problems in the world and if there were they wouldn't be affecting you. This is the type of listening I mean. Your whole mind and consciousness is being focused on what is coming in your ears.

With this depth of listening after you have done it you will find your mind is clearer and it feels as if your thoughts can come easier, the world is a brighter and clearer place and you feel in touch with the universe. Sounds like the sort of thing a drug addict might say doesn't it, well it's true that music can be addictive, but it's not going to destroy your life or get you put into prison.

Although in general this sort of listening isn't something that you can share, simply because it is such a personal and internal thing, those around you can still

enjoy the music itself, even if they don't gain the same level of enjoyment as you do they may enjoy it just as much so certainly share the experience with people.

When you do it right there is an incredible high you can achieve, it is a miraculous thing that touches you deep inside. As I write this out I am using a laptop that has music ripped onto it via a high definition format. I am listening to it via a moderately expensive pair of earphones and it is a wonderful sensation and I find it very empowering. A wonderful way to relax that can be done in the privacy of your home or in an area as public as a park. Anywhere you can sit and concentrate and just BE.

Although you can if you want to, you don't need to spend ridiculous amounts of money to have a high level of quality. A lot of people who might be reading this may already have all the equipment necessary to enjoy the mix of music and meditation.

You will want to have a reasonably high quality source to listen to and many modern MP3 players or CD Players are of high enough quality. Although I have mentioned several times portable music players, my preference is for a high quality source such as can mostly be found in the home hi-fi stereo system. When you use portable players there are often compromises in quality to get them to the price point where more people can purchase them easier. Don't worry about that though, as I have said most modern players have enough quality that you will still be able to enjoy them immensely. If you don't already have a music source then go to the section I have marked 'No music, so Sad'.

You can tell if your music source, whether it is a portable or a home system, and your speakers or earphones are of a high enough quality by putting on some music that has a lot of instruments and see if you can pick out individual instruments. If everything seems to be blended into each other then either your music system will need to be upgraded or maybe your speakers or earphones

do. If you know someone who is into high fidelity sound maybe you could test your system with his or her earphones or speakers.

A lot of stores that specialize in high fidelity sound systems can be very helpful when you are looking to upgrade your music systems. A lot of these people are into high quality music and you might enjoy talking to them about it and see what they recommend. Of course there are always the percentage that are just interested in a buck so I would suggest staying away from the chain stores and seek out those truly interested in listening to their music.

Lets get Musical.

So, do you want to get started?

First you need to get your music source setup and ready to go. Choose some music that you enjoy listening to and get it ready to play. If possible do this while alone since all you want to be doing is listening to the music, you don't want to be distracted by other people coming and going, or children coming in and disturbing you. Also try not have taken anything that may affect you physically such as coffee, tea or alcohol before you do this as they can nullify a lot of what we want to gain from the music so where possible try not to mix them with the listening experience.

Next set your self up so you're comfortable and able to relax. I find a seated position better for listening to music than lying down but you should try a variety of positions to see which is best for you.

Before you begin, take a moment to relax into the chair and settle down. If you can turn the music on with a remote or some method that means you don't have to get up and be disturbed then that's great. Make your self comfortable and let your body go still. Now is a good time to clear out your ears. Inside your ears is something called a eustation tube and it lies between your middle ear and your throat. It is designed to help equalize the pressure by allowing air to move in and out. You equalize the pressure in this by 'popping' your ears. Lightly pinch your nose closed and gently blow against your blocked nose. Do this gently. If your ears are blocked you want to open them as that will increase your ears sensitivity and also increase your enjoyment of the music. If you find one ear pops and the other doesn't and yet it still feels blocked, put a finger in the opposite ear and try again. You must do this gently as it can hurt to blow against an ear that isn't blocked.

Spend a few moments on your breathing, listening to it going in and out of your body, feeling your chest expand and contract with each breath. Try to feel a sense of calm and concentration on what your body is doing.

What you are doing before actually listening is settling and programming your subconscious so if you do this every time you listen to music, eventually your subconscious will know you want to be relaxed and focused on the music and will help you when it notices this trigger event. The trigger event is sitting and listening to your breathing and having a feeling of calmness and concentration. Once your subconscious is programmed you will find yourself easily getting into the mood for listening. There are many ways to program your subconscious and I go into them in greater detail in my book 'Fix your brain' which is soon available from my website www.fixyourbrain.com.

Start the music and listen to it as it starts. Begin to follow the flow of the music. If there is a vocalist, listen to their voice and how they are singing. Follow their voice and deeply listen to what it is doing and how they are singing. Can you hear when they breathe in and out? Once you have listened to one portion of the music, focus your attention onto some other aspect of the music, listen to one of the background instruments and try to follow it through the track. Find the instrument that isn't at the front of the music but one that takes effort to find while the track is playing. If you've chosen the right instrument there will be times when you lose track of it in amidst the rest of what's going on. This is perfect and exactly what you want to happen. Concentrate on the music and reacquire that instrument when you can, sorting through the sounds until you find the right one.

While you are listening you will find extraneous thoughts pop into your head and when it happens just dismiss them and let them go. It is normal for you to be distracted while you are doing this by thoughts that just seem to come from nowhere. You should be concentrating on nothing but listening, so just dismiss

the thoughts and go back to the music. The music should be filling your universe, let it be the only thing that is happening inside your head, just what your ears and your ability to concentrate bring to you. You will find that really listening to music can be a wonderful thing and an enjoyable way to relax. I find that when I let the stresses of the day get to me it can help to meditate with the music and let it flow through me and let the tensions flow out of me.

You will find the more you do this the easier it is to do. What you are doing is training your ears to locate the faint sounds that are in the musical track. Because your ears wont be used to this don't be concerned that the first couple of times you do this you wont have spectacular results as those will come with time. However you will find that even those first couple of times you get some great results and will appreciate your music a whole lot more.

I think a lot of people that haven't really listened to their music have no idea how complex some of it is and there is a whole new level of enjoyment available for you if your one of those people.

Advanced Listening.

When you gain more experience with this you can expand what it is you are listening to. Sometimes I find it interesting if I mentally arrange instruments in some sort of arbitrary order. I might focus on making the higher pitched instruments appear to be physically higher than the rest. The medium tones or maybe voices can be thought to be at a mid level and the lower tones including the bass notes will be at the bottom of the order. Naturally this artificial changing of the order of instruments isn't really occurring since you can't change what has been recorded in this manner. What you are doing is tell your brain that it's hearing it that way. By doing this it helps stretch your mind and strengthen the imagination with an added benefit of forcing you to concentrate on listening to the music.

You may be amazed at what you can actually have your brain do when you believe you can do it. Since your trying to focus on listening to the music any device you can envisage that will increase your concentration will help with the effects the music will have on you. For instance the more advanced listener who has previously been focusing on single aspects can focus on multiple aspects with maybe one instrument from each ear and progressing to multiple instruments or voices. The highest level of this is to listen to all the instruments and voices at once, which is difficult with complex music or with music that has a lot of instruments in it. When you are able to do this for even a small amount of time you will find it an astounding experience since your mind is actively processing many different sounds at once and is able to focus on multiple aspects of the sound. It is difficult to do initially though and does require some practice.

It is worthwhile to look at just what your brain is doing when you can actively focus on many instruments at once and are able to notice the minutest change in

tempo or when any additional sounds are added. Your brain is processing these multiple streams at the same time and you can get quite a feeling of enjoyment while doing it. While this is happening you are stretching your mind in ways you may not have realized. You are gently increasing the power of your brain to process input from the world around you and may not have known until you find yourself doing several things at once you would not have done before.

You may also find yourself tired after listening to music in this manner; this is something that can happen when you first start really listening to music. When you know why it's understandable, after all you have been making your brain concentrate on doing something you haven't done before. I don't mean listening to music since it's likely you have been doing that your whole life. No, I mean you have been telling your brain to focus its attention in a way it hasn't done before. Because this is new to your brain it will have been busy re-arranging and building a whole new set of neurons and connections and as such it has been stretching your mental capabilities. You're not just listening to music when you perform these processes, you are teaching your brain how to focus in a way it hasn't done before and it can be as tiring as having just crammed for an exam or test.

Live Music.

I have been talking about using recorded music but don't forget the live musical experience as well although some forms of live music lend themselves better than others to this form of concentrated listening. For instance a live rock concert would be bad to use these techniques on since they are usually so loud that your ears are overwhelmed with sound and you are unable to distinguish the quieter notes.

Being able to meditate with music depends on many factors, so why not try it and see. Orchestral or chamber music is particular suited to focused listening although there can be some great results from many other genres. If you enjoy the music and are able to focus on one or more aspects of the music then it should do as well or better than recorded music since the potential quality available from live music is better than any recording can be. Notice I said potential. That's because sometimes live music has a lot of distortion especially when amplifiers and speakers are used to make it loud enough to fill a hall. Once again, try it and see.

Examples of Music and what to listen for.

I have a wide range of music that I like listening to and it's quite a varied style. In this section I am going to write about a couple of the musical tracks I like to listen to and what portions I like to focus on. I will mention the Album name and the Artist and also the track no. Where it is useful I will include timings so that if you have access to a time counter on your player you can try to locate some of the musical elements and try to follow those through the tracks.

If you have these albums then follow along and listen to them. If you don't own these albums that isn't important and you can use the ones you have. These are just examples that I personally enjoy listening to.

Nora Jones – Come away with me.

Her voice has an interesting quality to listen to, kind of husky and breathy and it's a good album for listening to a voice. Listen to the timber of her voice and follow it's ups and downs.

I find there is a small amount of distortion on this album with some of the vocals, which is a shame since it's so pleasant to listen to.

In track 2 there is an acoustic guitar that is played in the left channel and another guitar in the right channel. Try to follow the both of them as they are played.

Pink Floyd – Dark Side of the moon.

This is a very old album and one I feel has stood the test of time. Every now and again it gets re-released and is an example of music that has some nice complexity to it although it shows its age in some parts. There are a lot of background sounds in this album, which makes it a good example to use. Here are a few of them you can locate and follow through the different tracks.

In track 2 there is a cymbal that is tapped repeatedly and this is a good example of an instrument to follow throughout the track.

At the end of track 3 you have someone running and you can hear them breathing.

At the start of Track 4 – Time – There are a lot of different clocks chiming. See how many different clocks you can identify and listen to their sound as it decays away. After the clocks there is the sound of a muted guitar string being plucked. It is meant to sound like the tick of a clock and this sound can be followed through out the track until it disappears behind the other sounds at approx 2:14 into the song.

Track 6 – Money – has a lot of elements that can be followed through out the track, as does most of the album.

Roger Waters – Radio Kaos

A lot of Roger Waters albums are complex in content. They have sounds and instruments that weave in and out of each track. They also tend to have a lot of sampled voices that are worth focusing on.

Mike Oldfield – Tubular Bells 2003.

The original Tubular Bells dates from 1973 and was a classic when it was released. It has recently been re engineered and remade with updated recording techniques and modern equipment. This is one of my favorite albums and one of the first that I listened to with any degree of concentration. I recommend listening to all of it since there are so many instruments and sounds in a complex mix that it's easy to find something to concentrate on. If you get this album, get the updated 2003 remix, it has 2003 in the title.

No music, So sad.

So you don't have anything of a high enough quality to play your music on? Well that can easily be fixed since there are many options out there that can provide high quality music relatively cheaply.

One of the cheapest options for personal music is an Ipod from Apple. There are many models but the smaller shuffle is cheap, although doesn't store many songs. You need to have a computer as well to transfer the music from audio CD to the Ipod, which can inconvenience some people. While the quality isn't exceptional it's quite good and usable for our purposes. There are a myriad of portable players that also require a computer such as various MP3 Players. These are small devices that allow you to store music and take it with you similar to an Ipod. The Ipod and mp3 players use a method of compressing the sound that can have an affect on the quality. If you want more information, there are many websites out there that can give you lots more info on this than I can go into here but have a listen to some of these portable players and see if they will do the trick for you.

Portable cd-rom players can give you good results and some of these are of good quality, although it would be a good idea to listen to these first. Usually it's a good idea to throw away the earphones they give you and get something of a better quality. I like Sennheiser but they can be a bit expensive depending on the model but I have always been happy with the quality of their sound.

If price is an issue or you just want a bargain, check out ebay or second hand stores and pawnshops. Often you can find some great buys at these places and although ebay is a great resource if you know what you want it's hard to audition the equipment before purchase and that's where a Hi Fi Store can be handy.

Conclusion.

Music is a wonderful thing and something that can be enjoyed time and time again. When you combine it with meditation it can be extremely relaxing and can have a positive effect on your life.

Give it a try and see. Most people already have all the equipment they need to put it into action and it is easy enough to do.

If you want to find out more about reprogramming your brain then check out my book and my website. www.fixyourbrain.com

Thank you.

Kevin James.