

But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids

How Does Music Move Us?

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[00:00:17] This is *But Why: A Podcast for Curious Kids* from Vermont Public Radio. I'm Jane Lindholm. We're turning things around today. Instead of you sending us the question, this time we're asking the questions and looking to you for some answers.

[00:00:34] We wanted to explore why music moves us. Sometimes it makes us feel like moving physically—wiggling, spinning, shaking and shimmying. And sometimes it moves us emotionally. It makes us feel something—happiness or sadness, or it brings back a really strong memory. So, we asked you: how does music make you feel? Let's start with what Jacob, age 6, from Ballston Spa, New York told us.

[00:01:02] [Jacob] It makes me feel good because it just makes my body dance.

[00:01:08] [Gracie] Hi my name is Gracie and I live in Burlington, Vermont. I'm 12 years old. I play the following instruments. I play violin, euphonium, mandolin, ukulele, bass, djembe, dun dun (*dune dune*), and many more. Music makes me feel calming. It makes me feel happy, most in general terms, although what I'm listening to them could make me feel happy; it could make me feel sad. It just makes me feel feelings.

[00:01:45] [Jane] But why does music make us feel feelings? Well, music actually triggers the amygdala, the center in our brains that makes us feel emotions. So, when you listen to music, it goes straight to your brain. And it also makes your brain release dopamine, a chemical that's associated with pleasure. That kind of explains why music can make you so happy that you just can't resist bopping your head and wiggling your body. In fact, music interacts with a lot of parts of our brains, and scientists are still discovering all of the various ways we are connected to music, why it can so easily trigger memories for example. But, why do I have to sing along to all the songs on the radio when I'm in the car? I know my son would prefer it if I could just listen silently, but sometimes I just have to sing along at the top of my lungs. Do you ever feel that way? What makes you feel like singing or dancing? Or maybe you're like my son and you tell your parents, "No, mom, just listen." Yeah. Thanks a lot. We asked one adult who has a lot of experience singing at the top of his lungs and getting kids to sing right along with him to write us a song about music. He invited some of the kids who take his music class to participate.

[00:03:01] I'm Chris Dorman. I'm the founder of Music for Sprouts, a music and movement program for children and families. (*soft guitar strumming*)

[00:03:12] And, oh, that music moves us physically. I wonder if, maybe, it's because the sound waves actually move through our bodies. Our bodies are permeable to the waves, the vibrations. Emotionally, well, the lyrics of a song can connect us to thoughts, or ideas or aspirations. That's things that we want to see happen, things that we want to do. It can connect us to memories, things that have already happened, things that we long for. And then the melody—the actual sound—when you hear that, you can almost feel yourself making that sound, that expression. Have you ever been walking down the street, say with your headphones on, and the song comes on with the real strong beat, and you look around and the scene that was once chaotic sort of falls into that rhythm? It almost helps you connect to the rest of the world around you. I also like to think that there's a bit of

mystery in it. One great joy is I'll start to play a song for kiddos and it's got a real strong deep boom-cha, boom-cha, boom-cha and all of a sudden I see a one and a half year old's knees start to bounce, or a toddler start to lift his feet off the ground and, before you know it we're all jumping. It makes me want to jump, too.

(Chris sings and children add italicized words)
When I hear the wind, it makes me want to *fly*.
Spread my wings and soar,
When I hear the wind, it makes me want to *fly*
And now we're flying around like *birds*
Flying around, flying around, flying around like *a feather in the wind*
Flying around, flying around, flying around like *airplanes*
Flying around, flying around, flying around like *"tweet, tweet, tweet, tweet."*
Flying around, flying around, (*whistles*)

[00:05:48]

When the snow melts away, it makes me want to *dance*
See the sprouts, flowers bloom
When it's turned into spring, it makes me want to *dance*
Now we're dancing around like *frogs, ribbit, ribbit*.
Dancing around, dancing around, dancing around like *airplanes, butterflies*
Dancing around, dancing around, dancing around like *kangaroos*
dancing around, dancing around, dancing around like *feathers, ooh...*

[*multiple voices talk—adult woman and children-- while Chris sings "ah" and strumming*]

Now we're running around like *a cheetah*
Running around, running around, running around like a *bear*
Running around, running around, running around like a (*multiple answers*)
Flying around...
Dancing around...

[sponsor message]

[00:07:17] [Jane] That was Chris Dorman. He runs a program called Music for Sprouts and he writes all kinds of songs about all kinds of different things. We have a link to his website where you can learn more about his music classes and hear some of those songs. You'll find it at ButWhyKids.org. And, in that song, we heard Sophie, Hazel, Alanna, Elijah, Ruby, Jade and Eva.

If you want to write a song about music, we would love to hear it. Have an adult help record you singing your song and send it to us. Send the file to Questions@ButWhyKids.org and maybe we'll put it in a future podcast.

[*theme music*]

Here's what 3-year old Bram and his mother discussed when they contemplated how music affects us.

[00:08:09] [Mother] What do you like about music?
[Bram] The sounds.

[Mother] You like the sounds. How did they make you feel?.

[Bram] Rock and roll.

[Mother] They make you feel rock and roll! Who's your favorite band.

[00:08:24] [Bram] Kiss. "Rock and roll nights", "Party every day".

[00:08:29] [Jane] Here's Bram's five-year old brother Reed.

[00:08:32] [Mother] What is your favorite band?

[Reed] All Time Low.

[Mother] What sort of music do they sing?

[Reed] Rock and Roll.

[Mother] If you could play any instrument what would it be?

[Reed] The guitar.

[Mother] Why?

[Reed] I just like how it sounds the most.

[00:08:51] [Jane] Research shows that kids who learn how to play an instrument get a lot of benefits. Playing an instrument helps improve your motor skills. It helps you be better at identifying distinct sounds. And some studies show that kids who learn how to play an instrument show improvement in academics and focus. So, how do you learn to play music? It can be a lot of work to learn an instrument and a lot of time to get good at it through practice, practice, practice. We talked with one young girl who's learning to play the violin.

[00:09:41] [Emmerson, *tape of her playing, "Ashokan Farewell" in background*] I'm Emmerson Rose Stapleton. I'm from Essex, Vermont. I'm 9 years old. I play the violin. It looks like a ukulele except for the bridge is farther up in the strings, more towards the head of it. Instead of having just a head, it's a scroll and looks like fiddlehead [fern].

[00:10:07] You just put it on your shoulder, so that the chinrest –or the tailpiece— is towards your neck, and you rest your chin on the chinrest. You have to hold the bow in a certain way. When you play it, you just pull your arm across the strings and try not to pull your arm back behind you, but in front. I started playing when I was 5 and I just did that because all my friends at school or preschool were, so I wanted to do that.

[00:10:59] I like all the challenges that you have, and that you don't just work and work and work for nothing. You actually get something out of it. You get to do recitals and get to do all the concerts and things.

[00:11:20] I practice every day. Well, sometimes it's not really good practice, but I'm usually about 15 to 20 minutes, sometimes more. In the beginning, it's super hard. But once you get better and better and better, it gets a lot easier to sight read and do new pieces.

[00:11:43] I want to get into the Vermont Youth Orchestra sometime and do that. The song I played is "Ashokan Farewell".

[00:12:03] [Jane] Thanks to Emmerson Stapleton for sharing her violin playing with us and teaching us a little bit about what it takes to play the instrument. Let's hear from a few more of you about what music makes you feel.

[00:12:17] [Lily] My name is Lily. I am 7. I like music because of the tune in it, all the different tunes of it. It makes me feel good. I like hip hop.

[00:12:30] [Jane] And here's another thought from

[Carson] Carson, four years old, in Washington, DC.

[00:12:37] My body moves. swiggle. I like instruments. I like the sound: BOOM BOOM. (*keeps up a vocal percussion.*)

[00:12:55] [Jane] Carson says one way he experiences that boom boom he likes so much is by going to a drum circle in a local park every week. (*sound of drums*)

[00:13:09] A drum plays rhythm. It has a beat just like your heart, and when you hear loud drums it can feel like you're feeling those vibrations right in your heart and inside your body. Maybe that's why it makes us want to dance. Well, let's hear from someone who knows.

[00:13:25] [Seny Daffe] My name is Seny Daffe. I am originally from Guinea West Africa. I started playing since I was 8, 9. I really love to share my culture. Dancing, drumming is part of my life, is part of my culture, because my country is very traditional with music we do in Africa. It's very deep for me.

[00:13:53] This is a djembe. It is a hand drum. Djembe have a good skin and three sound. First one is bass, the second one is tone, and third one slap. So, if you want to learn how to play djembe you have to know those three different sounds: bass, stone, slap. Then you can make the whole together. (*drumming interlude*) It sounds like this when you're playing by yourself but it's totally different with different accompaniments.

[00:14:56] (*higher pitched beat*) This little instrument is called krin—K R I N. A long time ago, a hundred years ago, a hundred, many, many hundred years ago, we didn't have electricity in Africa. We didn't have any phone; so, the communication used to be an instrument. For instance, if the king wants to see somebody, or somebody have a baby, ceremony, wedding. So, we communicate with this little instrument in the forest. This is from forest people; so, they going, at least they communicate with this little instrument from a long time ago, to have people know what happened in town, what happened in the neighborhood, what happened to the king, the palace, you know, all that so. If there wasn't music in this world, I don't know if anybody, anybody could live in this world. And the music is really important for us, and it's very important for me, because when I think, back home, we always play music every day. Any time you feel like you want to do party, you're free to do it, people are happy to enjoy it.

[00:16:16] [Jane] That was Seny Daffe who helps to lead the Jeh Kulu Drum and Dance Theater. He plays the djembe, the krin and many other traditional West African instruments. Before we go today here's one more thought you sent us about why music makes us feel things.

[00:16:36] This one comes from Kadija

[Kadija] I'm 17 years old and I love music. Music is so important to me because it expresses something we can't always say with words. It really moves us and it really changes the way we can think. Music can affect us in certain ways. It can make us happy.

It can make us sad. It can make us laugh and cry, and I really think that's beautiful. Music makes me dance because there's something about rhythms and beats and notes that really move me, and I'm so happy that music can make anyone stand up tall and dance.

[00:17:16] [Jane] Thanks so much to Kadija and everyone else who sent in thoughts on music this week. And thanks to the adults and parents in your lives who helped get your comments to us. We'd love to hear thoughts and questions from kids, big and small, just like you. So, if you have a question about anything really, you can send it to Questions@ButWhyKids.org. That's how this podcast works. You send us questions with help from the adults in your lives, and we help find the answers. We'll be back in two weeks when we'll hear from Winlon who lives in Georgia. He asks this question:

[Winlon] Who invented words?

[Jane] Good question, Winlon. I can't wait to hear the answer. And we've got a few other questions to answer to: like why the alphabet is in the order it's in, A, B, C, D and so on. Why isn't it Q, B, H, S, A? Well tune in in two weeks to find out.

[00:18:16] "But Why" is produced by me, Jane Lindholm, and Melody Bodette for Vermont Public Radio. Our theme song is by Luke Reynolds. Special thanks this week to Burlington Vermont's Jeh Kulu Drum and Dance Theater and their Thursday night class. And, also, to Chris Dorman and his Music for Sprouts.

[00:18:35] Thanks for listening, and stay curious. See you next time.