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The INFLUENCE of MUSIC

An experiment with mice shows us how much the music we listen to can affect us.

When I ask someone, “What do you remember most about Primary?” the answer is often, “The music.” The words to Primary songs never leave us—they are embedded in our hearts. Take, for example, the following Primary songs. Can you complete each phrase?

“I’m trying to be . . .”

“Heavenly Father, are . . . ?”

“Book of Mormon . . .”

As you completed each sentence, did you find yourself singing the melody?

If so, it’s probably because music enhances our senses, touches our emotions, and creates memories. So it’s no wonder that we celebrate temple dedications with a cultural event where youth participate in uplifting music and dancing. These events let us “make a joyful noise unto God” and “sing forth the honour of his name” (Psalm 66:1–2).

Music Always Affects Us

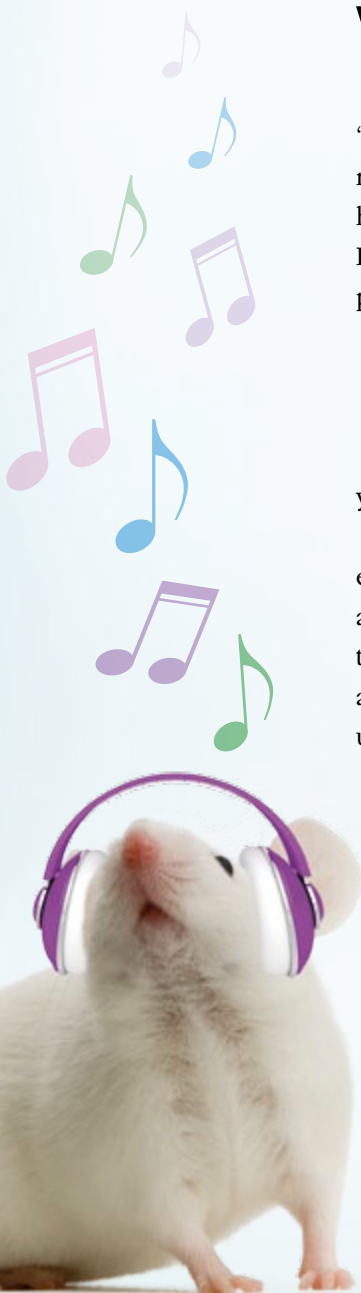
For the Strength of Youth teaches that “music has a profound effect on your mind, spirit, and behavior.”¹ Music can enrich your life in so many ways, but it can also be dangerous. President Thomas S. Monson said: “Music can help you draw closer to your Heavenly Father. It can be used to educate, edify,

inspire, and unite. However, music can, by its tempo, beat, intensity, and lyrics, dull your spiritual sensitivity. You cannot afford to fill your minds with unworthy music.”² And it may not matter if you listen carefully to the words or not; words that are put to music are often easily learned and easily remembered.³ No wonder we are cautioned to “choose carefully the music [we] listen to.”⁴

Mice, Music, and Learning

Your choice of music can also affect your ability to accomplish tasks or to learn. Two researchers explored this relationship by studying the effects of music and rhythm on the nervous system of mice. For eight weeks, one group of mice constantly listened to Strauss waltzes (highly organized and orderly music), while a second heard disharmonious sounds in the form of continuous drumbeats. A third group was raised in silence.

After eight weeks, the mice were placed in a maze to find food. The mice in the second group wandered off with no sense of direction—“a clear indication they were having trouble learning”—and took much longer to find the food than they had at the beginning of the study. The mice exposed “to discordant sounds not only developed difficulties in learning and memory, . . . but they also incurred structural changes in their brain cells.” The researchers’ diagnosis is



very interesting: “We believe that the mice were trying to compensate for this constant bombardment of disharmonic noise. . . . They were struggling against the chaos.”⁵

What could be the “chaos” in some of today’s music—things that might keep you from learning effectively? It may relate to the rhythm and beat of the music (as with the mice) or with the words used or messages presented. President Boyd K. Packer, President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, said: “Society is undergoing a subtle, but powerful, change. It is becoming more and more permissive in what it will accept in its entertainment. As a result, much of the music being performed by popular entertainers today seems to



be more intended to agitate than to pacify, more to excite than to calm.”⁶

Matters of Time and the Spirit

It is not only the rhythm and the lyrics of jarring music that are detrimental. By listening to such music, we also prevent quiet moments that allow us to think clearly and listen to the Spirit. In *The Screwtape Letters*, a popular Christian novel, a character named Screwtape represents Satan and tries to lead good souls to his cause. Screwtape says, “It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out.”⁷ In essence, Satan knows that he does not always have to fill our minds with bad thoughts if he can just keep us from focusing on things of the Spirit. “If you listen to music constantly, you may not have the quiet time you need for thinking, feeling, and receiving spiritual guidance.”⁸

We need the Holy Ghost with us at all times. For that reason, we should choose carefully the music we listen to and the dances we attend. Let the Spirit be your guide, and when you have doubts about the music you are listening to or the circumstances you are in, have the courage to act so the Spirit can remain with you. ■

NOTES

1. *For the Strength of Youth* (booklet, 2011), 22.
2. Thomas S. Monson, *A Prophet’s Voice: Messages from Thomas S. Monson* (2012), 77.
3. See Jack R. Christianson, quoted in “Author’s criterion for picking music: does it encourage a proper life style?” *Church News*, May 6, 1989, 5.
4. *For the Strength of Youth*, 22.
5. Richard Lipkin, “Jarring Music Takes Toll on Mice,” *Insight*, vol. 4, no. 14, April 4, 1988, 58.
6. Boyd K. Packer, “Worthy Music, Worthy Thoughts,” *Liahona*, Apr. 2008, 33; *New Era*, Apr. 2008, 9.
7. C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (1982), 20.
8. *For the Strength of Youth*, 23.

