



PART 1

Read the text below and answer questions 1–13.

THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE: AN INTRODUCTION TO MUSIC PSYCHOLOGY

Music psychology investigates how humans perceive, produce, and use music, and why organised sound can feel meaningful across cultures. The field draws on neuroscience, ethnomusicology, anthropology, and education, so it often appears “universal” while remaining deeply shaped by local tradition. At one level, researchers examine auditory processing in the ear and brain: how the auditory cortex encodes pitch and timbre, how the brain tracks a pulse, and how expectations guide perception. At another level, they study social function: how music coordinates movement, signals identity, and strengthens bonds. Modern accounts therefore treat musical experience as an interaction between biological preparedness and enculturation—learning the patterns of the musical environment one grows up in.

A common starting point is rhythm and entrainment. Humans can synchronise movement to a beat with unusual precision, and this ability emerges early in development. Rather than merely reacting, listeners predict when the next event will occur, using internal timing mechanisms to align tapping, clapping, or dancing. Neuroimaging studies have linked this predictive timing to networks involving auditory regions and motor planning areas, helping to explain why a steady pulse can make bodies move together in marching, dancing, and group exercise. Importantly, music rarely behaves like a metronome. Small timing deviations can be experienced as expressive—part of a performer’s “feel”—rather than as mistakes, because listeners expect controlled variation around a stable framework.

Pitch and melody are processed differently from rhythm, but they also depend on pattern detection. Listeners learn what melodic movement “usually” sounds like in a given musical system, and they form expectations accordingly. In Western tonal music, for example, certain notes feel stable while others create tension that seems to demand resolution. Yet what sounds natural is not fully hard-wired. Research on enculturation shows that familiarity shapes expectation: scales and tuning systems that are normal in one tradition may sound unfamiliar to someone raised elsewhere. Ethnomusicologists have long noted the diversity of musical structures worldwide, and music psychologists increasingly treat this diversity as evidence that universal capacities—such as sensitivity to contour and repetition—are moulded by exposure into different musical grammars.

Emotion is one of the most studied effects of music, but it is not a simple code. People across cultures often recognise broad cues: fast tempo tends to be associated with excitement or energy, while slow tempo can be heard as calmness or sadness. However,



the same piece can be comforting in one setting and distressing in another, because meaning depends on context and personal history. Laboratory research also points to physiological mechanisms: pleasurable musical moments have been associated with activity in reward-related circuitry and with dopamine release, particularly when expectation and fulfilment are skilfully balanced. At the same time, hormones linked to social bonding, such as oxytocin, have been discussed in studies of group singing, suggesting that emotional response can be both individual and socially amplified.

Memory helps music travel through a lifetime. Many people can sing lyrics or hum tunes learned years earlier even when they struggle to recall other details from the same period. Researchers partly attribute this durability to repetition and to the way music packages information through rhythm and rhyme, creating structured retrieval cues. Interest in music and memory has also grown in clinical contexts. In dementia care, including Alzheimer's disease, familiar songs have sometimes been used to stimulate recall and engagement, even when other forms of memory are impaired. While effects vary and are not a cure, such findings support the idea that musical memory can be resilient and can provide a route to communication when ordinary conversation is difficult.

Music also affects attention and learning, though popular claims are often exaggerated. Background music can increase persistence for some people during repetitive tasks, especially when the work is low in language demand. Yet it can interfere with complex reading or problem-solving when lyrics compete for verbal processing. In education, musical activities can strengthen engagement and timing skills, but outcomes depend on teaching quality and on whether music is integrated with clear learning goals rather than used as decoration. Researchers therefore caution against assuming that music automatically enhances performance; effects depend on task type, listener preference, and the structure of the learning environment.

Socially, music functions as a coordination technology. Singing, clapping, or drumming together can align breathing and movement, and this synchronisation is often linked to increased feelings of belonging. Music is also used to mark rituals, celebrate, mourn, and display status, giving groups a shared timeline and shared emotional vocabulary. At the same time, musical taste signals identity: it can create community among insiders while excluding outsiders who do not share the codes. From a psychological perspective, this makes music a powerful tool for social cohesion, but also a medium through which boundaries are drawn.

Technology has reshaped musical experience in the past two decades. Streaming services provide constant access and personalised recommendations, expanding exposure while also narrowing it through algorithmic filtering that repeatedly reinforces existing listening



patterns. Production software and inexpensive recording tools allow amateurs to create complex tracks at home, blurring the boundary between listener and maker. Yet concerns have also grown about attention fragmentation and about the economic sustainability of music careers in an era of low per-stream revenue. Overall, music psychology suggests that humans are prepared to learn music, but not locked into a single musical language: shared capacities for rhythm, pitch processing, emotion, and social bonding are shaped by culture, training, and technology into many musical worlds.

Questions 1–5

Select the correct answer.

1 The writer suggests the field can seem “universal” mainly because it

- A** treats culture as irrelevant once brain mechanisms are described
- B** combines biological processing with the social uses of music
- C** assumes all musical systems share the same scales and rhythms
- D** focuses mainly on classroom teaching rather than perception

2 What is emphasised about human rhythm perception?

- A** It relies on predicting the next beat rather than only reacting after it
- B** It depends primarily on recognising melodic patterns in a scale
- C** It appears only in adulthood after extensive musical training
- D** It requires timing to be perfectly regular to be perceived as correct

3 What point is made about melodic expectations?

- A** They are identical across cultures because they are biologically fixed
- B** They become weaker as listeners gain more exposure to music
- C** They are shaped by enculturation, so “natural” patterns can differ by tradition
- D** They depend on rhythm alone and are unrelated to pitch processing

4 According to the passage, background music is most likely to be unhelpful when

- A** a task is repetitive and low in language demand
- B** learners are practising movement coordination
- C** the music is instrumental and highly predictable
- D** language processing is already heavily loaded by complex reading

5 What concern is raised about streaming recommendation systems?

- A** They prevent listeners from accessing music at any time
- B** They may reduce variety by reinforcing similar listening choices



- C** They make it impossible for amateurs to produce music
- D** They eliminate cultural differences by standardising taste

Questions 6–9

Complete each sentence with the correct ending, **A–F**, below.

List of Endings

- A** often produces excitement because rapid tempo cues are widely recognised.
- B** can be driven mainly by personal associations and situational meaning.
- C** provides structured retrieval cues that make sequences easier to recall.
- D** can lead to physiological synchronisation that strengthens social bonding.
- E** can sharpen sensitivity to small pitch differences through training.
- F** may narrow exposure by repeatedly reinforcing existing preferences.

- 6** The emotional response to the same melody in different situations
- 7** Remembering a song learned years earlier may be easier because musical structure
- 8** Participating in group music-making, such as drumming or singing,
- 9** Streaming platforms that personalise what users hear next

Questions 10–13

Complete the sentences below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the text for each answer.

- 10** Slight timing deviations in performance can be heard as rather than wrong.
- 11** Reward-related responses to music are particularly associated with a balance between expectation and
- 12** The passage notes that classroom benefits depend partly on clear learning
- 13** Streaming services provide constant access and personalised

Answer Key

- 1. B
- 2. A
- 3. C
- 4. D
- 5. B



6. B

7. C

8. D

9. F

10. expressive

11. fulfilment

12. goals

13. recommendations