

## Get into a Better Pre-Audition Headspace with a “Heroic” Playlist

### Description

Whether it's waiting for your turn at an audition, getting stuck in traffic on the way to rehearsal, or standing in line at Trader Joe's on a Saturday, much of life seems to consist of...waiting.

Which in the grand scheme of things is probably not such a big deal (and might be something worth learning to embrace, as I learned from watching the movie [Click](#) ), but sitting around idly with nothing to do *does* tend to lead to a lot of mind-wandering.

And sure, letting our thoughts wander aimlessly is harmless enough when we're waiting for the dog to do his business, but when the thing we're waiting for is an audition or performance, letting our mind drift to all the what-if's, doubts, fears, insecurities, and comparisons our brain likes to ruminate on, can make for a pretty unpleasant wait.

Some folks have found that reading a book helps to pass the time and keep them in a more positive headspace.

Others prefer to rewatch old episodes of a favorite TV series, like *The Office*, or *Friends* – something you've watched a million times before but still manages to keep you semi-engaged.

And in sports, you'll often see athletes with headphones on during their pre-game preparations, using music to get into the zone (like [these six Canadian Olympians](#)).

It might seem a little odd to use something like Metallica to get into the right headspace for Brahms, but then again, a friend once mentioned that she would sometimes listen to the [Game of Thrones theme song](#) backstage to help her channel her inner “badass” when she needed to get into a more empowered headspace for auditions and big performances.

So...can the right music really keep your mind from wandering to the bad place, and be an effective way to help you stay in a more effective mental state on audition and performance days?

### Music time!

A team of Finnish researchers ([Koelsch, Bashevkin, Kristensen, Tvedt, & Jentschke, 2019](#)) recruited 62 participants to see what kind of effect different types of music would have on the positivity or negativity of their thoughts, as well as the tendency to mind-wander.

First, each participant was hooked up to an ECG to measure heart rate and heart rate variability.

...and then they answered a series of questions to get a sense of their current mood.

...after which they proceeded to listen to six 2-minute selections of heroic and sad orchestral music, at three different sets of tempos – one pair at 64bpm, a second pair at 95bpm, and a third at 115bpm. To make things as similar as possible, the selections were also matched for loudness and had no lyrics.

Between each selection, participants were asked to respond to a few questions that gave researchers a sense of what they were thinking about, how much mind-wandering may have occurred, and whether the selection of music had any effect on their mood.

So what effect did the music have on their thinking?

## What happened?

Well, as it turns out, the type of music they listened to didn't have much of an effect on mind-wandering. Participants reported that their thoughts drifted away from the music about 73.1% of the time. 72.6% for heroic music and 73.7% for sad music.

However, the music did seem to affect where their thoughts drifted *to*.

Listening to the sad selections was associated with a decreased heart rate, and thoughts that drifted to sad or demotivating things – like a breakup or funeral.

Listening to the heroic selections, on the other hand, led to an increase in heart rate, and a boost in mood. With participants saying they felt more positive, inspired, alert, and less afraid. And their thoughts tended to be more constructive, action-oriented, or motivating as well. Like I wonder “how I could help my friend to tidy her home” or I wonder “whether I will eat at home or at the student center.”

So what are we to make of all of this?

## Takeaways

Well, needless to say, the authors write that listening to sad music may not be the way to go if you're wanting to motivate yourself to get things done. And that listening to heroic music is likely to be a more helpful way to “improve constructive thought, and set plans into action.”

So in terms of performance, yes, if getting amped up and excited is what you need before an audition, listening to heroic music before you go on stage could be really helpful.

But I was actually more intrigued by the potential day-to-day use of this finding. As in, what would happen if you put together a heroic “get off the couch and practice” playlist for those moments when you're

dragging your feet, totally not in the mood to practice, and need a little nudge?

## Additional resources

Going back to auditions or performances for a moment, the effect of music on mood, and ultimately, performance, can be a little nuanced. In that the usefulness of music backstage may depend on the person, the situation, and what type of mood or physical state you're trying to get into.

You can learn more about how athletes use music for performance in this 2-min video:

[Can Music Improve Athletic Performance?](#)

Or dig a little deeper in this article that's for fencers, but seems pretty applicable to musicians too:

[Pump Up the Jams: How Music Affects Top Athletes' Performance in Competition](#)

Or, if you want to really geek out about this, here's an even more in-depth look at this area of research:

[Listen Up! The Experience of Music in Sport – A Phenomenological Investigation](#)

## Wait! What were the musical selections?

I don't know which parts of the works below the participants listened to, but I believe these were the musical selections that were included in the study:

**Slow HEROIC:** [Legendary](#) , by Epic Soul Factory

**Slow SAD:** [Venus, The Bringer of Peace, from The Planets](#) , by Gustav Holst

**Medium HEROIC:** [Addicted to Success](#) , by Fearless Motivation Instrumentals

**Medium SAD:** [Film Credits](#) , by Ólafur Arnalds

**High HEROIC:** [Heroic March](#) , by Spirit of America Ensemble

**High SAD:** [Hamlet](#) , by Ennio Morricone

## Only tangentially related...but still

This is a bit of a tangent, but you know those frustrating times when you have a fragment of some song stuck in your head, that is associated with some really meaningful memory or moment in your past – but you can't for the life of you remember enough of the song to Google or Siri any leads?

Well, that's what happened to Austin. And here's a really sweet 16-min podcast episode on his search for

that song:

[Putting a Phantom Tune to Rest](#)

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## References

Koelsch, S., Bashevkin, T., Kristensen, J., Tvedt, J., & Jentschke, S. (2019). Heroic music stimulates empowering thoughts during mind-wandering. *Scientific Reports*, 9(1).

## Date Created

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