

## Music and the Brain (Excerpt)



Image Credit: Julie Creasey 2021

### Don't Worry, Be Happy

The saying “*Don't worry, be happy*” is more meaningful than ever in a world that's been fighting COVID-19 for more than a year. With daily routines altered in so many ways, people have been searching for simple ways to bring joy to their lives.

Music is one pastime that's been lifting people's spirits. People have played concerts from their balconies, choirs have created virtual performances, and comedians have posted funny viral music videos. Is there something about the way our bodies experience music that helps us to feel happy?

Back in 1988, the phrase “*Don't worry, be happy*” was the title and well-known chorus of a surprise hit song. Having a number-one hit was even a surprise to Bobby McFerrin, the song's creator. He hadn't planned to record *Don't Worry, Be Happy* but during a studio session when another song wasn't working for him, he took a short break and quickly wrote the upbeat piece. Forty-five minutes later he'd recorded it, and, not long after, he had the first **a cappella** (song without instruments) hit to reach a number one on the Billboard charts. Can all music bring us joy, like this little song-that-could, and why are people so drawn to music?



Image Credit: Udiscovermusic 2021

Bobby McFerrin's song *Don't Worry, Be Happy* was a number one Billboard hit on September 24, 1988. He also won three Grammy Awards for the song in 1988.

## Music is part of all cultures and has been for thousands of years

Research shows that all cultures have music, though it's unknown how long music has existed. **Archaeologists** (cultural researchers) have searched for ancient musical instruments to help solve this puzzle. It's possible, though not proven, that music developed during the time of the Neanderthals—sometime between 130,000 to 40,000 years ago.

Neanderthals could have had the skill to make instruments, but none have been found. It's possible that the natural materials that Neanderthals would have been able to use to make instruments decomposed over time.

Examinations of skeletal remains show that Neanderthals did have use of their voice. They might have been the world's first singers. If they developed singing abilities, what purpose did music have? To become part of every culture and to stay with people for thousands of years, music must have an important function in human life. Could part of that reason be tied to our emotional nature?



Image credit: National Geographic 2021

This 43,000 year old bear bone was thought to be the earliest musical instrument discovered; however, the holes were later shown to have been made by a hyena chewing on the bone.

## Music is connected to our intellectual, emotional and social nature



Image credit: Ana Tablas 2021

Research shows that singing lullabies reduces stress for mothers and babies, as well as contributes to children's language and brain development.

Music is part of our biology. It's connected to a person's need to learn, express emotions and form social connections. The famous scientist Charles Darwin (in the 1850s) was interested in songs, and he thought that music was tied to humans' social instincts. He suspected it might be linked to finding a mate, but scholars have since learned that there's much more to it.

While people sometimes sing to themselves, music is mostly created for social and learning purposes. For example, caregivers sing to calm babies and teach children. Think about how you learned the alphabet. Does the ABC song pop into your head?