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The Power of Music

By Daniel Casciato

Music affects us all. How often have you used music to uplift you or take the edge off a bad day?

The American Music Therapy Organization says that there is a link between music, moods and emotions. Music therapists, who have been researching the links between music and the mind, believe that listening to music can actually alter how our brains and bodies function.

“Music taps into your emotional responses at a fundamental level,” says Mike Steele, a Glenshaw resident who is a classical musician and a member of the University of Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. “I think this holds in particular for classical music because good classical music is designed to convey emotions and images in a way that other media do not, tapping into the emotional core of human beings at a fundamental level,” he says.

“Putting on the right piece of music has the ability to let go of stresses and worries much more easily, which allows you to focus on the task at hand, be it work or relaxation.”

North Side resident Jodi Klebick, president of Klebick & Company, a public relations firm, listens to a wide range of music depending on the occasion. “While I’m working, when I need to focus on a project, I like listening to jazz,” she says. “This is the type of music that doesn’t interfere with my thought process.”

If she’s pulling an all-nighter on a project she enjoys listening to New Age music. When she needs to be creative or when she’s starting a project from scratch, instrumentals allows her to concentrate more. “You don’t want to listen to something that you’ll start to sing along with,” she advises.

When she’s doing mundane tasks like filing, she says swing music is often the best. “You must have music for that,” she says with a laugh. Klebick says that there is a difference in your mood when you work or relax with music as opposed to working or relaxing in an environment without music. “Every situation is different, but I think in a work environment, listening to some type of music does make a difference in your work performance,” she says.

For music to energize you, both Klebick and Steele opt for a faster, upbeat tempo.

“Contemporary music such as rock is my choice to get me going,” says Steele. “However, when I’m looking to get motivated to do some writing, or trying to decide what to teach my class on a given night, I choose classical music, particularly large-scale symphonic works with lots of brass. I find that this sort of music creates a vivid and colorful backdrop for my work that taps into my imagination and inspiration.”

What type of music should you listen to? The American Fitness Journal offers these tips:

- Listen to fast-paced, comfortably loud and lively music to wake up in the morning, recharge during the day or exercise.

- Listen to music with a slow and continuous tempo to relax after a stressful day, stretch after a workout, slow your eating pace or soothe yourself to sleep.

- Listen to up-tempo music with a pleasing melody to alleviate depression, anxiety, negative thoughts or improve self-confidence.

- Listen to loud music with a heavy beat to discharge anger, aggression or negativity.

Most people already have a collection of music they love to listen to. Try to carry a portable CD or iPod with you when you can.

“This is one reason my iPod goes almost everywhere with me,” says Steele. “Listening to the right music can have a tremendous impact on your outlook on any given day.”

For more information, please visit www.musictherapy.org.

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