

## Assessment of the Concept of Music in the Foundation of the Universe

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### ABSTRACT

*Pythagoras through his teachings attempts to expose his philosophy of the soul and music in connection to the universe. This paper, therefore, draws our attention to that connection and the relationship between the soul, music, divinity, humanity and the universe. It examines how music regulates and elevates the soul as well as foster harmony amongst listeners in the universe. It further reveals the value of music to the soul and the universe from even the Stone Age to the period we are in. It showcases numerous views and ideas of theorists on the concept of the soul, explaining how the souls of both man and animals' function in life and in death. It emphasizes how man is positioned at the centre of the teachings of both music and the soul. It employs the method of textual analysis of both primary and secondary texts. Also, it utilizes hermeneutics to explore and interpret the key notes in Pythagoras' philosophy of the soul, and music and that of the general authors. It can serve as a useful guide for further research on music, and the soul and the concept of music as the soul food. It concludes that Pythagoras' views on these concepts are not the final interpretation or investigation but a foundation for future researchers.*

**Keywords:** Music, Universe, Teaching, Age, Soul Food, Philosophy

### INTRODUCTION

The focal point of this paper is to attempt an exposition of music as the soul food in Pythagoras. Equal this to say that music and the soul forms the major teachings of Pythagoras' philosophy. He drew the connection between music and the soul first from his study of what forms the universe and second from the practice of his orphic cult. In this cult, Pythagoras believed that the soul must undergo a punishment or penalty for committing a wrong; and that after this penalty, the soul needs to be purified. In the process of this purification, and sanctification, the soul needs music to be awakened from spiritual death. Even after the purification process, the soul receives music for nourishment, relaxation and enjoyment. Pythagoras in his musical theory believed in the power of music to influence and harmonize the soul, body and mind of an individual.

Music is a reflection of the cosmic order. The harmony found in music and the soul is essentially the same principle as one that regulates both the cosmos and the human soul. This regulating therapy of music explains the effects it has on the listener's mood and character. The thought of music as a therapy of the soul explains that music is capable of healing, purifying the soul. This is because there are certain musical modes and harmonies that could found or have profound effects on the emotion and spiritual

well-being of the individual soul. Listening to or creating harmonious music could lead to inner balance, spiritual growth and connection of the soul to divinity. Music feeds the soul by elevating and fostering the soul with the universe. Music possesses the capacity to influence human character in virtue of the harmonic nature shared between the soul, music and the universe. Music is an essential part of the universe. Both are inseparable.

## WHAT IS MUSIC?

The attempt to answer the question 'what is music?', leads us to the discussion of various aspects of music; such as the history and periods, genres, notations, and the definition. The history and periods in music is dated back to the stone age, prehistoric, ancient, medieval, renaissance, baroque, classical, romantic and modern periods. The stone age, in this age people made music. The definition of music varies across cultures and contexts. Mantle Hood, a prominent ethnomusicologist, defined the field as "the study of music in terms of itself and within the context of its society," highlighting the intrinsic and societal dimensions of music (Hood, 1963, p.8). Similarly, Christopher Small introduced the concept of "musicking," proposing that music encompasses all activities related to its performance, including listening, rehearsing, and composing, thereby framing music as a dynamic process rather than a static object (Small, 1998, p.6).

The first music was made trying to imitate sounds and rhythms that occurred naturally. Human music may echo these phenomena using patterns, repetition and tonality. This kind of music is still here today. Shamans sometimes in their music imitate sounds that attract animals when hunting (Music - Simple English Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. <https://simple.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music>). This gives us the understanding that music is for both humans and animals. The first musical instrument used by humans was the voice, which can make different kinds of sound. The larynx (voice box) is like a wind instrument. The oldest known Neanderthal hyoid bone with the modern human form indicates that Neanderthals had language because the hyoid supports the voice box in the human throat. Also, the first rhythm instrument or percussion instruments involved the clapping of hands, stones hit together, or other things that are useful to keep a beat (Music - Simple English Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. <https://simple.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music>).

## PERIODIZATION OF MUSIC

- I. **The Prehistoric Music:** Prehistoric music refers to the earliest forms of musical expression, emerging before the development of writing systems. Music during this period was transmitted orally and primarily involved imitations of natural sounds. Early humans likely produced music by using their voices as the most ancient instrument and simple percussive methods (e.g., clapping or striking stones) to create rhythmic patterns. Although no written records exist from this time, archaeological discoveries (such as bone flutes and cave paintings depicting musical scenes) provide insight into these early practices (Grout & Palisca, 2001, p.12). The music of this period was not written. It is oral.
- II. **The Ancient Music:** This is the period before 350 BC. It is the music of the ancient people. It is not known what the earliest human music was like. Some architecture and paintings are thousands of years old but old music could not survive until people learned to write it down. The only way we can guess about early music is by looking at the very old paintings that show people playing musical instruments. The earliest piece of music that was ever written down and that has not been lost was discovered on a tablet in Hurrian, a language spoken in around northern Mesopotamia where Iraq is situated today from about 1,500 BC (Music - Simple English Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. <https://simple.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music>). The ancient period extending roughly from the origins of civilization until the early Middle Ages encompasses music from cultures in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. One of the earliest surviving examples of written music is the Hurrian hymn from approximately 1400 BC,

discovered on clay tablets in what is now northern Iraq. This period's musical practices, though not extensively documented, are inferred from surviving artifacts, iconography, and early theoretical writings that illustrate the use of scales, modes, and rudimentary notation (Grout & Palisca, 2001; Taruskin, 2005).

- III. **The Middle Age:** This is known as the medieval period in the history of music. It dates back to about 350-1400 BC. Most of the music in this era found written down was in and for the Catholic Church. This music was written for and by the monks to sing in church around 1250 BC. It is called chant or Gregorian chant or Sumer Is Icumen In. Much of the music in this period roughly 450-1420 BC was folk music played by working people who wanted to sing or dance. When played instruments, they were usually playing for dancers. The medieval period saw the emergence of musical notation and a dual tradition of sacred and secular music. Liturgical music, notably Gregorian chant, was central to the Catholic Church's worship and served to unify monastic communities (Hoppin, 1978, p.16). At the same time, folk music—often performed by the general populace for dances and communal celebrations—flourished alongside these formal compositions. Recent studies have further explored how these musical practices influenced social cohesion and religious experience during the Middle Ages (Everist, 2008, p.13).
- IV. **The Renaissance Period:** This period of music is between 1400-1550 BC. There was a lot of music and composers wrote it down. Many of these music can still be played, performed and sung today. Many new types of art and music was made during this time, like the sacred music made by the Italian composer, Giovanni da Palestrina for the church. The Palestrina songs are called the choir song because they sing together. Some are not for the church but for happy dance, romantic love songs. These were made with popular instruments, the viol, string played with a bow, lutes (a plucked instrument like a guitar and the virginal and a small quiet keyboard instrument.). Characterized by an explosion of artistic and intellectual activity, including significant innovations in musical composition and performance. Composers such as Giovanni da Palestrina refined the art of polyphony in sacred music, while the secular realm witnessed the rise of madrigals and instrumental music. This era's music was increasingly documented through improved notation practices, which allowed compositions to be preserved and disseminated more widely (Atlas, 1998).
- V. **The Baroque:** This music period was between 1600-1750 BC. This was western cultural era. The word baroque is derived from the Portuguese noun "barroco" which is a pearl that is not round but unpredictable and elaborate in shape. The music of this period emphasized drama and splendour in sculpture, painting, literature, dance and music. Baroque in music applies to the final period of dominance of imitative counterpoint where different voices (Music - Simple English Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. <https://simple.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music>), instruments echo each other at different pitches, inviting the echo and even reversing thematic material. This music era in style, popularity and success was promoted and encouraged by the Roman Catholic Church which believes that arts and music should communicate religious themes in direct and emotional involvement (Music - Simple English Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. <https://simple.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music>). Baroque music emerged with a focus on contrast, ornamentation, and expressive dynamism. The term "Baroque" (derived from the Portuguese *barroco*, meaning "irregular pearl") reflects the era's embrace of complexity and dramatic flair. Composers such as Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel exploited techniques like imitative counterpoint and basso continuo to create music that communicated both religious fervor and secular extravagance. The patronage of the Roman Catholic Church and European aristocracy significantly influenced the development of this richly textured musical style (Taruskin, 2005; Grout & Palisca, 2001).

- VI. **The Classic Period Music:** This period dates to 1750-1820 BC. It is also western music. Composers like Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig Van Beethoven (Music - Simple English Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. <https://simple.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music>). Composers in this period wrote longer pieces of music called symphonies that has several sections known as movements. Some of these movements were loud and fast, others were quiet and sad. This music had nice shape and used a structure called Sonata form. They used instruments like string quartet; violins, a viola and a violoncello flute, clarinet and oboe. This string quartet music has sections like Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. The piano was invented in this period. Composers liked the piano because it can be used to play dynamics (getting louder or getting softer). This era witnessed the maturation of musical forms such as the symphony, string quartet, and sonata—genres that reached their pinnacle in the works of composers like Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and Ludwig van Beethoven. The advent of the piano during this period also allowed for a wider range of dynamics and expressive nuance. Scholars highlight that the Classical period laid the groundwork for modern Western music by establishing principles of tonal harmony and formal design that continue to influence contemporary composition (Grout & Palisca, 2001; Sadie & Macy, 2001).

In addition to these international frameworks, local scholars have examined how traditional and contemporary musical practices intersect in culturally diverse contexts. For instance, Adeboye (2019) discusses the dialogue between indigenous African musical traditions and Western periodization models, emphasizing that local practices often blend oral traditions with formal structures in unique ways. Such studies highlight the importance of recognizing multiple paradigms in understanding the evolution of music globally (p.113).

## THE ROLE OF MUSIC

Music plays a multifaceted role in nurturing and connecting the human soul. Both local and international studies have identified several key functions of music:

- I. **Musical connection with our subconscious:** it is believed that our subconscious mind (soul) connects to music immediately our body respond to such music. Music is believed to resonate with our subconscious, eliciting involuntary physical and emotional responses. When you find yourself tapping your feet or nodding along to a beat without conscious effort, this phenomenon highlights how music is embedded within our neural circuitry. Adesina (2021) explains that such automatic responses reveal a deep-seated connection between music and the subconscious, which in turn influences personality and emotion (p.24). This intrinsic relationship also explains why music is frequently incorporated into meditation practices to facilitate deeper states of awareness. When you find yourself tapping your feet and bobbing your head with the beat of the music playing without even realizing you are doing so, know that your subconscious mind has come to play. Music is embedded into one's personality and very few people can claim not to like music (Music: Food for the Soul - Highonscore | The Score Magazine. <https://highonscore.com/music-washes-away-soul-dust-everyday-life/>). This is one of the reasons why music is often used as part of guided meditations of bodies.
- II. **Music facilitates and helps us to sleep better:** Many of us suffer from irregular sleeping patterns these days and insomnia. Increase in stress, diverse and hectic lifestyles have been known to cause people to forfeit sleep which is not good for one's health at all. The cure to this is listening to music before you go to sleep especially classical, soft music which is best said to help one sleep better. We cannot take it away that even children love music. From time immemorial we have seen infants falling fast asleep upon hearing a lullaby. Even though they barely understand the words or sounds, the soothing tune of the lullaby calm them down to

sleep (Music: Food for the Soul - Highonscore | The Score Magazine. <https://highonscore.com/music-washes-away-soul-dust-everyday-life/>).

- III. **Music makes the soul of everybody happy:** You will rarely find anyone who claims to dislike music. Music is not only good in connecting and socializing people, but it also motivates by putting them in a positive state of mind marrying the soul. It is associated with merry and happy moments as a universal phenomenon. Scientifically, it has proven that when you listen to music, the brain releases dopamine which makes one feel happy, excited and joyful (Music: Food for the Soul - Highonscore | The Score Magazine. <https://highonscore.com/music-washes-away-soul-dust-everyday-life/>). Soft, classical, or traditional lullabies can have a soothing effect that promotes better sleep. Balogun (2020) found that traditional lullabies in Yoruba communities help regulate sleep patterns among children and adults alike, reducing anxiety and easing the transition to sleep. This evidence suggests that music is a simple yet effective therapeutic tool in addressing stress-induced insomnia and improving overall sleep quality (p.72).
- IV. **Music improves the overall quality of health and life quality:** Music has a profound and deep impact on our soul, mind, spirit and body. It helps in healing one's soul and spirit, releasing the emotion built up of tension. Music universally uplifts mood and enhances emotional well-being. When listening to music, the brain releases dopamine a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and reward—leading to feelings of joy and satisfaction. Adeniyi (2018) demonstrated that engagement with both Nigerian pop and traditional music is strongly correlated with heightened emotional wellbeing and improved social connectivity, underscoring music's role in fostering happiness and communal bonds (p.47). Listening to music is said to decrease levels of the stress hormone cortisol in the body naturally leading to lesser stress which leads to lesser physical ailments and hence improves life's quality (Music: Food for the Soul - Highonscore | The Score Magazine. <https://highonscore.com/music-washes-away-soul-dust-everyday-life/>).
- V. **Music connects us to language:** Music precedes language in the sense that one can hear a piece of music in another language and be moved by the sound alone even though you don't hear and understand the language. Beyond its emotional benefits, music has tangible effects on physical health. Research indicates that listening to music can lower cortisol levels, thereby reducing stress and improving overall well-being. Ibrahim (2022) reported that indigenous Nigerian music contributes significantly to holistic healing practices, helping individuals manage stress and promote physical health. These findings highlight music's potential as a non-invasive means of enhancing life quality (p.114). Irrespective of language, a good piece of music will uplift your soul, mind, body, spirit and mood on hearing the sound, lyrics and the instrumental piece which can often inspire you. The human soul, mind, spirit body as well as the brain is wired in such a way that we understand music irrespective of age, language and culture. Music transcends all boundaries of language and culture connecting people across the globe (Music: Food for the Soul - Highonscore | The Score Magazine. <https://highonscore.com/music-washes-away-soul-dust-everyday-life/>). Music therefore is available in all forms around and we should use it to our advantage, incorporating it into our daily life for our happiness.
- VI. **Music as a Bridge to Language and Culture**  
Music transcends linguistic barriers, acting as a universal language that communicates emotion and meaning beyond words. Okeke (2019) argues that in multicultural Nigeria, music serves as a vital medium for cross-cultural communication, enabling individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds to connect through shared auditory experiences (p.37). This universal characteristic of music fosters social unity and enhances cultural exchange.

## THE PYTHAGOREAN CONCEPT OF SOUL

Pythagoras, the seminal figure in ancient Greek philosophy, founded Pythagoreanism in the 6th century BC with teachings that profoundly influenced conceptions of the soul. Central to his philosophy

was the idea that the body and soul function in tandem an integrated system where a healthy body necessitates a harmonious and well-nourished soul. For Pythagoras, the soul was the seat of sensation and emotion, distinct from the intellect, and it embodied the life and harmony of the physical elements. He posited that when these elements were disordered, the soul could cease to exist, only to be reborn in a process he termed *metempsychosis* (transmigration of the soul). In this view, the soul is eternal, moving from one body to another after death a doctrine that not only underscored its immortality but also its capacity for purification through successive incarnations.

Renowned music scholars have emphasized the enduring influence of Pythagorean thought on our understanding of music's transformative power. For example, Small (1998) contends that the act of "musicking" transcends mere auditory enjoyment; it is an embodied practice that enacts a dialogue between the human spirit and the cosmos (p.32). This notion resonates with Pythagoras's belief that music, through its inherent order and harmony, mirrors the cosmic structure and plays a crucial role in purifying and awakening the soul. Similarly, Kivy (2002) argues that music's capacity to evoke emotional and spiritual responses is deeply rooted in its structural properties that Pythagoras identified as key to maintaining the balance and purity of the soul (p.68).

Pythagoras's teachings on the soul were not purely abstract; they were integrated into his religious practices as well. His involvement with the cult of Dionysus and the Orphic tradition exemplifies how he applied his theories to ritual life. In these practices, the soul was seen as imprisoned within the body until it had expiated its past misdeeds through a rigorous regimen of ritual purity. This included abstaining from blood sacrifices, meat, and certain fish—measures believed to aid in the soul's purification and its eventual liberation. Locally, Adeyemi (2021) demonstrates how elements of Pythagorean thought persist in modern Nigerian choral and ritual practices (p.47). In these traditions, music is employed as a means to evoke a state of spiritual cleansing and renewal, echoing the ancient belief that harmonious sounds can stimulate the soul's connection to the divine.

Historical accounts also attest to the centrality of the soul in Pythagorean doctrine. For instance, ancient sources report that Pythagoras could engage in dialogues with the soul of a deceased individual—a phenomenon recounted by contemporaries such as Apion (as cited in Ferguson, 2008) and later by Josephus. Plato, profoundly influenced by Pythagorean teachings, incorporated these ideas into his own philosophical framework, thereby providing a more detailed window into the Pythagorean understanding of the soul. Ferguson (2008) offers an extensive exploration of how these interactions and beliefs shaped subsequent Western thought on the nature of the soul and its relationship to music.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examines the link between the Pythagoras concept of the soul, what is music and music as the soul food; explaining how music feeds the soul. It explains the functions and roles of music to the soul. No matter the category of species and sentient beings we belong to or may fall into, there is a musical connection through frequency, vibration and sound to match with what we feel at the moment. There is a genre of music that appeals to the soul of men which helps them to meditate, relax, enjoy and energize them to positive health. Music, for many, is the quickest way to connect deep in spirituality and to find solace. For other, this is divine. Through the mix of tender chords, and dancing to rhythmic flow is a passion that connects delicately and it is enduring. It can make you feel somewhat better, an evolving experience that you would want to always repeat. Countless musicians, fans and listeners of music out there in the universe have expressed themselves through this kind of channel and when you connect to the same expression, you will either feel the same way or a little way different. Music touches a cord within us and its effects resonate in our mind, heart and spirit. At various times and ways music helps us to forget the thorny issues of the moment and life, uplifting us to another dimension of possibilities. In no small measure music brings our memories to the present or past event, elevating our courage to the battles onward.

In a nutshell, just as the human body compulsorily needs food for nourishment and healthy living, it is necessarily required that the soul also be fed through music to ease tension, reduce stress levels and make you feel somewhat better, as well as connects to the universe.

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