

In The Mood For Mood

A musicological perspective on the mechanisms of the mood playlist

Herwin van Ee (6515983)

MA Applied Musicology

Utrecht University

Dr. Annelies Andries

Abstract

This thesis is mainly focussed on uncovering the workings of the mood playlist format. This format is found on streaming services such as Spotify and aims on influencing a listener's mood. These playlists are either made by users or Spotify staff members. What distinguishes the mood playlist from other playlists is the fact that they are thematically focussed on a mood instead of curatorial criteria such as genre or artist. To better understand what a mood playlist is, I have theorized different aspects which are of importance when it comes to the mood playlist in a theoretical framework. First of all, I am discussing what a mood is and how moods are influenced. While this is mostly because of emotions, which can be aroused and perceived through music, aesthetics play an important role as well. Aesthetics provide an important role because they contextualize the mood in a mood playlist. Secondly, I am explaining the characteristics of a playlist through a history of the playlist. This way, I can both show the characteristics of a playlist as well as from which medium they are inherited. The third part of the theoretical framework contextualizes the listening side of affective mood regulation. This includes a discussion on the changing role of music in everyday life as well as new listening modes and a comparison to the Muzak corporation. To show how these mood-regulating processes work in practice, I have conducted a case study featuring analyses of two mood playlists. These analyses contain a general discussion of the playlist's content and aesthetic as well as three song analyses. While analysing the songs, I saw processes of emotional expression as well as arousal. Often, the expressed emotion did not necessarily fully fit the aroused emotion.

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Introduction

The mood playlist is a phenomenon that probably everybody using streaming services such as Spotify has encountered. You might not have noticed their existence, but you surely have listened to them in the past. So you might be wondering, if I am not even aware of their existence, why are they worth researching? As the saying goes in Dutch: asking the question is answering it. The concept is not entirely new but becoming more and more ubiquitous. Regulating moods through music and influencing the listener's behaviour, whether incorporated at the office or in a store, has already been a thing since the first half of the twentieth century. Probably the most important instance of this phenomenon is the revenue model of a company known as Muzak. This company researched and supplied business environments with curated music aimed at influencing the listener into becoming more productive or wanting to spend money in a store. The mood playlist format has spruced up on streaming services, infiltrating the personal sphere while becoming rapidly more popular. At first, these playlists were solely provided by streaming services, but users are stepping up their game by making their own mood playlists as well.

To put it simply, the main goal of this thesis is to further understand what the mood playlist itself is and how it potentially influences our mood. This means that I both reveal the characteristics of what a playlist is and what makes the mood playlist a specific type of playlist, as well as dive deeper into mood-regulating mechanisms which are potentially aroused by listening to music. To achieve this, I have divided the main body of my thesis into a theoretical framework and a case study. This way I can both theorize and contextualize the mood playlist in its many facets as well as show how this works in practice. While this thesis is mostly built on academic sources, I found it essential to include some primary sources as well. This is due to the role of internet culture when it comes to mood playlists. Arguably, mood playlists have become a part of internet culture because they often rely heavily on it. For instance, the moods and aesthetics found in mood playlists are frequently defined by internet culture

The theoretical framework chapter is broken up into four parts. While the first three paragraphs discuss different subjects, they are interconnected by the mood playlist and brought together in a closing section that simultaneously functions as a recap of the first three parts as well as defines what a mood playlist is. The theme of the first paragraph is mood. It conceptualizes it by placing it in the context of affect and discusses properties which are

potentially influential on a mood. What I am primarily discussing here is emotion theory and aesthetics. To illustrate some of the mechanics used in the part on emotion theory, I have included models and tables with insightful information from academic sources on emotion theory. Where possible, these are included in the text. However, some were too big or detailed and because I did not want to ruin the text flow, I have included them in the appendix. The subparagraph of aesthetics is used to explain the relationship between mood and internet culture and helps in creating a connection between the mood playlist and internet culture on an academic level. The second paragraph explains what a playlist is through its historicity. Not only does this provide the reader with a background of the playlist's history, but it also shows from which media what characteristics are inherited. The third paragraph is centred around listening practices and the role of affective regulation. Here, I am discussing how listening to music can be used in a corporate setting to affect behaviour and music's changing position in everyday life. As I shortly introduced at the beginning of this paragraph, the last paragraph of the theoretical framework is a recap that functions as a conceptualization of the mood playlist. This part aims to both summarize the theoretical framework and make it interconnectivity of the parts clearer.

The case study features analyses of two mood playlists, both with different themes, available on Spotify. An overview of the content of these two playlists can be found in the appendix. The first playlist, titled *falling in love in the 80s/90s*, is made by a Spotify user and features a falling in love mood theme. This theme is supposedly contextualized in a 1980s and 1990s aesthetic. While the mood is incorporated rather straightforward in the playlist, the aesthetic context is a lot more abstract. The second playlist is made by Spotify staff members and is titled *pov: ur in an 80s film driving at night*. In this case, the aesthetic is incorporated more straightforward and the mood is rather abstract. Here, the mood is driving at night. While this might seem unlikely to fit the concept of mood, personally, driving at night is surrounded by a special atmosphere that brings a specific type of calmness or serenity I do not experience anywhere else. The aesthetic context of this playlist is based on the 1980s. Unlike the first playlist, multiple signs point towards a very specific aesthetic. This aesthetic is either known as Synthwave or Outrun. It is characterized by a retro perspective on the 1980s, musically highly influenced by scores from the 1980s and visually features neon colour pallets. By analysing both a user-made playlist as well as a professional playlist, I am potentially showing stylistic differences in the curatorial practice of mood playlist. While

conclusions from analysing two playlists do not necessarily have to count for all mood playlists that exist, it can potentially indicate differences also present in other mood playlists.

The Mood Concept: Affect, Emotion and Aesthetics

Discussion of affect

When theorizing mood, it is essential to start with a discussion of affect. This is because affect is simultaneously at the core of mood, and it also functions as a red line throughout the other elements of mood that I want to discuss. So what is affect and how does it relate to music? As a psychological concept, affect is described by David Martin, an academic in the medical field of mental health, as an “immediate expression of emotion” (Martin 1990, 925). These expressions of emotions can either be categorized as euphoric (e.g. being in love or feeling content), euthymic, or dysphoric (i.e. feeling tired or heartbroken). Euthymic feelings, however, primarily exist in people who live with “mood disturbances” (Lindberg 2018). Mood has, like *Stimmung*, the connotation of an affective state of being. Breidenbach identifies two important characteristics of this state. This state is psychological and can be communicated between people with a shared cultural background (Breidenbach 2020, 1-2). Affective state-of-beings are not unique to individual persons because they have a degree of relatability, which means that they can be communicated. This is of course only between individuals who possess a shared cultural understanding (Breidenbach 2020, 1).

From a music psychological perspective, affect can be described as a series of “mental reactions and states” (Sloboda 2001, 40) which include “feelings, emotions and moods” (2001, 40). The music psychological perspective on affect differs the most from the mental health perspective in the sense that it sees affect as an umbrella term instead of a perceptible emotional expression (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 585). Furthermore, Sloboda splits affect into the two categories intrinsic affect and extrinsic affect. He speaks of extrinsic affect when affective processes are activated by external triggers such as “music, smells and tastes” (Sloboda 2001, 41), which lead to associative processes. This means that hearing a known musical piece could potentially trigger a memory of a past event which is coupled with a specific emotion. For intrinsic affect he makes a subdivision, namely iconic and symbolic. These are used to signal different correlations “between musical structures and emotional responses” (Sloboda 2001, 42). The iconic relationship between music and emotion is whenever a musical structure seems to imitate affect. For example, a crescendo might sound like what anxiety feels like, while the symbolic relationship is all about playing with the listener's musical expectations (2001, 42). When composers use clichés in their songwriting, this could be experienced by a listener as comforting, or rewarding because that person was able to predict the following sequence. Throwing unusual or unexpected sequences into a

song could potentially have the opposite outcome. While these two correlations both lead to expressive processes, they do so in a different manner.

Doctrine of affects

Affect has a longer history within music, most notably the German *Affektenlehre* or Doctrine of Affects in English. This is not only important because it signals a monumental moment in time for affect in a musical sense, but also because it offers analytical tools which are incredibly useful for this thesis. The doctrine of affects is a theory of music aesthetics from the baroque era regarding the affective properties of music on its listeners. It is based on a set of beliefs taken from ancient Greek and Latin music theories (Buelow 2001, 1). These, mostly German, musicologists linked certain affects to musical features. Johann Mattheson, for instance, theorized that large intervals evoke happiness while small intervals evoke sadness (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2014, 1). The affective qualities of music in this doctrine are not limited to intervallic structures, harmonic progressions and the rhythm of a melody play an important part too (Rathey 2012, 77-78). While the works of Mattheson and his contemporaries are certainly interesting, it is important to keep in mind that they were written in a different day and age as well as being based on a completely different tradition in western music. While the doctrine of affects is largely based on eighteenth-century baroque music, I am researching popular music mostly dated between the second half of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century. For this reason, consulting more recent academic research on the relationship between music and affect or emotional states is essential.

What is mood?

While mood and emotions are similar, both can be categorized as mental states under the umbrella of affect, there are some important and distinctive differences. From a psychological perspective, is it first and foremost its intensity and duration. Emotions come up suddenly, remain for a short period but meanwhile are of great intensity. Moods seem to linger on but lack the intensity of emotions. Because moods last longer than emotions and simultaneously are less intense, Paul Allen Anderson likens them to a “colored lens through which we see and judge the world” (Anderson 2015, 816). While it can be hard to distinguish the two in practice it is fairly plausible that they influence each other (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 587-588). If we want to study the relationship between mood and music, it is vital to also take a closer look at the relationship between music and emotion. Because moods are omnipresent, constantly evolving and diffuse by nature, it is hard to precisely pinpoint exact moments in time where a specific mood takes place. Identifying them is often easier after they have

already passed and changed into a different mood. Therefore, it is essential to understand emotions because they shape and regulate moods. This makes emotions a suitable indicator for moods.

Emotion Theory: expression and arousal of emotion

In their chapter on the relationship between music and emotion, Patrik Juslin and John Sloboda theorize two distinctive features of this relationship. They conclude that music has the ability to both express as well as arouse emotions (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 602-03). The expressive quality means that listeners can perceive certain emotions as expressed through a process of meaning-making, a joint process by the performer and writer of said song, without actually experiencing that emotion (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 598-99). This conclusion is supported by empirical research data from numerous other studies regarding the expressive nature of music (2013, 589-90). Not only did they include research on whether music can convey meaning, and thus emotion, but they also provide data on the most common emotions perceived through music (2013, 590-93). Happiness/joy and sadness took up the top two places in three different studies researching agreement of perceived emotions by listeners, the third place was held by either 'desire,' 'anxiety,' or 'love'(2013, 591). The entire table can be found in appendix table one. Just like there exist multiple thoughts on how these emotions are expressed through music and perceived by listeners, different studies use different methods. Similar to the theories of the affektenlehre, Patrik Juslin has put together a list of musical features that correlate with emotions expressed through music (Juslin 2009, 269-70). The list can be found in its entirety in appendix table two. A closer look at the list also shows that certain musical features, such as fast or slow tempo, fit with multiple emotions. This leads, both me as well as Juslin and Sloboda, to the conclusion that the expressiveness of music is rather a combination of multiple features at once instead of singular features (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 598).

Patrik Juslin Also researched the underlying mechanisms at play by introducing an updated version of Brunswik's lens model. Originally, Brunswik's lens model is used to theorize how conclusions on a certain object are drawn when it, i.e. the object, is present in a specific environment and perceived through (inter)correlated cues (Wigton 2008, 110-11). The updated model by Juslin is fit for researching the expressive and perceptive nature of emotion in music. This model shows how this process works: a combination of various musical cues/features can be used in a process of encoding and decoding to carry over emotional meaning through music from composer and performer to listener (Juslin 2000,

1798-99). While the correlation between emotional expression and simple musical features, like the ones in Juslin's list, has been proven, it is more complex musical features such as harmonic progressions that have yet to be fully researched (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 595).

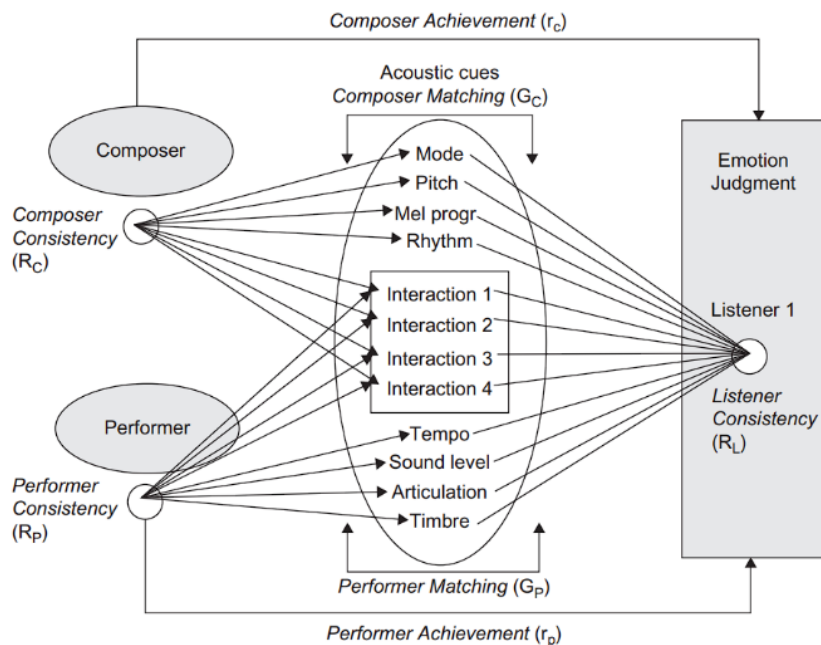


Figure 1 Expanded Brunswik lens model of musical communication (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 599)

The arousal of emotions, as a result of listening to music, is a process where neurological mechanisms are triggered (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 620). Different from the expressive emotional process, where emotions are merely perceived, the listener here is experiencing musical emotions. While there is an ongoing debate about the possibility of arousing musical emotions, a plethora of empirical research such as surveys and experiments suggest the existence of a difference between the arousal and perception of musical emotions (2013, 602-03). Multiple types of Physiological studies, such as Carol Krumhansl's physiological musical emotional responses, the four emotions based on cardiorespiratory variables by Ivan Nyklíček et al and musical emotions shown through brain imaging by academics such as Anne Blood and Robert Zatorre, prove the existence as well (2013, 603-04). Alf Gabrielsson theorized four possible relationships between the perception and arousal of musical emotions. The positive and negative relations are the most straightforward. A positive relation means that the aroused emotion is the same as the perceived emotion. A negative relation is when the opposite happens. It is also possible that there is no relation at

all, meaning an aroused emotion is not actually perceived. The fourth possible relation is labelled as no systematic relation. This means that there is no fixed relationship between the aroused and perceived emotion (2013, 602-03). A model illustrating these four relationships can be found in the appendix under model one.

Prevalence research on the arousal of emotion by listening to music in everyday life shows that the context in which music is listened to influences the process of arousing emotions. Not only do these studies show how emotional arousal does not necessarily happen every time music is listened to, but it also shows that it differs between listeners (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 606). This is highly likely due to differences in people's relationship with music and the ubiquity of music. When music surrounds most of your everyday life it is comprehensible that there would be differences in emotional intensity. Where negative emotions seem to dominate the perceptive side of musical emotions, studies on the arousal of emotions from music show that positive emotions dominate in this domain (2013, 591). This difference in types of emotions is the result of "a complex interplay between the listener, the music, and the situation" (2013, 610). The different types of causal factors at play here are therefore individual (e.g. age, gender, mood, preferential ways of listening and personality), situational (e.g. setting: location, time, acoustics, with whom music is listened to etc.) and musical (e.g. musical style or genre, timbre and tempo) (2013, 610-12). There have been many different attempts to produce a unified framework that uncovers the mechanisms of arousing musical emotion, but none as successful as the BRECVEM framework (2013, 613). This framework combines seven mechanisms through which emotion is possibly aroused in everyday life: "Brain stem reflexes, Rhythmic entrainment, Evaluative conditioning, Contagion, Visual imagery, Episodic memory, and Musical expectancy" (Juslin 2013, 240). The model can be found in appendix table three in its entirety. While some of the seven mechanisms do not seem to be related directly to music, take for instance visual imagery, they are all deeply connected to processes of emotion arousal in a musical context (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 613-14). In the example of visual imagery, an emotion is aroused by a mental picture painted as a result of listening to music.

Re-thinking aesthetics from an internet culture perspective

The third and last major connotation that fits mood is aesthetics. In the context of this thesis, I am addressing it from the perspective of internet culture, more so than from a literary aesthetics perspective. As part of a generation which grew up alongside the development of internet culture, for me, mood, aesthetics and internet culture are intrinsically linked. The

anecdote from the introduction of *Aesthetic and Philosophical Reflections on Mood* tells in a nutshell what mood can mean in internet culture. Here, an experienced mood scholar reminisces about her introduction to the concept of mood in an internet cultural context. Within this context, mood is an expression used to signal relatability and is only understood by people with a shared cultural understanding (Breidenbach 2020, 1). As seen throughout this part of the chapter, the element that provides a certain amount of relatability is affect; whether that is an emotion, mood or atmosphere. While the word aesthetics originally comes from the ancient Greeks, addressing sensory perception or experience, in modern philosophy aesthetics is seen as the study of beauty, particularly in the realm of art (Roald 2014, 55).

While aesthetics, from an internet culture perspective, is still about beauty, the notion of identity plays a much larger role in comparison to philosophy. How aesthetics work within internet culture is best explained by showing how it works in practice, using primary sources such as the Aesthetics Wiki housed on Fandom. This is a website whose main focus lies on housing wikis centred around media such as games, films and series as well as the internet and the pop culture surrounding it. These wikis are not only entirely community-driven, they are online representations of imagined communities. Originally conceptualized by Benedict Andersson to theorize a feeling of unity amongst people from different geographical locations who have not physically met, imagined communities are now often used in the context of digital communities because of the internet's transborder qualities (Morimoto and Chin 2017, 174). The Aesthetics wiki is one of the many communities on this website, with its own small community-driven staff, consisting of admins, a moderator, and a few thousand contributors (Community, n.d.). Not only does this community have hundreds of wiki entries, but there is also a discussion page with a clear set of rules that anybody contributing has to follow (Discussion, n.d.). These rules vary subject-wise, from how to cite resources or structure a layout to community guidelines and what counts as an aesthetic. In this context, aesthetics is defined as "a collection of images, colours, objects, music, and writings that creates a specific emotion, purpose, and community" (FAQ, n.d.). This makes it suitable for processes of identity creation.

Vaporwave, which is simultaneously an aesthetic as well as a music genre, is a good example of aesthetics in internet culture. The aesthetic combines very specific music, visuals and ideology, making it highly suitable as an identity. Musically, it combines lounge and smooth jazz (Vaporwave, n.d.) with slowed-down, reverbed and chopped-up stereotypical 1980's synth-pop samples (Cole 2020, 300). Visually, it exists of pink, blue and purple neon

tints paired with 1980s till mid-1990s styled visuals from sources such as obscure 3D games and TV commercials. All of this combined creates a sense of nostalgia draped with a “playful irony seamlessly imbricated with sincerity” (2020, 300). What makes it such a prolific example of aesthetics in internet culture is the fusion of visual aspects and music into a nostalgic mood fit for an identity, which would not make any sense to anyone outside the shared cultural understanding. Just like any other context with a shared cultural understanding, the only benchmark for being a part of this is whether you get it or not.

A Brief History of the Playlist

Playlist pre-History and the Analogue DIY age

Today, we know the playlist as a format facilitated by streaming platforms such as Spotify. However, it has a longer and more diverse history, of which its roots can be traced far beyond the age of streaming platforms. First and foremost, it is a child of the technological revolutions of mechanical music reproduction in the first half of the twentieth century. The word playlist, as introduced in the 1940s-1950s by popular American radio stations, describes “a selection of popular songs guaranteed air time on a given radio station” (Buckley 2001). In this description we read the notion of selecting certain tracks to form a new whole, thus creating a curated list where different songs from various musical contexts are combined. The legacy of curated song lists lies beyond those early days of pop music radio, with the invention of jukeboxes and record changers in the 1920s by companies such as His Master’s Voice and the Victor Talking Machine Corporation. The jukebox made it possible for people to manually choose multiple songs from a preselected inventory (Brylawski 2001), while record changer systems enabled consumers to listen to multiple records without manual interruption (midimagic, n.d.).

This element of combining different songs from multiple musical environments is also found in the compilation album. These albums are curated by record companies or artists and based on an overarching theme such as genre, year or emotion (Collins Dictionary, n.d.). While the general music consumer does not play an active role here in curating the album, I do believe that it helped to introduce the notion of creating your own curated list. Creating an ideological space for the emergence of the most direct predecessor to the playlist: the mixtape. The mixtape is a DIY compilation format made on a Compact Cassette. Because of the homemade nature of mixtapes, virtually anybody with access to music, meaning a private

music collection or a radio broadcast, can produce one. The mixtape is simultaneous “an aesthetic object and social practice” (Fenby-Hulse 2016, 171). This means that the mixtape is not just an object, a curated list mirroring your musical taste, it is also a means for people to engage in a practice of communicating their taste in music with others.

DIY goes physically digital

Just as the emergence of the vinyl record in the 1950s meant the demise of the gramophone record, the compact disc becoming affordable in the middle of the 1990s signalled the end of cassettes (Fenby-Hulse 2016, 172). However, this certainly did not mean the end of the mixtape. The CD's technological affordances made it possible for the medium to become the next mixtape medium. Not only was it possible to extract music from your own CD collection using a computer, a process known as ripping, but you could then also transfer your ripped music onto an empty CD. At the end of the century, the availability of music became even greater when peer-to-peer file sharing rose to prominence (Aitken 2013, 1). On peer-to-peer file sharing services, you could download music, which was mostly available in the file format MP3, from music collections of others all over the world. Because of the compressed nature of these files, they offer a lower bitrate and are smaller in size (Aitken 2013, 1). This made it possible to put even more songs on one mixtape. The seemingly endless amounts of music available on file sharing services are both technologically and ideologically an important step towards the playlist as facilitated by streaming platforms.

The last important phase before playlists on streaming platforms is the MP3 player. These portable media devices, of which the iPod is likely the best-known example, proved to be a major game changer in terms of consuming music (Gopinath 2014, 2). “The iPod transformed the nature and the portability of music libraries, and also permitted the crafting of playlists ‘...’ in a matter of seconds” (Hamm et al 2014, 44). Not only were the storage abilities of iPods far larger than CDs, but their pocket-size nature also made it possible to enjoy your music collection virtually anywhere. The biggest limitation to these MP3 players was their storage capacities, which ranged from 2GB to 256GB (ABT, n.d.).

The modern way?

By now, it is obvious that the playlist format, as we know it from Spotify, did not appear out of the blue. Whereas all older media I discussed can be characterized by limitations, ranging from storage capabilities or maximum play time to musical availability, the Spotify playlist seems to be characterized by its endless possibilities. Not only is there a seemingly endless

source of music and themes in which to curate playlists, but they can also be listened to on virtually any system that can play sound and can be connected to the internet. The Spotify playlist is not just different from its physical predecessors purely from a technological point of view, at the same time it signals a different aesthetic, albeit one which borrows elements from its predecessors.

Anja Nylund Hagen theorizes that subscription-based streaming services come with their own issues of ownership. While physical music collecting feels mostly like collecting because of the physical nature of the media, streaming services such as Spotify create a sense of ownership through the digital affordances of their software design (Hagen 2015, 627). Hagen paraphrases Tom McCourt stating that “in cyberspace ‘...’ people collect lists rather than objects, and those lists serve as a form of personal expression that derives from but also supersedes the record collection” (2015, 628). Even though his piece discusses digital music in the peer-to-peer age instead of Spotify playlists, the article was even written before Spotify was founded, the argumentation still holds. He discusses how cultural services were replacing cultural objects and argues that value is not necessarily dependable on the object but more so on the process of consuming music (McCourt 2005, 251). He also states that circulation plays an important role in this process (2005, 251). This ultimately means that musical processes which are lacking physicality can still generate value. This statement holds up quite well for our Spotify playlist. The fact that we do not own the music on our lists, does not mean that they are invaluable. Here, the value lies with the process of creating, collecting, curating, sharing and being shared. This is also understood by both Hagen and Marjorie Kibby. “Music is a complex example of compulsive acquisition because music collections are at once archives and participatory practices” (Kibby 2009, 428). Hagen agrees with this by defining the users of streaming services as content producers because of their personal participatory interactions with the platforms (Hagen 2015, 628).

Affective listening and Changing Habits in Music Consumption

The changing duality of background and foreground music

Technological advances of the twentieth century meant the further blurring of the duality between background and foreground music. Anahid Kassabian argues that the difference between these two music categories lies in the required mode of listening. Examples of background music are elevator music and functional music, which are made by companies

such as Muzak (Kassabian 2013, 35). This type of music largely has two functions, it provides 'environmental control' (2013, 33) by filling up otherwise empty and silent rooms (2013, 39). Paul Allen Anderson describes Muzak, elevator music, background music and functional music similarly but uses mood control instead of environmental control (Anderson 2015, 811-12). Because background music is merely there to fill the sonic void, and in the process stimulates workers and shoppers, it is a type of music that requires a low attentive listening mode. These characteristics combined partially explain the success of the Muzak Corporation throughout the twentieth century. In short, Muzak can be described as "an affective stimulant for the industrial workplace" (Anderson 2015, 815), whose main aim is to create "a carefully selected musico-affective atmosphere" (2015, 816). This already shows another important part of the Muzak success formula. The company invested in researching the most efficient ways of manipulating the musical atmosphere in workplaces and shopping environments, to create spaces which were optimized for working and spending money (Vanel 2013, 55-56). Lorraine Plourde corroborates this statement and adds that it can also be used to decrease stress levels and increase the productivity of labourers (Plourde 2017, 19).

The changing relationship between background and foreground music is, according to Kassabian, mostly due to the introduction of foreground music in the public sphere, meaning places such as stores, supermarkets and shopping malls but also workplaces which were originally filled with background music (Kassabian 2013, 35-36). She describes foreground music not just as music by 'original artists,' but also as music that, traditionally, invites its listener to a different, more attentive, mode of listening (2013, 36-37). An early musical example that is known for playing with this duality of background and foreground music is ambient music. It does so by simultaneously using characteristics of both background and foreground music. Ambient music exists somewhere in the no man's land between background and foreground music. This is due to its minimalistic nature and compositional choice to switch between sounding passive or active. By doing so, composers are constantly playing with the listener's attention.

Ubiquitous Listening: A new mode of listening

The fading line between background and foreground music is as much technological as it is sociological. Throughout the twentieth century, there have been massive technological evolutions in the realms of sound reproduction. While in the nineteenth century, before the invention of the microphone, music could only be consumed by attending a live performance, the twentieth century saw the introduction of various playback devices for recorded music.

These range from phonographs and jukeboxes to record players, boom boxes and Walkmans. Tim Anderson argues that technological advances led to a transition, in terms of the economical centre of gravity, from musical performances to recordings (Anderson 2004, 232). These new technologies, which became more portable as time went by, introduced music stripped from their original source to public spaces and simultaneously to environments such as workplaces where listening to music was uncommon. Music was becoming omnipresent in the urban society of the twentieth century. According to Kassabian, it is precisely this ubiquity of music in the urban industrial society that introduced a new mode of listening. This listening mode can be characterized as semi-attentive and fits the rowdy and noisy lives of city residents (Kassabian 2013, 39). Sourcelessness is the second important characteristic of ubiquitous listening. This means that music is not just detached from its original source, it can also exist and become a part of any environment imaginable (2013, 39). While music in public spaces was gradually becoming more normalized, technological progress made it possible for sound systems to become one with the space they were in. This has resulted in music becoming an almost inescapable part of our lives, even more so in spaces such as supermarkets where we are not actively choosing to listen to music.

Neo-muzak: curated musical moods and affective atmospheres on streaming platforms

The success of the Muzak corporation, and their methods for mood control, did not go unnoticed by streaming services. Paul Allen Anderson names several of these up-and-coming streaming services as successors to the crown of Muzak. He does so by labelling them as neo-muzak and describes their provided services as “personal care products for affect management and mood elevation” (Anderson 2015, 811). As discussed in the first part, moods are relatively hard to pinpoint and work like a coloured lens through which we experience the world. Where the Muzak corporation mostly tried to manage people into becoming more focussed on their jobs while at work or influencing their shopping habits in stores, the neo-muzak companies focus on micromanaging these moods (2015, 815). This in return affects how people behave and experience the world around them. These services mostly do this through their playlist software. At the time of writing his paper, Spotify mostly offered on-demand artist discographies as well as pre-made mood playlists (2015, 813). Their playlists are either curated by teams of professionals or algorithmically fabricated (2015, 813). By now, Spotify users have stepped up their game and made enormous amounts of mood playlists. While Pandora was back then the most specialized platform in algorithmically created mood playlists, nowadays this big-data approach is common among other streaming

services as well (2015, 814). Spotify also uses it to create tailor-made playlists for each and one every of its millions of users.

Recap: Introducing the Mood Playlist

As seen throughout the first part of this chapter, the playlist as we know it today has a long history characterized by technological evolution. These technological revolutions brought not only expansion in terms of musical availability for your own created lists, but at the same time, they introduced music listening to new environments as well as shaping social practices around music. The playlist as we currently know it from streaming services such as Spotify, combines aspects from all earlier musical media developments, such as DIY aesthetics, collecting and creating new musical contexts, making it both a social practice as well as a curatorial practice. On these platforms, playlists with mood-regulating purposes, either created by users or professionals working for the platforms, have sprung up like mushrooms. This is the result of technological developments and the socio-psychological changes that come with them. New sound reproduction technologies have made it possible for music to become ubiquitous. Background and semi-attentive listening have become somewhat of the standard listening practices in our modern everyday life. Music does not only set affective processes in motion when listened to attentively, affective responses can be produced when music is merely playing in the background as well (Kassabian 2013, xiii). This principle has already been researched and implemented by the Muzak company for environments such as workplaces and shops to increase productivity. Mood playlists can be implemented similarly if properly focussed by the creator on relatable affective stimulants such as emotions. This is because these stimulants are responsible for shaping and regulating our moods, even during background listening.

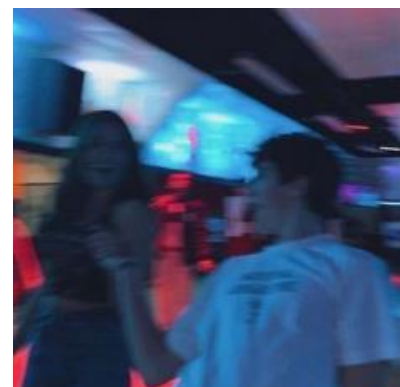
Case Study: Looking Into Mood Playlists

In this part of the thesis, I will be addressing my research topic, the mood playlist, from a practical side through the means of a case study. In this case study, I will be analysing two playlists that I have identified as mood playlists. These two mood playlists are based on different moods, falling in love and nostalgia, and capture the different affective aspects; e.g. emotion, state-of-mind and aesthetics, which I theorized to be relatable to mood. I chose falling in love as a mood because I wanted to analyse both positive as well as negative emotions. Falling in love is a process featuring ups and downs, thus including both positive as well as negative emotions. This strong emphasis on emotion, while analysing mood, is because of mood's diffusive nature and emotion's regulating properties when it comes to mood. The second part of this case study addresses a different kind of mood, namely a nostalgia-themed mood playlist. While emotions can play a role in creating a sense of nostalgia, there is a far larger role present for aesthetics and processes of identity in the playlist that I have sought out. Therefore, analysing a mood playlist focussed on nostalgia will display a different side of mood. While selecting mood playlists, I decided to analyse one user-made playlist as well as a professionally made playlist by Spotify staff members. While I feel that, mostly because of the internet, the boundaries between professionals and amateurs are fading when it comes to curating music, I do want to include both types of creators. This could potentially give a more distinctive picture of mood playlists by different types of creators and therefore function as a stepping stone for future research. Because of the obvious limitations that come with a MA thesis, I have decided to only analyse two different mood playlists. While analysing more examples of mood playlists would be quite useful, it would also mean that I would have to stay at the surface in my analyses. By keeping the number of analysis objects small, I think that I will be able to perform a deeper analysis of my research topic.

The Love Mood Playlist

falling in love in the 80s/90s by Autumn Lynn

The first playlist is titled *falling in love in the 80s/90s* and is made by a Spotify user named Autumn Lynn. The title of this playlist immediately shows how moods can be made up of multiple different aspects. The first part of the title represents a mood, falling in love, characterized by emotion. An



important distinction between falling in love and other love moods such as feeling in love is the noticeable presence of ups and downs. As can be seen in the plot of countless romantic films, falling in love is a process which can be defined by its alternation of happy and sad moments. Any playlist that tries to recreate that certain mood, should naturally incorporate those ups and downs musically. The second part of the playlist's title, *in the 80s/90s*, gives the first impression of a specific aesthetic context. There is something special enough about that specific timeframe that it is worth mentioning as a context for falling in love. However, when looking at the layout of the playlist, i.e. the description and playlist picture, and the featured songs, it is partially unclear what the aesthetic frame means precisely in this context. Nearly forty per cent of the featured songs, i.e. sixteen songs, were released in the two decades and there is no further explanation featured in the playlist description on what the frame means. The playlist picture, however vague it might be, seems to picture a couple in a roller-skate rink and uses a neon blue and pink colour palette. Even though this playlist might not be peppered with references to the 1980s and 1990s, there are enough to speak of a conscious decision. However, it would be essential to contact the creator to fully grasp the aesthetic, which is unfeasible for this thesis. Therefore I will be primarily focussing on the emotional aspects featured in the playlist.

Emotional expression and arousal: Juslin's lens model and BRECVEM framework

As explained earlier in the theoretical framework, Juslin's updated Brunswik Lens Model is used to analyse a listener's perception of musical emotion expressed through musical cues. To further understand how the mood playlist functions, it is essential to investigate these meaning-making processes. Therefore, I will be analysing three different songs using the model to show how emotions can be perceived through musical cues. For this, I have chosen two songs from the period as specified in the title of the playlist, i.e. the 1980s and 1990s, as well as a song released later. While it would have been impossible to hear this song in the 1980s or 1990s, it is still possible that elements in the song, whether those are lyrics, interpolations or the use of a specific genre, can still contribute to the aesthetic of time context. Alongside Juslin's model, I will also be using some of the mechanisms from the BRECVEM framework. This is to further demonstrate how emotions are potentially aroused in a musical context.

The Smiths - Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now (1984)

Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now is an indie pop song by the British band The Smiths, released by the independent record label Rough Trade in 1984. The song is written by two of

the four members of The Smiths, namely lead guitarist Johnny Marr and vocalist Morrissey (Wikipedia, n.d.). Since the composer and performer in the model are partially the same, chances are high that the emotions they want to convey through music are virtually the same. The song is written in the key of F# major and has an average BPM of 114 (Tunebat, n.d.), making it a moderately fast-paced song. Combined with the airy reverbed sound of the strongly present lead guitar, the instrumental part of this song can be described as happy. When looking at the use of lyricism, we get quite a different picture. The title already gives a little glimpse of the lyrics' contents. In the song, Morrissey sings dramatically about a person who is feeling miserable, wondering why he is spending time with people who do not seem to care about him (Genius, n.d.).

[Verse 2]

Two lovers entwined pass me by
And heaven knows I'm miserable now
I was looking for a job and then I found a
job
And heaven knows I'm miserable now

[Refrain 1]

In my life, oh, why do I give valuable time
To people who don't care if I live or die?

Verse 2 and Refrain 1 of *Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now* (Genius, n.d.)

The song's lyrics fit in with emotions such as sadness or despair. If we combine these musical cues, we both get elements that point toward happiness as well as sadness. This combination of positive and negative emotions lead me to the conclusion that the emotional message of the song is that feeling sad is not always a negative thing. When it comes to the arousal of emotion, to me, musical expectancy is the most prominent emotional arousal mechanism present in the song. With this mechanism, emotion is aroused by the listener because of specific musical expectations that are either confirmed, delayed or violated (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 615). While the general tone of the instrumental cues is happy, the lyrics and how they are presented certainly are not. In practice, this could lead to the arousal of feeling unsure about what you are currently feeling. However, if one of the two sides of the musical cues is stronger than the other it could also lead to feeling happy or sad.

The Cardigans – Lovefool (1996)

Lovefool is a pop rock song by the Swedish band The Cardigans, released in 1996. The song is written by lead guitarist Peter Svensson and vocalist Nina Persson, who are both members of the band (Wikipedia, n.d.). The song is written in the key of A but switches in the verses

and chorus between a major and minor mode (Ponutam, n.d.). The average tempo of the song is 112 BPM (Tunebat, n.d.), making it moderately fast as well. While the drums and bass throughout the entire song have a more disco-oriented sound, there is variation in sound when it comes to the lead guitar. In the song's chorus, the guitar has a clean sound and stylistically closer fits well with disco. However, throughout the verses, the lead guitar has a more fuzzy and distorted sound that fits better with alternative rock. The lyrics show a difference in tone, similar to the stylistic musical differences between the verses and chorus. While the singer sings about the hopeless status of her relationship, due to her partner losing feelings, the lyrics featured in the chorus seem hopeful and longing (Genius, n.d.).

[Verse 1]

Dear, I fear we're facing a problem
You love me no longer, I know and
Maybe there is nothing that I can do
To make you do
Mama tells me I shouldn't bother
That I ought just to stick to another man
A man that surely deserves me
But I think you do

Verse 1 of *Lovefool* (Genius, n.d.)

[Chorus]

Love me, love me
Say that you love me
Fool me, fool me
Go on and fool me
Love me, love me
Pretend that you love me
Leave me, leave me
Just say that you need me
So I cry and I beg for you to
Love me, love me
Say that you love me
Leave me, leave me
Just say that you need me
I can't care about anything but you

Chorus of *Lovefool* (Genius, n.d.)

If we look at these musical cues combined, we can perceive them emotionally as longing or feeling desperate. The emotional mechanisms that, for me, fit best with the emotional cues are evaluative conditioning and emotional contagion. Evaluative conditioning means that music induces a specific emotion because it has evoked that emotion, possibly because of other reasons, many times before (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 614). Emotional contagion means that you perceive an emotion and then actually experience it because you internalize it (2013, 615). Because I grew up listening to this song a lot, it generally evokes a feeling of happiness. This is also reinforced through emotional contagion by the danceable rhythm section of the song. While emotions such as longing and desperation can be perceived, they are overshadowed by my own positive memories.

TV Girl – Lovers Rock (2014)

Lovers Rock is an indie pop song released by the American band TV Girl in 2014.

Stylistically it is not a very straightforward indie pop song, since it also has noticeable electronic influences that seem to harken back to the downtempo subgenre known as trip hop

(Wikipedia, n.d.), which became popular in the 1990s. This observation is based on the presence of two soul and funk samples that play a significant role, both melodically as well as rhythmically (Whosampled, n.d.). This song is a bit slower than the last two but still moderate in tempo, with an average BPM of 105 and written in the key of F minor (Tunebat, n.d.). While minor keys are often associated with negative emotions such as sadness, I would personally not label this as a sad song. This is partially due to the melodic sampling of The Shirelles' *The Dance Is Over*, because the sampled strings are written in the key of E \flat major (Tunebat, n.d.). If we look at the lyrical content of the song, there is a similar tension between positives and negatives surrounding love to be seen. The singer sings about the potential of a romantic moment and compares it to a burning cigarette. It can start off right but eventually, it will end and leave you with nothing.

[Chorus]
But if you're too drunk to drive
And the music is right
She might let you stay
But just for the night
And if she grabs for your hand
And drags you along
She might want a kiss
Before the end of the song
Because love can burn like a cigarette
And leave you alone with nothing
And leave you alone with nothing

Chorus of *Lovers Rock* (Genius n.d.)

When combined, the emotional content of these musical cues can be perceived as lustful and longing or unanswered love. In Lovers Rock, for me, the mechanisms at play are episodic memory and visual imagery. Episodic memory means that an emotion is aroused based on a personal memory that is brought up by the music (Juslin & Sloboda 2013, 615). Visual imagery is when an emotion is aroused based on images that you picture within yourself when listening to a specific piece of music (2013, 615). In this case, these two mechanisms cooperate towards arousing emotion. While I was not familiar with this particular song, the musical cues do arouse a strong emotional response in me. The emotions that can be perceived in this song remind me of the early stages of a relationship. So when I hear the cues, I create a mental picture that takes me back to a personal and emotional memory.

The Aesthetic Nostalgia Mood Playlist

pov: ur in an 80s film driving at night by Spotify

The Second playlist I am discussing, named *pov: ur in an 80s film driving at night*, is centred around a specific aesthetic which is highly influenced by a sense of nostalgia. Globally, the aesthetic here is regarded as the 1980s as represented in film. If we combine this with



other elements such as the playlist picture and the music styles featured in this playlist, the aesthetic that fits this description best is known as Outrun or Synthwave. Visually, this aesthetic frequently uses 1980s sports cars, wireframe landscapes and sunsets or dusks, more often than not painted in neon colour palettes based on magenta, pink, blue, purple, cyan and black (Aesthetics Wiki, n.d.). From a musical perspective, the current synthwave style is seen as a revival style. This modernized version, which is often labelled as retrofuturistic, is mainly influenced by 1980s electronic film-, TV- and game scores, as well as italo-disco (Discogs, n.d.). Not only is the aesthetic present in music, but there is also a plethora of video games (e.g. Hotline Miami and Far Cry 3: Blood Dragon), films (e.g. Tron and Kung Fury) and TV series (e.g. Stranger Things and Riverdale) that uses the aesthetic (Aesthetics Wiki, n.d.). Since the aesthetic, from a musical perspective, is influenced by both film score and italo-disco, there is a diversity in how synthwave can sound. For instance, some artists produce a more straightforward italo-disco-influenced synthwave using song structures similar to pop music. Others, who are more influenced by 1980s film scores, produce a type of synthwave that is closer to ambient music. This diversity is also present in the playlist, since it also features songs belonging to subgenres such as chillsynth, darksynth, compositional ambient and cyberpunk (Organize Your Music, n.d.).

While the emphasis on the theme of this playlist lies on Synthwave/Outrun, it is still a mood playlist. Personally, driving at night is an activity that evokes specific feelings such as relaxation, calmness, serenity and solitude. While I am driving at night, the darkness combined with empty roads, lights and a quiet atmosphere arouses a state-of-mind that is different from other activities performed in a similar environment. To analyse the aesthetic and the mood tied to it, I will be focussing more on the BRECVEM framework than the Lens model. To determine the song's musical style, I am using a metadata analyser known as Organize Your Music. I deemed this necessary because these musical styles stray a bit further from my own area of expertise in terms of electronic music.

John Hayes - Fond (2022)

Fond is a neo-classical song released in 2022 by the American multi-instrumentalist and producer John Hayes, on the genre-less record label Sonder House (Bandcamp, n.d.). While neoclassicism is not so much framed in terms of instrumentation and musical style, it is bound by the idea that it revives the ideology of classicism and baroque music and moves away from the intense emotions and yearning found in genres such as romanticism (Burkholder, Grout and Palisca 2014, 798). The song might sound like ambient music at first, which is partially due to its electronic instrumentation and atmospheric sound, but it does not have ambient music's lack of structure and features a build-up that reminds me of classical music. While this build-up does not fully incorporate classicism's structure with demarcated segments, there are still separate recognizable segments. The biggest difference with classical music is that these segments flow into each other, disrespecting sturdy boundaries. It starts with a minimalistic base and throughout the song, multiple instrumental layers get added to it while others disappear. Throughout the song there surely is an increase in intensity, albeit a contained intensity that never really explodes. While the song ends in a calm and minimalistic manner, similar in style to the intro of the song, the musical material is distinctively different from the beginning of the song.

While *Fond* might not fit the music genre synthwave, it still fits the Synthwave aesthetic quite well. Because of its song structure and musical style, it feels like the song could have been taken from the soundtrack of a film featuring the Synthwave aesthetic. The atmospheric sound of this neo-classical song expresses, from an emotional standpoint, serenity. This perceivable emotion can also be experienced by the listener. The arousal of serenity can be achieved through emotional contagion, one of the BRECVEM framework mechanisms that I explained earlier in the case study, if the listener mirrors the perceived emotion internally. The visual imagery mechanism, where emotion is aroused through a mental image evoked by music (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 615), can work quite well with atmospheric music. Personally, the atmosphere of the song reminds me more of the serenity that floating in water brings than the serenity of driving at night, but, as explained by Juslin and Sloboda, the fact that emotion is aroused weighs in more than the reason behind the arousal (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 613-614).

Makeup and Vanity Set – Polyhymnal (2015)

Polyhymnal is a synthwave song released in 2015 by Makeup and Vanity Set on the synthwave record label TELEFUTURE (Bandcamp, n.d.). This solo artist is a producer who

specializes in synthwave and progressive electronic music (Synthwave Wiki, n.d.). I mentioned earlier that synthwave is often labelled as being retrofuturistic by nature, throughout this song you can hear why. *Polyhymnal* starts with a mysterious static noise that reminds me of the sound of wind on a wide empty plain. Throughout approximately the first half of the song, multiple layers of synth arpeggios, each one with a different sound, get added to the static noise. These work towards a climax, at 2:03, where a low-register drone, similar to the infamous horn used in the trailer of *Inception* (2010), and several synth lines are added. In terms of intensity, this is the height of the song. Both the arpeggios as well as the normal synths sound like they are being played through a modern synthesizer that uses synth modules which are meant to sound like they are from the 1980s. From approximately minute 3:20, the synth arpeggios are gradually removed, leading to a decrease in intensity. The last part of the song has a brooding dark atmosphere and ends with a mechanical voice speaking over a static noise, similar to the noise at the beginning of the song.

Since this is a full-fledged synthwave song, it is rather obvious that it fits in with the aesthetic rather well. From early on in the song, right until the song starts decreasing in intensity, it is loitered with synth arpeggios. The use of synth arpeggios is a classic cliché in the genre because it was immortalized through the 1980s film score, for example, the theme from John Carpenter's *Escape From New York* (1981) or throughout the soundtrack of *Bladerunner* (1982) from Vangelis. Its current use in the synthwave genre is thus a way of creating a sense of nostalgia. While *Polyhymnal* has an atmospheric sound, using a static noise as its background, I would surely not label it as serene. This is mostly because its middle part, filled up with a plethora of arpeggios, is too busy to radiate serenity. The song's build-up and the prominent positioning of the arpeggios are perfectly suited for emotional arousal through mechanisms such as brain stem reflex and rhythmic entrainment. With brain stem reflex, an emotion is aroused because the brain stem identifies acoustic characteristics of a specific piece of music as something important and thus deserving of extra attention (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 614). Personally, every time I hear this build-up, I can feel my heart rate going up. This fits in with the rhythmic entrainment mechanism. This song might not evoke the same feeling of calmness that I associate with driving at night that other songs on this playlist do, but it surely helps strengthen the sense of 1980s nostalgia and simultaneously ensures that the calmer songs feel calmer. This is because songs like *Polyhymnal* create a sense of dynamic in terms of activeness in the playlist.

Cosmic Cadence – Dark Matter (2021)

Dark Matter is a space ambient song with a dark undertone and synthwave influences released in 2021 by the Canadian ambient and soundscape producer Cosmic Cadence (Bandcamp, n.d.). It was also released as part of *Ambient Online 12*, a compilation series released by members of the ambient music forum of the same name (Discogs, n.d.). These synthwave influences are mostly audible through the use of instrumentation, most notably the synth arpeggios you can hear in the background. Space ambient is a subgenre of ambient music which focusses on a sound that fits both the aesthetic as well as the atmosphere of the vast emptiness of space. While the sound of space ambient songs can often be described as light and serene, take for example the Brian Eno album *Apollo* (1983), *Dark Matter* has strong undertones of dark ambient music. As is customary with ambient music, the song lacks a strong demarcated structure that we normally find in pop music and focusses much more on sounding atmospheric. While it starts off rather minimalistic and serene, this lasts for about thirty seconds. From this point on, up until the last seconds of the song, the song is constantly but gradually evolving. This ranges from atmospheric synth chords to glitches and short, electronic, sound effects. Ten seconds before the end of *Dark Matter*, a fadeout is queued to help calmly end the song.

Where *Fond* fits well in the tradition of atmospheric scores and *Polyhymnal*'s arpeggio-drenched sound creates a sense of retro nostalgia, the dark ambient sound of *Dark Matter* is reminiscent specifically of 1980s sci-fi and thriller scores. With this sound another atmospheric part of the Synthwave aesthetic is highlighted. An emotional arousal mechanism that fits quite well with this song is musical expectancy. Here, an emotion is aroused based on how the listener's expectations of the song's continuation are met (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 615). As is normally the case with ambient music, because of the genre's lack of structure, it is hard for the listener to predict what will happen in the song. Personally, what keeps surprising me most in the song is the use of short sound effects and glitches. It is compositional decisions like this that pull your attention back towards the song after your mind has wandered off due to the atmospheric nature of the song. Another mechanism that works well with this song is visual imagery. The dark atmospheric synths combined with the sound effects and glitches, trigger visual images of sci-fi movies. This potentially arouses feelings that can be associated with outer space, such as loneliness, emptiness or serenity.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have been theorizing the workings of a mood playlist. This thesis aims to create a stepping stone for mood playlist research by theorizing what a mood playlist is and how they are used to influence your mood. I divided my research into a theoretical framework and a case study. The first part of the theoretical framework focussed on affect theory. Here, I have discussed what a mood is, and how it can be influenced. While there are potentially more ways in which a mood can be influenced, I have focussed on emotions and aesthetics. The second and third parts of my theoretical framework were more focussed on providing a context. While the second part examined the history of the playlist, and thus explained the specifics of what a playlist is, the third part of the framework focussed more on listening practices and their relation to affective stimulation. The mood playlist is what ties it all together. While this medium is both indebted to the playlist history as well as the affective stimulation produced by companies such as Muzak, it would be greatly missed if I did not theorize what happens during these listening activities. Therefore I discussed emotion theories and aesthetics, from an internet culture perspective. These two are driving forces of the mood playlists that I analysed in the case study. I concluded that the playlist in itself is an aesthetic object, a curatorial practice and potentially a social practice. The mood playlist is all that but primarily focusses on influencing or regulating your mood. Moods are affective mental states, diffuse by nature and can last for longer periods while being low in intensity. They can be compared metaphorically to a pair of glasses with slightly tinted lenses because you can watch through them for hours and forget that you have them on, but meanwhile, they influence your experience of the world.

For the case study, I analysed two instances of mood playlists. When selecting potential mood playlists, I focussed on playlists with themes that involved both an aesthetic context as well as a mood. While uncovering the aesthetic context and processes of emotional expression and arousal in the chosen playlist, I ultimately aimed to see how all of this works together in the mood playlist. The first playlist, which was curated by a Spotify user, focussed on the mood falling in love and placed it in an aesthetic context that contained the 1980s and 1990s. While it was relatively easy to understand why the featured songs fit the mood, it was a lot harder to understand what the aesthetic context meant. Stylistically, it was a quite diverse playlist with pop and rock songs fitting in a variety of subgenres. It also did not help that most of the songs were released in a decade different from the 1980s or 1990s. The mood however was more straightforward. When looking at the processes of emotional expression and

arousal, it became apparent that the songs focusses on different emotional aspects of the process of falling in love. Here I also noticed that a positive relationship between the perception and arousal of emotion, as theorized by Gabrielsson, certainly was not always the case. But this difference in experience probably varies between listeners as well.

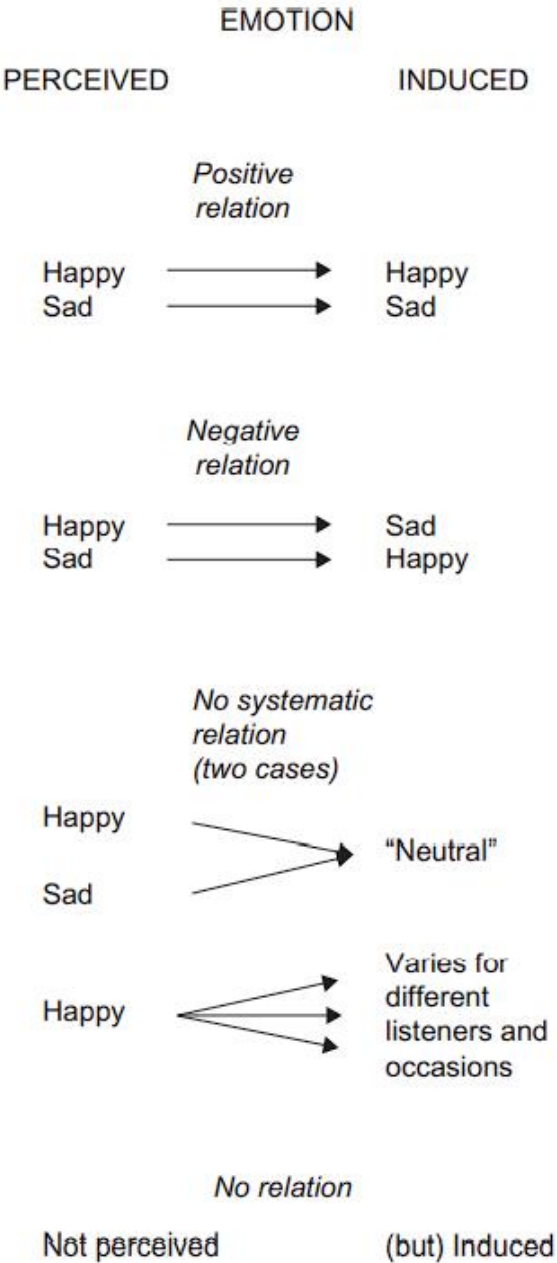
The second mood playlist, curated by the professionals working at Spotify, focussed on the mood driving at night and placed it in a 1980s aesthetic context as well. In this case, the aesthetic context was featured more clearly. I concluded that the specific aesthetic that they used for this context is the Synthwave aesthetic. This aesthetic focusses on a retro nostalgic perception of the 1980s, influenced by 1980s film scores. Because the incorporation of this aesthetic was much clearer, I was able to give it a more prominent place in my analysis, in comparison to the first mood playlist. As was the case with the first playlist, here I saw differences between the perception of emotion and the arousal of emotion as well.

Discussion

While I was writing this thesis, it become more and more apparent to me that it would function best as a stepping stone for future research. This is due to the obvious limitations that come with writing a master thesis. However, I do not think that these limitations, which are mostly time, word count and funding, make the research less meaningful. I perceive these omissions as new research opportunities. For instance, I wanted to analyse a few more playlists to provide a broader overview of how the mood playlist works. This would also provide me with more data on the workings of the mood-regulating processes of the mood playlist. For future research, it would be interesting to perform experiments with a focus group to see how they experience mood playlists. Another point worth looking into for future research is a wider discussion of mood. In my discussion of mood, I incorporated a part of a discussion by Birgit Breidenbach on what mood is. While I primarily focus on the emotional side of mood, she also relates it to atmosphere and tuning. It would be interesting to incorporate these two connotations in further research as well. All in all, I think that this thesis does add to discourses surrounding affective listening and mood playlists because it connects the two subjects and simultaneously functions as an invitation for further research.

Appendix

Figure 2
 Gabrielsson’s possible relations between perceived and induced emotions (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 602-03)



Mood Playlist 1
















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
















OPENBARE PLAYLIST

falling in love in the 80s/90s

Autumn Lynn • 194 vind-ik-leuks • 43 nummers, 2 uur 29 min


▶ ❤️ ⬇️ ⋮ 🔍 Aangepaste volgorde ▾

#	TITEL	ALBUM	DATUM TOEGEVOEGD	⌚
1	 I Was Made For Lovin' You KISS	Dynasty	12 nov. 2021	4:31
2	 It's Been a Long, Long Time Harry James	Best Of The Big Bands	12 nov. 2021	3:24
3	 Everybody Wants To Rule The World Tears For Fears	Songs From The Big Chair (Super Deluxe Edition)	12 nov. 2021	4:11
4	 Don't Dream It's Over Crowded House	Crowded House	12 nov. 2021	3:57
5	 Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now - 2011 Remaster The Smiths	Louder Than Bombs	12 nov. 2021	3:36
6	 Boys Don't Cry - Single Version The Cure	Three Imaginary Boys (Deluxe Edition)	12 nov. 2021	2:38
7	 Killer Queen - Remastered 2011 Queen	Sheer Heart Attack (2011 Remaster)	12 nov. 2021	3:00
8	 Good Old-Fashioned Lover Boy - Remastered 2011 Queen	A Day At The Races (2011 Remaster)	12 nov. 2021	2:53
9	 Beautiful Boy (Darling Boy) - Remastered 2010 John Lennon	Double Fantasy	12 nov. 2021	4:06
10	 Rhiannon Fleetwood Mac	Fleetwood Mac	12 nov. 2021	4:13
11	 Dreams - 2004 Remaster Fleetwood Mac	Rumours (Super Deluxe)	12 nov. 2021	4:18
12	 Harness Your Hopes - B-side Pavement	Brighten the Corners: Nicene Creedence Ed.	12 nov. 2021	3:27
13	 Lovers Rock TV Girl	French Exit	12 nov. 2021	3:34
14	 Oh, Pretty Woman Roy Orbison	Oh, Pretty Woman	12 nov. 2021	2:59
15	 I Want You to Want Me Cheap Trick	In Color	12 nov. 2021	3:11
16	 Love Grows (Where My Rosemary Goes) Edison Lighthouse	Love Grows (Where My Rosemary Goes) & Other G...	12 nov. 2021	2:55
17	 F.N.T. Semisonic	Great Divide	12 nov. 2021	3:30
18	 Hey Lover! Wabie	Cyclones and Hey Lover	12 nov. 2021	2:43
19	 Be My Baby The Ronettes	Presenting the Fabulous Ronettes Featuring Veronica	12 nov. 2021	2:41
20	 Come On Eileen - Single Edit Dexys Midnight Runners, Kevin Rowland	Come On Eileen / Dubious	12 nov. 2021	3:26
21	 Heroes - 2017 Remaster David Bowie	"Heroes" (2017 Remaster)	12 nov. 2021	6:11
22	 Puppy Love Paul Anka	Classic Songs, My Way (Deluxe Edition)	12 nov. 2021	2:43
23	 You've Really Got A Hold On Me The Miracles	The Fabulous Miracles	12 nov. 2021	2:58

24		This Charming Man - 2011 Remaster The Smiths	The Smiths	15 nov. 2021	2:43
25		Supersonic Rocket Ship The Kinks	Everybody's in Show-Biz	15 nov. 2021	3:32
26		Girls on Film - 2010 Remaster Duran Duran	Duran Duran (Deluxe Edition)	15 nov. 2021	3:33
27		Where'd All the Time Go? Dr. Dog	Shame, Shame (Deluxe Edition)	15 nov. 2021	3:55
28		Patience The Lumineers	Cleopatra	15 nov. 2021	1:36
29		Lovefool - Radio Edit The Cardigans	First Band On The Moon	15 nov. 2021	3:14
30		Pursuit Of Happiness (Nightmare) Kid Cudi, MGMT, Rataat	Man On The Moon: The End Of Day	27 dec. 2021	4:55
31		You & Me Song The Wannadies	Be A Girl	27 dec. 2021	2:51
32		Somethin' Stupid Frank Sinatra, Nancy Sinatra	The World We Knew	27 dec. 2021	2:42
33		Something For Your M.I.N.D. Superorganism	Superorganism	27 dec. 2021	2:45
34		Saturday Night's Alright (For Fighting) - Remastered 2014 Elton John	Goodbye Yellow Brick Road (Remastered)	26 feb. 2022	4:55
35		Hello Hello Elton John	Gnomeo and Juliet (Original Motion Picture Soundtr...	19 mrt. 2022	3:45
36		She's A Rainbow The Rolling Stones	She's A Rainbow / Dandelion / We Love You	22 mei 2022	4:14
37		Until I Found You Stephen Sanchez	Until I Found You	22 mei 2022	2:58
38		Ahead By A Century The Tragically Hip	Anne With An E (Music From The Netflix Original Se...	22 mei 2022	3:48
39		What I Like About You The Romantics	The Romantics	4 jun. 2022	2:55
40		There Is a Light That Never Goes Out - 2011 Remaster The Smiths	The Queen Is Dead	4 jun. 2022	4:05
41		Love Will Tear Us Apart - 2020 Remaster Joy Division	Love Will Tear Us Apart	4 jun. 2022	3:28
42		I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles) The Proclaimers	Sunshine on Leith	4 jun. 2022	3:39
43		Brandy (You're a Fine Girl) Looking Glass	Looking Glass	4 jun. 2022	3:07

Mood Playlist 2

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Herwin Van Ee



OPENBARE PLAYLIST

pov: ur in an 80s film driving at night































and credits

Spotify • 58.631 vind-ik-leuks • 72 nummers, 4 uur 41 min

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🔍 Aangepaste volgorde ▼

#	TITEL	ALBUM	DATUM TOEGEVOEGD	⌚
1	Fond John Hayes	Fond	29 jun. 2022	2:40
2	A New World Martin Ahm Nielsen, Code Elektro	Superstrings	29 jun. 2022	3:46
3	Starshine The G	Wanderers	29 jun. 2022	1:56
4	Ascent Ocoeur	Everything	29 jun. 2022	5:02
5	Outlaws Volkor X	Heart Wired, Pt. 1 (Original Soundtrack)	29 jun. 2022	6:15
6	Rewind Donbor	Nothing From You	29 jun. 2022	2:02
7	You Were Bigger Than Life Shook	Continuum	29 jun. 2022	6:26
8	Polyhymnal Makeup And Vanity Set	Wilderness	29 jun. 2022	5:10
9	Alonewolf Alonewolf	Singles Mixtape 1	29 jun. 2022	3:15
10	La pazienza della notte Lehel P.	La pazienza della notte	29 jun. 2022	3:03
11	Goodbye Captain Lee M83	DSVII	29 jun. 2022	2:25
12	The New Human Marcel Barsotti	Earth	29 jun. 2022	2:21
13	Love On A Real Train Tangerine Dream	Dream Sequence	29 jun. 2022	3:57
14	Red Tide Loscil	Monument Builders	29 jun. 2022	5:26
15	Night Journeys I Courtesy	Night Journeys	29 jun. 2022	3:07
16	Above The Euromechopolis OGRE Sound	195	29 jun. 2022	2:10
17	Rendez-Vous Fantastisizer	No Way Back	29 jun. 2022	3:52
18	The Son of Flynn Daft Punk	TRON: Legacy	29 jun. 2022	1:35
19	Where the River Ends Tecnosine	Where the River Ends	29 jun. 2022	7:32
20	Circle 12 Foam and Sand, Robot Koch	Full Circle	29 jun. 2022	2:47
21	Tri-State Above & Beyond	Tri-State	29 jun. 2022	4:12
22	Night John Carpenter	Lost Themes	29 jun. 2022	3:38
23	RESURRECTION ALEX	BLOOD CLUB (Deluxe Edition)	29 jun. 2022	2:25

24		Elements Jasper De Ceuster	Elements	29 jun. 2022	4:52
25		Subtract A.L.I.S.O.N	Signal Flow	29 jun. 2022	5:11
26		Childhood Dream Wojciech Golczewski	The Signal	29 jun. 2022	4:10
27		Future Waves Uther Moads	Uther Moads	29 jun. 2022	4:01
28		Out There Dynatron	Aeternus	29 jun. 2022	2:31
29		Penelope Trappes meets Silent Rumble Malcolm Pardon, Penelope Trappes	Penelope Trappes Death Revisited	29 jun. 2022	5:16
30		The Comet Fantom '87	The Comet	29 jun. 2022	1:36
31		Abduction Meteor	Voyage Into Fear	29 jun. 2022	2:36
32		Eclipse Cosmic Cadence	Eclipse	29 jun. 2022	6:32
33		Detroit People Mover Squarepusher	Be Up A Hello	29 jun. 2022	4:27
34		The Nation EMMX	The Nation	29 jun. 2022	3:20
35		Digital Delusion Jimmy Svensson	Digital Delusion	29 jun. 2022	5:42
36		Death and Ashes Jóhann Jóhannsson	Mandy (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)	29 jun. 2022	4:39
37		Power From The Blazing Stone Cornelius Link	Power From The Blazing Stone (Original Soundtrack)	29 jun. 2022	1:41
38		Flashback Night Raptor	Night Raptor	29 jun. 2022	4:00
39		Elena's Sound-World Sinoia Caves	Beyond The Black Rainbow - Original Soundtrack	29 jun. 2022	5:10
40		Night Flight Black Cab	明 (Akira)	29 jun. 2022	3:10
41		Transmission 13 Wojciech Golczewski	End Of Transmission 2	29 jun. 2022	2:44
42		At Last Light Hello Meteor	The Coastal Obscure	29 jun. 2022	2:34
43		Quintessence aspidistrafy	Altar of Dreams	29 jun. 2022	4:22
44		The Price of Failure Perturbator	I Am the Night	29 jun. 2022	6:21
45		Portico Tangerine Dream	Portico	29 jun. 2022	6:42
46		Union Opris	Dissolution	29 jun. 2022	7:48
47		None of This Is Real Aaryan Shah	None of This Is Real	29 jun. 2022	1:32
48		Absence of Paradox Lovett	Synchronicity (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)	29 jun. 2022	3:47
49		Mineral Camedor	Portal	29 jun. 2022	4:58
50		Departure Com Truise	Persuasion System	29 jun. 2022	2:39
51		SILHOUETTE Lorn	REMNANT	29 jun. 2022	3:53
52		Tower Boy Harsher	Tower	29 jun. 2022	3:30
53		Breaking the Dream (Lucid Dream Edit) Virtual Mage	Breaking the Dream	29 jun. 2022	4:17

54	 Memory Arc Rival Consoles	Persona	29 jun. 2022	2:13
55	 Stand Still Stilz	Sentient	29 jun. 2022	2:49
56	 Satellite 2 Fort Romeau	Reasons EP	29 jun. 2022	4:06
57	 Everything All at Once G Jones	The Ineffable Truth	29 jun. 2022	4:28
58	 Blue Night Tonebox	Nocturn	29 jun. 2022	4:00
59	 Moondust Virtual Mage	Moondust	29 jun. 2022	2:19
60	 Dreamers and Misfits Paul Haslinger	Halt and Catch Fire Vol 2 (Original Television Series ...	29 jun. 2022	3:08
61	 A New World Martin Ahm Nielsen, Code Elektro	Superstrings	29 jun. 2022	3:46
62	 Sky At Night Lucy In Disguise	004	29 jun. 2022	2:00
63	 A Beacon from Home Dynatron	Aeternus	29 jun. 2022	4:49
64	 Map to the Stars (Part II) Baldocaster	Solare	29 jun. 2022	1:52
65	 The Void Sekond Prime	Dark Awakening	29 jun. 2022	10:58
66	 Let Me In Wojciech Golczewski	Beyond The Gates	29 jun. 2022	3:26
67	 Catoptrophobia Konstantin Dellos	Catoptrophobia	29 jun. 2022	4:25
68	 Starship Supernova Aeronexus, Dynatron	Starship Supernova	29 jun. 2022	4:22
69	 Disappearance Occams Laser	Return to the Grid	29 jun. 2022	3:19
70	 Dark Matter Cosmic Cadence	Dark Matter	29 jun. 2022	5:05
71	 The Quest is not Over Space Tourist	Planetary	29 jun. 2022	1:53
72	 Leaf ROBORG	We Are Destroyers	29 jun. 2022	3:33

Table 1
Most common emotions amongst three different groups of music listeners (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 591)

Ratings of the extent to which specific emotions can be expressed by music

	Kreutz (2000)	Lindström et al. (2003)	Juslin and Laukka (2004)
Subjects	50 students	135 expert musicians	141 volunteers
No. of emotions	32	38	38
Rank ordering:			
1.	Happiness	Joy	Joy
2.	Sadness	Sadness	Sadness
3.	Desire	Anxiety	Love
4.	Pain	Love	Calm
5.	Unrest	Calm	Anger
6.	Anger	Tension	Tenderness
7.	Love	Humor	Longing
8.	Loneliness	Pain	Solemnity
9.	Fear	Tenderness	Anxiety
10.	Despair	Anger	Hate

Note. Only the 10 most highly rated emotions in each study have been included in the table. Those emotion categories that correspond to the basic emotions featured in Table 4 are set in bold text. (Anxiety belongs to the “fear family,” and tenderness to the “love” family, see, e.g., Shaver et al., 1987.) The original lists of emotion terms contained both “basic” and “complex” emotions, as well as some terms commonly emphasized in musical contexts (e.g., solemnity).

Table 2

Emotions with their corresponding musical features (Juslin and Sloboda 2013, 596)

Summary of features correlated with discrete emotions in musical expression

Emotion	Feature
Happiness	<i>Fast tempo, small tempo variability, major mode, simple and consonant harmony, medium-high sound level, small sound-level variability, high pitch, much pitch variability, wide pitch range, ascending pitch, perfect fourth and fifth intervals, rising microintonation, raised singer's formant, staccato articulation, large articulation variability, smooth and fluent rhythm, bright timbre, fast tone attacks, small timing variability, sharp contrasts between "long" and "short" notes, medium-fast vibrato rate, medium vibrato extent, microstructural regularity</i>
Sadness	<i>Slow tempo, minor mode, dissonance, low sound level, moderate sound level variability, low pitch, narrow pitch range, descending pitch, "flat" (or falling) intonation, small intervals (e.g., minor second), lowered singer's formant, legato articulation, small articulation variability, dull timbre, slow tone attacks, large timing variability (e.g., rubato), soft contrasts between "long" and "short" notes, pauses, slow vibrato, small vibrato extent, ritardando, microstructural irregularity</i>
Anger	<i>Fast tempo, small tempo variability, minor mode, atonality, dissonance, high sound level, small loudness variability, high pitch, moderate pitch variability, ascending pitch, major seventh and augmented fourth intervals, raised singer's formant, staccato articulation, moderate articulation variability, complex rhythm, sudden rhythmic changes (e.g., syncopations), sharp timbre, spectral noise, fast tone attacks/decays, small timing variability, accents on tonally unstable notes, sharp contrasts between "long" and "short" notes, accelerando, medium-fast vibrato rate, large vibrato extent, microstructural irregularity</i>
Fear	<i>Fast tempo, large tempo variability, minor mode, dissonance, low sound level, large sound level variability, rapid changes in sound level, high pitch, ascending pitch, very wide pitch range, large pitch contrasts, staccato articulation, large articulation variability, jerky rhythms, soft timbre, very large timing variability, pauses, soft tone attacks, fast vibrato rate, small vibrato extent, microstructural irregularity</i>
Tenderness	<i>Slow tempo, major mode, consonance, medium-low sound level, small sound-level variability, low pitch, fairly narrow pitch range, lowered singer's formant, legato articulation, small articulation variability, slow tone attacks, soft timbre, moderate timing variability, soft contrasts between long and short notes, accents on tonally stable notes, medium-fast vibrato, small vibrato extent, microstructural regularity</i>

Note. Shown are the most common findings. Features set in *italics* can usually be modulated by the performer. Adapted from Juslin (2009), by permission from Oxford University Press.

Table 3
BRECVEM FRAMEWORK (Juslin 2013, 243-244)

Updated Hypotheses for seven psychological mechanisms through which music might arouse emotions in listeners

Mechanism	Order	Survival value of brain function	Information focus	Mental representation
Brain stem reflex	1	Focusing attention on potentially important changes or events in the close environment	Extreme or rapidly changing basic acoustic characteristics	(Cued) sensori-motor representations
Rhythmic entrainment	2	Facilitating motor coordination in physical work tasks	Periodic pulses in rhythms, especially around 2 Hz	(Cued) sensori-motor representations
Evaluative conditioning	3	Being able to associate objects or events with positive and negative outcomes	Covariation between events	(Cued) associative representations
Contagion	4	Enhancing group cohesion and social interaction, e.g. between mother and infant	Emotional motor expression reminiscent of human voices	(Cued) sensori-motor representations
Visual imagery	5	Permitting internal simulations of events that substitute for overt and risky actions	Self-conjured visual images	(Detached) pictorial representations
Episodic memory	6	Allowing conscious recollections of previous events and binding the self to reality	Personal events in particular places and at particular times	(Detached) hierarchically organized schematic and pictorial representations
Musical expectancy	7	Facilitating symbolic language with a complex semantics	Syntactic information	(Detached) schematic and hierarchical representations

Mechanism	Key brain regions	Cultural impact and learning	Ontogenetic development
Brain stem reflex	The inferior colliculus, the reticulospinal tract of the reticular formation, the intralaminar nuclei of the thalamus	Low	Prior to birth
Rhythmic entrainment	Networks of multiple oscillators in the cerebellum and the sensori-motor regions	Low	Prior to birth (perception only)
Evaluative conditioning	The lateral nucleus of the amygdala, the interpositus nucleus of the cerebellum	High	Prior to birth
Contagion	'Mirror neurons' in the pre-motor regions, right inferior frontal regions, the basal ganglia	Low	First year
Visual imagery	Spatially mapped regions of the occipital cortex, the visual association cortex, and (for image generation) left temporo-occipital regions	High	Pre-school years
Episodic memory	The medial temporal lobe, especially the hippocampus, and the dorsal medial prefrontal cortex	High	3–4 years
Musical expectancy	The left perisylvian cortex, 'Broca's area', the dorsal region of the anterior cingulate cortex, the orbital fronto-lateral cortex	High	5–11 years

Mechanism	Induced affect	Temporal focus of affect	Induction speed	Degree of volitional influence
Brain stem reflex	General arousal, surprise	Present	High	Low
Rhythmic entrainment	General arousal, feelings of communion	Present	Low	Low
Evaluative conditioning	Basic emotions	Present	High	Low
Contagion	Basic emotions	Present	High	Low
Visual imagery	All possible emotions	Omnidirectional	Low	High
Episodic memory	All possible emotions, but especially nostalgia	Past	Low	Medium
Musical expectancy	Interest, anxiety, surprise, chills, hope, disappointment	Present/Future	Medium	Low

Mechanism	Availability to consciousness	Modularity	Dependence on musical structure
Brain stem reflex	Low	High	Medium
Rhythmic entrainment	Low	High	Medium
Evaluative conditioning	Low	High	Low
Contagion	Low	High	Medium
Visual imagery	High	Low	Medium
Episodic memory	High	Low	Low
Musical expectancy	Medium	Medium	High

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