

The International Journal of

WHOLE PERSON CARE

VOLUME 7 • NUMBER 1 • 2020 • 38-39

MUSIC, BRAIN AND HEALTH

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Music, like language, is a uniquely human experience, ubiquitous across human cultures and across the human life span.

Musical capacity appears early in evolution and it seems to be innate to most of the human population. Neurobiological studies of music perception and music performance profoundly affect the brain, in an acute and chronic way, by modulating networks involved in cognition, sensation, emotion, reward, and movement corresponding to the empirical findings why people listen to music: pleasure, self-awareness, social relatedness, and arousal and mood regulation.

Most intriguing is “salutogenic” effect of musical activities, such as instrumental and choral “musicking” (particularly in non-professional musicians), both on the individual level and in populations. Musical training can promote the development of non-musical skills as diverse as language development, attention, visuospatial perception, and executive functions.

Music is also a prophylactic resource; it improves the bonding of mother and child. There is a wide range of therapeutic domains and disorders where musical interventions improve the outcome. As an example, familiar music has an exceptional ability to elicit memories, movements, motivation and positive emotions from adults affected by dementia.

Considering that one of the most important problems in biomedicine is “understanding what is to be human” then “music should be an essential part of this pursuit” – of an understanding of the whole person. Despite

evidence of significant effects of music on health and well-being - music is not well present in current re-humanization of medicine. ■