

ON OUR MINDS, SEASON 4: “HOW MUSIC BOOSTS YOUR MOOD” TRANSCRIPT

Anonymous listener: *Dear, on our minds. Some tips I have for achieving a state of mental wellness that help me and could help other teens are to make sure to one, prioritize getting anything stressful for that week or day done in advance or on time, as well as manage your time well. Doing this helps me not have to be worried about the future or procrastinating, and it just helps me have so much less stress and way more free time. The last tip I have is to listen to music, a podcast, videos, or watch any TV show or movie I like, and this often helps me to escape, in a sense, from the real world for a little bit and enjoy the things I want to.*

[theme song]

JAMES: From PBS NewsHour, Student Reporting Labs.

BREE: And WETA

JAMES: This is on *Our Minds*

BREE: With Bree

JAMES: And James

BREE: A podcast made by teens for teens

JAMES: Because everyone deserves a place to feel heard.

[theme music fades]

BREE: Hey, James.

JAMES: Hi Bree, how are you doing?

BREE: I'm doing well. I really did love the message that we played at the beginning. And that's something new this season, we're collecting voice messages from our listeners. So if you have a message for us, go to the link in the show notes.

I definitely see music as a sense of escapism, like when I put on my earbuds and I listen to music, I'm in my all my own different world and it's just the best.

JAMES: Well, that's exactly what we're going to hear in this next piece. In December, Student Reporting Labs offered a winter academy for students in Austin, Texas. During that workshop, students talked about what music they're really into these days. Let's take a listen.

Marshal: I mean, I really like rap and R&B. Those are my two main genres that I listen to. I listen to a lot of the weekend, even his new stuff. I love everything. Like it's really my brothers that taught me.

[a few seconds of the Weeknd]

Jordan: I listen to an artist named Louis Tomlinson. He was actually part of One Direction, and he has helped me a lot get through life. He has kind of a punk punk rock feel. So my favorite song from him is probably out of my system. And it goes, Got to get it out of my system that I've got to get it off of my chest.

[a few seconds of Louis Tomlinson]

Jaylin: OK, so I am a jazz head. Okay. I love Take Five. I love Robert Glasper. I love just the swing of jazz. You can be listening to jazz and it's raining, pouring outside, or you can listen to jazz and you're cleaning your house, Jazz going downtown. Don't you know with every single up of the trumpet and every single low of the cello or violin or whatever is playing? Because jazz incorporates everything. It tells you that you don't have to stay on one spot. You don't have to be a certain way. You could be whatever you want to be as long as you make something.

[a few seconds of Robert Glasper]

Layla: The music that I like right now, the artist that I like is Sza, she's so calming. And also I like Frank Ocean, a lot like he's also calming and his songs are great. / I don't like listening to sad music, but with them it's like no sad music. And it's also very peaceful and calming.

[a few seconds of Frank Ocean]

Journey: My favorite type of music is / it's music from Spain. Like Rosalia. I have been really into her recently. Specifically her song "Beso" like *me encanto la cancion es muy* amazing.

[a few seconds of Rosalia]

BREE: Oh my gosh, I wish you guys could see the huge smile on my face and my reaction throughout hearing that. As soon as she said Rosalia, my jaw dropped.

JAMES: It's just so awesome how like we we talk about an artist and all of a sudden I'm like, sent down this trip down memory lane. Bree and I, we talked about Rosalia with, um, our producer Jaylah on our Seattle trip, so whenever I hear, like, the artist's name, all of a sudden, you know, I start thinking about everything honestly.

BREE: So you may be wondering how exactly music makes us feel better. Our researcher Simran found that listening to music can lower your blood pressure, heart rate, and stress hormones, which can improve anxiety, depression, and even physical pain.¹

JAMES: Many people know that listening to music releases a neurotransmitter called dopamine that makes you feel happy and motivated.² It's lesser known, though, that practicing an instrument produces a substance called myelin that wraps around nerve cells in the brain and body and increases the speed of nerve impulses. This has longer-lasting effects than simply listening to music and improves unconscious and conscious thinking.³

BREE: There's a lot of interesting myths about music too. Have you ever heard of the Mozart effect?

JAMES: No, actually I haven't. But I did dress up as Mozart for my third-grade Halloween, so...

BREE: It's a theory that listening to Mozart's music makes you smarter. But there's little evidence to back this up. Just know that classical music isn't the only way to improve your well-being.⁴ So keep listening to whatever kind of music makes you feel good.

¹ <https://www.psychiatry.org/news-room/apa-blogs/power-of-music-in-mental-well-being>
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1232294.pdf>

² https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/music-and-health

³ <https://news.uchicago.edu/how-your-brain-benefits-music>

⁴ <https://www.ucf.edu/pegasus/your-brain-on-music/>

JAMES: Another thing music can do is help us connect to a certain culture or heritage. For me, I remember feeling very disconnected with my Korean heritage. Though my parents had grown up in Korea for most of their life, I couldn't say the same about myself. And so once I started listening to more Korean music, I saw a unique way for me to revive my Korean heritage in my life.

BREE: That idea that music can help us connect to a part of our identity is what Samantha explored in this next piece. Samantha spoke with her friend Milo about music and their Jewish identities.

[Milo playing music]

SAMANTHA: When I was young, we had Shabbat dinners. We dressed up for Purim, and we ate potato latkes on Hanukkah. But if anyone would have asked me then to describe myself, there would be a million things I would talk about before saying I was Jewish. In high school, I joined the Jewish student union, and I met a lot of people who are proud of being Jewish and who really bonded over Jewish culture. Today, I'm going to be talking to one of these people about how music helps him connect to his heritage.

SAMANTHA: Hi, Milo. How has music changed the way you view your Jewish identity?

MILO: It has allowed me to become more educated about Jewish culture, specifically through the lens of music, especially a lot of prayers as well as folk music, Jewish folk music or Ashkenazi folk music specifically, called klezmer. I do a little bit of –

[piano music]

SAMANTHA: That's so good, because you connect Jewish music with your own styles. And I was wondering, who is your favorite artist?

MILO: John Zorn, he plays avant-garde jazz klezmer stuff. It's hard to get into because it sounds terrible.

SAMANTHA: [laughs] Can you give us an example?

MILO: He had this group that I think he worked with, this group, Naftule's Dream, and they have a song I like very much called "Friend of Kafka."

["Friend of Kafka"]

MILO: You can really hear blues music, you know, that's another music that grew out of suffering and I play a lot of blues. In klezmer music and blues music, you're not making clear distinctions. It's like, ... Ah! You know? Both klezmer and blues have... A little bit of that, because they're both, some form of dealing with sorrow, you know. They're not playing this note or this note music]. They're playing something in between. [music] It's, it's meant to sound like crying. It's about crying while you're dancing. It's about being. Happy while you're sad. That's what Jews—

SAMANTHA: That's what Jewish culture is all about.

MILO: That's what Jewish culture is about.

SAMANTHA: Something I remember from my bat mitzvah is that. My mom actually got the rabbi to play on a guitar and I remember thinking how much everybody, even the people there who weren't maybe Jewish or who didn't specifically connect with Judaism, connected to this music because it's just such a universal thing.

MILO: You can study music theory all day, but, at the end of the day, you don't have anything if you don't have a soul. And that's the power of music.

[Milo playing music]

JAMES: going into ninth grade, similar to Milo. I started to listen to, like, Korean music for the first time ever. And it started to actually help me re-learn my Korean in a way. I started to become a lot more invested in my heritage, and I started to bond a lot more with my brother, my parents, and me and my brother are complete opposites. Like, you will never find two people more unlike each other. I'm not going to lie. But we find ourselves bonding a lot over music. What was kind of your takeaway from this little excerpt?

BREE: Yeah. Well, it was definitely really interesting to learn more about, like, Jewish culture. My family, my huge family, is a family of dancers, and I'm not a dancer. So I really, really like our music, such as chutney or reggae or dancehall, everything from the Caribbean. I always kind of just sit in the corner and I just like to watch my family dance. But it just made me think about how important IT music is to like my culture and me accepting my culture.

JAMES: Yeah, I definitely agree. And it's so cool how like, you know, we all have such diverse tastes in music.

BREE: Another new thing this season we'll be sharing a few podcasts we think you'll like if you listen to *On Our Minds*. If you're interested in more conversations for and by teens, check out *This Teenage Life*, a podcast about the ideas, stories, and unique perspectives of teenagers in the middle of their own growth as humans. Let's listen to an excerpt from an episode they produced last year about music.

[music]

THIS TEENAGE LIFE EXCERPT:

I listen to music all the time. I'm doing my junior college workshop right now and basically it's where I have to answer a bunch of really personal questions and send them to my college counselors so he can get to know me. And one of them is like, if you could bring one thing with you to a desert island, what would it be? And I was reflecting on it and I realized I would literally just bring my Spotify. I know it's not a thing. I know it's like you know, it's like on the web and whatever. But I would bring my Spotify because I literally could make a playlist to fit everything on the island. Like, I can make a run from like iguanas, like searching for coconuts, like basking in the sunlight. I can make a playlist for everything. I'm like that. I could survive, but I can make it a vibe because music just like, makes it a vibe.

[music fades]

JAMES: That's amazing. Definitely take a listen to *This Teenage Life*.

BREE: Joining us now from the Nashville area is a musician and the winner of our theme music contest, Joseph Broad. Hi, Joseph.

JOSEPH: Hey! Good to be here.

JAMES: So, Joseph, tell us more about yourself and how long you've been playing music.

JOSEPH: I am 17 years old. I'm a senior in high school right now, and I've been playing music for pretty much my whole life. At my elementary school and kindergarten through sixth grade, we all had to take a music class, which had everything from vocal skills to music theory to, um, each grade having to learn a little bit of an instrument every year. When I heard about the contest for the theme song. It was a track that I'd already started making. It was already a work in progress that I started for another project. But, um, I heard about this contest and I listened to the music that was already in place for the last season and to some of the podcast content. And I thought, wow, okay, this thing that I made just so happens to fit this podcast.

JAMES: As a fellow musician myself, I definitely understand that music can help us feel such a range of emotions. So for you, how does making music make you feel?

JOSEPH: I mean, it depends on what I'm working on. Honestly, if I'm working on something really upbeat and energetic, I'll start feeling. I'll start feeling, you know better about life feel really good. Start jamming to it and everything. But like, if I'm working on something more like downtempo low beats, I guess if I'm in a lower mood that day, it helps me work through that. I guess it's a good way to, um, work that out in a healthy way by making something out of it, instead of just letting that simmer. The music I made for *On Our Minds* - It was a nice little in-between. It had the warmth of one of the more downtempo things, but still nice and energetic. So I thought it was... honestly a joyful experience working on that track. It was, uh, yeah, I'm proud of that one.

JAMES: Well, Joseph, we really appreciate you coming out to talk about your passion in music, and we really look forward to seeing what you'll accomplish in your future.

BREE: Thank you so much for joining us, Joseph.

JOSEPH: Thank you all for having me.

[music]

JAMES: I have a guitar right beside me. Is it cool if I play a little something for you?

BREE: [laughter] Yeah, play a little something for me!

[James playing Maroon 5 "Sunday Morning"]

BREE: [cheering and clapping] That was so impressive! As the kids say, you ate that.

JAMES: Thank you, thank you, Bree.

[music]

BREE: The next episode, which comes out in two weeks, is drumroll please. [drum roll] A special conversation with the band "Lawrence." Woo!

JAMES: I am so excited! The band is a brother and sister duo, Clyde and Gracie Lawrence. They are so good! Take a quick listen.

[music - Lawrence, "Don't Lose Sight"]

BREE: Our conversation with Lawrence is a special collaboration with the podcast *This Teenage Life*. The podcast we played a bit from earlier. James and I will join teens from

the podcast to talk with Lawrence about making music, working together with your sibling, gender, and more. You won't want to miss it.

JAMES: One last thing if you're interested in starting your own podcast, the Democracy Group Podcast Fellowship is a 12-week remote program for Gen Z leaders who want to start a podcast and build an audience to strengthen democracy, engage diverse viewpoints, and bridge political divides.

BREE: The fellowship runs from February through May and includes specialized training, live workshops, mentorship, and support. Applications are due February 12th. Learn more at democracygroup.org/fellowship. This fellowship is made possible by the Democracy Group's partnership with the Bridge Alliance.

[theme song]

BREE: *On Our Minds*, Season 4 is produced by Student Reporting Labs in collaboration with KUOW's RadioActive Youth Media.

JAMES: Today's segments were produced by...Digital Producer Rawan Elbaba and our Winter Academy fellows,

BREE: and Samantha from Stuyvesant High School in New York.

JAMES: This episode was produced by Lead Podcast Producer Briget Ganske and Associate Producer Jaylah Moore Ross with research and fact-checking by Simran Gupta.

BREE: Antonio Nevarez edited and mixed this episode. Approval and oversight by Editorial Director Marie Cusick and Executive Producer Leah Clapman.

JAMES: Theme music by – the one and only – Joseph Broad. Additional music from Blue Dot Sessions.

BREE: If you or someone you know needs help. We have a list of resources at studentreportinglabs.org/mentalhealthresources

Music helps our mental health
Music helps connect to our culture

- Mental health: Music can help reduce anxiety and depression, and improve mood. Listening to music releases dopamine, which activates the brain's reward centers.
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- Brain health: Music can help keep your brain engaged and stimulate new connections. It can also help you process information more efficiently.
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- Physical health: Music can help reduce pain and improve sleep quality.
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- Motivation: Music can boost your energy and motivation, especially during physical activity.
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- Socialization: Music can be a great way to socialize, especially if you sing or play an instrument in a group.
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- Academic performance: Research suggests that music lessons can improve IQ and academic performance in children.
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- Expressing yourself: Song lyrics can help you understand your situation and express yourself.

Reduce anxiety, blood pressure, pain