



MATTHEW CANTELLO

We know that as human beings, we possess the unique ability to conceive of and respond to beauty when it reveals itself to us. Over the course of our lives, if we are lucky, we may find ourselves becoming increasingly drawn to beauty of all kinds, catching on that the recognition of beauty can offer some of the most meaningful experiences available to us. When beauty reveals itself through music, however, the sound becomes much more than simply a transient object to admire and move on from. The experience of beautiful sound opens to a much wider and more extensive experience within. In lighter, more sanguine expressions, the beauty in music can be pleasurable, even comforting to the spirit. But in more intense articulations, the warmth of melodious themes can have a profound humanizing effect upon the soul. When experienced deeply using communing techniques, beautiful sonorities can serve to open the heart of the listener. We may feel rigid and resentful, even unconsciously, yet the music softens our hard edges with tenderness and warmth.

At its height, the beauty and tenderness in music becomes a powerful stimulator of our propensity for love, compassion and forgiveness. Often the seemingly innocent, simple beauty of a stirring melody or harmony becomes more poignant when contrasted with the often difficult and unresolved realities of our lives. This juxtaposition can cut through the tight hold we sometimes have on our circumstances, helping us to see more clearly into the nature of things. I find this humanizing effect to be one of the most advantageous and worthwhile that powerful music can evoke, as these sentiments are often the only appropriate responses to the reality of living in an imperfect, often difficult world. It is the spirit of compassion that enables us to deal with our relationships and circumstances with a greater degree of strength and love. In my experience, compassion and tenderness can sometimes be evoked by the simple yet stunning realization that such intense beauty can exist at all! There are some pieces of music that I personally find so extraordinary, that when I fully experience them, I can't help but be lead to reflect on the workings of the universe as a whole. These works are such precious gifts to mankind, that it is not only difficult for me to imagine life without them, but I can also get a sense -- a flash -- of purpose in a universe capable of creating such beauty.

On certain occasions, when the time is right, an encounter with music can become so exquisite, the expression so exalted, we can encounter "*peak experiences*", similar to the one mentioned in the introduction. The peak experience occurs when music inspires a glimpse of the sacred, evoking within us an overwhelming sense of wholeness. Tears, or some other form of release, are common reactions to this intense state of being, as the music becomes a



doorway to the divine. When the opportunity presents itself, these are profoundly spiritual experiences. But once again, why does powerful music bring forth such deep inner experience? In attempting to further expound upon this, it might be helpful to venture past more traditional explanations. One idea that I favor is that it may be that great music, like all creative genius, flows out of some sort of universal source of wisdom and beauty, inherent in all things. Artists of many backgrounds often speak of the mysterious spontaneity of their inspiration, claiming only to play the role of the vehicle, or channel in their creations. They claim to bear witness to the unveiling of beauty, as though it were already there, often contending to “*find*” instead of “*make*” a work of art. I, too, have had this experience in my own musical creation. So it may be that in the relatively rare occasions of creating powerful music, a composer or musician draws from what is sometimes referred to as “*the source*”, the spirit, or the soul. Yet whatever name is attached to it, it is a source that lies within all of us, within the composers, players, and listeners. In this way, beautiful music becomes a medium for the universe to have expression, revealing itself through us, and therefore leading us back to the truth within.

Excerpt taken from Matthew Cantello’s “*Communing With Music: Practicing The Art Of Conscious Listening*”. Used with permission.



**MATTHEW CANTELLO, AUTHOR OF “COMMUNING WITH MUSIC:
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