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The old wisdom is true: music feeds the soul. But I do not believe that this soul is supernatural; it is our human experience of individual and collective well-being, nurtured by meaningful, productive, and creative interactions with other people. The “*spiritual*” significance of music is actually a transcendent property of the act itself. For the performer, this special feeling comes from participation in a tightly-coordinated, demanding, and collaborative activity. Musicians can enter a flow state; the pleasurable experience of peak performance at the very edge of their abilities. Athletes in team sports experience a version of this transcendence as well. For the listener, music is a patterned auditory message that unfolds in time, stimulating the speech centers of our brain without requiring participation. Watching a performer activates the motor-control regions of our brains as if we were doing the actions ourselves, allowing us to experience the same high that the performer feels. Instrumental music provides the intellectual pleasure of syntax without semantics. Music with lyrics additionally engages our interest in listening to stories, an adaptive behavior that helps us learn about our complex world.

Another way that music is “*spiritually*” significant is that it gives voice to our desires and struggles. It’s no coincidence that Don Henley’s “*The Boys Of Summer*” resonated with my teenage psyche after I was rebuffed by a summer crush. The stories we hear in songs are a framework that we can project our own lives onto, providing validation, comfort, and visibility to generational or minority groups. Music is a universal activity in our species. The visceral thrill that we derive from listening to, and cooperating with each other shows hope for humanity. Music finds its true spiritual significance in its potential to remind us that we are all part of the same human tribe.



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