

### Speech

- Have you ever put on your headphones on “just for background noise” and suddenly realized you were actually getting things done?
- In my last speech, I utilized research to show that music is not just for entertainment; it's ancient, it is wired into our brains, and it literally changes how we think and feel. Today I want to take it a step further. I want to convince you to start using music intentionally every day as a tool for focus, to help you regulate your emotions, and to help connect you with who you really are.

## TURN THE MUSIC ON, ON PURPOSE

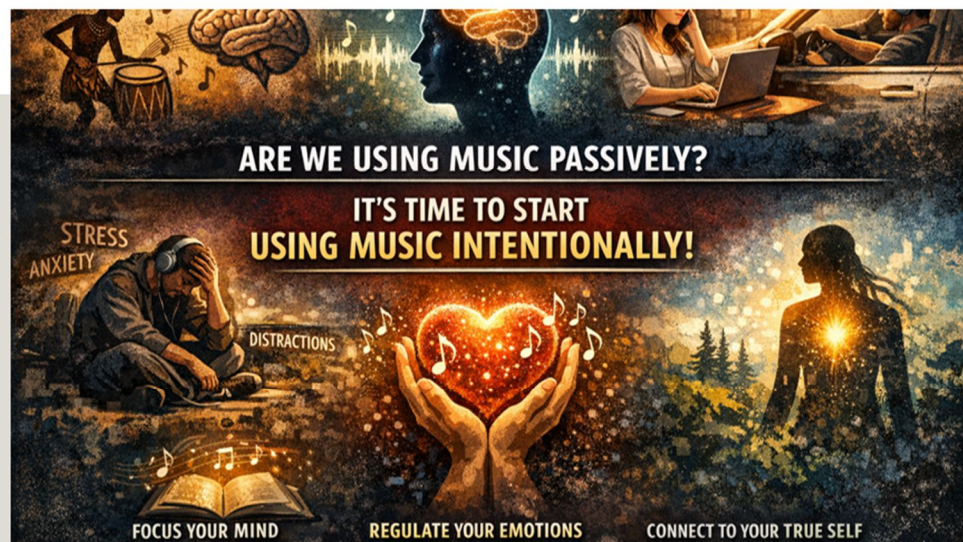
CARMEN JIMENEZ DE JESUS



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### Speech

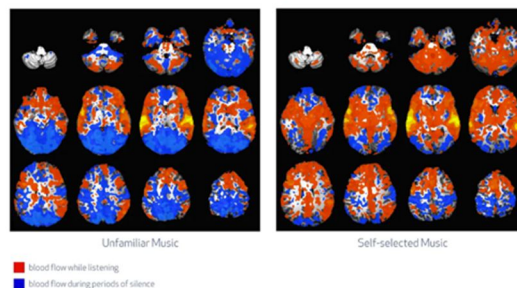
- The problem is that most of us use music as a passive tool; we shuffle our playlists, letting algorithms decide what to play while we study, drive, or cook, but we never ask, “What is this doing to our brains? How can we use this more intentionally? In a world where we are constantly under anxiety and stress, surrounded by distractions, environments forcing us to disconnect from ourselves and our culture, from each other, I ask that we stop ignoring this powerful tool and start using music intentionally.



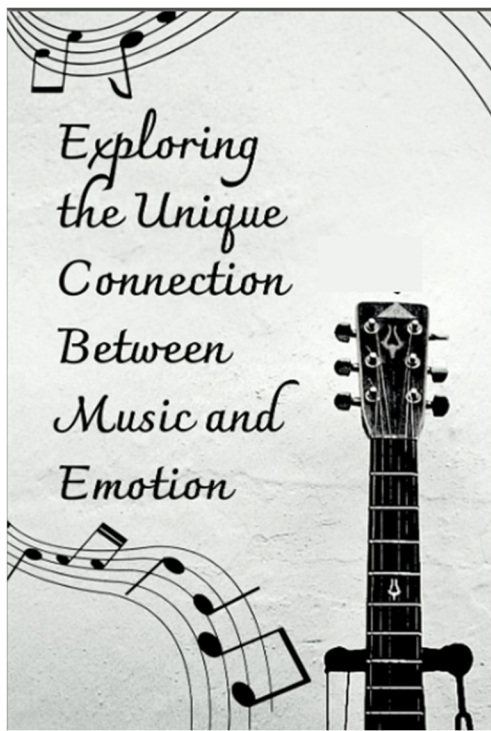
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- First, let's talk about science. A 2024 review article in Brain Behavior and Immunity Health explains that music engages a wide network of brain regions at once; our auditory, motor, emotional, memory, and executive areas all light up together when we listen to or perform music. Zatar and other authors describe how preferred music can trigger dopamine release in the brain's reward system and even modulate pain pathways in the spinal cord and brainstem. In other words, music doesn't just feel powerful; it is powerful at a neurochemical level.
- Houston Methodist University presented these comparison images. You can see the contrast in how the brain looks when listening to unfamiliar music versus when listening to music we have self-selected.

## MUSIC LIGHTS UP OUR BRAINS



(Above: Comparison imagery of patients' brains when listening to music they're not familiar with and music the subjects are familiar with, from a video by Houston Methodist.)



## “SOUND CONVEYS EMOTION”

### Speech

- Music historian Jeremy Montagu, in his article *How Music and Instruments Began*, argues that music likely predates complex language. Early humans used rhythm and vocalization for dance, ritual, communication, and, most importantly, social cohesion. He describes music as “sound that conveys emotion” and suggests that shared music-making helped bind early human groups, increasing their chances of survival through cooperation.

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• We have evolutionary theorists like Anton Killin, who argue that by around 400,000 years ago, our ancestors were already engaging in what he calls “social proto music,” which were grouped vocal and rhythmic activities around the fire that rehearsed emotional expression, coordination, and theory of mind. These weren’t Spotify playlists, but they served the same core functions of regulating emotion, synchronizing people, and creating shared meaning. Put all this together, and you get a clear picture: Music is one of the oldest, most natural technologies humans have for changing brain states and building connections.

• The article shares an image from the Tomb of [Nakht](#) in the Theban Necropolis, highlighting how music was used in rituals and burials during this time.

- Three musicians, from the tomb of [Nakht](#), located in the Theban Necropolis, on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes (present-day Luxor, Upper Egypt)



### Speech

• Now I want to bring this closer to home for me, as a Dominican. Merengue and bachata, which are our typical music, are not just another classification; they are social glue. Merengue was used to unify the nation, crossing class boundaries and becoming a symbol of Dominican identity. Bachata has evolved into a powerful symbol of Dominican authenticity and emotion, especially for immigrants abroad.



## Now that you know

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• **Now you know**, music has been with humans for hundreds of thousands of years. It has shaped our brains, our emotions, our cultures, and our identities. -----And science is clear: Music can improve our concentration and regulate our emotions. Music can strengthen our social bonds.

So, the question is no longer, "Does music matter?" The real question is, "Are you going to keep using it by accident... or start using it on purpose?"

"DOES MUSIC MATTER?"

THE REAL QUESTION IS,

"ARE YOU GOING TO KEEP USING IT BY ACCIDENT... OR  
START USING IT ON PURPOSE?"

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