



Religious Ecstasies, “Deep Listeners,” and Musical Emotion

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The aim of this study is to begin to provide an explanation for the worldwide linkage of music and ecstatic religious ceremonies. The basic hypothesis is that the physiological ability to respond to musical stimuli with strong emotional responses is one of the pre-conditions for the propulsion into ecstasy. A second hypothesis is that a sub-set of the music-loving community, the “deep listeners” who are profoundly moved (chills, tears) by musical listening will have emotional reactions similar to those of religious ecstasies. 60 participants, divided into five groups, were tested using galvanic skin response and heart rate measurements. The results seem to support the hypotheses by demonstrating 1) a correlation between being a religious ecstatic and having a strong GSR while listening to favorite music, in comparison with control groups, and 2) a correlation between being a secular “deep listener” and having a similarly strong GSR listening to favorite music, in comparison with control groups.

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