

THE SOUND OF TOGETHERNESS

Music has always been a way of bringing people together. Rhythms, instruments, spaces and social rules have changed, but the human need to connect through a shared sound has never disappeared. From ritual songs and dances around a fire to stadium concerts and business events in modern hotels, music continues to perform the same essential function: it creates an invisible space in which many individuals can, for a while, become part of a shared experience.

Neuroscientist and music researcher Daniel Levitin considers social bonding one of the historical functions of music. He argues that early humans used music to relieve social tensions and strengthen bonds within the group. At the same time, he argues that the modern Western model in which professional musicians perform while everyone else listens emerged relatively recently. For most of human history, music was much more closely connected to everyday life and direct participation.

The way people come together through music has constantly evolved. In some cultures, music was inseparable from ritual and collective action; in others, it became a way of communicating, playing and passing on traditions. Seen from this perspective, the history of music reveals a gradual transformation in the way people belong to a group: from direct participation in a shared rhythm to focused listening, then to self-expression and, eventually, to the creation of a complex shared experience.

ETHNIC — THE RHYTHM OF COMMUNITY

Some tourists once shared a memory that had stayed with them as one of the strongest impressions of their trip to St Petersburg. Walking along the shore of the Gulf of Finland on a White Night, in almost complete silence broken only by the sound of the waves, they heard very quiet, unfamiliar music coming from somewhere beyond the trees or a line of rocks. Rhythmic but gentle drumbeats and unfamiliar ethnic instruments seemed almost disconnected from the modern world. It was impossible to tell immediately who was playing or where the sound was coming from. Yet that uncertainty made the moment even more powerful: for a few minutes, the familiar sense of time and place disappeared, and the modern shoreline seemed connected by invisible threads to a much older human experience.

Ethnic music reminds us of one of the earliest forms of musical communication. People do not simply come to listen to it – they participate in it. It accompanies dance, celebration, ritual and other collective activities, and cannot easily be separated from the community that performs it and takes part in it.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF BEING TOGETHER

For example, in the drumming traditions of the Ewe people of Ghana and Togo, rhythm does not simply accompany dance – it helps organise the collective action itself. A lead drummer gives signals, dancers respond with movement, while other participants support the musical pattern through clapping, singing and playing additional drums. People are not merely listening to performers; they become part of the ritual, the dance and the music.

Another example can be found among the Inuit. Traditional throat singing, usually performed by two women, takes the form of a musical dialogue: the participants create short rhythmic and breathing patterns in turn and try to continue longer than their partner. The practice was part of everyday life – women sang while playing together during long winter evenings and also used the singing to lull children to sleep. Here, too, music does not exist separately from communication: it becomes the interaction itself.

This characteristic of musical participation is well described by musicologist Matthew Rahaim, Associate Professor of Music at the University of Minnesota. As he writes, “Ethnomusicologists have long been fascinated by the idea of participation” and by the way participatory music-making can draw individuals into forms of solidarity.

Music becomes less a work of art than a way of saying: we are here, we are together, we share the same tradition.

This is the principle of “we gather”.

MUSIC THAT BRINGS US THROUGH THE AGES

The model has proved remarkably resilient. Contemporary ethnic festivals, folk celebrations, opening ceremonies and cultural programmes still use music as a tool for bringing audiences together physically and emotionally. Technology may transform the stage, lighting and acoustics, but the basic logic remains the same: first, people are brought together in one space; then they are given the opportunity to feel part of what is happening. Music survives through reinterpretation. One extraordinary example is the Hurrian Hymn No. 6, a song dedicated to the goddess Nikkal

and inscribed on a clay tablet around 1400 BC in the ancient city of Ugarit. It is one of the oldest known songs with surviving musical notation, and modern musicians have reconstructed and performed it more than three thousand years after it was first written down. The exact melody remains open to interpretation, but the very fact that people can still bring this ancient musical idea to life connects performers today with a community that disappeared millennia ago. Hearing some of its modern reconstructions, one might almost be tempted to call it “ancient Syrian rock”.

A much more recent, but equally telling example is Greensleeves, the traditional English folk song first documented in the sixteenth century. Unlike the Hurrian hymn, it has been performed and reinterpreted countless times, moving across genres, generations and cultural contexts. Its melody has become so familiar that it can be placed in completely different musical settings while remaining recognisable – a reminder that folk music does not simply preserve the past, but continues to be reshaped by the people who inherit it.

We remain. We remember.

Music can therefore carry not only a tradition, but also a connection between people who may be separated by centuries.





CLASSICAL — THE ART OF PERFECTION

Classical music creates a very different way of being together. Here, participants are not expected to perform the music or move to a shared rhythm. Instead, they are expected to pay attention, while a certain distance between performers and audience is established through a set of behavioural rules.

The concert hall becomes a space where dozens of musicians follow the same score and the conductor's interpretation, while hundreds of listeners adopt the same rhythm of interaction: silence during the performance, concentration, anticipation of the climax and a response at the appropriate moment. Togetherness is no longer based on doing the same thing, but on agreeing to follow shared rules and experience a complex work at the same time.

We listen. We appreciate. We learn.

This is a different social code of music: distance, attention, mastery, etiquette, and a clear distinction between performer and listener. A person becomes part of the community not because they are doing the same thing as everyone else, but because they understand the rules of the space and share its values.

Yet classical music also reveals another side of collective experience. When an orchestra follows a score in perfect synchrony and an audience responds to the performance as one, many individuals become connected through a result that cannot be created by one person alone.

We experience perfection together.

And that is a very different form of belonging.

CHANGING WITHOUT LOSING ITS POWER

Classical music, however, has never remained frozen in its historical form. Today, works from previous centuries are given new life through contemporary arrangements, electronic music and reinterpretations, allowing different generations to meet within the same musical work. A particularly striking example is *Recomposed: Vivaldi – The Four Seasons* by Max Richter. The composer took Antonio Vivaldi's famous *Four Seasons* and, while retaining recognisable elements of the original, reimagined them through a contemporary musical language. For the listener, the result is neither simply an eighteenth-century composition nor simply a modern work, but a meeting point between two musical eras.

A more playful and immediately accessible example comes from *The Piano Guys*. In *The Cello Song*, cellist Steven Sharp Nelson takes the *Prelude* from J. S. Bach's *Cello Suite No. 1* – originally written for a single cello – and turns it into a layered performance built from

eight cello parts. Additional melodies, rhythmic patterns and even percussive sounds produced on the instrument transform a familiar Baroque composition into something closer to a contemporary instrumental track.

The two interpretations are very different, but their underlying principle is the same. The language of performance may change, but classical music can still connect people across generations.

MUSIC TO MAKE US FEEL

Meanwhile, the classical tradition has moved beyond the concert hall itself. One telling example emerged in the London Underground. In 2003–2004, London Underground began experimenting with classical music in station ticket halls, waiting areas and passageways. The initial aim was to improve passengers' experience and reduce antisocial behaviour. Research conducted several years later found that around 85% of those surveyed supported the practice, while passengers reported feeling calmer, happier and less stressed when classical music was played. Eventually, the programme was available at 64 stations.

Here classical music stops being an object of special attention. A passenger does not come to a concert or choose a piece to listen to; the music becomes part of the environment and influences the emotional perception of the space.

This is particularly relevant to hospitality and events. Sound can do more than accompany what is happening: it can shape the atmosphere of a place, set its pace and influence its emotional register.



DISCO — THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Disco brought the listener back into the role of an active participant, but fundamentally changed the basis of that participation. People were no longer brought together by a shared tradition or ritual, but by the possibility of expressing themselves in a common space.

The club and dance floor became places where sound could not be separated from movement, light, clothing, bodies and behaviour. Music was no longer simply something that filled the room: its social effect was created directly by the audience, which danced, moved, interacted and shaped the atmosphere together.

Most importantly, people on the dance floor did not have to move in the same way. On the contrary, the dance floor allowed individuality and turned it into part of the collective energy.

“I can be myself – and that is precisely why I belong to this group.”

A new principle emerged: we express, we connect, we belong.

FROM LISTENING TO SELF-EXPRESSION

For disco, this idea also had a very specific historical context. The genre developed within the club culture of 1970s New York, where the dance floor became a space for freedom, self-expression and new forms of social interaction.

At the same time, disco became one of the great musical laboratories of its era. One of the most telling examples is I Feel Love by Donna Summer and Giorgio Moroder, released in 1977. Its combination of repetitive synthesiser patterns and a dance-oriented rhythm became one of the defining sounds of the emerging electronic music scene and influenced the development of synth-pop, house, techno and other genres. In 2024, the recording was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame.

Disco therefore changed not only the way people danced, but also the idea of what a musical space could be. Sound became increasingly electronic, club culture became increasingly visual, and the artist gradually became a central figure in a larger spectacle.

Music was no longer simply a composition to be heard; it was becoming an experience to be seen and lived.

One of the symbols of this transformation was Michael Jackson. His Thriller in 1983 turned the music video into a major visual event and helped MTV evolve beyond its initial rock-oriented identity to become a global cultural phenomenon.

Music was thus moving closer to the form that the event industry knows so well today: the artist, stage, choreography, lighting, visual

language and audience become part of one integrated experience.

THE SOUND OF TOGETHERNESS

Music can bring people together even when they are not in the same place. A song, rhythm or musical instrument can travel far beyond the culture in which it was created and become a way of encountering another one. Music moves through time, across borders, between cultures and generations. A local musical style can become an international genre; a traditional melody can become part of a new composition heard by people on the other side of the world.

This ability to create connection despite physical distance is highlighted by Eric Clarke, music psychologist at the University of Oxford. He describes music as “a collective experience which can overcome physical distance” and argues that physical separation does not necessarily prevent “social togetherness”. Singing together, he notes, can create “a palpable sense of social solidarity”.

This matters in a world where musical experience is no longer tied to a single place. A concert can take place simultaneously on a stage and on the screens of thousands of viewers; a local musical tradition can become part of an international festival; and a composition created decades or centuries ago can continue to live through new interpretations.

But the modern event has inherited all of these models and brought them together within a single system. A festival still creates a sense of community; a concert still builds shared attention; a dance floor still preserves the freedom of self-expression. A conference or corporate event adds several more layers: architecture, programme design, visual communication, technology, gastronomy, lighting and audience engagement.

Here music does real work. It can subtly change the pace of a space, emphasise the highlights of a programme and create emotional connections between separate parts of an event. In a hotel, conference hall or festival venue, music becomes part of the architecture of the experience.

This is why contemporary events increasingly work not only with content, but also with feelings. A guest should not simply receive information or watch a performance; they should remember how they felt among other people.

Over thousands of years, the settings have changed. So have the ways in which people come together: from shared action, to shared attention and appreciation, to self-expression among others. The modern event brings all these models together and adds another one — the possibility of creating a unique experience that exists only here and now.

Formats will continue to change. New spaces, technologies and ways of interacting with audiences will emerge. But the reason people come together will remain the same.

