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MEANINGFUL MUSIC LISTENING: INSPIRATION AND SELF-TRANSCENDENCE

SUMMARY: Scientific studies suggest that media experiences may bring not only pleasure but also meaningful insights and inspiration. Such experiences can reflect self-transcendence, resulting in focusing not only on oneself but feeling more connected to others or to even be inspired to take action in the real world. One of the most powerful media forms in this context is music which also involves creative extramusical processes. These include emotions and visual imagery that vary depending on the types of musical pieces, on listeners' musical perception and on their sociocultural environment. Therefore, listening to music can also evoke meaningful insights, inspirational states, and self-transcendent experiences. In fact, studies show that music is the most popular media source for seeking inspiration.

This paper focuses on meaningfulness, self-transcendence, and inspiration evoked by music from the listeners' perspective. It also explores the thin line between the listeners' personal (inner) and social (outer) experiences since individual extramusical associations are greatly influenced by the listener's sociocultural environment including other media.

KEYWORDS: music listening, music perception, inspiration, self-transcendence, extramusical associations, sociocultural and media influence, meaningful media.

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1. Introduction

This paper focuses on music listening as a complex yet creative experience for the listener. The research was inspired by recent studies in the field of positive media psychology which suggest that various media forms, from a simple Instagram post to an epic film, can bring not only pleasure and entertainment but also meaningful insights, inspiration (de Leeuw, Janicke-Bowles, Ji, 2022) as well as self-transcendental experiences (Oliver et al., 2018). While many factors contribute to the process of music listening, the aim here is to mainly explore the afore mentioned aspects: meaningfulness, inspiration and self-transcendence in the extramusical context.

Although people may find meaningfulness and inspiration in various aspects of their life, in the context of media it is generally music that seems to be the most popular source for seeking inspiration (Raney et al., 2018). It is no surprise that there are so many genres and musical pieces to choose from, and listeners have a wide range of options to find what they like and feel moved by. Due to the Internet and digital technologies, music has never been so easily accessible meaning that today people can be listeners almost anywhere and anytime. Today, 79% of people think that there are more ways of music listening than ever before. Also, the older the generation, the higher the number, since they could experience the evolution and growth of music's different listening ways and habits (IFPI, 2023).

In many cases music listening can be more associated with purposes such as consumption, leisure, entertainment, background company while doing some (cognitive) tasks (Kiss, Linnell, 2023), exercising or relaxing (IFPI, 2023), or other activities. Nevertheless, music listening can be enjoyed by many people with no musical training required. As a result, it is a common everyday activity today with different (personal) purposes for which people usually spend over 20 hours per week (IFPI, 2023).

Music listening, especially active (when a person is consciously listening to music as opposed to passive background music listening), is seen as a complex process which in fact involves creativity. Listeners are considered active music-makers in a sense that they create their own way or perspective of musical experiences (Kratus, 2017). Active music listening can usually evoke emotional responses and visual imagery (extramusical associations) which vary depending not only on musical pieces (Varankaitė, 2021). That is, listeners' extramusical interpretations, especially visual imagery, are formed not only by the main audial source and stimulus (music), but also by social and cultural influences that are connected to that particular musical piece and to the listener (Varankaitė, 2021). In many cases, having these influences involved in the process, the margin between personal (inner) and sociocultural (outer) extramusical experience gets very blurry. The personal and social experiences also overlap when we talk about self-transcendent experiences where people's sense of connectedness and being a part of something bigger is boosted by meaningful music.

2. Everyday Music Listening: Main Choices and Reasons

We are probably aware of being exposed to music everyday whether we mean to or not. But are we aware of how much time during the day we actually spend hearing music even if it is only somewhere in the background? And can background music have an effect on accidental listeners? For instance, Christmas music in supermarkets every December (or even earlier) may elevate a Christmas mood for some people, but others may find it annoying. The influence of music on customers or the effects of different genres may be separate topics, and there are many factors that contribute to the complexity of everyday music listening. However, in this part of the paper the main objective is to provide an overview of general everyday music listening with more focus on the mindful choices of musical pieces (for both—*active* and *passive* [background]—music listening) and the reasons for those choices.

John Sloboda and his collaborators claim that “A substantial amount of music listening in contemporary Western society is deliberately chosen” (Sloboda, Lamont, Greasley, 2009, p. 431). The time that is spent on music listening grows each year. An average listener today spends over 20 hours per week on this activity and will usually listen to eight different music genres (IFPI, 2023). Table 1 presents the most relevant generalised data of a worldwide study on music listening habits in 2023 that involved over 43,000 respondents from 26 countries that accounted for 91.2% of global recorded music market revenues in 2022 (IFPI, 2023). According to the survey results related to mindful musical choices, many listeners consider music important for their mental wellbeing, relaxation and for physical activities. In addition to the information presented in the table, the study also showed that the top four ways for 16–24 year olds to engage with music are: short-form videos (82%), audio streaming (72%), video streaming platforms (66%), and radio (48%). At this point it can be noted that in general radio is still quite popular, being the third favoured way of music listening (see Table 1).

Sweden shows the highest rate (61%) of engagement with paid subscription. A possible explanation for this could be that Spotify, the most popular music listening subscription platform in the world (Leu, 2025), is a Swedish company, and “Sweden, the birthplace of Spotify, has long proven itself to be an accelerated market in terms of the maturity of music streaming” (Ingham, 2024).

Table 1*Overview of Worldwide Music Listening Aspects*

Avg. weekly time spent on music listening	20.7 hours
Top 10 favourite genres globally	1. Pop 2. Rock 3. Hip-hop/Rap 4. Dance/ Electronic 5. Latin 6. R&B 7. Classical/Opera 8. Country 9. Soundtracks 10. Reggae
Avg. number of music genres to which one person listens	8 (+)
Top 5 ways of listening to music	1. Audio streaming—32% 2. Video streaming—31% 3. Radio—17% 4. Purchased music records—9% 5. Other forms (e.g., TV)—7% 6. Live music—4%
Listening to music using licensed audio streaming platforms	73%
Top 5 countries most engaged with paid subscription	1. Sweden—61% 2. Mexico—57% 3. Germany—55% 4. USA—53% 5. New Zealand—52%
Music listening is important to listeners' mental health	71%
Music helps to relax and cope with stress	78%
Using music for specific individual activities	In the car—50% Commuting to work or school—45% Relaxing or unwinding—41% Housework—39% Browsing the Internet—37%

Note. Source: International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI, 2023).

Research studies suggest that there are three principal reasons for music listening: 1) regulating arousal and mood, 2) achieving self-awareness, and 3) expression of social relatedness (*The Big Three* of music listening as suggested by Schäfer, Sedlmeier, Städtler, Huron, 2013). In Powell, Olsen, and Thompson's study (2023) on hedonic and eudaimonic motivation for music, they conclude that people have intentions to listen to music for purposes of pleasure (hedonic experiences) and for more meaningful and challenging (eudaimonic) experiences.

According to a study by Kiss and Linnell (2023), most listeners listen to music in the background while driving or doing monotonous tasks. The most popular choice for those occasions would be vocal pieces, and they would listen with the aim to feel energised. Furthermore, participants, who listen to music while reading or studying, mostly would choose instrumental music and would listen to help calm down. As the authors conclude, there are different patterns and reasons in choices for background music listening that are not only dependent on the type and complexity of the task. This conclusion is also related to there being many factors involved in the process of music listening for enhancing the performance of one's task since each of the main three aspects—music, task and listener—have their own differences (Gonzalez, Aiello, 2019).

In another study, Kiss and Linnell (2021) found that listening to music chosen (preferred) by the listener, increases focus on the task and decreases mind-wandering. Of course it is important to keep in mind that not all people (or not always) use music for background when they work or study since some individuals may find it too distracting (Gonzalez, Aiello, 2019). Nevertheless, each listener has their own reasons and choices for creating an enjoyable personal experience of active or passive music listening and these may differ from day to day.

3. Creative Music Listening and Extramusical Associations

There are quite a few different notions offered by researchers for creativity in the music listening context—from “creative cognition” (Deliège, 2006) to “creative music listening” (Brattico, Tervaniemi, 2006). Leman (1999, p. 285) explains that musical creativity “is not a property of musical products but of persons that are involved with musical information processing”. Generally the creative musical activities that first come to mind would be music composition, performance, and improvisation (perhaps, due to the natural association with creativity as a very complex and more advanced process), and even if we think of music listening in the creativity category, it may be at the end of the list. Research, on the other hand, suggests that music listening is indeed a creative activity. Regardless of whether listeners produce any musical sounds or not, they can also be considered as “music makers” since their musical perception is an important contribution to the overall experience of the musical piece, this form can be described as some sort of “music making” (Peterson, 2006).

Imagination, as suggested by Hargreaves (2012), is also an essential part of creative musical perception, not only in music listening but also in music production. On the other hand, music listening has a great potential to be used as a stimulus for enhancing creativity (including convergent and divergent thinking) in people in general or in different specific settings, according to Ritter and Ferguson (2017). The authors also conclude their study by stating that listening to “happy music” (that conveys a positive mood and high arousal) stimulates divergent thinking (but not convergent) as compared to silence condition (control).

When we address the creative factors in music listening, it is important to include listeners’ conscious choices and active engagement in the process. Researchers tend to emphasise the connectivity of “active” and “creative” components in music listening and explain that every listener creates their own “unique musical experience” (Kratus, 2017). There are different levels in engaging with music, such as listeners having different music listening styles and consciously using music in various situations to achieve certain emotional states (Hargreaves, Hargreaves, North, 2011). Creative processes can happen even if the listener is not the one to choose the musical material; based on the level of engagement with the musical piece, the listener can still experience extramusical associations. Neuroscientists Brattico and Tervaniemi (2006, p. 293) suggest that listening to music can be considered as “an act of creation when it involves, apart from auditory abilities, imaginative, representational, attentional and emotional behaviours in order for the listener to reach the composer’s meaning or to create their own”.

In general, *extramusical meaning* “relates music to non-musical concepts such as emotions, ideas, etc.” (Wright, 1975, p. 419). There is still not much research carried out that focuses on the notion, especially in the context of music listening, however, such interpretations, including emotion, visual imagery and general associations, seem to be quite common to experience: they are multifaceted processes that have different links amongst each other as well as with elements of the sociocultural environment (Varankaitė, 2021). In this paper the terms “extramusical associations” and “extramusical interpretations” are used interchangeably to define listeners’ subjective music-induced perceptions.

Emotion is one of the most common elements of music-induced experiences. Many individuals can perceive emotion as a natural outcome of listening to music (~96% of listeners; Varankaitė, 2021) and those perceived emotions can be either very clear, strong, ambiguous, or mixed at the same time (Varankaitė, 2021). Therefore, it is quite a subjective experience since emotions usually “cannot be explained only in terms of objectively defined stimuli: stimuli gain their *significance* from how they are processed by a particular individual in a particular context” (Juslin, Sloboda, 2013, p. 587). Furthermore, there are many terms that are related to emotions but there are distinctions (e.g., mood, feeling, arousal, etc.) that even in the literature can be used interchangeably and in doing so, create some confusion. Also, there is an important difference between *perception* and *arousal* of emotions. In the first case music conveys emotion that is recog-

nised by the listener, and in the second, music evokes emotion that is experienced by the listener (Juslin, 2009; Juslin, Sloboda, 2013).

Another and one of the most interesting extramusical aspects is music-evoked visual imagery which “refers to a process whereby a listener conjures up—either intentionally or unintentionally—visual images while listening to music” (Vuoskoski, Eerola, 2013, p. 263). In other words, in most music listening cases listeners can effortlessly process the audial stimulus and turn it into visual information inside their minds. According to a study by Küssner and Eerola (2019), 77% of their 500 survey respondents had experienced visual imagery at least once during music listening. The perceived visual imagery can take various forms, from very abstract, blurry and static images to colourful, complex, and dynamic stories, and they can be based on personal memories or imagination or be a mixture of both (Varankaitė, 2021). It is important to note that other media is an influential factor in creating mental images when listening to music since we are surrounded by various audiovisual works like short reels and longer videos on social media platforms, films, advertisements, video games, stage performances and other, to which we are used to some sort of image-to-music or music-to-image linking (Varankaitė, 2021).

After all, even if we perceive music listening as a personal experience, we can still usually find reflections of the sociocultural environment because, as seen from the semiotic perspective by Tagg (2012, p. 46), music is “extragen-eric”—“related to society”. This may explain why listeners can in some cases have similar extramusical associations although they may be hearing the piece for the first time, and why they can easily create visual stories in their minds when listening to music even if it is instrumental with no direct (or abstract) verbal cues (Varankaitė, 2021).

Extramusical associations serve as empirical confirmation that music is full of signs. We may consider music as one of the most subjective art forms, one that is not easily decoded since it contains abstract musical elements (especially if it is an instrumental piece with no hints of the actual story in lyrics), but also “we seem to agree that music signifies” (Tarasti, 2002, p. 65). As mentioned earlier, no listener needs to be musically trained to perceive or create their own meanings in music, and they can base their meanings not only on the general sound of the musical piece but also on the separate multimodal elements, such as melody, harmony, rhythm, instruments (timbre), tempo, etc. These aspects induce extramusical associations that may result in a multimodal form as well, and here we can look for specific links between musical and extramusical elements, that is, in Saussurean terms, analyse the *signifier* and the *signified*. In the context of extramusical experiences we usually look for the *connotative* signified—what is *associated* with the musical piece.

4. Inspiration and Self-Transcendence in Music Listening

One of the extramusical elements linked to emotion is inspiration which, in turn, can evoke a self-transcendent experience. Inspiration, as a psychological construct, according to Thrash and Elliot (2003) involves three main factors: it is evoked (not an act of will), it implies motivation (stimulation and direction of behaviour), and it involves transcendence (“inspiration orients one toward something that is more important than one’s usual concerns”; Thrash, Elliot, 2004, p. 957). Self-transcendence is defined as “experiences pertaining to universality and connectedness, moral virtue, and spirituality” (Oliver et al., 2018, p. 384). Furthermore, “self-transcendence arises as viewers, readers, and players recognise in themselves elements of shared humanity (beyond service or sacrifice for a particular cause or community) and the potential for moral beauty, humility, courage, and hope” (Oliver et al., 2018, p. 384). These notions imply that meaningful media (or, specifically, musical) experiences may involve focusing not (only) on oneself (encourage self-advancement; Chang, 2022) but feeling more connected to others or even inspired to make good-will actions in the real world. In this case for instance, people may experience an increased inspiration for active willingness to help others (Pizarro et al., 2021).

A study conducted in the United States showed that 90.5% of respondents felt moved, touched or inspired while listening to music, making this sonic form of art the number one media source for seeking inspiration (Raney et al., 2018). According to another study (Schäfer, Smukalla, Oelker, 2013), intense musical experiences (IMEs), described as altered states of consciousness and very strong feelings induced by music, help listeners achieve deeper realisations about their inner self, life goals and dreams, and can even encourage listeners to follow these in their daily life. Therefore, the authors suggested that, since the IMEs may have the potential to help people see the difference between their dreams and real life, perhaps it could be used as a prevention tool (in music therapy); in other words listeners may be inspired by IMEs to be more courageous, to follow their real desires, and to change their life for the better.

In their empirical study, Ji and colleagues (2019) tried to find and show empirical evidence for a clearer connection between inspirational effect and self-transcendent sources (especially music) and they investigated the influence of awe-eliciting music on inspiration as well as a set of positive well-being aspects. The authors concluded that there is a direct link between awe-eliciting music and aspects that define self-transcendent experiences. Furthermore, listening to such music boosts an inspirational state, motivates listeners to seek the meaning of life and to take pro-social actions.

It should be noted that although the terms of inspiration, meaningfulness and self-transcendence are different, some researchers seem to use them as synonyms (Chang, 2022). In addition, inspiration and eudaimonia tend to be used interchangeably (Ji, Janicke-Bowles, De Leeuw, Oliver, 2019), most likely because these notions seem highly intertwined.

Although self-transcendent experiences can indicate bigger and wider outer social aspects, media psychology seems to be more concentrated on the inner, individual aspects (Whaley, Sloboda, Gabrielsson, 2009). Regarding sociocultural influences that contribute to shaping listeners' musical perception and extramusical outcome, music-induced self-transcendent experiences are examples of the blurred margins between individual/personal/inner and social/cultural/outer experiences.

It is also important to bear in mind that the notion *meaningful media* does not apply to any specific media product or even a genre. According to a study by Oliver and colleagues (2018), people (viewers, listeners, readers or players) may have different preferences, tastes and/or levels of perception regarding one particular media product. Therefore, the authors propose a better term—*meaningful media experiences*—that involves the very important subjective interpretations of media consumers. In the musical context, the focus is not on the musical object as being meaningful but on the experience of music listening including listeners' perceptions. The aspect of finding meaningfulness in a chosen media work now seems like a personal preference, perhaps even without questioning what the author of the work meant by it. We can therefore consider that the perception of the listener (or viewer, depending on the chosen media format) can be more important in the whole “meaningfulness” experience. As the listener is a participant in a musical process, “he must, in a sense, create his own experience, yet he need not take the attitude of the composer in order to do so” (Meyer, 1956, p. 41).

5. Empirical Study in Lithuania: Media Usage, Music Listening and Inspiration

To look at Lithuanian tendencies in music-induced inspiration, a study was conducted with 70 listeners in 2024. It was designed to explore the following main research questions within the Lithuanian context: (a) Which media forms are seen as most inspiring? (b) Is music amongst them? (c) Which music genres do listeners find most inspiring? (d) What are the main music-induced inspirational outcomes? and (e) What musical pieces and/or their elements induce specific inspirational aspects (signifier-signified links)?

The study was based on an anonymous online survey in the Lithuanian language consisting of mostly multiple-choice, some single-choice and open-ended questions. All closed questions had an additional option *other* which could be specified by respondents if needed. In most cases the participants were asked to choose between one and three options, although in one question (on preferred musical genres) they were given between two to five options, and in another one (about music-induced inspirational outcome)—all possible options (including “other”). The first section of the survey was modelled to look at Lithuanians' general media usage and preferences (four questions), the second section focused on their music listening habits and preferences (four questions), and the third

section was about music-induced inspiration (five questions). The final section consisted of seven demographic questions.

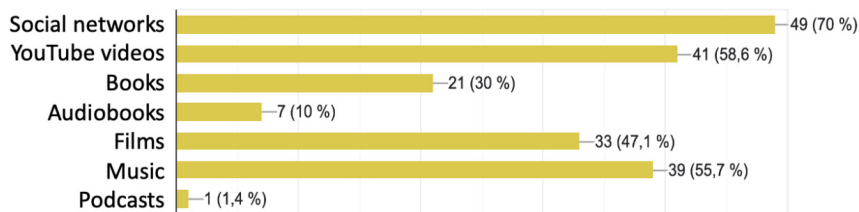
The respondents were specifically Lithuanians who reside in Lithuania (mostly from the two biggest cities, Kaunas, 68,6%, and Vilnius, 20%), their age was 18 and above (21–35 year olds was the biggest age group taking 41,4%; almost a quarter of all participants (24,3%) were 36–45 year olds; and the 66+ group was one of the smallest, 7,1%); women represented 77.1% of the respondents, and men represented 22,9%. Regarding participants' education levels, the largest group of 42,9% represented those with a master's degree, while 27.1% had a bachelor's degree, and 11,4% were PhDs. Overall, the respondents were highly educated although this is not very surprising as Lithuanians in general are amongst the most academically educated Europeans (State Data Agency, 2023).

Participants with no musical training totalled 44,3%, a quarter were amateur musicians, and a small percentage of the respondents could be considered music professionals. Of all respondents, 54,3% play one or more musical instruments (or sing—55,3%), amongst which the most popular were: piano/keyboard (71,1%), guitar (39,5%), violin (21,1%) and accordion (13,2%).

The first questions of the survey were not focused on music specifically, the interest was to first look at the bigger picture: what kind of tendencies can be found in media usage in Lithuania, and whether music is really the most inspiring media as it was in the previous studies from other countries. To answer the first question participants could choose one to three options to specify media formats for which they dedicate most of their time. As seen in Figure 1, most time is spent on social networks (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), YouTube videos, music and films. The same tendency is found across all participant groups no matter their age, gender, general or musical education, or even location of residence.

Figure 1

Media Forms on Which Participants Spend Most of Their Time



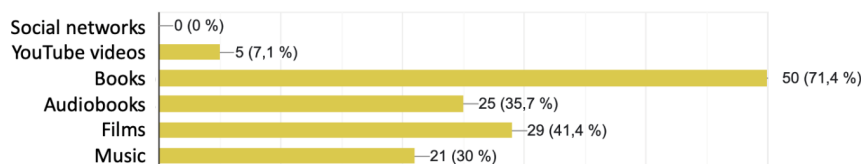
Note. Source: author's own elaboration.

It is probably no surprise that nowadays social networks take up most of people's time. However, the respondents did not express any interest in dedicating more time to it (see Figure 2), instead they wished to spend more time on books (71,4%), films (41,4%), audiobooks (35,7%) and music (30%). Interestingly, professional musicians mainly chose books and audiobooks, and did not tick

music at all, perhaps due to being surrounded by music not only in the context of leisure but also work. Generally, we can see that respondents' answers for this question represent some sort of counterbalance to the previous question on what they already spend their time on.

Figure 2

Media Forms on Which Participants Would Like to Spend More Time

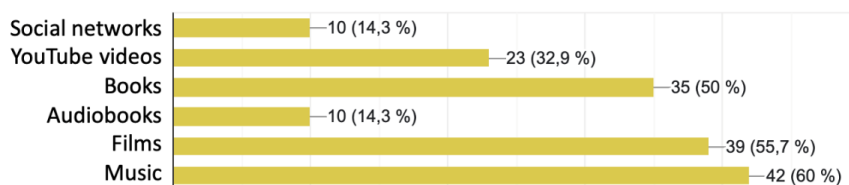


Note. Source: author's own elaboration.

As mentioned previously, research shows that music was found to be the most inspiring media form (Raney et al., 2018), and this is confirmed in this study (see Figure 3). After music, films and books seem to be amongst the most inspiring media forms for the Lithuanian participants.

Figure 3

Media Forms That Participants Find Most Inspiring



Note. Source: author's own elaboration.

Before moving straight to the results on music-induced inspiration, it is important to provide a brief overview of what the general music listening habits of the Lithuanian participants are based on. As can be seen in Table 2, the respondents tend to choose YouTube and Spotify as the main platforms for music listening as well as radio and, interestingly, in third place and even above radio we see attendance at live concerts (based on multiple-choice, one to three options, answers).

Table 2*Music Listening Patterns in Lithuania and IFPI Data*

	Lithuanian Respondents' Answers	IFPI Data
Most popular ways of listening to music	YouTube (62,9%) Spotify (50%) Live concerts (48,6%) Radio (41,4%)	Audio streaming (32%) Video streaming (31%) Radio (17%)
Most popular genres	Pop (71,4%) Classical (57,1%) Rock (37,1%) Jazz (37,1%) Film music (35,7%)	Pop Rock Hip-hop/Rap EDM Latin
Time spent on music listening	6 h and more/day (5,7%)	Avg. of 20,7 h/week (~ 2 hours and 57 minutes per day)
	3–5 h/day (4 h/day on avg.; 21,4%)	
	1–2 h/day (90 min/day on avg.; 22,9%)	
	4–6 h/week (~ 43 min/day on avg.; 21,4%)	
	1–3 h/week (~ 17 min/day on avg.; 24,3%)	

Note. Generalized data of the respondents' answers regarding everyday music listening and comparison with global data according to the report by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI, 2023).

The most popular genre is pop (based on multiple-choice, two to five options, answers), which coincides with the global data of IFPI (2023), and then the genres or their popularity ratings tend to differ: in second place is classical music (versus rock, according to the IFPI data), third is rock (IFPI—hip-hop/rap), jazz is fourth (IFPI—electronic dance music, EDM), and fifth place reveals that some Lithuanian listeners enjoy film music soundtracks (IFPI—Latin).

The average time spent for music listening globally is 20,7 hours per week (IFPI, 2023), which is approximately 20 hours and 42 minutes, or ~two hours and 57 minutes per day. Almost a quarter (24,3%) of the Lithuanian respondents spend only one to three hours per week (~17 minutes per day on average) for

music listening, 22,9% dedicate an average of ~ one and a half hours per day, 21,4% spend around four hours per day and another 21,4%—43 minutes per day on average, and only 5,7% seem to be real music lovers dedicating six or more hours per day for this activity (based on single-choice answers).

6. Respondents' Perception of Music-Induced Inspiration and Self-Transcendence

After providing a brief overview of the general music listening habits of Lithuanian listeners, the focus can now shift to more specific sources of music-induced inspiration and its effects on the listener as a tangible real-world outcome. Although most of the respondents were able to specify those aspects, one listener (non-musician) claimed that she is not inspired by music and there is no emotional influence.

According to the survey, classical music seems to be the most inspiring genre, equally for both musicians and non-musicians. However, it is not for the youngest group of participants (18–25)—none of them mentioned the genre as inspiring, and in fact, it appeared that the older the listeners, the bigger the inspiration and appreciation of the genre. One of the reasons why classical music seems inspiring is explained by a participant (amateur musician): “the sensuality of classical music arising from the multilayered movement of [different] pitches”.

Another inspiring genre specified by the participants is film music (soundtracks), equally across all participant groups (age, gender, musicians and non-musicians). Usually, this genre is considered to be inspiring in general, especially soundtracks with the big, wide, “epic” sound (according to personal discussions with students and even descriptions of musical playlists published on YouTube). One listener (amateur musician) describes their perception on music-induced inspiration: “I think that in all cases, the musical dramaturgical material is extremely important (especially in the case of film soundtracks), texture, ranges of selected instruments, timbres, if the work has words (text)—this is undoubtedly an extremely important component, which greatly affects the possibilities of musical interpretation and the associations that arise, related to or inspired by a specific work”. The last three most inspiring music genres are pop, rock and jazz (based on multiple-choice, one to three options, answers). Interestingly, the rankings of the top five most-listened-to music genres (see Table 2) do not coincide with the top five of the most-inspiring music, although the same five genres are found in both lists.

Table 3*Generalized Data of the Respondents' Answers Regarding Music-Induced Inspiration*

Most inspiring music genres	Classical (52,9%) Film music (41,4%) Pop (38,6%) Rock (27,1%) Jazz (25,7%)
Most inspiring music	J. S. Bach, W. A. Mozart, H. Zimmer, J. Hisaishi
	“The piece does not matter, the most important is the sound of piano”
	“No specific piece, depends on the mood”
Music-induced inspirational out-come	Helps to feel good/better (91,4%) Encourages dreaming (74,3%) Brings creative ideas (54,3%) Helps to concentrate (34,3%) Gives courage when making an important decision (32,9%) Encourages to help others (25,7%)

Based on the answers to the open-ended question, the respondents specified many and different musical pieces which they personally find inspiring, meaning no specific tendencies can be seen here (although, a few specific music authors were mentioned by a few participants: classical music composers Bach and Mozart, and contemporary film music composers Hans Zimmer and Joe Hisaishi). For some listeners inspiration is not found in a particular piece, it is more about the sound or some specific musical elements, and for others it just depends on their mood at that moment. It seems that in general it is not about genres—listeners tend to base their inspirational experiences mainly on particular sound qualities.

Some music-induced inspirational outcomes resulted in very high percentages of the respondents (the question was multiple-choice with all the possible options). Music helping to feel good was indicated by 91,4% of the participants, and this aspect once again confirms music being used for emotional reasons, specifically emotional regulation. Almost three quarters (74,3%) agree that music fosters (day)dreaming (which usually involves visual imagery), more than half (54,3%) of the participants claim that music can help bring about creative ideas, and over a third (34,3%) say that music helps them to concentrate. Two perhaps

more tangible and interesting music-evoked inspirational outcomes may be the following: music giving courage when making an important life decision (32,9%) and music encouraging to help others (25,7%). According to the results of this survey, music really seems to be a powerful tool for inspiration that may bring positive results or real-life changes to listeners.

Looking at some more comprehensive extramusical descriptions on musical inspiration provided by the respondents, some signifier-signified links could be found. Specifically, links between the musical aspect (signifier) and the inspirational reason (or general feeling of inspiration; signified). Excerpts of the respondents' descriptions are demonstrated below with signifiers being underlined and signifieds presented in bold:

- “Listening to loud rock makes you **want to drive more aggressively**”;
- “Words are the most **inspiring** because I pay a lot of attention to words and how they are used. Also the artist's voice, because it best conveys the emotion and context of the words”;
- “Rhythm and tempo may coincide with the rhythm of the activity I am doing, so music helps me to **return to myself, to calm down**. Words are also important to me, they are so sincere, they remind me of this value (**sincerity**)”;
- “The sounds of individual musical instruments, piano, electric guitar, drums are **inspiring**. For me, these are the most beautiful sounds, when needed they **help to relax**, sometimes they **excite**”;
- “Energetic elements of music **inspire me not to be lazy to work and to take the extra step** in work”;
- “*Kamanių šilėlis*, the fact that they sing in Lithuanian **resonates** a lot, the song of these artists and in general the whole creation helps to **sink somewhere deep into the heart and bring the feelings that are so deeply locked to the outside through sincerity, gentle but strong vocals and the sounds of music that accompany the whole thing like a meditation, a journey to yourself**”.

These extramusical descriptions show that listeners have quite different preferences for musical elements to be meaningful and to induce some kind of inspiration which also seems to be specific in many cases. From specific elements to whole musical pieces as signifiers and from instantaneous mood regulations to possible actions or deep philosophical insights as signifieds. Again, it seems to be more about particular sound qualities rather than music genres, although the first example identifies a genre—rock (with its specific set of sound qualities).

When the survey was conducted, there was no focus on self-transcendence, therefore there were no specific questions presented to the listeners, although some examples of self-transcendent experiences naturally emerged from their detailed answers. This again suggests the link between inspiration and self-

transcendence. Here are the descriptions of individual extramusical and self-transcendent experiences shared by the respondents:

- “Music is the basis of everything, **connection with the universe is through music**”;
- “You are just walking down the street, listening to music, the sun is shining, people are smiling and boom!—there is such a great feeling. I am **surrounded by some global warm tenderness, but at the same time I surround others with this feeling**”;
- “There have been some very interesting synchronisations when an answer was needed and it seemed to come from music, merging with the events of the moment through sounds and lyrics. When drawing, the **music takes you into [outer] space** and that space is absorbed into the canvas”;
- “When musical sounds **evoke associations with my own internal state and the environment**”.

These extramusical examples—even if only a few—reveal rather deep insights: a sense of globality, as well as looking internally into oneself but at the same time connecting with surroundings, and again we can see the ambiguous verge of personal and sociocultural realms. The example of music that “takes you into [outer] space” hints at an evoked visual imagery which, in this case, manifests itself as a painting on the listener’s canvas.

7. Conclusions

Due to modern digital-technological possibilities, music has never been more accessible and with the average number of music listening hours growing each year, it shows that this activity is becoming more and more important in people’s lives. The main purpose is not (only) leisure: there are many different personal choices and reasons for music listening including using music as a background for cognitive or physical activities, relaxation, seeking motivation or inspiration, and even experiencing self-transcendence. Compared to other media, music is the most used source for seeking such elevated states, especially inspiration.

Active music listening is a creative activity, and choices made by the listener in the process of music listening are also considered creative since each listener creates a unique music listening experience for themselves. Furthermore, active music listening usually evokes extramusical associations that almost always include emotion and visual imagery, as well as resulting in inspirational states and self-transcendence. Meaningfulness is mainly established by the listener individually, therefore this empirical study also showed that there were many different musical pieces (or authors, or sound, or elements in music) specified as inspiring by the respondents. In fact, the most inspiring musical aspects seem to be not genres or musical pieces but various particular sound qualities. A music-

evoked inspirational state regulates emotion (elevates), helps to concentrate, brings creative ideas to the fore, and may lead to real-life actions (pro-social). It may also result in self-transcendence which reflects or even boosts feelings of connectedness to other people, nature, humanity, etc.

The listeners' sociocultural environment is often reflected in their musical experience and perception. It is without doubt that people naturally consider music as a social and collective experience in cases like concerts where all listeners together are immersed in the same musical adventure. However, at the same time they may also have very personal experiences while they all are physically in the same social setting. Therefore, the creative process of music listening is somewhere in between the individual/personal/inner and social/cultural/outer perspectives which may intertwine in many different points. It seems that the clear distinction cannot be identified especially when we take into account extramusical responses, inspirational and self-transcendent experiences.

A more in-depth qualitative study would be beneficial to look at more specific aspects that listeners provide (and possibly explain) as meaningful and important details of their extramusical interpretations, helping to better understand their perception of music-induced inspiration and self-transcendence.

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