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# **Field Project:**

## **Music Preferences**

### **for Sexual Interaction**

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## Table of Content

1	Introduction .....	1
2	Music and Emotion – Perception of Music .....	3
3	Methodology .....	6
4	Design of Questionnaire and Results.....	9
	4.1 Listening Strategies.....	19
5	Conclusion .....	21
6	Bibliography .....	24
7	Appendices .....	26
	7.1 Questionnaire	
	7.2 CD	

# Music Preferences for Sexual Interaction

## 1 Introduction

*"People listen to music while working, talking, eating, engaging in sexual intercourse... What music does to people at different times, why they choose to listen to it so much, why they choose a particular type of music while engaged in a particular activity - all of these are important and unanswered questions"*

(Konecni 1982 cited in Hargreaves and North 1997b, p. 93).

As Hargreaves and North in the Introduction to their book The Social Psychology of Music (1997a, p. 1) state, *"music has many different functions in human life, nearly all of which are essential social."* Especially in the last 45 years with the growth of the mass media and the music industry, music has become available to a large number of people in the worlds population. *"Music takes up a larger proportion of everyday lives of ordinary people then ever before"* (ibid). And with the increase of time that people spend listening consciously or unconsciously to music, the uses of music have changed and are more manifold then before. Music is not 'only' a source for quite intellectual entertainment like a night out to the National Concert Hall, music is literally part of nearly every daily life situation, such as shopping, dining, working etc., and as we shall see, sexual interaction.

Most of the surveys on music and perception, or music and behaviour have been mainly undertaken in marketing. Hence, these surveys are mostly concerned with music in public spaces as in daily life music, but not private or personal music - not music people that actually choose to listen to, but music that people are made to listen to.

For example Hargreaves and North are interested in music and its daily life perception. They have performed several surveys on audience responses to music in daily life and seem to be the precursors within the different methodologies of how one needs to scrutinize such issues without manipulation or influencing results (Hargreaves and North 1997b).

Some of Konecni's 'unanswered questions', why people listen to certain musics in particular situations may be answered by now, but I did not find any case study on musical preferences for sexual interaction. Furthermore have not encountered any such writings in Ethnomusicology nor Anthropology that deals with both, music and sexual interaction. There are writings in Anthropology on gender issues that indeed include sexual experiences, but do not take account of music (e.g. Kulick and Willson, eds. 1995). There is however an interesting study done on *Visually Evoked Sexual Arousal in Human Males* by Stoléru et. al. (1999), but in order for Stoléru to get clear results these showed visuals were shown in silence. Therefore, the soundtrack obviously did not play any role to Stoléru's studies. A few other studies were conducted on sex and arousal in music videos, but again, none of these were concerned about the relationship of actual sound and sexual activities (e.g. Hall Hansen and Krygowsky 1994 or Andsager and Kimberly 2003). Also I did not find any similar study on musical evoked sexual arousal.

Therefore, the aim of this field project is to investigate what music people prefer to listen to during sexual interaction. Seen that musical taste is too complex to encounter in this project, I am interested in the general parameters that can be found in music of many different styles.

As there are a lot of different issues that need to be considered in a survey like this, many questions arise - how much impact does music on mood or emotions have? And more importantly, are people are consciously aware of these stimuli? These questions will be addressed in chapter 2, p. 3 of this essay. Chapter 3 will address some questions in relations to methodology – for example, how one can generally conduct a survey on arousal of music that stays as objective as possible and is this possible in a study on such a private and personal part of people's daily life as sexual interaction? I will then explain the design of the questionnaire I used

for this field project and evaluate the results in chapter 4, p. 9. Finally I will draw my conclusions in chapter 5.

## 2 Music and Emotion – Perception of Music

A major assumption for this field project is that music actually can impact – increase or lower – the mood people are in. Therefore first of all some literature and surveys on music and emotion, or perception of music, needs to be reviewed. As various studies and experiments show, music is able to induce various moods, such as feeling love, warm, serious, sad etc.

Music and the Brain, edited by C. MacDonald and R. A. Henson (1977), features an article on *Music, Emotion and Autonomic Function* by G. and H. Harrer. The article discusses how music affects people and causes similar body reactions in the same way as our emotions do, such as cardiovascular, respiratory and galvanic reactions. Depending on the subject's background, not every piece of music has the same impact on each individual. However, certain sections of music that changes body reactions of an individual subject are mostly the same sections, which the subject points out consciously after listening to the music as being most emotional. Therefore, music does not only cause the same body reactions, but can actually cause real emotional feelings. The article also says that music can lead to *"autonomic reactions although the sounds are not consciously perceived, for example in sleep with 'background' music" or in film music etc.* (Harrer and Harrer 1997, p. 203). While G. and H. Harrer based their experiments on music previously unknown to the subjects, Anne J. Blood and Robert J. Zatorre used music known by the subjects in their experiment on *"intensely pleasurable responses to music..."* as music preference is highly individual, and therefore *"subject selected music was the most reliable way to produce intense emotional responses"* (Blood and Zatorre 2001). The music people listen to in this field project is also music that they know

personally and often the chosen music may be of high emotional importance to them. The settings of Blood and Zatorre's experiments therefore are a bit closer to this survey. The difference here is that where Bloods and Zatorre's subjects were asked to listen music consciously (i.e. classical music only), the subjects of my survey relate to the music while having sex as background, and therefore pay much less attention to the music that is being played in general. In other words, in the private situation of sexual intercourse music stays (as the replies will show) generally more in the background, otherwise it is often perceived as too distracting, and is only sometimes but less often classical. Blood and Zatorre also measured that music induces shivers and chills when being played to the subjects. The subject's personal ratings of the emotional intensity and pleasantness were higher than the measured shivers and chills, *"suggesting that pleasantness and emotional intensity must reach a certain level before chills are experienced"* (ibid, p. 11820). Their survey reinforces the fact that music does have high emotional impact.

Interesting studies of Konecni in 1982 show, that people choose music to achieve an optimal level of arousal or mood. For example in surveys *"subjects preferred to listen to arousing music whilst exercising and relatively unarousing music whilst relaxing"* (Hargreaves and North 1997b, p. 96). Also the level of arousal of listeners in highly arousing situations seems to be reducing when listening to more moderate music in terms of complexity and volume.

*"The chosen music [i.e. any chosen music] reflects an attempt to bring about an optimal moderate level of arousal, and to compensate for any excessive demands of the listening situation"* (ibid, p. 94). This is of importance for my survey, as we will see that this is also the case for the overall music choice for sexual interaction. Thus, the question is what sort of arousal and mood are people looking for when having sex and does the choice of music style have any parallels to the desired

mood? Arousal is of course only one of many factors that impacts musical preferences. Others are for example the appropriateness of music for a given situation, taste etc. And also

*"...other cognitive factors may mediate any underlying effects of arousal-based goals on musical appropriateness: parties and making love might both induce similarly high levels of arousal, but would be accompanied by quite different choices of music."*

(Ibid, p. 96)

Ray W. Crozier (1997) reviews empirical studies that have been done by Bruner (1990) on affective responses to music. Bruner offered generalisations about the musical qualities that induce different moods. Summarized he classifies five main 'moods' which apparently can be induced by certain musical qualities:

1. *"Excitement/exhilaration is produced by music in the major mode - that is fast, of medium pitch, uneven rhythm, dissonant harmony, and loud volume."*
2. *"Tranquillity/peacefulness is produced by music in the major mode, slow tempo, medium pitch, flowing rhythm, consonant harmony, soft volume."*
3. *"Happiness/Joyfulness is induced by the major mode, fast tempo, high pitch, flowing rhythm, consonant harmony and medium volume."*
4. *"Serious is music in major mode, slow with low pitch, firm rhythm, consonant harmony, and medium volume."*
5. *"Sadness is produced by the minor mode, slow tempo, low pitch, firm rhythm, and dissonant harmony."*

(Ibid, p. 74)

Interesting for this project is, what kind of mood people are in when they are having sex. Hopefully in every case of sexual interaction the involved partners are 'excited', 'peaceful' and 'happy' – supposingly, the music that is particularly picked for these situations is a mixture of the first three named moods and therefore incorporates various characteristics of all the three. At the end of this project we probably wont be able to make general statements about the volume of music, since the questionnaire is not concerned with loudness of music. Maybe at the end of this essay I can relate the findings to this Bruner-Crozier list. I do however doubt that such a complex thing as mood can be broken down into a list of five main moods so easily. In daily life, not just during sexual interaction, it seems to me that there are constant overlappings within the five *"main moods"* mentioned.

Other readings that initially sounded promising unfortunately did not reveal anything of interest to this study. For example, *The Relationship between Music and Sex* by Nicholas R. Kahler (2006) investigates if a person's musical taste or preference would have any relationship with the age at which that person became sexually active – which it does not at the end.

My doubts at first if this field project can be taken seriously - were due to the fact that, when I mentioned this idea to my friends and colleagues they reacted enthusiastically. A lot of people offered to participate as an interview subject straight away. However, this topic causes some methodological difficulties, which I will encounter in the next chapter.

### 3 Methodology

As Ray W. Crozier (1997, p. 7) states, studies “show that musical preferences are subject to social influence”, but also that personal and social identity are not always the same. Subjects belonging to a certain group or society will state in a more public environment rather what they are supposed to think and like about their musical preferences and other values. Subjects tend to go with what the majority would say and what they are expected to state, when they are questioned within their public social environment. But these values and preferences might be quite different from what the same subjects would say in a personal and private environment (Finnäs 1987 cited in *ibid*, p. 71).

*“Personal identity refers to an individual's unique qualities, values, and attributes, and reflects his or her personal history, whereas social identity refers to the social categories to which people belong, aspire to belong, or share important values with.”*  
(*ibid*)

It is therefore crucial to establish the right surrounding or situation in which the subjects are questioned or scrutinized. In relation to my field project this is a very important consideration. Asking people about their musical preferences for sexual



interferences means asking them about an extremely personal and very private part of their life. Many people don't feel very confident to give an account on this topic. One initial idea in order to make it easier for the subjects to report about this personal issue was to invite all of them to a coffee afternoon. In doing so, they might have talked to each other about the questions and perhaps have had a laugh, which might have made them feel less awkward when answering.

However, within the coffee scenario the subjects might have actually written more as oppose to writing less when confronted on a one to one basis, but these answers may have been much less reliable. For example, the subjects may have influenced each other not only in the amount of words but also in the content of their answers. And although this topic is so entirely private, subjects are still influenced a lot by media. In conversation with several people about this field project, (before the questionnaires where handed out,) many said spontaneously *"Barry White is real bed music."* In the questionnaires however, none of the subjects mentioned Barry White at all. In the situation of a coffee afternoon, if only one had come up with this suggestion, probably a lot of other subjects would have written down the same.

In order to construct questionnaires I began reading Asking Questions by Seymour Sudman (1982) and was surprised by the openness and directness of various questions asked in relation to people's sexual habits and even more surprised about the answers the subjects gave (Sudman 1982, p. 68-71). Only a few people stated that they found some questions offending and would not answer them, whereas most of the subjects answered them, as it seems, honestly and very openly. However, unlike the subjects in Asking Questions I wont have access to 'neutral', or better 'anonymous' subjects, instead I will know most of them well enough. The problem here is that certain subjects may be hesitant to answer truthfully as they will know the interviewer and may be slightly embarrassed.

Therefore, my initial idea was to question everybody personally in confidence, so that I would be able to adjust questions or dig into answers if necessary. This appeared to be very fruitful in the first few interviews I conducted, but was unfortunately time-wise impossible to maintain. Instead I decided to send out the questionnaire per e-mail as a Microsoft Word form that is normally easy to handle and compatible for everybody. I also handed the questionnaire in printed form to a few people. In cases when answers were unclear, I could still get back to the subject and ask him or her to explain the statement.

I kept the questionnaire as short and easy as possible, in order not to frustrate the respondents. The questionnaire could be filled in within 10-15 minutes, leaving enough time for considering the answers. I used open questions (as opposed to closed questions, which may have restricted the subjects to pre-printed answers of my personal choice and may have been very manipulating and might not have necessarily suited everybody's ideas) so that the respondent could answer in his/her own words, which I found extremely important for the topic of this study in order to stay as objective possible.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to the questionnaire I also used field notes. The project will basically rely on informant's experiences and their subjective account of them. I tried to note everything of interest that was said in conversations related to this field project (Barz and Cooley 1997). Obviously such an inquiry is doomed to become body of tête-à-tête, which is good because sometimes, spontaneous statements can reveal a lot that stays hidden in the questionnaires – the mentioning of Barry White is such an example.

The subjects that were asked to fill in the questionnaires are basically all part of a similar cultural environment. They all have higher education; nearly all of them are quite musically trained and play instruments or have learnt instruments in their

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<sup>1</sup> Some guidance to the construction of questionnaires: Anonymous: *Survey Questionnaire Construction*. <http://www.tele.sunyit.edu/TEL598sur.html>. Accessed: 20/10/2006 and Hague 1993.

childhood. The age group is 20-35. Some are professional musicians or musicologists, for others music and playing music plays a high role in their extra-curriculum life. Consequently the study is not representative for the whole age group but represents a certain group with a musical background.

#### 4 Design of Questionnaire and Results

The first section gathers some important statistical data that is basically self-explanatory. There are certain things in the background of a subject that might have impact on the answers to the questions and therefore these questions need to be asked.

1)<sup>2</sup> Sex/Gender is always the first main difference between subjects to think of. In this context it will be interesting to see, if male subjects tend to reply differently from female subjects. In total 25 questionnaires were returned, of which 10 by male and 15 by female subjects.

2) Obviously interesting for this project is sexuality. Unfortunately I did not get any replies from homosexual people, although they number about 5 – 10 % of the population. But if 5 – 10 % of the subjects that reply would be gay, within the size of this project that would still only be 1 or 2 subjects. Any relevant evaluation regarding the sexuality therefore can only be done on a bigger scale.

3) Since the music that was popular 20 years ago is different from today's mainstream style and people's habits change when they get older, of course age is important. For this project I only questioned subjects from 20-35 years old. Firstly because I felt that this age bracket speak more openly about their sexual experiences and feelings and secondly this age brackets tends to have the same interest in music. The average age of the male subjects is 27, and of the female subjects 25 years old.

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<sup>2</sup> The numbers indicate to what question of the questionnaire the paragraphs are related. I have included the questionnaire to the appendix of this essay.

4) Nationality and also question 6 ("*Where are you living?*") are important, because the cultural background of the area that people are living in can be totally different, and as we have seen in chapter 3 on Methodology, p. 6, the social-cultural background of a subject has quite some impact on their musical preferences. My subjects are of quite a variety of nationalities. Three Irish, five German and two Swiss men replied, most of them living in their home country. On the female side I got replies from one Belgium, one Dutch, four Irish, seven German, two British and one Italian woman. Seven of the fifteen subjects live in Ireland (Irish/Dutch/German/British), the Italian woman lives in Austria, and the other seven subjects live in their home country. That means that nationality-wise we are not speaking of a homogeneous group of just e.g. Irish people, instead we are dealing with a mixed group of people of different cultural environments, within Europe. Although not asked in the questionnaire, I know that all the subjects are higher educated and are currently in their postgraduate studies or have just finished them.

5) The marital status is of importance, as people in a relationship or marriage have a different sex life than those who are single. I counted marriage and relationship together. At the time of the questionnaire the male subjects were equally divided into 5 singles and 5 men in relationships. 11 women were in relationships and 4 were singles.

#### Questions about the musical background, 7 to 10:

These questions are important, because the replies of none-musically-trained people might be entirely different then the replies of musically trained people. People with a musical background find it probably much easier to write about music, to name certain characteristics for example. In what form the perception of music is affected will be discussed in chapter 4.1 on *listening strategies*, p. 19. The

judgement if one considers oneself being a musical person is very subjective, therefore I did not want to stick to that one question. With the next questions I wanted to get a picture of how musical the people really are. Some people are certainly musical, but not necessarily trained as studying music in college or so. Apart from one male subject everybody considers himself or herself as being musical. The subject, who apparently is non-musical, is literally not concerned about music at all, states that he does not listen to music regularly nor goes to concerts. This is very different from all the other subjects, for which music is a very important part of daily life.

8) The average age of learning a first instrument or starting with musical education of the men is 6.6 years old, the women started slightly younger with 5.9 years of age. The majority of the subjects attend concerts more or less regularly.

9-10) Questions 9 and 10 were to find out about the overall musical taste and the replies are of a very wide range. In general it shows that the men tend to listen more to 'harder' music, styles that were stated are *"industrial metal"*, *"rock"*, *"punk"*, *"alternative" / "indie"*, *"rhythm and blues"*, *"ska"* and *"electric music"*.

Four of them also stated that they listen to all sorts of music including classical. The majority of women did not restrict themselves to one particular style, eight stated that they would listen to *"all sorts"* of music, also *"jazz"* and *"world"-music*, *"pop"*, *"rock"*, *"hip-hop"* and *"[Belgian] folk"* music were named. Four of the female subjects solely like classical music; in total 12 of the 15 women listen regularly to classical music. Two subjects do not attend concerts but listen to music frequently at home. Apparently the female-subjects in this field project generally are more open to classical music, while they contrary to the men are not too fond of 'harder' music.

Questions about your musical preferences for sexual interaction:

11) If people never listen to music when they are having sex, it is impossible to find out their musical preferences for sexual interaction. I must admit, that I did not expect anybody to reply both questions in 11 with “NO”. If I would carry out more studies on this topic, I would certainly take this more into account. However, people who don’t listen to music in bed are actually not really of interest for this particular project, because the whole point is to find out what musical preferences are of people who do listen to music when having sex. The question why some people do not listen to music when having sex is part of the chapter on listening strategies, p. 19. From the ten men questioned, nine of them do normally listen to music when having sex. The one who does not is the apparently non-musical subject. From the fifteen women questioned, eleven do listen to music when having sex; four normally do not but have listened to music while having sex sometimes. Three of the latter four generally listen more to classical music; and all these four are musicologists. One of them says that she does not listen to music when having sex, but in the same time picks the music especially (see question 12), which seems a contradictive statement to me.

12) If people don’t pick the music for the situation but just listen to what is in the CD player that might not necessarily be their first choice music for sexual interactions. Therefore I need to evaluate if people are concerned about the music in bed or not. Nine of the women pick the music especially, one does sometimes, four just listen to whatever is in the CD player and one stated “*neither*”.

Of the men, four normally pick music especially, while the five others go with whatever is playing. Some of them made it clear, that they don’t want to “*spoil the situation*” with interrupting the scene to select suitable music, but they would change certain unsuitable musics if they happened to be in the CD player.

Questions 13 to 15 are concerned with the qualities and characteristics people are looking for in the music for sexual interaction. I am not interested in any particular bands or singers in the first place, although this is asked in question 14.

But some people find it difficult to describe or name styles, which is the object of question 13. They might find it easier to name e.g. a band that they consider to be good music for sexual interaction, while I then can evaluate what style this band is. Other people do not want to pick a particular band or singer – they prefer to reply with general statements about the music. And yes – some people did leave either the one question out or the other. Also these questions are very much depended on the personal taste of the subject. What I will try to evaluate is if the different musics named share general parameters, for example more 'rhythmical' or 'slow', 'soft' etc. These parameters can be found in every style; classical music can be as hard or as sensual, as Rock music can be – Hard Rock or Soft Rock and Rock Ballads for example. In the sub-question to question 14 I tried to pin the subjects down to clarify what the important characteristics of the music they just named are.

13) The women answered the following to question 13:

- *quite and soft*
- *romantic*
- *slow, folky/pop acoustic music*
- *soft ballads, jazz piano*
- *soft/slow guitar rock*
- *sensual instrumental Jazz/World Music or sensual soft rock/pop, lounge music*

- four subjects stated "*classical music*", five provided no answer. This shows how difficult it is to name a certain style, as very often the reply reveals a characteristic of the preferred music rather than a particular style. The replies of the male subjects are comparable un-concrete, and also similar is that four of the men did not provide any answer to this question:

- *in general smooth, calm music*
- *mostly chill-out, atmospheric or relaxed music, in some situations also various 'harder' electronic music*
- *Rythm and Blues i.e. HipHop*
- *Soft / Jazz / Blues / Folk*
- *rock or dance (nothing really heavy)*
- *There are certain styles I would probably change if we were about have sex and it was already playing, such as metal, or anything too experimental. It might freak the girl out.*

14) As expected and implied, the replies to question 14 ("Can you name a particular singer, band or album/compilation that you like most when having sex?") are more concrete in contrary to the previous question. Again four women did not reply anything. The other replies are of a wide variety:

- *[German] Compilation: 'Kuschelrock' [Rock to cuddle, romantic rock]*
- *Charlotte Gainsbourg*
- *Alexi Murdoch, Norah Jones, Joni Mitchel*
- *Diana Krall (the look of love), Keith Jarett (a melody at night with you)*
- *George Michael, Divine Comedy; something gentle, musical and unobtrusive*
- *Goldfrapp, Morcheeba*
- *Portishead, Madrugá, Smashing Pumpkins: adore*
- *Norah Jones, Morcheeba, Moby, Air*
- *Bach*
- *Bolero (Ravel), but I've never tried it*
- *[...] Chamber music / orchestral music. – Maybe Ravel / Franck / Debussy Chamber music album.*

On the men's side only the 'non-musical' person did not provide an answer to this question:

- *Depends on my current mood. I like Nick Cave's "no more shall we part" but actually Manowar is not too bad either. And, of course, nine inch nails.*
- *John frusciante, REM*
- *The Corrs/ Air/ Patent Ochsner*
- *Café del Mar, REM, moby*
- *Arrested Development*
- *No, depends on mood and partner*
- *Everyone likes the Barry White and Lionel Ritchie, but I think that's just a bit stereotypical. I like music that is soft i suppose. Bands like Air or Sigur Ros come to mind. Definitely not the Pixies. Even though they're my favourite band.*
- *Norah Jones*
- *Jeff Buckley's Grace or Cocteau Twins*



Mostly the replies correlate to the subjects' answers on their musical taste and the previous question. What comes out of both questions is that the subjects generally look for a somewhat calm, soft and slower music, regardless of the taste and style. There also seems to be not a great overall difference between men and women, only that none of the male subjects thinks of classical music at all. With the number of subjects that can be coincidental.

Sub-question to 14) While the men seemed to be a bit more outgoing in the last two questions, in this sub-question they remain a little reluctant, where thirteen of the fifteen women reply more openheartedly and from different angles:

- **background** music to relax
- subject is love, music is **slowly**, sometimes **dramatic** and **soft** (Kuschelrock).
- Charlotte Gainsbourg: It seems **sensuous** and delicate, it is interesting that her mother is the voice in "Je t'Aime" which is perhaps an important song for your paper...I think it is the **timbre of her voice**, it is quite **breathy**.
- **Relaxing** mood, **easy** to listen to and soft **smooth** singing style.
- Quiet, romantic atmosphere
- Like classical music anyhow, suits most to romantic cuddle-sex, which I prefer to wild sex (for wild sex heavy metal would probably be best)
- I wouldn't like anything **too distracting**; it would have to be **relaxing**, something that blends into the **background**.
- Rhythm, repetition, mood... something like that. It's certainly hot music...It sounds like sex [Goldfrapp].
- Listening to Bach because **we both like it**.
- [Ravel's Bolero] because it grows and progresses gradually and because it is **not too intrusive**. But it would actually be a bit too short.
- **Slow** ballad-kind of stuff, still Guitar-Rock  
Music creates a particular **atmosphere**, which suits to the physicalness and the situation. This music is **sensual**
- Creates an atmosphere that both my partner and me like, is relaxing,  
Sensual, slow, no hard rhythm / beat, sexy, but also music that can stay in the background
- 1) Because it is **the sound of music both of us listen to and enjoy**  
2) Characteristics: beautiful sounding instruments / familiar music.

In this list of answers I emphasized the important buzzwords, the things that keep coming up. From these replies it appears that it is very important that the music "stays in the background", "is not too intrusive" or "easy to listen to". Also often mentioned is that both partners like and enjoy the music – here the music is

indeed a very personal experience and bounds together, two different people who share their musical taste. Music also creates a certain atmosphere that is often called “relaxing”, “quiet” and “romantic”. “Sensual” and “slow” are other qualities of the music that were pointed out frequently. These parameters are equally important for all the various music tastes, classical or popular, folk or jazz.

The men’s list of responses is much shorter, but the replies are similar:

- *First one because it is so **sentimental**. Second one because it has such a clear climax [Nine Inch Nails, Manowar, Nick Cave's “no more shall we part”]. If you're **not really listening to the music**, it helps to synchronize two people.*
- *slow music*
- *a romantic atmosphere*
- *calm & relaxed music, but in some situations looking for more stimulating music*
- *The **beat**, the **flow** of the singer*
- *[ (question 14:) No, depends on mood and partner] Fitting for the occasion*
- ***Relaxing** that you don't have to think about too much.*
- ***Sensual***
- *Dreamy or ambient atmosphere*

The male subjects are also looking for background music, and music to create a romantic/sensual/ambient atmosphere. It seems as that they are less concerned about the fact that both partners like and enjoy the music, which is one very important point for the women. Responses to previous questions sometimes brought up were that the men were more looking for music that pleases the women rather than being concerned if they personally like it.

15) The next question was designed to find out if and to what extent people are aware of the impact music has on their actions or movements or on their mood. The majority of both female and male subjects clearly think that music impacts the actual act of having sex (women: 10 of 15, men: 6 of 9). The explaining answers were both concerned with movement as – again – with atmosphere and mood. Music “helps to slow down the pace”, and especially rhythm, dynamics and speed were mentioned as factors regarding the impact on the act of sex. “If the rhythm is too strong/hard it dictates movements. If it is very sensual it helps to create more

*intimacy.” Or: “It may affect the way of having sex, slowly when the music is calm and easy, hard quick when the music is so.”*

16) Question 16 got very strong replies. The most subjects of both sexes answered that the musical situation for a One-Night-Stand would be very different, most would not bother with any music, since sex outside a relationship is often not very personal. If people normally would listen to music when having sex, they would either not do so when having sex outside of a relationship, or they would not care what music is on. It shows how personal the choice of music is in bed situations. Choosing music implies a certain degree of specialness of the occasion, with the intention to create a nice atmosphere. This atmosphere then can be totally different, relaxed and calm and normally without any time pressure. For fast and spontaneous sex these considerations do not take place and music then happens often to be less important.

*The 'One-Night-Stand' is mostly a result of a long Night and rarely meant to be a very romantic experience. Normally one barely knows each other and therefor is not all that informed about the musical preferences of the sexual partner. One does not spend much time on finding out about the partners music preferences and does not want to become that personal to show your own taste.*

17) With question 17 and 18 I basically tried to find out other reasons for listening to music when having sex - if music might distract from “uncomfortable noises” during sexual intercourse, again got very strong responses. Most men just said “No”, one “maybe” and only one “yes”. On the other side only five of the women answered “No”, three said clearly “yes”. Their replies showed how different this question can be interpreted. Another five replied that music might protect others in the house from “uncomfortable noises”, and one person actually said “Good Idea! But up to know no outside noises have really been able to distract me,” which is another, different angle. Frequently stated on both sides (men and women) was that “uncomfortable noises are good!”

If music is turned on loud to cover sexual noises for other people in the house, the choice certainly plays a different role. This would be another interesting question – how different is the music that is turned on for masking reasons from the music that is solely turned on for the sake of enjoying and accompanying the act of sex? And what different impact does that music then have? Music to mask noises won't be very sexual music, since that would not help covering the situation.

18) The majority of men clearly think that music does not help adjusting the two bodies. One stated straight away, *"I don't think human beings need that"*. Others said that the music especially picked would be too slow or too much in the background to affect the rhythm, but the thinking of having sex to rave music at 180bpm does not sound very appealing. Similar statements were made by the women, but contrary to the men more than half of them answered overall with *"yes"* or *"maybe"* to this question.

*On the one side music can be another interesting parameter for having sex (it can create movie-like atmospheres), on the other side it can support or even create a tendency in the body movement (fast, slow, hard, soft...)*

Music always impacts its listeners, even if it's just perceived unconsciously. But it can impact – as the replies show – in very different ways. Some people – as said before – cannot listen at all to music in bed because they find it too distracting. That is a very direct influence. For many subjects it does not in the first place affect movements but certainly sets the atmosphere.

19) The second last question did not particularly reveal anything new to this study, all the named musics matched the former responses in the questionnaire. One woman listened to the radio, but had to turn it off when the presenter started to twaddle.

20) The last question I asked was not to boost up any further studies about this topic, but opened space for people to note any more ideas they could not fit in their replies so far. Quite a few people said I should query more to what extent sex and the music to sex is planned. Maybe I could have been more direct in this question, but this was implied by question 12, if the subjects pick their music especially or not. Another point that came up a few times is why some people do not like to listen to music when having sex or if people feel the music is too disturbing while having sex. This was in a way implied by question 15, but indeed, I could have questioned that more directly. To a few subjects I replied straight away and asked directly why they don't like listening to music when having sex – and the answers were because they feel that the music is too distracting or disturbing. This leads into the next subchapter 4.1., in which I will try to find some answers to this matter. Just before, one final interesting suggestion was *"if anyone has had sex to music they hate and what affect it had on their enjoyment of the situation."*

#### 4.1 Listening Strategies

One very interesting question is, why some people do and other people do not listen to music while having sex. The replies on the questionnaire do not answer this sufficiently, but studies of Hargreaves and Colman (1981) offer some hypotheses. They showed that two general listening styles emerged in the listening strategies of adult education students – *"objective-analytic"* and *"affective"*. These two styles appeared to differentiate between those listeners who adopt an objective view, focusing on technical aspects of the music, and those whose attitude was more *"affective"*, emotional, and generally more naïve (Kemp 1997, p. 37). It is worth noting that the age group is the same as the age group of my field project. People who prefer not to listen to music when having sex may do

that, because they get too distracted by music. They listen structurally and whenever there appears a musical change they are not able to let the music be in the background. I asked a few of the subjects why they do not listen to music when having sex and their answers were all similar – they all seem to be “objective-analytical” listeners, all of them replied that they have to follow the music when music is being played and that they would be too distracted to listen to music and have sex in the same time. The amount of subjects that I asked this question is not big enough to base an argument on, but I would be not surprised if one would carry out another, bigger survey with this in mind, that the outcome would be similar.

Another scholar, J.D. Smith (1987 reviewed in Kemp 1997, p. 37) tried to identify differences between the listening strategies of music experts and untrained listeners. She came to the result that experts’ listening is to what in Hargreaves and Colman-terms would be “*objective-analytical*”. She calls it a “*syntactic*” form of listening, while the untrained listener would listen more referential, emotional, or sensual. It is certainly true, that an untrained listener rarely will listen “*syntactic*” or “*objective-analytical*” to music. But one cannot say that every music expert is always a “*syntactic*” listener. It is not clarified, what the level of musical training of the so-called music experts is, and also, how the people were asked to listen and engage with the music. The result has to be judged differently if the people were asked to concentrate solely on the music rather than just do anything while music is being played. In this context certain findings my project shows very clear that a lot of musically trained people, professional or at least semi-professional musicians, still listen “*affective*” to music, while only some of them apparently do not, when they feel that music is too distracting when having sex. As long the parameters of Smith’s experiments are not clarified one needs to be careful with the judgement of the results. Moreover, W. Jay Dowling argues that the (subconscious)

understanding of a piece of music by untrained or trained musicians is not very different at all, only a greater difference appears on the level of a conscious analyses of the music piece (Downling 1999). Since music during sexual interaction normally is picked to stay in the background, the perception of the music should not be too different between trained and untrained musicians. The differences appear when musicians are so trained that they are not able to leave the music in the background, but have to engage with the music constantly and consciously. The other extreme is the person who considers himself to be totally unmusical. He does not care about listening to music in any aspect of daily life. Since he normally does not listen to music when having sex, it is hard to tell, if the music would impact him or why not.

## 5 Conclusion

Although dealing with a mixed group of people of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds the responses do not show major cultural-related differences between the subjects within the size of this project. Even within the same environment or background people do have different tastes and preferences, while on the other hand, similar statements about the musical preferences were also made between e.g. German and Irish subjects.

The main interest of this project was to find out what the shared parameters of music (that is chosen preferably for sexual intercourse) are. Thus, the results show a general agreement between both sexes and all nationalities, that the music that is played during sexual interaction should not be too intrusive and stay in the background. Music is used to create an ambivalent atmosphere, *“romantic”*, *“sensual”* and *“relaxing”*. Therefore the music needs to be *“easy to listen to”*, more

calm, soft and slow, regardless of taste and style.<sup>3</sup> Especially important for the women is that music is a shared personal experience between the two partners, that both like and enjoy it. Men did put much less emphasis on this matter, but one has to keep in mind that at the time of the questionnaire more than 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the women were in relationships while only half of the men had partners. Therefore one should not put too much weight on this outcome, especially since the responses to the question if the music would be different for a One-Night-Stand got similar strong responses from both men and women – both agree that the difference would be quite big.

As reviewed in chapter 2, p. 5, studies of Konecni (1982) show, that people choose music to achieve an optimal level of arousal or mood. The responses of the subjects show that this seems to be also the case in music for sexual interaction – people want to achieve a certain atmosphere and use music functionally to create this ambience.

Most people are aware of a certain impact music has, but again it is more the atmosphere that is created. Movements sometimes can be affected from certain musics with strong rhythmic, that none of the subjects really prefers for having sex. As became clear in this study, music for sexual interferences tends to stay in the background, creating a certain atmosphere, and mostly not interacting directly with the act of sex. There are very similar uses of music in film that is also often used to create atmospheres (although not solely of romantic or sexual manner), and most of the time it stays in the background and the audience is barely aware of the soundtrack unless you turn it off. One of the subjects even mentioned that music *“can create movie-like atmospheres”* (p. 18 of this essay). For further studies

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<sup>3</sup> Earlier in this essay the question came up, if we perhaps at the end could relate the findings of this study to the list of moods by Crozier/Bruner (p. 6 of this essay). The overall desired qualities of music are most close to the second mood on the list, tranquillity/peacefulness, which is normally produced by “music in the major mode, slow tempo, medium pitch, flowing rhythm, consonant harmony, soft volume.” There are certain overlappings with the other moods and I would say that Crozier/Bruner’s list lacks a complexity since many moods and situations cannot be fit in this scheme as easily.



on this topic it would therefore be worth to consider and relate it more to film music theory and to investigate the 'diegetic' and 'non-diegetic' qualities of music during sexual interaction. I am thinking of writers such as Claudia Gorbman (1987), Siegfried Krakauer (1999), Michel Chion (1999) and Caryl Flinn (1992). Finally it is worth noting, although I am more concerned with these general parameters, some bands and singers were mentioned by people of different sex and nationality independently more than others - these were first of all *Norah Jones*, then *Moby*, *Morcheeba*, *Air*, *R.E.M.* and *The Divine Comedy*. For the sake of completeness and to give some insight into this music I have included a CD with song-examples of these above artists in the appendix of this essay.

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## 7.1 Questionnaire

### **Questionnaire: Music Preferences for Sexual Interferences**

First a few questions for the statistical data:

1. Sex: ☐ male ☐ female
2. Sexuality: ☐ heterosexual ☐ homosexual ☐ other: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Marital Status: ☐ in relationship ☐ single ☐ married ☐ separated
6. Where are you living? ☐ Germany ☐ Ireland ☐ other:

Questions about your musical background:

7. Do you consider yourself to be a musical person? ☐ yes ☐ no
8. Do you play an instrument or sing? ☐ yes ☐ no  
if yes, at what age did you start your musical education / playing your instrument? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you regularly attend concerts? ☐ yes ☐ no  
if yes, ☐ classical ☐ popular or ☐ both ?  
And how often? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Do you listen to music often? ☐ yes ☐ no  
What kind of music do you listen to most? \_\_\_\_\_

Questions about your musical preferences for sexual interaction:

11. Do you sometimes listen to music when you are having sex?  
☐ yes ☐ no.  
If "no", have you ever listened to music while having sex? ☐ yes ☐ no.
12. Do you pick your music especially for the situation or do you just listen to what is in the CD player?  
-----
13. Is there a kind of music you prefer most for sexual interaction?  
☐ yes ☐ no.  
If yes, what musical style is /styles are that?  
-----

14. Can you name a particular singer, band or album/compilation that you like most when having sex?

-----

To question 13 & 14: Why do you prefer these styles or that singer/band/CD most when having sex? What are the characteristics in this music that you are looking for?

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15. Do you feel that the music you are listening to while having sex does impact your act of sex? ☐ yes ☐ no

If yes, could and would you explain, how:

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16. Think back:

Would your choice of music be different if you were having sex with a person you do have a relationship with other than with a so-called "One-night-stand" or an affair? How?

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17. Do you think that music sometimes might help to distract from uncomfortable noises while having sex?

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18. Do you sometimes feel that music makes it easier to adjust two bodies rhythmically or in any other way while having sex?

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19. What music did you listen to when you had sex the last time? Was it your or your partner's choice?

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20. Is there anything you think I should consider in this questionnaire that I did not question already?

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Thanks a mil for this!

One last, very practical question:

May I eventually quote your answers anonymously in my essay to this study?

☐ yes

☐ no.

## 7.2 CD

### Tracklist:

<u>Artist</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Album</u>
1) Norah Jones	Come Away With Me	Come Away With Me
2) Norah Jones	Sunrise	Feels Like Home
3) Norah Jones	Turn Me on	Come Away With Me
4) Moby	Love Should	Hotel
5) Moby	Rushing	Play
6) Moby	Why Does My Heart Feel So Bad?	Play
7) Air	Biological	Talkie Walkie
8) Air	Cherry Blossom Girl	Talkie Walkie
9) Air	Venus	Talkie Walkie
10) Morcheeba	Charango	Charango
11) Morcheeba	Slow Down	Charango
12) Morcheeba	Undress Me Now	Charango
13) R.E.M.	Around The Sun	Around the Sun
14) R.E.M.	Electron Blue	Around the Sun
15) R.E.M.	Leaving New York	Around the Sun
16) The Divine Comedy	Diva Lady	Victory for the Comic Muse
17) The Divine Comedy	Snowball In Negative	Victory for the Comic Muse