

Cross-cultural emotional experience in response to music

Marco Susino

Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, Australia

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Are emotions in music cross-culturally experienced? While analyses of the emotional experience in response to music has bloomed in the last two decades, the research community is still not able to establish if this experience transcends cultural boundaries, since our knowledge is based largely on a small number of cross-cultural studies. Since Gregory and Varney's 1996 study of the cross-cultural perception of emotion in music, speculations about the universality or cultural uniqueness of emotions in music have been equivocal.

This paper presents an overview of this small literature. An analysis of empirical cross-cultural studies of music, from 1996-2013 reveals that although psychophysical cues in music seem to be accountable for the cross-cultural experience of basic emotions, other cultural cues also influence this experience. Results also show that generally, communication of emotions is more accurate for culturally familiar versus culturally unfamiliar listeners. Yet while these results suggest of cultural influence, what these cultural cues are is unclear. The literature review reveals that 'culture' is a vague concept in music psychology. This paper concludes by offering suggestions for further cross-disciplinary research, bridging sciences and the humanities to understand the value of culture in cross-cultural experience in response to music. For example, it is recommended that some emotions in music be studied in a way that is sensitive to culturally bound definitions and display rules to better understand why some emotions are recognised with such divergence across cultures.