PREFERENCES AND FUNCTIONS OF MUSIC IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

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Everyday life has taught us that in different situations the music we like to hear is of different type, too. Often there is a correspondence between the expression of music and the emotional state of mind of the listener, e.g. that the emotional expression of the music corresponds with the mood of the listener. On the other hand, we can observe as well that the music preferred in a certain situation not necessarily corresponds with the mood of the listener. Schaub (1981) and Behne (1984, 1986) showed in their investigation that the type of music their subjects (patients and students) liked to hear was far from corresponding with their actual mood, but was rather opposed to it. This so called "compensation principle" seems to occur preferably when a person is unhappy about his or her present mood (Behne 1984), but presumably more factors play a role in the context, e.g. arousal or cognitive factors (Gembris 1985).
The intention of the present study was to examine the following questions: (1) To what extent do musial preferences vary in situations of different emotional state of mind? (2) To what extent do different persons in the very same situation prefer various types of music? (3) What effects or functions does music have in situations of different mood? (4) Are there interdependencies between the character of music in different situations and personality traits? To answer this questions, two studies were carried out, from which some results are reported in this paper. The first study was explorative.

Method

A questionaire given to the Ss described four different situations, which were characterized by feelings of joy, depression, anger and contentment. Apart from slight modifications, the given emotions largely corresponded to those which Behne (1986) used in his study. The Ss were asked to identify with these feelings and to describe the music they preferred to hear in this situations using a semantic differential. The eight pairs of adjectives of the semantic differential have been adopted from Behne (1986) in order to allow a comparision with his data. In addition, the Ss were asked to explain why they chose a certain type of music and to possibly name an example of their preferred music. The last part of the questionaire contained general demographic information and a personality test (Freiburger-Persönlichkeitsinventar; Fahrenberg, Hampel & Selg 1985). Participant of the first study were 46 Ss (26 female, 20 male) of age 16 to 48. The majority of them were students, mostly students of music education and musicology. The other persons were students or professionals of other fields. The second study employed 123 Ss between the ages of 11 and 86 years. The procedure was basically the same as in study 1, merely in the semantic differential, three pairs of adjectives were added for a better description of the the music. The major part of the second sample were professionals from vaious fields, home-wifes and senior-citizens, a third were students. In order to find out wether there are various types of reaction within the situations, the data of every situation were analysed by cluster analysis (Ward method, euclidic distances) followed by discriminant analysis in order to find out which variables were important in separating the clusters.

Results

From the two studies, only some results can be reported in this paper. They indicate that the music preferred varies widely between the four situations. The means of the semantic differential of the situations joy and depression are almost diametrically opposed, the means of the situations anger and contentment are very different, too. The profiles of means between the different situations convey the impression that the emotional expression of the music reflects the respective emotional mood and the arousal level of the situation. So, at first glace, preferences seem to reflect emotions prevaling in the different situations, but to take in considerations only the means, however, may lead to wrong conclusions. The results of the cluster analyses show that within the four situations there were entirely different reaction patterns.

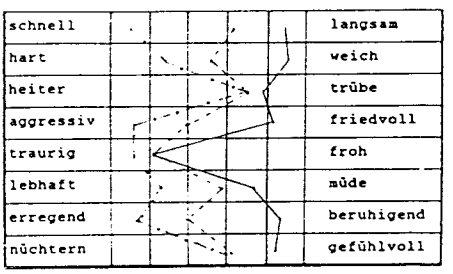

Figure 1 Descriptions of music preferred in a depressive situation (Study I)
cluster 1 (n = 18) -----
cluster 2 (n = 15) - - -
cluster 3 (n = 7) - · - ·

For the situation depression e.g. (study 1) the results of the cluster analysis reveal three clusters or groups (see Figure 1). The clusters consist of 18, 15 and 7 persons. The Ss of these three clusters agree upon the music to be rather dim and fairly sad. Apart from this, however, the character of this dim sadness varies extremely. Cluster 1 likes the music to be very sad and slow, soft, peaceful, tired relaxing and emotional. It may best correspond to the low spirits of a depression. In this music a person can "live" his or her mood and can "feel understood through the music" as somebody said in his explanation for his musical preference in this situation. A strong contrast to cluster 1 can be found in cluster 3. The Ss of this cluster like the music to be very fast, very aggressive and sad, lively and stimulating. Here, significant features are fast, hard, aggressive and exiting; these qualities signify this cluster most distinctly from the two other ones. In contrast to the type of music from cluster 1, the sadness is connected with aggression and hardness. The musical tempo, the aggression and hardness, however, are features rather opposed to the emotion of depression; this may be interpreted as repression. Cluster 2 lies between the two extrem groups. The persons of this cluster like music which is rather slow, between hard and soft, between lively and tired, and slightly tends towards the features agressive and stimulating (apart from this, though as in the other groups, it is rather dim and sad). On the one hand, the music is characterized by its representation

of the sadness of the situation, on the other hand, with regard to the other affective-emotional parameters, it is characterized by a certain retention.

With regard to the personality traits, the differences between the clusters seem rather small. However, whenever they emerge, a plausible correspondence with the type of preferred music can be found: with persons e.g. who, in a situation of joy, express their feelings through a correspondig type of music, the general personality traits tend towards irritability, aggression and emotionality. In the situation of anger (study 1), we observe that persons who want to calm their anger through relaxing music show inhibition-scores, which are above average. In the situation depression, however, we do not find any correlation between the preferred type of music and personality features. Furthermore, it seems an important finding, that in different situations the personality features which correspond with the character of the music chosen, are different ones. This finding can be related to interactional models of behaviour, e.g. proposed by Endler & Magnusson (1976) or Bowers (1973). According to theses models, personality traits do not emerge in all situation in the same manner, rather we can find -according to the respective situation - specific stable and changing patterns of behavior.

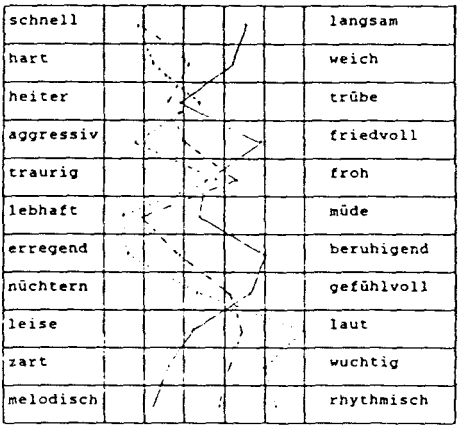

Figure 2 Descriptions of music preferred in a angry situation (Study II)
cluster 1 (n = 13) -----
cluster 2 (n = 18) - - -
cluster 3 (n = 12) .....

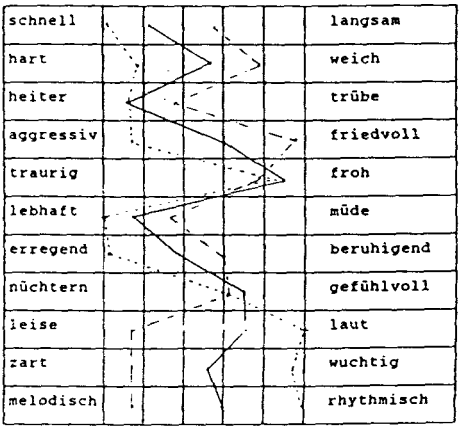

Figure 3 Descriptions of music preferred in a joyful situation (Study II)
cluster 1 (n = 48) ------
cluster 2 (n = 9) - - -
cluster 3 (n = 7) .....

Comparing the results of the second study with those of the first, we can state almost conform results in all situations. They indicate as well as those of the first study that (a) preferences in various situations differ significantly and (b) that there emerge different patterns of preferences within these situations, which obviously reflect different kinds of coping through music with these situations. Furthermore, I wish to point out, that the two studies presented here do not only lead to very similar results, but also show high conformity with the results of Behne (1986), although Behne investigates a different sample and used different descriptions of the

situations as well as a different type of cluster analysis. From this fact we can conclude that the phenomena we have to do with are replicable and obviously of a general nature.

Summary

Musical preferences change depending from the emotional state of mind in a situation. There are apparently different strategies of coping with a situation by using music, in which general coping strategies are possibly reflected (e.g. sensitizers, repressors). Obviously, personality traits also play a role herein; however, they do not have an uniform effect in all situations, but in various situations there are different patterns of correlation with musical preferences. The various strategies of coping through music are especially of significance for music therapy because they question the so-called Iso-principle.

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