



## **What is spirituality?**

Music is closely associated with emotion, but we need to go further than this to recognize the spiritual elements of music and the spiritual role music can play.

### *More than religion*

We need to avoid the common mistake of equating spirituality with religion. Religion is a major way of expressing spirituality for billions of people, but it is not the only one. There are, of course huge numbers of people who have no religious faith, but who none the less have spiritual needs and challenges.

### *Major focus on meaning*

Spirituality involves a wide range of issues, including meaning, purpose and direction, a sense of awe and wonder, a sense of connectedness (being part of something bigger than ourselves – whether or not a religion), values and so on.

Developing meaning – how we make sense of the world and our place within it – is a central theme. Our identity – who we are and how we fit into the world – is also part of this.

Identity includes how we relate to other people – our sense of belonging (or not), and this links with the idea of connectedness.

## **What is music?**

... and how does it relate to meaning?

The relationship between spirituality and music is much broader than between religion and hymns.

### *Air vibrations*

According to my school physics teacher of yore, music is basically vibrations in the air that are picked up and processed by our ears and brain. However, it is clearly much more than this.

### *Music as a framework of meaning*

Music can be understood as a framework of meaning in a number of ways. Think, for example, of the sets of associations we have with particular pieces of music (or genres). Think also about how music is used as part of rituals (weddings, funerals, celebrations and so on).

Some of these meanings are biographical – that is, specific to the individual concerned – but there are also cultural patterns of shared meanings associated with music, hence the need to recognize music as a *framework* of meaning, rather than just a reflection of an individual's musical preferences.

### *A “marker” of identity*

These meanings can have significant implications for our identity. For many people, music plays little or no part in their life, while, for many others, it is a key element of their well-being and indeed their sense of who they are.

### *A basis for belonging*

Again, the meanings are not just individual / psychological, but also cultural / sociological. Many people will have a strong sense of belonging associated with music. Consider the days of mods and rockers, for example. But, it isn't just a matter of youth cultures. There will be people who associate strongly with classical music, jazz, blues or whatever. Folk clubs, not as popular as they once were, but still alive and well, would be an example of this.

### **Conclusion**

There is no shortage of music that “connects” with loss, grief, death and dying. While there is traditionally a strong association between grief and classical music, it is important to note that all genres of music can address grief issues and therefore potentially be useful as a spiritual resource to contribute to comfort and solace.

Sade: No Ordinary Love  
(Grief is the price we pay for love)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcWHZc8s2I>

Moby: Why Does My Heart Feel So Bad  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qT6XCvDUUsU>

Harvey Andrews: The Mallard  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMpLZTpPMVc>

Ewan MacColl: The Joy of Living  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sseyUtOvetA>

Peter Hammill: Four Pails  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GJv374Pno0>

Peter Gabriel: I Grieve  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4d\\_ilHsFjc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4d_ilHsFjc)

Dafydd Iwan: Yma O Hyd  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpaYJT-5MHc>

Gerry and the Pacemakers: You'll Never Walk Alone  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV5\\_LQArLa0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV5_LQArLa0)

Hillsborough vigil: You'll Never Walk Alone  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5x2YBPd9hYk>

