

## Experiences and Appraisals of Musical Awe

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### ABSTRACT

#### Background

A proposed model for the emotion of awe created by Keltner and Haidt (2003) suggests that one may perceive awe when encountered with a stimulus that is both vast and requires change in existing schemas. Additional hedonic appraisals of threat, beauty, ability, virtue, and supernatural causation are thought to shape this experience. Alternatively, awe has been proposed as an aesthetic reaction to the sublime, comprised of joy and fear, and only when experienced with thrills/chills and being moved does the emotion emerge (Konečni, 2005).

#### Aims

The aims of this study were to gather experiences of musical awe to empirically test proposed appraisal models, evaluate commonalities in experiences, and derive a better characterization and understanding of musically-induced awe.

#### Method

Questionnaires based on the Geneva Appraisal Questionnaire (Scherer, 2001) were collected from the general public. Participants were asked if they have felt awe (defined as ‘a combination of appreciation of beauty surprise and possibly fear’) in response to music and to describe their experience. Finally, based on their own experiences of musical awe, participants rated theoretical appraisal factors by way of psychometric scales.

#### Results

Results showed an overwhelming association with the term ‘awe’ when classifying powerful emotional moments experienced from music. Participants’ vivid recollections described highly intense yet pleasurable chill-inducing experiences with beautiful and often virtuosic. Increased enjoyment and engagement with the music was also found while few participants related their experience to that of fear.

#### Conclusions

Musical awe was found to be an uncommonly occurring complex emotional experience that is not perceived as terrible or fearsome but has retained its sense of grandeur and power. These positive associations suggest that musically-induced awe may be a particular illustration of the sublime that emphasizes vastness, beauty and virtuosity that is closely related to states of being moved. Future studies building on the analysis of this questionnaire will continue to investigate the causes and effects of awe-inducing music.

### Keywords

awe; music psychology; emotions

### REFERENCES

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