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One Note at a Time

While conducting a personal interview with AJ Fratto, I got this little piece of wisdom:

"Music has saved my life (...) The reason I say it is it saved my life because when you're, ya know, pretty much like praying. When the world has brought you to your knees, you're in the perfect position to pray. Well for me, it's that, but also to listen to music... Music that motivates me, music that brings me up, music that makes me feel that I can get through anything" (Fratto, “Personal Interview with AJ Fratto”).

These words that AJ has spoken are true for any person whose love for music has helped them through many difficult situations, such as school, work, raising a child, or more specifically a period of extreme depression. Music, for people dealing with disorders such as depression and anxiety, helps change a person’s personality for the better. Music helps people open up to new experiences, create happiness, and gain the realization that life happens. Sometimes events may occur that may knock you down for a little while, but music seems to help people get out of their ruts, get back on the horse, and continue experiencing life for what it has to offer.

Listening to music is one of my favorite things to do, whether it is at the beach, the park, school, work, or at home. Going to concerts especially is super cool; being there in person listening to a favorite band performing a fantastic song is a wonderful experience to enjoy. Putting the emotionally revolutionary experience that music can be, into words is very difficult, though. Here, however, I'm talking about how music has helped changed people who are dealing with disorders’ personalities, such as depression and anxiety. I hope that sounds a little more exciting, as, the figure that I will be using to help explain this topic is definitely exciting. The man's name is Anthony James Fratto, otherwise known as AJ. This bald-headed, bear-like man is not only my father, but one of my heroes. Although he deals with many problems, such as depression and anxiety, my father tries to see the best in situations and keep calm, with the help of listening to music. AJ uses music as an outlet in order to keep calm, release stress and energy, and connect different emotions, feelings, and form friendships with other people.

Music has helped AJ to develop traits and feelings toward different situations. I sat AJ down on March 13, and talked to him about how music has changed his personality and brought different people into his life. In this personal interview video with AJ, you will notice at the 3:25 mark that he has a reaction to the dryer beeping in the background. Several years ago, this reaction would have been negatively amplified one hundred percent. AJ's reaction in this video, however, is more level-headed because of the fact that he has been using music to help himself stay calm.

My father is also involved in the AJ's BraveHearts, INC., which is a non-profit organization that helps to raise money and awareness for different charities, such as the Ronald McDonald House and the Hotel for Dogs and Cats. Through this organization, my father has helped raise awareness for different issues, and has met people who feel strongly about the charities he is trying to help. AJ believes that, by helping other people through the use of music, he is in turn helping himself. On December 23, 2015, AJ’s BraveHearts partnered with Vinyl Music Hall to host a Toys for Tots charity event. There were about five different bands that performed at the event, including the band AJ is the lead vocalist for, Gotham City Troubadour. At this event, the different bands played their own music and covers to help raise money for organizations such as the Hotel for Dogs and Cats, the Favor House of Northwest Florida, and Manna Food Pantries. AJ used his love for music to help create this event and raise money and awareness for these charities and organization. AJ’s BraveHearts: “helping people & pets through the love & healing power of music” (AJ’s BraveHearts).

Music has brought many different people into my father’s life, famous or not. My mother is an example of that. AJ explains in the personal interview that, when he met my mother, when he first held her hand, when he first kissed her… he remembers each song that was playing in the background. My father connects different songs to different memories to help him remember important times or events that have occurred in his life. During the times of deep depression that my father has been through, he would play these songs to help himself remember that there have been good times in his life and that, eventually, more good times will come. In the personal interview with AJ, he says “sometimes, it’s nice to have those things in your mind that can make you feel so thankful for what you’ve had, no matter how tough things have been”(Fratto, “Personal Interview with AJ Fratto”). This statement is definitely something that AJ lives by in his day-to-day life. My father believes that you need to cherish what you have while you have it because, in life, plans may change and it may not be in your favor. Different events like meeting my mother, falling in love with her, and especially their wedding brings about feelings of love and happiness that have been connected to different songs, which helps my father to realize that he needs to cherish what he has and live for the happy times that will come in life.

After interviewing my father, I sat one of his high school friends down and asked him similar questions. Mr. Jeff Jacobus has been friends with AJ since high school while not only growing in his own personality, but has also been observing AJ in terms of his personality development. I asked Jeff about times when he has been affected similarly, and he says “you talk about from your happiest times to your saddest times, music has always been there. It has been such an integral part of my life” (Fratto, “Personal Interview with Jeff Jacobus”). This statement shows that Jeff believes that music has always been there for him in his life, through the happy, the sad, and all the times in between. I personally agree with this statement because I have used music as an outlet to help release my sadness, enjoy being happy, and get through all of the mediocre times with a smile on my face.

When asking about how he has seen my father’s personality change throughout the many years that they have been friends, Jeff is sort of stuck at first, but quickly recovers. Jeff states:

“Music really… it really is simple, but it makes such an impact in some people’s lives, most people’s lives, including mine. But to watch him do what he does, and he’s the best at what he does, and to see the smile… ya know, to sit at the side of the stage and watch him do what he does is… and the smile on his face and just… it just makes me so happy” (Fratto, “Personal Interview with Jeff Jacobus”).

With this answer, Jeff is saying that, with the help of music, he has noticed changes in AJ’s behavior and personality. AJ is not only listening to music and performing on stage for himself, but also for other people. When performing on stage, AJ is determined to touch his audience with his voice, his tone, his actions, and the music that he is displaying to make them feel joy, hope, motivation, and awe.

Interviewing my mother, Kristin Fratto, was tough. Kristin was not as comfortable talking in front of the camera, so I took an audio clip of her answering one of my questions: “How have you seen music impact Dad’s behavior or personality?” My mother took almost ten minutes before feeling fully comfortable with her answer:

“… he’s more focused, and he… even though he’s screaming and singing loudly and jumping all over the stage and stuff, he seems to focus and he… it calms him, and even leading up to the performance, um he’s more mentally sharp and calm and he’s just basically focused on the job”(Fratto, “Personal Interview with Kristin Fratto”).

My mother, having stood on the sidelines after numerous concerts, benefits, and charity events, has seen my father go up onto a stage and release what had been previously bothering him. Being in a marriage with my father for twenty years has opened my mother up to experience times of love, joy, and comfort, but also times of fighting, discomfort, and fear. Kristin has been the person by AJ’s side, watching him change with the help with music and becoming calm the second he steps onto that stage.

People listen to music for different reasons: because they enjoy the song, or to help change, or enhance, their emotions at the given time. In the article “Personality and Music: Can traits explain how people use music in everyday life?” the author, after performing the experiment, explains that “there are different reasons as to why individuals choose to listen to music in everyday life, and that these uses are significantly related to established personality traits” (Furnaham and Chamorro-Premuzic). When thinking about personality types, I think about being an introvert or an extravert. These personality types can be reflected upon how people choose to listen to music. Introverts seem to listen to music to understand the more structural side of the song, group, or genre, or to get experiences that cater to their intellectual needs. An extravert, on the other hand, may listen to music in order to connect emotionally and help change, or enhance, their emotional state at the given time. AJ, being an extravert, listens to music because he enjoys the messages that they give and the emotions that they make him feel. An example of this is when he listens to his wedding song; AJ says that his knees get weak and it makes him feel loved and sad. These emotions are connected to this song because the song has been attached to a significantly important part of his life.

When listening to different types of music, you are also setting a general range of tempo for your tastes in music. For instance, I enjoy music with a slower tempo for the experience and to become more open to the emotions that I am having as well as the emotions that the artist is trying to convey. In the article “The Relationship Between Music Preferences of Different Mode and Tempo and Personality Traits – Implications for Music Pedagogy”, the author states that the “correlation coefficients showed that there is a significant correlation between preferences for major key and fast tempo music and some personality traits – optimism, emotional stability, conscientiousness and agreeableness” (Ercegovac and Dobrota). My father, comparatively, listens to music with a faster tempo in order to experience stability with his emotions and stay calm in stressful or emotionally draining situations. An example of this is when I was home for Christmas this past year. My father was freaking out about the dog tearing up the sprinkler system, but once he tuned in to the Kiss song on the radio, “Rock and Roll All Night”, he started to sing along and calm down to process what just happened with the dog.

In the article “Openness to Experience and Awe in Response to Nature and Music: Personality and Profound Aesthetic Experiences”, the author explains the results of an experiment that they performed by stating the following:

“Openness to experience had the largest effects of the five factors on the items related to whether the song seemed familiar to them, whether it resembled the kind of music they usually listened to, and how closely they listened to the song” (Favyn, Silvia, Nusbaum, and Beaty).

This explanation further explains the fact that different people listen to music for different reasons, such as because they enjoy the song or to relate the song to an emotion or an event in their life. Instead of simply listening to a song just because it is on the radio, I have been listening to the lyrics and paying attention to the structure and the emotional feeling the artist portrays in the song. I then connect the song to a specific time in my life or a feeling that I encounter.

Music is shoved into every little space available in my life, my father’s life, and in the lives of so many people in the world. For people dealing with disorders, such as depression and anxiety, music is a source that can help develop or enhance their personality. AJ Fratto, a man dealing with both depression and anxiety, is an example of someone who has used music to help with his personality and behavior. My father has used music to not only help himself in difficult situations, but also to touch other people and move different emotions onto them, such as concern, love, and hope.