

Arts University

Studying for finals? Let classical music help

Works by Bach, Brahms, Mozart and others are effective aids that improve sleep patterns and reduce stress, studies find



BY Allison Engel

DECEMBER 2, 2022



Studies show that listening to classical music benefits the brain. (Photo illustration/Holly Wilder)

This story was first published on Dec. 5, 2014.

As the season of cramming and finals approaches, Trojans can get help with a healthy, easily accessible study aid — classical music.

It's a solution available 24/7 at **Classical KUSC** in Los Angeles or **Classical KDFC** in San Francisco. Listen either on the radio or live-streamed at kusc.org or kdfc.com. There's a new version of KUSC's **free app** and one for **KDFC** to use on mobile devices.

THE A number of academic studies recently zeroed in on classical music, showing that listening benefits the brain, sleep patterns, the immune system and stress levels — all helpful when facing those all-important end-of-semester tests.

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Face the music

University research in France, published in *Learning and Individual Differences*, found that students who listened to a one-hour lecture where classical music was played in the background scored significantly higher in a quiz on the lecture when compared to a similar group of students who heard the lecture with no music.

The researchers speculated that the music put students in a heightened emotional state, making them more receptive to information.

“It is possible that music, provoking a change in the learning environment, influenced the students’ motivation to remain focused during the lecture, which led to better performance on the multiple-choice quiz,” they wrote.

According to research from the Duke Cancer Institute, classical music can also lessen anxiety.

Researchers gave headphones playing Bach concertos to men undergoing a stressful biopsy and discovered they had no spike in diastolic blood pressure during the procedure and reported significantly less pain.

But make sure you are listening to classical music, because not all music aids blood pressure, a University of San Diego study found.

Scientists at the university compared changes in blood pressure among individuals listening to classical, jazz or pop music. Those listening to classical had significantly lower systolic blood pressure when compared to those listening to other musical genres or no music at all.

Just relax

Classical music helps you relax even when you don’t pay attention to the music, a Russian study published in *Human Physiology* found.

Children who listened to classical music for one hour a day over a six-month period exhibited brain changes that indicated greater levels of relaxation — even when the children were not asked to pay attention to the music.

If testing anxiety causes sleepless nights, classical music can help soothe insomnia. A team of researchers at the University of Toronto found that tuning into classical music before bedtime helped people fall asleep faster and stay asleep longer. Works by Brahms, Handel, Mozart, Strauss and Bach were effective sleep aids because they use rhythms and tonal patterns that create a meditative mood and slow brainwaves, the study found.

(KUSC and KDFC make it easy to access quality classical music all night, every night. The California Classical All Night program airs on both stations from midnight to 5 a.m., seven days a week.)

Cut out the cannons

So what selections do classical music experts favor for listeners trying to absorb new information?

KUSC host and producer Alan Chapman suggested pieces that are more restrained to provide a nice aura in the background. Skip over large orchestral pieces, particularly those with a dynamic that ranges from whispers to booming cannons.

“The 1812 Overture would not be a good study aid, unless you were studying to be a demolitions expert,” he observed — a sentiment echoed by KDFC host and assistant program director Rik Malone.

Chapman suggested choosing solo piano pieces, perhaps Mozart sonatas or French piano music by Poulenc, Debussy or Fauré. Mozart string quartets are also good choices, he said, for the regularity of phrase structure in classic period pieces.

Guitar music is gentle enough to study by, as is lute music, which has enjoyable, dulcet tones. Sample Bach lute suites, Chapman suggested.

Elizabethan consort music from the late 16th century, played on viols, was intended to create a pleasant atmosphere at court without demanding attention, Chapman said, and is another good candidate for music to study by.

So before turning to the books, turn on Classical KUSC or Classical KDFC.

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