

Haven Herald



Healing Through Music by Michelle Hoffman

A client shared that after her husband died, she was cooking one day and decided to play music from his laptop to help fill the silence. She did not know what to expect, and upon clicking the play button, she heard love. She heard music that meant something to him, even if it was not to her liking, but that always put a smile to his face, and so, she continued to play that music and there beside her while cooking was her husband.

Music has this power to bring back a memory, to distract us from our grief, to remind us of who we are or who they were. Listening to music you enjoy may bring you a sense of self, and surround you with the safety net we desire when our sadness seems profound. Play your music! Do not focus on what others think of your musical taste, of the lyrics you can recall so well. If your music releases endorphins and you can step out of your grief, then feel that freedom. Hearing music that reminds us of our loved ones who have died, may also release those endorphins. A playlist of their favorite tunes, a channel of their music genre, or sitting in on a live performance can bring their memory alive. Many church hymns have the ability to soothe your spirit. Listening to a cellist, such as Yo-Yo Ma, perform Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 can bring a tear to your eye.

Plenty of research supports the idea that music is medicine for the mind, the body, and the spirit. Music provides relaxation by releasing endorphins and reducing stress. Alexander Pantelyat, M.D., with the Johns Hopkins Center for Music and Medicine, states "Listening to music activates as many, if not more, parts of the brain than any human activity..." His center researches various music-based interventions, including music therapy, which is often a treatment for patients with chronic illnesses, such as Alzheimer's disease or Huntington Disease. For someone unable to speak or to write, music can be a way to express their emotions, including their grief. I have witnessed the magic of playing a song from an Alzheimer's patient's childhood, and witnessing the patient light up and hum along. Music therapists bring in various instruments a drum to beat, a guitar to strum, that patients may use to express themselves. The ease of creating a small sound, not even a full melody, may bring joy.

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Letter from the Executive Director

Spring brings beauty and hope as it gently renews us. This is a busy time of year at Haven as we focus on our spring groups and workshops as well as do a bit of spring cleaning and tend to the grounds around our house. We welcome the lovely change that this season offers and look forward to the first blooms and warmer days.

Spring can be a challenging time for those in grief. No amount of sunshine and beautiful flowers will change the sorrow of grief. It is hard to reconcile the pain we are feeling from our loss with new life growing all around us.

This newsletter focuses on how music can help us cope with the despair and sorrow that losing a loved one can bring. Music can help our brains and soothe our spirits. When my father died suddenly twenty-seven years ago, I found music to be a great comfort. It became a constant in my grief process and helped me through a very difficult time. I learned firsthand that music can provide the gift of healing in the midst of the sadness.

Jill Bellacicco



What Worked For Me “Melodies of Memories” by Michelle Hoffman

“Love Potion #9”, “Killer Queen”, “His Eye is on the Sparrow”, “Dream a Little Dream of Me” it is not at first obvious what these songs have in common as they come from different music genres. Yet they have one fan who knew every word - my mom. She was a savant of melodies who played them in our home, our car, and as often as possible. Her melodies were my tribute to her during her funeral. Anthems of rock, music of her childhood, glorious Mahalia Jackson, left attendees bewildered, yet smiling and asking why I chose them. My response was to describe the beautiful, quirky, and downright unique woman that mom was. The only person aware of my playlist was my mother’s sister, Aunt Pam. We knew what filled mom’s heart with joy, what would heal our hearts with good memories. We giggled, we embraced, reflecting on times when one of us caused mom to crack up laughing to the point of crying. Only the two of us could make her laugh like that. Each song had a meaning, especially these four, a bittersweet homage.

“Love Potion #9” - You may be asking why we included a song about a potion to make someone fall in love with you. I cannot explain it, she sang it when happy, hummed it shopping, cleaning, working, showering...it was an “ear worm”. To this day, I sing about the cop on 34th and Vine and Madam Ruth, especially when I’m feeling down and need a pick me up. Or perhaps just a ‘potion’ of mom’s love.

“Killer Queen” - Perhaps a risqué choice for a funeral, yet Freddie Mercury, the lead singer, was her icon. She owned every album. While driving me to school, we would sing at the top of our lungs, swinging our hair to Bohemian Rhapsody or seat dancing to “Don’t Stop Me Now”. But “Killer Queen” was a cabaret tune that made us theatrical, not caring how we looked to other drivers. When I hear any of their masterpieces, I always imagine us in that car with big goofy smiles and our one of a kind seat dances.

“His Eye is on the Sparrow” - Mom told me years before her funeral that gospel choirs had the most soulful and powerful singing she ever heard. She said they made her believe in God. She wanted to hear a gospel choir in person, wanted to feel the goosebumps she had felt while listening to one in a movie or on TV at The White House for the Obamas. I hoped her spirit was present with us, as I made sure there was gospel at her funeral from the powerful Mahalia Jackson. Every note in “His Eye is on the Sparrow” stirred a flutter in your heart and it just made sense for Mahalia to soar through the funeral home that day.

“Dream a Little Dream of Me” - I included this Mamas and the Papas lullaby version mom sang to me since I was a baby. As I gained an interest in the flute and started performing, she’d apologize for being off key, saying she didn’t know where my talent came from. Yet her lullabies soothed me and were my first loves of music. She still sounded lovely, even off key. Now when I hear the following lyrics, I thank her for her lovely singing and can’t help but think it’s her telling me she will always be with me:

“Sweet dreams ‘til sunbeams find you
Sweet dreams that leave all worries behind you
But in your dreams, whatever they be
Dream a little dream of me.”

Maybe my playlist was over the top, inappropriate, or not solemn enough. That just wasn’t my mom. It’s okay to dedicate your affection for someone through music they loved and shared with you. I keep my playlist on a CD in my car to listen to, and she’s right there beside me. My belief and hope is that she heard my tribute, my bittersweet homage, and sang along with every song, danced with Freddie, cracked up laughing. Perhaps I left an “ear worm” for her to know how much I cherish her.



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Using these breathing techniques may also help ease intense grief. As a musician, breathing techniques help in how you perform, how you lower anxiety and focus. In the article, "How Music Helps People Heal: The Therapeutic Power of Music," by David Victor, he describes how the use of rhythm in breathing can relax the body in order to address pain, to lower heart rate and blood pressure. Listening to the "Big 3" classical composers of our lifetime - Bach, Mozart and Beethoven - you can identify the rhythm easily in their melodies. It's okay if you feel like you are off count or are unsure if you are counting correctly. Focus on the pattern of notes, the melody and that will guide you to relaxation! Put on Pandora or Spotify and ask for relaxing music, even spa music, and close your eyes. Let the music flood into your body and calm grief's handle on you. Another breathing exercise is the "4-7-8" technique: breathe in for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 7 seconds and exhale for 8 seconds. Using this breathing technique with calming music increases relaxation!



If you are unsure on what to listen to or want to explore examples of music that may bring relaxation to you, may bring joy, or that may make you feel something you did not know music could trigger, then I recommend these 10! As there are countless songs and compositions out there I could recommend, these are 10 that I enjoy and that take me out of my grief, even if only for a few minutes:

1. Anything composed by Claude Debussy! Try "Clair de Lune" or "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun", lay down and close your eyes. You will thank me.
2. Jon Baptiste's "Freedom" and rendition of "Blackbird" brings the soul in music that I think is missing from the radio these days.
3. Bruno Philippe, a young cellist, portrays such emotion in his body and in his sound! Watch his beautiful performance of Camille Saint-Saens' Cello Concerto in A Minor.
4. If Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade" does not evoke passion and all the endorphins of love, then I do not know what will!
5. Including some rock n roll, the group Shinedown has a lead singer who knows how to soar in "Crow and the Butterfly"!
6. An artist who has crossed several genres over the years and should be applauded for her songwriting skills, is Brandi Carlile. Check out "The Story", and keep a tissue handy.
7. As a flutist, I have to add composer, Valerie Coleman, a fellow flutist who has created several complex yet amazing melodies. I recommend "Requiem Milonga".
8. As a flutist, I also need to add Andre 3000 from the rap group, Outkast, who decided on a whim to learn flute. Check out his music from his upcoming album, "New Blue Sun".
9. A vocal group making waves, Pentatonix, knows how to produce chords that bring goosebumps. Check out their performance of "Hallelujah"!
9. Chris Stapleton is a part of outlaw country, yet his voice is bluesy and knows how to hit emotions, such as "Fire Away".



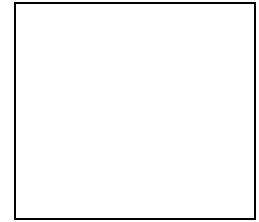
HOW HAVEN IS FUNDED

Haven is classified by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. It is funded mainly by donations from individuals in the community who wish to support our work and by those who donate in memory of a loved one. Donations are tax deductible. If you are interested in making a donation, please contact Haven at (703) 941-7000 or at havenofnova@verizon.net

Haven of Northern Virginia, Inc.

4606 Ravensworth Road

Annandale, Virginia 22003



Spring Schedule

Sibling Loss Workshop
Saturday, May 18, 2024
10:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Suicide Loss Workshop
Saturday, June 1, 2024
10:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Four-week Widow/Widower/Partner Support Group
Saturday, June 8 – June 29, 2024
11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Please call or email Haven to register for the group and workshops.

Drop-in Suicide Loss Support Group
2nd Saturdays of each month
11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Haven also offers individual support by phone and in person; please call to schedule an appointment. For immediate support without an appointment, a volunteer is available on a walk-in basis Monday through Friday between 10:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.

Contact Information

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Hours of Operation

Monday through Friday
9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
www.havenofnova.org

Messages may be left on our voicemail after hours