



**GAPS2 - Global Arts and Psychology Seminar**  
**"Creativity in music and the arts"**

14-16 September 2023  
York, Graz, La Plata, & Melbourne

**BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**

Edited by:  
Kempf, A., Parncutt, R., Martínez, I. C., Pérez, J. B., Glasser, S., Osborne, M.,  
Daffern, H., Waddington-Jones, C., O'Neill, K., Schiavio, A.

## Impressum

*GAPS2 - Global Arts and Psychology Seminar "Creativity in music and the arts".  
Book of Abstracts*, Kempf, A., Parncutt, R., Martínez, I. C., Pérez, J. B., Glasser, S.,  
Osborne, M., Daffern, H., Waddington-Jones, C., O'Neill, K., Schiavio, A. (org.),  
2024

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This conference was funded in whole, or in part, by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) [10.55776/P32460] and by an event sponsorship from the University of Graz.

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Glacisstraße 27  
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Published by the University of Graz  
ISBN 978-1-3999-6450-0  
DOI [10.25364/554.2024.1](https://doi.org/10.25364/554.2024.1)

## ***Love songs and serenades: A theoretical review of music in romantic relationships***

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### **Background**

In the *Descent of Man*, Darwin (1871) first articulates the hypothesis that musicality may have been selected for sexually. In addition, popular musicians are frequently portrayed as sex icons, seemingly supporting the notion that musicality may be attractive (Marin & Rathgeber, 2022), and love songs feature in most human cultures (Mehr et al., 2018). Despite this, the scientific literature on the evolutionary functions of music has focused primarily on social bonding (Savage et al., 2021) and credible signalling (Mehr et al., 2021) theories, and there are limited examples of high-quality research to test a sexual selection function.

### **Aims**

In this theoretical review, we aim to reconcile these apparent multiple functions of music, highlighting the ways in which music may be used in the formation and maintenance of romantic/sexual relationships, while drawing upon theories of love and relationship stages from social psychology.

### **Main contribution**

We propose that there may be two distinct types of music making for these different functions: music for attraction, which would be virtuosic in nature to display physical and cognitive fitness to potential mates; and music for connection, which would facilitate synchrony between partners and likely engage the same reward mechanisms seen in the general synchrony-bonding effect, enhancing perceived interpersonal intimacy as a facet of love. These functions may also map onto the behaviours of non-human animals, such as birdsong (Rose, Prior & Ball, 2022) and duetting in non-human primates (Raimondi et al., 2023). Furthermore, we consider the additional function of shared musical knowledge or music preferences as a display of similarity (Figueredo et al., 2006), which may be important in attracting mates, as well as maintaining a relationship through shared interests. We make an initial attempt to map different functions of music to the facets of love in the triangle model (Sternberg, 1986), while recognising that the relative importance of these functions may change based on the relationship stage (Knapp, 1978). The possible role of individual differences in personality, attachment style, and love languages are also discussed.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Through this discussion, we produce testable hypotheses of the use of music in romantic relationships in contemporary society. This creates a roadmap for future research which may rigorously test whether there is a role for sexual selection in the evolution of musicality, or whether music in romantic relationships is just a special case within the general social bonding theory.

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