

Music is a Surprising Catalyst to Reduce Climate Change

While music alone won't mitigate climate change, it can play a surprisingly big part in getting people to act to save the planet. From songs that inspire action to fast-paced pieces that influence what you buy, music has unexpected impacts on how people behave.

Music can Change Behaviour

We know almost intuitively that music can change what we do. Disco music can get us dancing and hip-hop can excite us, for example, while symphonies may calm us. Research shows that music can lead people to be eco-friendly.

One example is in resolving the attitude-behaviour gap, which Popular Science magazine explains as the difference between what people say and what they do. Even though consumers have a positive attitude towards sustainable or green products, for instance, they don't always buy them. Researchers found, though, that the music in advertisements can help convince consumers to purchase green products. University of Bath associate professor Haiming Hang and his co-authors found that music going over 94 beats per minute reduced the attitude-behaviour gap by about 40 to 50 percent. "Advertising music can play a vital role in driving consumers to purchase green products," says Hang.

And calming music can reduce the amount of energy electric vehicle drivers use. A study led by University of Salford lecturer Duncan Williams found that drivers listening to classical music from composers such as Beethoven have a greater driving range than drivers listening to music by artists such as Kanye West and Adele. Whereas up-tempo music such as pop or hip-hop can reduce EV range due to its influence on driving styles, drivers who listen to classical music can go further. Listening to Beethoven or Brahms may reduce energy usage.

Other research similarly shows that music can influence consumers' behaviour.

Music and Musicians can Teach People

While music itself can change people's behaviour, performers can also influence people to think about the environment and reduce climate change.

As researcher Richard Kahn noted, protest songs to advance environmental activism date back at least to the 19th century, with music such as the 1837 song, "Woodman! Spare that Tree!". Since then, songs about gardens, the landscape and nature furthered conservationist movements that are among the foundations of modern environmentalism and social movements around sustainability.

A fundamental issue for musicians, however, has been the climate change caused by their massive greenhouse gas emissions. Live music in the UK alone generates 405,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions every year, according to Euronews, and global totals are even more massive. Even recorded music is an issue. Streaming as well as sales and radio play of 'Heat Waves' by Glass Animals alone would require 128,000 trees to absorb the 3,072 tons of carbon emissions that it causes every year, according to Uswitch, while good 4 u by Olivia Rodrigo causes 2,867 tons of emissions annually.

Yet musicians can reduce their emissions and encourage their fans to take action too. They can campaign, talk about climate change and inspire their fans to use public transport. They can lead by example by using renewable energy for their performances and the vehicles for their tours. They can also encourage fans to download rather than stream songs, which Spotify said in its Sustainability Report would reduce the 70,000 tons of CO₂ emissions streaming causes each year by 80 percent.

Indeed, some artists are changing what they do. Coldplay, Billie Eilish and Harry Styles are among the performers who have started to eliminate single-use plastic at concession stands, offer merchandise made with recycled materials, and encourage fans to use climate-friendly transportation. Coldplay started working several years ago to reduce emissions from their tours. More recently, Lil Dicky released *Earth* with a pledge to use his celebrity and social media to make it one of "the more monumental moments in human history", according to New Scientist, and profits go to charities that support conservation.

Within two months after its release, more than 140 million people had watched it. Another is Grimes, who released *Miss Anthropocene* with the aim of making climate change fun. And at concerts by REVERB, the Washington Post reported, greeters wear upcycled concert T-shirts and encourage fans to connect with environmental non-profits.

Yet it is not only renowned performers that use music as a catalyst for change. Students and faculty at the University of British Columbia collaborated to present a Sounds of Earth concert, for instance, to celebrate Earth Day in April 2022. The ClimateMusic Project in San Francisco has supported creation and performances of music to inspire people to engage on climate change. And a multitude of other local groups have similarly organised musical events to inspire eco-friendly activities.

Non-profits are leveraging music too, with organisations such as the Nature Conservancy and Sierra Club highlighting songs about climate change. On the corporate side, Warner Music Group is creating a virtual concert venue within the metaverse for performers to engage with fans remotely rather than on emissions-causing concert tours.

Music can Help Change the World

While music is clearly not the sole solution to climate change, using it effectively make a difference. Musicians can educate people, lead by example with environmental-friendly concerts and encourage fans to reduce climate change. Advertisers and even manufacturers can use music to encourage purchase or more effective usage of climate-friendly products. Indeed, the power of music to help save the planet is greater than we may ever have expected.