

Pandemic music struck a darker chord, study finds

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A new study examining the music people listened to during the pandemic has revealed a taste for more downbeat and darker music—in direct contrast to music recommended to raise the spirits.

James Cook University psychology lecturer Dr. Amanda Krause and Ph.D. student Kaila Putter, along with colleagues from The University of Queensland and Curtin University, conducted the study, which has been [published](#) in the journal *Music & Science*.

Krause said over six separate lockdown periods, Melbourne had cumulatively the world's longest [lockdown](#) in response to COVID-19, totaling more than 260 days.

"Lockdown measures required people to remain at home and resulted in people experiencing long periods of social isolation, unprecedented changes to everyday routines, and various psychological challenges such as fear, anxiety, insomnia, irritability and anger," said Krause.

The team compared a crowd-sourced [playlist](#)—produced by a Melbourne newspaper after an appeal to readers for music recommendations to raise spirits during the Australian lockdowns—and chart data on what people were actually listening to.

"We compared the '[pandemic](#) playlist' songs to charting songs during the first six months of the pandemic in 2020 and the same period in 2021 with regard to their musical features and lyrical content," said Krause.

Putter said the findings indicated the songs included in the pandemic playlist differed significantly from the charting songs in 2020 and 2021.

"The playlist songs were higher in energy (relative to 2020 and 2021) and less acoustic (relative to 2021). Additionally, the lyrics of the pandemic playlist songs had significantly more positive words," said

Putter.

She said what people actually listened to in response to the pandemic seems to be darker, uncertain, escapist, and isolated.

"This appears to reflect a preference for mature and meaningful media content when faced with a threat," said Krause

"It's possible people's suggestions for the pandemic playlist reflected the music they expected would improve the mood of others, which may not necessarily have been the music they would select to regulate their own emotions."

She said the findings broaden understanding of [music](#) listening behaviors in response to societal stress.

More information: Kaila C. Putter et al, Examining the Lyrical Content and Musical Features of a Crowd-Sourced, Australian Pandemic Playlist, *Music & Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/20592043231215632](https://doi.org/10.1177/20592043231215632)

Provided by James Cook University

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