

The magic of voices: Why we like some singers' voices and not others

April 25 2024, by Ina Wittmann



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Many famous singers have distinctive voices. But why do we prefer some singers to others? A team of researchers led by the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics (MPIEA) in Frankfurt am Main,

Germany, has investigated what determines our preferences for singing voices. The results are [published](#) open-access in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

The researchers investigated how much singing [voice](#) preferences can be traced back to objective characteristics such as pitch accuracy or tempo, and to which extent the personal situation or individual characteristics determine the preferences. To do so, they surveyed 326 study participants online and additional 42 participants in the Institute's laboratories.

"Intuitively, one would expect that personal preferences for singing voices would be based on certain acoustic criteria. However, in the course of our study, we came to a different conclusion," first author Camila Bruder of the MPIEA explains.

In the preliminary online experiment, the study participants were asked to rate a total of 96 a cappella vocal performances by 16 trained singers according to their personal preferences. The evaluation showed a wide distribution of liking ratings and large individual differences in the participants' preferences, but the researchers also found some similarities in the average liking ratings that they thought would need to be based, at least to some extent, in acoustic characteristics of the voices themselves.

However, this assumption was not confirmed upon closer examination: the acoustic characteristics could only explain a small part of the liking ratings. Rather, the preferences for certain singing voices were explained by the way the voices were perceived and interpreted by the listeners themselves.

"Although we often feel that our acoustic preferences are based on [objective criteria](#), our results suggest that the famous saying 'beauty is in

the eye of the beholder' could also be applied to acoustics," says Pauline Larrouy-Maestri, the study's senior author of the MPIEA. "We could say, 'preference is in the ear of the listener'—although the auditory system encompasses processing much beyond the characterization of the acoustic signal, of course."

In future studies, the researchers plan to extend their investigations to other styles of singing and the attractiveness of speaking voices.

More information: Camila Bruder et al, Perceptual (but not acoustic) features predict singing voice preferences, *Scientific Reports* (2024).

[DOI: 10.1038/s41598-024-58924-9](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-58924-9)

Provided by Max Planck Society

Citation: The magic of voices: Why we like some singers' voices and not others (2024, April 25) retrieved 26 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-04-magic-voices-singers.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--