

Emotional expression in music and speech share similar tonal properties

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Music is a very strong emotional communicator, and different cultures have different emotional associations for different musical "modes". Now, a new cross-cultural study shows that tonal trends used to express feelings in music are consistent in different cultures and are similar to those used in speech. The full report is published March 14, in the open access journal *PLoS ONE*.

In Western music, the major mode is generally associated with excited happy emotions, while the minor mode is generally associated with more subdued or sad emotions. Carnatic music, the classical music of South India, has similar associations between "ragas" and emotions. By comparing modes and ragas used to express similar feelings, the authors of the study found that certain features held in common.

They go on to show that these common features parallel cross-cultural tonal characteristics of speech expressing similar emotions. The authors, led by Dale Purves of Duke University, conclude that their results support the hypothesis that the tonality of a [piece of music](#) expresses emotion because it imitates the tonal characteristics of emotion in the voice.

More information: g DL, Sundararajan J, Han S, Purves D (2012) Expression of Emotion in Eastern and Western Music Mirrors Vocalization. *PLoS ONE* 7(3): e31942. [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0031942](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0031942)

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