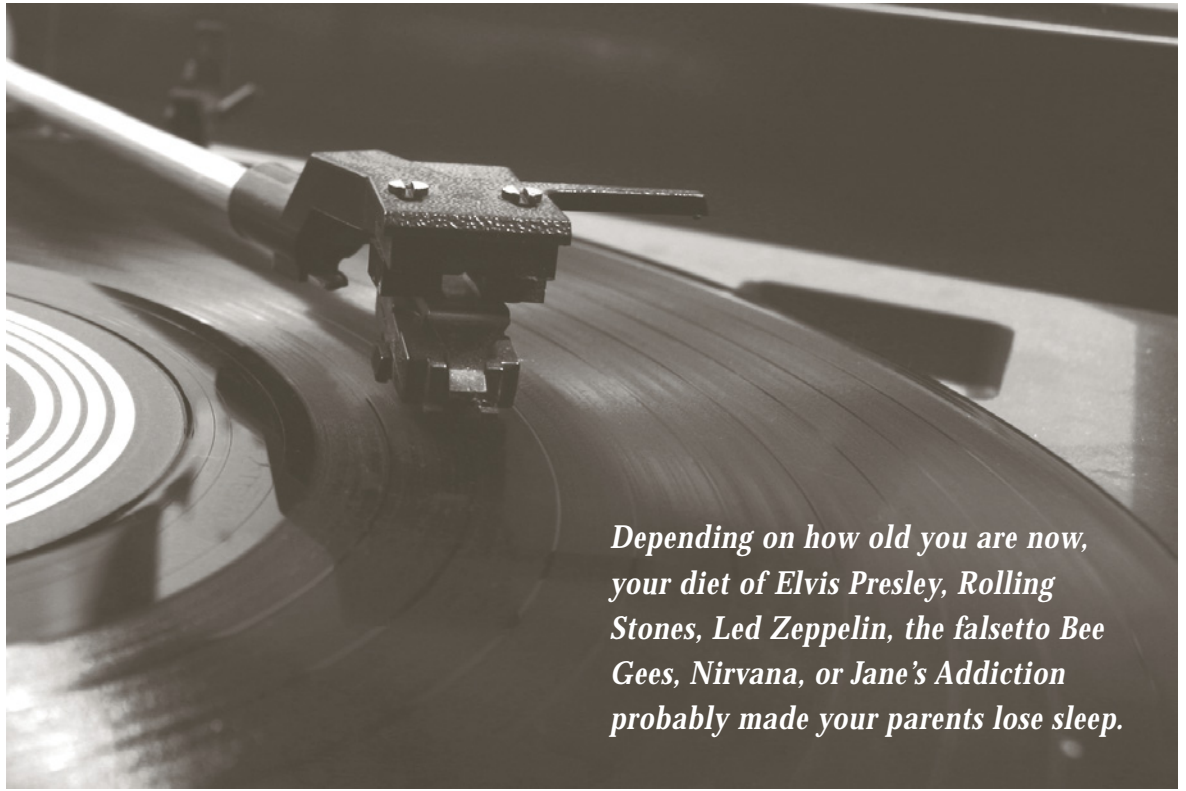


Turn That Music Off!

By Dr Lee Chung Horn, Editorial Board Member



Depending on how old you are now, your diet of Elvis Presley, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, the falsetto Bee Gees, Nirvana, or Jane's Addiction probably made your parents lose sleep.

"If music be the food of love, play on," goes one of Shakespeare's most famous lines.

Music, without doubt, is something all of us enjoy. As children, our sense of melody, rhyme and rhythm was first tickled by kiddy songs we chanted in kindergarten. In primary school, we moved on to school anthems. *Singapura*, *Chan Mali Chan*, and *Home* were indelibly imprinted on our minds. Then, for most of us, our teenage years were lived out to a (preferably loud) pop music soundtrack. We knew so well the lyrics to the latest hit songs of the day that, as adults, we get flashbacks of dimly remembered events whenever we hear a song that once drove us to distraction.

But, most of us doctors leave music behind. There is little precious time when you are a houseman. Then, later, there are other things – higher exams, career, money, family, all more important – that demand our attention. Slowly, the shiny happy lure of pop music fades, we stop buying music, and our relationship with music stops. This is why there are oldies radio stations to cater to people who stopped listening to music, oh, in 1976; and why at hospital D&D's, they always play the old songs, because nobody older than 30 is likely to recognise any song released after 1985, much less shake a hip to it.

However, a new musical awakening is forced upon us when our children start listening to music. Remember

how, like the best of them, you tried to educate your toddlers with earnest purchases of *The Sound of Music* or *Mary Poppins*? "Oooh, so cute! They love *The Lonely Goatherd!* Every time the Von Trapp kids perform this song, my son gets on all fours, and pretends he's a prancing lamb!"

Of course, if your kids are in their twenties or thirties, music does not become an issue. You are not going to be bonding over music. They have their own lives. And chances are, your kids, like you in your time, have grown out of, or are growing away from, music.

But rewind ten years, and, believe me, the day comes. Your kids become teenagers. Their music tastes start to shift, become unrecognisable, or, worse, downright worrying. "Stop buying music for me, dad! This stuff is horrible! I want Hoobastank, or, like, Sum 41 or Linkin Park!" Teenagers in your house? Get ready for at least seven years of headache. Because they are still in your charge, you feel you are entitled to an answer: "What is this stuff in your room? Why is she dressed like that? Why is this band called the Killers?" To your question, you get a cold, disdainful glare, or if they are more empathetic, a roll of the eyes – "Why would I expect you to even understand?" But yes, they would wheedle uncool you to shell out precious dollars to buy the latest CD. "Dad! I want that Pink CD! Like, now!" Every week.



About the author:

Dr Lee Chung Horn is an endocrinologist in private practice who struggles with an ever expanding music collection. He publishes the online rock music magazine, *Beta*. For his unapologetic views on music developments in 2004, and the best records this year, log on to <http://www.betamusic.com.sg>. His next piece will put the spotlight on the hip new phenomenon in music – blogging.



Not a trick question: Yes or no – Avril Lavigne is a fly girl.

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Of course, much of the music teenagers listen to today is harmless. Pop music has always been designed to appeal to the teen demographic, because that is where the money is. The people who buy CDs (and iPods, music downloads, ringtones) are young people. Pop music gives off a veneer of rebellion. And danger. Teenage kids need that. Record companies know that. Kids need an identity distinct from their fuddy-duddy parents. So rock n’ roll, hip hop, nu-metal, or punk, will do nicely, thank you very much, to drive Pop or Mom crazy.

It happened in our time, too. Depending on how old

you are now, your diet of Elvis Presley, Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, the falsetto Bee Gees, Nirvana, or Jane’s Addiction probably made your parents lose sleep.

But, many of us need to learn a whole new music vocabulary. So here is an update for folks who need to catch up in a big hurry. Come cop a couple of suggestions for that stocking-filler that would fire up your hip quotient for the new year, and jump-start that all-important parent-child bonding.

Girls who want a hint of danger will like that rock chick stuff. Avril Lavigne, in my opinion, is no great shakes, but her song *Don’t Tell Me* is the best girl empowerment ballad since Lita Ford’s *Kiss Me Deadly*. So, she is good for some easy-to-digest, junior college level feminism, and hopefully, your baby girl would not get her heart broken too many times. If your girl shows a budding interest in gender studies, literature, and politics, get her some Patti Smith (suggestions: *Horses*, *Radio Ethiopia*) and P J Harvey (*Dry, To Bring You My Love*). Warning: if you know precious little about all this, be prepared for a learning curve.

Hip hop is very hip. Since 1988 (yes, 1988!), it has become a big part of mainstream culture. But many doctors wail: “I can’t stand all this rhyming! How could you even call this music? What’s a fly girl? What’s bling? What are my kids listening to?” Some blink: “What is it, please?” Well, hip hop is probably the most important turning point in the history of 90s popular music. Remember when Bob Dylan turned electric? No? OK, let’s make it real simple. Hip hop ushered in a zeitgeist change as revolutionary as the internet. Things would not ever be the same again. So, the kids today like their hip hop light and bouncy – Will Smith, Kanye West, and Nelly fit the bill. But when your hip hop loving children are ready, introduce them to Public Enemy’s incendiary *It Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. That record is an eloquent and impassioned history lesson on black America. For a bit of sheer creative genius, De La Soul’s *Three Feet High And Rising* cannot be beat.

I must discuss Linkin Park next. Linkin Park is rap-metal, also called nu-metal. Wah, is that heavy metal?! Not healthy, right? Do not fret, the truth is your boys (the girls do not usually take to this kinda stuff) will find their Linkin Park CD about as endearing as a midnight curfew in one quick year. Take it from me, Linkin Park is just souped up angst for those oh-so-dark teenage years. Relax, your son is safe. Get him to listen to the Pixies’ *Doolittle* – it is a hugely better record. If he likes Maroon 5, nudge him to sample Bruce Springsteen’s *The River*.

Finally, what if your child has no interest at all in pop music? Now, you might just feel a pang of anxiety if you fancy yourself as a bit of a music connoisseur. If your tone-deaf child arouses no emotion in you whatsoever, chances are you do not care a hoot about music yourself. Whichever – do not despair. Einstein never liked music. Neither did Florence Nightingale. ■

