

Soundtracks for... Relaxing

by **Mark McKergow**

Music has been used to aid relaxation since time immemorial. If **'music has charms to soothe a savage breast, to soften rocks or bend a knotted oak'** (from a 17th century play by William Congreve), then it surely should be a teacher's friend and support.

Our bodies will unconsciously start to try to synchronise the heartbeat, breathing and other physiological rhythms to whatever music we hear. Almost any slow music has the capacity to be calming. Music with a tempo of below 80 beats per minute will generally produce a calming response.

There are many genres of music offering relaxing possibilities. I enjoy using classical music, with slow Mozart offering a particularly restful quality. Accelerated Learning pioneer Georgi Lozanov used slow Baroque music to enhance alpha brainwaves as well as a restful mood. More recent studies have shown that slow music from US sax star Kenny G has the same effect in terms of promoting changes in the brain, so you can choose from many possibilities.

I like to make sure that my relaxing music is not too mournful – make sure your classroom doesn't sound like a chapel of rest. One thing to watch in a lively classroom is precisely how 'calming' the music should be. For best effect the pace and energy of the music should not be too much lower than the starting level in the room. A very soothing piece may have little effect if the students are bouncing off the ceiling with excitement. Follow the great opera composers and bring

the pace down gradually.

Some of my particular relaxation favourites include:

- Slow Mozart – for example 'Chill with Mozart' (Naxos CD) or 'Relax with Mozart' (Tune Your Brain series)
- Slow baroque music – the excellent Lind Institute CDs Largo, Pastorale, Adagio and Andante have great collections from Vivaldi, Corelli, Telemann, Handel and many others
- Kenny G – 'Breathless' (Arista CD)
- Steven Halpern – 'Music for Accelerated Learning' (CD) – piano, flute and violin, very gentle
- Pure Moods (Virgin CD) features many modern chill-out classics including Enya and Jean-Michelle Jarre

Again, remember to fade the music out when you want to move on – a sudden cut can be a great jolt after all that lovely calm and quiet. And do make sure that whatever classroom activity you use alongside this music is appropriate – reflecting, settling down to do something, quiet reading.

Too much soothing of the savage breast might end up with sleeping – wouldn't that be a novel problem? Good luck!

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by Roland Roberts

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Mark McKergow is a speaker, author and learning consultant. His website www.mckergow.com contains more information and research on music and learning, as well as links to CD, book and web sources.

