

From the pen of *ESSENCE MAGAZINE* Featured
Relationship Expert *RYEAL SIMMS, Ph.D.*



Why We Love
Love Music

drryealsimms.com

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Whitney Houston. Michael Jackson. Prince.

It seems like every time I check my Facebook feed another music icon has passed away. One of the most recent ones is Rock and Roll pioneer Chuck Berry. And as I read all of the tributes from music royalty roll in honoring him, I remembered how the loss of one artist in particular hit me really hard — The death of Whitney Houston.

The Greatest Love of All

I remember the moment I first heard the news. Instantly, I was transported back to the time when I once met and shared the stage with her.

Years ago, when I was paying my dues as a background vocalist, my dear friend, John Buddy Hopkins, made it possible for us to sing along with Whitney, Smokey Robinson and others during the final song for the American Music Awards.

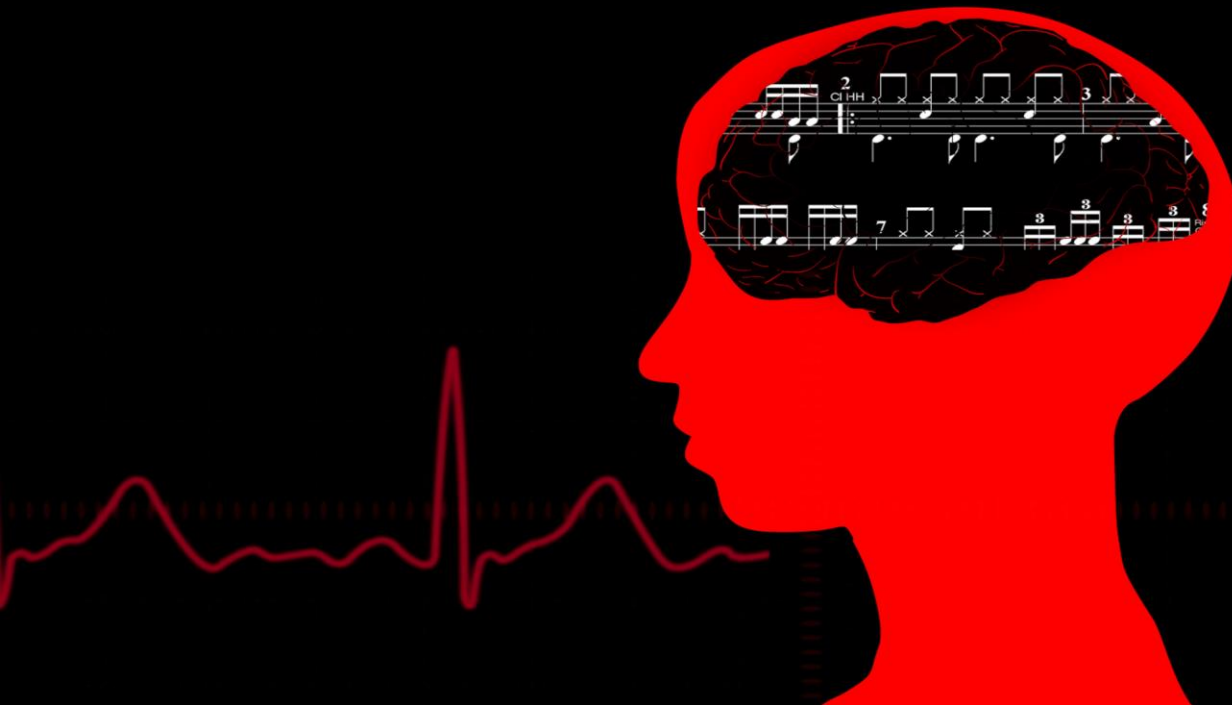
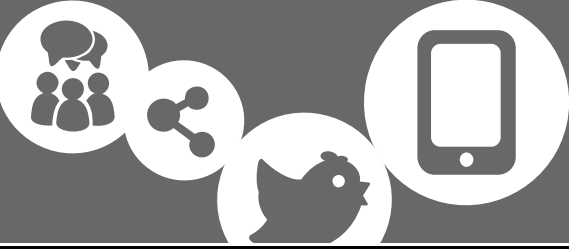
Whitney and I never spoke personally, but I do remember being in awe of her, because she was the epitome of love music for me. Her voice. Her songs. Everything her music represented was exactly what I was striving to communicate as a soloist and songwriter.

I was in love with **love** music.

But as years passed, record deals failed to materialize and the direction of the industry shifted, my relationship with music changed. Not only did I fall out of love with **love** music, but I also grew to resent it so much that for a long time, I couldn't even listen to **love** songs.

Then, Whitney Houston died unexpectedly. And instantly, I remembered just how much I still loved **love** music. And as I watched fans, friends and celebrities share how Whitney Houston's music touched, shaped and provided the soundtrack to their lives, I realized I wasn't alone.





The Most Powerful Sound

Music also neurologically:

- Triggers the naturally occurring feel good drug of dopamine in our brain
- Taps into our deepest emotions or fears
- And directly stimulates the areas of our brains which houses our memories.

That's why when you hear a piece of instrumental music or a song, it can transform your mood from happy to sad or transport you back in time to a distinctive memory.

And what memories are more distinctive or stronger than love?

No matter what race, class, sex, creed or culture we are, we all love love music, because it touches each and every one of us deeply, profoundly and eternally.

But how is that possible? Why does music - the most powerful sound in the world - move us to laugh, cry or remember?

To answer this question, we must go back to the womb. At 17 to 19 weeks old, sound is the second sense we develop after touch as fetuses.

And what is sound? It's simply a collection of vibrations that travel through the air, which enter through our ear canal and are converted into neurosignals. Those signals then travel from the ear to our brain stem - the primeval base of our brain - and up to our auditory cortex, which is laid out in pitch order almost, like piano keys.

That's how sound works and has worked since early man uttered his first words to express love, humor or danger. But music and our relationship with it is a special case. Why? Because the vibrations of music - unlike the chaos of noise - are continuous and regular.

In other words, music makes sense to us on such a deep, primal, soulful level, it's impossible for us to not fall in love with it.



The Need To Belong



Maslow's Hierarchy tells us that we all have a need to belong. And there is no greater need than to love and receive love.

That's why we love **love** music. It unlocks our most basic need as human beings and cognitively produces or summons memories to subconsciously teach us lessons about love.

I'm a relationship neuroscientist, but I'm not ashamed to say I have gleaned many lessons from Whitney Houston's music. We all have.

And despite her personal struggles with relationships and addiction, we all loved and mourned Whitney's death, because her music represents the hopes we all have and the challenges we all face when it comes to love.

Thank you, Whitney Houston, for sharing the phenomenal instrument of your voice and loving us eternally through your music. May you continue to rest in peace.



Learn more from Relationship Scientist RYEAL SIMMS



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DrRyealTheRelationshipscientist

@Ask The Relationship
Scientist Ryeal Simms



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