

The Musical Cleanse

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"Purge out the old leaven..." - I Corinthians 5:7

The musical cleanse is a 5-step process to rid oneself of the noise of the world in order to purify the soul of musical attachments.

The end is to have proper discernment with music; to be able to discern well the music that will aid your spiritual life and rid yourself of that which is harmful to it, even if you greatly enjoyed it in the past.

Why is a Cleanse Necessary?

One may ask, "isn't it obvious what music is good and what is bad?"

In better times, it was much more obvious. For some who are well-informed it is more obvious, but for many it is unclear. In today's world, we are so steeped in noise and evil music (whether we wish to be or not), that we can very easily think harmful music is good. (For example, the Jackson 5 seems tame and harmless compared to Lady Gaga, but that does not make the Jackson 5 good or acceptable.) It is easy to err in good faith in this regard.

Also, we may be attached to music which we suspect or even know is not good for us, but we may be unwilling to stop listening to it due to our attachment.

This is where the musical cleanse comes in.

How Can One Discern Good Music From Bad Music?

There are basic guidelines here: <https://oldschoolmusicstudio.weebly.com/guidelines--playlists.html>

This is a general standard which serves as a starting point to narrow things down. However, there is much more to discerning music than avoiding major issues:

What if the lyrics seem moral enough, there are no gravely offensive beats, and it seems to be innocuous overall? Does that mean it's good?

Often, yes. And if you did enough work to determine those three things, you are on the right track.

But, those points are not everything. Much music that fits that description is still objectively harmful to us. Music that seems moral enough can still bring you down spiritually more subtly, but not gravely. So, there is no need to be scrupulous. Follow the list of guidelines first if you have not already done so to narrow things down. Then, if you wish to do more for yourself spiritually, do the musical cleanse.

The Five Phases of the Musical Cleanse

For those who are less familiar with these genres, or perhaps don't know where to begin with each phase, there is a list of music for each phase here:

<https://oldschoolmusicstudio.weebly.com/guidelines--playlists.html>

I. Cultivate silence for a minimum of 1 week.

Detach yourself from listening to music altogether. It is necessary to begin with silence, especially for those who are accustomed to listening to music often. The purpose of the silence is to begin the process of detachment and clear noise from the mind so that you can begin with a blank slate. If you normally go for a run with headphones, run in silence. If you listen to music in the car, drive in silence. If you play music while you clean or work, work in silence. Do this for a minimum of one week. If you can go longer, do so. Some people need more time than others. For some, it's easy to do things in silence while for others it's nearly impossible, but everyone can do it for at least one week. During this week, make a firm resolution to become detached from all the music you have ever listened to and loved. By the end of this first phase, you should be comfortable with silence. If you are not, continue the silent phase until you are.

II. Gregorian Chant

Listen exclusively to Gregorian chant for some time. The timeline will be different for everyone. I recommend you listen to it long enough to have three favorite chants which you know by name and can hum or sing along to. If you are already familiar with chant, find three new favorites. Having three favorites indicates that you have listened to it long enough to move to the next step. If you do not love Gregorian chant, by the end of this phase you should at least find an appreciation for it and take joy in listening to your favorites. If you already loved Gregorian chant before you began, you should find a deeper appreciation for it.

III. Sacred Choral Music and Hymns

Listen to Sacred choral works (specifically motets and masses from the Counter-reformation) along with a-Capella traditional hymns. As in the previous phase, listen long enough to have three favorites. For now, stay away from choral works with orchestra or brass and hymns accompanied by orchestra. The goal is to cultivate a deep appreciation for the voice on its own in its purest form before delving into instrumental works.

IV. Baroque Music

Listen to Baroque works until you have three favorites. Vivaldi, Bach, and Handel are great choices, especially orchestral airs, suites, concertos, and oratorios.

V. Classical Music

Listen to Classical era works, specifically Mozart and Haydn. Avoid the later works of Beethoven, as they are more Romantic in character than Classical. Avoid operas for now; find symphonies, concertos, quartets, piano sonatas, and sacred works. As always, listen until you have three favorites and have cultivated at least a surface-level understanding of Classical music and an appreciation for it.

Once you have completed the five phases, you will find that you have a greater appreciation for music overall. Now, having exposed yourself to the ideal for long enough time to find favorites in each genre, you will be far more sensitive to harmful music.

Go back to some of the music you listened to before and pay close attention to how your body and soul react to it. Pay attention to your heart rate, breathing, and muscles. Identify whether certain songs make your muscles tight or tense, identify whether certain songs engage an specific area of the body, and identify the movement or dancing that is inspired by the song. Listen to your gut when you hear a song.

If you pay close attention to all of these details, you will find that much of it is no longer attractive to you. You may still feel attachments, but if the music is harmful, you will know in your conscience that you need to let it go. Above all, be willing to let things go.

Music is not neutral.

It does one of two things: it either brings you up, or it brings you down.

If you undertake the musical cleanse in a spirit of detachment to seek the truth, by the end you will be able to discern well the music that will aid your spiritual life and put aside that which will hinder your spiritual growth even slightly or subtly.

The musical cleanse is not something to be rushed through. It is important to take your time and cultivate a love for each phase of music before moving to the next. For some people, this will be easy, for others, it may require quite a bit of discipline. For everyone, it will be beneficial.

Ad Jesum per Mariam,

Eliza