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Book review

Brodsky, Warren (2015). *Driving with music: Cognitive-behavioural implications*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate. 383 pp. ISBN 9781472411464 (hbk)

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Music and cars go together. Listening to music while driving is a common everyday occurrence. However, as Brodsky points out himself in the preface, it is interesting that very little research has considered driving with music, even though it is a very common activity. As Brodsky states, “driving with background music might be *the* most prevalent music behaviour ever taken on by the human species” (p. xiv)! As the social and applied psychology of music has begun to recognize the importance of context when explaining our relationship with music, more and more interesting research questions are being considered. With *Driving with music: Cognitive-behavioural implications*, Warren Brodsky has focused his attention to considering how music is experienced in the car; and in doing so, he provides a comprehensive and critical examination of this musical behaviour.

Brodsky’s 300+ page book aims to explore the everyday use of music listening while driving a car in a manner that is accessible to multiple professions and interest groups—the work has merit for researchers interested in transportation, driver behaviour, media, and the psychology of music as well as for drivers and passengers themselves. In putting together *Driving with music: Cognitive-behavioural implications*, Brodsky has created a useful handbook, emphasized by its content and chapter layout, that, as he contends, addresses the gap in research concerning in-car music as a contributing factor to driver error and traffic violations.

From the outset, Brodsky outlines the importance of this topic. Recent research continues to point to the car as a location in which many people listen to music. In fact, while Brodsky highlights the results of car company surveys that consider people’s opinions, there exists a lack of empirical evidence regarding the effects of music on

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driver behaviour and vehicle performance. Thus, not only posed as an interesting subject for the social and applied psychology of research, understanding the potential benefits and consequences of listening to music in the car is essential to our public safety out on the roads.

The beginning of the book presents background information: Chapter 1 details the history of car audio, while Chapter 2 discusses music as background to non-musical activities. In Chapter 1, the automobile culture is considered both from a historical and sociological perspective. Reinforcing how “autocentric” our society has become, the historical development solidifying the car’s importance in our daily lives is expertly detailed. The links that Brodsky draws between the development of cars as well as car audio and personal choice and autonomy explain this consumer behaviour by demonstrating just how important sound has become to the driving experience. Moreover, the chapter concludes by highlighting how media has reinforced the importance of car culture: in-text discussion (and the appendices listings) outline movies, video and computer games, and songs about cars and driving.

Then Chapter 2 outlines the effects of background music in everyday life. The chapter serves as a broad overview of relevant background material from the field of music psychology. Importantly, the second section of the chapter focuses on background music in everyday life. Indeed, it was nice to see a discussion concerning (a) the potential role of choice with regard to listener engagement and (b) how mobile music now is as technological developments have increased the accessibility of music in everyday life. Familiar reading to those of us involved in music science research, nevertheless it is focused on considering these fundamental concepts with regard to the

experience of car drivers and passengers. Brodsky concludes the chapter by outlining Hargreaves' Reciprocal Feedback Model of Responses to Music (a solid conceptual scheme in which human response to music result from the three-way interaction of the music, the listener, and the environment), as it is clearly applicable to the topic at hand.

Chapter 3 outlines people's thoughts about their behaviours in cars. In particular, the chapter illustrates how people consider the car to be a prime environment to listen to music. Brodsky presents statistics concerning the popularity and frequency of listening devices, popular songs for driving, as well as songs that might be considered safe/dangerous for driving. I found the section on "boom cars" to be a fascinating consideration of how certain rap and hip-hop music was created specifically for car listening. The data presented concerning people's attitudes towards music suggest that they perceive listening to music as a helpful activity, with survey data indicating that listening to music is perceived as a low risk activity with regard to driver distraction. Further, evidence for and against the use of music to counter fatigue and maintain alertness is presented.

Chapter 4 considers how listening to music in the car might be counterproductive. Specifically, Brodsky works through four contraindications for the use of background music while driving: structural mechanical interference, perceptual masking, capacity interference, and social diversion. While acknowledging that little traffic psychology research has considered music as a source of inattention and distraction, this chapter weaves together pertinent findings from studies that have considered various aural stimuli.

Brodsky continues his consideration of the ill-effects of listening to music in the car in Chapter 5. Specifically focusing on music-intensity evoked arousal, music-tempo generated distraction, and music-genre induced aggression, this chapter presents a critical evaluation of previous research to consider how the ill-effects are influenced by the driver, driving circumstances, music, and level of involvement with the music. For each of the three ill-effects, Brodsky explains the relevant theoretical concepts and presents research studies, drawing on surveys, naturalistic driving data, as well as simulation studies, and more.

Chapter 6 shifts its focus to considering efforts to use music in order to promote safe driving. For those familiar with Brodsky's work, the information presented in Chapter 6 will be familiar. However, the contribution that this book makes for those familiar with his work, though, is the direct application of his research set against the information presented in the previous chapters. As Brodsky used the earlier chapters to set up the theoretical and contextual basis in which his research sits, this chapter closes the book on a positive note. By presenting research that is aimed at developing the use of music as a strategy for safe driving, the implications and applications of music for safe driving suggest that not all in-car music must contribute to negative consequences.

Lastly, in the Chapter 7 postscript, Brodsky briefly reiterates his prevailing message from this work. He does well to express this message in four connected parts, presented in full as the conclusion of this work on page 304. Solidly based on the information presented throughout the entire book, the reader can readily agree with Brodsky's argument that the driving experience is related to the interconnected

influence of the driver and driving demands and the music, as well as the interaction with the music.

While at times over-laden with statistical and methodological details, the text does provide a very rich and informative consideration of applicable research regarding the cognitive and behavioural implications for listening to music (and speech) while driving. I found the most merit in the second half of the book. It is in the second half where Brodsky critically considers the potential benefits and risks to background music in the car. Rather than operating from a single viewpoint, Brodsky expertly pulls together applicable findings from a large number of studies that allow for the consideration of how music influences drivers and their driving performance. Through what could be interpreted, at times, as an overly-critical review of the previous research, Brodsky clearly points to the strengths and limitations in the research he reviews.

The stated aim of the book is to consider the issues related to listening to music while driving, and for this the book is successful. It is clear that considerable time and effort went into the research and preparation of the book. As a result, readers will benefit from Brodsky's ability to pull together information from across disciplines in a manner that is approachable for those from a range of disciplines. At times, the text felt somewhat repetitive due to the chapters' structure, though for those less familiar with the theories and pertinent concepts from the field of psychology of music, this text will likely assist the reader in understanding Brodsky's arguments. Additionally, the tables, figures, and appendices assist in presenting pertinent information clearly. Moreover, the statistical and methodological details might potentially bog down some readers less

familiar with the research process; however, Brodsky re-emphasizes points along the way, which will carry readers along.

Overall, the scope of the book is impressive and *Driving with music: Cognitive-behavioural implications* offers much for those researching in the social and applied psychology of music to think about. It is clear that 'cars and music' is both an area of great importance and also an area ripe and ready for additional research. Therefore, this book will serve as a useful foundation for future research. As Brodsky states: "as long as automobiles are accessible to consumers, drivers will always be cruising down some roadway with their favourite playlist of tracks blasting out of the cabin speakers in full volume, as the croon away in the best of karaoke style" (p. 36), making it important that we understand our relationship with music in the car.