Pleasurable Sadness in Music

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“ [...] it has been noted that people tend to avoid experiencing sadness in real life, but that they somehow find the experience of sadness pleasurable in music listening.”

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4 different theories:

I. P. Kivy

listener only perceives sadness, but does not experience the emotion itself

-> does not account for cases of genuine arousal of sadness by music

II. D. Huron

adaptive physiological responses (like hormones) counteract pain/sadness

-> only explains pleasure following sadness

-> fails to explain how music is special in this

III. E. Schubert

aesthetical stimuli inhibit the aversion system (preventing negative feelings like sadness or pain)

-> inconsistent with recent findings (where subjects rated sad music as pleasurable but scary music as unpleasant)

IV. P. N. Juslin

listener experiences mixed emotions at the same time (resulting from the interaction of the Contagion mechanism and the Aesthetical judgement mechanism)

-> actually accounts for simultaneous experience of genuine sadness and pleasure

-> explains why music (or art in general) evokes these special mixed emotions