



MUSICALITEA

Article by Kaiya

One of the earliest homework assignments new tea students are given here at the center is to begin making music selections for their tea sessions. We pair music with our tea sessions here the majority of the time, we've sent you two collections of beautiful tea music, and I always touch on music selection in my articles on tea, but we've never really shared about this important aspect of the tea ceremony in an article before. But before we delve into the various considerations that go into a skillful choice of music, we should first touch on the question of why we include music at all, as silence is often an equally attractive backdrop for a session with a fine tea.

The main advantage of drinking silent tea is that, in theory, there is nothing distracting you from the tea. Even music that is in perfect alignment with the tea can be something I am paying attention to other than the tea, or a bit of a crutch, doing some of the work for me. But when I quiet and still my mind within silence, keeping undisturbed and focused, I can sink down into the deepest roots of the Earth or soar to the furthest heights of the Heavens with my tea.

Although really well-chosen music also can inspire such dizzying sessions, there is something extra-special to the intimacy, simplicity and pureness of such journeys taken with "just the two of us". Other times I don't choose music because the natural sounds of the environment are so exquisite, such as crickets at night, songbirds in the morning or a cool, rainy afternoon—even the so-called mundane sounds of everyday life outside the window can be nice punctuations between the silent spaces of a quiet session.

As with all things tea, though, we can't get lost in the heights; there are practical considerations to keep in mind. If, for example, I am in the city and the tea space isn't very well insulated, I will often play music simply so that the entire session isn't punctuated by horns, shouts, cat fights, (some of you have had the pleasure of listening to our drunken karaoke singer), and so on. I may choose music because I am serving a large group of people or one or two extremely talkative or restless individuals.

In these cases, music will naturally put the guests at ease and give their busy minds something to focus on in between steepings or while water is boiling. It will also begin to bring them towards and introduce them to the energy of the tea they are about to meet, if it is well chosen.

And the more I let the tea choose the music instead of me, the better the choice will be.

This letting-go of personal preferences, desires, and tastes is vital for all tea preparation. Instead of telling tea which teapot She is going to go into, which cups She's going to be drunk from, and so on, I ask Her which ones She prefers. I am serving tea, after all, not making tea, and in the same way I would do my best to make an honored guest in my house as comfortable as possible, I want to do the same when I serve tea—both serving tea to people and serving the goddess Tea herself. Music is no exception.

I didn't have many tea preferences when I got here. I hadn't bought any teacups or teapots before, didn't have bad habits of choosing them according to what I wanted. I was lucky; I didn't have a lot of rubbish teaware I needed to throw out after spending a lot of money on it like many people. But I did grow up in a musical family, playing and listening to music constantly since I was a child. I went to live shows through high school, university and beyond, and had quite a large music collection. It was a big part of my identity. I had developed very solidified preferences, desires, and tastes in music, in other words, and frankly speaking, I just didn't like the same music that Tea likes. But listening to the music I liked was just another kind of mental noise getting in the way of my tea, and frankly, I have found that nobody enjoys drinking my mind!

When you drink tea, the tea becomes you, and you become the tea. That tea's energy merges with yours and you begin to vibrate with it. The very same is true of music. Even more so, because music is pure vibration without any physical form. When you listen to music you become it as well; it permeates you just as Tea does, so it's very important that the vibrations are as complementary as possible, or your guests will feel uncomfortable as conflicting energies literally pour into their bodies! So you must choose music which shares an energetic frequency with the tea.

The final factor in choosing music is the environment. Not just the environment you are in, such as the weather or time of day, but also the environment you wish to encourage and create. Of course, you should also have selected a tea that has that energy or once again you will be in conflict, but for now let's assume you've made a perfect selection. Actually, environment is the most basic aspect of music selection and is the perfect place to begin with a few elementary homework assignments.

Having spent our whole lives waking, working and going to sleep, we all naturally have an awareness of



the difference in energy between the beginning, middle and end of the day. So the first and most basic homework assignment is to choose a music that is well-suited to the morning, one for the afternoon, one for the evening and one for any time of day. For extra credit, choose a few moods, such as tranquility, loving communion or calm joy. You can cheat a little, by looking for music that actually contains titles that are obvious, for example “Morning Ragas” is a favorite album of ours, as a guide.

Traditional instrumental music, especially Indian or Chinese, Zen music, ambient sounds, chanting, meditation or yoga music, are all good genres to begin searching through. If there are lyrics, it’s often better if they’re in another language to avoid distraction, but many of our favorites here have English lyrics too. At some point, I strongly recommend spending a session or at least the first half of a session with each of your teas in silence, familiarizing yourself with their energy, and then looking for a song or even a whole album that compliment that tea specifically. (Keep a notebook!)

You will also find that many albums can go with not only any time of day but also with any tea. Keep a list of those albums with notes about their unique qualities for reference until you know them like the back of your hand and don’t need to look at your notes anymore. These are necessary for those times when you just need to quickly put on something that works, such as when you are asked to brew a tea you are unfamiliar with, or for guests you don’t know. It simply doesn’t work to begin something, re-

alize it’s not a good choice, then turn off the music, flip through your library, and start over in the middle of a session.

We all know the joy of sharing and discovering new music with friends, and tea is the same. Of course, these are only guidelines, but the three considerations of guests, energy and environment are good places to start. There will always be exceptions. If I brewed tea with music for ten meditators, simply because it was a large group of people, for example, I would probably miss out on what would have been a great silent session—one whose depth and profundity would have been greatly enhanced and strengthened by the large number of people, rather than hindered by it. Tea is flexible and yielding and ever-present to the situation, so we must be as well. I hope your tea introduces all of you to some beautiful new music, and please remember to pass on the favor and share your discoveries in the forums with everyone this month!

