

Gen Z's penchant for sad music

1. Look at some Spotify playlist titles and discuss the questions.

Comforting Sad Mix

Sad Girl Summer

Most Depressing Songs
to Ever Exist

Crying Myself
to Sleep

- Have you ever listened to a playlist like one of these? How did it make you feel? If you haven't listened to any playlists like these, would you?
- Can you think of any artists, bands or songs with a 'sad' sound that you might find in these playlists?
- Why do you think people like listening to sad music?
- What are some playlists that you like listening to?

2. Complete the sentences with the words and phrases in the boxes.

cathartic

melancholy lyrics

resonate with

slow tempo

stripped-back

wallow

- A. I hate listening to _____ because I don't want the music I consume to bring my mood down.
- B. I love when a song tells a story, especially when it's something I can personally _____.
- C. If I'm in a bar or restaurant, I dislike music that's too loud or chaotic. I prefer a _____ sound.
- D. If I need to relax, a song with a _____ is nice. If I'm exercising, I need something with energy!
- E. Sad music is popular, but I prefer heavy metal – it's much more _____ for releasing strong emotions.
- F. I have a couple of favourite sad songs that I put on when I need to _____ in my feelings. The songs allow me to accept my feelings, even the difficult ones.

3. Name a sad song with each of the features below.

A sad song that:

- has melancholy lyrics
- tells a story you can resonate with
- has a stripped-back sound
- has a slow tempo
- feels cathartic
- allows you to wallow

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4. Look at some comments about preference for sad music. Choose those that you feel strongly about and discuss them.

- *"My concern with Gen Z obsessing over sad music is that it lets them wallow too much in their negative emotions. Young people should try to experience life more positively, and happy music can help with that."*
- *"We don't want to admit it, but the reason Gen Z love sad music is because they're realists! Depressing songs reflect our current society. Happy music doesn't serve a purpose apart from distracting us from our true feelings."*
- *"In my opinion, sad music provides a necessary and cathartic release of emotions... I think this helps to build emotional maturity and a tolerance for uncomfortable feelings."*
- *"Sadcore is more of a trend than anything connected to real emotion. Beneath the cool, stripped-back sound of these 'sad' songs, the lyrics are all shallow and meaningless."*
- *"People just love to find fault with Gen Z. Depressing music also resonated with Millennials, Gen X and Boomers, they just didn't have platforms like Spotify and TikTok to broadcast their listening habits."*
- *"The reason Gen Z are listening to so much sad music is because they're not going to clubs and dancing anymore! Everyone is more concerned with looking good than having a fun time."*

5. Look at some information about changing music trends and answer the questions.

Decreasing popularity in bands

2022 saw the lowest occupancy by bands in the Billboard Top 50 Songs at a mere 8%. In 2022, 80% of the charts were occupied by solo artists.

Discoverability

Social media is making it easier to discover new music, e.g. nearly 70% of young people reported finding music through TikTok in 2024.

Song length

The average song length in 1990 was 4 minutes and 19 seconds. Today, Gen Z express preferences for songs of 3 minutes and under.

Genre changes

63% of Gen Z listen to more diverse, non-English music, e.g. LatinX or K-Pop (Korean pop music) than previous generations. Conversely, they show less interest in genres such as rock and punk music.

- Have you noticed any of these trends? Do you find any of them surprising?
- What do you think is causing the trends of band popularity, song length, and genre differences?

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- What are some other ways people discover new music?
- Have you noticed any other trends? How do you think social media is affecting the way Gen Z experience music, aside from finding new songs?
- What music trends do you predict in the coming five to ten years?

6. Complete the statements with your ideas.

- Gen Z's love of sad music is simply a cultural response to ...
- I think older generations might have preferred happier music because ...
- Other generations also had genre preferences, like ...
- The pandemic heightened the importance of music because ...
- Music created by AI (Artificial Intelligence) will ...
- The use of AR (Augmented Reality) and VR (Virtual Reality) in live performances is ...
- Algorithms have affected our consumption of music by ...

READING TIME

Vocabulary

melancholy	A. Easily broken or delicate
tempo	B. Sad or gloomy in feeling
stripped-back	C. Supported or lifted
proliferation	D. Revival or renewal of energy
buoyed	E. Speed or pace of music
fragile	F. Cultural movement opposing mainstream norms
counterculture	G. Spread or increase rapidly
reinvigorated	H. Simplified; reduced to essential

Use the words in the box to complete the sentences. Each word is used once.

Words: melancholy | pandemic | subtle | resonate | accompaniment | grief | aesthetic | forge

1. Sadcore lyrics often express deep _____, which helps listeners feel understood.
2. Many young people were drawn to sadcore during the global _____.
3. The band's music has a _____ beauty, with gentle sounds and minimal production.
4. Songs that _____ with emotions often create a strong bond with the audience.
5. A simple instrumental _____ can make the vocal line stand out even more.
6. Musicians often explore themes of loss and _____ in their sadcore songs.
7. Sadcore differs from emo not only in sound but also in its overall _____.
8. Musicians like Macdonald aim to _____ connections with listeners through shared feelings.

Comprehension

1. What distinguishes sadcore from other musical genres?
2. How does sadcore help listeners according to Amy Macdonald?
3. Why does Jocelyn Gould believe sadcore is popular among young people?
4. In what ways does sadcore differ from emo music of the early 2000s?
5. How have social media platforms influenced the sadcore genre?