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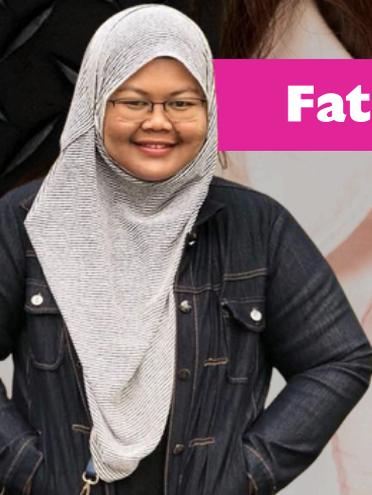
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ECHOES OF DESPAIR: THE HAUNTING LEGACY OF GLOOMY SUNDAY:

HUNGARIAN SUICIDE SONG, ITS PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT ON
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND STATE RESPONSE

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The song *Gloomy Sunday* (*Szomorú Vasárnap*), composed in 1933 by Hungarian pianist and composer Rezső Seress, remains one of the most haunting pieces in modern music history. Initially penned during the interwar period of political instability and rising depression in Hungary, the melancholic composition acquired infamy not merely for its somber tone but due to its alleged association with a wave of suicides in Hungary and beyond.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CHRONOLOGY

Rezső Seress wrote *Szomorú Vasárnap* at a time of personal and national despair. Hungary, reeling from the economic aftermath of World War I and the punitive Treaty of Trianon (1920), faced growing poverty and political turmoil. The lyrics, later revised by poet László Javorka, centered on themes of mourning and the loss of a beloved, eventually evolving into a metaphor for existential despair (Ziegler, 2015).

The song reportedly became linked to more than 100 suicides in Hungary during the late 1930s and early 1940s (Stack & Lester, 1989). Victims were said to have left lyrics of the song behind or died with it playing nearby. Internationally, the English version, popularised by Billy Holiday in 1941, further cemented its morbid legacy. Although the statistical link between the song and suicides is still speculative, the psychological phenomenon known as suicide contagion or the Werther effect might have played a role in creating its eerie pattern (Phillips, 1974).

Amid public concern and sensationalist media coverage, Hungarian authorities responded by placing restrictions on the song's broadcast. Although exact legal records are scarce, anecdotal evidence and media reports suggest that Hungarian radio stations unofficially banned the airing of Szomorú Vasárnap during the height of its notoriety. The BBC followed suit, refusing to broadcast Billie Holiday's version during wartime, citing its "disturbing nature" (BBC Archive, 2004).



While no formal Hungarian legislation explicitly outlawed the song, the response illustrates early 20th-century tendencies toward moral panic and censorship in response to media-linked social anxieties. The case mirrors later legal approaches toward regulating potentially harmful content in media, including suicide portrayal, as reflected in modern mental health policies and media ethics codes (World Health Organisation, 2017).



THE EFFECT OF A SONG FROM AN EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH

Today's students face various pressures, from academic demands to social and financial problems. In this context, music may seem like a "companion", but it can also be a "mirror" that reflects their disappointment and despair. Songs like Gloomy Sunday, filled with sadness and loss, may reinforce feelings of loneliness and meaninglessness in struggling students.

Without strong emotional support systems, students may find it difficult to distinguish between artistic expression and real life. They may see the song as a "call to surrender" rather than a form of creative expression. Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions to detect early signs of emotional disorders and provide appropriate interventions.

MUSIC AS A REFLECTIVE AND THERAPEUTIC TOOL

Although some music can have negative effects, it can also be used positively. In arts or counselling classes, a song like Gloomy Sunday can be used for reflection by helping students understand how art represents human emotional reality. It can also be used to build empathy, analyse lyrics, and discuss social issues such as depression and loss.

Music therapy is also proven to help manage stress and anxiety. Hence, it is important to educate students on how to choose music that fits their emotional needs, rather than just following trends.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATORS

Educators play a major role in guiding students to perceive art and music in a balanced manner. They need to be sensitive to emotional changes in students and provide safe spaces to voice their feelings. Educators can also help build students' emotional intelligence so they can critically assess musical content rather than passively absorbing the messages.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the challenges of exposure to negative-themed music such as Gloomy Sunday, several educational steps can be taken:

-  Integrate mental health modules into the curriculum –subjects like Moral Education, Islamic Education, or Arts can include topics on emotional awareness and responsible media consumption.
-  Guided reflection and discussion sessions – Teachers and lecturers can facilitate post-listening discussions to help students process their emotions.
-  Training for educators and counsellors – Provide training on identifying signs of depression and using art for emotional support.
-  Campaigns on healthy music choices – Schools and universities can organise awareness campaigns on choosing music that supports emotional well-being.

CONCLUSION

Gloomy Sunday has become a symbol of how powerfully music can affect human emotions. Though its association with suicides may be exaggerated, the song remains relevant as a subject of study in education and psychology. In the educational world, such a song should not be feared but understood—as an entry point to discuss important issues such as mental health, emotional expression, and the role of art in human life.

With proper guidance and a holistic educational approach, students can be taught to appreciate art critically and responsibly and manage their emotions in a healthier way. Education is not just about delivering knowledge but also nurturing the heart—and in this, music plays an important role.

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