

The main goal of this proposed research is to study a possible role of musical experience in the evolution of a conceptual consciousness. The conceptual consciousness is often associated with the conscious experience of language categories but is not restricted solely to them. Since musical experience, especially the experience of musical pitch and rhythm, is difficult to describe in well-defined concepts, it is hypothesized that the sensations that accompany listening to music represents a transitional state between consciousness based on emotional sensations and consciousness based on vivid, mainly visually imagined concepts. The additional rationale for this hypothesis is that on the one hand music lacks semantics whilst on the other hand it is a syntactically complex form of auditory medium of communication.

In order to achieve the aforementioned goal, interdisciplinary research is planned. It will combine the knowledge and methods characteristic to musicology with the achievements of cognitive sciences, especially the philosophy of evolutionary biology and the psychology of music. Additionally, comparative studies will be conducted which will compare the conscious experience of speech and music. Since the naturalistic paradigm assumes the continuity between humans and their animal ancestors, the comparison of certain human perceptive abilities and the abilities observed among our closest animal relatives will also be performed. A good point of departure for this comparison is a set of music-like behavior observed among our evolutionarily less related species. Therefore the comparison between bird and human singing abilities are planned. The main result of this project will be a model of a preconceptual proto-consciousness based on musical sensations as well as the evolutionary scenario of the transition between this proto-consciousness and conceptual consciousness.

The reason for this project is the fact that musical experience has been underestimated in the theories of the origin of consciousness. Also, the fact that the evolutionary scenarios of the appearance of human musicality have not indicated the relation between the sensations that accompany listening to music and consciousness suggests more attention is required. The results of this research will help to better understand the role of human musicality in the evolution of our conscious mind and to answer the question of what makes humans unique in the animal kingdom.