



Why We Like Music: Ear, Emotion, Evolution

Silvia Bencivelli

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Does music have an evolutionary purpose? This contribution by Italian science journalist Silvia Bencivelli to the fascinating literature on music and the brain evenly surveys the whole range of recent studies and the different conclusions they suggest. How, when, and why did human beings develop brains and bodies with such marvelously precise and complex abilities to hear, make, and enjoy music? Bencivelli investigates the fascinating new science of music in search of answers. Ranging widely through discoveries in acoustics, emotion, healing, cognition, neuroscience, and infant development, she covers the state of the art in research about our relationship with music and presents several possible conclusions. Bencivelli paints vivid and human pictures of the scientists involved in the search for answers to some of the deepest questions of human development. She gives clear insight into their motivations, and examines their methods and rationale for carrying out experimental tests of various kinds. Her natural command of science and medicine and experience interpreting these technical subjects in her work for television and radio allows her to explain briefly for general readers how disputes have arisen and been settled, often over highly technical details. Parents of young children will be particularly interested in her discussion of the so-called Mozart effect for which extravagant claims of improvements in intelligence have been made. Reporting a controversy played out in *Nature*, *Neuroscience Letters*, and other journals over several years, Bencivelli carefully adjudicates claims made with rigorous methodology and others based on pseudoscience.

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