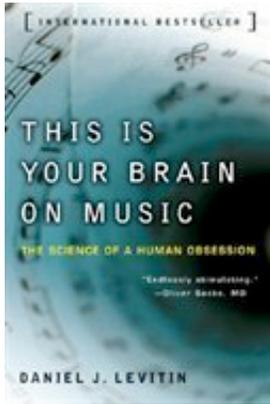


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HOW MUSIC WORKS

By ANDREW DOWLER

 **THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON MUSIC: THE SCIENCE OF A HUMAN OBSESSION** by Daniel J. Levitin (Plume), 326 pages, \$18.50 paper. Rating: **NNNN**



Daniel Levitin, Professor of Psychology at McGill, asks questions we've often asked ourselves: Why does music seem to come so easily to some and not to others? Where does creativity come from? Why do some songs move us and others leave us cold?

His answers lead to a discussion of how composers do their work, why practice beats talent and, especially, of how the body and brain process music, with side trips into other cultures, lab experiments and more.

Some of it is esoteric stuff, but Levitin presents full, beautifully organized details in lively, clear prose, well-sprinkled with pointed anecdotes and musical examples that you'll recognize whatever your musical tastes. He neither dumbs it down nor floats into academic obscurity.

Levitin writes purely for the non-specialist, so some of the material will be familiar, but it's worth going over again. His explanation of the C major scale and its harmonies in Appendix B is as transparent as any I've read.

Appendix A is a pair of brain diagrams. They're very useful for staying oriented as you navigate your way along. Why they're not listed on the contents page is a mystery. This editorial lapse is the book's biggest flaw.

Science and philosophy are currently mounting a strong challenge to the traditional view that the mind is something other than the brain, that it is kind of a mysterious theatre that processes the brain's activities.

Levitin never addresses that topic directly, but his fluid leaps from brain to mind suggest he's with the newer camp. This makes Your Brain On Music a good introduction to the brain/mind unity subject tackled in demanding density in Daniel Dennett's Consciousness Explained.



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