The author of the New York Times bestseller and Los Angeles Times Book Award Finalist This Is Your Brain on Music tunes us in to six evolutionary musical forms that brought about the evolution of human culture.

An unprecedented blend of science and art, Daniel Levitin's debut, This Is Your Brain on Music, delighted readers with an exuberant guide to the neural impulses behind those songs that make our heart swell. Now he showcases his daring theory of six songs, illuminating how the brain evolved to play and listen to music in six fundamental forms—for knowledge, friendship, religion, joy, comfort, and love. Preserving the emotional history of our lives and of our species, from its very beginning music was also allied to dance, as the structure of the brain confirms; developing this neurological observation, Levitin shows how music and dance enabled the social bonding and friendship necessary for human culture and society to evolve.

Blending cutting-edge scientific findings with his own sometimes hilarious experiences as a musician and music-industry professional, Levitin's sweeping study also incorporates wisdom gleaned from interviews with icons ranging from Sting and Paul Simon to Joni Mitchell, and David Byrne, along with classical musicians and conductors, historians, anthropologists, and evolutionary biologists. The result is a brilliant revelation of the prehistoric yet elegant systems at play when we sing and dance at a wedding or cheer at a concert—or tune out quietly with an iPod.
My Personal Review:
Daniel Levitins first book, This is Your Brain on Music, was a fairly dense science for non-scientists book (as one of the previous reviewers put it) that only occasionally let its insights take wing, as he felt the need to establish the legitimacy of the scientific findings he was presenting. As a rock guitarist who became a recording engineer who became a record producer who became a research scientist, he made sure in his first book to show that what he was talking about was empirically-based science, not a late-night dormitory bull-session.

Fairly late in that book, he described, with evident distaste, the claim of another scientist that music (and by extension all art) is a useless hitchhiker that developed as a trivial consequence of the brains linguistic and patterning abilities.

This book is his extended - and poetic - cry of rebuttal to that belief. Here he stakes out his counter-argument: that the musical and artistic abilities of the brain develop first and pave the way for the acquisition of language and for bonding into families and societies.

Dont expect another research-based book like the first. Here, what he showed in the first book is assumed, as the scaffolding for a leap into philosophy, with the empirical sources for this book being music and society themselves. The book itself is a suite: the chapter on songs of comfort - with a focus on the blues - had me in tears by the end.

Hes doing here what Jacob Bronowski did in The Ascent of Man: using his scientific insight to meditate on what it means to be human, and on how what we do makes us who we are. This book is an important contribution in that tradition, as well as heartfelt work of art.

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