

We Read: Every Brain Needs Music - The Neuroscience of Making and Listening to Music

by [Larry S. Sherman](#) and Dennis Plies (223, 270 pages)

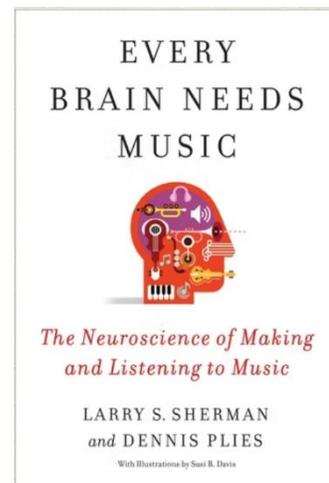
“Regardless of when these music cells first appeared, the notion that such cells exist raises the possibility that the human brain evolved to engage in music. Modern humans have existed for around 300,000 years. The oldest known musical instruments are flutes made from bones....”

If you are interested in how humans create, perform, practice, and listen to music then this one is for you. Did you know we have music brain cells? We have music-loving neurons. Outstanding!

This book hails from Oregon. Larry is a professor of neuroscience at Oregon Health Science University and a pianist. Dennis, also a musician as well as a music educator, taught for many years at Warner Pacific University.

In a nutshell, in their words - “By the end of this journey, you will better understand how human beings create, practice, perform, and listen to music. You will also gain insights into how the neuroscience underlying these activities can help you appreciate the origins of your own creativity, inspire approaches to teaching and learning, and reveal whole new ways to appreciate the music and other art around you.” (pg. viii)

The book sounds very scientific and intellectual, and is, but in a very accessible, practical and passionate way. Also, while reading the book cover to cover makes sense, one could instead pick a chapter of interest and start there. For example, the



“third through sixth movements” of the book (aka chapters three to six) are focused on the science of practicing and learning an instrument. Other chapters focus on how the brain performs, listens to and enjoys music. Those interested in composition will find the second chapter fascinating, including the fact some of it is based on not only hard science, but also insights from a survey of 100 composers. The illustrations, by Susi B. Davis, a watercolorist/acrylic artist from Oregon, are incredibly helpful to translating and giving meaning to the content. Larry, Dennis, and Susi make a great trio.

In whole, the book covers many angles on the topic, including the science of stage fright, both authors feel the main thrust of the book is how obvious it is that deliberate practicing challenges the brain. “Although listening to music has its own benefits, the process of practicing is the greatest challenge music poses to our brains.... practicing music is one of the most challenging things a brain can do.” (Larry, pg. 197) Simply listening to music doesn’t make you smarter, unless you are a musician.

“Another highlight is being able to share with others my increased understanding of why stage fright is so normal. I have more confidence to help others bring their authentic and prepared self to public performance. It’s clearer how caring about and communicating with audiences can bring inner freedom; getting our minds off ourselves and instead onto our desire to communicate is an act of love that holds higher value.” (Dennis, pg. 193)

“Learning to play an instrument or sing can drive the generation of new cells, new synapses, and new myelin in our brains as we combine fine and gross movements with the complex sensations of vision, touch and hearing to generate music....” (pg. 190) “Moreover, music, like food and sex, has the capacity to dramatically influence our emotions and to bring a tremendous level of pleasure to those who learn to play, perform, or listen to it, activating neurons that reinforce our desire to learn and play more.”

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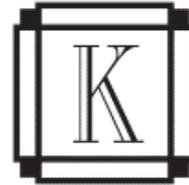
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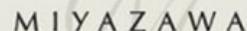
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