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Musicophilia



Synopsis

Revised and Expanded With the same trademark compassion and erudition he brought to *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, Oliver Sacks explores the place music occupies in the brain and how it affects the human condition. In *Musicophilia*, he shows us a variety of what he calls "musical misalignments." • Among them: a man struck by lightning who suddenly desires to become a pianist at the age of forty-two; an entire group of children with Williams syndrome, who are hypermusical from birth; people with "amusia," to whom a symphony sounds like the clattering of pots and pans; and a man whose memory spans only seven seconds-for everything but music. Illuminating, inspiring, and utterly unforgettable, *Musicophilia* is Oliver Sacks' latest masterpiece. From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Customer Reviews

Musicophilia is an absolutely phenomenal book, and will be of interest to anyone fascinated by music, mysteries of the mind, and the human condition. Sacks covers 29 different topics, ranging from synesthesia, to musical hallucinations, to savants, and beyond. In each chapter, he introduces the topic through cases (his own and famous ones in the literature--neurological and classic fictional

literature, that is!), always maintaining a deep engagement with the humanity of the subjects: what is it like for these individuals? how do they describe their talent or illness or condition? Sacks also speculates on the possible neurological bases for these fascinating scenarios. This is a real page-turner, beautifully and clearly written, and it will give readers a new respect for the special place of music in our psychology, as well as a deeper understanding of the range of what it is to be human. 20 stars!

Dr. Oliver Sacks is a British neurologist with a love of music and science. This book blends music and science together like no book I've ever read. There are some amazing stories here. I love the story of surgeon Tony Cicoria who developed a passion for listening and playing music after he was struck by lightning. The story of British conductor Clive Wearing is amazing too. He developed amnesia after his brain became inflamed. He has the memory and ability to conduct and sing music, but he can't remember anything else. I also loved the story of the research chemist named Salimah. Her shy personality was changed after she suffered a seizure. She suddenly had the desire to listen to music all the time. I was also touched by the story of Woody Geist. He suffers from Alzheimer's disease, but he still performs in an a cappella singing group. Leon Fleisher is a classical piano player who performed with one hand for many years because of a condition called dystonia which affected his right hand. I learned about a genetic disorder called Williams Syndrome in this book. Kids with Williams Syndrome have difficulty paying attention, but they often possess a love for music. I was entertained and informed by this book so much.

It is refreshing to see how a specialist still retains the ability to be marveled by the cases he sees in his office. Too often scientists get so blasé over their practice that they miss the finer human aspects of every case. Sacks leads the reader gently by hand, even while using neurological jargon, into amazing stories of patients who live through situations we would not have imagined. And they all involve music and how humans experience it. I believe this book is a must for musicians, who will probably acquire new understandings regarding the dimensions of their music in relation to their own brains.

My wife thoughtfully purchased this book for me. I had read about it and was very excited to dive right in. Unfortunately I ended up really having to convince myself to finish it, as it became redundant fairly quickly. Sacks presents (too) many case studies regarding music and the brain, but the presentation feels random and somewhat unfocused. Had his editor suggested grouping the

studies by themes or urged Sacks to provide more neurological background information it perhaps would have better kept my attention. It felt as if the reader had to do a lot of work to pull together some of the concepts. As for the perceived redundancy, I kept waiting for the conclusion or wrap-up that would provide the overarching theme to all the seemingly disconnected patient stories, but to no avail. It almost felt as if the stories were starting to repeat themselves but with different patient names. The length too felt far too long, almost as if everything presented in the first half were just recycled for the second. Additionally, the writing style is very informal and easy to digest, which is not necessarily a positive. The book begins to feel as if the author were afraid to intelligently, academically, and thoroughly dissect the subject matter for fear of alienating too many readers. The result is a glossy feeling, like you're reading the U.S.A. Today version of something that could have really offered some insightful perspectives. Promising topic, but presented without much organization, background information, or conclusion. I'm surprised that an editor would allow such breadth to be published without any true depth.

In his latest book, Oliver Sacks continues to tell us stories that draw us in, engaging our minds and emotions. In each chapter he introduces different people, some sorely affected by neurological disease, who have strange and profound relationships with music. This is not a dry scientific treatise. Sacks describes these people in a highly personal way, so that we see and feel the human aspect of science. At the same time he teaches us about the science of the brain, and the wonderful ways that music and the mind are intertwined. The subject is inherently fascinating, and the author does not disappoint. Drawing upon case histories from his own practice, and some from literature, he delves into the mysteries of the human brain, how it produces music, and how it is profoundly affected by it. Sacks writes in a clear and straightforward manner. It is wonderful to find medical writing that is so accessible. There is some material here from his prior books, but it does not detract from this work. This is a highly engaging and informative book. I took great pleasure in reading it. If you are interested in music or science, you will enjoy this new offering from Oliver Sacks.

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