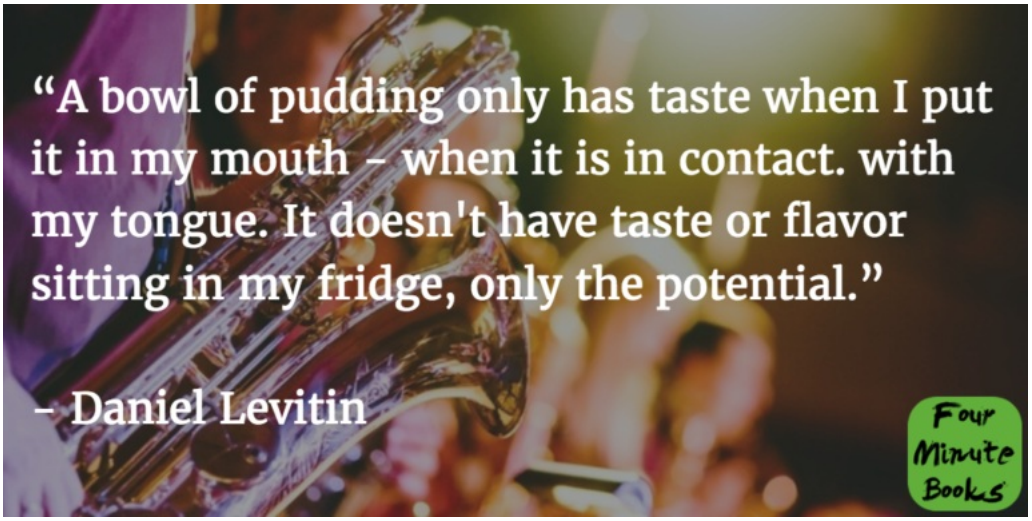
This Is Your Brain On Music Summary

1-Sentence-Summary: *This Is Your Brain On Music explains where music historically comes from, what it triggers in our brain, how we develop our tastes and why it's a crucial part of our lives, along with what makes great musicians great.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Daniel Levitin is a man of many pursuits. He's a cognitive psychologist, neuroscientist, TED speaker, best-selling author, musician and record producer, but above all, he's dedicated to one thing: helping us understand music better.

This Is Your Brain On Music was released in 2006 and became a New York Times bestseller, having sold over 1 million copies so far. It's a look into what happens in your brain when rhythm, pitch, tempo, loudness and reverberation come together.

This analysis won't only help you understand music better, it'll also prepare you to become a better, more skilled musician, in case music is your passion.

As someone who loves music, I'm excited to learn more about something so simple, yet so complex.

Here are 3 lessons about the neuroscience of music:

1. Music is an essential part of evolution, not just a fad.
2. Whether you like a song or not is based on your expectations and ability to predict what's next.
3. Every song you hear leaves an imprint for future reference in your brain.

Ready to look at your brain on music? Let's explore!

Lesson 1: You could not take away music without changing the course of history, since it's part of our evolution.

There's a small minority of scientists that argues that music only serves hedonic purposes – it's simply a byproduct of language and is only a pastime for us to feel pleasure. But that would mean that if you eliminated all music from the world right now, life would just go on as if nothing happened.

Can you imagine that?

I know I can't. And I think you probably couldn't either.

If so, then you'll likely find yourself on the majority side of scientists, who believe that music played a key role in our evolution and **has paved the way for our human ancestors to develop speech**.

Music and speaking are quite similar, so it's possible that by practicing singing and making sounds, our ancestors could have developed the skills needed to later articulate words.

Additionally, Darwin believed that music was a way of finding a mate for two reasons:

1. Singing and dancing requires you to be physically and mentally (and therefore sexually) healthy.
2. If you have time to sing and dance, your food and shelter are likely taken care of, which makes you a safe bet in terms of survival.

Looking at how musicians are idolized today and many are considered the sex symbols of their generation, I'd say Mr. Darwin's argument is pretty sound, what do you think?

Lesson 2: Music is all about expectations and how well you can predict what's to come.

How much you like a song depends primarily on one thing: how well you can predict what comes next. Great musicians play with your brain and expectations in the way that they get you to expect something, and then surprise you, before taking you back to comfortable terrain.

A great song surprises you, but not too much. It balances the familiar with the unknown, and therefore creates the perfect mix of comfort and excitement.

For example, many people sitting through a wedding service at a church will tear up only when "Here Comes The Bride" starts playing, because then they know what's to come. Another classic move is to suddenly drop the music, for example in Jazz, and having the singer "prompt" the band at certain points (like Justin Timberlake does here).

There's also something called *the deceptive cadence*, which is when a song repeats certain patterns over and over again, until you expect it to do nothing else and then, at the last chance it gets, an unexpected rhythm break or unfamiliar chord catches you off guard (kind of like the rhythm switch in this electronic song).

However, it's important as a composer to not overdo this, because it'll wear the listener out. For example, the song "Over The Rainbow" does a great job by ripping the listener out of his comfort zone with the chorus part "some-WHERE", but then brings you back nicely with the rest of it.

Lesson 3: Each song you hear leaves an imprint in your brain, which is used for future reference.

Memory is an incredible complicated thing, but music seems to have somehow cracked the code – songs are really easy for us to remember.

While many areas of the brain light up simultaneously during music, such as your subcortical structures, auditory cortices, the hippocampus and others, something unique happens the very first time you hear any song: a certain set of neurons fires together, and **a unique, abstract, generalized imprint is created**.

This can then be called upon any future time you hear this song or a part of it. That's why when studies looked at the brain waves of people when they listened to songs and compared them to when they were just imagining the song in their head, the patterns were indistinguishable.

The resulting model is called multiple trace theory and it suggests that our brains store both more abstract (like the overall combination of instruments, rhythm and melody), as well as more specific information (like the slang words in the lyrics) of the songs.

That's how you can remember a childhood event from decades ago when you hear an old song or where you first listened to a song by your favorite artist.

This Is Your Brain On Music Review

Again, music is such a complex topic, yet it affects most people in this world somehow. Whether you're just listening to music when you're exposed to it, or wear your headphones every time you leave your house, learning more about music will give you a better understanding and make all your future listens better.

This Is Your Brain On Music is the perfect place to start.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- The 7 basic elements of music
- How the brain weaves its musical picture of a melody
- What grooves are and how your brain reacts to them with emotions
- Which two factors lead to musical expertise
- Why what your Mum listened to when she was pregnant is important

Who would I recommend the This Is Your Brain On Music summary to?

The 16 year old aspiring violinist, who's sometimes frustrated with practice, the 54 year old classical music connoisseur, who enjoys sitting in his armchair and listening to the classics, and anyone who regularly walks around with headphones on outside.