

Keynote Talk 1

What makes us musical animals

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Abstract

We are all born with a predisposition for music, a predisposition that develops spontaneously and is refined by listening to music. Nearly everyone possesses the musical skills essential to experiencing and appreciating music. Think of “relative pitch,” recognizing a melody separately from the exact pitch or tempo at which it is sung, and “beat perception,” hearing regularity in a varying rhythm. Research shows that all humans possess the trait of musicality. We are a musical species—but are we the only musical species? Can there be musical machines? In his presentation, Henkjan Honing embarks upon the quest to discover the cognitive and biological mechanisms that underpin musicality.

Biography

Henkjan Honing is a professor of Music Cognition at both the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Science of the University of Amsterdam (UvA). He studies what musicality is or can be and to what extent human beings share musicality with other animals. His aim is to define the cognitive and biological mechanisms that underpin musicality. In addition to a research agenda (*The Origins of Musicality*, 2018, MIT Press), Honing has published several books for the general public, including the English-language publications *Musical Cognition* and *The Evolving Animal Orchestra*. Honing’s books and lectures are popular with a broad audience and are appreciated both inside and outside the scientific world.