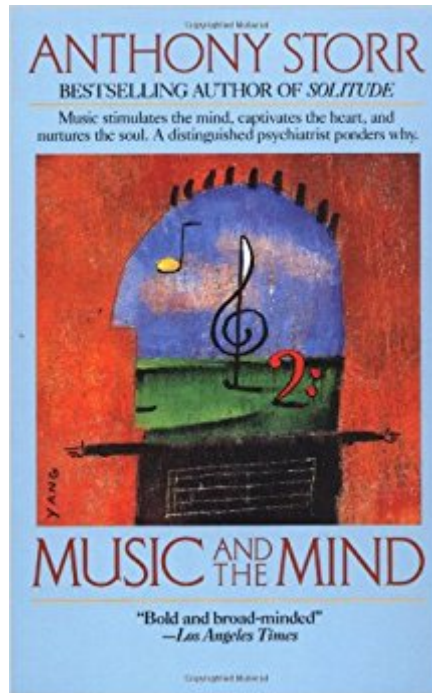




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Music And The Mind



Synopsis

"Writing with grace and clarity...he touches on everything from the evolution of the Western tonal system, to the Freudian theory of music as infantile escapism, to the differing roles of the right and left brain in perceiving music." WALL STREET JOURNAL Drawing on his own life long passion for music and synthesizing the theories of Plato, Schopenhauer, Stravinsky, Nietzsche, Bartok, and others, distinguished author and psychologist Anthony Storr illuminates music's deep beauty and timeless truth and why and how music is one of the fundamental activities of mankind.

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Customer Reviews

Rejecting the Freudian notion that music is a form of infantile escapism, British psychologist Storr (Solitude) argues that music originates from the human brain, promotes order within the mind, exalts life and gives it meaning. In an engaging inquiry, Storr speculates on music's origins in preliterate societies and examines its therapeutic powers, even in people with neurological diseases that cause movement disorders. Focusing on Western classical music from Bach to Stravinsky, he rejects the view, expounded by Leonard Bernstein and others, that the Western tonal system is a universal scheme rooted in the natural order. Citing studies of physiological arousal, Storr updates Arthur Schopenhauer's thesis that music portrays the inner flow of life more directly than the other arts. He turns to Friedrich Nietzsche, a philosopher, pianist and composer, for an understanding of music as an affirmative medium that helps us transcend life's essential tragedy. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Writing with grace and clarity...he touches on everything from the evolution of the Western tonal system, to the Freudian theory of music as infantile escapism, to the differing roles of the right and left brain in perceiving music." WALL STREET JOURNAL Drawing on his own life long passion for music and synthesizing the theories of Plato, Schopenhauer, Stravinsky, Nietzsche, Bartok, and others, distinguished author and psychologist Anthony Storr illuminates music's deep beauty and timeless truth and why and how music is one of the fundamental activities of mankind.

Coming from a social and psychological perspective, for me Storr's opening insight in this book begins with a discussion of the social origins of music and the place music had in specific cultures. Citing, as an example, Australian Aboriginals, he notes that music was used to store and pass on knowledge that was critical to survival. He notes that early music also served a collective function where music expressed 'the structure of their knowledge and social relations' (19). As well music served as a form of shared identification - they're playing our song - themes, anthems, war cries and so on. From the outset Storr draws on a diversity of material to make his point and the illustrations used in this opening chapter evidence the work that has gone into writing this book. It is also this detail that is such a delight for the reader to take in and it is really difficult to rely the pleasantness of this read without recounting each and all of the stories he recounts. And as such why for me this is a difficult review to write in a manner that captures what Storr offers here. In Ch 2 Storr begins to unpack his central theme - we can all have physical and emotional responses to music and while we may share similar responses, one person may not necessarily respond to a piece of music exactly the same as another or indeed respond to the same piece in the same way at different times in life. Our methods of perception (left/right brain alone) may mean that we take from music something that another does not. He also notes the capacity for some to empathise with a piece of music while others focus on its structure and form. Similarly, a capacity to appreciate music doesn't necessarily translate into a talent for performing music. Music he notes, plays a variety of roles in health care and interestingly, the brain can process music or song in differing ways pre and post injury. Ch 3 is a tough read but he draws forth some important insights. First that music is deeply embedded in culture. The creation of specific works of music draw deeply from that culture and are unique to it. Here he draws attention to the variety of musical scales that exist and which may be unique to a given culture. He suggests that one may learn the music of another culture, just as one can learn their language, but few will be able to deeply grasp that which is not culturally theirs. In this chapter he also introduces another key thematic, that of the cultural imperialism of the westernised

form of music, noting some perceptions of it as though it were the only true musical form. In Ch 4 he explores the idea that music in itself can express ideas without words. But at the same time poses the idea that what the composer wrote in the music, their ideas and insights may be set in a given time and space, and as such others may never perceive in the music what the composer intended. Again here he brings forth his insight about the cultural centrality or groundedness of compositions and the capacity of the listener of such creations to ever get what the other was on about. One cannot just know a composer because you have studied their music (121). Here and elsewhere (e.g. page 129) Storr brings forth a social constructionist theme, questioning our capacity to grasp a thing in itself as distinct to our interpretation of phenomenon as they seem to us. In the ensuing chapters he takes up some more psychological themes. In Ch 5 he considers music thru the question as to whether it is an escape from reality. I am no fan of Freud and as such I found parts of this chapter overly analytical - sometimes an ink blot is just an ink blot Sigmund! Music does though, have the capacity to take us to another 'mental space' and give life satisfaction - a thematic that he draws forward now until the end of the book, noting in the end that like Nietzsche music has been 'something for the sake of which it is worthwhile to live on earth' (188). Music can be a source of comfort for those who find themselves alone, but do not wish to be so (111). Music can also be a source of solace in an otherwise alienating world (121). Ch 7 & 8 get to the heart of the question for me, the place of music in the realisation of the self - the finding and expressing of meaning in life. Here the breadth and depth of discussion, encompassing Jung, Plato and Schopenhauer (among others) is exhilarating. The experience of the aesthetic, the contemplation of beauty, abstraction, knowing ourselves, personal striving and the will to power, the satisfaction of desire and dealing with the internal hunger, the craving that the death of God means for individuals, in this case Jung and Nietzsche, something that many of us can identify with. And what is this striving about but: "becoming what one is (as) a creative act comparable with creating a work of art" (153). But it is not gooey art - it is art that embraces the fullness of life as tragedy wherein "we have moved beyond mere enjoyment of music to a condition in which we are saying yes to life as it actually is: tragic, ecstatic, painful and joyful - following Nietzsche, music and art make sense of the world and justifies existence' (158). I enjoyed this book and it is one that I will read again. I can't recall what I thought I would find in this book but I was surprised and delighted by the breadth and depth of the lenses thru which he considered not just music but life as well. From his early discussions of the role of hearing in the development of emotion thru to the difficult questions of finding meaning and satisfaction in a "tragic" world, Storr takes one on a journey. And thru his Jungian lens, he suggests that there is a sense of wholeness, of balance to be found on this journey. And when one has music in mind, I

think he is saying that it is as much as what we bring to music in our yearnings, expectations, or current realities, at a given time and place in our lives, as it is as about what we take away from it that makes music so very personal. Storr recognises that music can engage us physically, emotionally, economically, environmentally, psychologically, socially, in solitude as well as isolation and spirituality. Music can meet us at the intersection of multiple perspectives and combined life experiences. For sure we can all respond to a given piece of music at some level of shared experience but fundamentally music will speak to us as who each of us is at a given moment in our life journey. Thru these multiple pathways music speaks not just to us and thru us, but also thru the expression of and/or the creation of music we too can have a say, we can express what we need to share with a wider world and we too can be a part of the creation of beauty and of the every day. Certainly life has its discords, but even within the dissonance of life harmony exists and perhaps it is within our hands to resolve the dissonance and either express a chord that resonates within, or to express a sound that for us is our enduring albeit individual statement of meaning, purpose or being.

The second of the 2 best books on music and learning. "The gift of music is the most enlarging development of the mind since the beginning of learning." Harold Seckinger, President of the Citrus Youth Educational Symphonic Orchestra.

Great book about music and humanity, culture and history

Excellent!

Good shape.

COOL BEANS!!!

Excellent !

This book has some interest value - but does not really get to the point and heart of why music has such an impact on our minds. It is more of a long review of other peoples' writing on this topic - mostly psychologists, sometimes turgidly long. Read Oliver Sachs as well, and get nearer to the mark.

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