

Beethoven's Anvil: Music in Mind and Culture

By William Benzon

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Why does the brain create music? In Beethoven's Anvil, cognitive scientist and jazz musician William Benzon finds the key to music's function in the very complexity of musical experience. Music demands that our symbol-processing capacities, motor skills, and emotional and communicative skills all work in close coordination--not only within our own heads but also with the heads (and bodies) of others. Music is at once deeply personal and highly social, highly disciplined yet open to emotional nuance and interpretation. It's precisely this coordination of different mental functions, Benzon argues, that underlies our deep need to create and participate in music. At once daring and scholarly, this remarkable book offers a sweeping vision of a vital, underappreciated force in our minds and our culture.

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Editorial Review

From Booklist
Benzon, a horn player, is intensely interested in how music brings people together and gives us a fascinating, at times profound, and speculative book on it. Believing that speculation is necessary for intellectual and scientific progress, he writes for the future while proposing concepts to be tested in the present. He doesn't claim his ideas are true, only that they should be considered and tested. The book begins with stories of musical experience and proceeds to show how music can bring groups, not just pairs, together by means of their coordinated neurological systems; how music affects different sections of the brain; and how music has played a part in developing cultures throughout history. Although largely oriented to Africa and Europe, the book provides examples from the rest of the world, too; and Benzon often draws on personal experience to demonstrate how emotion and physiology combine in the music-making act. At times the text is heavy going, but Benzon's wide-ranging mind and striking analogies hold one's attention. *William Beatty*
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Review
"A provocative and persuasive treatise." -- *Howard Gardner*

"Beethoven's Anvil is learned, proficient...a profoundly provocative and creative synthesis. Reading it was a great experience for me." -- *William H. McNeill, author of Plagues and Peoples* and *Keeping Together in Time*

"Path-breaking...Sure to deepen our understanding of music and of ourselves." -- *Charles Keil, author of Urban Blues*

About the Author

William L. Benzon, Ph.D., a cognitive scientist, is Senior Scientist with Metalogics Incorporated and an associate editor of The Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems. He is also co-founder of the musical ensemble AfroEurasian Connection. He lives in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Sellers:

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