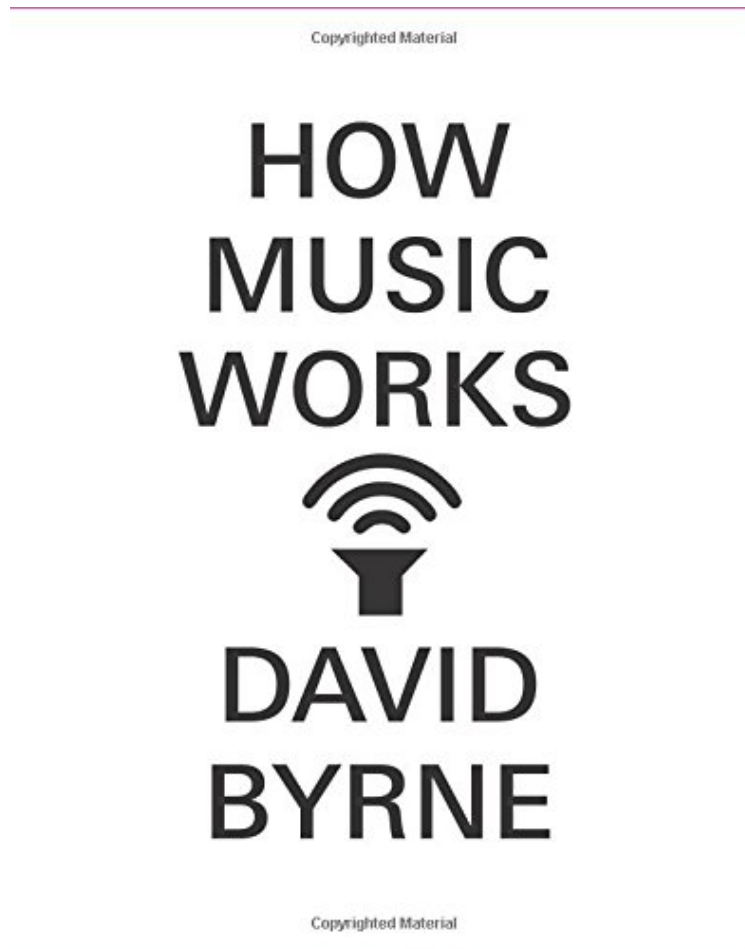


How Music Works

David Byrne

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David Byrne : How Music Works before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How Music Works:

187 of 199 people found the following review helpful. Musical Musings: A Hodge-PodgeBy Dr. Debra Jan BibelByrne begins his wide-ranging historical, technological, psychological and sociological examination of music with a novel insight: architecture of musical venues shape composition and instrumental arrangements. Regarding huge gothic cathedrals, intimate nightclubs, and jungle camp sites, room reverberation, volume of space, and audience vocal ambience dictate modal versus scale works, instrument development, and performance dynamics. The great revolutionary divide was recording technology, and musicians discovered that what works live does not necessarily achieve the same result on vinyl, tape, CD, or .mp3, and vice versa. Expectations often lead to disappointment and the performance and performer suffers. With such an interesting introduction, the book offers much promise. It almost fulfills expectations with both personal and general tidbits and theses that reward the reader, though for myself his

personal examples are somewhat weaker. The second chapter is an musical autobiographical section describing the evolution of his music and stage attire over the succeeding eras of rock. In his world travels, his encounter with Japanese and Balinese traditional music and theatre art had a profound influence on the development of his stage craft. One of his suits clearly had classic Japanese origins. Chapters 3 and 4 return to musicology with an expansion of the role of technology, recording and playback. The historical account is amusing when considering the delusions of reality instilled by each new device on the unconditioned and uneducated ear. The ideal of recordings was and remains an actual live performance, particularly among classical music fans; but the alternative worthy philosophy is the electronic creation of uniquely shaped sound itself, as with tape editing, synthesizers and digital programming, and electric instrument design. Oddly, computerized editing of recordings to achieve perfection in tempo, pitch, and so forth proved imperfect to the ear and lacking in warmth and positive emotional value. Byrne does not elaborate in later chapters, but recordings (and its transmission over radio) changed society by uniting peoples, speeding musical development, and (for instance, in Brazil) of overturning governmental policy of approved musical forms. I do not share Bryne's lament about the calculus-like wave sectioning of digital CDs over analogue LPs because of psychoacoustics, an aging ear, and the fact that speakers are yet analogue in their cone movement and shaping. Of interest is Byrne's belief that we are now so awash in music, indeed private music on personal .mp3 players and smart phones, that live performances are becoming more important, as that increasingly rare commodity, silence. I enjoyed Bryne's relating, in brief James Burke fashion, the connection of the Chinese mouth organ, the shen, to digital computers. Chapter 5 is again more personal with Bryne's experiences in a recording studio and the art, engineering, and strategy of creating an album. Entire books have been written and documentary films have focused on this subject, but the use of computers on mixing boards is a new phenomenon. The following chapter discusses his collaborations. He had already mentioned his albums with Brian Eno, but now Byrne moves beyond Talking Heads by developing music with Caetano Veloso and choreographer Twyla Tharp and creating with Norman Cook [Fatboy Slim] a theatrical piece on the Philippine's Imelda Marcos. Chapter 7 is all about the business and financial side of the music industry. There are pie charts. He explains the very recent changes in industry, when musicians can edit and mix their music on their laptop computers and distribute it via digital download and cloud companies and promote themselves with YouTube videos and have kickstarter campaigns to get public underwriters. The giant brick mortar record shops (Tower, Borders, Virgin Megastore) are no more and the power of music labels are severely diminished. This chapter should be read by anyone considering how to create and promote their own music; he describes various business models. The next chapter furthers practical advice on the choice of venues, song material, the courage to be different, responsibility to band members and fellow musicians, and so on. It is a peculiar chapter for such a book. Chapter 9 pulls back to a shotgun approach critical of musical elitism and lauding the amateur musician. In the days before mass-marketed recordings, there was a piano in the parlor. Even in the 1960s, every kid (yours truly included) had an acoustic guitar, singing folk songs. Until very recently, courses in music appreciation were dedicated only to classical music and rarely jazz. Governmental and corporate funding erected costly symphony halls and museums. Byrne seems to ignore the reality that these measures were to preserve and encourage endangered music styles and that the masses are doing fine in supporting pop and avant-garde culture, filling stadiums and arenas and small local music joints. Symphony halls are not restricted to dead European composers; I have heard contemporary American, Japanese, Argentinian, Iranian, and other world composers. Still, the point is taken when middle and high schools do not offer music and art classes and other nations support amateur musicians, music clubs, and youth bands and orchestras. Music and art should not be passive art forms. The final chapter covers music as a human, biological, and indeed metaphysical essence. This historical and anthropological section sketches prehistorical, ancient, and early modern musical instruments, musical sciences, and philosophies. Everything vibrates, from atoms to planets. He does not include it, but string theory of matter involves vibrating strands of energy. Bryne briefly mentions the differing scales of music across the planet, the relationship of language and speech to music, neurological imprinting of music and its performance, music in religious rituals [Taliban and similar zealots aside], the natural ambient music appreciated by John Cage and the composed ambient music of Satie, Eno, and Feldman, and various other aspects of music. Bryne can only touch upon these large subjects as he closes the book. While it may lead to further reading, I find the section too scattered to be truly effective. This grand book, with its padded cover, offers a little of everything to everyone. Fans of Bryne, as leader of the Talking Heads or as musicologist, will surely find much to appreciate here. I do think, however, that he could have prepared two smaller books, one dedicated to the practice of musicmaking today and one to music's historical and anthropological aspects.

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. My Favorite Book of 2012 By Michael P. McCullough It would be difficult to praise this book too much. Clearly at age 60 David Byrne has had a lot of experience in the world of music and has had a lot of time to think about it and he has graciously decided to share his thoughts here. The book starts out as a sort of anthropological look at music in general, then continues as he explains how the actual space in which the music is created (a small tavern, a concert hall, or a forest, for example) influences what type of music is produced. Or how technology changes and influences music. There is quite a bit of musical autobiography here as he discusses his work with Talking Heads, and subsequent projects. Personally the first five Talking Heads albums (especially #1 and #2) were and are incredibly important and influential

in my own personal history, and even in my development from a youth to an adult; but after the fifth album I moved in a different direction musically than Byrne did and honestly, unless I heard it on the radio, I have never even listened to his subsequent works - so it was interesting read about them here. As the book progresses Byrne explains much about the technical processes involved in recording music and the business side of music - that is to say different ways in which the music is marketed and sold. It's all fascinating, the writing is just right - I never actually thought "Oh, get over yourself!" even during the autobiographical sections, (this demonstrates the perfection of his writing style), the illustrations were interesting, and physically the hard cover McSweeney's edition is in itself a work of art. This is interesting - I recommended this book to my Dad, who is 76 years old. He knows who David Byrne and Talking Heads are and he never really liked them at all (but I know he got to hear a lot of their music, probably against his will, as I lived in his house during my five year infatuation with Talking Heads) but he loved the book stating he thought Byrne was a genius! Actually I will just go ahead and quote his email review - I don't think he will mind: "I've mentioned this book, recommended to me by Michael, to each of you whom I've seen in the past week or so. I found "How Music Works" by David Byrne to be fascinating and it's opened up to me new ways of looking at music in the world. I'll leave it to the description which I've included to give you a general overview. I have never been a 'Talking Heads' fan but that doesn't matter while reading this thing. This guy is a genius and his observations are very stimulating, thought provoking. He knows whereof he speaks and, though I didn't grasp some topics. I am really glad I tried." 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Insightful, entertaining highly recommended for anyone making music

By Kat In The Hat This is a masterwork - David Byrne has really outdone himself with this erudite, well-thought-out insightful book that is part auto-biography, but is mostly him sharing the wisdom from his long eclectic music career. This is one of those books you'll read find yourself nodding or saying "right!" out loud. Dave takes half-intuitions I've built over a lifetime of being creative sonically with words/lyrics brings them all out into the open examines them in the kind of clear manner only an analytical creative introvert could do. It really doesn't matter if you like the Talking Heads or not -- though it wouldn't hurt to like them or David Byrne to read this. But it's really band-agnostic applies to all kinds of musics anyone making music now or thinking of doing so. If you create music of any sort are thinking of getting this book: GET IT! I read a lot of books, especially non-fiction, and this is one of the best books I've read in years. I began wanting to underline passages or turn down page corners to find the good parts started off doing that (books I own aren't museum pieces to be treated like glass-covered art, but utilitarian objects for learning) -- but I found myself wanting to underline -- most of the text bookmark almost every page. So instead of notes bookmarking, I'm just going to read it at least one more time, all the way through - paying more attention to digesting the deeper info ideas on musical approaches that spill from this incredible tome on every page. I can't say enough good things about this book have already recommended it to all my musician friends 2 of them that read parts of it bought it can't stop calling me telling me how amped they are about it (I foresee many fruitful jam sessions coming very soon). So: great book - GREAT BOOK - 5 out of 5 stars It's the book I wish I read when I started making music. But better late than never! Buy a copy, you won't be sorry.

How Music Works is David Byrnes remarkable and buoyant celebration of a subject he has spent a lifetime thinking about. In it he explores how profoundly music is shaped by its time and place, and he explains how the advent of recording technology in the twentieth century forever changed our relationship to playing, performing, and listening to music. Acting as historian and anthropologist, raconteur and social scientist, he searches for patterns and shows how those patterns have affected his own work over the years with Talking Heads and his many collaborators, from Brian Eno to Caetano Veloso. Byrne sees music as part of a larger, almost Darwinian pattern of adaptations and responses to its cultural and physical context. His range is panoptic, taking us from Wagnerian opera houses to African villages, from his earliest high school reel-to-reel recordings to his latest work in a home music studio (and all the big studios in between). Touching on the joy, the physics, and even the business of making music, How Music Works is a brainy, irresistible adventure and an impassioned argument about musics liberating, life-affirming power.