



A Million Years of Music: The Emergence of Human Modernity

By Gary Tomlinson



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A Million Years of Music: The Emergence of Human Modernity By Gary Tomlinson

What is the origin of music? In the last few decades this centuries-old puzzle has been reinvigorated by new archaeological evidence and developments in the fields of cognitive science, linguistics, and evolutionary theory. In this path-breaking book, renowned musicologist Gary Tomlinson draws from these areas to construct a new narrative for the emergence of human music. Starting at a period of human prehistory long before *Homo sapiens* or music existed, Tomlinson describes the incremental attainments that, by changing the communication and society of prehuman species, laid the foundation for musical behaviors in more recent times. He traces in Neandertals and early sapiens the accumulation and development of these capacities, and he details their coalescence into modern musical behavior across the last hundred millennia.

But *A Million Years of Music* is not about music alone. Tomlinson builds a model of human evolution that revises our understanding of the interaction of biology and culture across evolutionary time-scales, challenging and enriching current models of our deep history. As he tells his story, he draws in other emerging human traits: language, symbolism, a metaphysical imagination and the ritual it gives rise to, complex social structure, and the use of advanced technologies. Tomlinson's model of evolution allows him to account for much of what makes us a unique species in the world today and provides a new way of understanding the appearance of humanity in its modern form.



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Editorial Review

Review

Music's role in the development of the human capacity for abstract thinking is persuasively traced through an original and virtuosic interdisciplinary narrative.

(Ingrid Monson, Quincy Jones Professor of African American Music, Harvard University)

To have modern philosophical conundrums about music traced back to their aboriginal origins is simply breathtaking, and Tomlinson crosses disciplines with such deep knowledge of so many, and such fearlessness, as to give new meaning to the idea of intellectual synergy

(Carolyn Abbate, Paul and Catherine Battenwieser University Professor, Harvard University)

This brilliant book offers the most convincing argument I have seen for how music came to be. If the model of biocultural coevolution proposed here is right, the explanation for music lies not in a simple adaptationist logic -- that it was 'good' for us in some way. Instead, music arises from a beautiful spiraling dance between culture and biology extending across the deep history of humanity. In developing this complex and compelling argument, Tomlinson synthesizes a literature that spans both science and the humanities. *A Million Years of Music* is a model for how scholarship in the twenty-first century can be done.

(Daniel Lord Smail, author of *On Deep History and the Brain*)

About the Author

Gary Tomlinson is John Hay Whitney Professor of Music and Humanities at Yale University, where he directs the Whitney Humanities Center. His books include *Music in Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others*; *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera*; and *The Singing of the New World: Indigenous Voice in the Era of European Contact*.

Users Review

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