



How Music Works

By David Byrne

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How Music Works is an unparalleled account of a life in music and an explanation of how and why music works from one of the world's most accomplished performers. With his albums for Talking Heads, his work with Brian Eno or his solo output, David Byrne has been consistently at the forefront of musical - and artistic - innovation. In this extraordinary book Byrne explores why the past matters and what the future might bring. From personal accounts of devising and performing his most famous work, to an exploration of the possibilities of new technologies, Byrne discovers that artistic creation is less about an internal creative spark than we thought and more about external factors such as history, architecture and technology. "The universe of music follows broad and basic evolutionary patterns-as does birdsong, to take one example. It seems the will only triumphs if the context is amenable, just as in Darwinian adaptation. What we hear is determined by what we want to hear, by what can be heard, and by the circumstances that allow it to come into being."

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Amazon Best Books of the Month, September 2012: It's no surprise that David Byrne knows his music. As the creative force behind Talking Heads and many solo and collaborative ventures, he's been writing, playing, and recording music for decades. What is surprising is how well his voice translates to the page. In this wide-ranging, occasionally autobiographical analysis of the evolution and inner workings of the music industry, Byrne explores his own deep curiosity about the "patterns in how music is written, recorded, distributed, and received." He is an opinionated and well-educated tour guide, and the resulting essays--on topics from rockers' clothes to the role of the turntable, concert stages to recording studios--will give you an entirely new perspective on the complex journey a song takes from conception to your iPod. --Neal Thompson

From Booklist

Starred Review Most people know idiosyncratic, Scottish-born David Byrne as the front man of that great new wave band, Talking Heads. But he is also an author, painter, photographer, and film and record producer. In this wide-ranging celebration of the power of music, he discusses, among many topics, the early days of the recording industry, various types of music venues, birdsong and whale calls, the significance of mixtapes, the development of CDs, his love of African rhythms, and the concept of creativity and what it means to be creative. But he also mentions his own career as well as the many collaborators he has worked with, including English musician and producer Brian Eno, Brazilian composer and singer Caetano Veloso, and DJ Fatboy Slim. He describes the origin of his twitchy stage persona and acknowledges his own shyness, describing himself as "a withdrawn introvert," whose most comfortable way of communicating was, he says, onstage. ("Poor Susan Boyle; I can identify," he writes). At one point, he even self-diagnoses himself as having a mild form of Asperger's syndrome. He concludes by asking provocative questions: What is music good for? Why do we need music? "Funding future creativity is a worthy investment," he insists. Endlessly fascinating, insightful, and intelligent. --June Sawyers

From Bookforum

Byrne's book tells a version of the musical life that is deliberately less dramatic and heroic than first-person accounts by musicians usually are. That's because *How Music Works* isn't just a memoir... it meanders at some points, or lapses into a digest of Byrne's broad reading on various subjects. In a book that covers so much ground, often with a zoomed-in level of detailed focus, it's up to the reader to find the through lines that speak to his or her particular concerns. —Simon Reynolds

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Teresa Howard:

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