



# How Music Works: The Science and Psychology of Beautiful Sounds, from Beethoven to the Beatles and Beyond

*By John Powell*

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What makes a musical note different from any other sound? How can you tell if you have perfect pitch? Why do 10 violins sound only twice as loud as one? Do your Bob Dylan albums sound better on CD or vinyl? John Powell, a scientist and musician, answers these questions and many more in **HOW MUSIC WORKS**, an intriguing and original guide to acoustics. In a clear, accessible, and engaging voice, Powell fascinates the reader with his delightful descriptions of the science and psychology lurking beneath the surface of music. With lively discussions of the secrets behind harmony, timbre, keys, chords, loudness, musical composition, and more, **HOW MUSIC WORKS** will be treasured by music lovers everywhere. The book also includes a CD of examples and exercises from the book.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this enlightening book, Powell, a British scholar and professor, sets out to explain how we experience music. He selects examples from all manner of disciplines--music composition, simple mathematics, physics, engineering, history--and offers his insights, such as how Bach's Prelude in C Major is similar to Led Zeppelin's Stairway to Heaven. In the first half, he defines the elements of music like pitch, frequency, harmony, rhythm, and decibel. Building on this foundation, Powell hits his stride in the book's second half as he demonstrates, using both classical and pop music, how musicians create sound and how we listen to it. Some of the information can get scientific but Powell conveys the material with enough humor ( I think the decibel was invented in a bar, late one night, by a committee of drunken electrical engineers who wanted to take revenge on the world for their total lack of dancing partners ) and cocktail party facts ( when we listen to Mozart's music nowadays, we are hearing it a semitone higher than he would have intended ) to keep the book light and fun. Included in the book is a 10-track CD.

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### Review

"By reading Powell's book we can gain a more solid knowledge of the foundations of music and therefore be better able to appreciate it."?Amanda Mark, *New York Journal of Books*

"Any readers whose love of music has somehow not led them to explore the technical side before will surely find the result a thoroughly accessible, and occasionally revelatory, primer."?James Walton, *The Spectator*

"An exceptionally informative discussion of the hows and whys of music...The presentation is clear and logical-even for a layman like myself. Yet it is never pandering, or overly simplified. In short, this is just about the best book on the subject I have come across."?Greg Barbrick, *Seattle-Post Intelligencer*

"In this distinctive combination of scientific treatise and laugh-out-loud commentary, composer and physicist Powell...has carved out an intriguing niche by using humor to enliven what could have been an otherwise dry introduction to acoustics...readers ... should glean some useful background for music study while simultaneously being entertained."?Barry Zaslow, *Library Journal*

"The author...uses easy-to-follow, conversational language to lead the reader into the science of music...It is amazing that after a few hours of Powell's explanations, a musical novice (like me) can begin to read music, which is written in a language that is as foreign to most of us as Sanskrit."?Phillip Manning, *Science Book News*

### About the Author

John Powell holds a PhD in physics from Imperial College at London University. He has taught physics at the University of Nottingham and the University of Lulea in Sweden. In 2003, he earned a master's degree in music composition from the University of Sheffield in Great Britain.

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**Jimmy Dolce:**

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