

Musicophilia

Tales of music and the brain

AUTHOR Oliver Sacks

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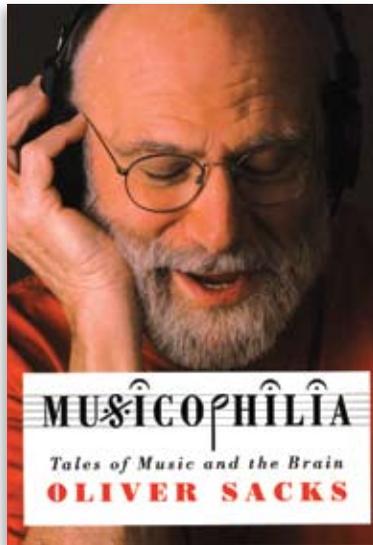
OVERALL RATING Excellent

STRENGTHS Well written; erudite; short chapters; easy to read

WEAKNESSES Footnotes interrupt narrative flow; some case histories are repeated from his earlier book, *An Anthropologist on Mars*

AUDIENCE Musicians, music lovers, and medical practitioners with an interest in the correlation between music and neuroanatomy

In *Musicophilia*, the eminent neurologist Dr Oliver Sacks explores the important role that music plays in our lives and in the lives of our patients. He does this by sharing his own personal history, followed by a series of clinical vignettes. He writes about the experience of feeling emotionally numb after his mother died. One day he was walking down the street and heard a radio playing Schubert through an open basement window. The music triggered many happy childhood memories, and he started to feel alive again. He writes about common everyday phenomena (eg, "earworms," in which a catchy tune keeps going through one's mind). He discusses the neuropathology of various medical conditions related to music, such



as musician's focal dystonia. He presents fascinating case histories; for example, the case of the orthopedic surgeon who was struck by lightning and subsequently became obsessed with music, to the point where he was constantly listening, playing, and even composing music (so-called musicophilia). He writes about the emergence of musical talent in patients with frontotemporal dementia, and the musical talents of children and adults with Williams syndrome. He makes a plea for the use of music therapy for patients with dementia, aphasia, parkinsonism, and stroke. He illustrates the neuroanatomic substrate of various musical symptoms, such as musical auras, musical hallucinations, and amusia. With frequent references to classical literature and historical figures, Dr Sacks provides a compendium of interesting facts and figures. There is an extensive bibliography for anyone interested in further reading. However, the too-frequent use of footnotes occasionally interrupts the narrative flow.

There was a paucity of literature on the neuroscience of music before the 1980s, but in recent years a number of books on this subject have emerged. *Musicophilia* is highly recommended for clinicians.

—Manuel Matas MD

Dr Matas is a psychiatrist in Winnipeg, Man.