



Excerpt: Foreword

RESONANCE: The Music We're Made Of | Ron K. Miller

Babies dance. Not eventually, not after someone shows them how. Before they can walk, before they have words for anything, a beat comes on and they grab the nearest table or chair and bounce. Just bounce, with everything they have, for as long as the music lasts. My own kids did this. Diapers, unsteady legs, no context for what they were hearing. They felt it anyway.

Nobody taught them that. There was no lesson. The music arrived and the body answered. Whatever music is, it got to them before anything else did.

So what is it, exactly?

The answer, at least the beginning of one, is stranger than the explanations we've settled for. We've been calling it entertainment for so long that the word has stopped feeling like a choice. But music is a stimulus, the same category of thing as heat or pain or the smell of food, something that produces specific physiological responses through specific mechanisms that science has now documented well enough that ignoring them requires effort. And those mechanisms point toward something most of us have filed under "just how music works" without ever stopping to ask what's actually doing the filing.

I'm a musician, have been most of my life, and I also see music, literally and not poetically, which is a neurological condition called synesthesia that I'll explain when we get there. I've carried the argument in this book for years without knowing how to make it. Making it correctly means being honest about where the evidence ends and the hypothesis begins, and I've always been more comfortable playing music than talking about it.

This book moves through three kinds of territory. The first is personal: what I've experienced and observed, which gives me standing to make the argument but not the right to treat it as proof. The second is scientific: what researchers have actually established, which is more than most people realize and less than I sometimes wish it were. The third is inference: the places where the evidence points somewhere I cannot fully demonstrate but cannot stop following. I've tried to signal which territory we're in at any given moment. Where I have strong evidence, I'll say so. Where I'm making a leap, I'll say that too. The honest version of this argument requires both.

The cost of misclassifying music shows up in the Alzheimer's ward, in the kid who was told they couldn't carry a tune and stopped trying, in the person who reaches for the wrong thing when three minutes of the right song would have done it. We have been misclassifying something fundamental for a long time, and the bill is personal. Music is an operating system, not entertainment. That is the argument of this book, and the evidence for it is stronger than most people realize.

One more thing before you start. I could write separate books about most of the artists I've mentioned here. I've cut roughly half of what I wrote to get to what you're holding. For someone with ADHD, condensing a message is genuinely harder than expanding one. The free flow is easy. The discipline is the work. What that means is that everything still here earned its place.

The argument of this book lives in the first three parts. The closing section, the Coda, is where I follow the question past what I can prove. I wanted you to know that before you start.