



The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body

By Steven Mithen

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The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body By Steven Mithen

The propensity to make music is the most mysterious, wonderful, and neglected feature of humankind: this is where Steven Mithen began, drawing together strands from archaeology, anthropology, psychology, neuroscience--and, of course, musicology--to explain why we are so compelled to make and hear music. But music could not be explained without addressing language, and could not be accounted for without understanding the evolution of the human body and mind. Thus Mithen arrived at the wildly ambitious project that unfolds in this book: an exploration of music as a fundamental aspect of the human condition, encoded into the human genome during the evolutionary history of our species.

Music is the language of emotion, common wisdom tells us. In *The Singing Neanderthals*, Mithen introduces us to the science that might support such popular notions. With equal parts scientific rigor and charm, he marshals current evidence about social organization, tool and weapon technologies, hunting and scavenging strategies, habits and brain capacity of all our hominid ancestors, from *australopithecines* to *Homo erectus*, *Homo heidelbergensis* and Neanderthals to *Homo sapiens*--and comes up with a scenario for a shared musical and linguistic heritage. Along the way he weaves a tapestry of cognitive and expressive worlds--alive with vocalized sound, communal mimicry, sexual display, and rhythmic movement--of various species.

The result is a fascinating work--and a succinct riposte to those, like Steven Pinker, who have dismissed music as a functionless evolutionary byproduct.

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Editorial Review

Review

Why should music be so important to us? Steven Mithen begins his task with a detailed analysis of music and musical ability, drawing on musicology, psychology and neurobiology to build a comprehensive and erudite picture of music's capacity to move us...This is a long-overdue book, which approaches human evolution from an intriguing as well as entertaining angle. (R. I. M. Dunbar *Times Literary Supplement* 2005-07-28)

Mithen draws on archaeological record and current research on neurology and genetics to explain how and why humans think, talk and make music the way they do. If it sounds impenetrably academic, it isn't: Mithen acts as a friendly guide to the troves of data on the evolution of man (and myriad sub-mysteries of the mind, music, speech and cognition), translating specialist material into an engrossing narrative casual readers will appreciate...Mithen's expertise in the science and history of his subject is combined with a passion for music that makes this book enjoyable and fascinating. (*Publishers Weekly* 2006-02-27)

Mithen has many fascinating suggestions about how the circumstances of early hominid life on the African savanna may have provoked changes in anatomy and improved the range and precision of communication...By bringing music to the fore, Mithen remedies earlier neglect and offers his readers the most perspicacious portrait of the role of communication among our remote predecessors that I have ever encountered. That is a great accomplishment...Mithen's book, in short, seems destined to become a landmark in the way experts and amateurs alike seek to understand the character and evolutionary importance of hominid and early human communication...[*The Singing Neanderthals*] offers a learned, imaginative overview of the most important and most elusive dimension of the real but unrecorded past: i.e., how communication among our predecessors changed their lives, sustained their communities, and promoted their survival. No one has previously undertaken that task so well. (William H. McNeill *New York Review of Books* 2006-04-27)

With a fascinating blend of neurology, anatomy, archaeology, developmental psychology and musicology, Mithen seeks the source of our propensity for making music, a universal human feature that has been strangely neglected compared with the origin of language. (Blake Edgar *Scientific American*)

Among the most dicey academic inquiries are the ones that deal with the origin of human consciousness. Faced with difficulties of such daunting scope, Steven Mithen remains undaunted. In his 1996 book, *The Prehistory of the Mind*, he argued that both the origins of thought and the origins of human language are natural outcomes of evolution. But according to the first chapter of Mithen's latest work, *The Singing Neanderthals*, that story was incomplete. What it neglected was the central role of music in the psychosocial makeup of our species...'Without music,' Mithen writes, 'the prehistoric past is just too quiet to be believed'...Thus, Mithen speculates, humanity might have developed much as the individual does: music first, then language. From an evolutionary standpoint, music would not only help ensure the well-being of the individual, but also the cohesiveness of the group. Calling on primate studies, Mithen likens group music-making to grooming, an activity that evokes feelings of contentment and belonging...Taken as a look at the natural history of music, Mithen's book is thoughtful and certainly entertaining. (Laurence A. Marschall *Natural History* 2006-10-01)

The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body by Steven Mithen is a book that

has you making up your own theories about how grunts became speech and songs. (Doris Lessing *Granta* 2008-12-09)

About the Author

Steven Mithen is Professor of Early Prehistory and Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Reading.

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Lee Durfee:

This book untitled The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body to be one of several books that best seller in this year, here is because when you read this e-book you can get a lot of benefit on it. You will easily to buy this book in the book retail store or you can order it through online. The publisher on this book sells the e-book too. It makes you more easily to read this book, since you can read this book in your Cell phone. So there is no reason to your account to past this book from your list.

Alan Coleman:

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