

Book Review

Caicedo, P. (2021). *We are what we listen to: The impact of music on individual and social health*. Barcelona, ES: Mundo Arts Publications, 157 pages. Print €25.88. ISBN 9781733903547

For those who are excited about the emerging research concerning the effects of music upon health and well-being, Dr. Patricia Caicedo's latest book *We Are What We Listen to: The Impact of Music on Individual and Social Health* is an excellent, easy to read source for all readers. Dr. Caicedo, MD, PhD, is a physician, doctor of musicology, international professional singer and author of numerous books; she has assembled a wide sweeping cornucopia of material from numerous cultures that includes,

The ancient relationship between rhythm, movement and health, the mysterious brain mechanisms that link music, pleasure and emotion, and the many ways in which music improves our quality of life, leads to wellness, happiness and provides us a sense of purpose and meaning in life. (Introduction)

Her book reaches deeply into the literature of the receptive and expressive uses of music in the areas of psychology, medicine, health, musical performance and neuroscience. Her reference material spans a period of over 4,000 years. She comfortably explains and integrates material from a vast range of health sciences and music with applications to anthropology. One example is in her description of the primacy of vibrations within every part of our body that, when amplified, produce sound. The field of sonocytology has found that cells and organs communicate their state thru sound. Caicedo states, "our cells sing." This awareness of body sounds eventually developed into ancient human's use of sound, through variations of tone and rhythm, for communication before the development of language.

In just 157 pages the 10 book chapters present a full panoramic tour of the effects of music listening and music making, including musicking, within medical applications, biology; neurology (including "the marvelous brain, of musicians"); music cognition; pleasure, emotion; happiness and the meaning of life; rhythm, movement and health; pain and death; creativity; global health, and the current pandemic. Before the 215 bibliographic reference section Dr. Caicedo included a Postlude of autobiographical

exercises in which the author invites the reader to "reflect on the music that has accompanied you throughout your life including a social media hashtag to share playlists from the exercises." The Postlude continues with notebook pages to write songs that express beliefs and outlooks on life. Enhancing one's awareness of soundscapes is the closing exercise.

Although including summaries of the contents of each chapter is beyond the purpose of a book review, I will present vignettes of some of the chapters that engaged my full interest and expanded my knowledge.

There is inclusion of the therapeutic functions of music beginning with the Assyrians from 2000 B.C. This is followed by a description of a pictural depiction on the walls of the ancient caves of Les Trois Freres of a masked, possibly shamanic, dancer wearing an animal skin and the head of a bison, holding what appears to be a musical instrument. These examples bolster one of the book's themes that the relationship between music and health has been ubiquitous throughout the history of humans. After reading this book I came away further believing that the physiological, cognitive, emotional, communicative, spiritual and social value of music, upon discovery by the people of ancient times, foreshadowed its adaptive cross-cultural development throughout time.

In another chapter Dr. Caicedo cites literature that listening to music can produce long-term effects upon our well-being. In addition to experiencing and regulating emotions, music triggers our past experiences and autobiographical memory. This fact is well known to music therapists who work within dementia care. Identifying emotions in music begins to appear in the first few months of life as we relate positive and negative feelings to consonant and dissonant sounds. A take-away for me is the reminder that the advanced development of the identification and discrimination of emotions stimulated by music and its triggering effect of memories is one of the examples of how music therapy attracts that which is healthy in us. The author also integrates the role of our body responses and their signals to the nervous system with appraisals from our social, cultural and environmental endowments to explain how music causes different emotional reactions in different people. She cites many sources in further developing a cross-cultural and contextual perspective on the relationship between music and emotions.

Throughout the book Dr. Caicedo draws upon her medical and musical knowledge and personal musical experiences to present a vast amount of information in a clear, easy to follow writing style that inspires the reader. The personal antidotes from her vocal performance experiences considerably add to her comfortable writing style. This personal addition allows

potentially complex information to come across in a spirited, less academic manner and serves to invite the reader to add one's own musical associations and imagination into the reading experience.

Readers might object to the use of male pronouns throughout the book. This, apparently, is a result of the translation from the original Spanish to English. Also, initially I found myself wishing for the addition of an index to return to the medical and neuroscience concepts. However,

referring to the chapter headings made it easy to find any topic or example.

In summary, *We Are What We Listen To: The Impact of Music on Individual and Social Health* lives up to its title in delivering an informed understanding of how music enriches our lives and our social world.

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