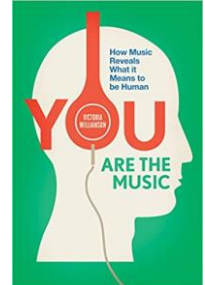


## BOOK REVIEW

# You are the music: How music reveals what it means to be human (Williamson)

Reviewed by **Olusegun Stephen Titus**

Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria



**Title:** You are the music: How music reveals what it means to be human **Author:** Victoria Williamson **Publication year:** 2014 **Publisher:** Icon Books Ltd **Pages:** 224 **ISBN:** 978-1848317437

### REVIEWER BIOGRAPHY

**Olusegun Stephen Titus** is a university lecturer at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Nigeria. His research focuses on medical and environmental ethnomusicology. He received IFRA health humanities workshop sponsorship in 2012. Through the TETFund grant in 2012 he organised HIV/AIDS awareness musical concerts for barbers and hairdressers in Kogi State, Nigeria. He is an AG Leventis Postdoctoral Fellow and was visiting scholar at SOAS, University of London, UK, in 2014. Titus collaborated with the Faculty of Clinical Sciences and Institute of Public Health, College of Health Sciences, OAU, and organised HIV/AIDS world concerts in 2015. He earned a doctorate degree in ethnomusicology from University of Ibadan, Nigeria, in 2013. [[segungeneral@gmail.com](mailto:segungeneral@gmail.com)]

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Victoria Williamson is a music psychologist and a faculty lecturer in the United Kingdom. *You Are the Music* is a study of why music is a part of our everyday lives, from the perspective of music psychology. From the introduction to the last chapter, the writer introduces us to how she got engaged in music and music psychology; the paternal factor in her engagement with music, riding on her father's introduction and encouragement in reading music books early in life, is quite strong. The writer notes that she is not only addicted to music, she is also working out why she is passionately committed to music.

The book begins with why music is so much a part of our everyday lives. Williamson describes music psychology as a vibrant science that examines the relationship between music and our mind, brain and body. Music psychology focuses on examining the impact of music on our everyday life. Williamson's explanation of music psychology is further supported by other researchers (e.g., Tan, Pfordresher & Harré, 2010; Sloboda, Lamont & Greasley, 2009), who say that music psychology may be regarded as a branch of both psychology and musicology. It aims to explain and understand musical behaviour and experience, including the processes through which music is perceived, created, responded to, and incorporated into everyday life. It is, therefore, noteworthy to say that music psychology encapsulates the daily musical experiences and encounters from birth to death.

The book lists findings and theories through which researchers have sought to tell the story of "why we live with music" (p. 3). The author notes that music can trigger growth in the brain at any age, and this has been linked to enhancement of hearing acuity, language-learning and motor control. It can help improve recovery from illnesses and injury. Williamson argues that music is part of what

turned us into the modern human that we recognise today, and that this sense of our musical lives provides a glimpse into what it means to be human.

The first part of this book focuses on music and the unborn child. The author reiterates that there is such a thing as talent and prodigies. She notes that music until about the fourth month of pregnancy is meaningless. Given that a foetus is surrounded by amniotic fluid, we can assume that they perceive sounds a little like when music is played underwater. Most of the sounds common at this time are the mother's digestive system, air movements through her lungs and the activity of her heart and blood vessels. Williamson argues that the debate on nature and nurture is valid; when it comes to new-borns' ability in relation to foetal exposure to music in the womb, it is noted that such exposure will enhance better musical performance in later life.

The second chapter enumerates theories of music in childhood. It particularly discusses the Mozart effect and development theory. Mozart-effect theory started in 1995 with the publication of Rauscher, Shaw and Ky's work in *Neuroscience Letters*. They speculate that hearing Mozart's music might strengthen neural firing in an area of the brain that also supports performance on spatial-temporal tasks. However, just listening passively to music generally, and Mozart's music in particular, does not necessarily increase child development; rather the child must undertake active engagement with music. This shows that Mozart's music as source of mental reawakening cannot really be generalised. Music lessons could impact positively on a child's development in hearing, listening, and language and reading. Furthermore, in effective music education, the child's love for the instrument, the ability of teachers to maintain motivation, and practice, all count for children.

In Chapter Three, the author focuses on adolescence. She argues that music that is most cherished in the adolescent years is cherished through the rest of a person's life. This adolescent period tends to focus on music for the mood and emotions. Williamson argues that music has specific roles in changing mood and emotions, such as happiness, sadness, and anger. Adolescence is a time full of strength, energy and changing moods. Music, according to the author, can be a comparatively safe option to drugs for emotion and mood expression and regulation. According to Saarikallio (2007), the four main functions of music are identity, interpersonal relationships, emotion and agency.

In the second part of the book, in Chapter Four, the author explains the role of music in adult life. She explains the role of music in changing the brain; we are never too old to learn and for the brain to change, and learning to play an instrument or sing can be a powerful way to stimulate the mind. Chapter Five explores the use of music at work; it elucidates the history of music at work and music in the indoor office. Background music in offices is good for work, especially music that the officer or office worker loves to listen to. It affects or causes psycho-physiological arousal, cognitive engagement and is mood-changing. This chapter also enumerates music preference and choice. It furthermore explains the place of music in the community; especially in the commercial world, as it affects consumers through the secret messages in music. A good example is the advertising power of music to lure people to buy things like clothing. Chapter Six focuses on music and play. It encapsulates the place of music in daily life and activities, which include exercise, work, and romance.

The third part of the book starts with Chapters Seven and Eight, which discuss music across the lifespan. Williamson's emphasis here is on music and lifelong wellbeing, music therapy and music medicine. Other areas include music and autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and dyslexia. Williamson notes that music as therapy and music as medicine are adjunctive treatments to

support well-being throughout the human lifespan. She observes also that the music of one's life may one day have the power to support one through difficult and traumatic times. She further notes that music is not a pill, a solution or a cure when it comes to times of trouble, but it can be an important and flexible source of personal support, consolation connection and inspiration.

Overall, Williamson's book vividly communicates how music can reveal what it means to be human in our day-to-day activities and endeavours. A gap observed in the book pertains to the role of music in relation to death and dying. This gap could perhaps be addressed in a future edition.

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