

Wired for Sound - O Magazine – December 2008

Noted neurologist and author, Oliver Sacks, MD shares his findings that a bond exists between music and our brains...especially as we age.

Each culture enjoys its own musical traditions. Often said to be “the universal language”, music has long brought people together to sing and to dance, share customs, etc. Regardless of one’s religious beliefs, holiday music can be particularly meaningful as it often brings to mind our earliest experiences as children and causes memories to flood back involving our families, friends, traditional foods, the sights, sounds and smells in our homes and communities – for many, these are “comfort” feelings.

Have you ever thought about the fact that “humans are uniquely able to produce and enjoy music – very few other animals can do so.” Dr. Sacks feels that “...music not only bonds us to each other, it literally shapes our brains.” He feels that it is no accident that we teach young children with songs and rhymes...**music burrows its way deep into the nervous system...so deep that even those individuals who suffer devastating neurological disease or injury, lose music from their memories last.** He has seen it over and over again with his patients; those living with Parkinson’s disease, aphasia, Tourette’s syndrome and even Alzheimer’s disease. Music memory somehow bypasses the deprecation of Alzheimer’s disease. Even those with advanced dementia discover that music can reawaken personal memories and associations.

The positive effects of music on someone who may otherwise be uncommunicative or not responsive to other stimuli are improvements of mood, more positive behaviors or lack of negative behaviors, even stronger cognitive function. These effects, says Dr. Sacks, can sometimes last for hours or even days in people with dementia. Though still being studied, professionals have witnessed that **“music is a powerful therapy for those with nearly any kind of neurological problem...often their best medicine!”**