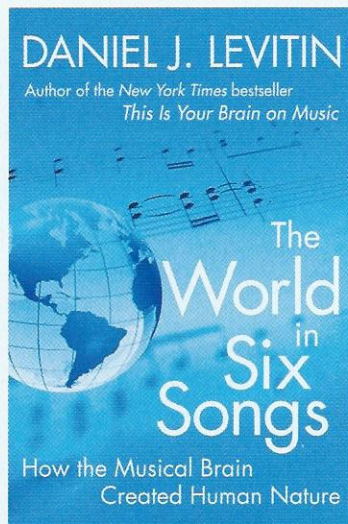


# BELLS AND WHISTLES

BOOKS BOUND TO CAUSE A QUIET RIOT ON YOUR SHELF. BY AMY NANCE

For those of us looking for some holiday reading not in the tradition of Dickens, Sedaris or Nicholas Sparks, plenty of spirited alternatives pop up in overstuffed bookstores this season. And what better time to seize on music, that most festive of topics? Here we trumpet the pleasures of songs, bands and musical merry-making with four new books that will appeal to every fan. While scientist Daniel J. Levitin wonders about the role of music in shaping the brain, Duran Duran guitarist Andy Taylor talks about how it turned him on. And like a true rock star, Jon Holmes behaves badly in his outrageous collection of rock myths, which are nearly surpassed by the exploits of piano prodigy Ervin Nyiregyhazi in Kevin Bazzana's meticulous biography.



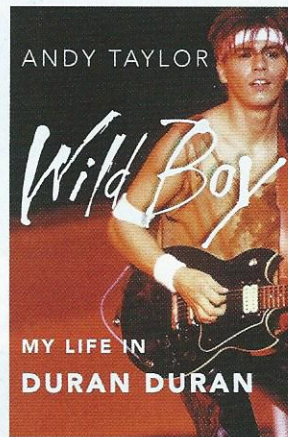
**The World in Six Songs** by Daniel J. Levitin (Penguin, Hardcover, \$25.95) "Americans spend more money on music than they do on prescription drugs or sex, and the average American hears more than five hours of music per day," *Songs* author Daniel J. Levitin reminds us in this ambitious book about the neuroscience of song. A research scientist at McGill University, Levitin's musical knowledge may be vast, but he's more adoring fan than dry academic, counting performers such as Sting and Pete Seeger both as sources and as friends. In this generous and careful examination of music's function in our lives, Levitin's passion and appreciation for songs of all stripes is evident.

He argues that there are only six universal song tropes that express emotions common to humankind, appealing to us to remember "how large music is." Like Joseph Campbell's *The*

*Hero with a Thousand Faces*, *Songs* shows off its author's nimble mind, his vision of music as a wise and inclusive system by which we make sense of our experiences. "Each new song is a link in a millennia-long chain of evolutionary enhancements to previous song building—slight alterations in the "genetic structure" of one song leads us to a new one, he says, as he considers "how we are made up of music."

**Rock Star Babylon** by Jon Holmes (Penguin, Trade Paper, \$13) Where Taylor's memoir details the trappings of fame in the music industry, Holmes' little essays are like a perverse love letter to them. These "apocryphal tales from rock's highway to hell hewn roughly into the shape of a book" offer some form of dirt on just about everybody who's anybody in the business, from James Brown to Belinda Carlisle.

In this compendium, some of the tales are true and some are just tall, but all of them are presented in Holmes' freewheeling, audacious, offensive style—and with copious footnotes to boot. How does he know what he knows? As a long-time radio personality and writer on the music scene in London, Holmes has long had an ear to the chatter from those inside the industry. While he openly discloses that some of the stories are legends, that doesn't make reading them any less entertaining. Holmes is the kind of writer who can reference Pirandello and Van Halen in the space of two sentences, who takes such pleasure in the transgression he's describing that he almost misses the punchline. Still, this is the outrageous book you should read aloud to gathered family after a few pulls on the egg nog—when the kids are in bed and everybody's looking for a little less sanctimony.



**Wild Boy: My Life in Duran Duran** by Andy Taylor (Hachette Book Group, Hardcover, \$26.99) There's nothing better than a rock 'n' roll tell-all to pass all those hours you're not watching football with everyone else. Guitarist Andy Taylor of Duran Duran holds nothing back about the 1980s British act, which

gave the world and its discothèques "Hungry Like the Wolf," "Rio" and "Girls on Film." Here, Taylor recounts every noteworthy incident in the band's history, from a concert attended by royal super fan Princess Diana that was nearly sabotaged by the IRA to the band's not being told by their manager that they had won two Grammy Awards.

And there are the expected tales of extravagance, though in Taylor's case, the excesses seem downright restrained, mostly because he spends so much time atoning for them in the book. He writes with perspective about the band's dissolution in 1985, saying Duran Duran was in "terminal decline." His honesty about how friendship within the confines of a band is often easily eroded makes you realize just how amazing it is when a group of similar stature manages to stay together (that would be you, U2).

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