

Listening for the oldest songs: The origins of music in the sounds of the more-than-human world

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Animals such as songbirds, humpback whales, and many kinds of insects make sounds that can be described as music, once music is defined as sounds organized into patterns and forms whose meaning comes out in their performance rather than any semantic content. Most of the specific qualities that distinguish human music from human speech can be found in these animal sounds that are millions of years older than the human species, thus it is likely that the human conception of music evolved in the context of a rich musical world dominated by other species. This connection between human and animal musics has largely been forgotten, but at the dawn of the anthropocene it is time to recover this connection. Does a human-dominated world begin to change the perseverance of animal musics? More careful listening and interaction with the musics of other creatures will help us find the answer.