



RICHARD PARNCUTT

It is clear that music has spiritual significance, because music often plays an important role in spiritual experiences and in the circumstances in which they occur. The interesting question for me is: "*Where does the connection between music and spirituality originally come from?*" Music has puzzled evolutionary psychologists because it is strongly emotional although it has no clear survival value. Why do patterns of pitch and time in music so easily carry such strong emotional messages? A possible answer is that the internal sounds of the human body – the voice, heartbeat, footsteps, movements, and digestive sounds – depend strongly on the person's emotional state. We know from countless empirical studies that the fetus hears and processes the internal sound patterns of its mother's body during the second half of pregnancy. The fetus thus has access to information about the emotional state of the mother. Evolutionary arguments suggest that the fetus uses these sound patterns to monitor the mother's state. If that is true, the first patterns of sound that a human being ever hears may be associated with emotions.

Why is music associated with spirituality? A possible answer is that emotional aspects of both music and spirituality have their ultimate origin in the *mother schema*: the mother as perceived by her child or fetus. By *schema* I mean all aspects of an object, person, or situation that are both *perceptible* and *important* for the observer. The fetus perceives the mother during the third trimester via the fetal senses of hearing, taste, touch, movement and orientation. The fetus also has access to information about the mother's changing physical and emotional state, which is crucial for its survival. The *mother schema* concept implies that, for the fetus, all this information is rolled into one. On the basis of these ideas, I have constructed a theory of the origins of music that is simultaneously a theory of the origins of spirituality. The theory assumes that both music and spirituality have their ultimate origin in the mother schema: the original god. This does not mean that god is a woman, because the fetus has no concept of gender, or of anything else for that matter. I wish to emphasize that the theory is speculative and is currently not accepted by most leading music psychologists; however, no theory of the origins of music currently enjoys widespread acceptance. I should also emphasize that the theory is confined to *emotional* aspects of music and spirituality. It cannot, for example, account for cognitive aspects such as the universal human desire to explain the unexplainable.



**RICHARD PARNCUTT, AUTHOR OF
*"HARMONY: A PSYCHOACOUSTICAL APPROACH"***