

Æstetisk Seminar

Steven Mithen

The co-evolution of music and language

Music and language have numerous similarities. They share the principle of compositionality, the use of a finite number of units to create phrases that are more than the sum of their parts and potentially infinite in number. Both can be expressed by the voice, by the body – as in singing and dancing – and in written form. They are typically undertaken as a form of communications between individuals and groups but can also be pursued alone. And yet, music and language are also profoundly different: words and spoken utterances have semantic meanings that are shared within a speech community; musical tones and phrases do not. Music may induce a shared emotional response but, unlike language, lacks any informational content. The overlaps between music and language have long suggested they have a shared evolutionary history. By drawing on my research published within *The Singing Neanderthals* (2007) and *The Language Puzzle* (2024), I will suggest music and language evolved from a single archaic, multi-purpose communication system and diverged at c. 1.5 million years ago when the first words emerged from what had been holistic ape-like calls. Those words provided the first towards language and liberating the remnant holistic calls to focus on the unique roles that music accomplishes today.

Torsdag den 31. oktober 2024, Kl. 14:15

Kasernen, bygning 1584, lokale 126

Alle er velkomne / All are welcome