

Questions for Nina Kraus

The Northwestern professor is a biologist and amateur musician who thinks about sound and brain health. She is the author of a book for the intellectually curious.



by **Bookends and Beginnings**
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Nina Kraus is Hugh Knowles Professor of Communication Sciences, Neurobiology, and Otolaryngology at Northwestern University. As a biologist and amateur musician, she thinks about sound and brain health. Her research has found that our lives in sound, for better (musicians, bilinguals) and for worse (concussion, hearing loss, language disorders, noise), shape how our brain makes sense of the sounds we hear. Her book *Of Sound Mind: How Our Brain Constructs a Meaningful Sonic World* was written for the intellectually curious.

Your cocktail-party description of *Of Sound Mind*:

This is my love-letter to sound, how sound connects us, its biological impact on making us *us*, and how it affects the world we live in. Sound is an underrecognized, powerful force in our lives. The hearing brain engages how we think, feel, move and integrate our other senses.



Author Nina Kraus: This is my love-letter to sound, how sound connects us, its biological impact on making us *us*, and how it affects the world we live in." (Photo: Justin Barber)

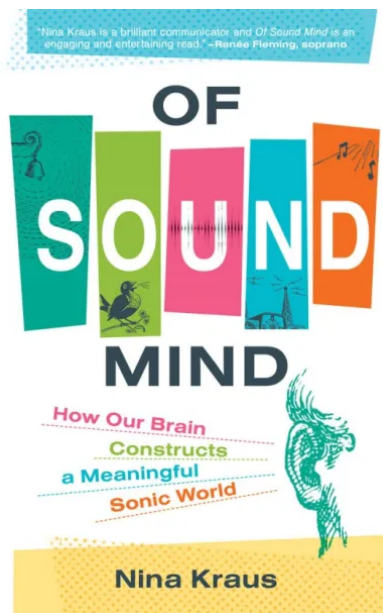
When you realized you wanted to be an author:

I didn't realize it, consciously. It just happened. If you visit my lab's website, you'll find we study music, rhythm, bilingualism, concussion, aging, language and its disorders. I wanted to bring all these themes together in one place. The book is written conversationally, full of personal anecdotes (science is a deeply human endeavor), while at the same time, drawing on accumulated scientific literature. Art is science. Science is art. There are 80 original illustrations, most conceived in partnership with artist Katie Shelly.

Your first published work:

About 400 scientific articles. Of Sound Mind is my first book. My first article was my dissertation. I witnessed firsthand how a neuron would change its activity once a rabbit learned a sound had meaning.

Author you most admire, dead or alive:



Primo Levi (*The Periodic Table*)

Favorite musical artist of all time:

Impossible to say. It depends...Debussy...Judas Priest...Extracto...

Sound you love the most:

The sound of my sons' voices.

Sound you hate the most:

Leaf blowers, beeping delivery trucks.

Book you think should be in every child's library:

The Pushcart War by Jean Merrill. It is a story about solidarity, friendship and not tolerating bullies.

Book you're reading now and want to recommend to others:

The Forest Unseen by David George Haskell. I find myself increasingly impressed by the biological similarity among living things. Haskell, a plant biologist, does a poetic job teaching us about life in the forest.

Things you like most / least about living in Evanston:

The lake / Over-salting our roads in winter.

Where you've lived besides Evanston/Chicago:

New York and Trieste, Italy.

Three favorite local shops / restaurants (B&B is just assumed, so you can leave us out 😊):

Guitar Works, Ltd., Hogeye Music, Belgian Chocolatier Piron, Inc.

Question we should have asked but didn't:

How can we strengthen our sound mind?

Sound fills the space surrounding you and me, and connects us when we speak. Sound is alive. We have no script when we talk; we are everyday improvisors. When we're having a conversation there is reciprocity, reverberation and tunedness; psychiatrist and scholar Iain McGilchrist calls it "betweenness." It is probably the most precious communication there is. Sound helped us communicate for hundreds of thousands of years before there was print. Hearing evolved to keep us fed, to keep us safe from predators, to warn us of danger and to connect us with mates. Sound has deep biologic roots. As our society becomes increasingly alienated, isolated, depressed, anxious and divided, sound can heal if we relearn to value it. We can make more music with our friends and families. We can talk to our children instead of to our phones. I believe sound holds

a key for fostering a new sense of engagement and meaning in the 21st century.

“Anne was passionate about helping us find our perfect home!”



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