

# Book review: “The Dreams Behind the Music: Learn Creative Dreaming as 100+ Top Artists Reveal their Breakthrough Inspirations.” by Craig Sim Webb

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**Summary.** The book, by Craig Sim Webb, includes a large variety of stories showing how dreams can provide inspirations for melodies, lyrics, song titles, instrumentation, arrangements, new performance ideas, musical instrumentation inventions, and even help to train performing skills. Being a dream expert and a singer-songwriter, these accounts are backed up by his own experience. The book also includes instructions to increase dream recall and how to incubate music dreams in order to harvest the dream ideas.

**Keywords:** Music dream, creativity, continuity hypothesis

Although music and dreams are universal phenomena playing a role in every culture worldwide, (Herndon & McLeod, 1982; Shulman & Stroumsa, 1999), their intermingling has rarely been studied systematically. There are two aspects of interest: 1. How do musical experiences during waking affect subsequent dreams and 2. How do dreams affect waking life musical activity, e.g., by providing ideas for new melodies and lyrics?

The book by Craig Sim Webb focuses on the second aspect of this relationship (Webb, 2017). In addition to extending previous reviews on that topic, (Barrett, 2001; Grace, 2001, 2012), the author being not only a dream expert but a singer-songwriter himself describes his own music dream experiences based on a large series of roughly 15,000 recorded dreams. Although the author has put together an impressive collection of musicians that were inspired by dreams, from shamans to classical composers like Igor Stravinsky, Giuseppe Tartini, Richard Wagner and modern musicians like Paul McCartney, Sting, Billy Joel, U2, Karlheinz Stockhausen, I would like to concentrate on the author's own experiences as these are unique and endemic to his book.

On page 18, Craig shares a powerful life-calling vision dream in which he saw and felt the joy of teaching dreams and, in the second part, experienced an even more joyful feeling regarding sharing his music as a singer-songwriter. A dream he had two decades before publishing the book came true as he achieved both goals. Of his 15,000 dreams, about 6% contain sound or music; a figure that is compa-

rable with the 5.41% in a dream series of 10,398 dreams (Schredl, 2015) and the 6.30% of music dreams reported by a large online sample of 1,966 participants (König et al., 2018). Craig also points out that music is associated with positive emotions, not only in waking but also in dreaming. This relationship has been supported by empirical studies showing that music dreams include more positive and less negative emotions than other dreams (König & Schredl, 2019). However, music students reported negatively toned music dreams regarding problems with performing music, e.g., “*Sitting in the orchestra, I heard the signal for my entry but did not find my instrument and missed it.*” Interestingly – reported in the book – Paul Simon being 5 ft. 2 in. had performance-related nightmares about the microphone being too high for him to reach.

Being a song-writer it is not astonishing that Craig reported that he dreams only sometimes about music of other artists, and that the majority of music dreams (about 80%) include original and new music. This is in contrast to music dreams of non-composers with 20% to 30% of music dreams in which they created new melodies/pieces of music (König et al., 2018; Vogelsang, Anold, Schormann, Wübelmann, & Schredl, 2016).

Other very interesting aspects are illustrated by the author presenting a dream of his own on page 20.

*“I hear this amazing African-sounding piece of music in its entirety. I am quite taken with it and think, ‘Wow. I want to remember this!’ In the dream, a woman comes and tells me that the song was recorded by so-and-so already. I feel a bit disappointed.”*

Craig wasn't sure within the dream whether it was really a new melody. Paul McCartney who dreamed the melody of “Yesterday” at first – after waking up from the dream – thought he had heard the melody somewhere before. This is a common theme found throughout the book. Another aspect also found, in several examples, that the new music is not played by the dreamer herself or himself but by another person or even a fantastic character like the devil

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playing violin in Guiseppi Tartini's dream. These dreams might reflect the doubts of composers they are "really" creative. Also typical is having difficulty remembering the new melody or lyrics after waking, so the skilled dreamer tries to improve memory by repetition and/or the intention to recall it upon awakening (not always working).

Another interesting observation described by the author on page 24, is that the music is not an intrinsic part of the dream but feels like coming through a separate channel of information. For people who listen to music in waking but do not compose new music (König & Schredl, 2019; Schredl, 2015) dream music is often integrated into the dream action, for instance dancing to music or listening to music played by others. It would be interesting to study whether this "outside the dream experience" is related to creating new music in the dream, i.e., studying the dream diaries of gifted musicians. Craig wrote that musical dreams occur more often when he planned to work on music in his waking life. This is in line with the continuity hypothesis of dreaming which is backed up by studies showing that playing an instrument, listening actively to music is related to music dream percentage (König et al., 2018; Vogelsang et al., 2016).

The major aim of the author of putting together the large number of accounts regarding the creative effect of dreams on music was to stimulate musicians to listen to their dreams as they can provide inspirations for melodies, lyrics, song titles, instrumentation, arrangements, new performance ideas, musical instrumentation inventions, and even help to train performing skills. One of the first steps is to improve dream recall by focusing on the intent to recall a dream at sleep onset and having a voice recorder near the bed – detailed instructions are provided in the book. The next step is called dream incubation, i.e., the dreamer actively focuses on the intention that the dream should include new music. In a small group setting, Craig reported high success rates. From a scientific point of view, more systematic studies would be necessary to corroborate this observation.

In a considerable number of accounts, the dreams mentioned in the book are of a nightmarish character. This is not surprising as creative people tend to have thinner boundaries and so experience more nightmares (Hartmann, 1991). Therefore, the suggestions to deal with nightmares given in the book and elaborated in more detail on Craig's website ([www.craigwebb.ca](http://www.craigwebb.ca)) are helpful for musicians. This is particularly important as nightmare sufferers rarely seek professional help for this (Schredl, 2013), even though the treatment strategy called Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT) can be very easily applied by the dreamer herself or himself. The basic idea is to actively confront and solve the nightmare situation in waking imagination sessions and train these skills for two weeks (for five to ten minutes a day) so they have an effect on subsequent dreams (Krakow & Zadra, 2006).

To summarize, the book is a wonderful introduction in the manifold ways dreams can stimulate waking life creativity by inspiring new melodies, lyrics and so on. The personal experience of the author supports the stories of other musicians. How this creative potential can be tapped in a systematic way is still a topic of future research.

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