

masters of repetition; nursery rhymes and the little chants and songs we use to teach young children have choruses and refrains. We are attracted to repetition, even as adults; we want the stimulus and the reward again and again, and in music we get it. Perhaps, therefore, we should not be surprised, should not complain if the balance sometimes shifts too far and our musical sensitivity becomes a vulnerability.

Is it possible that earworms are, to some extent, a modern phenomenon, at least a phenomenon not only more clearly recognized, but vastly more common now than ever before? Although earworms have no doubt existed since our forebears first blew tunes on bone flutes or beat tattoos on fallen logs, it is significant that the term has come into common use only in the past few decades. When Mark Twain was writing in the 1870s, there was plenty of music to be had, but it was not ubiquitous. One had to seek out other people to hear (and participate in) singing—at church, family gatherings, parties. To hear instrumental music, unless one had a piano or other instrument at home, one would have to go to church or to a concert. With recording and broadcasting and films, all this changed radically. Suddenly music was everywhere for the asking, and this has increased by orders of magnitude in the last couple of decades, so that we are now enveloped by a ceaseless musical bombardment whether we want it or not.

Half of us are plugged into iPods, immersed in daylong concerts of our own choosing, virtually oblivious to the environment—and for those who are not plugged in, there is nonstop music, unavoidable and often of deafening intensity, in restaurants, bars, shops, and gyms. This barrage of music puts a certain strain on our exquisitely sensitive auditory systems, which cannot be overloaded without dire consequences. One such consequence is the ever-increasing prevalence of serious hearing loss, even among young people, and particularly among musicians. Another is the omnipresence of annoyingly catchy tunes, the brainworms that arrive unbidden and leave only in their own time—catchy tunes that may, in fact, be nothing more than advertisements for toothpaste but are, neurologically, completely irresistible.

1. The idea that “brainworms” are part of “a coercive process” (line 7) is best supported by the word
  - (A) “pathological” (line 2)
  - (B) “maddeningly” (line 3)
  - (C) “circling” (line 5)
  - (D) “repetition” (line 5)
  - (E) “irrelevant” (line 6)
  
2. Which of the following words is grammatically and thematically parallel to “plugging” (line 26)?
  - (A) “lost” (line 22)
  - (B) “thinking” (line 23)
  - (C) “jumped” (line 25)
  - (D) “talking” (line 26)
  - (E) “loudly” (line 26)

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Is it possible that earworms are, to some extent, a modern phenomenon, at least a phenomenon not only more clearly recognized, but vastly more common (165) now than ever before? Although earworms have no doubt existed since our forebears first blew tunes on bone flutes or beat tattoos on fallen logs, it is significant that the term has come into common use only in the past few decades. When Mark Twain was writing in the 1870s, there was plenty of music to be had, but it was not ubiquitous. One had to seek out other people to hear (170) (and participate in) singing—at church, family gatherings, parties. To hear instrumental music, unless one had a piano or other instrument at home, one would have to go to church or to a concert. With recording and broadcasting films, all this changed radically. Suddenly music was everywhere for the asking and this has increased by orders of magnitude in the last couple of decades, so (175) that we are now enveloped by a ceaseless musical bombardment whether we want it or not.

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