With ever-increasing interest from the general public in non-fiction scientific writing, and a concurrent boom in the accessibility of music, this book and its broad focus on the role music plays in everyday life is timely. We seem to also be increasingly focused on what constitutes well-being in life. This, with the unprecedented boom in music’s presence, creates a need for greater knowledge about the benefits of playing, performing, listening to and discussing music in everyday life. Some 20 authors and many more participants (from studies in Europe and Australia) have contributed to this book. Personally, I have found many of its chapters thought provoking and informative.

*Musical Life Stories* places the human relationship with music at centre stage and explores its complexity from a number of consumer-based vantage points; including adolescents, musicians, fans, music therapists, music therapy students, grieving parents, and adults experiencing mental health issues or going through moments of ‘crisis’ in life. Broadly speaking, the book considers how ‘ordinary people’ use music in their lives, and what benefits or (in some cases) potential harms may come from this.

Lilliestam considers the value of personal preference in music listening, seeing “our music, the music that we like” (p. 17) as most effective in having therapeutic and positive impact on well-being. Further positing that early musical tastes form a subjective “blueprint” of what constitutes ‘good music’” (p. 21), Lilliestam presents a chapter that explores music’s potential to influence existential health across the lifespan, taking in such differential aspects such as age, gender and ethnicity. Interestingly, Lilliestam raises the arguable point that it is possible that the sheer abundance of instantly accessible music today might potentially make us somewhat less appreciative of it (or simply take it for granted). It seems likely that many creative artists who attempt to make a career from songwriting or recording would agree, given how hard the Internet age has made financial gain from making music. Music is presented as a tool that helps us maintain and shape our personal identity, and as something that is inextricably linked to the concept of meaning in our lives. Having a personal understanding of our own “musical biography” (p. 45) is considered to assist in achieving subjective well-being through offering opportunities for “psychic balance” (p. 34) in life, as well as points of reference and meaning, through concepts like nostalgia, positive emotion, aural mirroring and existential coherence.

Co-editor Skanland brings a resource-oriented view to current day music listening habits, (particularly to the ubiquitous MP3), and explores music’s links to positive psychology. Young music listeners discuss and explore the positive value of being able to enter a world of their own with their personal music. Discussion of the potential dangers of headphone use is at once timely and poignant. Skanland raises the issue that there is strong potential for long-term hearing damage (perhaps, one thinks, of epidemic proportions!) if people use music played very loudly through headphones to mask out external noise. The impact of such listening is also considered a traffic...
safety threat for pedestrians, who potentially become unaware of their surroundings (this is certainly a very real problem in Melbourne, Australia, with multiple tragic deaths occurring in recent years as result of this). Finally the impact of listening to music on headphones on social interaction is considered. Certainly, until the current omnipresence of headphone use in public, music listening had been more an experience shared between listeners.

Much of the book is phenomenological in nature, exploring the experience of music listening and music making. Through a well balanced consumer-clinician-researcher co-authorship, McFerran and Baird explore the listening habits of young and maturing people, seeking complexity and challenging the idea that music can be either “reliably positive” (p. 117) or “overwhelmingly dangerous” (p. 177). Together they explore both the positive and negative potentials of preferred music and its influence on mental health. Through an in depth-interview focusing on the personal experience of an internationally renowned musician, Trondalen explores the concept of musical performance as a means to personal health and existential wellbeing, and how for an instrumentalist, the instrument itself becomes deeply linked to personal identity. Vist and Ole Bonde present the perspective that health is both a resource and a process that can be significantly influenced through strong experiences with music. Through the tragic example of the loss of a child, they present the ways that musical contexts can “encourage people to open up for emotions” (p. 141) assisting the process of catharsis and the expression of strong feelings. Ruud further explores the role of music in the experience of grief, and how music can be used to address, explore, understand and express emotional difficulties related to the experience of life crisis.

For a book of its length (around 350 pages) *Musical Life Stories* covers a remarkably broad cross section of viewpoints – its breadth is certainly its greatest strength and it could be said that the book holds something of interest for all. Many of the book’s chapters strive to present authentic qualitative voice of research participants sharing their stories – what the experience of music consumers is, and what they themselves think and feel about its value and impact on wellbeing. In this regard, the book’s success is entirely praiseworthy. Given it’s broad view, perhaps its only weakness is that it is wholly focused on first world uses of music - it doesn’t explore the ways music is used in ethnic minority groups, though in its defence, the book does not mean to be an exhaustive text on the topic. For its potential readers, music therapists, students, educators, and the interested general public, this book holds many gems of insight and wisdom on the role of music in modern everyday life.