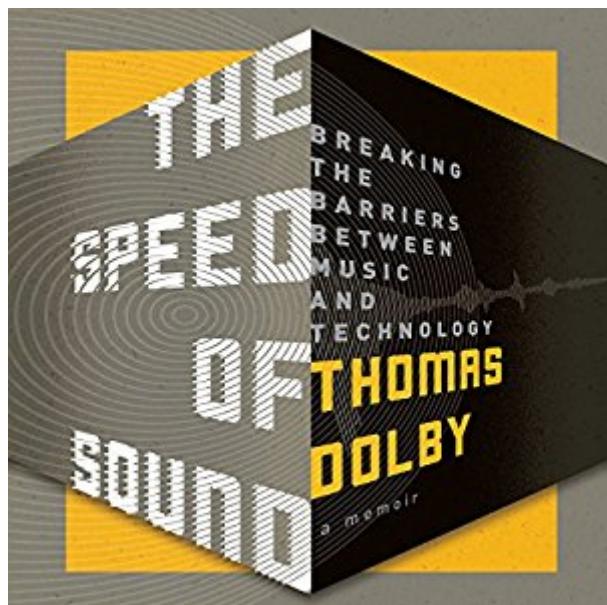


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The Speed Of Sound: Breaking The Barriers Between Music And Technology



Synopsis

The remarkable story of rising to the top of the music charts, a second act as a tech pioneer, and the sustaining power of creativity and art. Thomas Dolby's hit songs "She Blinded Me with Science" and "Hyperactive!" catapulted him to international fame in the early '80s. A pioneer of New Wave and Electronica, Thomas combined a love for invention with a passion for music, and the result was a new sound that defined an era of revolutionary music. But as record company politics overshadow the joy of performing, Thomas finds a surprising second act. Starting out in a rat-infested London bedsit, a teenage Thomas Dolby stacks boxes by day at the grocery and tinkers with a homemade synthesizer at night while catching the Police at a local dive bar, swinging by the pub to see the unknown Elvis Costello, and starting the weekend with a Clash show at a small nightclub. London on the eve of the 1980s is a hotbed for music and culture, and a new sound is beginning to take shape, merging technology with the musical energy of punk rock. Thomas plays keyboards in other bands' shows and, with a bit of luck, finds his own style, quickly establishing himself on the scene and recording breakout hits that take radio, MTV, and dance clubs by storm. The world is now his oyster, and sold out arenas, world tours, even a friendship with Michael Jackson become the fabric of his life. But as the record industry flounders and disillusionment sets in, Thomas turns his attention to Hollywood. Scoring films and computer games eventually leads him to Silicon Valley and a software start-up that turns up the volume on the digital music revolution. His company barely survives the dot-com bubble, but finally even the mavericks at Apple, Microsoft, Netscape, and Nokia see the light. By 2005 two thirds of the world's mobile phones embed his Beatnik software. Life at the zenith of a tech empire proves to be just as full of big personalities, battling egos, and roller-coaster success as his days spent at the top of the charts. The Speed of Sound is the story of an extraordinary man living an extraordinary life, a single-handed quest to make peace between art and the digital world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I just finished reading Dolby's memoir. For someone who's been a fan of his music for over 30 years, it was a revelation. The book is full of fascinating anecdotes about his early career as a musician, and his later career as a tech entrepreneur. Throughout the memoir he comes across as an artist who refuses to compromise his integrity, a sort of romantic Don Quixote figure crossing lances with the dragons of the music business and e-commerce. Fans of music will gain many great insights into the making of his songs and albums, as well as discovering what he was doing in the many years in between the production of his music. The biggest gap is his childhood--I would have liked to have learned more about what drew him to music, and synthesized music, in the first place, and would have enjoyed reading about his early years traveling around with his archeologist father. Otherwise this is a gem of a book, and should appeal not only to fans of his music, but to people curious about the inner workings of the music industry since the days of '80s synth pop.

Interesting read, I couldn't put it down, wound up reading it in 2 sessions over 2 days. Mr Dolby provides a very good look at the recent history of the music business and his career in particular which segues nicely into the world of the modern age of wireless which is the dotcom/internet zombie fest of virtual products and data points and vaporware and of course IPO's. This book cost me money, I wound up buying Thomas Dolby's original catalog (released on Rhino Records) and the remastered Golden Age of Wireless, but it was a wise investment or at least my ears thought so. Great music that doesn't age quickly, and now I understand the reasoning and circumstances behind it. Heartily recommend this book to anyone interested in music, technology, music business or the technology business. Funny, tragic, engrossing and sometimes romantic, but virtually no nudity and no animals were harmed in the production of this tome. May contain wood pulp and other organic products.

Finished this fascinating memoir the day I received it. I've been anticipating the book's release for a while, and it did not disappoint. SPOILERS (but what review doesn't have a few): I already knew Elizabeth was Europa, but I still gasped when she said "We'll be the Pirate Twins again", I cried

when TMDR described the worst moment of his life checking his Blackberry outside the school, I laughed about the water skiing accident, I cheered when Kathleen told off Michael Jackson and I felt sympathy for Lesley. And as for Kevin Rowland, "Come on Eileen" is the biggest turd of the 80s. As TMDR admits early on, some events seemed to be re-ordered from ways we have heard them before, but this is done with admirable intent to emphasize the chronology of events and how each lends to things further along. I would have liked to see a bit of greater detail during the Sole Inhabitant and Map of the Floating City years since Le Funky Shed and the Nutmeg were great places of artistic cultivation. Things I learned: 1. When setting out, it never hurts to keep a name in your pocket 2. Stay true to who you are and what you want to build and steer your course with that mindset 3. Keep the Sharpies away from Tony Hadley

Although Thomas Dolby is best known for his first careers as a musician and producer at the height of the 80's synth pop craze, he has since reinvented himself as a silicon valley entrepreneur, taken a few years off in semi-retirement in his native England, and most recently returned to the US as a professor at Johns Hopkins. To me the most interesting aspect of Dolby's story is how he has managed to do all of this as a largely self educated man from a modest background. Lots of one hit wonders have come and gone in the music industry, but I can't think of another who has followed that up with even more success in business. I can also think of lots of successful silicon valley entrepreneurs, but most of them come from privileged Ivy League backgrounds (you might mention Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerberg, but I'd respond that both of them got into Harvard even if they didn't bother to finish.) Dolby tells his story in a straight forward way, including lots of unflattering details that other autobiographers might have skipped. At times there is too much detail about recording sessions, concert tours, and business meetings, but some of the stories about personalities and events are fascinating. I would have liked to hear more about Dolby's latest reinvention as a college professor and what he wants to work on at this stage of his life.

I have gotten used to hearing the staple song "She Blinded Me With Science" in the grocery store and as a Dolby appreciator have kept up with some of his subsequent musical output over the past many years and have always been amazed at what a great musician he is. However, beyond the music, you may be surprised to find out that Dolby is a renaissance man and probably very close to a genius. Beyond helping to create electronic music and give rise to EDM, Dolby has been involved with electronic and technological, pioneering that has literally changed our world. It's fascinating to hear about the evolution of the internet and the cell phone from the perspective of a person who

was, when started out, basically a rock star who nobody suspected was also a brainiac. Dealing with his distaste for the business side of the music business it's fascinating to watch Dolby deal with the business side of the technology revolution, which makes the music business look like a day at Disneyland. Incredibly well written, apparently without the aid of a ghost writer, which further cements Dolby's reputation as a unique talent. Highly recommend this.

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