

What Do Great Musicians Have in Common? DNA

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Scientific American:

At age 13, jazz great Thelonious Monk ran into trouble at Harlem's Apollo Theater. The reason: he was too good. The famously precocious pianist was, as they say, a "natural," and by that point had won the Apollo's amateur competition so many times that he was barred from re-entering. To be sure, Monk practiced, a lot actually. But two new studies, and the fact that he taught himself to read music as a child before taking a single lesson, suggest that he likely had plenty of help from his genes.

The question of what accounts for the vast variability in people's aptitudes for skilled and creative pursuits goes way back — are experts born with their skill, or do they acquire it? Victorian polymath Sir Francis Galton — coiner of the phrase "nature and nurture" and founder of the "eugenics" movement through which he hoped to improve the biological make-up of the human species through selective coupling — held the former view, noting that certain talents run in families.

Read the whole story: [*Scientific American*](#)