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## Play together to stay together



MUSICAL ability is linked to gene variants that help control social bonding. The finding adds weight to the notion that music developed to cement human relationships.

Irma Järvelä of the University of Helsinki, Finland, and her colleagues recruited people from 19 families with at least one professional musician in each and tested their aptitudes for distinguishing rhythm, pitch and musical pattern. These abilities - which are thought to be innate and unteachable - ran in families, consistent with their being under genetic control.

When the researchers scanned the volunteers' genes, they found that two variants of the gene *AVPR1A* correlated strongly with musical ability (*PLoS One*, DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0005534). *AVPR1A* codes for a receptor for the hormone arginine vasopressin and has been linked with bonding, love and altruism in people.

Järvelä thinks musical aptitude evolved because musical people were better at forming attachments to others: "Think of lullabies, which increase social bonding and possibly the survival of the baby."