



The Sound of Life's Unspeakable Beauty Martin Schleske (Eerdmans) \$24.99
Maybe once or twice a year I get an impassioned note from somebody in the book biz – a sales representative or editor that knows us – sending an early manuscript with a handwritten note insisting that this may be their favorite book in a long time, a stellar project, and they wanted me to be aware, etc. This is a true privilege and since it doesn't happen often, I take such suggestions seriously. *The Sound of Life's Unspeakable Beauty* came from a professional at Eerdmans saying mostly that it was just so beautiful, that it was gloriously exceptional and he was sure I'd appreciate it. The prose was beautiful and he promised that the publisher would be doing the book on high-quality glossy paper and two-color ink because the writing (and moody black and white photographs done by a respected German photographer) deserved such a weighty, handsome presentation.

That book is now in our hands and I suggested it to a very sharp customer and friend, a consultant and church leader, himself somewhat of an explorer and quite creative; you may know him because he is in the DVD series *For the Life of the World*. I knew he'd like this book but I didn't know he'd call me twice in the next three days exclaiming how very, very moved he was, insisting this was one of the best books he's ever read.

So, my guy at Eerdmans was right. *The Sound of Life's Unspeakable Beauty* is beautiful and exceptional.

And, it is really interesting. Translated from the German (where it was a bestseller) *The Sound...* is written by a world-class luthier. That is, by a violin and guitar maker. It is a rumination on the art of crafting instruments, starting with picking the wood in the forest (and what a chapter that is where he listens to the trees!) but it is also about the glorious aesthetic dimension (my words, not his, exactly) that pervades all of life. (For those that like this notion, it is an insight explored by Calvin Seerveld, especially in his *Rainbows for the Fallen World*.) *The Sound of Life's Unspeakable Beauty* is a book that helps us learn from this master craftsman how to attend to the deep beauty all around us.

Here is how the publisher describes it:

Are the sounds and signposts that direct us towards the meaning of life hidden? One of the greatest luthiers of our time reveals the secrets of his profession—and how each phase of handcrafting a violin can point us toward our calling, our true selves, and the overwhelming power and gentleness of God's love.

When we are able to express the inexpressible, the unheard aspects of life, we become like a well-tuned instrument. As Schleske says, "In the final analysis, music is prayer cast into sound."

Visual artist and writer Makoto Fujimura wrote a wonderful foreword, which is well worth savoring itself. Near the close of his few pages, Mako says,

So the words of this beautiful book do not just describe, explain, or share information; these words are, in themselves, part of the Sound, and I can hear it from the first paragraph. Then, after, the worlds begin to overlap with music; I wanted to savor every paragraph, as if I, too, am a tuner listening to the timbre.

Perhaps you know the book *The World Beyond Your Head* by philosopher/motorcycle repairman Matthew Crawford (who also wrote *Shop Class as Soul Craft*) where he interviews workers about the body-knowledge and insight about their jobs. I thought of that fine and profound work as I read my advanced copy of *The Sound of Life's Unspeakable Beauty* and more so when the handsome hardback arrived and there was an blurb on the back from poet and essayist Marilyn McEntyre, saying,

Reading these richly evocative reflections, I found myself again and again 'surprised by joy.' And gratitude. I was reminded that when people live into their callings deeply and faithfully, they become beacons. Stories from Schleske's work as a violinmaker, his knowledge of trees and music and even varnish, become heart-opening parables, not by preachment, but by the loving particularity with which he pays attention to the work he was given.

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