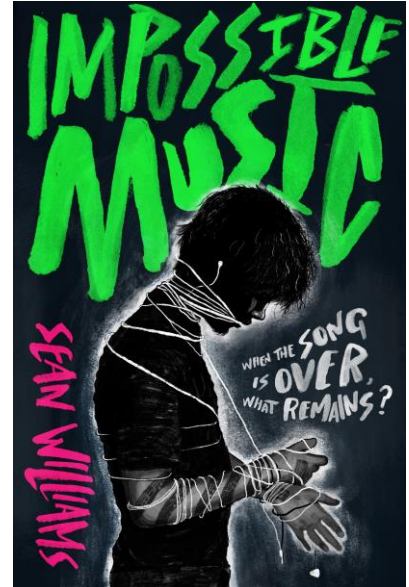


# Impossible Music

By Sean Williams

July 2019 ISBN 9781760637156  
 Paperback novel  
 Recommended for 13-18-year-olds



## Summary

Music is Simon's life – which is why he is devastated when a ministroke obliterates his hearing. He resists attempts to help him adjust to his new state, refusing to be counselled, refusing to learn sign language, refusing to have anything to do with Deaf culture. Refusing, that is, until he meets G, a tough-as-nails girl dealing with her own newly experienced hearing loss.

In an emotionally compelling tale crackling with originality, Simon's quest to create an entirely new form of music forces him into a deeper understanding of his relationship to the hearing world, of himself, and of the girl he meets along the way.



*Impossible Music* is a departure for an established and bestselling science fiction and fantasy writer. Set in contemporary Adelaide, the novel explores complex questions about our 'real' world: questions of love and loss; identity and personal growth; and the nature of music and what it means to be a musician. These themes, combined with the story's non-linear narrative structure, and writing that is often brilliant and always passionately heartfelt, makes *Impossible Music* a compelling, thought-provoking and ultimately deeply satisfying read.

## Use in the curriculum

Teachers should definitely utilise the Spotify playlist referred to on the author's website! <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5WsluRALmbRID7rmTDESqB?si=tUIKnKTzQ9aXPbHGQBLJsQ>

### Senior Secondary English

*Impossible Music* would suit the requirements of the Australian Curriculum for Units 1 & 3.

### Yr 9 English

Language (ACELA1550) (ACELA1551) (ACELA1552) (ACELA1553) (ACELA1557) (ACELA1561)  
 Literature (ACELT1633) (ACELT1771) (ACELT1635)  
 Literacy (ACELY1746)

### Yr 10 English

Language (ACELA1563) (ACELA1564)  
 Literature (ACELT1641) (ACELT1812) (ACELT1642)

### Yr 9 & 10 Music

This novel could work well in the music classroom, inspiring new approaches to composition and performance. (ACAMUM099) (ACAMUR104)

Visit <https://www.allenandunwin.com/resources/for-teachers> for free down-loadable teachers notes, reviews by teachers, extracts and more. And sign up to the Allen & Unwin e-newsletter to receive monthly updates on new resources!

Contact Carolyn Walsh, Education Marketing Manager,  
 Ph: +02 8425 0150 Email: [education@allenandunwin.com](mailto:education@allenandunwin.com)

## Themes

- Deafness
- Deafhood
- music
- identity
- love and loss

## Discussion questions

- Before reading the story, examine the front cover of the novel (image, colours, font) and write a short paragraph to explain how the cover makes you feel and what sort of things might occur in the novel?
  - After finishing the unit of work go back to this paragraph to see whether your predictions about the plot were correct.
- Sean Williams employs a non-linear narrative structure in *Impossible Music*. In 200 words define this term and discuss its effect on the way you read the novel. In your answer consider whether it made the story more or less interesting for you.
- *Impossible Music* uses first-person narration.
  - Give three reasons why Sean Williams might have chosen to use this for a story about a teen coming to terms with a major event in his life.
  - How might a more traditional third-person narrative have changed the nature of the novel?

- **Music, performing music, gives my life meaning.**

*There you go. Shockingly articulate as well as completely obvious.*

**Sorry to disappoint you. You wanted it.**

*I did. I do. And please no jokes....*

**Particulars, please.'**

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Simon and G spend much of the novel communicating via text messaging. Do you think these conversations are different to conventional dialogue because they are using mobile phones and not looking at each other? Do you find these passages are closer to poetry than conventional dialogue because they are more pared-down, or do you find they lack subtlety and depth?

- Sean Williams writes in the Author's Note that, 'A key thread in this novel is the challenge of relearning intimacy once the power of speech is gone.' How does this statement relate to the relationship between Simon and G as it evolves through the novel?

- *Body language is simultaneously silent and more honest for anyone who can interpret it.*

[Page 96]

*...I understand that sign language is inscribed on the water of our bodies and swept away in the moment of its creation. That makes it the best means of describing the ephemeral—emotions, lovemaking, music....*

[Page 29]

How does G's insistence on communicating via sign language at the Festival Theatre create a major turning point in the novel?

- *Maybe the old me was too busy fighting his battles to realise that he had already lost the war.*

*Except that's not the right metaphor. The old me isn't gone. He's just...learned. Met the new Simon halfway.*

*And guess what—he's still me.*

[Page 288]

When Simon loses his hearing early in the novel he believes he is afflicted by deafness but by the end of the novel he embraces the concept of Deafhood.

- What is the difference between these concepts?
- What major events in the novel help Simon make this transition?
- How does this transition parallel Simon's shift from composing impossible music to improbable music?
- Write a short profile on John Cage or Evelyn Glennie and describe how this artist provided inspiration to Simon and helped him on his path to creating 'A Little Light Opera' at the close of the novel.
- To find out more about Auslan, Deaf Culture and Deafhood go to:  
<http://www.auslan.org.au/>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NbYyUlcHU>  
<https://www.aussiedeafkids.org.au/deaf-culture.html>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWfKkcc5YME>

## From the author

'Have you ever loved something so much you can't imagine living without it?

'My new novel is about a teenage guitarist who suddenly loses his hearing. Music is Simon's greatest love, so rather than give it up he sets out to invent an entirely new kind of music, one the Hearing and Deaf can equally appreciate without anyone missing out. This puts him on a collision course with G, a girl with extreme tinnitus whose disability is a match for his own. Together, they find new ways to live just as fully and fabulously as they did before.

'*Impossible Music* is aimed at passionate readers who are looking for a story that matters to them. Right now, many teenagers are losing the thing they think defines them, fighting battles that will change them in unforeseen ways, and discovering that there's more possibility in their future than they ever imagined. This story came out of a period of painful confusion in my own life. I hope it will help those on their own journey right now.

'If that sounds heavy, let me just add that *Impossible Music* is also pretty funny (I'm told) and unlike my previous novels, it's set entirely in the real world. There's even a Spotify playlist at <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5WsluRALmbRID7rmTDESqB?si=tUIKnKTzQ9aXPbHGQBLJsQ> so everyone can sing along.

*Impossible Music* is a love-song to music and finding your best self. It is also the most personal novel I have ever written. I hope you enjoy it.'

— Sean Williams



## Sean Williams

Sean Williams was born in the dry, flat lands of South Australia, where he still lives with his wife and family. He is the author of over 40 novels and 120 published short stories.