Jerrold Levinson, *Musical Concerns: Essays in Philosophy of Music*, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 173, £ 25.00, ISBN 9780199669660

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This brief collection consists of a dozen essays, only three of which have not been previously published. Readers who would expect some larger-scale argumentative arch and novelty from Levinson may be disappointed. However, this open form permits the distinguished author to revisit questions of the aesthetics, ontology, axiology and ethics of music in an approachable and concise way. In this sense, the book may serve as an introduction to Levinson's recent work on music, involving some core concepts of his philosophy.

In the opening essay, Levinson reflects on the possible non-superficial affinities between *Philosophy and Music*, considering the following relations: (1) music as *inspiration* for philosophy, exemplified here by what he calls "philosophical literature" (Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, Huxley's *Point Counterpoint*) and, conversely, philosophy inspiring music (Strauss's *Also sprach Zaratustra,* Satie's *Socrate* etc.); (2) principles of music as sharing some mathematical core with philosophical demonstration, a thought of a broadly intended Pythagorean-Leibnizian descent that Levinson refuses to embrace; (3) music and philosophy as sharing some basic features, in that they both (a) aim at a kind of *wholeness* or *completeness* (p.9), (b) are forms of *thought* (see also Levinson 2003), (c) are impractical, if taken superficially, but in fact utterly practical on a deeper, existential level, as potentially inducing meditative states of "ethical reflection and self-knowledge" in those who engage with them (p.13); (4) contemporary music, in particular, may be regarded as involving philosophical thought wherever composers choose to write music according to an original, rationally devised system; the metamusical ideas of Schönberg, Xenakis, Cage, Reich and Glass contribute to the overall interest of their compositions (although I think that Schönberg himself would reject Levinson's suggestion that he composed according to a consciously established calculus). The same may be said of the contribution of extra-musical philosophical ideas to the value of works by such composers as Wagner, Schumann, Beethoven

and Scriabin. In his most intriguing point, the fifth, Levinson explores the metaphorically intended *music of philosophy* (a concept discussed more broadly but similarly, in the form of a philosophical *scherzo* by Gołaszewska 2005) which would be the "distinctive sound, melody, rhythm […] of philosophizing, of theorizing the world and its meaning in a rational and systematic manner" (p.16). This feature is something distinct, perhaps within the vaster notion of "style", including rhythm (*halting/flowing*), cadence (*striding/mincing*), timbre (*light-toned/dark-hued*), texture (*linear/convoluted*) and melody (*severe/ingratiating*). Our ability to recognize a particular thinker from a small passage of his text, without the more familiar conceptual features of identification, is "indicative of the real existence of distinctive musics in the writing of the great philosophers" (p.16). Such a declaration in an analytic philosopher's mouth is most wonderfully arresting and deserves to be carefully developed – for example, by interpreting the philosophical text as a score for a silent performance, rather than merely a neutral bearer of propositional meanings (*pace* Kivy 2006:90, who explicitly rejects such a possibility with regard to philosophy).

In the two subsequent essays, Levinson neatly characterizes *The Aesthetic Appreciation of Music* and carries on a meticulous polemic with Kivy on their respective viewpoints regarding the nature of the basic experience of music, namely, concatenationism (Levinson 1997) and architectonism (Kivy 2001), invoking some recent empirical research. Aesthetic appreciation is adequately attending to music, "for its hearable form and [expressive – J.C.] content" (p.18), leading to satisfaction or positive estimation thereof for its own sake. Levinson emphasizes the role of the bodily movement, gesture and (latent) disposition to dance as inherent to musical understanding.

Ch.4 clearly presents Levinson's powerful point in the ontology of the musical (and literary) artwork, seen as an *initiated type*, which is neither a type *sensu stricto*, nor a *qua* object, but a Wollheimian generic entity. A classical musical composition is not an eternal platonic object, as such objects cannot be created. It is rather a combination of pre-existing abstract tonal elements (*cum* historically emerging performance means), as selected (in the act of *artistic indication*) by the composer in a specific context, and established to be instantiated in subsequent

performances. One perplexity arises when Levinson states that: "in the case of literary initiated types, such instantiation occurs through the printing of copies" (p.53). It is not clear why we should not count the *reading* of a literary work as its instantiation, rather than just its printing, as in the case of music. One source of this confusion may be that silent reading unites in one complex action what in music are two distinct moments, involving typically, but not essentially, two different agents: the artist's *performance* and the audience's *aesthetic experience.* However, in the case of literature, it is the act of reading which constitutes the object to be aesthetically experienced. This, I think, should count as a proper instantiation of the work, in contrast to its mere material support (score, text). This becomes problematic in cases such as those of concrete and visual poetry, in which the visual aspects of the printed text co-constitute the object of aesthetic appreciation (although there are similar examples in music). As a consequence, on these occasions literature ceases to be an (entirely) allographic art and its instantiations can therefore include its printed exemplars.

Ch.5 explores the narrowly intended *Musical Beauty* as a specific aesthetic property, distinct both from the pretty (as merely pleasurable) and the artistically valuable (or broadly beautiful, as in Zangwill 2001). This beauty has at its core "an immediate, unmitigated, and unmixed pleasure in how the music sounds and unfolds […] in which tension and discord have at most a minor place". Such music "seduces, charms, and gently conquers us" (p.59) and "provides a sonic vision of an ideal world" (p.66), thus delivering existential consolation. It is distinct from the pretty by being not only pleasurable but also expressive and moving.

Ch.6 comments loosely on the various *Values of Music*, generally divided into *intrinsic* and *instrumental,* taking into account the evaluative perspective (of listeners, performers, and composer). First and foremost is the *aesthetic* value of music, emerging in the act of *aesthetic appreciation* and central to its broader *artistic* value. A variety of other values of music follows: *symbolic, self-affirmation, social, idiosyncratic, mood-enhancement, accompaniment.*

Shame in General and Shame in Music is the promising subject of Ch.7, in which the following sorts of musical shame are distinguished: *formative* (concerning "deficiencies in one's musical education", p.94), *performative*, *creative* and

appreciative. Shame could be *expressed* by pure music only if that music were such as to be "readily and spontaneously heard as the expression of shame by attentive and suitably backgrounded listeners" (p.97). Levinson is somewhat skeptical about this condition being met; nonetheless, he suggests that certain fragments of R. Strauss's *Metamorphosen* and Schönberg's *Verklärte Nacht* could be heard as expressing shame quite without effort, if not spontaneously, especially if taken in full context.

Levinson's jazz essays in this volume are remarkably rich in musical examples and precious observations. In *Jazz Vocal Interpretation,* he explores the specificities of such a performing practice, on the part of both the vocalist and the audience. Stressing the obligatory elements of variation and improvisation in the interpretation of a standard, he considers its background factors: the straight version of the song known to the audience, the interpretive tradition and the vocalist's public persona, including their "gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical appearance" (p.100): All these factors, together with the core musical qualities emerging in a performance, interact significantly with the sense of the text.

Popular Song as a Moral Microcosm introduces the concept of a distinctive moral or ethical *quality* which characterizes some texted music, complementing the three sorts of musical moral force distinguished by Kivy (*epistemic, behavioral* and *character-building;* cf. Kivy 2008). This ethical quality is to be perceived in "the mind or spirit reflected in the music", and to be evaluated according to whether it is "such as to elicit admiration and induce emulation" or rather "distaste" and "avoidance" (p.116). According to Levinson, such music, *pace* Kivy, has a durable effect on our lives, if regularly revisited, like "good" and "bad" influences in our social lives. It is better "to spend time with music of sincerity, subtlety, honesty, depth, […] than with music of pretension, shallowness, or vulgarity" (p.117), because "musical works are person-like in psychological ways" (p.118). Levinson's detailed analyses of American popular songs and their jazz interpretations show the range of ethical qualities they display. Tom Adair and Matt Dennis's *Everything Happens to Me* would endorse, for example, "outsized self-pity" and "self-indulgence", thus inducing ethical disvalue (p.125-6).

The Expressive Specificity of Jazz argues that, because of some essential musical features, jazz is incapable of expressing certain types of high-energy negative (HEN) emotions like anguish, grief, scorn, despair or rage. Levinson extends this to a "general thesis that *all* musical idioms have limits to expressiveness" (p.141), although each to a significantly different degree. Appearances to the contrary, this is to the advantage of music, as there is hope that some new, unheard musical idioms would unveil new sorts of expressiveness.

In his penultimate essay, Levinson comments on Alperson 2008 and 2010. In full agreement with Alperson's critique of the commonsense view of instruments as autonomous, discrete devices designed to be used by performers in order to make music, he recalls Alperson's account of instruments as "*necessarily embodied entities* with an *inescapably material aspect*" (p.145), which co-act symbiotically with the body. He argues against Alperson's concept of "listener instruments", such as portable players or speakers, emphasizing the differences between such devices and standard musical instruments. *Artistic* improvisation normally implies the performer's decision and commitment "*not to decide* what in detail one will do" (p.149). Consequently, the improvised performance situation displays a distinctive ethical aspect, relevant to the appreciative and evaluative attitudes of the audience.

The final essay, *What is a Temporal Art?,* was co-authored in 1991 with Alperson. In order to clarify in what aesthetically relevant senses an art might be qualified as temporal, the authors propose 13 criteria, falling into three main categories, according to whether they concern a temporal characteristic of an art's: *objects* (e.g., being diachronic), *experience* (e.g., being temporally prescribed) or *content* (e.g., when time is thematized). A tentative general criterion for temporal art follows: "Objects of the art form are such that their proper appreciation centrally involves understanding of temporal relations within them" (p.166). I would like to add to their catalogue another criterion, expressing one more interpretation of the view of music as *l'art du temps par excellence*: "Objects of the art form are established by means of a semiotic system containing *specific time-determining symbols*". No art other than music (and dance) *writes down* with precision temporally

organized structures, using apposite symbols such as rhythmic values, rests and M.M. *tempi*.
The book is commendable in particular for the way it engages interpretatively with numerous and varied musical examples, notably jazz songs. The reading experience is significantly broadened here by the enthralling excursions into the realm of sounding music.

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