

Music listeners, philosophers, and researchers

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Hodges, D. (2013). Music listeners, philosophers, and researchers. *Physics of Life Reviews*, 10(3), 275-276.

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Abstract:

Relationships between philosophy and science have ranged from Wittgenstein's view that cognitive science has nothing to offer the understanding of art to the view that science is in the process of eliminating the need for philosophy [1]. Taking a middle approach, I wish to base my brief comments on Juslin's excellent article with an expansion of a seemingly innocuous statement, "And, it is the listener's criteria that count, if our goal is to explain actual responses to music" [2]. Fig. 1 provides a graphical way of illustrating how we might arrive at a more coordinated and coherent view of musical and aesthetic emotions by combining insights gleaned from music listeners, philosophers, and researchers, using the BRECVEMA model. Imagine a highly trained musician who agrees with Stravinsky when he said, "Do we not, in truth, ask the impossible of music when we expect it to express feelings?" [3]. Philosophers might label our highly trained musician a Formalist, and using the BRECVEMA model, researchers might find support for this position in the mechanism of Musical Expectancy which is supported by specific brain regions [2, Table 2].

Keywords: philosophy | music | listeners | science

Article:

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highly trained musician a Formalist, and using the BRECVEMA model, researchers might find support for this position in the mechanism of Musical Expectancy which is supported by specific brain regions [2, Table 2].

Next comes an avid amateur jazz musician who agrees with the legendary trumpeter Louie Armstrong when he said, “You use it [jazz] to say all kinds of things and explain all kinds of moods” [4]. This musician might be called an Expressionist and the relevant mechanism is Evaluative Conditioning [2, Table 2]. Finally, let us imagine an untrained listener,¹ who prefers country music, finding that it elicits powerful memories of a life of loves and losses. Philosophers might label this approach Symbolism, and the researchers could link this to the Episodic Memory mechanism [2, Table 2]. A consistent thread in these examples is preference. Recently, listeners who heard their all-time favorite music showed increased connectivity in the Default Mode Network, implicated in self awareness and processing of autobiographical and emotional memories, regardless of the style of the music [5], [6]. Even though these brief examples are simplistic, they do indicate that we have much to gain by coordinating insights from music listeners, music philosophers, and music researchers.

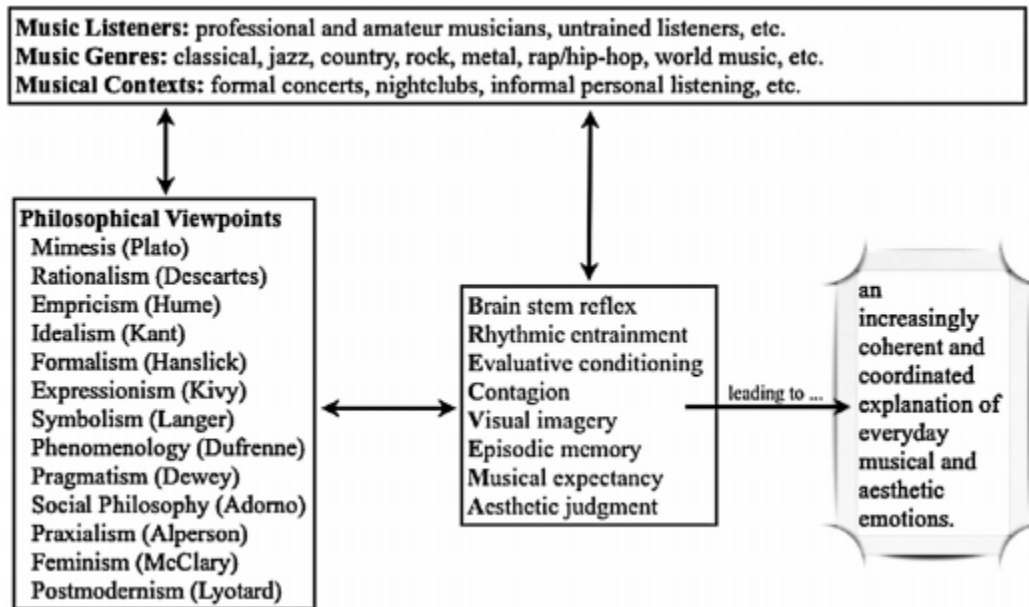


Fig. 1. A combinatorial approach using insights from music listeners, philosophers and researchers using the BRECVEMA model would lead to a more informed understanding of everyday musical and aesthetic emotions.

Notes:

1. Being formally untrained does not indicate a lack of musicianship. Barring massive dysfunction—and even then there is likely to be *some* responsiveness to music—everyone can find meaning in the music of his surrounding culture.

References

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