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978-0-521-87734-3 - Music, Philosophy, and Modernity

Andrew Bowie

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## MUSIC, PHILOSOPHY, AND MODERNITY

Modern philosophers generally assume that music is a problem to which philosophy ought to offer an answer. Andrew Bowie's *Music, Philosophy, and Modernity* suggests, in contrast, that music might offer ways of responding to some central questions in modern philosophy. Bowie looks at key philosophical approaches to music ranging from Kant, through the German Romantics and Wagner, to Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Adorno. He uses music to re-examine many current ideas about language, subjectivity, metaphysics, truth, and ethics, and he suggests that music can show how the predominant images of language, communication, and meaning in contemporary philosophy may be lacking in essential ways. His book will be of interest to philosophers, musicologists, and all who are interested in the relation between music and philosophy.

ANDREW BOWIE is Professor of Philosophy and German at Royal Holloway, University of London. His many publications include *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* (2003).

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ANDREW BOWIE

*Royal Holloway, University of London*



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*For James*

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## PREFACE

This is not a book about the ‘philosophy of music’ in the sense which that term generally has within academic philosophy. Rather than seeing the role of philosophy as being to determine the nature of the object ‘music’, it focuses on the philosophy which is conveyed by music itself. This idea is explored via the interaction between philosophy and music in modernity which is largely ignored, not only in most of the philosophy of music, but also in most other branches of philosophy. The consequences of my exploration are, I suspect, more important for philosophy than for the practice of music, but musicians, and especially musicologists – who these days seem increasingly interested in philosophy – may find what I say instructive. If they do, it will be because I want, via a consideration of music’s relationship to verbal language, to question some of the ways in which philosophy has conceived of the meaning and nature of music.

The ideas for this book have been a long time in germinating, beginning during work on Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* for my PhD in the 1970s (Bowie 1979), and continuing with my work on the relationship of German Idealist and Romantic philosophy to contemporary concerns in the humanities during the 1980s and 1990s and beyond, and the ideas are, of course, by no means exhausted by what I have been able to say. Such a book is necessarily interdisciplinary, and the attempt to cover all the issues touched on in it in any detail would have resulted in an impossibly large volume. As a consequence this is also one of those books where lots of people have had important things to say about its concerns who are either ignored, or dealt with in too summary a manner. For this I can only apologise.

Motivations for the book have come not just from talking to friends and colleagues, but also from playing music itself. Like most people

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who write about music who are not primarily musicians I always have the doubt as to whether I have the right to say anything about it. It was probably late-night discussions of music in Berlin in the late 1970s with Stephen Hinton that first persuaded me that I might have something useful to say, despite my lack of musicological training (and terrible sight-reading, which has, sadly, not got any better). Playing with the Blue Bayou Jazz Band in Berlin at that time made me realise how important music was as a means of communication: friendships from that period have been very durable. During the writing of the book the opportunity to play jazz sax with a whole series of excellent musicians in Cambridge and elsewhere, from Scandinavia, to Australia, to Japan, has proved to be a vital way of exploring what I wanted to say. The list of musicians could go on for a long time, but Pete Shepherd, Paul Stubbs, John Turville, John Brierley, Pete Fraser, Peter Mabey, Jon Halton, Laurence Evans, Adrian Coggins, John Gregory, Derek Scurll, Simon Fell, and many others from the various bands at the Elm Tree pub and elsewhere in Cambridge, have offered invaluable musical and other insights, as has my old friend and relentless critic of my playing, Eddie Johnson. It is not that we always talked directly about the issues of the book, though we sometimes did that too, but rather – and this is a key theme of the book – that we were involved in communication about the issues via music itself. A final thanks to Jody Espina in New York, who makes and sells in an exemplary manner the saxophone mouthpieces which at last stopped me buying new ones (only another sax player can know just what this means).

The list of philosophical and musical colleagues and research students who were indispensable is also long, and I apologise to those who are not mentioned by name, but who also contributed. Karl Ameriks, Jay Bernstein, Arnfinn Bø-Rygg, Susan Bowles, Liz Bradbury, Tony Cascardi, Paulo de Castro, Stanley Cavell, James Dack, John Deathridge, Peter Dews, Richard Eldridge, Manfred Frank, Neil Gascoigne, Kristin Gjesdal, Lydia Goehr, Christopher Hasty, Zoe Hepden, Lawrence Kramer, Bente Larsen, Nanette Nielsen, Peter Osborne, Henry Partridge, Robert Pippin, Richard Potter, Alex Rehd- ing, John Rundell, Jim Samson, Robert Vilain, Nick Walker, and many others, all helped in a variety of philosophical and musical ways.

Talks given at, among others, the following universities: Loránd Eötvös Budapest, Cambridge, Columbia, Cork, East Anglia, Fordham, Harvard, Melbourne, Princeton, the New School, Oslo, Lancaster, and at the Internationale Hegel-Vereinigung, allowed me to test out the

ideas under ideal conditions, and I would like to thank the many people whose questions at these talks both made me see some of the problems inherent in what I was trying to say, and encouraged me in the idea that it was still worth saying.

The book would not have been possible without the financial support of the Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Research Council) Research Leave Scheme, and a Major Research Fellowship from the Leverhulme Foundation. I am very grateful indeed to both bodies for allowing me to complete a project that might never have been completed but for their assistance. I am also grateful for the chance they gave me to do some more serious study, practice, and performance on the saxophone, which proved vital to the crystallisation of the book's ideas. The German Department at Royal Holloway tolerated my extended absence, and I owe a special thanks to Ann White for her selfless leadership of the Department, to Maire Davies for her encouragement of my efforts, and to Jerome Carroll, who took my post for the duration of my leave.