

## A HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC

This book presents a comprehensive, accessible survey of Western philosophy of music from Pythagoras to the present. Its narrative traces themes and schools through history, in a sequence of five chapters that survey the ancient, medieval, early modern, modern and contemporary periods. Its wide-ranging coverage includes medieval Islamic thinkers, Continental and analytic thinkers, and neglected female thinkers such as Vernon Lee (Violet Paget). All aspects of the philosophy of music are discussed, including music and the cosmos, music's value, music's relation to the other arts, the problem of opera, the origins of musical genius, music's emotional impact, the moral effects of music, the ontology of musical works, and the relevance of music's historical context. The volume will be valuable for students and scholars in philosophy and musicology, and all who are interested in the ways in which philosophers throughout history have thought about music.

JAMES O. YOUNG is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. His books include *Art and Knowledge* (2001), *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* (2008), *Critique of Pure Music* (2014) and *Radically Rethinking Copyright in the Arts* (2020).

# A HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY OF MUSIC

JAMES O. YOUNG  
*University of Victoria, British Columbia*



Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
 978-1-108-49784-8 — A History of Western Philosophy of Music  
 James O. Young  
 Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE  
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom  
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India  
 103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,  
 a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of  
 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108497848](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108497848)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108654777

© James O. Young 2023

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions  
 of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place  
 without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2023

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ Books Limited, Padstow Cornwall

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

NAMES: Young, James O., 1957- author.

TITLE: A history of western philosophy of music / James O. Young.

DESCRIPTION: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2023. |  
 Includes bibliographical references and index.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2022030455 (print) | LCCN 2022030456 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108497848  
 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108721936 (paperback) | ISBN 9781108654777 (epub)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Music—Philosophy and aesthetics—History.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC ML3800 .Y68 2023 (print) | LCC ML3800 (ebook) |  
 DDC 780.01—dc23/eng/20220628

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022030455>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022030456>

ISBN 978-1-108-49784-8 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence  
 or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this  
 publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,  
 accurate or appropriate.

*For my students, past, present and future*

With the truth, all given facts harmonise; but with what is false,  
the truth soon hits a false note.

Aristotle

I must have my share in the conversation if you are speaking  
of music.

Jane Austen

## *Contents*

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
1 The Ancient World	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Music and the Imitative Arts	4
1.3 Music, the Cosmos and the Soul	8
1.4 The Value of Musical Experience	20
1.5 The Origins of Musical Genius	31
1.6 Conclusion	33
2 The Middle Ages	35
2.1 Introduction	35
2.2 The Art and Science of Music	37
2.3 Music, the Cosmos and the Soul	44
2.4 The Value of Musical Experience	51
2.5 The Musician	62
2.6 Conclusion	64
3 The Early Modern Period: 1500–1800	66
3.1 Introduction	66
3.2 Origins of Early Modern Philosophy of Music	69
3.3 Music and the Fine Arts	78
3.4 Music and the Cosmos	81
3.5 Emotion and Music	82
3.6 The Decline of Imitation and Empiricism in Philosophy of Music	127
3.7 The Moral Effects of Music	144
3.8 The Musician	148
3.9 Conclusion	162
4 The Modern Period: 1800–1950	164
4.1 Introduction	164
4.2 Music and Metaphysics	167
4.3 Content without Metaphysics	198
4.4 Musical Content: The Outliers	214

viii	<i>Contents</i>	
4.5	The Origins of Music	223
4.6	Formalism	227
4.7	Music and Morality	245
4.8	The Ontology of Music	247
4.9	Conclusion	252
5	The Contemporary Period	256
5.1	Introduction	256
5.2	Music in Context	258
5.3	Music and Emotion	266
5.4	Representation in Music	295
5.5	The Problem of Opera	301
5.6	The Value of Music	304
5.7	The Ontology of Musical Works	322
5.8	Performance	341
	Envoi	352
	<i>Bibliography</i>	357
	<i>Index</i>	380

## *Preface*

I am acutely aware that writing a history of philosophy of music takes a certain amount of chutzpah. No one can plausibly claim to be an expert in all eras of the history of philosophy of music. The four and a half years that I have spent writing this book have taught me that much, at least. Nevertheless, in this book, I offer what appear to be authoritative pronouncements on the full range of the subject. No doubt, experts in a given era of the history of philosophy of music will find my account of that era to be wanting in certain respects, but I believe that stepping back and looking at the big picture has value. I have attempted to tell a story and to identify trends, developments and relationships. A grasp of the big picture can assist in understanding particular periods in the history of philosophy of music and, indeed, provide insight into philosophy of music.

My hope is that this book will not be of interest only to philosophers. An understanding of the history of philosophy of music can, I believe, assist listeners in appreciating music. A knowledge of the philosophy of music prevalent in, say, the early eighteenth century, can provide insight into the music of the baroque period. Composers were often well aware of the philosophy of music of their time, and some even made important contributions to the philosophy of music. We have every reason to believe that what composers took themselves to be doing in their music was influenced by philosophy of music. If we want to understand their music, we need to understand their philosophies. Even more importantly, philosophy of music can reveal what music can achieve and, once we know what music can achieve, we know what to listen for in music.

I have worked, wherever possible, from original sources, and I have tried to reach my own conclusions about each figure in the history of philosophy of music. I have quoted extensively from primary sources in an effort to allow each writer on music to speak for him- or herself.

I have profited from the assistance of many people as I wrote this book. Matteo Ravasio, author of the excellent *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*



articles on the history of philosophy of music, read much of the manuscript and offered judicious suggestions for improvement. My departmental colleagues Nina Belmonte and Thomas Heyd helped me understand texts in German. My wife, Laurel Bowman, a professor of classics, helped me to come to grips with certain writings in Greek. I am thankful to Daniel Martín Sáez for drawing my attention to significant texts from the history of philosophy of music that I might otherwise have overlooked. I am grateful to Myrthe Bartels and Andy Hamilton for the opportunity to participate in the conference on Philosophy of Music: Perspectives on Antiquity, at the University of Durham, July 2019. I learned a great deal from the participants in this conference. Initially, I was to have co-written this book with my former departmental colleague, Margaret Cameron. Unfortunately, her other commitments and new responsibilities as Head of the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies at Melbourne University prevented us from collaborating on this project. Nevertheless, I benefited from the initial plan for this work that Margaret and I developed at the outset of the project.

I am grateful to Hilary Gaskin of Cambridge University Press for her patience and guidance as I have written this book.

This book is dedicated to my students. In particular, it is dedicated to my 2020–21 students in PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy. As was the case with so many other courses in this plague year, this course was offered via Zoom. I had not looked forward to teaching online, but my students in PHIL 100 brought an enthusiasm and curiosity to the study of philosophy that was invigorating and inspiring. They were not about to let a global pandemic spoil their introduction to philosophy.