

Theodore Gracyk and Andrew Kania, eds. 2011. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*. Abingdon, UK, and New York, NY: Routledge.

Reviewed by Scott Gleason

Early in Plato's *Symposium*, after the guests arrive at Agathon's house, after Socrates' entrance, after deciding as a group not to drink wine to the point of excess, but before reclining into the philosophical discussion proper (orations in praise of Eros), Eryximachos, the physician, abruptly dismisses the aulos-playing female (αὐλητρίδα) from the room and from the philosophical conversation to follow (1997:176e). With this gesture Eryximachos dismisses art from science, experience from thought, music from philosophy. Apparently unable to listen to music while thinking philosophically, music is to have no part in the conversation—the philosophy—that follows. The problematic, then, of philosophizing about music, or even conceiving a kind of musical philosophy, has conditioned our discourses since their putative origins. An essential addition to the modern literature, *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music* shares in this problematic but raises its stakes, encouraging us to renew our attempts to think music philosophically.

While philosophers have consistently discussed music (see, for example, the *British Journal of Aesthetics*), philosophical work by scholars trained primarily as musicians has only lately emerged within academic circles as a growth industry. The Society for Music Theory's Music and Philosophy Interest Group has witnessed a renewed intensity in work and focus, and the American Musicological Society recently established a Music and Philosophy Study Group, as has the Royal Musical Association. (I imagine an English-language journal devoted solely to the topic will be forthcoming. In the meantime, there is *Musik und Ästhetik*.)

The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music signals these changes and will provide an important resource for musicians interested in discussing philosophical issues. It accomplishes its primary goal admirably: it could very well accompany discussions of music and philosophy for some time to come. Edited by scholars employed in philosophy departments, the *Companion* features entries by many of the leading philosophers of music who have been working in the field for decades. Far less represented, however, are scholars working in music departments—indeed the latter's entries are somewhat marginalized, appearing primarily in the final part. While the *Companion* reads primarily as a philosophy of music text (the “and music” in the title, while certainly not an afterthought, figures music as

a subsidiary consideration), music scholars will find a tremendous amount of material to ponder.

The *Companion* introduces and takes readers far into nearly all the available issues across music and philosophy, both traditional and contemporary. Part I concerns foundations, or “General Issues.” For example, the first chapter, entitled “Definition,” seeks literally to define music; Chapter 3, by the eminent philosopher Roger Scruton, discusses the apparently Platonic “elements” or “fundamentals” of music: rhythm, melody, and harmony. The next part covers philosophical theories of how music relates to emotions, which historically have been of concern mainly for philosophers, but have received renewed attention by, for example, scholars working in music cognition. Part III, entitled “History,” swerves initially to consider music philosophy in India, China, and the Middle East, before presenting chapters historicizing the classical Western tradition of philosophical thought about music. Part IV concerns major historical figures like Plato and Rousseau, but emphasizes the German tradition with philosophers ranging from Kant to Adorno. (Chapters on Susanne Langer, Nelson Goodman, or Peter Kivy, for example, would have been welcome.) Part V presents eight chapters about non-classical music (with the exception of opera) still loosely within the Western tradition, like jazz, rock, and film music. In its last part, “Music, Philosophy, and Related Disciplines,” the *Companion* in effect re-disciplines music and musicology broadly conceived. Indeed, this section’s more than one hundred pages, containing the most entries by scholars employed by music departments, reads as an updated Kerman (1985) or *Rethinking Music* (Cook and Everist 2001) from the perspective of an analytic philosophy of music, ending, appropriately enough, with a chapter on “Music Education” by Philip Alperson (56).

Ethnomusicologists and historical musicologists trained to think about music after the New Musicology—the cultural or hermeneutic turn—or, now, Critical Musicology will find much to be either confused or dismayed by in this *Companion*. For the articles it contains are for the most part emphatically if not explicitly written from the perspective of analytic philosophy (also known as Anglo-American philosophy, and not to be confused with music analysis nor the analytic/synthetic distinction). As a symbol of the dominance of this perspective, consider the lists of cross references at the end of each chapter: although a welcome addition and encouraging a certain freedom of reading, tellingly, the “Analytic Philosophy and Music” chapter (27) by Stephen Davies is the sole chapter to omit these cross references, signaling analytic philosophy’s neutral, normative status with respect to the other chapters: it applies to all. (Indeed, the chapter arrives both at the end of the “History” section and roughly halfway through the work as a

whole.) If academic musicians tend to be knowledgeable about continental philosophy, what, then, is analytic philosophy? Although in some ways an outgrowth of logical positivism or empiricism, analytic philosophy can be read as a critique of that tradition. Undoubtedly the dominant trend in twentieth-century philosophy departments, “what distinguishes analytical philosophy, in its diverse manifestations, from other schools is the belief, first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language, and, secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained” (Dummett 1993:4). Analytic philosophy tends to analyze claims rather than proffer them; it is committed “to objective, clear argument and to an interpersonal, empirically orientated approach, and it eschews grand theories in favor of treating specific philosophical issues and problems in piecemeal or cumulative fashion.” (S. Davies:295) While cultural studies since the 1960s has in general picked up the continental tradition(s) of Husserl, Adorno, Foucault or Derrida, the analytic tradition began earlier with works by Frege, Moore, Russell and Wittgenstein. Another way to define the tradition is by its achievements:

(i) the recognition that philosophical speculation must be grounded in pre-philosophical thought, and (ii) the success achieved in understanding, and separating one from another, the fundamental methodological notions of logical consequence, logical truth, necessary truth and apriori truth. (Soames 2003:xi; see also pp. 50–2, 229–30, and 264–70)

All of this suggests certain disciplinary alignments: music theory and cognition seem to align easily with analytic philosophy, whereas ethnomusicology and historical musicology seem to align with continental philosophy. The degree to which that schism is real is the degree to which these two sets of discourses cannot or will not speak to one another. Increasingly polarized, the former takes on the qualities of the sciences, the latter, the humanities: the refusal—which atrophies into inability—to speculate, the demand for the naively empirical and parsimoniousness of the former; the absurd or at least fanciful speculations of the latter; the supposed neutrality with respect to the social of analytic philosophy; the blindness to truth of continental. The editors are, of course, aware of this problematic, hence chapters 26 and 27, covering the continental and analytic traditions, respectively, can be read as windows into the remaining chapters, holding the two in tension throughout the *Companion*. As Andrew Kania (also one of the co-editors) says in the first chapter:

Whether or not you are grabbed by the topic [of defining music] might depend on whether or not you are moved by Marx’s claim that “the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point,

however, is to change it,” or by Harry Frankfurt’s that “there are plenty of people and institutions devoted to changing the world, but philosophers are among the few who are devoted to understanding it.” (5, emphasis original)

Interestingly, this is itself an aesthetic appeal (being grabbed, moved by) and philosophy here figures as a kind of avant-garde (standing outside, contemplating) but, staying within the analytic/continental problematic, in their editorial Preface Gracyk and Kania state the last part’s merits:

Besides extending the scope of the book beyond philosophy, the topics in this part also reflect a goal of creating a broadly inclusive companion that goes beyond the concerns of the Anglo-American school that dominates contemporary philosophy of music. (xxiv)

That “beyond philosophy” is, of course, music or musicology, the ostensive subject of inquiry. To return to the scene in Plato’s *Symposium* with which we began, at least we musicians are no longer entirely dismissed before philosophy begins—we can still be heard, playing in the background.

Perhaps, however, these alignments are too easily forged. If philosophy is the foundational discipline, then how we change the world will in fact depend upon how we define the subject of inquiry, in this case, music. Complementarily, disinterested contemplation has come under attack from virtually every corner of the humanities. It was precisely the accomplishment of the cultural turn to *historicize* philosophy: philosophies are products of various cultures. (See, for example, Goehr [1992] 2007, which Tiger C. Roholt discusses in this volume, pp. 285–87.) Speaking from my own disciplinary position and primary training as a music theorist, although I would argue that, as before, music theory associates easily with analytic philosophy, music theorists are in fact still committed to grand systems, often at the expense of actual musical experiences of listeners or performers. Some music theorists took a critical turn in the 1990s, with studies of historical music theories evincing this turn most prominently. Informally, most music theorists concerned with philosophy at all are still interested in critical theory of the Adornian variety. I think the future will not see this trend continue, however, as the system-building music theorists, who are concerned with treating specific music-theoretical issues in piecemeal or cumulative fashion, (re)turn to a renewed empiricism, associating their work with music cognition and analytic philosophy. The trend has already begun.

As an example of the style of an analytic approach to musical issues, the “Ontology” chapter (4), written by Carl Matheson and Ben Caplan, offers conceptual rewards by respecting our pre-philosophical intuitions about music, but extending them. Most academic musicians will probably

not have invested much energy into thinking about the ontological status of the musical entities through which culture filters, or the status of the entities they analyze. Even while assuming a work–concept ontology, by suspending the historicizing impulse this chapter enables us to clarify our notions of what works are, specifying whether works are abstract types instantiated into sound tokens; events, occurring at specific times; or sums of performances. The chapter further discusses and eventually problematizes the positions of musical Platonism, whereby works are types which do not come into existence (they are atemporal, always existing, discovered by the composer); sonicism, whereby a work is distinguished from others solely by how it sounds; contextualism (not to be confused with the use of the same word in historical musicology and music theory), whereby historical context distinguishes works; and instrumentalism, whereby a work is distinguished by the specified musical instruments on which it is performed. Some of these positions accord more with the intuitions of performers, while some will be more useful for the theorist, thus respecting, extending, and even challenging our intuitions about pieces. Further, these categories can wrap back onto cultural readings of musicologists: I can imagine a number of studies by music theorists or historical musicologists, for example, with the goal of determining more precisely their musical ontologies, using this chapter as a foundation. (For example, it would be interesting to read this chapter against Bohlman 2001.)

At its best, then, an analytic approach can offer real insights. (I am thinking especially of chapters 4 [“Ontology”], 5 [“Medium”] by David Davies, and 7 [“Notations”] by Stephen Davies.) There is still something to be said for stretching one’s ears and thinking beyond one’s comforts. I would suggest interested readers unfamiliar with twentieth–century philosophy in academia read the analytic philosophy chapter (27) first, only then reading the “Definitions” chapter (1) and the rest of Parts I and II, then reading chapters such as (54) “Music, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science” by Diana Raffman, and (55) “Psychology of Music” by Eric Clarke.

This is not to say, however, that continental approaches are omitted. Indeed, one of the strengths of the *Companion* is its ability to appeal to readers from seemingly every music–academic discipline. In his chapter (26), Tiger C. Roholt provides an introduction to the traditional continental issues related to music. From here, I would suggest those interested in tracing this lineage read the “Figures” Part (IV) from Kant to Schopenhauer, Nietzsche to Hanslick, Wagner and Adorno. Finally, Bruce Ellis Benson’s chapter on “Phenomenology of Music” (53); James Currie’s chapter on “Music and Politics” (50); and Anthony Kwame Harrison’s chapter (51) covering sociology and cultural studies of music would provide an appropriate close.

Current Musicology

One of the nice qualities of philosophers of music is that they can be refreshingly free of the ideologies in which musicologists (broadly defined) are entrenched:

It may indeed have been assumed in pre-modernist musical circles that only certain kinds of sounds were an appropriate vehicle for music. But figures such as Russolo, whose theory and practice advocated seeking out “noise” to use as a musical medium, not to mention rock music in general, give one reason to think otherwise. (D. Davies 51)

Traditional musicology would find this problematic, would, indeed, not think otherwise, as noise and rock music are difficult categories for classical musical understanding, thus their inclusion here shows the openness these philosophers have to traditionally marginalized musical practices. This said, there exists an unevenness to the emphasis of the *Companion*, due to the editors’ disciplinary position as primarily philosophers, for just two chapters earlier Jennifer Judkins discusses “Silence, Sound, Noise, and Music” (2) without ever mentioning Russolo or the tradition he started, and only barely mentioning Cage, whose work of course serves as the modern condition of possibility for her topics.

Strikingly absent from this *Companion* is sustained or extended discussion of the post-War avant-garde, or the current concert tradition. At one time I would have imagined this to be a primary topic of conversation. Earlier I suggested that Harry Frankfurt’s defense of the abstraction of philosophy from social concerns was a kind of avant-garde stance. Could it be, then, that the general omission of the musical avant-garde serves as a way of absorbing that tradition into philosophy? Hence, while not a philosophy *of* music nor a *musical* philosophy (the traditional dialectic), perhaps what we have here is philosophy-as-proxy, a philosophy *qua* substitute for (avant-garde) music. This is not to say that I am adverse to philosophy in the space of music. Quite the contrary: while I have been marking some of its limits, I want to emphasize the point that philosophy in the space of music can encourage academic musicians to become less provincial, less certain, to think beyond that which is given, to speculate, imagine, wonder.

The *Companion* provides a new standard of philosophical conversation toward which musicians can aspire. However, at over 600 pages in length and priced at \$225 (\$200 for the e-book) it is a difficult work to absorb as a whole and restrictively expensive, thus it seems a reference book only, and so I am left revising my earlier suggestion that it is an accessible *companion*, a fellow traveler. (The paperback version will alleviate some of this burden.) Indeed, so rich is this work that its heft cuts both ways: because it addresses so many contemporary and historical issues, readers may take any number

of paths through it, only some of which were suggested here. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music* thus contributes insightfully, crucially, but at times frustratingly, to a growing conversation.

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