

Preface: Music and Emotions under Cross-disciplinary Reflection

Juha Sihvola

University of Helsinki

The emotions, whatever we think of their value, are crucially important for the understanding of human flourishing and the meaning of life. Some of us may think that it is just the emotions that make life worth living, while others may doubt the ethical value of the vulnerability and uncontrollability they necessarily bring into our lives. Whatever our convictions, we surely need to understand the psychology of emotion in order to understand happiness and flourishing.

The psychology and ethics of the emotions used to be a major topic in the tradition of Western philosophy from Aristotle and the Stoics to Descartes and Kant. In the early part of the last century, the theme was, however, more or less neglected among analytical philosophers. The situation, fortunately, drastically improved later in the 20th century when emotions again returned to the center of philosophical discussion and scholarship. There are both historians of philosophy and systematic philosophers who have recently been enthusiastic about the Stoic theory of emotion. The Stoics famously interpreted emotions as judgments of reason about the significance of external events to the human flourishing, while simultaneously being irrational and harmful judgments. The Stoics have been a major stimulation for contemporary studies on emotion, although few philosophers today subscribe to the Stoic ideal of *apatheia*, requiring the complete extirpation of all emotion.

Cognitive theories in which the emotions are closely connected or even identified with beliefs and judgments are currently among the most popular ones in philosophy as well as in cognitive science. There are, however, topics in which the cognitive view of emotion faces serious difficulties. The relation between music and emotion is certainly one of them.

Risto-Pekka Pennanen (ed.) 2010
Music and Emotions

COLLEGIUM

Studies across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences 9.
Helsinki: Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. 3–5.

It seems undeniable that music, perhaps more than any other field of art, has a close connection to our emotional life. It seems to be able to give expression to our loves, fears, joys, griefs, pities, and sympathies. Music is also essentially non-verbal. So how can music embody emotions if it lacks the linguistic basis seemingly necessary for the articulation of attitudes and emotions?

The emerging dilemma seems to admit three solutions. First, we could reject the claim that music as such embodies emotions in the full sense of the word. Second, we could allow non-cognitive emotions at least in the special case of music, and finally, we could claim that even in instrumental music language-like structures can be discovered and propositions formulated which then act as constituents of emotions. Martha Nussbaum, in *The Upheavals of Thought*, suggests a fourth solution to the dilemma. She succeeds in combining all the three propositions of the dilemma, i.e. that music is non verbal non-verbal by nature, that linguistically formulable cognitive attitudes are necessary constituents of emotions, and that music is capable to embody emotions. This is done by extending the notion of cognition to include phenomena that cannot be linguistically formulated.

A study of emotions has become a major topic for philosophers in Finland, both those focusing on the history of philosophy and those working on systematic themes. The Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies has been a most appropriate environment for these studies, being an ideal meeting-place for scholars of cross-disciplinary orientation. It has been most stimulating to invite cognitive scientists, musicologists, anthropologists, historians and others to share the floor with philosophers. The HCAS is also privileged to have one of the world's leading figures in the philosophy of emotions, Martha Nussbaum, as its Permanent Visiting Fellow. She has always been a great musiclover, but in her more recent work in particular she has extended her studies on emotions to musical themes. The choice of music and emotions as the topic of Martha's annual summer colloquium at the HCAS accordingly sounded both natural and intellectually stimulating.

The Colloquium on Music and Emotions was organized in Helsinki on June 2 and 3, 2009. Besides Martha's keynote lecture on forging democratic emotions in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, we were delighted and honored to have lectures by two leading specialists in the field, Charles Nussbaum from the University of Texas, Arlington, and Stephen Halliwell from the University of St. Andrews, Scotland. They gave presentations offering us two stimulating but also different perspectives to the symposium's topic. Charles Nussbaum presented a profound analysis of sentiments and sentimentality in music, whereas Halliwell discovered fascinating aspects of music and emotions in Tolstoy's literary works.

In accordance with the Collegium's best tradition, the symposium also gave a possibility for junior fellows to present their ongoing work for an international

audience. Out of the three presentations at the symposium, we are delighted to have two published here. Both of them bring in new dimensions to the cross-disciplinary character to the symposium. The cultural historian Rachel Nussbaum Wichert, drawing from her project on the formation of democratic civic culture in Weimar Germany, sensitively explores the emotional aspects of German political opera. Finally, the ethnomusicologist Risto Pekka Pennanen analyzes the orientalist aspects of Bosnian folk music, showing in a stimulating way how the government's interest in political discipline and control affected the emotional aspect of music.

The HCAS Colloquium on Music and Emotions did not entertain any pretension of being comprehensive in its field, and neither does the publication of this volume. The intention was above all to open up fresh and stimulating perspectives into an emerging field in cross-disciplinary studies and promote searching discussions of new ideas. I am grateful to all our speakers, writers and discussants for the exhilarating results, as well as to the HCAS for accepting the volume for publication in the *COLLeGIUM*, and to Risto Pekka Pennanen for his editorial work. The volume will prove that the philosophy of music will remain an exciting field of reflection not only for philosophers but all open-minded scholars in the humanities and social studies.