

A Perspective Theory of Music Perception and Emotion

Akademisk avhandling
som för avläggande av filosofie doktorexamen i ämnet
musikvetenskap, med vederbörligt tillstånd av humanistiska
fakultetsnämnden vid Göteborgs universitet,
kommer att offentlig försvaras av

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onsdagen 19 mars 2008, klockan 13.00

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ABSTRACT

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Doctoral dissertation in musicology at the Department of Culture, Aesthetics and Media, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 2008, 311 pages.

Language: English.

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Series: *Skrifter från musikvetenskap, Göteborgs universitet* nr 90

ISSN 1654-6261

ISBN 978-91-85974-06-1

In order to answer the question of why music moves us emotionally we need to understand the perception of music. A perspective theory is suggested. A perspective implies a frame of reference. This means that the perspective selects content - an implicit meaning. This content is an important agent in the perception of form. The general assumption that we judge the content from the form (signification) can thus be challenged. The opposite is also possible: the content makes us perceive form. This is a new understanding of the old question of whether music is a representative or just form. The meaning is immanent in the form.

These processes are pre-attentive. It has been shown that we do not have to perceive music consciously to be emotionally affected by it. This has an interesting consequence. We do not always connect the emotion caused by the music to the music heard. This is obvious in the case of film music. The emotion could attach to anything that we happen to attend. If we pay attention to film characters, the emotion is ascribed to them. If we attend to the own body, the emotion is ascribed to the body (as feelings). Only when we focus on the music the emotion is ascribed to the music and we experience the music as emotional.

The perspectives are discussed in the light of target/source domain theory. A target domain is typically an abstract and complicated behaviour. Source domains are concrete behaviours of survival value. It has been suggested that music is the target domain of several source domains. I argue that the perspectives are source domain processes. Musical emotions are discussed as functions of these source domains: the perception of sound, identification with the other, navigation, and joint action. The perspective theory potentially offers answers to several questions in music philosophy.

Key words: perception-action theory, emotion, perspective, imagery, enhanced formalism source domains and target domains.