Embodying the Music and Death Nexus
Emerald Interdisciplinary Connexions

Published in partnership with Progressive Connexions:
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*Emerald Interdisciplinary Connexions* promotes innovative research and encourages exemplary interdisciplinary practice, thinking and living. Books in the series focus on developing dialogues between disciplines and among disciplines, professions, practices and vocations in which the interaction of chapters and authors is of paramount importance. They bring cognate topics and ideas into orbit with each other whilst simultaneously alerting readers to new questions, issues and problems. The series encourages interdisciplinary interaction and knowledge sharing and, to this end, promotes imaginative collaborative projects which foster inclusive pathways to global understandings.
Embodying the Music and Death Nexus: Consolations, Salvations and Transformations

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**About the Contributors**

**Marie Josephine Bennett** completed her PhD at the University of Winchester, where her research focused on critical readings of queer performance in a number of mainstream post-Production Code Hollywood film musicals released between 1970 and 1980. Her other major areas of interest are music in films, queer studies, celebrity studies, popular music of the 1960s–1980s and the Eurovision Song Contest. Marie is an active music teacher, musician and researcher.

**Janieke Bruin-Mollenhorst** conducted her PhD research on music during contemporary funerals in the Netherlands at the Department of Culture Studies of Tilburg University (the Netherlands). In addition to her dissertation, she has published various articles and book chapters on music and death. She is the initiator of the DONE network, a Dutch network of scholars who study death-related topics, and the FUNERALLAB, which aims to bring together both various funerary professionals and death scholars. After finishing her dissertation, she continued her career as a teacher and researcher at the University of Groningen. Currently, she is the academic coordinator of the Institute for Ritual and Liturgical Studies, located at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam.

**Amanda DiGioia**’s PhD thesis asks, ‘How are women, and to some extent other genders, conceptualised and represented in Finnish heavy metal music lyrics?’ Her research interests outside of her PhD thesis include feminist approaches to narratives in texts. Her publications discuss a variety of topics, ranging from toxic masculinity in duelling (as explored in her monograph *Duellings, the Russian Cultural Imagination, and Masculinity in Crisis*, 2020), to childbirth and parenting in horror texts (as explored in *Childbirth and Parenting in Horror Texts: The Marginalized and the Monstrous*, 2017 and *Gender and Parenting in the Worlds of Alien and Blade Runner: A Feminist Analysis*, 2021). Her future work will touch on gender in Peter Benchley’s novels *Jaws* and *White Shark*.

**Jenny Game** is an educator, scholar, composer and performer (saxophones). Her doctorate focused on intercultural music and the composition of a chamber opera *The Aqueduct*. Her research interests also include music education, ethnomusicology and the performing arts. Jenny has been composing and performing professionally for over 30 years and has released a number of CDs/DVDs as performer/composer. In March 2021, Jenny performed the compositions discussed in this chapter, *Marianne, So True* and *Onedelast*, with her new music
ensemble Aurora Lumina (vibraphone, tenor and soprano saxes, five string double bass, marimbas, kit and hand percussion). The performance was live streamed as part of the multimedia production *Windows of Longing* that celebrated the life and art of Australian painter Edward Heffernan OAM (1912–92).

Marek Jeziński is Professor of Media, Communication and Journalism at Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland. He is an author of over 150 academic papers on media and communication, journalism, popular music, political science, political language, sociology, popular culture, contemporary theatre and performance. He published the books: *The Quest for Political Myth and Symbol in the Political Language of Akcja Wyborcza “Solidarność” and Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej* (2003); *Marketing polityczny a procesy akulturacyjne. Przypadek III RP* (2004), *Język przemówień politycznych Wojciecha Jaruzelskiego w okresie stanu wojennego* (2009), *Muzyka popularna jako wehikuł ideologiczny* (2011), *Mitologie muzyki popularnej* (2014), and *Muzyka popularna i jej odbiorcy w poszukiwaniu autorytetu* (2017). He published articles in *Medien und Zeit, M/C Journal, Rock Music Studies, Riffs, AVANT, Kultura Popularna, Studia Politylogiczne, Athenaeum* and *Kultura Współczesna*. Also he is an editor of several academic books on popular culture, art, media and communication, journalism, cultural anthropology and political sciences.

Rebecca Jiggens is a recovering ordinary language philosopher turned critical disability lawyer specialising in employment discrimination. Her academic research follows a central theme of what constitutes effective communication and understanding of deep subjective meaning across critical epistemic and cultural divides – for example, class, disability, gender/ID, ethnicity and faith. When not trying to address disability epistemic injustice in the Employment Tribunal, she can probably be found ranting on Twitter. ND. CI. VI.

Alison Duncan Kerr is a feminist philosopher. She was the Founding Director of the St Andrews Institute for Gender Studies, from where she moved to be Founding Co-Director of the Centre for Research Activism for Intersectional Justice. Her research focuses on philosophy of mind, emotions, gender and their application in practice.

Benjamin Lassauzet is Professeur agrégé at the Clermont-Auvergne University (France) and member of CREA (Centre de Recherche Expérimentale sur l’Acte Artistique) and CHEC (Centre d’Histoire Espaces et Cultures). He completed a PhD in 2017 about Debussy and humour, from which he wrote a book entitled *L’Humour de Claude Debussy* (Hermann, 2019), which won an award in 2020 (‘Coup de Coeur’ Prix France Musique Claude Samuel). He has also worked on the notion of ecstasy in Scriabin, the symbolic role of music in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the sources of influence of Radiohead’s *OK Computer*, and Icelandic music and identity in a globalisation context.

Gary Levy did his foundational studies in the Alexander Technique and has been a qualified and practicing teacher of the Technique since 1992. He has also worked as an educational researcher, university lecturer and tutor since 2012,
teaching in the areas of curriculum, pedagogy, health and well-being, philosophy of education, and educational research methodologies, also supervising post-graduate students. He has published in the areas on sociology of education, post-qualitative research, music, death, affect- and auto-theory. Gary is an amateur musician (at the piano, in a chorus, with an audience) and concurs with Nietzsche’s dictum that, ‘without music, life would be a mistake’.

Matthew McCullough is the current Van Mildert College Trust PhD Scholar at Durham University where he is affiliated with the Department of Music and The Centre for Death and Life Studies. He holds an Associate Fellowship at Van Mildert College and a DCAD Fellowship at Durham University (2021–23). Matthew’s research specialism lies in British and Irish music and culture of the 19th and 20th centuries, and more broadly at the intersection of musicology and death studies; he is particularly interested in music’s relationship with death, grief, trauma and memory. Matthew’s current PhD thesis (historical musicology and analysis) merges these interests in a study of British composers’ responses to World War I and the ways in which their work helped shape a collective and cultural memory of the war.

Nachthexe is a psychoanalyst and auto-ethnographer who specialises in trauma and herstory, performance studies, disability studies and metal music studies. She is a member of the National Coalition for Independent Scholars and the Forum for Independent Research Endeavours. She sits on the editorial board for the International Society for Metal Music Studies and the new series Advances in Metal Music and Culture through Intellect Books. Her monograph Black Metal, Trauma, Subjectivity, and Sound: Screaming the Abyss is out now through Emerald Publishing Limited.

Niall Scott is Reader in Philosophy and Popular Culture at the University of Central Lancashire. He is the principal editor of the Intellect journal Metal Music Studies and was a founding member and chair of the International Society for Metal Music Studies (ISMMS). He has published widely on heavy metal music and its culture from a philosophical and theological perspective, including in edited collections such as Reflections in the Metal Void (2011), Heavy Metal and Gender with Florian Heesch (2016) and Heavy Metal Music and the Communal Experience with Nelson Varas-Diaz (2016).

Francesca Stevens is an operatic soprano, metal musician and academic. She has a diverse range of interests that span across the history of music from classical to modern metal. Her academic research focuses on extreme metal music, feminist psychoanalysis, ethnography and musicology. Francesca is a Lecturer in music at Falmouth University (UK) where she teaches across all three music courses. As a songwriter and performer, she has toured the UK and Europe with black metal collective Denigrata and released the debut album Missa Defunctorum: Requiem Mass in A Minor. She is also currently working on a feminist blackened folk duo with Nachthexe entitled Dólóir.
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Acknowledgements

The editors would like to thank Rob Fisher and Susanne Schotanus of Progressive Connexions for their help and support in bringing this collection together. They would also like to express their grateful appreciation to each and every one of the authors and acknowledge the various challenging circumstances in which they found themselves while contributing their chapters to this volume. Thank you.
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The German Catholic philosopher Joseph Pieper wrote that ‘music may be nothing but a secret philosophizing of the soul, an Exercitium Metaphysice Occultum’ (1990, p. 39). He went on to suggest that ‘music prompts the philosopher’s continued interest because it is by nature so close to the fundamentals of human existence’ (p. 39, italics in original). In this volume, Embodying the Music and Death Nexus: Consolations, Salvations and Transformations, we suggest that the inevitability of death, foreseen or otherwise, is another such fundamental. The fact that we (humans) each assume and inhabit a unique corporeal form is a third such fundamental. Thus, the intersections and entanglements between music, death and the body provide fertile ground for original exploration.

This collection has some of its antecedents in a conference held in Vienna in December 2017 that explored the relationship between music and death from a variety of perspectives and vantage points. A number of the papers from that conference were curated and published by Emerald in 2020. The three co-editors of this volume attended and presented at the Vienna conference, and each contributed chapters to the follow-up publication. Marie Josephine Bennett was also one of the two co-editors of the previous volume. The music and death nexus continued to grip the three of us, and we shared an instinctive belief that there were other rich veins to tap into. The metaphorical vein we hit on turned out to be one in which the human body itself was the site through which music and death converged, organised and intensified. Once this became clear to us, we were ready to solicit contributions from scholars working in a variety of disciplines and genres, as well as to begin some fresh work of our own.

Oliver Sacks, the English neurologist of the soul, wrote that:

"Music can pierce the heart directly, it needs no mediation. One does not have to know anything about Dido and Aeneas to be moved by her lament for him; anyone who has ever lost someone knows what Dido is expressing. And there is, finally, a deep and mysterious paradox here, for while such music makes one experience pain and grief more intensely, it brings solace and consolation at the same time."

(2007, p. 301)

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1 Bennett and Gracon (2020).
While solace, consolation, pain, grief and mystery are all alluded to in the chapters that follow, Sacks’s image is also noteworthy for the way it acknowledges the physical, even physiological power and potency of music. A heart literally pierced would more than likely lead to the death of the heart’s owner, yet here, Sacks is suggesting that the power of music can, paradoxically, be lethally restorative. Via the same, aforementioned essay by Sacks, Maria Popova is also led to an autobiographical text by Wendy Lesser (2007). Lesser describes how listening to a concert in Berlin helped her to come to terms with the loss of a loved one. As an atheist, it was important that she did not know the words (to the Brahms’ composition *A German Requiem*) that were being sung by the chorus, but rather:

I just allowed them to echo through my body: I *felt* them, quite literally, instead of understanding them. And the reverie I fell into as I listened to Brahms’s music was not about God triumphing over death, but about music and death grappling with each other.

(cited in Popova, 2016, np)

Like Sacks’s ‘piercing’, Lesser’s notion of ‘grappling’ points to the physical bridging of death and music, a wrestling that has both corporeal and affective dimensions. The nineteenth-century German philosopher Artur Schopenhauer suggested that music ‘does not speak of things but tells of weal and woe’ (1851/1974, p. 430). A weal is a visible swelling or bruising of the flesh created by the impact of an actual blow or pressure, a physical marking and signifying of pain or sorrow. For Schopenhauer, music had a unique capacity to speak this marking and signification. Embodied encounters with death often have a musical accompaniment. Sometimes, that musical accompaniment can serve as a necessary (and unexpected) container for powerfully-felt reactions that might otherwise prove to be overwhelming, if not unbearable, for the death-affected person, family and/or community. At other times, the musical accompaniment can provide means and modes for the near-death, grief, loss, fear or desire to be processed, understood, accepted, integrated, rejected or harnessed as a catalyst.

The interdisciplinary nature of this volume intentionally avoids location in any singular field of study, offering material for researchers and practitioners in areas including death studies, classical music, popular music sub-genres, psychology, psychoanalysis, auto/ethnography, trauma studies, cultural history, disability studies, film studies, funeral studies, musicology, subculture studies and queer studies. The four sections and their respective headings highlight the breadth of approaches adopted by the authors. Thus, in Section One, ‘Death and the Canon’, the music of Bach, Mozart and Mahler, respectively, provides the primary source and impetus for exploration and analysis. In Section Two, ‘Chthonics’, it is various forms and sub-genres of black metal music that act as lynchpins for very broad and deeply personal encounters. In Section Three, ‘Death and Resurrection’, the personal and aesthetic intersect with queer and disability pre-occupations and perspectives. In the final section, ‘Life Beyond Death’, each of the three chapters focus on particular historical moments of death as axes...
around which complex, prolific and poignant musical responses were engendered. Together, the 12 chapters highlight the different ways in which the embodiment of death through music has been encountered and expounded. They thus have the potential to move readers towards a deeper exploration and fuller understanding of their own and others’ entangled embodiment of music-inflected encounters with death.

The chapters within traverse a variety of ways in which the nexus of music and death is mediated through bodily experiences and responses. These bodily experiences can be physical and/or emotional, with resonances and ramifications also felt spiritually and/or politically. The various authors invite us to consider, if not also to co-inhabit, the faithful body (Levy; Bruin-Mollenhorst); the cinematic body (Bennett); the grieving body (Lassauzet); the composing body (Game; Nachthex; McCullough); the suffering body (DiGioia; Nachthex); the collective body or body politic (Jeziński); thecrip body (Duncan Kerr and Jiggens); the resurrected body (Lassauzet; Bruin-Mollenhorst); the lost body (McCullough); the abject body (Duncan Kerr and Jiggens; Stevens); the vulnerable body (DiGioia) and the apophatic body (Scott). In each of these chapters, different bodies act as sites through which death resonates and reverberates in a wide variety of music genres and modes of expression.

Coupled with this Prologue, we have provided short introductions to each of the four sections, as well as an Epilogue with some final reflections following the last chapter. When first embarking on this project, we were surprised at how little other work we were able to find (in English) that coupled the music and death nexus with an interest in corporeal, embodied or affective dimensions. Even the poets, often the finest musicians of life’s fundamentals, appear to have remained largely silent on the subject. All the more reason, then, that this collection offers itself up for perusal, extended listening and deeper contemplation.

Marie Josephine Bennett, Jasmine Hazel Shadrack and Gary Levy, February 2022.

References


