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Review article

## Metaphor and music emotion: Ancient views and future directions

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### ABSTRACT

Music is often described in terms of emotion. This notion is supported by empirical evidence showing that engaging with music is associated with subjective feelings, and with objectively measurable responses at the behavioural, physiological, and neural level. Some accounts, however, reject the idea that music may directly induce emotions. For example, the 'paradox of negative emotion', whereby music described in negative terms is experienced as enjoyable, suggests that music might move the listener through indirect mechanisms in which the emotional experience elicited by music does not always coincide with the emotional label attributed to it.

Here we discuss the role of metaphor as a potential mediator in these mechanisms. Drawing on musicological, philosophical, and neuroscientific literature, we suggest that metaphor acts at key stages along and between physical, biological, cognitive, and contextual processes, and propose a model of music experience in which metaphor mediates between language, emotion, and aesthetic response.

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## 1. Introduction

It is commonly held that listeners perceive music as both expressive (Gabrielsson & Juslin, 2003; Juslin, 2013) and evocative of emotions (Dowling & Harwood, 1986), and that this property is music's primary purpose (Cooke, 1959), and man's primary motive for engaging with it (Juslin & Laukka, 2004). The pervasiveness of this notion is illustrated by the widespread use of music in contexts in which the effectiveness of music to induce emotional states is taken for granted – e.g. film (Cohen, 2001), marketing (Bruner, 1990), or therapy (Bunt & Hoskyns, 2002). In what follows, we examine how theoretical and empirical evidence supports and/or challenges this notion. Specifically, we first discuss ancient philosophical views, recent empirical evidence, and current debate surrounding the existence of a causal link between music and emotion. We then consider potential pitfalls in the discourse on music and emotion, and highlight the conceptual distinction – despite occasional coincidence, hence danger of conflation – between two dimensions: emotion expression-perception, and emotion induction-experience. Based on the evidence that the emotional response to music does not always coincide with the emotional label attributed to it, we go on to suggest that music might move the listener through an indirect, mediated mechanism. Our central proposition is that one potential mediating mechanism between music and emotion is metaphor.

We support our suggestion by tracing back the discourse on metaphor to antiquity, and highlighting metaphor's long-acknowledged significance as a device that promotes an awareness of relations between objects. We then consider how this relational property makes metaphor directly relevant to human communication and cognition, and examine how the notion of metaphor as a comparison has recently been incorporated in modern conceptual theory. Building on the evidence reviewed, we propose and outline an empirically testable model aimed at characterising the precise role of metaphor in the relation between music and emotion. Specifically, the model presents and discusses the implications of two alternative (but compatible) configurations, in which metaphor may either mediate between music and emotion, or arise from emotion directly. Throughout the discussion, 'emotion' and 'feeling' will be used to denote two interrelated but distinct entities, the latter being a component of the former, as proposed in componential appraisal theories (see Grandjean, Sander, & Scherer, 2008; Sander, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2005).

## 2. Music and emotion

### 2.1. Ancient views

The ability of music to please and move has been presumed for centuries. In More's *Utopia* music is characterised as providing a bodily pleasure of its own kind, as it 'arises neither from our receiving what the body requires, nor its being relieved when overcharged, and yet, by a secret unseen virtue, affects the senses, raises the passions, and strikes the mind with generous impressions – this is, the pleasure that arises from music' (More, 1516/1901, unpaginated). Hence, in More's view, music is valuable not only for being a source of pleasure, but also by virtue of its ability to 'affect the senses, raise the passions, and strike the mind'. The affective implications of music are further highlighted in the notion that 'music, both vocal and instrumental, renders and expresses natural feelings' (More, 1516/2003, p. 102). Given the centrality of music in man's social and affective life, More's Utopians 'after supper [...] play music' (More, 1516/2003, p. 50), and, in *Utopia*, 'no evening meal passes without music' (More, 1516/2003, p. 58).

The existence of a causal link between music and emotion has been discussed at least since Antiquity. Associations between modes and emotions are found in ancient texts from the Indian, Middle Eastern (e.g. Persian), and far eastern (e.g. Japanese) traditions (Randel, 1986/2003). The *Nāṭya Śāstra* (treatise on dramaturgy from the 5th century BCE), for example, prescribes certain modes and musical forms for the expression of particular emotions, which, in turn, are expected to elicit particular aesthetic feelings (Capwell, 1986/2003, p. 813). Similarly, in ancient Greece it was widely believed that exposure to different kinds of music could affect human health and character, and promote the development of virtues such as calm, balance, harmony, and order. On the basis of this belief, both Plato (429?–347 BCE) and Aristotle (384–322 BCE) issued guidelines about the appropriate kind of music for the education of the young to good citizenship. In *The Republic*, for example, Plato holds certain modes as best suited for the representation of particular feelings or states (Plato, *Republic*, Book 3, 398b and ff.). These considerations are echoed in Aristotle's remarks about the different ways in which listeners are affected by different melodies (Aristotle, *Politics* 8.1340a-b). Both Plato and Aristotle saw the link between music and affective states as an expression of a more generalised and pervasive influence of various aspects of music – including mode, rhythm, and melody – on the overall human character. Plato, for example, believed that 'good rhythm wait[s] upon [...] good and fair disposition of the character and the mind' (*Republic* 3.400e). Similarly, Aristotle argued that 'rhythms and melodies contain representations of anger and mildness, and also of courage and temperance' (Aristotle, *Politics* 8.1340a-b). The belief that music could influence human character and emotions had serious moral and pedagogical implications. Plato's preoccupation

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