

MARTINELLI, RICCARDO (2019).

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Philosophy of music. A history.

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Philosophy of music. A history is an English translation of Riccardo Martinelli's *I filosofi e la musica* (2012. Bologna: Il Mulino), which explores “*philosophical* ideas and doctrines on music” (p. V). Perhaps the original title (literally, The philosophers and music) would be read differently, but the truth is that this work is an important addition to the literature on this topic, hence the need for an English translation. According to the author (p. V), the existing works were focused on a specific author or period, so there was the need to enrich the literature with a single work, similar to a manual, that provided a historical view of the philosophical thought about music from its origins in ancient times, with thinkers such as Pythagoras, Aristotle and Plato, to contemporaneity. However it seems that other authors such as Peter Kivy (2020. *Introduction to a philosophy of music*. Claredon Press) and R. A. Sharpe (2004. *Philosophy of music. An introduction*. McGill-Queen's University Press) had previously tried similar exercises.

The volume is divided in four chapters (“The art of the Muses”, “Harmony and disenchantment”, “The century of music” and “Dissonances”), each of them organized into sections devoted to specific philosophers (such as Descartes, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Susanne Langer and Adorno) or philosophical positions on music. *Philosophy of music* also includes an Introduction and a Preface. The latter intends to give answers to some of the questions that followed the publication of the Italian edition, such as the clarification of the title, the author's proposal of organizing the philosophical views on music in three categories, which will be addressed further on, and the fast development of the studies in the philosophy of music. Martinelli explains that the expression

“philosophy of music” was chosen for the title, instead of “philosophy and music” which is more commonly used because of its neutrality, to emphasize the content of this book: the presentation and explanation of philosophical views on music.

The first chapter, “The art of the Muses”, is divided into six sections that deal with what music is from Pythagoras until the Middle Ages. The second chapter, “Harmony and disenchantment”, begins with the reflections from the Renaissance, such as those of Boethius, a medieval author frequently read and translated throughout the Renaissance. After dealing with this period, the perspectives of philosophers such as Descartes, Leibniz, Rameau, Rousseau and Kant are presented in the remaining sections of this chapter.

The third chapter, “The century of music”, is time wise focused on the nineteenth century, exploring the work of the Romantics in the field of acoustics and of the thinkers of that time such as Hoffman, Schopenhauer, Hegel and Nietzsche. The fourth and last chapter, “Dissonances”, deals with the new ideas that emerged in the twentieth century as a result of the questioning of the tonal system and the discovery of new musical forms outside of usual European centers.

The author is very meticulous in the presentation and analysis of the philosophic ideas. Nevertheless, the writing and the language used is clear to comprehend, even for the reader less familiarized with the specific language of this field of studies. For instance, the sentences are not too long and complex to understand, the ideas presented are logically organized and the author gives clear examples of what is being explained.

The positions analysed on this volume can be organized in three main categories, proposed by the author as an alternative to the chronological view: the physical-mathematical order, the analogy with language and the call for direct experience. The first category, the physical-mathematical order, or Pythagoreanism, due to the importance of Pythagoras to this line of thought, is based on the theory that music has a close relation with mathematics. Mathematics, specifically the mathematical proportions, use music as a way to permeate the human soul, which may cause the subject to react in a harmonious and receptive way or, on the contrary, the subject can react in a negative way by feeling agitated and disturbed. The fact that music can

trigger such antagonistic reactions in the subject, explains why in certain periods, such as in Middle Ages, music is seen as either celestial or demonic.

The second category, the analogy with language, or Aristotelianism, is based on Aristotle's "formulation that the key to the problem lies in the analogy between music and verbal discourse" (p. VI). Lastly, the third category, the call to direct experience or scepticism is a call to a more critical and rational approach to the considerations on music. Those who follow this perspective advise us to bear in mind that in "the actual daily fruition of music [...] there are no wonders" (p. VII), as opposed to what is suggested by the numerous metaphors associated with music. This perspective constitutes obstacle to the long-established relationship between music and ethos, for music, according to the sceptics, doesn't convey any "character" (p. VII) or meaning.

Although the subject of reflection is music, it is necessary to bear in mind that the starting point for the considerations on music presented in this volume is philosophy. As the author states: "philosophical ideas and doctrines on music" (p. V). But Martinelli also assumes that this focal point on philosophy is not absolute and in some cases there is the need to complement the discussion with ideas from "neighbouring fields of research" (p. V). Therefore, when philosophers ponder on music, they come across subjects such as aesthetics, metaphysics, ethics, anthropology, mathematics, science, language and psychology.

Riccardo Martinelli leaves an invitation for more researchers to work and contribute to the literature of this field of study. The author considers that this is a field of study that evolves quite rapidly and his approach in *Philosophy of music* didn't analyze the topics in depth. This may be the reason why the author assumes a neutral position, since he never voices judgments. Martinelli performs a role similar to that of a narrator only giving an account of the ideas that were assembled on this volume. By doing so, he leaves space for others to contribute to the research with the possibility to follow the guidelines left in this volume.

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