

Introduction to the Special Issue on Music and Empathy: Part 1

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THIS special issue presents seven target articles and fifteen commentaries exploring current perspectives on music and empathy research. The wide range of topics and perspectives on music and empathy contained in this special issue reflects the emerging importance of empathy research in a variety of different musical contexts. The target articles presented here have been developed from papers presented at the SEMPRE Music and Empathy conference (November, 2013, University of Hull). Further information about the conference, including a full programme and conference review, may be found at www.sempre.org.uk.

The seven target articles are grouped rather loosely into two themes, corresponding to the two issues of *Empirical Musicology Review*. This first theme (appearing as vol. 10, no. 1) invites the reader to explore different perspectives on empathy and music listening. Deniz Peters presents a theory of “musical empathy.” He proposes that musical perception is a doubly active affair in which bodily knowledge extends auditory perception cross modally, through what he terms “emotional co-constitution,” and orients a bodily hermeneutic. Philip Alperson considers Peter’s article in the context of the Structural Object Model of musical experience and elaborates on some of the challenges Peters’ essay raises for both theoretical and empirical research on musical experience. Anthony Gritten offers a broad context for empathic listening based on its value as a transferable skill, reflects on the relationship between musical empathy and social empathy via music, and comments on the indeterminacy at the beginning of empathic listening.

Jacques Launay explores the apparent paradox that despite musical engagement being generally thought of as a form of social engagement, it often seems to be an enjoyable asocial phenomenon. He argues that through identification of human agency, sometimes in combination with motor resonance, engagement with any musical sound can be experienced in a social way. In response to Launay, Rolf Inge Godøy considers a motor cognition theory of musical experience, and suggests that listening to music alone might be regarded as social in so far as music reflects shared motor cognition experiences. Istvan Molnar-Szakacs contends that emotional empathy is central rather than peripheral to the question of music perception, and argues that studying emotion in music perception is essential to understanding how asocial music listening may be perceived as a social experience.

Two articles then consider the relationship between music preferences and empathy. The first, an empirical study by Shannon Clark and Giac Giacomantonio, investigates the relationship between adolescents’ music preferences and prosocial behavior. In response, Alexandra Lamont considers the uses to which information about music preferences can be put, and critically examines some of the assumptions made in this and other related research papers. Susan O’Neill also examines some of the assumptions made by Clark and Giacomantonio and suggests that the predictive power of musical preferences on empathy-related responding might benefit from a consideration of the larger pattern of psychological and subjective wellbeing within the context of developmental regulation across ontogeny that involves mutually influential individual–context relations. Finally, Sara Prot and Douglas Gentile consider Clark and Giacomantonio’s study in the context of other research on media and prosocial behavior.

The second article on music preferences, contributed by David Greenberg, Jason Rentfrow, and Simon Baron-Cohen, considers music preferences through the lens of Empathizing–Systemizing theory. The authors offer implications for Autism and for how music therapists and clinicians might use music as a tool in their work with individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Conditions. In her commentary, Tal-Chen Rabinowitch shifts the focus of analysis from the type of music, to the more fundamental mechanisms by which music in general may promote empathy, suggesting that from this alternative perspective Empathizing–Systemizing theory might lead to novel theoretical predictions about music, empathy, and Autism. Meanwhile, Jonna Vuoskoski invites the reader to explore an alternative explanation for how music making and music listening might be able to evoke empathy and affiliation. This alternative explanation stems from the perception–action model of empathy, and the affiliation-evoking effects of mimicking and synchronized actions.