

PH371-15 Music and Imagination

24/25

Department

Philosophy

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Matthew Nudds

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Music has a central role in our lives, and for many it is something which has great value. But why do we care about music and why do we think it is valuable? What is it about music that makes us listen to it? What makes it so compelling? This module will approach these questions through an examination of debates in philosophy about the nature and value of music.

We will begin with what music is: what makes something music? Can any sequence of sounds be music? Should we draw a distinction between 'sound art' and music proper or does that reflect a cultural prejudice?

Next we will focus on our understanding and appreciation of music. What is it to understand a piece of music? Do you need to have musical knowledge in order to truly appreciate it, or does musical understanding operate at a more basic level? A central theme of this module is that understanding music involves imagination. One way it does it through the connection of music and emotion. It is often suggested that music engages with emotion in a special way. How should we understand that? We will look at a number of theories, in particular the view that music connects to emotion through imagination.

Answering the questions about musical understanding will lead us to the question of the value of music: why is music valuable and does its value consist in the simple fact that we enjoy listening to it? That doesn't seem enough to explain the great investment people make in music, but can we make sense of the idea that music has some other kind of value?

Finally, we will consider the nature of a musical work. Although often regarded as a form of art,

Philosophers have argued that composers cannot create a musical work, but only discover it. That is a counter-intuitive claim, so what is it about musical works that has led some to defend it, and how is it consistent with the idea that music is a creative art?

Module aims

By the end of the module students should have an understanding of the central debates in about the nature of and our understanding of music, and should be able to clearly articulate the opposing positions in those debates. They should be able to provide arguments in support of those different positions, and to be coherently set out and defend those arguments. They should have a sound understanding of the key literature, and have a good understanding of the central concepts that frame the debates. They will be able to identify and draw on additional literature beyond the key literature discussed in class.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

- What is music?
- Music as autonomous and the acousmatic thesis.
- Music and meaning.
- Music and emotion.
- Expressive music.
- Music and imagination.
- The value of music.
- Musical works.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- By the end of the module students should have an understanding of the central debates about the nature of and our understanding of music, and should be able to clearly articulate the opposing positions in those debates. They should be able to provide arguments in support of those different positions, and to be coherently set out and defend those arguments.
- They should have a good understanding of the key literature, and have a good understanding of the central concepts that frame the debates. They should be able to critically evaluate the arguments for and against the positions defended in the key literature.
- Students should be able to analyse and critically evaluate the key ideas and arguments discussed during the module, and come to an independent assessment of their merits with the aid of key literature. Students should be able to identify and draw on additional literature beyond the key literature discussed in class.
- By the end of the module students should be able to discuss clearly the issues raised by their reading of the key literature. They should be able to engage with and evaluate this literature in a way that demonstrates relevant and appropriate philosophical skills. They should be able to identify and draw on additional literature beyond the key literature

discussed in class

- Students should also to be able draw connections between the key ideas and arguments in the debates in the aesthetics of music to wider debates in aesthetics.

Indicative reading list

Kivy - Music, Language, and Cognition

Kivy - Introduction to the Philosophy of Music

Levinson - Contemplating Art - essays in section II

Levinson - Music, Art, and Metaphysics - essays in part 3

Davies - Themes in the Philosophy of Music

Budd - Music and the Emotions

Scruton - The Aesthetics of Music

Scruton - Understanding Music - part 1

Subject specific skills

The ability to understand, analyse and criticise philosophical ideas and arguments. The ability to develop an understanding of key philosophical debates in the aesthetics of music.

Transferable skills

The ability to argue, analyse complex ideas, and write clearly. The ability to grasp complex ideas and arguments, identify their strengths and weaknesses and write about them in a structured manner.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 2 hours (12%)
Seminars	8 sessions of 1 hour (5%)
Private study	124 hours (83%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

No private study requirements defined for this module.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A3

	Weighting	Study time
1250 word Essay	50%	
3 x 1,250 word essays (each of the best two essays count for 50% of the module mark)		
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3 x 1,250 word essays (each of the best two essays count for 50% of the module mark)		

Feedback on assessment

Student will have their essays returned with detailed comments and have the chance of a consultation over their performance in each of their essays.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- UPHA-V700 Undergraduate Philosophy
 - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
 - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy