

## Book Review

**The Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology**

Hallam, S., Cross, I., &amp; Thaut, M.

Patsy Tan<sup>1</sup>, Ng Wang Feng<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>University of Adelaide & My Therapy House®<sup>2</sup>St. Andrew's Community Hospital, Singapore.**Hardcover:** 960 pages | **Publisher:** UK: Oxford University Press | **Language :** English | **ISBN-13:** 978-01998722946**Abstract**

*The Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology* provides a comprehensive overview of the latest developments in this fast-growing area of research. With contributions from experts in the field, the coverage offered has both range and depth. The fifty-two articles are divided into eleven sections covering both experimental and theoretical perspectives. Ten sections each present articles that focus on specific areas of music psychology: the origins and functions of music; music perception; responses to music; music and the brain; musical development; learning musical skills; musical performance; composition and improvisation; the role of music in our everyday lives; and music therapy and conceptual frameworks. In each section, authors critically review the literature, highlight current issues, and explore possibilities for the future. The final section examines how in recent years the study of music psychology has broadened to include a range of other scientific disciplines. It considers the way that the research has developed in relation to technological advances, fostering links across the field and providing an overview of the areas where the field needs further development in the future.

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This is a comprehensive text organized in 11 parts with distinct themes. It provides a general overview to music therapy and psychology students on the various functions of music and its impact on human behavior both physiologically and psychologically. There is some overlap between parts and chapters. Given the multifarious aspects of the nature of music psychology research over the years, examined by the many authors from varied academic specializations who contributed, this was unsurprising. Broad-ranging and informative overviews of various relevant topics related to each theme are presented, with some background on the history, development and evolution of the research. The chapters often, to varied extents, provide useful evaluative discussion points of what has been studied, update the latest research and suggest possible future directions.

Part 1 of the book is basically an introduction that covers the origins and functions of music. It examines the underpinnings of current research and theories of music and human evolution, musical universals, musical meaning, and the functions of music. The Western bias inherent in existing theories is highlighted. This part serves as a useful

and informative update of the scholarly enquiry into these important questions, including its limitations.

Parts 2 and 3 provides a theoretical review on the knowledge base of musical perception and responses to music (both body and emotional), perceived meaning in the music, music neuroaesthetics, and music preferences. Topics examined include perception of pitch, including absolute pitch, tonality, timbre, time, memory, and musical structure. Useful recommendations are offered, based on what is needed to further these areas of enquiry. Of worthy mention, the need for neuroscientists, biologists, psychologists, philosophers, musicologists, music critics, and so on, to collaborate in research is highlighted, now that some groundwork has been laid.

Part 4 focuses mainly on how the human brain responds to music. It gives an overview of the processes engaged in music: general mechanisms of expectation, prediction, evaluation (similar mechanisms are identified in language processing), and heavy involvement of the motor system (in processing musical rhythm). Evidence suggests that pathways involved in pitch and rhythm perception and production are separate but work together. Musical training causes the brain to change both structurally and functionally, throughout the lifespan. All of these aspects have implications for learning and rehabilitation.

Part 5 and 6 of the book aim to give readers an overview on how musical skills are developed and learned. Part 5

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presents a wide-ranging theoretical overview on musical development from prenatal stage to early years, concluding inevitably with the observation that there are no obvious coherent theories of musical development. This section also provides a useful breakdown of evidence or rather, an acknowledgment of the lack of positive associations connecting music ability with non-music abilities. A plausible conclusion for now is that in general, high-functioning individuals are likely to take music lessons, and music lessons may exaggerate slightly their pre-existing advantages. Part 6 follows with wide-ranging discussions on learning and the various aspects of learning music - music potential, practicing, motivation, and external factors: family and institutions, with American perspectives.

The next 3 parts of the book aim at helping readers have an understanding of musical performance. Part 7 covers both theoretical and practical perspectives of musical performance that involved body, emotions, expression and communication of structure. Some focus given to Music Performance Anxiety, and its treatment is summarized.

Part 8 provides an excellent overview of the literature and research on musical composition and improvisation, particularly on teaching practice in schools and informal settings. The varied subject categories that have been studied, underlying philosophical approaches, and the views from musicological, sociological, psychological and pedagogical are presented.

Part 9 serves as informative overview of the research topics related to everyday lives, from the ways that people interact with music, music in film, theatre and dance, community music and educational settings, music in commercial premises, music as background stimulus versus as the main task. Limitations of the current research and future recommendations are offered though not evenly across the different topics.

Part 10 aims to give readers a highly assessable introduction to the scientific model for music therapy to produce functional, lasting outcomes for patients. The emphasis is on science, in particular Neurologic Music Therapy (NMT), even though the other models of music therapy that have preceded NMT and have been very influential in clinical practice and research efforts were quickly referenced.

The final part of the book gives a very informative and insightful review on the history and research development in the area of music psychology. The role of technology is also briefly mentioned. It is essentially a discussion section on future directions recapping on the need for collaboration in different disciplines. Limitations and challenges are also briefly discussed in this last part of the book.

In its entirety, this book is scholarly in nature. I would recommend this text as it covers a lot of ground and summarizes a significant amount of research. It certainly provides the newly-initiated and practitioner/academic's

interest in music psychology with related and up to speed topics on current research. As well it provides the necessary background to motivate further study and knowledge. It is an especially encouraging read for music therapists and students, as they find their profession referenced in a music psychology text targeting general audience (and others). The position taken in the music therapy chapters is clearly rooted in the scientific paradigm, and gave less emphasis on other established ways of music therapy clinical practice and qualitative research. In conclusion, it is a good snapshot of the perceived needs of the current times, mostly from a Western perspective (North America, Europe and Australia) though a few international perspectives were represented in the literature were consulted. This text regardless will serve its readers well enough. A future edition could perhaps balance the bias by inviting more scholars with the relevant expertise from other continents to contribute.

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