

PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICE

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Philosophical Practice for Musicians: A Short Report on TOM-Tool¹

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Abstract

This paper is a short report on TOM (Thinking on Music). A Questionnaire for Musicians, a self-reflection tool for musicians. TOM is an example of philosophical practice for musicians and a means of knowledge transfer for the philosophy of music. The paper gives background information about TOM, enlists all its questions, and provides an overview of its concept and methodology.

Keywords: *life-philosophy, music, life, performance, repertoire, affirmation, wonder*

I. Background and History

2016–2018 the writer of this article was Lise Meitner Research Fellow at the Institute of Aesthetics of Music at the University of Music and Performing Arts (KUG) Graz in Austria, where he led the research project Music as life-affirmation. The value of music in life-philosophy (Homepage: <https://musiclifephilosophy.kug.ac.at/index.php?id=18426>).

The project sought to examine the music aesthetics of life-philosophy as a distinct movement in the history of philosophy. Life-philosophy, mostly known under its German term *Lebensphilosophie*, covers an era from the Early Romanticism until the Philosophical Anthropology of the 20th century. Its most prominent representatives are Friedrich Schlegel (1772-1829), Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Henri Bergson (1859-1941) Ludwig Klages (1872-1956), Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), and Helmut Plessner (1892-1985). Two artists who were not philosophers in a literally sense but nevertheless stood very close to life-philosophy, Richard Wagner (1813-1883) and Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), were also considered.

In life-philosophy music is seen as the art which is closer to life. Its main paradigm of reference is purely instrumental music, music with words, so called absolute music. The iconoclastic movement of instrumental music is seen in analogy with the immanent teleology of the emotion, and in life-philosophy life is primarily emotion and a total feeling of life. So instrumental music is the art that better corresponds to the general affective character of life. Furthermore, the ability of instrumental music to generate an abundance of forms is seen in analogy with the abundance, the plenitude of life itself. The practical consequence of instrumental music being the most prominent paradigm of life is that music seems to affirm our sense for life, where affirmation can have a transformative character. That is very briefly what this project was about.

At the end of the project the writer of this article got a knowledge transfer fund from the vice dean of research to implement a project that would both serve knowledge transfer and the dissemination of his research project on music and life-philosophy. Since this project took place at a musical university where future professionals of music are trained, the applicant thought that musicians

should be the primary target group of such a knowledge transfer project. The idea was to create a self-reflection tool for musicians in the form of a questionnaire. The project took place from the beginning of October until the end of December 2018. In January 2019, TOM with its 29 questions was uploaded to the homepage of the research project <https://musiclifephilosophy.kug.ac.at/index.php?id=19563> and also sent to selected musical institutions.

II. Concept

The main issue of TOM was to address the concerns of emerging musicians. Therefore the questionnaire focused on three issues: a) the personal relation with the works of music, b) musical performance, and c) repertoire choices. Since the target group was musicians where no philosophical background ought to be presupposed, the challenge was to keep it simple, direct and personal. Since the daily routine of a musician is full with endless hours of practice, studying, and engagements, another challenge was to keep the questionnaire as brief as possible, as something that would be intriguing but not overwhelming. 29 questions were considered a fair amount.

Before coming to the methodology of TOM I enlist all its questions. The questionnaire in its full form is available under <https://musiclifephilosophy.kug.ac.at/index.php?id=19563>

III. The Questions

29 questions about music, performance, and repertoire. Under the motto that playing music always involves asking and wondering. ♪ ? !

1. If you could inhabit a musical work, which one would you choose?
2. Which works of music do you associate with the most important stations of your life?
3. Which music presents for you the notion of destiny?
4. Which music has offered you the greatest solace?
5. Which music has the biggest cathartic effect on you?
6. Which music brings you closer to silence?
7. If your life were a movie, how would its score sound like?
8. How many persons 'live' inside the piece you are currently studying?
9. Do you encounter oppositional forces in the piece you are currently studying?
10. If the work of music you are currently studying were a piece of literature, what would that be: a poem, a novel or a play?
11. What odours, flavours and memories emerge from the piece you are currently studying?
12. How would you imagine a video clip for the piece you are currently studying?
13. Could you find a text for every piece of instrumental music?
14. Does every music convey a concrete feeling of life?
15. Can you discover melodies and rhythms everywhere?
16. How would the inner side of the wind sound like?
17. Which contemporary or earlier pieces of music mirror the spirit of today?
18. Which works of music would you have written in another way?
19. Do you consider crossover practices an enrichment of music?
20. Are there any mythological themes which are under-represented in music?
21. Which forgotten works of music ought to be brought back to life?
22. Could the distinction between an open and a closed society apply to musical works?

23. What would you urgently change in the canon of music?
24. Which music makes you feel physical, emotional and intellectual strength?
25. Is there a secular work of music you consider as an equivalent of a sacred work of music?
26. Does the geography of music matter to you?
27. How would you put utopia into sounds?
28. How would you put the fullness of life into sounds?
29. What is the highest goal you could achieve with music?

IV Premise

The short motto of TOM gives at the same time its starting point: that both philosophy and musical practice deal with questions and are, in essence, acts of wonder. Methodologically, this suggestion creates a common ground between philosophy and music and serves as an invitation to think musical practice together with philosophical asking and wondering. This premise is graphically presented by a quarter note put next to a question and an exclamation mark ♪ ? ! as if the quarter note were transformed first to a question and then to an exclamation mark.

V Order and organisation of the questions

TOM consists of 29 questions put one after the other. While I was working on the project I was thinking of organizing these questions into clusters. Very soon I abandoned the idea for two reasons: a) clusters would give a formal character I would rather avoid—they would work against the immediacy and of intimacy I want to convey, but, most important, b) I wanted to give a musical tone in this questionnaire, it should be like a symphonic movement or an overture that has an escalation, where the beginning concerns something more personal that proceeds to something brighter, like a bird's-eye view. Take the beginning and the end. The first question sounds almost intimidatingly personal: “If you could inhabit a musical work, which one would you choose?”; and the last, “What is the highest goal you could achieve with music?”, sounds like law-making. In sum, I thought the less formalized the order of the questions was, the more musical and, thus, attractive the outcome would be.

VI Key notions

Behind most questions key notions of life-philosophy can be traced: music as a game of oppositional forces (# 9); music as conveying feelings of life (# 14); the ubiquity of music (# 11, 15, 16); the geography of music (# 26); the openness to various cultures of music or musical pluralism (# 19 and # 22); the idea that all arts come out of the spirit of music and that music makes the content of other arts more intimate (# 10, 12, 13); the comparison of musical and religious experience (# 25); the issue of vitality, the idea that music should promote vitality [understood in a very broad sense and not physiological] (# 24); the bond of music and mythology (# 20); the notion that music expresses the fullness of life (# 28); the faith in the great potential of music (# 27, 29).

VII Philosophers behind the questions

To render the questions representative of the spirit of life-philosophy meant also to let the individual voices of the philosophers sound. Let us now see the names behind the questions. Question # 1 is

inspired by Rilke and Plessner; # 2 by Nietzsche; # 3 by Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Rilke and Dilthey; # 4 by Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Rilke; # 5 by Nietzsche; # 6 by Rilke; # 7 by Schopenhauer; # 8 by Rilke; # 9 by Nietzsche and Dilthey, # 10 by Nietzsche; # 11 and 12 by Rilke; # 13 by Schlegel; # 14 by Dilthey; # 15 by Nietzsche, Klages and Rilke; # 16 by Rilke; # 20 by Nietzsche and Spengler; # 22 by Bergson; # 25 by Dilthey; # 26 by Nietzsche and Ortega y Gasset; # 27 by Richard Wagner; # 28 by Nietzsche and Rilke, # 29 by Nietzsche.

These are the philosophers behind each question. Sometime there is only one, sometimes two, sometimes three. Some philosophers are more present like Nietzsche, others much less. The reason for this is plausible. Not all life-philosophers have written equally on music. Nietzsche has written more than any other life-philosopher on music, being himself a musician—not to forget—and he is consequently overrepresented. And if Rilke seems overtly represented, all the more given the fact that he is not a philosopher even though he stands close to life-philosophy, that should not surprise because his writings on music are highly dependable on Nietzsche and, thus, becomes a kind of literary communicator of him.

VIII Conclusion

TOM is a self-reflection tool for musicians in the spirit of philosophical practice. Behind its 29 questions lie key notions and individual voices of life-philosophy. The questions give impulses for self-reflection concerning personal relationship to music, performance and repertoire. The ideal outcome would be, first, a fruitful self-reflection of the person who deals with the questionnaire, and, second, that this questionnaire functions as an invitation for a further exchange with life-philosophy and its aesthetics of music.

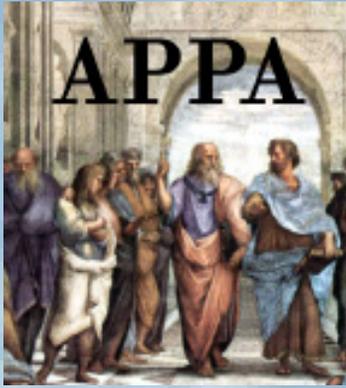
Note

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Aims and Scope

Philosophical Practice is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the growing field of applied philosophy. The journal covers substantive issues in the areas of client counseling, group facilitation, and organizational consulting. It provides a forum for discussing professional, ethical, legal, sociological, and political aspects of philosophical practice, as well as juxtapositions of philosophical practice with other professions. Articles may address theories or methodologies of philosophical practice; present or critique case-studies; assess developmental frameworks or research programs; and offer commentary on previous publications. The journal also has an active book review and correspondence section.

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Nobody Governs Truth**