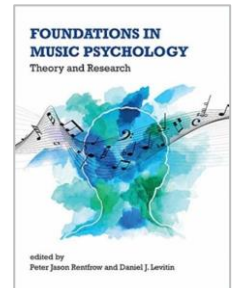


## BOOK REVIEW

# Foundations in music psychology: Theory and research (Rentfrow & Levitin, Eds.)

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**Title:** Foundations in music psychology: Theory and research **Editors:** Peter Jason Rentfrow & Daniel J. Levitin  
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Music psychology is often viewed as a relatively new field of study, as it has only become widely recognised beyond academic circles since the early 1970s. However, as in music therapy, some of the fundamental concepts, including the use of music for enhanced wellbeing, originated in ancient Greece, where music was seen as praxial, "skilled, intentional, action that is judged as "good" according to the benefits it provides to specific groups of people in specific contexts" (Elliott & Silverman, 2012, p. 29). As early as the nineteenth-century, William James was formulating psychological theories about the relationship between emotions and music. His observation that activities (including singing) can stimulate as well as express emotion (James, 1890) has had an impact on how modern researchers view the contribution of music to mental health. Contemporary psychological research "contributes to the understanding of music by characterizing the processing mechanisms of the listener" (Deutsch, 2013, p. 26). This growing understanding of why and how music affects us can be helpful in developing creative, educational, and therapeutic applications.

*Foundations in Music Psychology*, is a well-structured introduction to some of the main topics in what is now a burgeoning field of research. Parts 1 and 2 explain many of the basic principles underpinning music perception and cognition, including the way in which the human brain processes pitch, rhythm and timbre. Part 3 also provides introductory material on the role of music in our lives, from an evolutionary and cross-cultural angle. Part 4 focuses on various aspects of musical training, ability and performance, including an evaluation of the role of musical assessment and a discussion

of concepts of musical ability. Finally, part 5 explores the social and emotional effects of musical experiences in everyday life.

The individual chapters cover some of the topics that are of perennial interest to musicians and non-musicians alike, including exploring the contrasting phenomena of amusia (Quintin, Lense and Tramo) and absolute pitch (Levitin). Jakobson and Cuddy's chapter on music training and transfer effects provides a raft of strong arguments in favour of musical education and training, including the intrinsic value of musical participation as well as the more commonly cited extramusical benefits, such as improving listening and language related skills, prosocial behaviour, emotional expression, and behavioural regulation.

For readers specifically interested in the relationship between music psychology and music therapy, the chapter by Etoile and Roth provides a comprehensive summary of the development and application of a wide range of theoretical frameworks and practical therapeutic approaches. References to music therapy research are threaded throughout other chapters, including Annabel Cohen's contribution which thoroughly explores the physical, psychological, and social aspects of singing before discussing the benefits to wellbeing and therapeutic applications of voice work. A welcome inclusion, which is not often featured in music psychology publications, is McGarry, Sternin and Grahn's discussion of music and movement, including the use of music in gait interventions, the role of dance therapy, and using music as a motivational adjunct to physical exercise.

This edited volume would provide a firm foundation for researchers with a special interest in the complex relationship between brain functioning and the functions of music. Each chapter begins with concise definitions related to the topic under discussion and some useful background to the relevant research. However, the title of the book, in some ways, belies the academic level of the content. The book would be an invaluable reference for anyone already researching, teaching or studying topics in music psychology, as it provides detailed information on a broad spectrum of fundamental topics. The content, though, is not purely foundational, as some of the more technical sections in each chapter would not be easily accessible to newcomers to the discipline.

There are a few additions which would enhance the accessibility of this book for all potential readers. Whilst there are some helpful illustrations in most chapters, more use of diagrams, charts and tables would further improve the reading experience. A glossary of terms would also be useful, as most chapters contain swathes of specialised vocabulary. This is understandable, given the nature of the topics under consideration, but some of this terminology is likely to be unfamiliar even to seasoned researchers or practitioners. In some places, footnotes could also be used judiciously to reduce the density of the main body of the text.

There are also a few surprising omissions and rectifying these would add to the impact and accessibility of the book. Firstly, there is no editorial foreword or general introduction to the discipline of music psychology. This would have helped to contextualise the content, to clarify the purpose of the book, and to identify the intended audience. Secondly, all contributors were obviously selected for their expertise in their specialisms, and it would have been helpful to include authors' biographies to contextualise their writing.

The above reservations aside, *Foundations in Music Psychology* is a weighty tome, with 951 pages in total, comprising 21 chapters full of insights from scholars with wide-ranging experience in relevant research, theory, and praxis. The editors have adopted a truly interdisciplinary approach, drawing on

the contributors' combined expertise in areas including music psychology, music cognition, music therapy, musicology, musical evolution, education, public health, social psychology, and neuroscience. This publication highlights the potential for future collaborative research and sharing of ideas, and it is to be hoped that this interdisciplinary work might be a catalyst for developing innovative practical resources and strategies in music education, performance and therapy.

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