

John Sloboda, *Exploring the Musical Mind: Cognition, Emotion, Ability, Function*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-19-853012-9 (hardcover) EUR 81.23. ISBN 0-19-853013-7 (paperback) EUR 36.85

This collection of articles chronicles the extraordinary journey of one of music psychology's preeminent scholars. John Sloboda himself portrays an initial impulse for this collection as, in part, a "tidying up" — a coda to a 30-year research career which, at the time of its conception, he felt might be "about to come to an end". *Exploring the Musical Mind* contains 22 reprinted articles, reviews, and book chapters, drawn from Sloboda's 120-odd publications. These are framed by an introductory preface and a final chapter that reflects on the ethics of research. Many of the items reprinted here were published in less accessible sources, so their assembly in a single volume is a welcome though expensive convenience.

John Sloboda's research interests have spanned an impressive range of musical topics. His published scholarship includes work on the psychology of music reading, musical memory, music and language, musical meaning, music and autism, musical development, music and emotion, performance timing, musical ability and expertise, musical function, listening behaviours, and music and worship. This range of topics is matched by an equally diverse range of research methods. In this single volume, one finds research using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Different chapters involve experimental hypothesis testing, free visual recall, survey methods, experience sampling methods (using pagers), autobiographical surveys, and Sloboda's own personal introspections as a musician.

Exploring the Musical Mind traces a distinctive intellectual journey. Sloboda's earliest research articles exhibit behaviourist leanings which quickly give way to a more cognitive orientation. In keeping with mainstream cognitive psychology, Sloboda's writings in the 1980s assume that the principal task of music psychology is to characterize the structure of musical knowledge. As cognitive psychology morphed into cognitive science, the new discipline rested upon the twin pillars of artificial intelligence and linguistics. These pillars are reflected in Sloboda's early enthusiasms for Christopher Longuet-Higgins' computer modeling of metre, on the one hand, and for Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff's linguistically inspired theory of music, on the other. "I have no doubt at all," wrote Sloboda in 1986, that "the coming of age of our discipline [...] was the publication in 1983 of Lerdahl and Jackendoff's *Generative Theory of Tonal Music*" (p. 102).

By the 1990s, Sloboda's growing interest in emotion led him to become critical of the "propositional" or "cold" approach to cognition. His writings document a gradual moving away from a structural or linguistically inspired model and growing embrace of a more non-propositional or "hot" approach. In 1991, he wrote: "Because modern systematic studies of music have approached it with the tools of cognitive science and linguistics, the emotional aspect of music has been virtually

overlooked, and naive readers of modern research studies might be forgiven for thinking that music is simply another kind of complex structure to be apprehended like chess or physics” (p. 254).

Despite his abandonment of the structure-of-knowledge approach, Sloboda’s subsequent writings on musical emotion remained true to his cognitivist roots. References to Lerdahl and Jackendoff are replaced by references to the work of Anthony Ortony and his colleagues. Sloboda’s theoretical perspective shifts to what Randolph Cornelius refers to as “appraisal theories” (Cornelius, 1996). “The experience of emotion,” argues Sloboda, “arises when substantial cognitive re-appraisal is required, and accompanies such re-appraisal” (p. 199).

Appraisal theorists stress the importance of cognitive interpretation in shaping emotions and deemphasize the role of automatic or reflexive feelings. Sloboda’s embrace of appraisal theories is reflected in his criticisms of what he calls the “pharmaceutical” model of musical emotion. The effects of music should not be likened to the effects of some drug on human physiology, he argues. The effects of music are far more situational, less reliable than a drug, and are mediated by the choices and mental state of the listener. “It should not take too much reflection,” he suggests, “to reject the pharmaceutical model as hopelessly inadequate” (p. 346). Sloboda blames this way of thinking for impeding the progress of emotion research in music (p. 319).

In the world of emotion research, appraisal theory represents only one of several major schools of thought (see Cornelius, 1996). While appraisal theorists rightly draw attention to the importance of cognitive interpretation and situational variables, other theories are better able to account for other aspects of emotional behaviour and affective phenomenology. Sloboda shows little interest in the more physiologically grounded approaches that are fundamental to the newer cognitive neuroscience of music. For example, he overlooks the work of Isabelle Peretz, Robert Zatorre, and others.

Even the research studies cited by Sloboda in support of his appraisalist views lend equivalent credence to the dreaded “pharmaceutical” conception of musical emotion. Research by Sloboda’s own students (Neilly, 1995; De Las Heras, 1997) shows that in contemporary societies, listeners do indeed commonly use music as a self-administered mood regulator — to help wake up in the morning, to relax, energize, etc. Even drugs affect people differently, are not always reliable, and are mediated by situational factors such as mental states. As musicians, we might be offended by the tendency for listeners to use music like a psychoactive drug, but as scholars we cannot ignore the implications of these practices.

Perhaps Sloboda’s most influential work relates to musical expertise — in particular, the acquisition and development of musical skill. Two studies (Sloboda, Davidson and Howe, 1994; Sloboda, Davidson, Howe and Moore, 1996) suggest that the main factor influencing musical achievement is simply *practice*. These results are consistent with other research. For example, Sosniak (1985) found that

none of 24 top U.S. pianists showed any distinctive signs of exceptional ability when they began their musical training. Similarly, Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Römer (1993) found that student violinists rated “excellent” had accumulated twice as many hours of practice compared with “average” student players of equivalent age. Sloboda comments that “the notion that very early achievement is the normal precursor of adult excellence finds very little support in the documented research literature. The child prodigy may be the exception rather than the norm” (p. 269).

Sloboda argues against the notion of some innate musical talent that is distributed unevenly throughout the population. He goes on to point out the educational repercussions of his view: “the most consistent and educationally sound conclusion to adhere to at the present time is that if there is such a thing as musical talent (interpreted as an inborn capacity for and predisposition towards musical activity), then it exists to equal measure in the vast majority of the population, and in no way accounts for the very wide range of adult musical accomplishment that exists in the populations of industrialized societies such as ours” (p. 301).

The results of Sloboda’s research happily mesh with his egalitarian and humanitarian concerns. In Chapter 19 (a reprint of Sloboda, 1999) his social concerns are finally brought to the fore. “Where have all the musicians gone?” he asks. Sloboda laments the decline of the social institutions that formerly supported a range of amateur music-making: sing-alongs at the local pub, village festivals, church choirs, brass bands, and other venues. Moving beyond the empirical research, Sloboda agrees with Simon Frith’s (1996) assessment that the gateways to music-making are now appropriated by “the academy” — music departments, conservatories, music examinations, competitions, and the private tutor system promoted by classical music (p. 340).

Sloboda is critical of the elitism promulgated by academic musicians. “The academy in most of its manifestations promotes the classical performance tradition as the paradigm and paragon of what music ‘really’ is, and what it is to be a musician. Limited nods in the direction of jazz and an assortment of exotica labelled as ‘world musics’ hardly modify the message that the academy sends to most people” (p. 342). Sloboda argues that, rather than promoting mass participation, academic musical training raises barriers. The traditions and forms of the academy are inaccessible to most people.

Sloboda agrees with the long-standing interpretation — inspired by Karl Marx — that the professionalization of music redirects our conception of music and musicianship from appreciating its intrinsic value to appreciating its exchange value: “Art is often seen as of no value except as a commodity to be purchased by consumers for ‘entertainment’ in exchange for hard cash. Therefore musical expertise is only valued to the extent that it can earn money for the purveyors of entertainment” (p. 341). Sloboda blames the media for dumbing down music to mere entertainment. At the same time, he blames music academia for denigrating recreational music-making.

The main message of the book is to be found in the final four chapters, a set of writings given the collective title "Music in the Real World". Here Sloboda expresses his deep political concerns and outlines a new professional and personal agenda:

At a personal level I have constantly been struggling with the issue of justifying what I do for a living, in a world where there appear to be so many more pressing issues requiring the resources of collective human intelligence. In the context of the state of the world, the question that poses itself to me, repeatedly, and in increasingly stark form is:

How can I allow myself the luxury of researching music psychology, when half the world's population lives below the poverty line, when millions of children die of malnutrition and avoidable disease every year, when the activities and consumption patterns of the rich world are destroying the ability of the planet to sustain human life into the long term future, and when violence between people grows increasingly dangerous as the means to inflict violence become ever more lethal and large-scale (p. 406).

The tipping point for Sloboda was in March 1999 when nineteen NATO nations intervened militarily in the Serbia crisis. Sloboda describes his feelings of anger, sorrow and despair at these events. With the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Sloboda experienced a political awakening that resulted in a new set of priorities. Although Sloboda retains a part-time faculty position at Keele University, he has now taken on a second career working on behalf of a non-governmental organization promoting peace and disarmament.

Sadly, the declaration of Sloboda's admirable personal mission is marred by parting swipes at the science of music. In Chapter 22, Sloboda suggests that the science of music fails to address questions of importance, that music science is complicit with the forces of Western capitalism, and that researchers are engaged in gross and offensive simplifications. In describing one experiment, he likens the choosing of exemplar stimuli to a bigot's dismissal of the individuality of members of some ethnic minority (p. 376). It is a disappointing postscript to an otherwise admirable career in music psychology.

John Sloboda has been an inspiration to many of us in the field. His earlier 1985 book *The Musical Mind* introduced many people to the psychology of music. His new book *Exploring the Musical Mind* reminds us of Sloboda's many contributions to our field. We wish Dr. Sloboda the very best in his new career as he works for a more peaceful world¹.

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