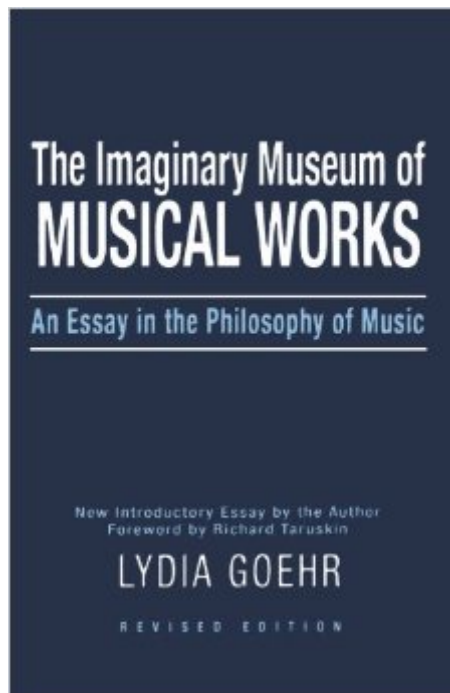


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The Imaginary Museum Of Musical Works: An Essay In The Philosophy Of Music



Synopsis

What is involved in the composition, performance, and reception of classical music? What are we doing when we listen to this music seriously? Why when playing a Beethoven sonata do performers begin with the first note indicated in the score; why don't they feel free to improvise around the sonata's central theme? Why, finally, does it go against tradition for an audience at a concert of classical music to tap its feet? Bound up in these questions is the overriding question of what it means philosophically, musically, and historically for musicians to speak about music in terms of "works". In this book, Lydia Goehr describes how the concept of a musical work fully crystallized around 1800, and subsequently defined the norms, expectations, and behavioral patterns that have come to characterize classical musical practice. The description is set in the context of a more general philosophical account of the rise and fall of concepts and ideals, and of their normative functions; at the same time, debates amongst conductors, early-music performers, and avant-gardists are addressed. *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* is a seminal work of scholarship, and has appeared in an astonishing variety of contexts and disciplines from musicological and philosophical since its initial publication. This second edition features a new Introductory Essay by the author, discussing the genesis of her groundbreaking thesis, how her subsequent work has followed and developed similar themes, and how criticisms along the way have informed not only her own work but the "Imaginary Museum" concept more generally as it spread across disciplinary lines. A provocative foreword by Richard Taruskin contextualizes Goehr's argument and points to its continuing centrality to the field.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book does not claim to be more than An Essay in the Philosophy of Music and addresses itself primarily to the question "What Is a Work?" I can see that this is a hot issue in early music, but in the last two centuries, I had thought that these matters had all been thrashed out by the Absurdist and copyright lawyers. Evidently, philosophers are still chewing on this question. Try, "Character indifference is a reflexive, symmetric, and transitive relation which, by obtaining, produces a class of character-indifferent inscriptions under the partition generated by this relation" (p.23). However, the arcane terminology of professional philosophers, particularly the post-modernists, can look like bafflegab to a layperson. Do you exist? Do I? Is there any such thing as Reality? Skipping over those, the author asks some tough questions, such as "How much liberty should the conductor be allowed in interpreting an orchestral score?" There are deep discussions here, but the author does not offer firm answers and I believe I've seen more concise answers in other books. If your interest is mainly in music history of the last two centuries, this will be slow going for a meager yield.

I found this book to be thoroughly engrossing, exciting, and fascinating. I frequently get into all sorts of hand-waving strange arguments with people, about "musical works" (e.g. my pseudo-"composition"/appropriation work "Your Life Up To This Moment"), and in Lydia Goehr's book, I found a very useful framework for thinking clearly and critically about such things.

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