

Melodies of the Mind: Connections Between Psychoanalysis and Music

By Julie Jaffee Nagel. Published by Routledge/Taylor & Francis, Nov 2012. 168 pp, 6 x 9 in. \$37.95 (paperback). 978-0-415-69279-3.

In her insightful and scholarly new book, *Melodies of the Mind: Connections between psychoanalysis and music*, Julie Jaffee Nagel invites us to look below the surface of the music and composers we know to explore the larger emotional landscape around us and within us. Her terrain is deep and wide, connecting the complex world of music to the dynamic principles of psychoanalysis and the unconscious. She describes how “musical and psychoanalytic concepts inform each other, showing the ways that music itself provides an exceptional non-verbal pathway to emotion” (p77). The book ambitiously illustrates how such an interdisciplinary approach can help decipher and address the larger psychological, social and educational issues of our times. As an experienced psychologist/psychoanalyst and classically trained musician from Juilliard, one could not ask for a more soulful guide.

The book is intended for a wide range of readers (clinicians, musicians, music lovers, students, teachers, professionals in the humanities and social services) and is organized into three parts with eight chapters.

Part I: The Aural Road (Chapter 1) begins with Dr. Nagel’s early experience that music helped her “feel what she could not articulate” (p3) and goes on to explain how she increasingly came to understand music as a source of “quasi-clinical data.” In framing her position, she offers a historical perspective on how classical psychoanalytic thinkers of different eras viewed the significance of music in mental life. She shares her notable surprise, for example, that Sigmund Freud himself professed a lack of interest in the topic. She goes on to detail how other writers—from Max Graf in 1910 to Ernst Kris and Heinz Kohut in the 1950s to modern analysts such as Feder in the 1990s—furthered the conversation. Part I concludes with the first two of many clinical vignettes from Dr. Nagel’s psychoanalytic practice.

In Part II: Moods and Melodies (Chapters 2–7), Nagel presents five thought-provoking “case-ettes” and includes a discography of selected CDs and DVDs for music cited. Nagel explains that her “case-ettes” represent “a metaphorical amalgamation of clinical vignettes and musical compositions.” While most powerful when considered together, each case-ette stands alone in illustrating the relationships between specific psychological themes and specific musical aspects. The case-ettes show how the formal aspects of music may parallel psychoanalytic concepts such as manifest and latent content,

multiple function, overdetermination, displacement, dissonance, consonance, silence, tension, conflict, and ambiguity. She demonstrates how music can illuminate the unconscious material previously unavailable through verbal means for a listener, composer, or therapy client. Indeed, this is a recurring feature in all of the case-ettes.

While a full description of the case-ettes is well beyond the scope of this review, some specific highlights of them will be offered by way of introduction. By no means do these highlights adequately mirror the color or complexity of Nagel’s rich analyses.

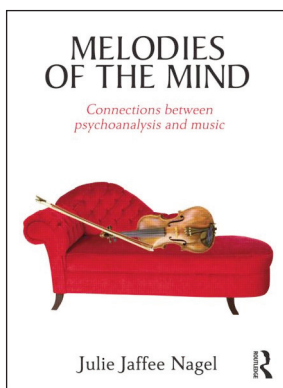
Case-ette 1 explores the theme of musical and psychological ambiguity using Leonard Bernstein’s score for *West Side Story*. Dr. Nagel suggests: “In this case, the tritone as used throughout *West Side Story* and especially in “Gee, Officer Krupke” represents a sonic metaphor for ambiguity, restlessness, and instability. As we listen, we are drawn into a search for tonal and emotional resolution that reflects the young characters’ profound inner turmoil” (p34).

In addition to addressing how specific aspects of the music brings the characters’ conflicts and issues to life for the audience, she describes the history of the use of the musical interval, the *tritone*, and even respectfully speculates how the composer’s artistic use of it may have been “a multiply determined aural vehicle that allowed him to express his own intrapsychic contradictions through sound” (p37).

In case-ette 2, the theme of self-esteem is featured in Nagel’s analysis of Sergei Prokofiev’s musical fairy tale *Peter and the Wolf*. She begins by describing the interrelationships between music, dreams, the use of animals as symbols, fairytales and psychoanalytic themes. She goes on to illustrate how Prokofiev’s characters, human and animal, are linked with particular instruments and musical themes and how musical thematic motifs in the composition follow Peter’s psychosocial development, “displaced onto animals and their adventures” (p47).

Case-ette 3 uses Mozart’s Piano Sonata in A Minor, K.310 written in 1778 to illustrate the themes of separation, loss, grief, and growth experienced by the composer as a young man. Nagel follows the 22-year-old Mozart through significant psychological events—his separation from his father, the death of his beloved mother, other significant losses, and his subsequent self-expression and individuation from traditional musical canons. The discussion concludes with Nagel describing the case of Ms. A, whose verbal association to a familiar song permitted access to deeper emotional material than was previously available to her, thereby facilitating the progress of the analysis.

Case-ette 4 opens with another case study from Nagel’s clinical practice. She describes how Ms. O’s simple act of unselfconsciously humming a particular tune created a safe space for exploration of her inner world and how this was used productively in her analysis over time. Nagel goes on to show how the use of tonality in Verdi’s opera *Otello*, particularly in the use of the *Bacio* (Kiss) theme, brings the listener emotionally into the opera’s core themes of conflict, jealousy, and murder. She explains: “Music ‘works’ because it has the



capacity to put us in touch with the vulnerabilities, strengths, and complexities of our own psyches, allowing for regression to primal instincts while also permitting ego mastery. Music resonates uniquely with each listener's inner life" (p87).

In case-ette 5, Dr. Nagel provides a richly detailed narrative of Donizetti's opera *Lucia di Lammermoor* from a psychoanalytic perspective. She illustrates how the music itself amplifies the characters' core themes of shame, betrayal, rage, and revenge. In the process, she informs the reader of various analytic opinions as to the inner workings of these powerful affects and how music, perhaps more than any other art form, may directly stir the listener's unconscious understanding and response.

Case-ette 6 focuses on the concepts of multiple function and polyphony using the case of Mr. B. and the "Tonight Ensemble" from *West Side Story* to illustrate. For the lay reader, "multiple function" refers to the fact that any significant psychological tendency fulfills more than one unconscious function whereas polyphony refers to the simultaneous experiencing and/or expression of opposites.

Nagel first describes the psychoanalytic treatment of Mr. B., a graduate piano student, for severe performance anxiety. She allows the reader to accompany her on the developments in the case as she came to understand how her patient's dysfunctions in many areas, including his performance anxiety, were indeed a complex and often contradictory adaptation to his multiple unresolved childhood conflicts and psychological pain. She explains how his core dynamics and behavior were further re-enacted with her as his analyst, which included his abrupt exit from analysis.

Nagel goes on to again describe how music can illustrate similar psychoanalytic principles. In one example, she writes: "In the Tonight Ensemble, we hear *musical* polyphony through harmonic dissonances, clashing tonalities, and multiple rhythms; these elements provide an aural analogue for the characters' verbal expressions of latent and manifest motivations, drives and defenses (p105)." She reflects on how "the music powerfully conveys the fluctuations of the stage characters' emotions while pulling for those of the listener's simultaneously."

Part III: The Aural/Oral Road Less Traveled, Chapter 8, concludes the book with a well-conceived and far reaching essay on the crucial role played by music and psychoanalytic sensibilities, not just in the concert hall or therapist's office, but in our culture at large. Nagel once again utilizes a blend of historical information and perspective with current examples to make her point about the importance of interdisciplinary contributions and multi-faceted depth approaches.

Nagel outlines the ongoing challenges faced by depth approaches in the social, political, educational, economic, and

health realms. She rightfully laments the accelerating erosion of interest in appropriately complex and long range solutions to problems in all of our major institutions. She quotes Patricia Gourguechon (2011) in calling this a "public health crisis ... a national emergency of superficiality, of simplification of cause and effect, and of ignoring or trivializing the inner life" (p113) and goes on to describe this as a "crisis in creative and critical thinking" (p113).

Despite these discouraging trends, Dr. Nagel goes on to describe various possibilities for developing collaborative programs utilizing psychoanalysis and music in such areas as education, social services and political involvement. For example, she cites the work of Isaac Tylim (2009) who advocates using psychoanalytic approaches in international affairs to problem-solve, negotiate, and understand entrenched issues of prejudice and aggression (p117). She ends with a reminder to the reader that "music and psychoanalysis contribute powerfully to thinking, feeling, understanding and the creation of meaning is a lasting legacy for both disciplines" (p119).

A brief aside: as an analytically-informed clinical psychologist, I have been encouraged by the growing appreciation amongst practitioners in my field of analytic approaches in general, but especially in the treatment of trauma. Advances in neuropsychology underscore the critical importance of emotion, the unconscious, somatic learning, attachment, and self-regulation in human development. This is especially relevant to understanding and healing the effects of trauma where cognitive processes can take one only so far. Indeed, cognitive processes have been over-valued at the expense of emotion in clinical psychology for decades, contributing to the devaluation of psychoanalytic work.

While economic interests in healthcare will undoubtedly continue to undervalue psychoanalytic approaches for the foreseeable future, psychoanalytically informed musicians, clinicians, teachers, and policy makers of all disciplines will benefit from understanding how the power of music informs their repertoires. *Melodies of the Mind* is not light reading as is fitting of its subject matter. I highly recommend that the musicians and practitioners of the Performing Arts Medicine Association read this book.

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