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# Tributes to Leonard B. Meyer: He Was the Very Model of a Modern Musicologist

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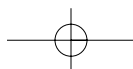
*He Was the Very Model of a Modern Musicologist*

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Rarely does a scholar so greatly influence a field as Leonard B. Meyer has ours. With unparalleled clarity and wit, his scholarship offers a vision of how one could (and should) study music. From his first and most famous book—*Emotion and Meaning in Music* (1956)—to his last—*The Spheres of Music* (2000)—Meyer broke ground on subjects that other musicologists feared, disdained, or simply ignored, including melodic structure, implication and realization, closure, rhythm and meter, the evolution of style, the influence of culture and ideology on musical experience, and defining the musical parameters.

Throughout his revolutionary scholarly career, Meyer argued that music is a subjective, cognitive experience. Musical structure to Meyer was not an abstract and timeless object frozen on the notated page, but rather a very real, dynamic process in the listener's mind. Thus, what was once the domain solely of musicologists became fair game for psychologists. Conversely, Meyer made subjects such as emotion, expectation, and memory reasonable ones for musicologists, allowing them to shift attention from composers' processes to listeners' perceptions, and to demand more rigor and evidence for claims about the nature of musical structure. At the same time, he showed those in the sciences and in the humanities the value of crossing disciplinary boundaries. By using the methods of cognitive psychology, anthropology, linguistics, computer science, and other fields, one gains invaluable knowledge about musical experience. Even more important, by studying music, one learns about the totality of human experience: the arts, language, culture, and history.

Perhaps the best way to evaluate Meyer's oeuvre is by his own standards: "A theory is valuable, not only for conclusions it reaches and the phenomena it explains, but also for the questions and discoveries to which it leads. If the ideas presented . . . can lead to new questions and through them to new answers, if they can lead to reformulations, and if they can lead to a more fruitful analysis and criticism of music, this will be their best ultimate validation." (Meyer, 1956, p. 255) Given that



we have the opportunity to study meter perception, emotion in music, musical memory, and other fields directly derived from his work, the value of Meyer's scholarship is astonishing. His theories have directly led us to questions and discoveries, to reformulations, and most certainly to a more fruitful analysis and criticism of music.

The fruits of Meyer's labors have nourished us for over 50 years, and yet, we have by no means exhausted his resources. So rich is his prose that we often miss some of the trees for the forest. His books, like Brahms symphonies or John Coltrane solos, stand up to repeated readings, each time enlightening us in new ways. Perhaps our greatest challenge is to ensure that future generations appreciate Meyer's genius as we do. His work, including but not limited to *Emotion and Meaning*, should be the backbone of not only graduate seminars and courses on the psychology of music but also the pedagogies of our specific disciplines. Introductory psychology and introductory music theory classes and textbooks would benefit enormously from his wisdom and intellectual profundity.

Like the Gestalts that he persuasively argued shape our listening experience, Meyer was more than the sum of his parts. As we celebrate the enduring impact of Leonard Meyer's scholarship, we also lament the loss of Lenny. We can and will return many times to his books but will forever miss his quotes of Shakespeare and Gilbert and Sullivan that seemed to perfectly encapsulate the feelings and thoughts at hand. We can and will continue to be inspired by his ideas, searching for answers to his questions about the nature of the human mind, but we will forever miss his irreverence and the dirty jokes that somehow fit into discussions of Brahms, hierarchical structure, and cultural evolution. We can and will teach our students the value of his unparalleled contribution not only to the psychology of music but also to music theory, music history, ethnomusicology, and aesthetics, amongst other fields, but we will forever miss his smile, his laugh, and his extraordinary good nature. As we recognize that Leonard B. Meyer belongs to the pantheon of immortal scholars who have revolutionized how we think, we must also, unfortunately, say goodbye to Lenny.

