

USC Department of Philosophy Presents

**Jonathan Neufeld
College of Charleston**

“The Emotional and Ethical Expression in Music”

Friday, September 8th

3:30-5 p.m.

Close-Hipp 303



One of art's central functions is to express and explore emotions and art has long been taken to be able more delicately, interestingly, strikingly to capture and to communicate emotion than ordinary modes of communication. The importance of emotional expression has increasingly been explored in both ethical and political deliberation. In recent years, a great deal of interesting work has been done on the connection between Aesthetics and Ethics where emotional expression serves as a kind of bridge. While there has been an explosion of work on ethics and literature, film, painting, photography, videogames—on ethics and narrative and representational arts—there has been significantly less work has been done on the relationship between ethics and non-narrative and non-representational music—what Pete Kivy called “music alone”. With a few notable exceptions, instrumental music without a narrative program has thus far not received much sustained philosophical attention. There has been, on the other hand, an abundance of work on music and emotion. If we might find a valuable role in ethics for art's nuanced articulation of emotions, then why the disconnect between the expression of emotion in music and ethics? In this talk, I want to argue for what appears to be a relatively modest thesis that, I think, has surprisingly far-reaching consequences. Namely, if one thinks that emotion terms of even modest complexity are appropriate in the description and evaluation of music, then one must also be open to the possibility of ethical terms being appropriately applied to music. As a result, many questions that arise in aesthetics and ethics debates about representational and narrative arts can arise when considering purely instrumental music. Appreciating this will help us better understand the role that the arts in general can play in ethical and political deliberation.

Join Us!

