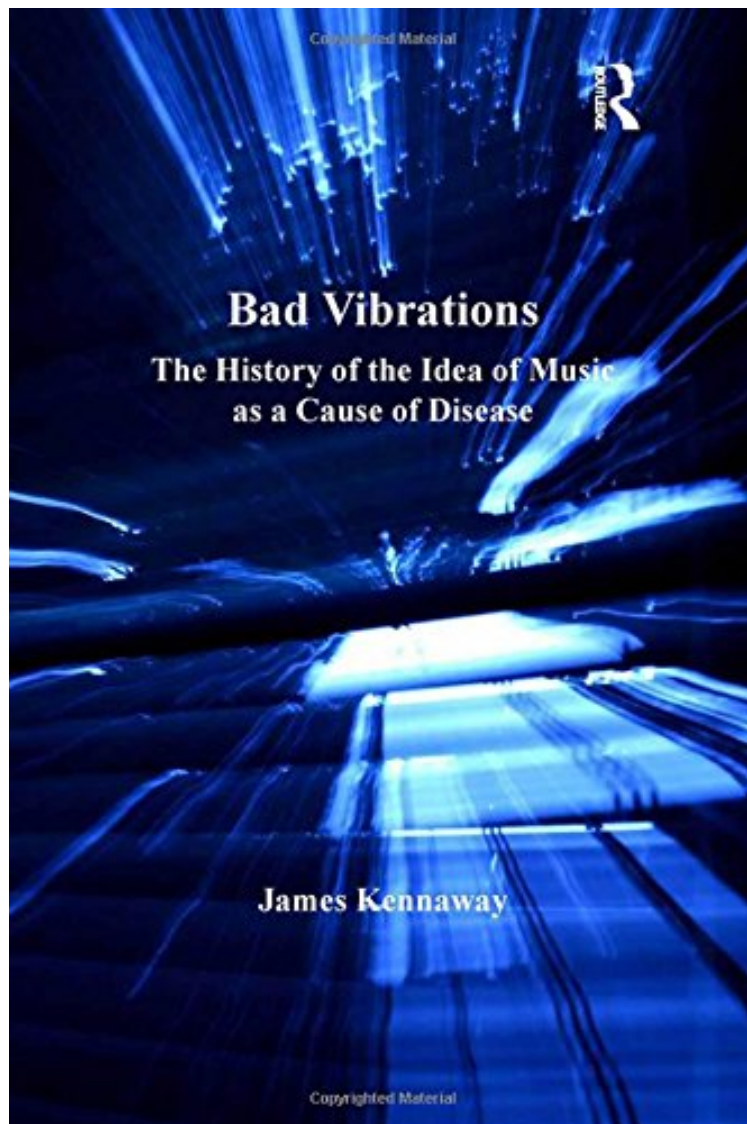


[Library ebook] Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease (The History of Medicine in Context)

Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease (The History of Medicine in Context)

James Kennaway

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James Kennaway : Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease (The History of Medicine in Context) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bad Vibrations: The History of the Idea of Music as a Cause of Disease (The History of Medicine in Context):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Great and essential reading By Allyson B. This insightful book

applies forensic psychology to create a clear picture of how vibrations and music impact the human mind.³ of 3 people found the following review helpful. Great and informative study

By Alexander From the pen of James Kennaway, a historian of medicine at Durham University with an interest in popular culture, this detailed account of the shifting representation of the nature, hidden dangers and even strategic uses of music now arrives. In the five main chapters of Kennaway's study, music and disorder, nervous condition, Wagnerism, special treatment of music in Germany and the USA and finally music as a weapon, the author adds valuable detail to music appreciation throughout the centuries. My review, however, will focus on the unique position jazz holds in a discussion on the sensual qualities of music as identified by Kennaway. Going back as far as to Plato's warnings that a change in the use of music and harmonies would finally lead to the general disobedience of laws, alteration, progress and evolution of musical styles have been critically surveyed by the ones deeming themselves in the position to judge upon these. The greatest shift, however, in this critical supervision of music took place in the late 18th century when recent developments in musical presentation "doubtlessly" seemed to be the reason for hysteria, a decay of morals and an urge to let go all discipline. Music - while being transferred to the body through vibrations and hence being a matter of nervous attraction - thus was responsible for disease, hysteria and could ruin one's life. This shaped the idea that music was, in fact, pathological music. And this is why (I guess) the book is called "Bad Vibrations," still echoing Brian Wilson's great surf tune "Good Vibrations." Even so, also musical brainwashing and the use of subliminal messages and orders hidden in popular music was once popular and is being examined in this study. Already in the Middle Ages was there a profound distrust in the qualities of music since it could stimulate "the flesh" and have all reason and fear of God vanish from the mind of man; hence music was identified as a threat to order and religion just as any other influence that would remind man of self-determination, sensuality and freedom. Another dominant (and as irrelevant) fear was the emasculating effect of harmonies; men could lose their masculinity while listening to music. This is where the notion of something that could be called "musical hygiene" presented itself in a new disguise. Although there are historical sources that state the healing powers of music, the sheer complexity of the subject and the fact that music was one form of nervous stimulation made it easier to condemn the art form altogether. For especially in the 18th and 19th centuries over stimulation was seen as the source for a wide range of diseases. To the sense of "musical hygiene," the aspect of "racial hygiene" was added later and Kennaway correctly states that the two countries where this idea was carried out most vehemently were, in fact, Nazi Germany and the USA of the early 21st century. In both countries, the clearly visible effects of the sound on the body and hence possibly uncontrolled sexuality, be it jazz in the USA and the "New Music" in Germany; and in both countries, the comprehensive idea that this music carried the possibility of miscegenation, sickness, was drug related and in conclusion the effect of an overall perverted sexual instinct. Added to the homemade, mostly racist anxieties of the American public concerning ragtime and jazz, in the 1920 the paranoid European theories on new and unusual music were added to the American discourse. There it was not the fear of the "New Music," Jewish influences and the music of the Bolsheviks but the effects of the wild and seemingly untamed rhythms of African-American origin that would stir female sexuality and cause a decay of morals. One of the worst fears was the supposed contagiousness of the rhythms of jazz over long distances (a notion which is satirical portrayed by African-American author Ishmael Reed in *Mumbo Jumbo*). One key element here was the syncopated rhythms of jazz that seemed to have the power to alter a person's state of mind. To cut this short: *Bad Vibrations* is a perfectly unusual and very informative study. For Mr. Kennaway not only dug up documents from the history of medicine; since music and the body naturally are the subject of many academic disciplines we read from sources as diverse as neurology, gender studies, psychiatry, music criticism, the history of the body and the history of emotions. This review was originally posted on [...] where there are many more reviews of books on music and culture.

Music has been used as a cure for disease since as far back as King David's lyre, but the notion that it might be a serious cause of mental and physical illness was rare until the late eighteenth century. At that time, physicians started to argue that excessive music, or the wrong kind of music, could over-stimulate a vulnerable nervous system, leading to illness, immorality and even death. Since then there have been successive waves of moral panics about supposed epidemics of musical nervousness, caused by everything from Wagner to jazz and rock 'n' roll. It was this medical and critical debate that provided the psychiatric rhetoric of "degenerate music" that was the rationale for the persecution of musicians in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. By the 1950s, the focus of medical anxiety about music shifted to the idea that "musical brainwashing" and "subliminal messages" could strain the nerves and lead to mind control, mental illness and suicide. More recently, the prevalence of sonic weapons and the use of music in torture in the so-called War on Terror have both made the subject of music that is bad for the health worryingly topical. This book outlines and explains the development of this idea of pathological music from the Enlightenment until the present day, providing an original contribution to the history of medicine, music and the body.

'What an interesting find! From the pen of James Kennaway, a historian of medicine at Durham University with an interest in popular culture, this detailed account of the shifting representation of the nature, hidden dangers and even strategic uses of music now arrives... *Bad Vibrations* is a perfectly unusual and very informative study.' Jive Talk blog

'[Kennaway's] volume, a musicological and literary analysis, offers a compelling cultural history of the nerves and the invention of pathogenic music... [His] approach is refreshingly broadminded.' *Social History of Medicine* 'Bad Vibrations is a very exciting, well written and intelligent survey with a focus on the dark side of music.' *Torture* 'This is a pioneering work which provides a strong argument for conceptualizing music as a powerful technology that has shaped, and has been shaped by, Western understandings of disease and health in social as well as individual bodies. It suggests that medical professionals and also the lay public have been as interested in music's degenerative effects as in its healing powers, and paves the way for future research that looks at the complex relationship between these conflicting ideas.' *British Journal for the History of Science* 'With its ominous title of *Bad Vibrations*, readers might approach this truly remarkable work of energetic erudition and brilliant scholarly insight with trepidation, but author James Kennaway has produced a thought-provoking opus on the history of music from the perspective of a disciplined medical historian with sufficient scientific knowledge to address the human impact of music and indeed of sounds in general... this is a work destined to become a classic of medical history.' *Lawrence Kruger in the Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* '... raises a vital discussion in that it seeks to include aesthetic experience, particularly the involuntary and content-free aspects of musical experience, in the history of medicine... the book's conversational diction and capacious arguments for the importance of music to the history of medicine are entirely convincing in their aim of bringing critical attention to the topic.' *Year's Work in Critical and Cultural Theory* '... *Bad Vibrations* provides a fascinating study of the intersections of Western medical and musical thought, and it is perhaps one of the few extant books that will appeal simultaneously to scholars of German romanticism, the history of gender and sexuality, Wagner, jazz, heavy metal, and modern neurology. ... an enjoyable read and a worthwhile purchase for any library or scholar seeking a broader perspective on the history of Western music.' *Notes* 'Bad Vibrations offers a fascinating account that will open many doors through which to explore the lively, curious, and sometimes dark relationship between the musical and the medical, as well as the world of sound in which we live.' *ISIS*

About the Author James Kennaway is a historian of medicine, with a joint appointment in the Department of Philosophy and the School of Medicine and Health at Durham University. He specializes in the relationship between music, aesthetics and the body, with broad research interests in the history of physical and mental illness.