Reply to **Robert Cantrick**

Nicholas Cook

[1] Regarding listening: I wasn't arguing that meaning is “in” the music in any metaphysical sense. Meaning is realized through individual acts of experiencing music as meaningful; in this sense it is performative. I argued, however, that specific pieces of music constrain such performances of meaning in specific ways, and to this extent one can say that the music has a determinate potential for meaning. By way of shorthand we tend to refer to this as the music's meaning—but it *is* shorthand, and misleading shorthand, if it leads us to think that music has meaning other than in the act of experiencing it. It was in an attempt to clarify this that I drew a distinction between *potential* and *actualized* meaning.

[2] The point about performance is similar. In my article I talked about constraints inherent in compositional structure—so that I discussed the meaning of (or more correctly, a determinate potential for meaning inherent in) the first movement recapitulation of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, rather than the music as specifically performed by Furtwaengler in 1953, say. Of course listeners don't hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in the abstract, they hear specific performances of it, and each performance adds its own attributes to those specified compositionally. That is, every performance has its own potential for meaning; it can filter out possible meanings or add others. (The model I outlined would work equally well as applied to individual performances.) The kinds of properties I was talking about, however—brightness, glare, flicker and the rest—are probably more or less invariant as between performances, which means that the associated potential for meaning can be regarded as inherent in the composition rather than just in performances of it. But to say this isn't to say that listeners are responding to some kind of an abstract, out-of-this-world object.

Nicholas Cook  
Research Professor of Music  
University of Southampton  
http://www.soton.ac.uk/~ncook  
ncook@soton.ac.uk

Copyright Statement

*Copyright © 2002 by the Society for Music Theory. All rights reserved.*

[1] Copyrights for individual items published in *Music Theory Online (MTO)* are held by their authors. Items appearing in *MTO* may be saved and stored in electronic or paper form, and may be shared among individuals for purposes of scholarly research or discussion, but may not be republished in any form, electronic or print, without prior, written permission from
the author(s), and advance notification of the editors of MTO.

[2] Any redistributed form of items published in MTO must include the following information in a form appropriate to the medium in which the items are to appear:

This item appeared in *Music Theory Online* in [VOLUME #, ISSUE #] on [DAY/MONTH/YEAR]. It was authored by [FULL NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS], with whose written permission it is reprinted here.

[3] Libraries may archive issues of *MTO* in electronic or paper form for public access so long as each issue is stored in its entirety, and no access fee is charged. Exceptions to these requirements must be approved in writing by the editors of *MTO*, who will act in accordance with the decisions of the Society for Music Theory.

This document and all portions thereof are protected by U.S. and international copyright laws. Material contained herein may be copied and/or distributed for research purposes only.

Prepared by Eric J. Isaacson, Co-Editor and Tahirth Motazedian, Editorial Assistant