

SCIENTIFIC FOUNDATIONS OF THE CONCEPT OF THE MUSICAL PHENOMENON

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Abstract: This article analyzes the philosophical essence of the concept of “phenomenon” and its interpretation in the art of music, tracing the gradual development of the category of phenomenon from antiquity to modern phenomenology. Particular attention is given to the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon in I. Kant’s transcendental idealism, the intentional nature of consciousness in E. Husserl’s phenomenology, R. Ingarden’s theory of the strata of the work of art, as well as M. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of embodied perception, all examined from a musical-aesthetic perspective. The concept of the musical phenomenon is scientifically substantiated on the basis of the research findings.

Keywords: phenomenon, noumenon, phenomenology, musical perception, aesthetic experience, intentionality, musical phenomenon, artistic meaning, performance, listener.

Аннотация: В данной статье анализируется философская сущность понятия “феномен” и его интерпретация в музыкальном искусстве, прослеживается поэтапное развитие категории феномена от античности до современной феноменологии. Особое внимание уделяется различию между феноменом и ноуменом в трансцендентальном идеализме И. Канта, интенциональной природе сознания в феноменологии Э. Гуссерля, теории слоёв художественного произведения Р. Ингардена, а также концепции телесного восприятия М. Мерло-Понти, рассматриваемых в музыкально-эстетическом аспекте. Понятие музыкального феномена научно обосновывается на основе результатов исследования.

Ключевые слова: феномен, ноумен, феноменология, музыкальное восприятие, эстетический опыт, интенциональность, музыкальный феномен, художественный смысл, исполнение, слушатель.

As is well known, the concept of a “**phenomenon**” by its essence derives from the greek “*phainomenon*” — meaning something that appears, an extraordinary or rare event or fact; from a philosophical point of view, it denotes that which is perceived through sensory experience (in this sense, it stands in

contrast to the **noumenon**, which manifests as an object of intellectual contemplation in terms of its intrinsic essence)¹.

The concept of a “**phenomenon**” may also be applied to a unique, great, or exceptional individual, as well as to remarkable events. In the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Philosophy*, it is defined as follows:

“**Phenomenon** — from the Greek *phainomenon* — ‘that which occurs’ or ‘that which appears. According to its meaning, it is classified into three groups:

1. A visibly observable state or occurrence.
2. A rare or exceptional case, or a great and unique individual.
3. A philosophical term denoting a particular state given in sensory cognition and experience; a concept that signifies an event perceived and comprehended through sensory experience, an object of living contemplation².

Aristotle used this term in the sense of “that which appears” or “that which is perceived.” According to him, a phenomenon is something apprehended through the senses, and human knowledge is acquired through experience and perception.

What is seen by the eye, heard by the ear, and observed in experience is considered a **phenomenon**.

For Aristotle, a central issue was the distinction between **appearance (phenomenon)** and **essence**:

- **Phenomenon** — the external manifestation of a thing.
- **Essence** — its true nature and underlying cause.

¹ **National Encyclopedia of Uzbekistan**. Letter “F.” – Tashkent: State Scientific Publishing House “O‘zbekiston Milliy Ensiklopediyasi,” 2002. – p. 95.

² **Encyclopedic Dictionary of Philosophy**. – Tashkent: Publishing House of the National Society of Philosophers of Uzbekistan; Chief Editorial Office of the “Sharq” Publishing and Printing Joint-Stock Company, 2004. – pp. 427–428.

The task of philosophy, therefore, is to move from phenomena to essence. In scientific inquiry, Aristotle proposed first collecting observable facts (phenomena) and then seeking their underlying causes.

In the *Philosophical Encyclopedic Dictionary*,³ this term refers to a phenomenon that is perceived through sensory experience or received as an object via sensations, and it differs from essence (noumenon). In the history of philosophy, this concept has been interpreted in various ways: as the manifestation of an idea or essence (Neoplatonism, Leibniz, Schelling, Hegel); as the world of knowable appearances (Kant); or as a set of subjective experiences (Berkeley, Hume, phenomenism). In the idealist tradition, the phenomenon is associated with intellectual intuition and interpreted in the form of “pure essences” (Plato, Goethe, Husserl). In Marxist philosophy, the phenomenon is equated with the category of “appearance,” which expresses the external aspects of an object and reveals its essence.

In the art of music, the concept of “phenomenon” did not previously exist as a distinct term. It gradually developed within the history of philosophy and aesthetics. One of the founders of German classical philosophy, the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), began using the term “phenomenon” in philosophical discourse. Kant was the thinker who gave this concept a clear scientific and philosophical form as a category. In his work *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*), he states: “A person perceives the world not as it is in itself, but as it appears through the structures of the mind.” Therefore, he divides reality into two realms:

Table 1

³ **Philosophical Encyclopedic Dictionary.** – Moscow: *Sovetskaya Entsiklopediya* (Soviet Encyclopedia), 1983. – 717 p.

Concept	Meaning
Phenomenon	Reality as it appears to us; perceived or experienced reality
Noumenon (thing-in-itself)	The true state of reality independent of consciousness

According to the theory of Immanuel Kant, **perception** is reflected in three stages:

1. **Sensibility**
2. **Forms of intuition: space and time**
3. **Categories of understanding**

A person receives external stimuli, but they are initially disordered. The mind automatically places all incoming data within the frameworks of space and time. Through concepts such as causality, quantity, and quality, the understanding organizes reality. Therefore, space and time are not properties of nature itself, but forms that exist within human perception. As a result, experience formed in the human mind through external influence gives rise to the **phenomenon**.

In Kant's major work, Critique of Pure Reason, the term "phenomenon" is expressed in German as *Erscheinung*. In the chapter titled "**Transcendental Aesthetic — the foundation of the phenomenon,**" Kant discusses space and time as forms of intuition. In this section, he advances the idea that:

"We do not perceive things as they are in themselves, but as they appear through space and time." (Translation ours, T.B.)

In terms of content, space is the form of outer sensibility, while time is the form of inner sensibility; whatever appears within these forms gives rise to the **phenomenon**. Thus, a phenomenon can be understood as:

Phenomenon = sensation + space/time + understanding

Here, Kant for the first time substantiates the idea that:

Phenomenon ≠ the thing-in-itself.

In this book, he gives particular attention to the distinction between phenomenon and noumenon.

- **Phenomenon** — the object as it appears to us.
- **Noumenon** — an object independent of consciousness, but unknowable (Translation ours, T.B).

Reason can conceive of the noumenon, but it can know only the phenomenon. These ideas later became one of the main sources of phenomenological philosophy. In the chapter “How is experience possible?”, Kant explains how consciousness processes information. The mind gathers data in three stages:

1. Sensation provides the material;
2. Imagination synthesizes it;
3. Categories organize it.

From this it follows that ordered perception equals a **phenomenal object**. Here it is demonstrated that the “object” is constituted in consciousness.

In the chapter “Conclusion of Transcendental Idealism,” Kant presents his important conclusion:

“We live only in the world of phenomena. Noumena may exist, but they are not objects of possible experience”⁴.

According to Immanuel Kant’s theory, it forms the foundation of musical philosophy. In his view, the main component of music is melody. Melody does not exist in nature by itself; it emerges as a result of human perception.

In music, the objective and subjective aspects are realized as follows:

Table 2

Objective	Subjective
Sound vibrations	Hearing
Frequency	Melody

⁴ Critique of Pure Reason — “Conclusion of Transcendental Idealism”, Berlin.:1913, **A369–A380 / B306–B310**.

Objective	Subjective
Time	Rhythm

For example, if two people listen to the same musical piece, they will hear it differently. This is because the “phenomenon” is formed differently in their consciousness. In his book *Critique of Judgment*, Kant writes: “Beauty is not a property of the object itself, but a way of perceiving it.” This means that a work is not inherently “beautiful”; rather, it is experienced as “beautiful.” Therefore, from an aesthetic perspective, it is a phenomenal experience.

As a conclusion of Kant’s theory, a phenomenon can be interpreted as the appearance of the external world structured through consciousness. Thus, he opened the way for studying art and music not as objects, but as processes of perception.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel interpreted art as “the manifestation of Spirit.” As a result, music is understood as the art form with the least material substance and the strongest spiritual content. This view later became one of the foundations of phenomenology in philosophy.

Phenomenology (from Greek *phainomenon* — phenomenon, *logos* — doctrine) is a 20th-century philosophical movement whose main aim is to analyze the phenomena of consciousness in their pure form, free from naturalism and psychologism. Phenomenology studies consciousness through reflection, striving to describe acts of consciousness and their contents directly as they are experienced.

The founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, sought to ground philosophy as a “rigorous science.” He proposed that research should focus not on the object itself, but on how experience occurs. This idea produced a crucial turn in musical art: the structure of a composition became secondary, while the listening experience became the primary object. From this point onward, music began to be regarded not as an “object,” but as an “experience unfolding in time.”

Husserl proposed the method of *epoché*—the temporary suspension of the “natural attitude” (the unquestioned acceptance of the real world’s existence). Through this suspension, the researcher can reach the pure forms of meaning within consciousness. In phenomenology, consciousness is always intentional—that is, always directed toward something. Every act of consciousness is oriented toward an object. Therefore, phenomenological analysis seeks to uncover the intentional relation between acts of consciousness and their objects.

The Polish phenomenological philosopher Roman Ingarden (1893–1970) was the first to conduct a special phenomenological analysis of music. He divided music into three layers:

1. The musical score
2. Performance
3. The reality formed in the listener

According to Ingarden, music does not exist as a finished work; it is recreated each time it is heard. His research laid the foundation for “musical phenomenology.”

The French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) introduced the concept of “embodied perception” into phenomenological analysis of music. In his view, music is not only heard but also felt bodily. Rhythm influences walking; timbre affects breathing. Thus, music becomes a lived bodily experience. In the 20th century, with the development of science, the concept of “phenomenon” expanded in meaning. The American composer, musicologist, and philosopher Leonard B. Meyer (1918–2007) explained musical emotion through the mechanism of “expectation and fulfillment,” interpreting the phenomenon as a psychological process.

The Canadian musicologist and philosopher Jean-Jacques Nattiez (b. 1945), professor at the University of Montreal, argued that musical meaning arises in three places:

1. The composer

2. The text (score)
3. The listener

According to his research, the strongest meaning in music emerges within the listener.

In Chinese musicology and aesthetics, the term “phenomenon” is not used directly as in Western philosophy, yet similar theoretical views are widely developed. Music is understood not as an independent object, but as a living experience unfolding in human perception. In this respect, Chinese aesthetic tradition is close to phenomenological thinking.

Ideas close to phenomenology can be found in the works of:

- Zong Baihua
- Xu Fuguan
- Li Zehou
- Cai Zhongde

Zong Baihua interpreted the artwork not as a finished object, but as “the manifestation of the spirit of life”⁵. According to him, aesthetic experience occurs through an “image-state.” Art is not an object, but a spiritual manifestation where subject and world unite.

Xu Fuguan, drawing on Neo-Confucian aesthetics, argued that artistic meaning does not exist in the object, but in spiritual movement⁶. He explained Chinese artistic spirit through the concept of “spiritual resonance,” whereby musical impact arises not from acoustic material but from inner movement between performer and listener.

⁵ **Zong Baihua.** *A Stroll in Aesthetics (Meixue sanbu 美学散步)*. – Beijing: Sanlian Shudian, 1981.

⁶ **Xu Fuguan.** *The Spirit of Chinese Art (Zhongguo yishu jingshen 中国艺术精神)*. – Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju, 1966.

Li Zehou interpreted aesthetic perception as the activation of accumulated cultural experience in consciousness. Music, in his view, is the manifestation of past cultural emotions in present perception⁷.

Cai Zhongde described music not as an acoustic structure but as “living meaning” born in performance—close to performative phenomenology⁸.

Guqin performer and scholar Cheng Gongliang emphasized that music exists not in the score but in performance; listening is not passive reception but co-presence.

Musicologist Boris Asafyev in his book “Musical Form as Process”⁹ argued that music is not an object but a process. He maintained that “the measure of music is hearing.” Form is not a fixed scheme but moving intonational development. Music exists only in performance. In *Intonatsiya*, Asafyev emphasized that the basic unit of music is not sound but intonation, linking music and speech as “two branches of one sound stream.” Musicologist Valentina Kholopova in her monograph “The Phenomenon of Music”¹⁰ considered music not as a collection of sounds but as lived meaning in human consciousness.

Dmitry Gorbatov argued that music is not a language, though it shares common roots with language. From a bioacoustic perspective, both rely on zonal hearing. However, semiotically they differ:

- Language uses true signs and transmits information.
- Music uses quasi-signs and produces emotional meaning.

Language has grammar and syntax; music has quasi-syntax. Language can be translated; music cannot. Language communicates; music creates states. Thus, “musical language” is a metaphor¹¹.

⁷ Li Zehou. *The Path of Beauty (Mei de licheng 美的历程)*. – Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1981

⁸ Cai Zhongde. *History of Chinese Musical Aesthetics (Zhongguo yinyue meixue shi 中国音乐美学史)*. – Beijing: Renmin Yinyue Chubanshe, 1995.

⁹ Asafyev, B. V. *Musical Form as a Process*. – Leningrad: Muzyka, 1971 (2025 edition). – pp. 211–215.

¹⁰ Kholopova, V. N. *The Phenomenon of Music: Monograph*. – Saint Petersburg: Planeta Muzyki, 2023. – 452 p.

¹¹ Gorbatov, D. B. The Phenomenon of Music and the Phenomenon of Language: Aspects of a Systemic-Typological Comparison (Preliminary Theses) // *Scientific Bulletin of the Moscow Conservatory*. – 2022. – Vol. 13, No. 3. – pp. 602–631.

Based on research, the concept of “phenomenon” in music may be classified into five typological groups:

1. Stylistic-historical phenomenon
2. Genre-modeling phenomenon
3. National-identification phenomenon
4. Synthetic (intermedial) phenomenon
5. Individual-semantic phenomenon

Certain composers become cultural-historical phenomena embodying entire epochs:

- Johann Sebastian Bach
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
- Ludwig van Beethoven
- Arnold Schoenberg
- Dmitri Shostakovich
- Uzeyir Hajibeyov
- Mutal Burhonov
- Mirsodiq Tojiev

In Uzbek music culture, figures such as Abu Nasr al-Farabi analyzed music philosophically, while later composers shaped national professional music through synthesis of tradition and European compositional thinking.

The concept of “phenomenon” in music does not have a single fixed meaning. It is a multilayered scientific category manifested through historical, genre, national, and semantic factors. A musical phenomenon is the living process of artistic meaning reborn repeatedly in human experience. Music is not a thing, not a text, not mere acoustics. It is a spiritual event occurring between human beings and sound.

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