

ABSTRACT

The scope of “The Viola as a Voice of Lamentation: The Story Behind the Sound” is a collection of four case studies that connect the historical trajectory of the lament from vocal music to instrumental music in various contexts, all sharing the thread of storytelling. The chapters emphasize elemental practices and artistic demonstrations of lamentation from Antiquity to the 21st century, highlighting the funerary rituals and oral traditions of the Ancient Greeks, the development of the *lamento* in Renaissance operas and its transference to wordless music within the framework of topic theory, and, lastly, the development of the voice of the viola within its repertoire of more than two hundred works of lamentation and related genres. Looking directly at the stories and musical works from this historical lens, one finds that the cultivation of these characters of lamentation take shape in many forms, including: the lamenting woman (i.e., real-life professional mourners or literary/mythical characters), the lament bass figure as a character of topic theory, and the viola, which, through its own history of construction and the evolution of its repertoire, showcases an affinity for works of a lamentable nature due to its melancholy tone and similarity in range to the human voice. While this dissertation sinks into the history and idiomatic characterization of the viola’s lamenting voice, it also advocates for more creative interpretations of its character in a series of writings that would investigate the viola’s multifaceted story through its versatile history of sounds.