In folk psychology, the term ‘empathy’ refers to the ability to understand or feel the experience of another person. This might involve, for instance, inferring the thought processes of an individual, which can allow one to understand why that person makes the choices they do. This would also include some awareness of the other person’s history, of their beliefs and background. Accordingly, empathy can entail complex imaginative and deductive processes where we place ourselves in their position or, in a sense, ‘enter into’ their mental lives. But empathy can also involve a more basic awareness of the corporeal and emotional-affective states of the people we encounter. This ability appears to be rooted in a fundamental capacity to associate the bodily movements, gestures, expressions, and vocal inflections we perceive in others with states we experience ourselves. In this talk I consider such phenomena in the context of human musicality. I begin with a brief overview of research and theory and then introduce two perspectives that appear to offer a way forward – Simulation Theory (ST) and Interaction Theory (IT), respectively. Here I argue that while both approaches offer important insights, IT may be especially well-suited for examining musical experiences. This is because it overcomes the ‘internalist’ bias that tends to guide other perspectives – where mental processes are understood in terms of representational content (e.g., ‘simulations’) limited to the brain. Taking this further, I then outline a 4E framework (embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive) for musical empathy that draws on recent work in affective neuroscience, developmental studies, social cognition, and dynamical systems theory. To conclude, I explore how an IT approach guided by the 4E model of cognition could provide a useful orientation for future research as it highlights the role of the situated body in musical experience, extending the domain of musical empathy beyond the brain and into the living socio-material environments where musical events unfold.

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