Joseph Kerman has called for a transformation of musicology from its positivistic roots to what he calls music criticism, paralleling the same transformation in other disciplines. He has suggested hermeneutics as a possible direction for music criticism.

In response to Kerman a theory of music criticism called musicological hermeneutics has been developed, based on the "philosophical hermeneutics" of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900- ). A detailed presentation of Gadamer’s theory is presented in Chapter Two. Of particular importance are Gadamer’s concepts of effective history (that the various interpretations of a text constitute its meaning) and the fusion of horizons (the ability of a text from the past to address an interpreter in the present).

The writings of several scholars including LaRue, Kivy, Tomlinson, and Treitler, are used to develop a system of musicological hermeneutics in Chapter Three.

In Chapters Three through Five, the theory is tested on the theoretical treatises and musical compositions of Christoph Bernhard (1628-1692). Bernhard’s works are placed within the cultural context of seventeenth-century German humanism and his treatises and compositions are examined for manifestations of humanism.

Utilizing Gadamer’s concept of the fusion of horizons, a comparison of Bernhard’s works with contemporary approaches to music theory and composition is made in Chapter Seven. Similarities between the earlier scholastic-humanist debates and the current modernist-postmodernist debates are presented from both a philosophical and a musical standpoint.

Several problems emerge related to Gadamer’s opposition to method. The system developed here does not meet Gadamer’s requirement for a dialogue rather than a method. Neither can it practically incorporate the historical material necessary to fulfill Gadamer’s concept of effective history. While this study does provide additional knowledge about Christoph Bernhard as a composer, it was unable to provide a novel approach to music criticism based on Gadamer’s hermeneutics.