This study of Johann Mattheson’s Das forschende Orchestre investigates the influence of early modern philosophy on his theory of music. It includes his formative years from 1690-1705, particularly his involvement with the Hamburg opera during the rise of evangelical pietism, and the publication of Der vollkommene Capellmeister in 1739. More specifically, it focuses on the period of his life from 1705-1728, during which time he wrote the three related Orchestre treatises Das neu-eröffnete (1713), Das beschützte (1717), and Das forschende Orchestre (1721), served as tutor to the son of an English diplomat, and, beginning in 1715, director of music at the Cathedral in Hamburg. The potentially conflicting roles of opera singer and church musician, one secular the other sacred, contributed to events which led to Mattheson’s philosophical outpouring.

To defend his belief that modern music owed more to the sense of hearing than it did to the acoustical science of the ancients, Mattheson drew upon various schools of science, philosophy, theology, and musical theory, among them: Pythagoreans and Aristoxenians, English moral philosophers, English and French skeptics, including the ideas of the more radical libertins, the French Academy of Sciences, Lutheran Orthodox and Pietist theologians, and a number of musical theorists active during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In order to identify and explain these influences on Mattheson’s philosophy of music, numerous statements have been selected from his Orchestre treatises and translated into English. They are presented in chapters that discuss: the evolution of Das forschende Orchestre, the rejection of neo-classical music theory inherited from the ancients, the significance of new discoveries in science and philosophy with regard to music, the changing notion of musical affect, and Mattheson’s support of dramatic musical style during the rise of evangelical pietism.