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A HISTORY OF
WESTERN MUSIC

Third Edition with *Claude V. Palisca*, YALE UNIVERSITY



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Preface

Ten years have passed since this book was last revised, and it now seems time for a third edition—again, not to recast the work entirely, but to include art music of the last decade and results of recent research.

The history of music is primarily the history of musical style and cannot be grasped except by first-hand knowledge of the music itself. It is therefore essential to become acquainted with the *sound* of the music discussed in this book and to be able to examine it more or less in its entirety. In past editions, the selection of music examples was greatly influenced by the availability of works in standard editions and various anthologies, which were duly listed in the bibliography for each chapter of the book. This procedure inevitably visited great hardship on the student seeking out the sources in disparate volumes and also limited the works available for discussion in the text. Therefore, Professor Claude Palisca of Yale University was asked to prepare the *Norton Anthology of Western Music* (hereafter and forever known as NAWM) which could serve as a score resource for the third edition of a *History of Western Music*. The reader will find references to the appropriate pieces in NAWM scattered through this substantially revised text, since almost all the specific discussions focus on this new repertory. Additional examples are cited in the Bibliography.

An elementary knowledge of musical terms and of harmony has been assumed. The Glossary contains brief definitions of terms not elsewhere defined in this book. The various Appendices to this third edition have been revised and updated: an entirely new one, describing a typical Mass and Office, follows Chapter II; suggestions for further reading in the Bibliography reflect the most recent scholarly advances; and the Chronology has been extended to 1979.

I am especially grateful to all the scholars who have provided expert advice on portions of the book that lay in areas of their special competence and whose help I have acknowledged in the first and second editions.

For the present revised edition I wish to thank Professor William W. Austin, Professor Gaynor Jones, Professor Rey M. Longyear, and Mr. Sidney Cox for valuable suggestions. The following colleagues provided detailed comments on the last edition as a practical teaching tool: Professor William C. Holmes, University of California at Irvine; Professor Steven Ledbetter, formerly of Dartmouth College; Professor K. Marie Stolba, Indiana University-Purdue University at Fort Wayne; and Professor Efrim Fruchtman, Memphis State University. I have carefully considered all their valuable counsels and have heeded many of them. Also my gratitude goes to my able research assistants Mrs. Mary Hunter Parakilas and Mr. Jeffrey Cooper, and to Mr. Michael A. Keller, Music Librarian of Cornell University. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to Mrs. Claire Brook of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., for her devoted care in the production of the present edition.

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I

The State of Music at the End of the Ancient World

Anyone living in a province of the Roman Empire in the fifth century of the Christian era might have seen roads where people used to travel and now travelled no more, temples and arenas built for throngs and now falling into disuse and ruin, and life everywhere becoming with each generation poorer, more insecure, and more brutish. Rome in the time of her greatness had imposed peace on most of western Europe as well as on considerable parts of Africa and Asia; but Rome had grown weak and unable to defend herself. The barbarians were pouring in from the north and east, and the common civilization of Europe was splintering into fragments which only after many centuries began to coalesce gradually into the modern nations.

The grand events of Rome's decline and fall stand out so luridly in history that it is hard for us even now to realize that, along with the process of destruction, there was quietly going on an opposite process of creation. This came to be centered in the Christian Church, which until the tenth century was the principal—and oftentimes the only—bond of union and channel of culture in Europe. The earliest Christian communities, in spite of three hundred years of sporadic persecution, grew steadily and spread to all parts of the Empire. After his conversion in 312, the Emperor Constantine adopted a policy of toleration and, what is more, made Christianity the religion of the imperial family. In 395 the political unity of the ancient world was formally broken up by the division into Eastern

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and Western Empires, with capitals at Byzantium and Rome. When after a terrible century of wars and invasions the last Western Emperor finally stepped down from his throne in 476, the foundations of the Papal power were already so firmly laid that the Church was ready to assume the civilizing and unifying mission of Rome.

The Greek Heritage

The history of Western art music properly begins with the music of the Christian Church. But all through the Middle Ages and even to the present time men have continually turned back to Greece and Rome for instruction, for correction, and for inspiration in their several fields of work; this has been true in music—though with some important differences. Roman literature, for example, never ceased to exert influence in the Middle Ages, and this influence became much greater in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when more Roman works became known; at the same time, too, the surviving literature of Greece was gradually recovered. But in literature, as well as in some other fields (notably sculpture), medieval or Renaissance artists had the advantage of being able to study and, if they so desired, imitate the models of antiquity. The actual poems or statues were before them. In music this was not so. The Middle Ages did not possess a single example of Greek or Roman music—nor, it may be added, are we today much better off. About a dozen examples—half of them mere fragments—of Greek music have been discovered, nearly all from comparatively late periods, but there is no general agreement as to just how they were meant to sound; there are no authentic remains of ancient Roman music. So we, as well as the men of medieval times, derive nearly all our knowledge of this art in the ancient civilizations at second hand from a few rather vague accounts of performances, but mostly from theoretical treatises and literary descriptions.

There was a special reason for the disappearance of the traditions of Roman musical practice at the beginning of the Middle Ages: most of this music was connected with social occasions on which the early Church looked with horror, or with pagan religious exercises which the Church believed had to be exterminated. Consequently every effort was made not only to keep out of the Church music which would recall such abominations to the minds of the faithful, but, if possible, to blot out the very memory of it. How much may have slipped in and been preserved, and how much may have survived outside the Church over the centuries, no one knows.

Yet there were some features of ancient musical practice that lived on in the Middle Ages if only for the reason that they could

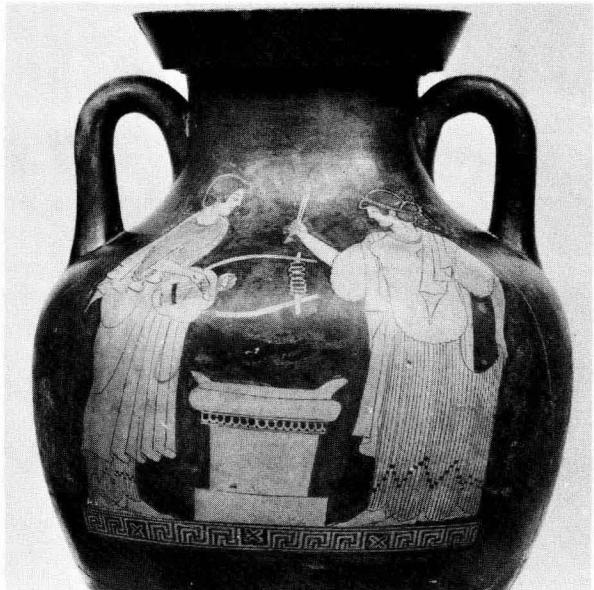
hardly have been abolished without abolishing music itself; furthermore, ancient musical theory was the foundation of medieval theory and was part of most philosophical systems. So in order to understand medieval music, we must know something about the music of ancient peoples, and in particular about the musical practice and theory of the Greeks.

Greek mythology ascribed to music a divine origin and named as its inventors and earliest practitioners gods and demigods, such as Apollo, Amphion, and Orpheus. In this dim prehistoric world, music had magic powers: people thought it could heal sickness, purify the body and mind, and work miracles in the realm of nature. Similar powers are attributed to music in the Old Testament: we need only recall the stories of David curing Saul's madness by playing the harp (I Samuel xvi: 14-23), or of the trumpet-blasts and shouting that toppled the walls of Jericho (Joshua vi: 12-20). In the Homeric Age, bards sang heroic poems at banquets (*Odyssey* VIII, 72-82).

From earliest times music was an inseparable part of religious ceremonies. In the cult of Apollo the lyre was the characteristic instrument, while in that of Dionysus it was the aulos. Both these instruments probably came into Greece from Asia Minor. The lyre and its larger counterpart, the kithara, were instruments with five to seven strings (later as many as eleven); both were used for solo playing and to accompany the singing or reciting of epic poems. The aulos, a double-pipe reed instrument (not a flute) with a shrill piercing tone, was used in connection with the singing of a certain kind of poetry (the dithyramb) in the worship of Dionysus, out of which it is believed the Greek drama developed. As a conse-

**Music in
ancient Greek
life and
thought**

Vase painting of Apollo playing a lyre and Artemis holding an aulos before an altar. The lyre was a loosely constructed instrument with a body made from a tortoise shell or wooden bowl over which was stretched a skin. Two horns or wooden arms projected upward from the bowl and supported a horizontal crosspiece to which strings were attached; the other ends of these arms were fastened to the underside of the sounding bowl after passing over a bridge. The lyre was played by plucking the strings either with the fingers or a plectrum. (Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1907)



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quence, in the great dramas of the classical age—works by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides—choruses and other musical portions were accompanied by, or alternated with, the sounds of the aulos.

From at least as early as the sixth century B.C. both the lyre and the aulos were played as independent solo instruments. There is an account of a musical festival or competition held at the Pythian games in 586 B.C. at which one Sakadas played a composition for the aulos illustrating the combat between Apollo and the dragon—the earliest known piece of program music, and one which remained famous for centuries. Contests of kithara and aulos players, as well as festivals of instrumental and vocal music, became increasingly popular after the fifth century B.C. As instrumental music grew more independent the number of virtuosos multiplied; at the same time the music itself became more complex in every way. In the fourth century Aristotle warned against too much professional training in general music education:

The right measure will be attained if students of music stop short of the arts which are practised in professional contests, and do not seek to acquire those fantastic marvels of execution which are now the fashion in such contests, and from these have passed into education. Let the young practise even such music as we have prescribed, only until they are able to feel delight in noble melodies and rhythms, and not merely in that common part of music in which every slave or child and even some animals find pleasure.¹

Sometime after the classical age (about 450 to 325 B.C.) a reaction set in against technical complexities, and by the beginning of the Christian era Greek musical theory, and probably also its practice, had become simplified. Most of our surviving examples of Greek music come from relatively late periods. The chief are: two Delphic hymns to Apollo from about 150 B.C., a *skolion* or drinking song from about the same time or perhaps a little later, and three hymns of Mesomedes of Crete from the second century A.D.

Although we do not know much about Greek music or its history, we can say that in three fundamental respects it was the same kind of music as that of the early Church. In the first place, it was primarily *monophonic*, that is, melody without harmony or counterpoint. There is some slight evidence of two-part music in Greece, but certainly the practice could not have been systematic or important. In the period when large vocal and instrumental ensembles were employed, it frequently happened that certain instruments would embellish the melody simultaneously with its plain perform-

¹ Aristotle, *Politics*, VIII, 6, 1341^a 10, tr. B. Jowett in R. McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, New York, 1941, 1313. Cf. also Plato, *Laws*, II, 669E, 770A.

ance by others in the ensemble, thus creating *heterophony*. But neither heterophony nor the inevitable necessity of singing in octaves when both men and boys took part constitutes true polyphony.

In the second place, as far as we know, musical performances in the most flourishing period of Greek civilization were improvised. The performer was, to a certain extent, also the composer. This does not mean that what he did was completely spontaneous and unprepared; he had to keep within the universally accepted rules governing the forms and styles of music suitable for particular occasions, and he probably incorporated in his performance certain traditional musical formulas; but outside these restrictions he had considerable freedom. He was not playing or singing something he had memorized or learned from a score, and consequently no two performances of the "same" piece were exactly alike. Improvisation, in this or some similar sense, was characteristic of all ancient peoples. It prevailed also in our Western music up to perhaps the eighth century A.D., and the practice continued to affect musical styles for a long time even after precise musical notations were invented, as we shall see.

Thirdly, Greek music was almost always associated with words or dancing or both; its melody and rhythm were most intimately bound up with the melody and rhythm of poetry, and the music of the religious cults, of the drama, and of the great public contests was performed by singers who accompanied their melody with the movements of prescribed dance patterns.

To say, however, that the music of the early Church resembled Greek music in being monophonic, improvised, and inseparable from a text, is not to assert a historical continuity. No direct historical connection from the one to the other can be demonstrated. It was the theory rather than the practice of the Greeks that affected the music of western Europe in the Middle Ages; and it happens that we have much more information about Greek musical theories than about the music itself. Those theories were of two classes: (1) doctrines of the nature of music, its place in the cosmos, its effects, and its proper uses in human society; and (2) systematic descriptions of the materials and patterns of musical composition. In both the philosophy and the science of music the Greeks achieved insights and formulated principles, many of which have not been superseded to this day. Of course Greek thought about music did not remain static from the time of Pythagoras (*ca.* 500 B.C.), its reputed founder, to Claudius Ptolemy (2nd century A.D.), its last important expositor; the account which follows, though necessarily simplified, emphasizes those features that were most characteristic and most important for the later history of Western music.

The word *music* had a much wider meaning to the Greeks than it has to us. It was an adjectival form of *Muse*—in classical mythology

Greek musical theory



Apollo holding a kithara. The kithara had a heavy body solidly joined together with a wooden sounding board and strong arms supporting a crossbar around which the strings were wound. This painting is on a Greek oil-vase from the middle of the fifth century B.C. (Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Mr. & Mrs. Leon Pomerance, 1953)

any one of the nine sister goddesses who presided over certain arts and sciences. The verbal relation suggests that among the Greeks music was thought of as something common or basic to activities that were concerned with the pursuit of truth or beauty. In the teachings of Pythagoras and his followers, music and arithmetic were not separate; as the understanding of numbers was thought to be the key to the understanding of the whole spiritual and physical universe, so the system of musical sounds and rhythms, being ordered by numbers, was conceived as exemplifying the harmony of the cosmos and corresponding to it. This doctrine was most thoroughly and systematically expounded by Plato, particularly in the *Timaeus* (in the Middle Ages the most widely known of his dialogues) and the *Republic*. Plato's views on the nature and uses of music, as interpreted later by medieval writers, exercised profound influence on their speculations about music and its place in education throughout that period.

For some Greek thinkers music also had a close connection with astronomy, not only through the identity of mathematical laws that were thought to underlie both the system of musical intervals and the system of the heavenly bodies, but also through a particular correspondence of certain modes and even certain notes with the various planets. Such magical connotations and extensions of music were common among all Eastern peoples. The idea was given poetic form by Plato² in the beautiful myth of the "music of the spheres"; it is echoed by writers on music throughout the Middle Ages, and appears also in Shakespeare and Milton. Ptolemy, one of the most important of the ancient writers on music, was also the leading astronomer of antiquity—as, in our own day, many of the best amateurs of music are physical scientists.

² Plato, *Republic*, X, 617.

The close union of melody and poetry is another dimension in which we may view the amplitude of the Greeks' conception of music. Actually it is incorrect to speak of a "union," for to the Greeks the two were practically synonymous. When we now speak of "the music of poetry," we are conscious of using a figure of speech; but to the Greeks such music was actual melody whose intervals and rhythms could be precisely described. "Lyric" poetry meant poetry sung to the lyre; "tragedy" incorporates the verb *aeidein*, "to sing." In fact, many of the Greek words that designate the different kinds of poetry, such as *ode* and *hymn*, are musical terms. Forms that lacked music were not designated at all. In the beginning of his *Poetics* Aristotle, after setting forth melody, rhythm, and language as the elements of poetry, goes on to say: "There is further an art which imitates by language alone . . . in prose or in verse. . . . This form of imitation is to this day without a name."³ The Greek idea of music as essentially one with the spoken word has reappeared in diverse forms throughout the history of music; it is present, for example, in Wagner's theories about music drama in the nineteenth century. The search for a perfect union of words and music may, for some modern composers, mean no more than striving for correct rhythmic declamation of the text. For others it may have a more comprehensive meaning; it may be motivated by the belief that there is a power in music akin to the power of words for influencing human thought and action, and that therefore an artist, whether in music or words, is under obligation to exercise this power with due regard for its effect on others. Such a belief formed one of the most conspicuous and most important aspects of Greek thought about music.

The doctrine of *ethos*, or the moral qualities and effects of music, seems to be rooted in the Pythagorean view of music as a microcosm, a system of sound and rhythm ruled by the same mathematical laws that operate in the whole of the visible and invisible creation. Music, in this view, was not only a passive image of the orderly system of the universe; it was also a force that could affect the universe—hence the attribution of miracles to the legendary musicians of mythology. A later, more scientific age emphasized the effects of music on the will and thus on the character and conduct of human beings. How music worked on the will was explained by Aristotle⁴ through the doctrine of imitation. Music, he says, directly imitates (that is, represents) the passions or states of the soul—gentleness, anger, courage, temperance, and their opposites and other qualities; hence, when one listens to music that imitates a certain passion, he becomes

The doctrine of *ethos*

³ Aristotle, *Poetics*, I, 1447^a 28, tr. I. Bywater, in McKeon, *op. cit.*

⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 8, 1340^a, b; cf. Plato, *Laws*, II, 665, 668–70, 812C.



An aulos player from a painting on a Greek drinking-cup of about 480 B.C. The player is shown holding the double pipes in his left hand; a leather band fastened over his face is pierced with two holes just large enough so that he can put the ends of the pipes in his mouth. (Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchased by subscription, 1896)

imbued with the same passion; and if over a long time he habitually listens to the kind of music that rouses ignoble passions his whole character will be shaped to an ignoble form. In short, if one listens to the wrong kind of music he will become the wrong kind of person; but, conversely, if he listens to the right kind of music he will tend to become the right kind of person.⁵

Both Plato and Aristotle were quite clear as to what they meant by the “right” kind of person; and they were agreed that the way to produce him was through a system of public education in which two principal elements were gymnastics and music, the one for the discipline of the body and the other for that of the mind. In the *Republic*, written about 380 B.C., Plato insists on the need for a balance of these two elements in education: too much music will make a man effeminate or neurotic; too much gymnastics will make him uncivilized, violent, and ignorant. “He who mingles music with gymnastic in the fairest proportions, and best attempers them to the soul, may be rightly called the true musician.”⁶ But only certain kinds of music are suitable. Melodies of expressive softness and indolence are to be avoided in the education of those who are being trained to become governors of the ideal state; for them, only the Dorian and Phrygian “tunes” are to be retained as promoting the virtues of courage and temperance respectively. Multiplicity of notes, complex scales, the blending of incongruous forms and rhythms, ensembles of unlike instruments, “many-stringed curiously-tuned instruments,” even aulos-makers and aulos-players, are to be ex-

⁵ Also see Plato, *Republic*, III, 401E.

⁶ Plato, *Republic*, III, 411.

⁷ *Republic*, III, 398 ff.; also, *Laws*, VII, 812E.

cluded from the state.⁷ Furthermore, the foundations of music once established must not be changed, for lawlessness in art and education inevitably leads to licence in manners and anarchy in society.⁸ For Plato the saying "Let me make the songs of a nation and I care not who makes its laws" would have expressed a political maxim; more than that, it would have been a pun, as the word *nomos*, with the general meaning of "custom" or "law," was used also to designate the melodic patterns of a certain type of lyric song.⁹ Aristotle, in the *Politics* (about 350 B.C.), is less explicit than Plato about the particular rhythms and modes, and also less severe. He allows the use of music for amusement and intellectual enjoyment as well as for education;¹⁰ but he agrees with Plato that all music used for educating the young should be regulated by law.

It may be that in thus limiting the kinds of music allowable in the ideal state both Plato and Aristotle were consciously opposing certain tendencies in the actual musical life of their time, particularly the use of enharmonic intervals, the use of certain rhythms connected with orgiastic rites, the independence of instrumental music, and the rise of professional virtuosos. But lest we be tempted to regard these philosophers as men so out of touch with the real world of art that their opinions on music cannot be of importance, these facts must be remembered: first, in ancient Greece a great deal more was included in music than we now understand by the word; second, we do not know how this music sounded, and it is not impossible that it really did have certain powers over the mind of which we can form no idea; third, there have been many instances in history of the state or some other authority prohibiting certain kinds of music, acting on the principle that this matter was important to the public welfare. Music was regulated in the early constitutions of both Athens and Sparta. The writings of the Church Fathers contain many warnings against specific kinds of music. Nor is the issue dead in the twentieth century. Dictatorships, both fascist and communist, have attempted to control the musical activity of their people; churches usually establish norms for the music that may be used in their services; all enlightened educators are concerned with the kinds of music, as well as the kinds of pictures and writings, to which young people are habitually exposed.

The Greek doctrine of *ethos*, then, was founded on the conviction that music affects character and that different kinds of music affect it in different ways. In the distinctions made among the many different kinds of music we can discern a general division into two

⁸ *Republic*, IV, 424; also, *Laws*, III, 700C.

⁹ Cf. *Laws*, VII, 800.

¹⁰ *Politics*, 5-7.