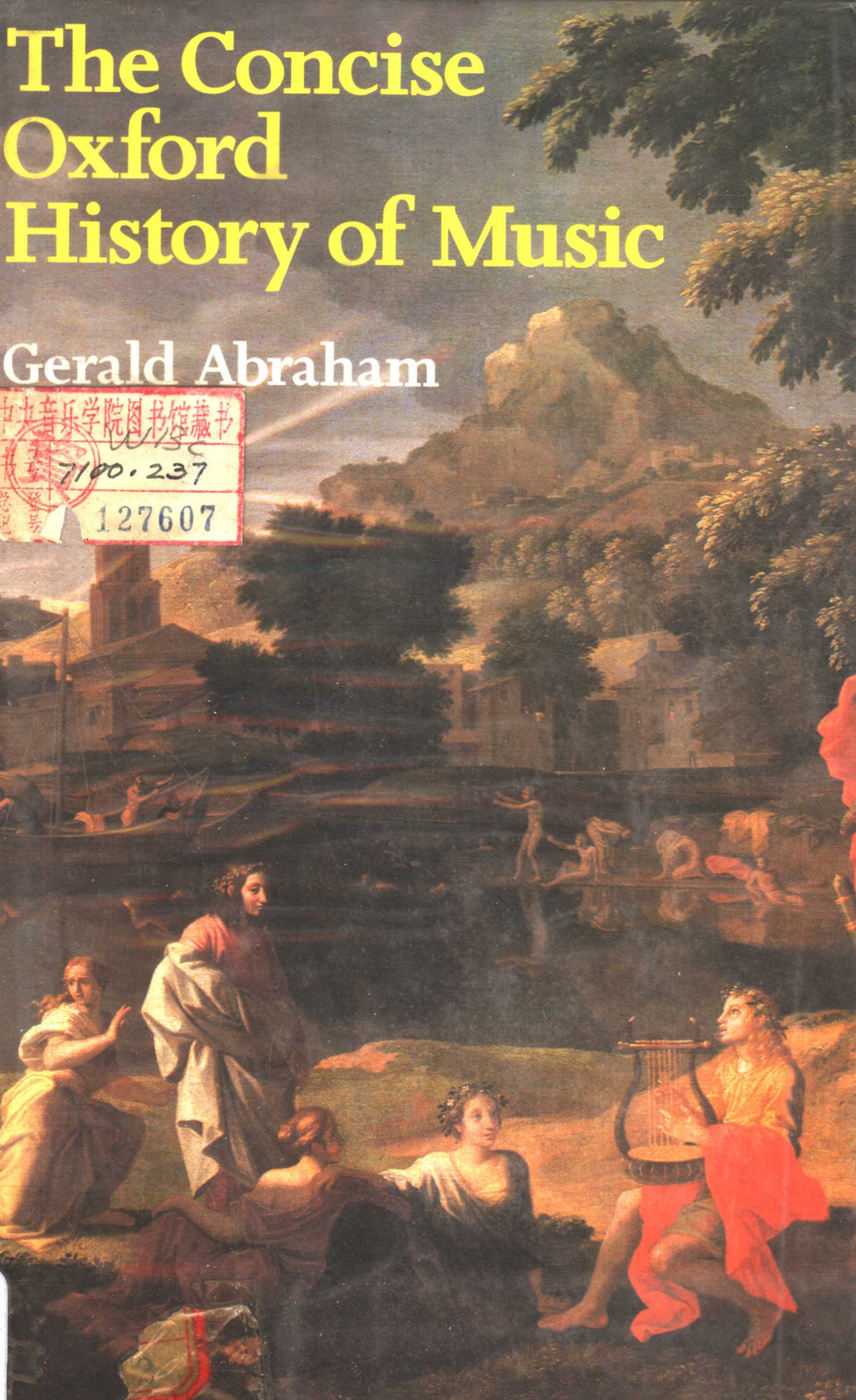


The Concise Oxford History of Music

Gerald Abraham



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Gerald Abraham

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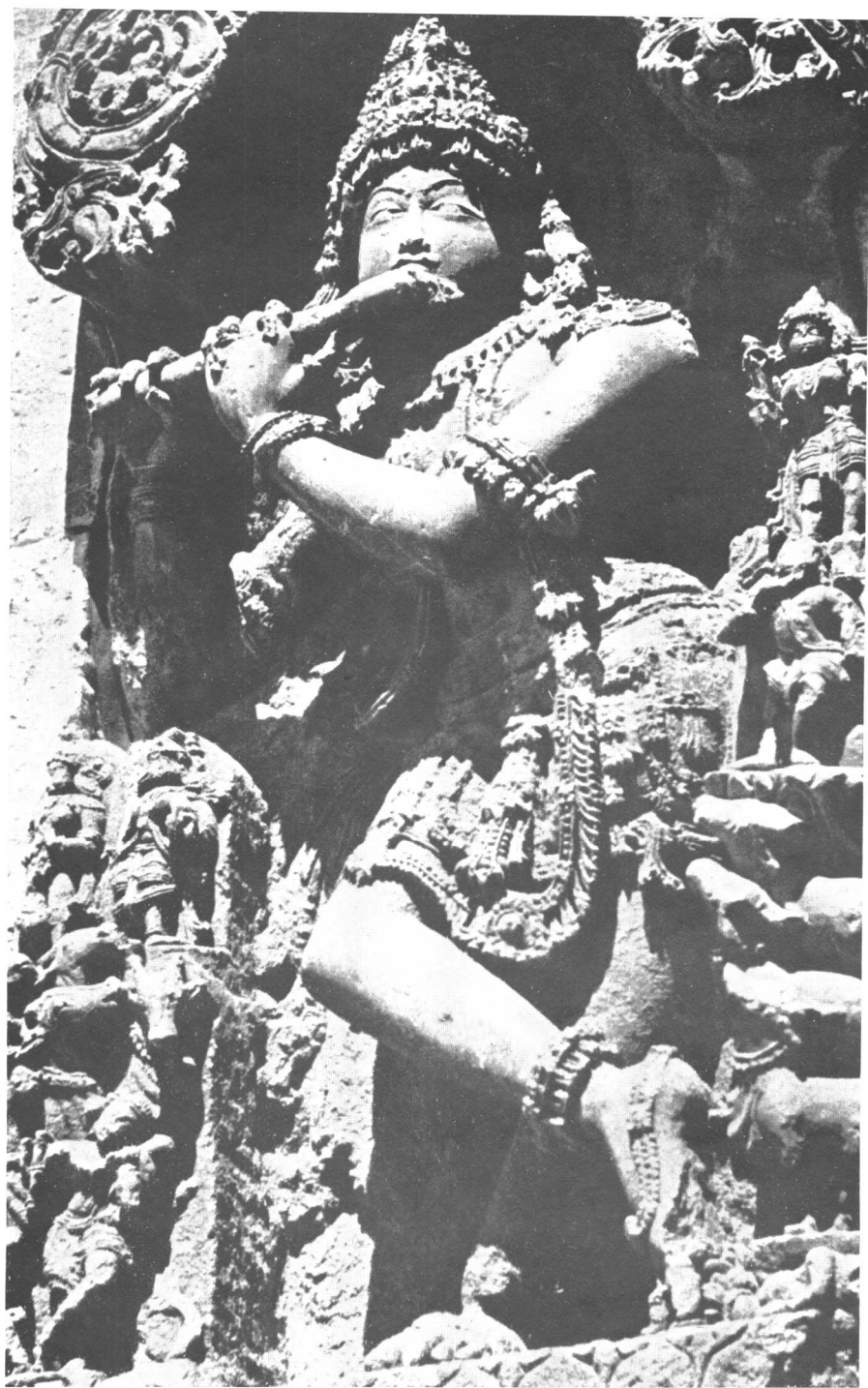
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KRISHNA PLAYING A FLUTE

Relief from a temple at Belūr (Deccan). Hoysāla Dynasty, 12th century

Preface

It has long been generally agreed that large-scale histories of music by single authors are things of the past. Nevertheless it has seemed to me that a chronological synoptic survey of the whole field in tolerably readable quasi-narrative form, a survey by one man who has for years been occupied in scrutinizing the work of specialists, might still be useful to the intelligent layman and non-specialist. It might even perhaps be useful to a specialist who, finding himself 'knowing more and more about less and less', might wish to stand back and consider the whole continuum of musical history.

It is the reality of this continuum that concerns me: music itself in so far as and when we can grasp it. Not composers except as producers of it, not instruments except as they help to make it; there are plenty of other books which give that kind of information. Instead of attempting a general valuation of X, I have tried to show what X contributed to the course, and perhaps the evolution, of church music, of orchestral music, of opera. If his creative career falls partly in one period, partly in another, I wish to show each part of his output in the context of that of his contemporaries rather than in that of what he himself had already achieved or was to achieve later.

Far from being a condensation of the *New Oxford History of Music*, which would be impossible, this book is not even based on it. The *New Oxford History* employs the microscope, the *Concise* the telescope. Through the telescope one sees the broad lines and can also pick out details that reveal life and reality – though not, unfortunately, the details which would fill out and qualify simplified accounts of complex matters. In far distant time past the telescope is useless; one sees mostly haze and mirage. In the recent and immediate past it is again useless. One sees all too many figures close at hand – some of them personal friends and acquaintances – among whom it is not easy to pick out the really significant. Yet one must try to do so if the account is not to degenerate into a meaningless list of names. Even with the telescope there is a famous precedent for the use of the blind eye.

The choice is necessarily arbitrary, as many other decisions must be arbitrary – choice of music examples (I have tried to avoid the familiar), bibliographical references, and so on – though I have always had reasons for my decisions. Some omissions have no doubt been accidental; but the thinning out of references to bibliographical help and to complete editions

after the eighteenth century has been deliberate, not merely because the bibliography is impossibly large and the complete editions are less necessary to the probable reader – the intelligent layman or student, not the mature musicologist – but because the probable reader is likely to be much better informed about music in the normal repertory. For the same reason I have modified my general approach, giving over-familiar music of the nineteenth century perhaps over-much space in order to avoid annotated lists of great names and works, but at the same time drawing attention to the music of secondary and tertiary masters so as to correct any impression that great names make up the whole picture.

Since the area I have swept with my telescope is practically boundless, I have directed it principally to what I conceive to be the main stream of Western music which flowed initially from Western Asia and the East Mediterranean lands. And not improperly, for in the long run it has spread and flooded the greater part of the world. It is true that the serious musicologist no longer regards 'music' as Euro-centred; he recognizes that the vast majority of the world's inhabitants have their own musics – some of them 'high' cultures of great antiquity and sophistication. Even the widest Euro-American musical public is aware of their existence and sometimes enjoys superficially the musics of India, the Islamic world, and Eastern Asia, although these can hardly convey to Western listeners what they convey to natives of their own lands. All the same, Western music has developed more richly than any other and when it has come into contact with these others it has, regrettably, often tended to absorb or contaminate them without being more than occasionally and superficially influenced in return. Writing for the Western reader, I have tried to give at least brief *aperçus* of some outstandingly important non-Western musical systems, interrupting my main account at those points in history where the West became intelligently conscious of them.

The relationship between 'high art' Western music and anonymous-popular music presents another kind of difficulty. The relationship has been mutually beneficial and the gap that began to open between them during the nineteenth century has been harmful to both. But here again I have generally had to bypass the music of the 'folk' as I have the 'high art' of some peripheral Western countries.

Even so, the areas I have tried to cover are so extensive that, in contrast to the specialist, I have found that I know less and less about more and more and have called upon kindly experts to save me from grievous error: in particular Professor Denis Arnold and Mrs. Arnold, Dr. E. J. Borthwick, Dr. John Caldwell, Mr. W. V. Davies, Mr. T. C. Mitchell, Mr. Jeremy Noble, Dr. Laurence Picken, Dr. Richard Widdess, and Mr. Owen Wright. I am infinitely grateful to them and, last but far from least, to Mr. Anthony Mulgan of the Oxford University Press for his constant encouragement and helpful advice.

Designation of notes by letters



Abbreviations

<i>AfMF</i>	<i>Archiv für Musikforschung</i>
<i>AfMW</i>	<i>Archiv für Musikwissenschaft</i>
<i>CEKM</i>	<i>Corpus of Early Keyboard Music</i>
<i>BWV</i>	<i>Thematisch-Systematisches Verzeichnis der Werke J. S. Bachs</i>
<i>CMM</i>	<i>Corpus Musicae Mensurabilis</i>
<i>ChW</i>	<i>Das Chorwerk</i>
<i>DDT</i>	<i>Denkmäler deutscher Tonkunst</i>
<i>DTB</i>	<i>Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Bayern</i>
<i>DTÖ</i>	<i>Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich</i>
<i>EDM</i>	<i>Das Erbe deutscher Musik</i>
<i>EECM</i>	<i>Early English Church Music</i>
<i>HAM</i>	<i>Historical Anthology of Music</i>
<i>JAMS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Musicological Society</i>
<i>MB</i>	<i>Musica Britannica</i>
<i>MF</i>	<i>Die Musikforschung</i>
<i>MGG</i>	<i>Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i>
<i>M&L</i>	<i>Music & Letters</i>
<i>MQ</i>	<i>Musical Quarterly</i>
<i>NOHM</i>	<i>New Oxford History of Music</i>
<i>OAM(M)</i>	<i>Oxford Anthology of Music (Medieval Music)</i>
<i>PRMA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association</i>
<i>SIMG</i>	<i>Sammelbände der internationalen Musikgesellschaft</i>
<i>StMW</i>	<i>Studien zur Musikwissenschaft</i>
<i>TCM</i>	<i>Tudor Church Music</i>
<i>VfMW</i>	<i>Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft</i>
<i>ZfMW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft</i>
<i>ZIMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der internationalen Musikgesellschaft</i>

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