A History of Western Music

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Revised Edition

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A HISTORY OF WESTERN MUSIC

REVISED EDITION

W · W · NORTON & COMPANY · INC ·

NEW YORK

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Grout, Donald Jay.

A history of Western music.

Bibliography: p.

1. Music—History and criticism. I. Title.

ML160.G87 1973 780'.9 72-10089

ISBN 0-393-09416-2

Printed in the United States of America

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Preface

A generation ago this book would have been called simply a "History of Music." Today's view is different, and the word *Western* in our title reflects the realization that the musical system of western Europe and the Americas is but one of several among the civilizations of the world. Two further limitations should be stated here: this book is concerned only with art music; and it emphasizes certain composers, works, and historical relationships. Fashions in history change with the generations, like fashions in musical taste. Of course a historian tries to be objective; but any general history of music is bound to reflect its writer's judgment as to which of the music of the past that he happens to know, and which aspects of the historical development of that music, are most worth attending to in the present.

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 musical examples cited in this book and to hear them *in their context;* for this reason, most of the examples have been selected from works which are conveniently accessible in standard editions or in anthologies of music, and these are listed in the Bibliography for each chapter.

An elementary knowledge of musical terms and of harmony—equivalent perhaps to a first-year course in theory—has been assumed. The Glossary contains brief definitions of terms not elsewhere defined in this book; but many of these are terms which a student who is ready to begin the study of the history of music should not need to look up, unless by way of reminder.

The Appendixes also contain suggestions for further reading. These lists are not intended as bibliographies. Most of the titles are in English, since many university undergraduates are not able to read a foreign language.

Particular thanks are due to Professor Otto Kinkeldey and Professor Paul Henry Lang. Both read all the chapters in manuscript and gave me much excellent advice, most of which I have followed. Other colleagues as well have given me the benefit of their specialized knowledge from time to time. I want to thank Dr. Emanuel Winternitz and Professor Carl Parrish for help with the illustrations; Mrs. Brian McGuinness for special assistance; and Mr. Harold Samuel, Music Librarian of Cornell University, for his quiet efficiency and never-failing patience.

Preface to the Revised Edition

The purpose of the Revised Edition is to improve this book, not to recast it entirely. Numerous changes, corrections, and some additions have been made, with a view to bringing the whole into line with the results of most recent research in all fields of the history of Western music. A new section on the period since 1950 has been added and the bibliographies and chronology updated.

I am especially grateful to the following scholars who have kindly provided extensive and expert advice on portions of the book that lay in areas of their special competence: to Professor Albert Seay, The Colorado College (medieval period); Professor Leeman Perkins, Yale University (Renaissance); Professor Joseph Kerman, Oxford University (English music of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries); Professor Christoph Wolff, Columbia University (Baroque); Jens Peter Larsen, Professor Emeritus, University of Copenhagen, and Professor Dénes Bartha, University of Pittsburgh (Classical period); Professor Gerald Abraham of Sussex, England (nineteenth century); and Professor William W. Austin, Cornell University (twentieth century). I have carefully considered all their very valuable counsels and have heeded most of them; any errors and shortcomings that remain in the following pages are mine alone.

Other friends and colleagues have responded to my occasional appeals for help or enlightenment. Particular thanks are due to Professor Paul Henry Lang, Professor R. M. Longyear, and Professor John D. Bergsagel for many helpful suggestions; to Professor Zofia Lissa and Dr. Wajciech Pazdro of Warsaw for information on

the history of Polish music; and to Professors John Hsu and Don Randel of Cornell, Professor Lewis Lockwood of Princeton, Professor Edward Lowinsky of Chicago, Professor Eugene J. Leahy of Notre Dame, and Professor William G. Waite of Yale for information on special points.

I wish also to express appreciation to Mrs. Judith Bossert and Mrs. Martha Hsu of the Cornell University Libraries and to Mr. Richard Hunter and his amiable assistants in the Cornell Music Library. Finally, my thanks go to Mr. David Hamilton and Mrs. Claire Brook, of W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., for their painstaking care in the production of this revised edition.

Donald J. Grout
"Cloudbank," Spafford, New York
August, 1972

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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

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; further-

more, 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.

Music in ancient Greek life and thought

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 consequence, 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.

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)

I. The State of Music at the End of the Ancient World

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. (see HAM, No. 7 for examples).

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 performance 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.

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

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.

Greek musical theory

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 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 Pythagoros 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

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)*

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 the speculations about music and its place in education throughout that period.

For some Greek thinkers music had also 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 Plato[2] 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.

The close union of melody and poetry is another dimension in which we may view the amplitude of the Greek's 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

2 Plato, *Republic*, X, 617.

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

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 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 Aristotle[4] 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 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

[3] Aristotle, *Poetics,* 1, 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.
[5] Also see Plato, *Republic,* III, 401E.