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History and Influence of
Ancient Music.

by

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The history of music is a very interesting one, especially the music of the ancients.

Unlike architecture, sculpture, and painting, music is necessarily ephemeral in its material form, and so we possess no specimens to inform us of its character during remote periods, but we know that it has been cultivated even among the most uncivilized races of men, from time immemorial.

Its existence may be traced through all the Greek philosophies and mythologies. We have the myth of the sirens, who lured the ill-fated mariners to destruction, by their sweet songs. We also have a trace of it on the Egyptian obelisks and ancient tombs "everywhere gilding the twilight of antiquity with its suggestive presence."

It is strange and still more strange that in all countries, ancient and modern, music has been used as a part of all religious rites and ceremonies, it is the highest praise that can be given to the gods and the Creator, it seems to be the connecting link and the divine link between the people and their Gods.

There are many myths in regard to the origin of music. The Greeks had a mathematical

and astronomical theory, which was probably taken from the Egyptians. They believed that the scale was founded on the seven planets known to astronomers at that time. Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. The Sun was supposed to be the controlling middle note around which all the others circled.

The Egyptians were divided as to the origin. Some of their legends say that it belonged to beneficent Deities, others award it to Satan or the evil principle.

There were three gods, Hermes, Horus, and Osiris who fostered music. They discovered the various tones and instruments. Similar to the Greeks the tones were taken and named from the same heavenly planets. It is a strange fact that like their religion the Egyptians had a music for the people and a music for the priesthood. They had two distinct schools, scientific and popular. The scientific music was the music used for the praise of the gods and was considered the highest possible art, but the popular music was the music for the people, and was degraded as a pastime for the lowest orders.

The Chinese had a very different origin for their music, they thought it was given to the people by supernatural beings during the reign of Chi-hwang-che, who is supposed to have reigned during the time of spirits. He invented the rules of pronunciation, the written character of the language and Chinese music.

Tcho-yung once listened to the songs of birds and these songs caused him to invent a music which according to the sages "penetrated everywhere, speaking to the intelligence, calming the passions of the heart, causing perfect equilibrium in emotions, facilitating and improving the use of all the senses and prolonging the life of man."

More mysterious than all the rest is the Hindu music. This also belonged to the gods. Legends say that at Brahma's command, his consort, Saraswati, Goddess of Speech and Oratory, brought this wonderful art to man. To aid music Mahadev Krishna let five keys spring from his head as nymphs, Parvati his wife giving one more, then Brahma added thirty lesser keys or nymphs.

Their scale is a pretty myth. it is made up of seven chief tones which are represented by so many heavenly sisters, between each tone there are four lesser tones which are also nymphs. Each principal tone with the four tones above belong to the same family. So instead of calling a tone flat they say, for instance, "Severet na, has been introduced to the family of Santa and her sisters.

These are a few of the principal stories in regard to the origin of music. It is very probable that the Greeks obtained part of their music from the Egyptians, for the early Grecian music experienced its first real onward movement when Egypt was thrown open to foreigners.

The Hebrews also probably received the most of their training from the Egyptians. Moses is believed to have acquired a knowledge of music as practiced by the Egyptian priesthood and Miriam was instructed in music when she received her Egyptian education.

Little is definitely known of the tonal system of the Israelites, not even the

structure of their scale; but some writers conjecture that they had a system of harmony or part writing, and in support of this claim urged that a people capable of such depths of feeling as were the Hebrews could not rest satisfied with the mere outline of music of which melody consists, but that they must have sought and discovered that rich method of tone coloring which harmony supplies. But it is to be borne in mind that there is nothing in the extensive written traditions of the Jews to establish this. And that even the Greeks, with their so much higher intellectual powers, and their system of philosophy failed to develop harmony.

The influence of the ancient music was as great if not greater than ours of today. The Egyptian considered music useless and even hurtful because as they said it enervated the soul and made the man effeminate. Nevertheless it was used in their work. They had a custom of singing while working, one man gave the time of the refrain for all to sing

and they all kept time to the beat. Then, too, the chief portion of their funeral services were conducted to music. Many of these songs were accompanied by a clapping of the hands, which, by the way, is not unpleasant as many can testify who have heard some of our own southern darkies sing.

Directly opposed to the Egyptian idea of music was the Hebrew music. With them music was seldom detached from their religious rites and was always used in praise of the Deity. This fact ought to prove to some critics that the music of other races, because it was such a highly considered art, with them, no matter how ill-sounding it is to our ears, should merit our attention.

David exerted great influence over Saul's crazed mind by his skillful and almost divine playing. This is one of the earliest notices of the effects of music in mental disease.

The influence of the Hebrews has been vast and far-reaching. W. M. Dethick says "Lifted, as a people, with the distinguishing

characteristics of refined sensibility and poetic temperament, they naturally possessed the most exalted ideas in regard to music, which they associated inseparably with religion, and as their religion was incomparably nobler than that of any other nation, their music naturally sought a higher plane. They addressed the Almighty in hymns of praise regarding music as a divine link which connected man with his Maker.

The Chinese exerted great influence over each other by their music. Fo-hi invented an instrument by which he could regulate his heart and curb his passions. He was considered a beneficent ruler, for he sought in all ways to benefit his race. He arranged and regulated a system of music not as an amusement, but as a means of popularizing his thoughts on all sciences. His first song celebrated his triumph over ignorance and barbarism.

They based all other sciences on music and sought to make that the foundation of all others. At different times music was regarded in different lights. Some

emperors believed it to be the most important of all arts and did their best to encourage its study, while others did not regard it in so noble a light.

Kaungchi says in a proclamation concerning the diminution of the number of court musicians, "Music has power to quiet the heart and therefor was beloved by our sages. They also could while enjoying themselves at its practise, benefit themselves, because the fundamental principles of government are contained in the art of music. But such a comparison is scarcely suitable to virtuosity. Why, therefore, expend money on it? I approve of the action of Ngai-Fi in discharging them."

One emperor tells us what music should be. He said "Music should follow the sense of words. It should be simple and unaffected. Music is an expression of the soul of the musician."

There were some French missionaries in China at an early period and the emperor was very much interested in their music, but the people did not like it.

One missionary says, "I saw upon their countenances only a cold and vacant look, which announced to me that I had not touched them in the least. One day I asked them how they liked our music and begged that they would tell me frankly what they thought. They answered in their politest way that 'our melodies were not made for their ears, nor their ears for our melodies.'" It was not surprising therefor that they could not find beauties in our melodies as they could in their own. One man said in answer, "The melodies pass from ear to heart and from heart to soul. We feel them and we understand them, those which you have just played have no such effect upon us. The airs of our ancient music were something quite different, one needed but to hear them to be vanquished by them. Our books give to them the most pompous eulogies, but they tell us at the same time that we have in a great measure lost the excellent method by which the ancients produced such marvellous effects. The great emperor Chum always

prepared to deal with the affairs of the empire to the sound of the *kin* & to its melody we owe the love and care which he constantly gave to his people.

I quote a song improvised by Ohum on the *kin*.

"The breeze of midday brings warmth and dispels sorrow; may it be the same with Ohum; may it be the joy and the consolation of his people. The breeze of midday causes the grain to grow, which is the hope of the people; even so Oh, Ohum! be thou the hope and the wealth of thy subjects." etc.

Kong-ji-tsie or Confucius, leader of Chinese thought and philosophy once heard some ancient music and the effect was so marvellous that for three months he scarcely could eat for thinking of it. "I should never have believed" he said, "that composers could have reached such a pinnacle of perfection." He was an excellent performer on the musical stones of the *king* and a passer-by once hearing him exclaimed "surely one who can play thus, must have a soul

occupied with great thoughts."

Once when starving he played^{and} sang as usual^{and} one of his disciples ventured a reproach asking how he could sing when all were starving; he replied "the wise man seeks by music to strengthen the weakness of his soul, the thoughtless one uses it to stifle his fears."

It was in Grecian music that we probably find the highest type of ancient music. It exerted a great influence over the Greek mind the same as the music of other nations had influenced its hearers.

Louis Q. Elson says "Music meant to the Greeks all the aesthetics and culture that were used in the education of youth."

Music was a great feature of the public games of Greece and seemed to inspire the partakers to greater action. One famous trumpeter Herodocus, could play on two trumpets at a time and caused his audience to sit farther away because the concussion was so great. He won a number of prizes in the musical contests. He was of great use in military affairs. At a siege of Argos

troops were giving way, Herodotus began to play his two trumpets, this inspired the warriors so that they returned to fight and won the victory.

Terpander was one of the most famous post-musicians of his time. At one time Sparta was in trouble because of wars^{and} internal dissensions. The Oracle of Delphi was consulted as to what the future would bring forth. The Oracle replied "dis cord would be quelled in Sparta when the sound of Terpander's harp was heard there".

Terpander was sent for and the effect of his songs was truly remarkable. It is said that "men burst into tears, enemies embraced each other and all internal dissension was at an end."

Olympus composed an air which caused Alexander to seize his arms for battle when it was sung to him.

"The severest simplicity was an essential feature of Grecian art and architecture, and nothing was regarded with more vehement disfavor than any tendency to frivolity." Aristophanes in his Comedy "The Clouds", satirizes this departure thus.

"Had any one for sport essayed such shakes
and trills to practice,
Like Phrynes has now introduced - neck-
breaking ship and flourish,
Of stripes he'd had a measure full, for holy
art corrupting."

Samon of Athens thought that the intro-
ductions of a new and presumably enervating
scale would endanger the fabric of the
state, and that a single key could not
be altered without imperilling the future
welfare of Greece."

Plato maintained that only music
that ennobled the mind should be tolerated
and that it was the duty of the law-givers
to suppress that which possessed merely
sensual qualities.

"Thus, as music was in a sense a re-
cognized custodian or safe guard of the
public virtue, the very jealous care
with which its integrity was guarded
closed off the only avenue to its true and
perfect development and left that work
to a later and less severe civilization."

Lucian music finally passed into the
custody of the Romans where for a time it

was treated as the beautiful art it is. But, as I etthick says "the tendency to sensualism soon usurped the place of the pure love of beauty, the dance degenerated into voluptuous posturing; the dominating influence of the virtuous demoralized the standard of true propriety, and the divine art reached such a degradation of decay, that it ultimately fell altogether into the hands of licentious women, who used it to attract attention to their meretricious charms, and it was expunged by order of the state from the curriculum of Roman education on the ground that an art practiced by slaves and the depraved and despised, was unworthy the training of the patrician youth."

The Emperor Julian deemed no study more worthy of attention than good music.

It is strange that the ancient nations should have been so much more susceptible to music than the people of today. It may be that the accounts are very much over drawn and that the imagination may have played a very

large part in these stories, but although wrapped in so much mystery, we know that the ancients had an intellectual insight into the true principles of music. If they had allowed more freedom to their composers and musicians they might have made rapid strides towards the music of today, but it was guarded by such jealous care to keep it perfectly pure and perfectly beautiful that it stood in its own light and waited for our later civilization to develop it in all its beauty.

"Thus, with Rome, as the Lamp of knowledge was extinguished, the art of music sank deeper in the gloom than any other. In the decay of Rome, the mythological and classical ages became effete, and in the dark horizon which bounded the outlook of humanity and progress, there was only to be recognized the hopeful light of the star that had risen in Bethlehem."