

Introduction

In the seventh book of his monumental account of Rome from its beginnings until his own day, the historian Livy digresses on the origins of Roman theater. The institution began, he reports, in response to a plague in 364 BCE:

cum vis morbi nec humanis consiliis nec ope divina levaretur, victis superstitione animis ludi quoque scenici – nova res bellicoso populo, nam circi modo spectaculum fuerat – inter alia caelestis irae placamina instituti dicuntur; ceterum parva quoque, ut ferme principia omnia, et ea ipsa peregrina res fuit. sine carmine ullo, sine imitandorum carminum actu, ludiones ex Etruria acciti ad tibicinis modos saltantes, haud indecoros motus more Tusco dabant. imitari deinde eos iuventus, simul inconditis inter se iocularia fundentes versibus, coepere; nec absoni a voce motus erant. accepta itaque res saepiusque usurpando excitata. vernaculis artificibus, quia ister Tusco verbo ludio vocabatur, nomen histrionibus inditum; qui non, sicut ante, Fescennino versu similem incompositum temere ac rudem alternis iaciebant sed impletas modis saturas descripto iam ad tibicinem cantu motuque congruenti peragebant. Livius post aliquot annis . . . ab saturis ausus est primus argumento fabulam serere. (7.2.3–8)

When neither human remedies nor divine help relieved the pestilence, it is said that the Romans, their minds overcome by superstition, included also theatrical games among the rites they established in order to appease the angry gods. Such games were something new for the warlike people, who had previously known only games in the circus. The thing itself was a small affair, however, and, as is generally the case in all beginnings, a foreign import. Dancers, summoned from Etruria, dancing to tunes provided by a *tibicen* (*tibia* player), performed quite proper dances in the Etruscan manner, without singing or imitation. Then the youth began to mimic them, at the same time hurling insults at each other with rude verses; and their motions were in agreement with their voices. And so the thing was taken up, and it developed as it was repeated more often. Professional actors got the name *histriones* because *ister* is the Etruscan name for a dancer. They did not exchange a primitive rough verse similar to Fescennine verses, the way it had been done before; but they acted out *saturae* filled out with rhythms, with a written song performed to the accompaniment of the *tibia* player, and with

corresponding movement. After some years Livius Andronicus first ventured to create a play with a plot out of the *saturae*.

Roman theater, to Livy, began with music and remained a distinctly musical genre. The tradition started as dance, accompanied by the *tibia*, an instrument that will occupy much of the following pages. The addition of song, in the form of insulting verses, was the next step. Third came a refinement of the song and dance: the exact nature of that refinement, the dramatic *satura*, is uncertain, but Livy clearly envisions it as a musical genre with varied melodies. Only as a final step did dramatic plots – and presumably with them spoken dialogue – arrive.¹

We can hardly accept Livy's account uncritically. In all likelihood it derives, directly or indirectly, from one or more works of the first-century-BCE antiquarian and polymath Varro. Varro appears to have had a bad habit of applying Greek explanations of origins to Roman phenomena when he had no Roman evidence; and parts of this account of the origins of Roman theater look suspiciously like Aristotle's description of the origins of Attic theater (*Po.* 1449a). Livy's account may be further distorted by his own clear bias against theater.²

In spite of these caveats, the basic outline of Livy's account may well be accurate. Given the importance of Etruscan culture in early Rome, and the scenes of dancing to the accompaniment of the *tibia* in Etruscan tomb paintings, it makes very good sense that Etruscans would help inspire the earliest Roman theater.³ Because theatrical games are official government activities, some account of their beginnings was probably preserved in the official records of Rome – the priests' *Annales Maximi* or similar documents. These events occurred after 390 BCE, so the relevant documents would not have been destroyed in the Gallic sack of Rome. The similarities between Aristotle and the Roman accounts are as likely to reflect similar developments in Athens and Rome as borrowing on the part of Roman antiquarians.

¹ Valerius Maximus' account of the origins of Roman theater (2.4.4), which derives at least in part from a source other than Livy (Oakley 1998: 777), similarly places music at the center of the tradition. For Valerius Maximus song came first, and then dance, but the progression through *saturae* to musical drama is the same as in Livy. For Horace's somewhat different account of the origins of theater at Rome, see below.

² Varro as source: Schmidt 1989: 78–108 (with a review of earlier scholarship); Oakley 1998: 43–4. Varro creating Roman history by analogy with Greek: Horsfall 1994: 67, Baier 1997: 189. Livy's antitheatrical bias: Feldherr 1998: 165–217. On unreliability in accounts of early Rome: Feeney 2005: 228.

³ Oakley 1998: 52 (cf. Hering 1966). *Tibiae* show up with extraordinary frequency in Etruscan art (Lawergren 2004–7).

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In all probability, then, Roman theater started with music. And music continued to dominate the Roman stage throughout its history. Roman authors of all periods make the association between music and theater so emphatic that the two are nearly equated. In the first century BCE Cicero, contrasting the circus, where horse races were held, and the theater, takes for granted that one watches spectacles in the former and hears music in the latter (*Leg.* 2.38). The Augustan poet Ovid writes of common folk singing songs they have learned in the theater (*Fast.* 3.535). In the high Empire, the orator Fronto, describing dreams, envisions a fan who sees an actor in his sleep together with one who hears an instrumentalist (*De Feriis Als.* 3.13). In the third century CE, Censorinus includes the following words in his salute to a friend's birthday:

nec vero incredibile est ad nostros natales musicam pertinere. haec enim . . . certe multum obtinet divinitatis et animis permovendis plurimum valet. nam nisi grata esset deis immortalibus . . . profecto ludi scaenici placandorum deorum causa instituti non essent. (*De Die Natali* 12.1–2)

And it is no wonder that music is connected with our birthdays. For music surely has divinity within it and has the greatest power for moving souls. For if it were not pleasing to the immortal gods . . . surely then no theatrical games would have been established for the sake of placating the gods.

Music thus lay at the heart of Roman theater, and without music there would be no theater at Rome. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Roman theatrical genre best represented in our extant texts: the *palliata*, or comedy in Greek dress, of the third and second centuries BCE. Joining the actors for any performance of a *palliata* was the *tibicen*, or *tibia* player, who had a conspicuous position on or near the stage. The extant texts of Plautus and Terence, the two writers of *palliatae* whose works survive, suggest that in most plays the *tibicen* accompanied over half of the words the actors performed, and in some plays nearly four-fifths of the verses were delivered to accompaniment. Actors joined in the musical performance with singing and dancing.

Understanding this all-important music is no easy task. No melodies used in the plays of Plautus and Terence survive; and in spite of much excellent work on various aspects of Roman comedy's music – the *tibia*, the meter of the plays, the origin and role of *cantica* – the nature and effect of that music remains largely a mystery. Hence this book. I hope in what follows to bring to life some part of Roman comedy's lost music, and to evaluate what that music contributed to the plays.

SOURCES

Five types of evidence can help us as we attempt to understand Roman comedy's music: descriptions of musical and theatrical performance by ancient authors, extant written music from the ancient world, notation in the late-antique and medieval manuscripts of Plautus and Terence, archaeological and epigraphical evidence for the *tibia* and for ancient performance, and comparative evidence from other traditions of music and theater. Each of these types of evidence brings its own set of methodological problems, but together they can tell us much about the music of the plays.

Ancient authors

By far the most important sources for this study are the writings of various ancient authors. Besides the plays themselves, we possess descriptions of performances, works of music theory, accounts of the history of theater, and various other works where music and theater are mentioned. I will assess the value of many of these sources as we encounter them. It will be worthwhile now, however, to consider what we can learn from the plays themselves and production notices called *didascaliae*, the late-antique Latin grammarians Donatus and Diomedes, the orator Cicero, the poet Horace, and Greek authors.

Evidence from the plays themselves

The plays of Plautus and Terence include various references to music. On four occasions Plautus' characters make explicit reference to the accompanying *tibicen* (*Cas.* 798, *Ps.* 573a, *St.* 715 and 758). Plautus and Terence's characters also refer to other male and female *tibia* players (*tibicines* and *tibicinae*: *Epid.* 218, *Merc.* 125, *Most.* 933–4, 960, *Poen.* 1415, *St.* 380, 542, 545, *Ad.* 905–7), and *tibicinae* appear as characters in three Plautine plays (*Aul.* 281 and *passim*, *Most.* 971 [Philematium], *Ps.* 482 [Phoenicium]). We also hear of and see on stage female lyre players (*fidicinae*, *Epid.* 514 and *passim*,⁴ *Most.* 960, *St.* 380, 542, 560, *Eu.* 133 and *passim*, *Ph.* 109 [also called a *citharistria* at *Ph.* 82, 144]) and harp players (*psaltria*, *Ad.* 388 and *passim*, *sambucae*, *St.* 381); and characters mention male players of a shallow drum (*tympanum*, *Poen.* 1317, *Truc.* 611). There is no evidence that any of these musicians except the official *tibicen* actually played during the performance.

⁴ Note, however, that Periphanes refers to her *tibiae* (514).

As we will see in the ensuing chapters, there are also several references to singing and dancing. More importantly, the meter of the plays' verses will provide a foundation upon which we can build musical analyses.

We must consider several questions in using the plays as evidence. First, Plautus and Terence adapted their plays from Greek comedies, called New Comedies, written in the late fourth and early third centuries BCE by a number of playwrights, most notably Menander. In addressing any phenomenon in Roman comedy, therefore, it is important to ask how much that phenomenon is a product of the Roman playwrights' own creative powers and to what extent it is a recreation in Latin of what was already in the Greek original.⁵

In the case of Roman comedy's music, we can be confident that we are dealing with a feature of the plays vastly different from the works the Roman playwrights adapted. From what remains of Menander and his contemporaries it is clear that New Comedies included extra-dramatic choral interludes between acts. The Roman playwrights abandoned the five-act structure of their originals and with it the chorus and its interludes. Outside of these interludes New Comedy was a genre where music was the exception rather than the norm. The surviving fragments suggest that Menander and his contemporaries wrote a great majority of their scenes in a meter known as iambic trimeter (the Greek equivalent of the iambic senarius, on which see below).⁶ Iambic trimeters were with very few exceptions performed without accompaniment. The playwrights of New Comedy appear to have avoided almost entirely the more exotic meters and elaborate polymetry (frequent changing of meters) that are abundant in Roman comedy. In both cases where we can compare an extensive passage of Roman comedy directly with its Greek original (Pl. *Bacch.* 526ff. and Menander's *Dis Exapaton* 11ff., and fragments of Caecilius' and Menander's *Plokion*, quoted by

⁵ This is not to suggest that features of Roman comedies derived from New Comedy are irrelevant for an understanding of the aims and techniques of the Roman playwrights or the effects of the plays. As several scholars have pointed out, the incorporation of a portion of a Greek play into a Latin play relatively unchanged is itself an artistic decision on the part of the Roman playwright and is as important a part of the play's overall effect as portions modified considerably or created from scratch. We can nevertheless learn a great deal about Plautus and Terence's aims, methods, and audience by determining what kinds of changes they chose to make in their Greek originals. For provocative and thorough analyses of how Plautus and Terence may have altered their Greek originals, see the various publications of Eckard Lefèvre (e.g., 1997, 2003, 2006, 2008). For less daring approaches to the question, see, among others, Ludwig 1968, Gaiser 1972, Zagagi 1980, and the various articles of Lowe (e.g., 1992, 1997, 2003).

⁶ The plays that survive in anything more than small fragments are all by Menander. It may be that other writers of New Comedy such as Diphilus and Philemon used more music than did Menander, but there is no indication that their plays were anywhere near as musically complex as those of Plautus and Terence.

Aulus Gellius [2.23]), the Roman playwrights' changes include replacing some of Menander's unaccompanied verses with accompanied meters.⁷

In dealing with any ancient text, given the vicissitudes of textual transmission before the invention of the printing press, we must always ask ourselves to what extent the text as handed down reflects the authors' actual words. In the case of Roman comedy, especially Plautus, this question is unusually difficult. When addressing ancient dramatic texts, we face not only the usual problems of scribal error and other events that change manuscripts over the centuries, but also the question of how the text made the transition from a performance script to a text meant for a wider audience. Plautus' plays, and perhaps Terence's as well, were performed for decades before they were first handled by scholars interested in determining what the playwrights actually wrote (Goldberg 2005: 62–75). Changes in the text, sometimes substantial, are inevitable as a text passes through the hands of various producers and actors for such a long period. Otto Zwierlein has gone so far as to propose that very large parts of Plautus' corpus – up to a third of some plays – are additions made by actors and producers (1990, 1991a, 1991b, 1992).

We need only look at the various versions of Shakespeare's plays produced during his lifetime to confirm that even before a playwright's death his texts are subject to change. C. W. Marshall argues that Roman comedy – or at least Plautine comedy – was peculiarly open to improvisation upon the written text, and that there was therefore never a “standard” text of Plautus' plays. Rather, actors, producers, and the playwright himself made changes to their scripts in response to the inspirations and demands of performance (2006: 245–79).

The arguments of Zwierlein, Marshall, and others provide a salutary check on our tendency to assume that we have the words of Plautus or Terence in each verse preserved in the manuscripts. At the same time, several factors provide assurance that we need not despair of finding the playwrights' own contributions to the music of their plays. First, as I will argue at several points below, Roman comedy was probably less improvisatory than Marshall suggests, and Zwierlein's claims of wholesale interpolation by actors and producers are undoubtedly exaggerated (cf. Gratwick 1993b; Jocelyn 1996). Second, a good deal of what follows is an examination of the overall musical structure of plays, indicated, as we shall see, by large units of verses in single meters. Short interpolations would have a minimal effect on

⁷ The question of just where Plautus got the inspiration for his polymetric songs, though fascinating and important, is beyond the scope of this book. For recent reviews of the question, see Dumont 1997, Hurka 2008.

these large musical structures, and interpolations large enough to interfere with the musical structure, such as the unaccompanied interpolated scene that follows the musical opening of Plautus' *Stichus* (48–57), are likely to be conspicuous enough that they can easily be recognized and accounted for. Third, where we can be certain that verses were interpolated, the meter is usually iambic senarius, the one meter of Roman comedy that was virtually always performed without musical accompaniment: the actors and producers who added verses appear to have been most comfortable in this meter and least comfortable with the most exotic meters.⁸ We can therefore be confident that the passages of the greatest importance for the plays' music were the least affected by alterations made by those performing the plays.

If we have trouble knowing for certain what words Plautus and Terence wrote, it is often even more difficult to know how their verses worked metrically. As we will see in chapters 4 through 6, the meters of Roman comedy are among the most complicated verse forms used in ancient Greece and Rome. Plautus and Terence's meters are based on patterns of long and short syllables, and they include an unparalleled number of metrical positions where a long syllable, a short syllable, or two short syllables are all permitted. Several of the meters are very alike, differing sometimes in only one metrical position. And the prosody of Roman comedy's Latin (which syllables are long, which short) is subject to a plethora of uncertainties. The scansion of Plautus and Terence's verse has therefore been the subject of numerous scholarly studies for centuries and remains controversial.⁹

Again, we need not despair. The metrically most complicated and uncertain passages are the polymetric passages of Plautus. Cesare Questa, the leading expert on Plautine polymetrics, has published these with his scansion (1995). Questa's text is not the last word: he has himself changed his mind about some verses in later publications,¹⁰ and I will have occasion to disagree with him a few times in what follows. His work nevertheless

⁸ Note the alternate endings of *Poenulus* and *Andria*, and the interpolated first scene of *Stichus*, all in iambic senarii. An additional alternate ending of *Poenulus* includes trochaic septenarii.

⁹ The standard work on the prosody and meter of Plautus and Terence is Questa 2007. The most thorough work in English is Lindsay 1922, unfortunately dated and subject to dangerous methodological fallacies (e.g., false assumptions about the effects of ictus). For the iambo-trochaic meters, the best guides in English are Gratwick 1993a: 40–63 and Barsby 1999: 290–304. Because I am concerned with the musical effects of sung verse rather than the explanation of metrical features, I will deal only cursorily with the linguistic foundations of prosodic and metrical phenomena. For a recent and sound assessment of the controversies surrounding the relationship between language and meter in Roman comedy, see Fortson 2008.

¹⁰ Note, for example, the changes between Questa 1995 and Questa 2001 in the attribution of verses in the final scenes of *Casina*.

allows us to describe with confidence the basic metrical patterns of Plautus' polymetric *cantica*, even if some details remain uncertain.¹¹ For the non-polymetric parts of Plautus and for Terence, I rely for my metrical analyses primarily on the *schemata metrorum* (lists of meters) of the Oxford Classical Texts of Lindsay and Kauer/Lindsay, respectively. Each of these texts has been justly criticized for inadequacies in matters of meter.¹² The meter outside of Plautus' polymetrics is considerably less problematic, however, and I have, where appropriate, abandoned the respective *schemata metrorum*.¹³

Didascaliae

Accompanying the texts in the manuscripts of two plays of Plautus and five of Terence are *didascaliae*, which preserve information regarding the first performance, including usually its date (established by the names of the consuls), the title of the Greek play adapted, the festival and presiding magistrates, and the leader of the theatrical troupe. All but one of these give information about the play's musical accompaniment. Thus we find, for example, preceding the text of Terence's *Phormio* in the manuscripts:

incipit Terenti *Phormio*. acta Ludis Romanis L. Postumio Albino L. Cornelio Merula aedilibus curulibus. egere L. Ambivius Turpio L. Hatilius Praenestinus. modos fecit Flaccus Claudi tibiis inparibus tota. Graeca Apollodoru *Epidicazomenos*. facta IIII C. Fannio M. Valerio cos.

Here begins Terence's *Phormio*. It was performed at the Roman Games under curule aediles Lucius Postumius Albinus and Lucius Cornelius Merula. Lucius Ambivius Turpio and Lucius Hatilius Praenestinus brought it to the stage. Flaccus, the slave of Claudius, produced the music on unequal *tibiae* through the whole play.¹⁴ The play comes from the Greek play *The Petitioner* by Apollodorus. It was the fourth play of Terence produced, in the consulship of Gaius Fannius and Marcus Valerius [161 BCE].

¹¹ Particularly important is Questa's skepticism regarding overarching structural principles of *cantica*, universal characteristics of meters, and the relationship between meter and meaning, three assumptions that have led some previous students of Plautus' meters to circular reasoning and faulty scansion. In the quotations of Plautine polymetric *cantica* in the ensuing chapters, I have followed Questa's verse indentations as well as his text and scansion.

¹² See the criticisms in Questa 2007: *passim*.

¹³ In particular, I have regularly compared Lindsay's text of Plautus with the less conservative and metrically more sophisticated text of Leo.

¹⁴ Reading *tota* as an ablative, with the word *fabula* assumed. Cf. Martin 1976: 97. One could also read *tibiis inparibus tota* as its own sentence, meaning, "The entire [play] was accompanied by unequal *tibiae*."

The origins of the *didascaliae* are uncertain,¹⁵ but Leo's theory is most convincing: they are excerpts of longer *didascaliae*, probably produced by Varro for his *De rebus scaenicis*. Varro could draw upon magistrate lists and literary sources for good evidence of the original productions. The *didascaliae* are thus generally reliable pieces of evidence for the original performances, even if some details, such as their chronological arrangement of the plays,¹⁶ are inaccurate because the excerptors of the *didascaliae* did not understand the material they excerpted.¹⁷ Their information about the *tibicen*, his instruments, and his contribution to the production will prove invaluable in the following chapters.

Donatus

Perhaps the most important source for the music of Roman comedy is the commentary on Terence attributed to Aelius Donatus, a grammarian of the fourth century CE. Donatus discusses *tibiae*, when they played, and how the actors performed musical sections of the plays both in *De Comoedia*, a short account of comedy that precedes the commentaries on the individual plays in our manuscripts, and in the prefaces to each of the plays.

Donatus' text comes near the end of a continuous Roman grammatical tradition, from Accius and the other grammarians of the mid-Republic, who would have known performances of Plautus and Terence close to the original performances, through Varro to grammarians of the early Empire such as Probus and Suetonius, and finally to the grammarians of late antiquity such as Donatus (cf. Jakobi 1996: 12 n. 34). Donatus clearly had an interest in the technical aspects of the theater; and although it is unlikely that the many stage directions in Donatus' commentary reflect original performance, there are some descriptions of performance practice in both the *De Comoedia* and the commentary that almost certainly show Donatus was using a source acquainted with Republican Roman performance traditions.¹⁸ It is likely, therefore, that the commentary preserves a reliable

¹⁵ Mattingly 1959 has gone so far as to argue that the *didascaliae* are merely the fantasies of imperial antiquarians. Mattingly's method, however, in which he assumes he can derive accurate biographical information from the prologues, is seriously flawed. Cf. Linderski 1987: 87 n. 25; Tansley 2001: 31 n. 35.

¹⁶ The chronological inaccuracies have been reasonably explained as records of different performances (Leo 1883: 318, Deufert 2002: 91, Goldberg 2005: 74–5). Klose 1966: 37 proposed that the numbering of the plays in the *didascaliae* reflects their order of composition rather than of performance.

¹⁷ Leo 1883: 318; cf. Deufert 2002: 88–96, 226. Klose 1966: 37–41 is too sanguine in proposing that the *didascaliae* go back to Terence himself (cf. Deufert 2002: 91 n. 195).

¹⁸ *de Com.* 8.8 (introduction of curtain), *Eu.* 967.2 (on the job of the *choragus*), *Ph.* 315.2 (Ambivius rehearsing the role of Phormio, though this may be apocryphal). Cf. Weinberger 1892: 123–7.

core of information about the music of the original performances. Much of my work in what follows will be trying to determine where that core lies.

A look at the contradictions and absurdities found in much of the Roman grammatical tradition, however, suggests that later misunderstandings and speculations added many inaccuracies to this core. Furthermore, as students of Donatus have long observed, the commentary as we have it is a hodge-podge. It does not survive in its original form but was excerpted in late antiquity or the early Middle Ages into marginalia accompanying texts of Terence. These marginalia were brought together again into the text as we have it by later grammarians, who added glosses of their own.¹⁹ Thus the entire commentary as we have it is both fragmentary and heavily interpolated. The *De Comoedia* presents still further questions: some scholars have suggested that it, like the *De Fabula* of Evanthius that is also part of the commentary's preface, is a work by another author added to the commentary later (e.g., Smutny 1898: 95–8). As valuable as it is, therefore, we must use Donatus' commentary with extreme caution, always on the lookout for unjustified speculation on the part of Donatus himself, his sources, or later interpolators.

It should be noted that Donatus has no value as an eyewitness of performance. There is some evidence for occasional performance of plays by Plautus and Terence in Imperial Rome,²⁰ but that evidence becomes exceedingly sparse by Donatus' day, and Donatus himself shows no signs of having actually seen Terence's plays in performance.²¹ If he had, those performances would probably have been vastly different from what spectators of the mid-Republic would have experienced.

Diomedes

The fourth-century-CE grammarian Diomedes ends his *Ars Grammatica* with a discussion of various genres of poetry, including an account of

Wessner 1905: 1547 notes that even later interpolators who added material to Donatus' text often used competent imperial grammarians when making their additions.

¹⁹ Grant 1986: 60–2, Kaster 1988: 276 (each with a review of scholarship on the question). It is proposed in Herzog 1989, however, that the apparent gaps and repetitions in the commentary can be explained by Donatus' own practice of mixing together many sources without attempting to harmonize them (155).

²⁰ Jürgens 1972: 229–30. It has long been argued that most theatrical performance, especially of tragedy, from the late Republic on consisted of excerpts (e.g., Heldmann 2000). Nervegna has recently made a strong case, however, for the continued performance of whole dramas well into the Empire (2007: 14–42).

²¹ Donatus' only clear reference to contemporary performance, a reference to women playing roles, "ut nunc videmus" (*An.* 716.1), probably refers to mime. Cf. Jakobi 1996: 12.