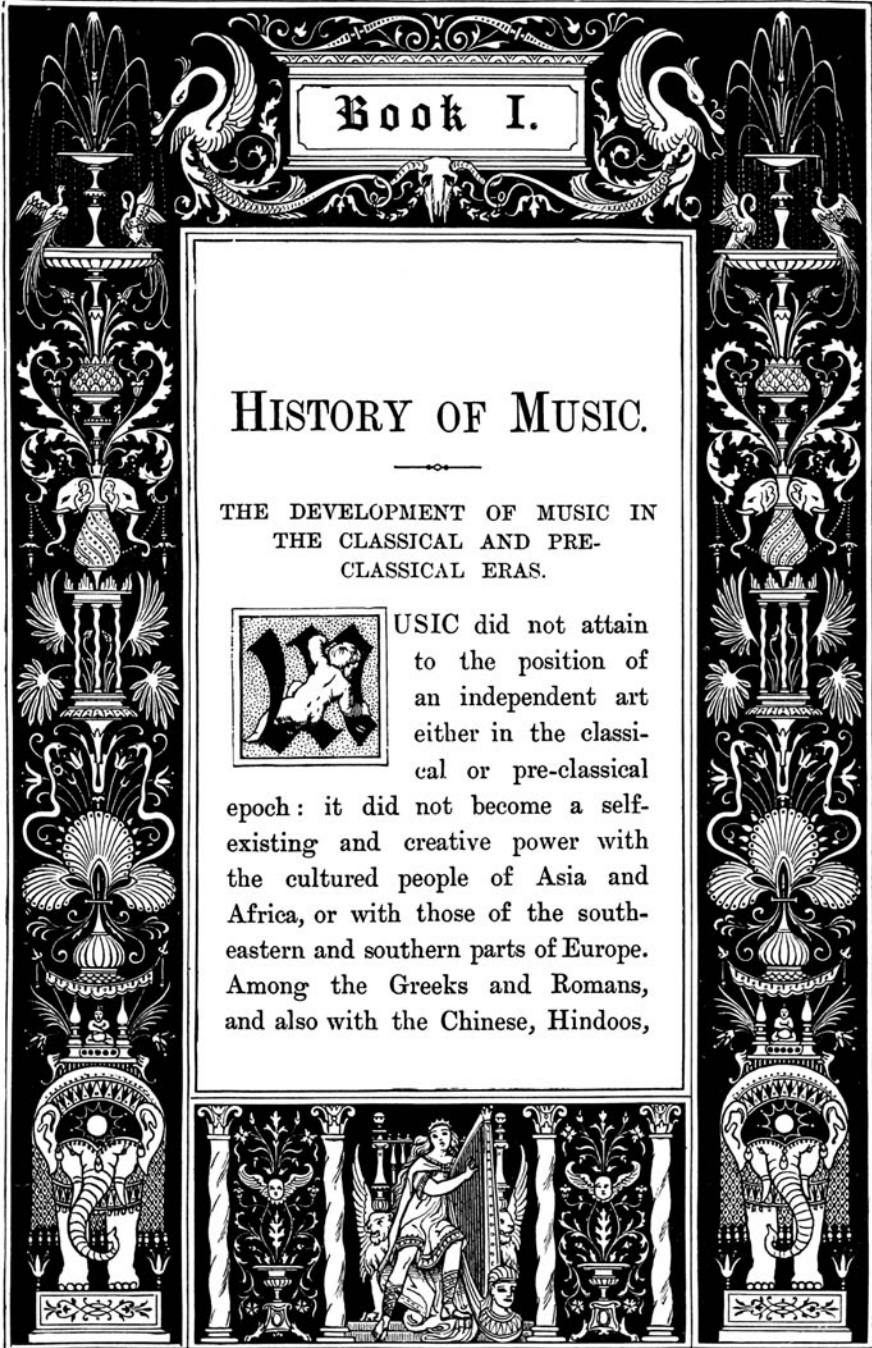


Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06163-6 - The History of Music: Volume 1

Emil Naumann Translated by Ferdinand Praeger Edited by Frederick Gore Ouseley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

B

Egyptians and Israelites, music was closely associated with poetry, the drama, and the dance, although it occupied a position inferior to those arts.

The greater or less esteem in which music was held by these nations had an important bearing on their progress or retardation in general civilisation. The more or less remarkable development of the other arts, especially poetry, exercised also an influence as powerful as those of religion, race, natural tendencies, climate, and geographical position. This is exemplified in the great contrasts presented to us by the different ancient civilised peoples of Asia and Europe, in their national existence, their philosophy, and also in their conception of the musical art. Not without reason does Herodotus lay stress on these seemingly irreconcilable contrasts that characterised the general mental life of Asia and Europe; and he even attributes to them all the sanguinary wars that raged, from the Trojan War, surrounded with its halo of myth, down to those which were waged against Persia.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the Greeks adopted Egyptian, Lydian, and Phœnician traditions in their theory of music as well as in their melody and rhythm, and that these traditions had a great influence on their selection and construction of musical instruments. But their innate sense of beauty and proportion saved them, on the one hand, from the manifold barbarisms which disfigured the music of the other nations, while, on the other hand, their talent for grasping heterogeneous matter, and reproducing it in a refined and intellectual form, enabled them to mould into a nobler and more complete unity the separately transmitted fragments of the musical culture of other lands.

In common with most nations of the pre-classical age, the Greeks were in the habit of making music the subject of speculative philosophy; but whilst the Orientals lost themselves in mythology, or revelled sometimes in strange and voluptuous, sometimes in childish yet ingenious flights of fancy, the Greek mind, seeking in all things for an organic whole, systematised the sensations, ideas, and combinations produced by musical sounds, by subjecting them to a progressive philosophical and mathematical investigation, at once consecutive and exact.

The Greeks, as well as the civilised tribes of Asia, evinced a great partiality for speculating on the nature of music, an enjoyment entirely distinct from the pleasures they experienced through its sensuous charm:

but they assigned to it an ethical position, a dignity and importance, both in relation to education and the state, as well as a softening influence on the passions that was not dreamt of by the Oriental nations.

The Greek tribes of Peloponnesus and Hellas, as well as the Egyptians, Phœnicians, the Greeks inhabiting the isles of the Ægean Sea, and especially those of Cyprus, had a primitive "Lament" which seems to have come originally from Phœnicia. It was a funeral chant on the death of the youthful Adonis, who represented symbolically the beautiful but short-lived spring. The Egyptians changed its signification into a lament of Isis for Osiris. The Greeks called it *Linos*, and the Egyptians *Maneros*; but wherever we find it on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean it always has the character of a plaintive wail of anguish at the evanescence of all things mortal.

We see by this in what inseparable proximity music has, from the first, stood to the contemplation of nature, and to the earliest thoughts and feelings of the human race. For this song, perhaps the oldest of which we have any knowledge, is a dirge for the fast-fleeting spring of youth and beauty—a lament over the frailty of all earthly things! Thus soon was the key-note sounded of that sorrowful strain which inspired the greatest poet of modern Germany, when he sang—

“‘But why am I transient, O Zeus?’ Beauty asked.
 ‘To fade I made Beauty,’ stern Jupiter said;
 And youth, flowers, dewdrops, all heard his sad words,
 And weeping they turned them away from his throne.”

From the earliest times of which we have any record, music has lent its voice to grief as well as to joy; and if no art was more capable of giving expression to the earliest accents of sorrow, none was more suited to afford consolation and hope to the broken-hearted. Thus music by its magic healed the wounds which it had itself inflicted; but whether its lyre was attuned to joy or to sorrow, it consecrated both by elevating them above terrestrial darkness into the purer atmosphere of sublime art; and in this respect the earliest and latest musical utterances display the most striking affinity. For the folk-songs of the most ancient nations, those which were sung beside the cradle of humanity, equally with those of our own time, are, like the immortal creations of the tone-poets of the last four centuries, one and all, mirrors of most purely unaffected and

heartfelt sentiment. Indeed, this natural utterance came much more unwittingly in the early and middle ages than in the present, but a large part of this ingenuousness descended to the great masters of the classical epoch. Hence it arises that it is precisely in the periods either of an imperfect development of the art or of its super-refinement that we meet with musical monstrosities and degeneracy, with over-elaboration, sentimentality, exaggerated expression, coquetry, voluptuousness, falsehood, diffuseness, and an artificial striving after effect.

However, the greater part of this primordial ingenuousness, which betokened the sweet innocence of bewitching childhood, was destined to disappear again until the day should come when the first faltering accents of music should be transformed into a genuine tone-language.

When this moment arrived, and the contemplation of music assumed a more intellectual character, then, in her endeavours to attain the ideal, she was launched on a boundless sea of trouble and obscurity. How could it be otherwise? For every awakening from dreams of innocence and childhood is just like the expulsion from Paradise enacted anew; the plucking of the fruit from the tree of musical knowledge could only be atoned for by the sweat of the brow. To reach the coveted goal, the first pioneers in the field of music had to grope their way through tortuous and thorny paths; and to follow them therefore in their search after light and truth furnishes us with an interesting historical retrospect. If, in the different stages of its course, which are marked by the long epochs of its warfare with besetting difficulties, music, the perfectly natural art, often returns very near to its starting-point of simplicity and unaffected expression, it takes nevertheless a place as high above its origin as the features of a Madonna by Raphael surpass those of a handsome peasant-girl. This is the relation in which the music of the ancients—many of whose immortal folk-songs are still extant—stands to the compositions of such composers as Bach, Gluck, Mozart, or Beethoven. Even the happiest attempts of the ancients—outpourings of their deepest sensations and feelings—are but the germs and foreshadowings of a higher subsequent development. The perfectly-matured art unfolds her wondrous wings, and, transcending expectation, soars above the most daring flights of fancy in the pursuit of her noble ideal.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06163-6 - The History of Music: Volume 1

Emil Naumann Translated by Ferdinand Praeger Edited by Frederick Gore Ouseley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

THE MUSIC OF THE ANCIENT ORIENTAL NATIONS.



IF we wish to gain a clear idea of the position in the history of music of the people who inhabited the eastern and southern parts of Asia, those of the south-west countries, generally classed together under the name of the Orient, the inhabitants of the Upper and Lower Valleys of the Nile—in fact, of all the civilised nations of the eastern half of the old world—we must divide them into four groups.

From this point of view we shall arrange together for purposes of examination the Chinese, Japanese, and Hindoos; classing together in the same way the Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Western Asiatics.

In the same way, the followers of Islam, although comprising many nations and distinct races, should, with reference to their musical achievements, be grouped under one head. This applies still more especially to the Israelites, who, arrogating to themselves the title of the “chosen people,” certainly merit that appellation in the musical art of the pre-classical age.

The Chinese, Japanese, and Hindoos may be treated of in one and the same chapter; first, because they are neighbours geographically, and secondly, because they are alike in that their music had no influence over the tonal art of the people of Europe. The still closer relation which existed amongst themselves will be left, however, for further investigation.

The second group of nations—viz., the Egyptians, Ethiopians, and Israelites—are closely connected by their geographical position, and in

addition to this have a common descent and language; they are either Semites, or have Semitic elements in their civilisation. But this important link is wanting in the former group, since the Chinese, being descendants of the Mongols, and the Hindoos of the Aryans, differ widely both in descent and disposition.

We have devoted an entire separate chapter to so comparatively small a people as the Hebrews, whilst compressing into the same space the history of the Chinese and Hindoos—who, without the Japanese, comprise more than half the inhabitants of the whole world—because, as already explained, the wonderfully high endowments of the former have obtained for them the first place amongst Orientals. It should further be mentioned that there existed a peculiar and intimate connection between the music and religious poetry of the Israelites; and lastly, that Palestine became the garden of the Lord, from whose soil was to spring forth and bloom the flower of Christianity—in other words, that religion by means of which music was to be elevated into a self-existing art.

It may appear incongruous to include in this section the Mohammedans with the nations of the pre-classical age. It is, however, an ascertained fact, that typical Arabian music, and even many Arabian instruments, belong to a period anterior to the Mohammedan era; and, moreover, were we not to refer to them here, some difficulty and confusion might be experienced in returning to them when tracing the history of the music of the Western nations. For a similar reason Kugler, Lübke, and other eminent writers interpolated Mohammedan art between classical art and that of Western Christianity; or between the oldest Christian plastic art of Byzantium and Rome, and that of the Middle Ages, because ancient traditions exerted so great an influence on Byzantine architecture, sculpture, and painting, and on early Christian art, that at the time of Rome's decadence they could not be said to have as yet attained to that individuality of style which characterises the art of the later Middle Ages.

The musical historian has to deal with a somewhat different state of circumstances. Although Christian music was trammelled by ancient tradition for several centuries, yet it was not so heavily weighted as were the arts of painting and sculpture of that time. Christianity and music had, from the commencement, so great an attraction for each other, that they literally coalesced by spontaneous approximation. For this reason we

have not wished to separate the early history of Christian music from its development, and therefore have preferred to speak of that of the Islamites here. Thus the history of the tonal art shows that already, in its earliest beginnings, it was the most Christian of all the arts. This is proved by the fact that almost all music of Paganism can, from an historic point of view, be divided into separate groups, according to the impress of nationality borne by their tonal art. With the Christians, however, no such division was ever possible, as all Christian nations, from the moment that music came in contact with Christianity, have collectively contributed to the development of music in the same direction without reference to nationality.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHINESE, JAPANESE, AND HINDOOS.

IN this chapter are included three nations, the Chinese, Japanese, and Hindoos, for though differing widely in race and temperament, they were, nevertheless, allied by the proximity of their geographical position, as well as by a certain mental resemblance. The spreading of Buddhism from India to China and Japan, the division into castes, and the tenacity with which the three nations clung to ancient customs during thousands of years, without change or progress, are all of importance in tracing their musical history. To these causes, together with an enervating climate and imperfect political institutions, may be ascribed the origin and growth of Fatalism in Japan, and Quietism in India and China.

Apart from the similarity of their mental life just indicated, these nations present to us, in other respects, the most striking contrasts. This is not perhaps due so much to dissimilarity of race and the vast territories over which these races extended, within which one might find every variety of character, as to the difference of disposition which led these nations to regard the world from divergent standpoints.

Whilst the Hindoos possess a lively imagination, the Chinese exhibit in its stead a circumscribed but practical worldliness. The former's conception of the world is poetical and ecstatic; the latter's, insipid and prosaic, with a puerile and pedantic trait running throughout. Whereas Chinese art is

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06163-6 - The History of Music: Volume 1

Emil Naumann Translated by Ferdinand Praeger Edited by Frederick Gore Ouseley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

superficial, that of the Hindoo, on the contrary, attempts to be profound, to fathom the connection between mind and matter, uniting therewith a predilection for the transcendental, the fantastic, and the mysterious.

Nothing can more forcibly demonstrate to us how intimately the growth of music is associated with the development of special characteristics and civilisation among nations, than the almost opposite method adopted by the Hindoos and Chinese, both in their treatment of musical theory, and in the manufacture of musical instruments.

An investigation of the peculiar characteristics of the above-named nations, as reflected in their musical conceptions and in their systems, will astonish those who have not fathomed the profound connection that exists between civilisation and art.

In turning our attention first of all to the Chinese, we find that the origin of music with them, as with all other nations, is in close affinity with that of their religion. The Chinese builds his world upon the harmonious action of the heavens and earth; regards the animation of all nature, the movement of the stars and the change of seasons, as a grand "world-music," in which everything keeps steadfastly in its appointed course, teaching mankind thereby a wholesome lesson. One of the founders of their religion, Fo-Hi, is believed to have been the inventor of the *Kin*, a stringed instrument still in use in China. The close relationship that originally existed between the constitution of the state and music is also clearly shown in Chinese history.

All their music has from time immemorial been under state supervision, in order to guard against the stealthy introduction of any tone contrary to ordinance. Here we already meet with the pernicious influence of a bureaucratic pedantic state, as well as that of the prosaic character of the Chinese, upon their music. Both features are exemplified in the names of the notes of their oldest musical scale, which consisted only of five tones, from F to D, omitting the B.

No. 1.



The lowest note of this scale, F, was called "emperor;" the G, "prime minister;" A, "loyal subjects;" C, "affairs of state;" and the D, "mirror

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06163-6 - The History of Music: Volume 1

Emil Naumann Translated by Ferdinand Praeger Edited by Frederick Gore Ouseley

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHINESE, JAPANESE, AND HINDOOS.

9

of the world." A people in whose tales and novels the climax culminates in the success or failure of the hero's state-examination could not but possess very feeble notions of the tonal art. The emperors did not disdain to bring themselves into close communication with musical institutions. In the year 364 A.D., Ngai-Ti published a decree against weak, effeminate music; and Kang-Hi, 1680 A.D., invented with success some new melodies, and founded an Academy of Music.

We will now endeavour to describe Chinese music by noticing some of its prominent features. Among the Chinese the art of music has ever remained an object either of diversion or of speculation. It has never revealed to them the language of the heart and intellect. Nevertheless they draw a distinction between sound and noise. The period at which their five-toned scale was enlarged to seven tones has been described by Chinese theorists as the commencement of the decadence of their musical system. They ascribe to their mythical bird "Fung-Hoang," and his mate, the invention of tones and half-tones; the six whole tones to the male, and the half-tones to the female. Such a creed coincides with all their notions of man and woman. The whole tones represented to them things perfect and independent—as heaven, sun, and man; the half-tones, things imperfect and dependent—as earth, moon, and woman. The enlargement of the scale from five to seven tones was owing to the insertion of the two half-tones E and B, which were called "leaders" and "mediators." These appellations proceed from a very fine musical instinct, as indeed E and B are "leaders" to F and C, and they possess also, for the modern cultivated ear, the quality of resolving themselves into the half-tone above, acting at the same time as mediators, and filling up the void between D and F—A and C.



After the completion of the octave the intermediate half-tones were added, viz., sharps to F, G, A, C, and D; dividing the Chinese scale, like our modern chromatic scale, into twelve semitones within the octave. From

this time the scale received the name of *Low*—*i.e.*, Law ; but they clung to F as the root of all tones.

It is characteristic of the Chinese, who generally regard things from an opposite point of view to other nations, that in music they call *low* what we call *high*, and *vice versa*—*e.g.*, the E of scale No. 2 would be to them the lowest, and the F at the beginning of the scale the highest tone.

In their theory of harmony there is a foreshadowing of the relation of the tonic to its fourth and fifth, but they did not perceive the full importance of these intervals as upper and lower dominants of the tonic, although in their circles of fourths and fifths they always returned to F, their starting-point. Their theories are based upon an infinite variety of rules, and exhibit a timorous mental hair-splitting which has completely fettered all artistic imagination. Here, too, the pedantic mind of the Chinese makes itself manifest, for, though possessing a strong power of discrimination, yet it lacks all imagination. It masters up to a certain point all knowledge that can be acquired by industry and observation. Beyond this, however, even in an art like music, its barren, theorising character makes itself felt. To suit its exigencies, tone too must do didactic duty, operating not upon the emotions but upon the intellect. The most interesting part of Chinese theory is its ingenious combination of tone with nature, men, and things, to which we have already referred.

The Chinese are the only people who, thousands of years ago, possessed a system of octaves, a circle of fifths, and a normal tone. With this knowledge, however, their eighty-four scales, each of which has a special philosophical signification, appear all the more incomprehensible to us. Hence the conclusion gains cogency, that notwithstanding the early development of their theory, they never used tone to express feelings.

The oldest known Chinese book on music dates from the eleventh century before Christ. Five hundred years before our Christian era, a friend of Confucius, the great moral teacher of the Chinese, wrote a musical commentary, the great teacher himself writing a song-book, which Rückert, a celebrated German poet, translated in 1833 A.D. All these songs were intended to be set to music, and are for the most part of a didactic character. Amiot, the French Jesuit and missionary in Peking, mentions in his work on Chinese music, published in Paris, 1776 A.D., no less than sixty-nine theoretical works. From a great number of these it appears that the Chinese care less