

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06487-3 - Six Lectures on Harmony: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, before Easter 1867

G.A. Macfarren

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## LECTURES ON HARMONY.

---

### LECTURE I.

#### INTRODUCTORY.

I AM gratified by the opportunity permitted to me of offering a series of technical Lectures on Music to the members of this Institution, in which matters of science and art are expounded, with the purpose of unfolding their principles and describing the laws through which these operate. It is a frequent practice to give musical lectures, on the contrary, in the form of concerts interspersed with anecdotes of the masters whose compositions they include, with perhaps a chronological notice of the rise and decline of the various styles these compositions exemplify. In pursuing a different course from this, of presenting musical performances with—shall I say—historical illustrations, I trust it may not be vain for me to emulate the pattern of the great men in all departments of knowledge who appear before you at this table; and I shall be proud if I can communicate any insight into musical principles analogous to that which you receive here upon other subjects.

I pre-suppose that the announcement of the theme of these lectures has in some sort prepared you to

B

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06487-3 - Six Lectures on Harmony: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, before Easter 1867

G.A. Macfarren

Excerpt

[More information](#)

look rather for instruction than amusement in the series; and, as I shall not pretend to furnish you with amusement, I must appeal to the interest in the technicalities of harmony—which I presume has drawn you hither—for such sympathy with the subject I am about to discuss as may enable me to render acceptable the instructive form in which it will be cast.

I presume further that each member of my audience is forearmed, not only with an interest in the subject I am about to treat, but also with a considerable knowledge of its terminology; at least, I trust that you all are familiar with the names of musical notes, and with any words that are in constant use with persons who have some practical proficiency in any branch of the musical art. I will not weary you, therefore, with explanations of technicalities with which every musical tyro is conversant; but I must tax your patience—I hope not too heavily—in defining some terms that are in less general use, yet must frequently occur in my remarks.

Let me say also in advance, to mature musicians, if any such honour me with their attention, who come less to learn than to criticize, that any unfamiliar theoretical views which I may bring forward are not of my own discovery. My late friend, Alfred Day's theory. Day, communicated to me his very original and very perspicuous theory of Harmony, by means of which many obscurities in the subject were cleared that my previous anxious study had vainly sought to penetrate, many discrepancies of principle and practice were reconciled between the writings of profound

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06487-3 - Six Lectures on Harmony: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, before Easter 1867

G.A. Macfarren

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTORY.

3

teachers and the works of great masters that had previously perplexed and discouraged me. I am indeed so thoroughly convinced of the truth of Day's theory, and I have derived such infinite advantage from its knowledge in my own practical musicianship, that I should be dishonest to myself and to my hearers were I to pretend to teach any other; and if I could have the good fortune to bring any doubters to share in my conviction, I feel that the satisfaction, the self-reliance, the genuine faith they would thus acquire would be a worthy memorial of the keenly penetrating genius of my friend.

The term harmony belongs not exclusively to Harmony and melody music. Its Greek original defines the fitness, propriety, accordance of things; so that we use the word in a primitive rather than a figurative sense, when we speak of harmony among the members of a society—of a harmonious whole, comprising the diverse elements in a work of art. It is employed as a technical term by painters; with whose province, however, I will not interfere by speaking of the signification in which it is understood by them. In music, the word harmony expressly defines a *combination* of notes, in contradistinction to melody, which means a *succession* of notes: the first signifying music which requires several performers—except when such instruments as the pianoforte are employed, whereon many notes may be sounded together; the second, which can be executed by a single voice or any instrument that can yield but one sound at a time: the first expressing music which is written vertically; the

B 2

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06487-3 - Six Lectures on Harmony: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, before Easter 1867

G.A. Macfarren

Excerpt

[More information](#)

second, music which is written horizontally. We must not confound this bare technical interpretation of the horizontal, one-voiced, successive melody, with the sense in which the word is popularly received, the sense comprising rhythm, accent, and numberless delicate gradations, the total of which constitutes what should properly be called *good melody*, whose absence is implied when critics complain that a piece of music contains no melody at all, since this would be, in true technical terminology, to declare that such a piece was composed of a single reiterated note.

Harmony  
unknown to  
the Greeks.

The term Harmony—in the musical sense of *symphony*,<sup>a</sup> accordance, combination—was unknown to the Greeks. I am aware that scholars have had divided opinions as to this fact; but I am convinced, by the very passages in the writings of Greek theorists which are adduced to the contrary, that the ancients never knew the effect of harmonious combination. The art of music, therefore, which I am not single in estimating as the most subtle, the most intense medium of the expression of the beautiful, which has always been classed by ancients and moderns in advance of poetry and painting, is virtually the youngest of the artistic sisterhood; for its very birth—nay, the first dawning upon men's minds of the natural principles which are its basis—dates only within the last six or seven centuries.

Since all harmonic progression must, however, con-

---

<sup>a</sup> The word is not here used as the definition of an orchestral composition or the prelude and interludes of a song, but to signify the sounding together of several musical tones.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06487-3 - Six Lectures on Harmony: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, before Easter 1867

G.A. Macfarren

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTORY.

5

sist of a combination of melodies, it may be well to glance briefly at the melodic code of that great people, and to note some of the distinctions, which have been too commonly confounded, between the Greek principles and our own. I will spend a few words first upon the three genera of the Greeks, since their titles belong to our modern terminology, though with meaning somewhat amplified.

The Diatonic genus admits of none but the normal Diatonic genus notes of the key in which a musical passage is cast—those notes, namely, that accord with the signature of each key in modern music. Through inflection by sharps or flats, notes bear the same relationship to their key-note in any one key as in every other. Thus the sharps which characterize the key of A, or the flats which distinguish the key of  $\flat$ A, bring the notes of these keys into the same relationship with their key-note as that of the natural notes to the key-note of C. Sharps or flats, then, may exist in the Diatonic genus, but those only which belong to the signature of the key.

The Chromatic genus of the Greeks contained, in Chromatic genus each tetrachord, or series of four notes, two notes that we should write on the same line or in the same space, the one being raised above the other by a sharp or a natural—as C and  $\sharp$ C,  $\flat$ B and  $\natural$ B. Our modern Chromatic genus may be defined as admitting accidental sharps, flats, or naturals, which induce no modulation to another key. Let me exemplify the distinction between these two genera: a musical phrase begins in the key of C, and modulates into the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06487-3 - Six Lectures on Harmony: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, before Easter 1867

G.A. Macfarren

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6

## INTRODUCTORY.

key of G, and the  $\sharp F$  that induces this modulation is marked by an accidental :—

SONATA, Op. 53.—*Beethoven.*

The image shows two systems of musical notation for the introductory section of Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 53. The first system features a grand staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The bass line is marked *pp* and consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The treble line has a few notes, including a sharp F. The second system continues the piece, showing a melodic line in the treble clef and a more active bass line. A sharp F is again present in the treble line, indicating the modulation to G major.

another phrase continues throughout in the key of C, and yet contains an accidental  $\sharp F$  twice :—

OVERTURE TO DER FREYSCHÜTZ.—*Weber.*

The image shows a musical score for the Overture to Der Freyschütz by Weber. It consists of a grand staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The bass line is a simple accompaniment of eighth notes. The treble line features a melodic phrase that includes two instances of a sharp F, which are noted as being in the key of C.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06487-3 - Six Lectures on Harmony: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, before Easter 1867

G.A. Macfarren

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTORY.

7



The first of these phrases is Diatonic, because the  $\sharp F$  belongs to the key of G; the second is Chromatic, because the  $\sharp F$  does not alter the original key.

The genus I have yet to describe is called **Enharmonic**. This, with the Greeks, comprised a smaller interval than the semitone—a note, namely, between B and C, higher in pitch than the first, but not so high as the second. The word Enharmonic may perhaps be rendered *inter-harmonic*, and probably implied an intervening *sound*—having the same reference to the  $\sharp B$  between B and C that in architecture, it has to the *style* between the Corinthian and the Composite.

I shall have future occasion to discuss the etymology of the names of the other two genera, but may dismiss this term Enharmonic with what has now been said. There are two accounts of the origin of the Enharmonic genus. One refers it to the Eastern and Southern nations who habitually intonate smaller musical intervals than semitones—the Persians, for instance, divide their scale of an octave into eighteen sounds, whereas our modern scale is divisible into no more than twelve (the thirteenth, C, being a repetition of the first):—

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06487-3 - Six Lectures on Harmony: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, before Easter 1867

G.A. Macfarren

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8

## INTRODUCTORY.



The other account ascribes the origin of this genus to a practice of sliding the voice from one to the other note in an interval of a semitone, instead of attacking distinctly the two individual sounds—a practice analogous to the *portamento* of modern singing; and in this sense, though it is never written, the effect of the Enharmonic diesis is employed by no means rarely in the musical performances we daily witness. So far as regards musical notation, it may be said that the word enharmonic denotes the distinction between the several names that may be given to the same sound on a keyed instrument, as  $\sharp C$  and  $\flat D$ ; the true distinction between these two notes, which may be articulated by a voice, or on an instrument such as the violin, whose notes are stopped by the fingers, presents a field for wide discussion which must be reserved till a subsequent lecture.

Greek modes.

In the diatonic genus, the Greeks had several modes—or, as we should now call them, scales—differing, as do the scales of our several keys, in being higher or lower than each other, but corresponding, as do our scales, in all having the same distribution of tones and semitones. From the Greek modes, the Dorian may be cited as the standard of all, and it may thus be represented in modern notation:—





Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06487-3 - Six Lectures on Harmony: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, before Easter 1867

G.A. Macfarren

Excerpt

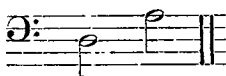
[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTORY.

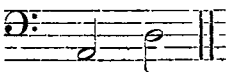
9

The Phrygian mode began from E, and had the same distribution of tones and semitones as the Dorian, which was induced by the addition of a sharp to F and the withdrawal of the flat from B. The Lydian began from  $\sharp F$ , and had  $\sharp G$  and  $\sharp C$ . The Mixo-Lydian began from G, and had  $\flat B$  and  $\flat E$ . Each of these modes had a collateral mode at the interval of a 4th below, and this was distinguished by the addition of the prefix Hypo (*under*) to the name of the original; so, the Hypo-Dorian may be counted from A with all natural notes, the Hypo-Phrygian from B, with  $\sharp C$  and  $\sharp F$ , the Hypo-Lydian from  $\sharp C$ , with  $\sharp D$ ,  $\sharp F$ , and  $\sharp G$ , and the Hypo-Mixo-Lydian from D with  $\flat B$ .

The original four modes were styled *Authentic*, and Authentic and plagal. were characterized by the two predominant notes of melodies which were cast in them (equivalent to our Tonic and Dominant) being at the interval of a 5th.



The four *Hypo* modes were called *Plagal* (or side-wise, or relative), and were characterized by the two predominant notes of melodies which were cast in them being at the interval of a 4th.



These terms Authentic and Plagal have endured to our time, and still denote the same melodic affinity, defining the variable forms of any one melody for the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-06487-3 - Six Lectures on Harmony: Delivered at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, before Easter 1867

G.A. Macfarren

Excerpt

[More information](#)

subject and answer of a fugue. The interval of the 5th and its inversion the 4th are distinguished, in modern terminology, by the epithet *perfect*, and it is to be remarked that their distinction was already observed in remotest times, and when many niceties, which are obvious to modern perception, were still unregarded.

Of acceptance less common than the above, were the Æolian mode, whose intervals were counted from F, and the Iastian or Ionian, whose intervals were counted from  $\flat E$ , and these, like all the others, had their tones and semitones in the same order as the Dorian. Earlier, in the days of Pindar, the Æolian mode was counted from A, but differed from the Hypo-Dorian in not being plagal.

Ecclesiastical Modes.

A manifest fiction has obtained credence in later times, and in recent years has been brought into prominence, to the effect that St. Ambrose, at the end of the fourth century, and St. Gregory, at the end of the sixth, respectively appropriated the Greek modes to ecclesiastical use and reformed abuses which had corrupted this appropriation. Particular uses, in other matters as well as music, distinguished the Churches of Milan and Rome, of which the two worthies were severally bishops, and men described themselves as Ambrosians or Gregorians according as they followed the use of either ordination. The scales, or modes, or tones, belonging to the Roman Church differ essentially from those of the Greeks. The earliest mention of them that has been traced is by our countryman, Alcuin of York, writing under