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978-1-108-06520-7 - A Concise History of Music: From the Commencement of the Christian Era to the Present Time

Henry George Bonavia Hunt

Excerpt

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## HISTORY OF MUSIC.

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### SECTION I.

#### GENERAL SUMMARY.

1. WHILE in the works of many of the ancient writers the subject of Music has been dwelt upon at more or less length, it is impossible for us to form upon their statements or passing allusions an exact idea of the character or extent of the art as practised in the days of the Egyptian, Grecian, and Roman empires.\*

2. With regard to the musical scales of the Greeks, all that we really know is :—That they were built on a system of *tetrachords*—or groups of four notes ascending in diatonic succession ; that, familiarly speaking, two of these tetrachords put together formed a “scale ;” that there were various kinds of scales, differing in nature from each other in respect of the relative positions occupied by the semitones ; and that, therefore, the effect of the music, whether melody or harmony, produced from such scales, was entirely different from that of the present day.

3. It is generally believed that the Greeks originally derived the rudiments of their musical knowledge from the Egyptians, who were great proficient in the art, as

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\* “In short, there can be no history of music as an art, where no musical works of art exist.”—SCHLÜTER.

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may be seen from the monumental remains of that splendid nation. Upon a number of these monuments are representations of harps, lutes (or guitars), and other instruments; bands of musicians performing concerted music; but in the nature of things there is no source from which we may gain any notion as to the effect or character of the music produced.

4. There has been much discussion on the question whether harmony was known to, or employed by, the ancients. On the one side it is asserted that the Greek writers make no mention of harmony\* (as we understand the term) in any of their works upon music, and that the construction of the old scales—the discordant nature of their “thirds,” for instance—effectually precluded the use of polyphonic music. On the other side, the existence of the stringed instruments, such as the lyre, the harp, and the lute; the structure of the double pipes blown by a single mouthpiece; have been adduced as strong evidence in favour of some sort of harmony, however crude it might sound to modern ears.

5. The most noted among Greek theorists were **Pythagoras** (*circ.* B.C. 600) and **Lasos**; amongst practical musicians were **Terpander** of Lesbos (B.C. 670), who invented or introduced the seven-stringed kithara; **Olympos** the Phrygian, who brought into Greece the art of flute-playing, which thenceforward formed an important element in Greek instrumental art; and **Tyrtæus**, a soldier, musician, and poet,—who in fact was a “troubadour,” or minstrel.

6. Although it is tolerably conclusive that instrumental music, pure and simple, was a favourite recreation of the Egyptians, the Greeks for many ages employed their instruments only as an accompaniment to the voice, whether for monologue or chorus. It is

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\* The term *ἀρμονία* (*harmonia*), as employed by Greek writers, is applied only to their octave system, or conjunction of two successive tetrachords (*v. par.* 10).

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characteristic of the race that the later development of flute-playing as a separate art was accompanied by the institution of competitive trials of skill, by which the real vocation of the musician was lost amid the petty technicalities of mere mechanical display. And upon this began the decline of Grecian music, which indeed practically died out with the fall of the Grecian empire.

7. The Romans had no distinctive music of their own. They were pre-eminently a martial race, and probably the music they most appreciated was the trumpet-call. In their earlier days they were too busy, and in later times too lazy, to cultivate the art among themselves. In the era of luxury and dilettanteism which preceded their decay, they employed Greek slaves as singers and players. In the reign of Nero, who affected a devotion to music, the pursuit of the art became fashionable for a time, but the Romans were not in earnest, and consequently left behind them no marks of musical culture.

8. It is not until the fourth century after Christ that the actual history of music as a separate art begins. About the year A.D. 330, Pope **Sylvester**, we are informed, instituted a singing school in Rome, but there is no statement upon which we may form an accurate idea of the kind of music practised. By the light, however, of subsequent events we know that the singing must have been unisonal, and that the melodies were built upon the old Greek scales or modes, or possibly were ancient Hebrew airs, though some good authorities consider this doubtful. We also infer that St. Sylvester was acquainted with the method of antiphonal chanting, as Pliny, who lived in the second century, incidentally mentions this as the custom amongst the Christians of his day.

9. A few years later (374—397) **St. Ambrose**, Archbishop of Milan (not the Ambrose to whom is attributed the authorship of the *Te Deum*), took an especial interest in the culture of Church music, and arranged

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the four diatonic scales known as "The Authentic Modes." He decreed that upon one or other of these scales all Church melodies should be constructed, and during his time many new hymns or chants were composed, some of them by himself. St. Ambrose also greatly improved the style of antiphonal singing, and organized a fine choir in his own church at Milan.

10. St. Ambrose had no immediate successor to continue the excellent work he had begun. By degrees the music of the Church deteriorated; and it was not until two centuries had elapsed that a reform was effected. **Gregory** the Great (590—604) during his pontificate devoted himself to the work of reformation and improvement, and restored to Church song that solemnity of character which it had gradually lost. He also added to the Ambrosian scales four others, which he called "the *plagal* modes." Both the authentic and plagal modes have for their foundation the old Greek system of "tetrachords." We annex a complete table of the eight scales :—

TONE	AUTHENTIC.	TONE	PLAGAL.
1. Dorian.	DEFGABCD	2. Hypo-Dorian (or Æolian).	} ABCDEFGA
3. Phrygian.	EFGABCDE	4. Hypo-Phrygian.	BCDEFGAB
5. Lydian.	FGABCDEF	6. Hypo-Lydian (or Ionian).	} CDEFGABC
7. Mixo- Lydian. }	GABCDEFG	8. Hypo-mixo- Lydian. }	DEFGABCD

On comparison it will be seen that the plagal modes commence at a fourth below the authentic. The above are known as the eight "Gregorian modes."

11. St. Gregory established a music school at which these modes and the order of the Church Service were systematically taught. The liturgy was noted entirely, it is said, by himself, and the whole was entitled the "Antiphonar," the chant or plain-song (*cantus-planus*, or *cantus-firmus*) being sung alternately or antiphonally

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between priest and choir. A very crude description of notation was used, consisting of dots and scratches of various shapes, and the “stave” was then unknown.

12. The system founded by Gregory the Great quickly spread throughout the Christian countries. Trained teachers and singers were sent from Rome to France and Germany (604—752), and schools of Church music were established in most of the principal dioceses in those countries. It is, however, affirmed that the improvement effected was but transient, owing to the barbarous and untutored condition of the people, who in those times were little more than savages.

13. The Emperor **Charlemagne** (768—814) proved himself a zealous apostle of the musical system of St. Gregory. He founded music schools at Metz and other towns, and placed them under Italian singers of note. In this work the emperor employed one **Alcuin**, a British ecclesiastic, as his principal assistant, and Charlemagne himself paid periodical visits of inspection to these schools, both in France and Germany. It was not until this period that “Gregorians” became the universal use throughout western Christendom.

14. There is documentary evidence that at this period musicians had a crude conception of harmony. Isidore of Seville, a contemporary of Gregory, alludes in his “Treatise on Music” to Symphony and Diaphony, concerning which Professor Ritter observes—“By the first word he meant probably a combination of consonant, and by the latter of dissonant, intervals.” Some little time after the death of Charlemagne, **Hucbald** (840—930), a Fleming, accompanied his melodies by a *discantus*, or added part, consisting of a series (when combined with the melody) of consecutive fourths or fifths; a “diaphony” which would be simply horrible in our ears. *Organum* was another term for this weird accompaniment. The organ was now in use at some churches, and in Winchester Cathedral there was an

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
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
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instrument having 400 pipes, a magnificent one for those days.

15. **Guido of Arezzo** (990—1050) effected many important improvements in the system of notation, or rather founded the system upon which our present method is based. The somewhat comprehensive term, *inventor musicae*, was applied to him by the musicians of his time. Hitherto two lines only had been employed as a staff; to these he added two others. Each of these additional lines had its distinctive colour—the one red, the other green or yellow. The yellow line indicated the place of the note C ; the red

line the place of the note F ; and from these our C and F clefs are respectively derived. Guido may also be regarded as the father of solmization, for he invented the terms *ut, re, mi, fa, sol, la*, which are used by students even now. (*Si* was not used till the 17th century, when Lemaire introduced it as a name for the seventh of the scale, or leading note.) The terms used by Guido were derived from the following Latin lines, which he taught his students to sing to a melody so arranged that each line began with the note it was employed to indicate :—

UT queant laxis	FAMuli tuorum,
REsonare fibris	SOLve polluti
MIRA gestorum	LABii reatum,
	Sancte Johannes.

16. **Franco of Cologne** (c. 1200)\* formulated a system of musical measure and time by means of varying the shape of a note to denote its comparative length. They were named and figured as follows :—*maxima*, 

\* Forkel assigns to Franco a much earlier date than this, maintaining that he flourished during the latter half of the 11th century.

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

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(or *duplex longa*); *longa*, ; *breviſ*, ; and *semi-breviſ*, . He likewise invented “rests” of the same relative values, and the signs he used are practically identical with those of the present day. He divided time into “triple,” or perfect, and “duple,” or imperfect. The bar , which gives a more perfect rhythm and accent to music, was not introduced till a much later date. In Franco’s time, counterpoint of even five parts was employed in the accompaniment of melodies, but, although no longer restricted to progressions of fourths, fifths, and octaves, the harmony was of the most rigid kind, imperfect concords being at that period classed as discords.

17. **Adam de la Hale**, who also lived in the 13th century,\* was a famous troubadour or wandering minstrel, and wrote songs in three-part harmony, the melodies of which would be accounted agreeable even in the present day. In character the songs of De la Hale are not unlike the popular “folk-songs” of Southern France and Northern Spain, as still sung by the rural population in those provinces. As in those early times Church music was exclusively in the hands of ecclesiastics, so these troubadours were the chief composers of secular music. As a rule they also wrote their own “words.” Amongst the most notable troubadours were DE LA HALE, CHATELAIN DE COURCY, (King) THIBAUT of Navarre, and FAIDIT.

18. **Marchettus of Padua** (c. 13—), is credited with having “established the first correct principles in the use of consonances and dissonances;” while to **Jean de Meurs** (c. 1330), who was probably a contemporary of Marchettus, is ascribed the introduction of florid counterpoint. It is supposed by some, that notwithstanding the character of the name, Jean de Meurs (or de Muris) was an Englishman.

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\* Czerny fixes the date at about 1280.

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19. (B.) We now come to the rise of the Belgian School. About this time (14th century) Belgian musicians began to devote themselves in a special degree to the elaboration of counterpoint\* (harmony as a distinct branch of study was not known till long afterwards), and so distinguished themselves in the art that they won the best appointments in France and Germany.

20. (B.) The first important name in the Belgian series is that of **Guillaume Dufay** (1380—1430), chapel-master (*maestro di cappella*) at Rome. He harmonized many existing melodies, both sacred and secular, in fairly good style, for four voices. He also wrote masses, in which appear some excellent specimens of canon. Dufay was followed by **Johannes Ockenheim** [or Ockeghem] (1430—1513), who has been called “the Sebastian Bach of the 15th century,” and of whom some say that he founded the canonic or fugal style.\* This latter assertion, as we have already seen, is scarcely true. As to canon we have positive evidence that Dufay was familiar with that form of writing, while in those days a “fugue” was scarcely more than a free style of canon. There is no doubt, however, that Ockenheim’s work was more polished, and had more breadth and design; but he fell, with his contemporaries, into the error of exhibiting his contrapuntal skill at the expense of the feeling of the music.

21. (B.) But both as a scholar and as a composer, Ockenheim was outdone by his brilliant contemporary and pupil, **Jusquin des Prés** (1440—1521), of whom Luther was wont to say that he was “master of notes, while others were mastered by notes.” Various amusing anecdotes are told of Des Prés, who is accused of making musical puns in his compositions “to gain his private ends.” It is more to our present purpose to record his originality as a composer; for he was one of the first to discard the old *cantus firmus* and secular *motif*, and to

\* ‘*Sumer is a Iumen in*,’ an English composition (c. 1250), is, however, an earlier instance of canonic writing. \* v. *note*. p 95.



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invent his own musical subjects. Des Prés wrote several masses and motetts, in four and in five parts. He began his public career as a singer in the pope's chapel, but subsequently became chapel-master to Louis XII. of France. Des Prés numbered among his pupils ARCADELDT, MOUTON, WILLAERT, GOUDIMEL, CLEMENS non PAPA, and other excellent musicians.

22. (B.) **Adrian Willaert** (1490—1563) is frequently spoken of as "the founder of the Venetian School." As, however, Willaert was a Belgian both by birth and by training, it is confusing, if not altogether misleading, to disconnect him from the Belgian School. Indeed, we doubt if the existence of "the Venetian School" is sufficiently distinct and apart from the Belgian and Roman Schools to merit a separate page in the annals of musical history. It is better, therefore, to class the Venetian and Roman Schools (after the time of Willaert) under the common head of "Italian." Willaert received his training from Des Prés,—some say from Mouton also,—and after many wanderings finally settled at Venice, where eventually he obtained the post of chapel-master at St. Mark's. Willaert was a voluminous composer of songs and motetts, some of which he arranged for two, even three, separate choirs; and to him is ascribed the introduction of a new feature—the *madrigal*. He was succeeded at St. Mark's by **Cyprian de Rore**, a pupil and fellow-countryman, who became so popular with the Italians that they styled him "Il divino." De Rore excelled in the madrigal. Another contemporary of Willaert was **J. Mouton**, master of the chapel to Francis I. of France.

23. (B.) The most distinguished contemporary of Willaert was **Orlando Lassus**, or **LATTRE** (1520—1595), who attempted nearly every then-known form of composition, but devoted himself chiefly to Church music, such as psalms, hymns, litanies, magnificats, motetts, &c., &c. His settings of the Seven Penitential Psalms, for five voices, are amongst his best works.

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Lassus introduced the *chromatic* element into musical composition, as well as such musical terms as *Allegro* and *Adagio*. He was greatly eulogized in his day, was spoken of as "the prince of music" (*musicæ princeps*), and received the order of the Golden Spur.

24. (B.) With Lassus, the famous Belgian School is brought to a close. To the Belgians we owe a considerable development of the great first principles of the art; but they carried their scholasticisms too far, and burdened their music with painful elaborations and curious conceits. The spirit was lost in the letter. For material on which to build their numerous contrapuntal devices they indiscriminately selected Gregorian plainchants and secular melodies, even to love ditties and comic songs, which gave their titles to the masses and motetts that were built upon them; *e. g.* "The Noses Red," "Adieu, my loves," were well-known titles of sacred compositions. During this period the canonic or imitative form of counterpoint was developed; the madrigal, too, was introduced. It is *said* that BERNHARDT, a German, invented the organ pedal about the year 1490.\* PETRUCCI, an Italian, was the inventor of movable music types, 1502. For some time prior to this date music had been printed from large wooden blocks on which the characters were engraved.

25. (E.) We have now to speak of the Early English School, which, so far as we have any record, was inaugurated by **Dunstable**, who died in 1458. He has been called "the father of English contrapuntists," and was reputed as excellent a musician as his contemporary, Dufay. Another early writer was **John Taverner** (*c.* 1530), organist of Christ Church, Oxford. **Christopher Tye** (*c.* 1500—1560) in the year 1545 received the degree of Doctor in Music from the University of Cambridge. Tye was afterwards appointed organist of the Chapel Royal, and was the

\* As organ pedals were in existence before this date, the truth probably is that Bernhardt introduced them about this time at Venice.