

### Capsule. 'Music in Ancient Greece'.

The Minoan and Mycenaean palaces (c. 1700–1100) had housed professional musicians who performed religious hymns, royal praise poetry, and various other musical rituals. For this period we have physical remains of instruments, musical scenes in various media, and later myths about magical musicians like Orpheus, Thamyras and Amphion. Double-pipes (*auloi*) and seven-stringed lyres indicate that the classical tonal system of Mesopotamia was known (see previous article). During the Dark Age (c.1100–750) which followed the mysterious collapse of palatial society, Mycenaean traditions developed or died locally. Religious music survived through continued worship of Mycenaean gods, especially in Lesbos, Athens, Thebes, Sparta, and Cyprus. Praise poetry—epic song celebrating the 'famous deeds' of gods and men—reached new heights in the Ionian migration to the Eastern Aegean (c.1000–800). Homer (c.700) is the last great representative of this school, which used formulaic metrical expressions to improvise performances accompanied by the *phorminx*.

In the Archaic period (c. 750–500), renewed prosperity, open-mindedness and pan-Hellenism brought innovations. While liturgical music continued, secular and personal expression was cultivated by the 'lyric poets', singer-songwriters to the lyre like Archilochus, Sappho, Alcaeus and Anacreon. Musical skill became synonymous with polite breeding. The lyre-teacher (*kitharistês*) drilled children in music, letters, and classics like Homer; girls were similarly educated in places like Sappho's Lesbos. Throughout Greece, choral performance was a second pillar of education for both sexes. Music motivated physical and (for the boys) martial training, and sweetened poets' moral lessons; athletic victories and civic rituals were so celebrated too. Terpander, Alcman, Pindar, and Bacchylides are famous names here. Men contributed musically to *symposia*, the drinking-clubs at the heart of aristocratic society. Increasingly technical art-music was pursued in tyrants' courts and at the festivals of Delphi, Olympia, Delos, Sparta, and Athens. An Assyrianizing fashion in the Lydian capital of Sardis—the Paris of the times—meant renewed exposure to contemporary Near Eastern music. The evolving *aulos* introduced complex new tonalities, first into choral music—including its fifth-century Athenian outgrowths, tragedy and comedy.

This *aulos* revolution culminated in the controversial New Music (c.425), Euripides its most famous exponent. A comprehensive new theoretical system was given final form by Aristoxenus, Aristotle's musicologist and author of the earliest extant work of this sort, *The Harmonic Elements*. Musical notation used modified letter-forms written over a text's syllables, the long and short lengths of which preserve the ancient rhythms. A late source gives the key, so extant 'scores' can be deciphered. Over sixty of these, mostly fragmentary, are known from manuscripts, inscriptions and papyri. Two hymns to Apollo, inscribed on the Athenian treasury at Delphi in 127 BCE, best represent the mature style. *Mousikê* was now sophisticated entertainment, often purveyed by traveling companies like the 'technicians of Dionysus'. In the cosmopolitan Hellenistic period (c.323–31 BCE) which followed the unification of the Eastern Mediterranean and Near East by Alexander and his successors, Greek theatres and concert halls were widely erected, and *mousikê* became a staple of cultured life. With Rome's first conquest of Greece in 197 BCE, this art came to Rome alongside drama, literature, and philosophy. As Horace famously recalled, 'Greece, though captive, captured its wild victor'.

Music, melody, harmony, rhythm, meter, tone, tune, ode, chord, chorus—all derive from Greek, often via Latin, and are shared in one form or another by most European languages. So while the artistic use of sound is a human universal, our own ideas of 'music' are fundamentally indebted to Greek *mousikê*.

#### SIDE BAR: KEY INSTRUMENTS

Lyres (defined by two arms, crossbar, and equal-length strings) were common throughout antiquity. Harps (single arm and tapering strings) were more typical of the Near East and Egypt. Both came in many varieties. Greek epic singers used the *phorminx*, a round-based lyre with perhaps only a few strings. The later *kithara* was a grand seven-stringed concert lyre with flat-base; Hellenistic models could have nine or more strings. *Lyra* typically meant the tortoise-shell

instrument of students and amateurs. Double-pipes (Greek *aulos*) were widespread, both for solo and ensemble play; it had a clarinet's cylindrical bore but the double reeds of an oboe. Percussion varied regionally, but frame-drums, hand-cymbals, castanets, and sistrums were widely known.

Illustrations

#### SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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