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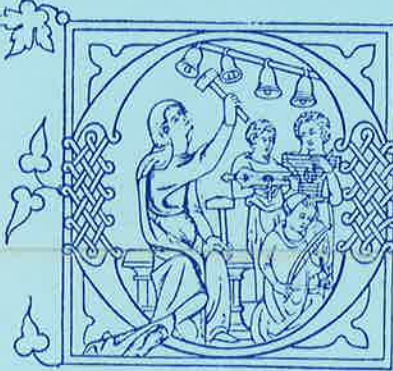
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Of Music, Ancient and Modern

"The great obscurity and uncertainty in which the history of Orpheus is involved, affords very little matter for our information; and even renders that little, inaccurate and precarious...For who has ever been able to affirm any thing with certainty, concerning his origin, his age, his parents, his country, and condition? This alone may be depended on, from general assent, that there formerly lived a person named Orpheus, whose father was OEagrus, who lived in Thrace, and who was the son of a king, who was the founder of theology, among the Greeks; the institutor of their life and morals; the first of prophets, and the prince of poets; himself the offspring of a Muse; who taught the Greeks their sacred rites and mysteries, and from whose wisdom, as from a perpetual and abundant fountain, the divine muse of Homer, and the philosophy of Pythagoras, and Plato, flowed; and, lastly, who by the melody of his lyre, drew rocks, woods, and wild beasts, stopt rivers in their course, and even moved the inexorable king of hell; as every page, and all the writings of antiquity sufficiently evince."

From THE HYMNS OF ORPHEUS by Thomas Taylor

Dear Friends:



Orpheus, in art, is usually represented carrying a lyre, a small musical instrument of the harp family used by the Greeks to accompany their melodic songs and poetic recitations. Prior to the time of Pythagoras, the harmonic scale of intervals was unknown, and in choral pieces each singer sang according to the convenience of his own voice. It is now suspected that Orpheus brought to Greece the concept of modal music, already known to Eastern nations. The Orphic lyre was tuned by adapting the classical concept of the intervals between the orbits of the planets. Unfortunately, the secret of the original tuning is lost, and all efforts to reconstruct it are more or less speculative.

According to the most popular account of the life of Orpheus, his divinely inspired music caused the trees to bend in homage, and the wild animals of the forest gathered at his feet. Some say that even the rocks were moved in their places by his sweet songs. When Eurydice died from the sting of a serpent, Orpheus followed her, protected by his music, and even charmed the god of death. When he was unable to restore Eurydice to physical life, he wandered disconsolate and finally died, and nightingales built their nests upon his tomb. There is an interesting and curious improvisation concerning the death of Orpheus. One report tells that he was torn to pieces by Ciconian bacchantes. These devotees of Bacchus, intoxicated with wine and drugs, drowned out the music of Orpheus and then tore him to pieces. Even after death, however, his head continued to sing.

The ancient Hellenes in their theory of music gave first place to the human voice. The soul in man was regarded as an harmonic structure, and when this was released into expression by discipline and the purification of the life, it bore natural witness to the universal harmony. They rejected percussion and wind instruments as most likely to excite the emotions, sensations and appetites. In the Mysteries of Eleusis, part of the ritual was presented by choral groups, and this procedure was later adopted into Christianity and became the basis of the Gregorian chants. The healing power of music was also emphasized and on two occasions, Pythagoras pacified dangerous psychotics by striking the strings of his lyre. So important was music to the preservation of Grecian culture, that laws were enacted to prevent the corruption of this art, and those who violated these statutes were subject to exile and even death.

Hymns were composed to honor the various deities, resulting in the development of modes that paralleled closely the orders of architecture. In the course of time certain compositions were played only on appropriate occasions. Solemn music was suitable to sacred matters. Martial music was reserved for military purposes, and sentimental music for romantic interludes. Architects introduced musical elements into the temples erected to honor the several orders of divinities. It is said that Pythagoras, walking along a city street, struck on his Lyre the musical keynotes of the various buildings which he passed. It is interesting to note that at the time the Walls of Jericho fell, trumpets were used to disintegrate the masonry. This would be consistent with the Greek viewpoint.

There was always considerable resistance to the inclusion of enharmonic intervals in a musical composition. This has been somewhat modified, and Richard Wagner accomplished dramatic effects by their use. The great composers have all worked from a musical keynote within themselves. Franz Schubert stated on at least one occasion that he heard his compositions in the air around him before he wrote them down. Needless to say, the well-tempered scale has worked a serious hardship upon the esoteric aspects of music.

Orpheus, as the personification of the music of the spheres, brought all creatures into the experience of eternal harmony. In order to destroy the spiritual significance of music, it was necessary to drown it in discords. When this occurs, both the soul in nature and in man are profoundly disturbed, resulting in destructive pressures and tensions. The furious bacchantes corrupted the tonal patterns that protect the internal integrity of both the individual and the collective. They tore the body of music "limb from limb," until only the head remained alive. It seems to me that this tragedy is being repeated in our contemporary culture. On the popular level we are ignoring the vibratory power of sound. The heavens make music, but on the earth there is mostly noise. It would be a serious mistake to assume that we could live in the midst of discords without damage to ourselves. We seem to be living in a bacchanalian age, and like the furies of old, we are under the destructive influence of alcohol and drugs. Too many are seeking nothing more important than thrills, and nearly all of the performing arts have lost their original dignities. The Greeks would say that the human soul has been offended and sickening within itself is corrupting our conduct on almost every level of society. Most of us are profoundly disturbed over television programs and recent motion pictures. We feel that too many compositions and plots were created by the sick; to wit, the jaded nerves of audiences that are also sick.

The Grecians had their faults and have long been accused of nature worship. They loved the beautiful and honored the gods they worshipped as ever-flowing fountains of harmony

and joy. They left to the world some of the most lovely art that mankind has ever fashioned. They gave us over two hundred enlightened philosophers, poets and mystics. The age of Pericles bestowed a noble heritage upon all the generations that followed. They were not lacking in men of science, and although none of their music has survived for us except one possible fragment from the Eleusinian Mysteries, we know their theory of music and its place in the perfection of human character. Fortunately, their ideals were not entirely forgotten, but were passed on to the European Guilds. The Minnesingers and troubadours passed their heritage to the Mastersingers of Nuremburg. Their story has been perpetuated for us in what has been profanely referred to as Wagner's "comic opera" Die Meistersinger. Unless we wish to again destroy the Orphic ministry of sound, we must produce modern musicians who are also mystics. By thoughtlessness and indifference we have damaged the dignities of arts and sciences. They were all given to us by the Divine Plan of things to help us to unfold our truly human potentials. Extreme commercialization is leading us further and further into what John Bunyan called "the slough of despond." While noise seems to be an inescapable dilemma, we can withstand it best if we can retain peace of mind and emotional poise.

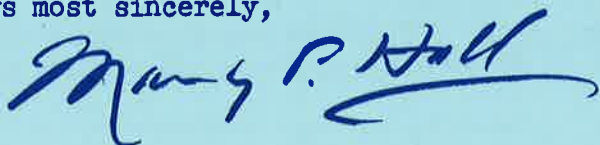
Plotinus, in his essay "On the Beautiful," reminds us that the human soul, derived from the Universal Soul, is in all its parts sublimely beautiful and deficient in nothing appropriate to its divine source. The soul in man, perceiving external beauty, rushes forth to embrace it, resulting in joy, affection and a renewed conviction of the presence of God in all things.

Beauty is expressed in the world of form as symmetry; in the world of vibration as harmony; in the world of emotions as morality; and in the world of mind as integrity. Music is experienced as originating in the vibratory sphere, but it also bestows its harmonies upon the emotions and the mind. All of the arts are especially close to man's psychic nature, and when they are profaned they become forms of sickness, both infectious and contagious. Music is now used successfully in offices, factories and institutions to counteract stress and tension. It has been found that the most suitable type of musical composition is gentle, rhythmic, harmonic and melodic--preferably a composition with which the listener is familiar and is associated with pleasant memories. Further research in this area is probably justified when we realize that most modern composers have little background in musical theory, and do not recognize personal responsibility for the effects of discords on the public mind. It is gratifying to realize, however, that recordings of world-famous symphonies, operas and well-loved chamber music are enjoying ever increasing popularity among those who understand musical theory.

It is important that young people with an interest in music should receive a proper training. They should be taught not only technique, but the philosophy of music. They should learn that in entertaining personal friends or public audiences, they exert a powerful influence upon the inner lives of their listeners. The musician has the power to bring peace to the human heart and refreshment to the mind. He should research the traditions of his art, and regard himself as the beneficiary of a magnificent legacy of idealism, both religious and secular.

May this convey to you my continuing appreciation for your inspiration and friendship through the years. We hope you will all enjoy a happy Thanksgiving Season.

Always most sincerely,



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