

Aesthetics of Musical Origin in the
Quattrocento

An analysis of early Renaissance philosophy of the cosmological and
cognitive origins of music and musical composition

By Gretchen Hull

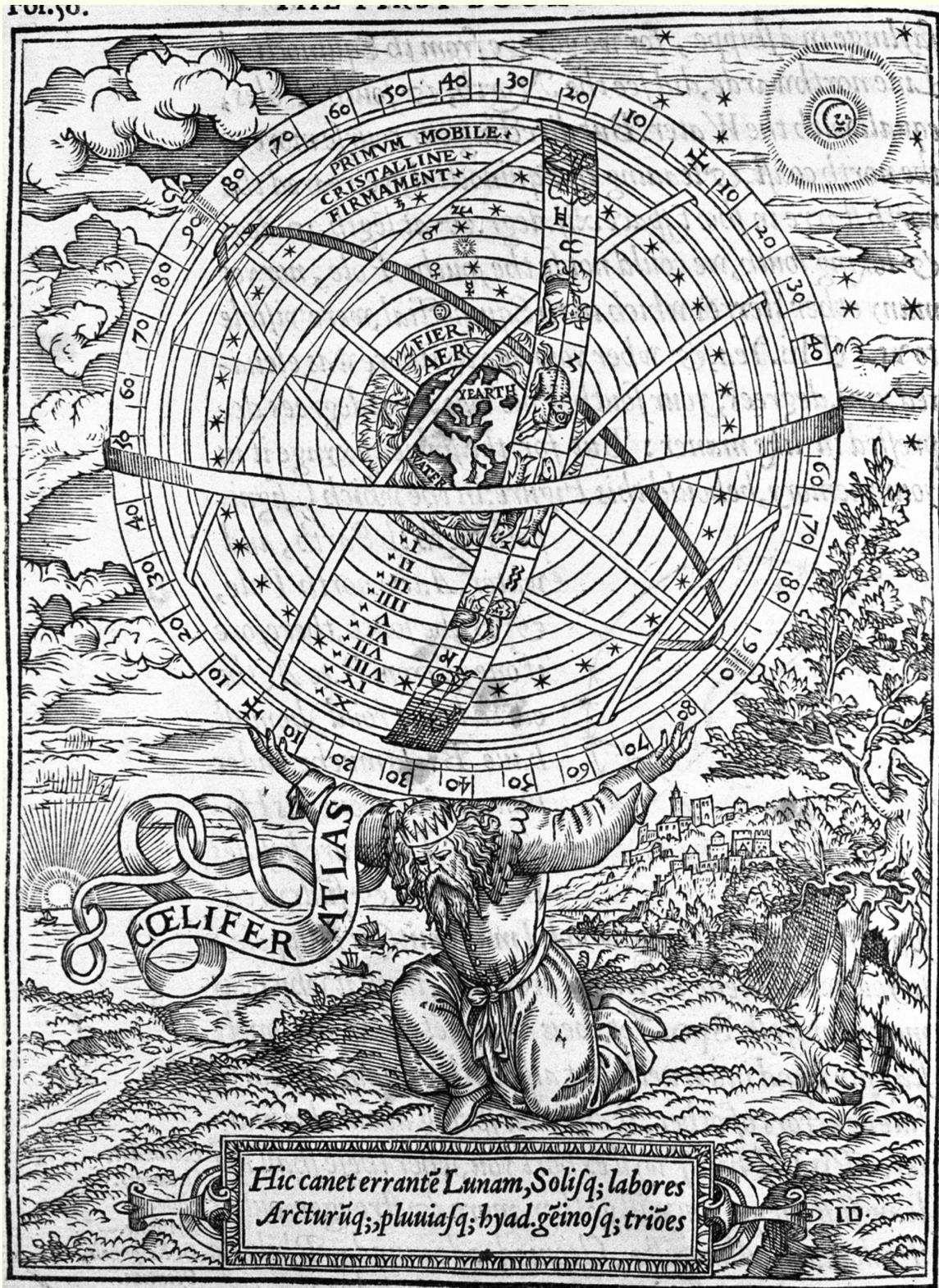


Figure 1 "Atlas bearing the heavens in the form of an armillary sphere from William Cunningham, *The Cosmographicall Glasse*, London 1559. The verse at the bottom of the engraving is from Book I of Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Atlas is referred to as a teacher of astronomy."

Photo and caption taken from <http://www.sites.hps.cam.ac.uk/starry/armillpoems.html>

Aesthetics of Musical Origin in the Quattrocento

Gretchen Hull

*Mercury, eloquent grandson of Atlas,
Who turned with your voice the wild habits
Of young people into one intelligent and in the manner
Of a noble wrestling,
I sing to you, great Jove's and the gods'
Herald and parent of the bent lyra,
Skillful at hiding whatever pleased you
With a jolly theft.¹*

Johannes Tinctoris (c. 1435-1511), a Franco-Flemish composer and theorist of the early Renaissance, drew heavily upon Greek and Roman literary references as well as Judeo-Christian literature and theology to devise his historical account of music and to flesh out his descriptions of musical instruments in *De inventione et usu musicae*. This is poetically evidenced in his quotation of Horace in a discourse on music of the Greek *lyra*,

¹ Tinctoris, quoting Horatio in *De inventione et usu musicae*.
See original Latin:

Mercuri facunde nepos Atlantis,
Qui feros cultus hominum recentum
Voce formasti catus et decore
More palestres,

Te canam, magni Jovis ac deorum
Nuntium curveque lyre parentem,
Callidum, quicquid placuit, iocosum
Condere furto.

(considered by him the parent of “the ‘viola,’ the ‘rebec,’ the ‘gittern,’ the ‘cittern,’ and the ‘tambura;’ by whom all these were invented”)² wherein Mercury’s voice is praised for his “influence” in taming and strengthening young men. Tinctoris also weaves in references to the Hebrew figure King David in the same passage, and earlier in the fifth chapter wherein he lists the effects of music, recalling David calming King Saul with the music of the lyre:

Eighteenthly: It drives away a demon. Indeed (as it reads in the first book of Kings), when David played the harp, the evil spirit departed from Saul.³

This synthesis⁴ of Greco-Roman classical philosophy, literature, poetry, and musical theory with Judeo-Christian theology and teachings was a common practice in the early Renaissance, when humanism and secularism were only beginning to take hold, many of the paradigms of musical understanding of the Middle Ages were still prevalent, and works of Plato and Aristotle were being explored with fresh fervor. Because of this investment in the thought of antiquity and the recent centuries, it will prove illuminating to study the dominant musical aesthetic of the Middle Ages, as well as that of antiquity (as understood by theorists of the Quattrocento) before proceeding to a detailed investigation of the themes of Classicism, beauty, proportion, mathematics, creation, and imagination as they appear in the 15th century, and briefly addressing how they morph or fade with the coming ages.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ It should be noted that Tinctoris was not in agreement with Plato and Aristotle in the matter of *musica mundana*, as will be addressed later.

I. Aesthetics in Antiquity and the Middle Ages

Dimitrije Bužarovski in “Generative Ideas in the Aesthetics of Music” provides an account of the highly and lastingly influential Pythagorean tradition of music theory, noting first that the very definition of the term “music” and the quantity of disciplines included under its umbrella has changed dramatically over time,⁵ and secondly that “music” in the time of the Pythagoreans included dance and poetry as well.⁶ Citing Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz in, *History of Aesthetics*, Vol I:⁷

Etymologically derived from the Muses, the word 'music' originally signified all the activities and crafts falling under their patronage. However, at an early stage its meaning became restricted to the art of sounds. By Hellenistic times the original wide meaning was already used only metaphorically.

The word MOUSIKE was an abbreviation of MOUSIKE TECHNE, meaning the art of music, and retained permanently the ambiguity of the Greek term “art,” which embraced both theory and practice.

Such was the legacy of the Pythagorean school that Bužarovski attributes much of Platonic and Aristotelian thought to them, seeing in their theory the seeds of generations of future aesthetical paradigms, as seen below:

Pythagorean theoreticians were not merely the founders of the aesthetics and theory of music; they also exposed or anticipated almost everything one can find in the very rich

⁵Bužarovski, 165.

⁶ Ibid., 169.

⁷ Ibid., Bužarovski cites Wladislaw Tatarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, Vol. I, (Warszawa: PWN—Polish Scientific Publishers, 1970), 217-218.

history of these disciplines. When we speak of the five “generative ideas” we will be constantly reiterating the Pythagorean contribution, for it is the unavoidable beginning of nearly all of these ideas, albeit the connection is sometimes remote, and the original idea has undergone much modification. The Pythagoreans provided the framework for the aesthetics of music; everything which followed historically has been merely a contribution to or a refutation of their statements.⁸

This is a dramatic claim, but certainly the Aristotelian theory that follows later will bear many similarities.

Bužarovski includes in his list of five “generative topics” the notions of music as mathematics, music as imitation, music as expression, music as language, and music as “meaningless formal structure.”⁹ He goes on to recount the Pythagoreans’ concept of music as “unconscious mathematics,”¹⁰ whose ratios, intervals, pitch, rhythm, harmony, and form are mathematically defined, and therefore harmonically measurable. To Bužarovski, Pythagorean theory addressed the meaning of music peripherally, those parameters of meaning being derivative in relation to music’s mathematical properties.¹¹ Furthermore and most broadly, music was seen to be participatory with the form, proportion, and ratios that pervaded, bound, and defined the entire cosmos. This music of the spheres was the grandest manifestation of the same order that was supposed to be found within the human being (*musica humana*) and of course, calculable in practiced music (*musica instrumentalis*).¹² Initially, correspondence between pitches and the Pythagorean cosmology was complicated by the fact that there were ten concentric spheres, a

⁸ Ibid., 166.

⁹ Ibid., 164.

¹⁰ Ibid., 167.

¹¹ Ibid., 168.

¹² Bartel, 11.

sum which didn't easily correspond to musical components,¹³ although in time the seven pitches or modes of Greek musical theory were associated by Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) with each of the seven planets.¹⁴ Interestingly, by the Middle Ages, the ten concentric wheels had been preserved, but renamed, with the earth, and not fire,¹⁵ at the center:

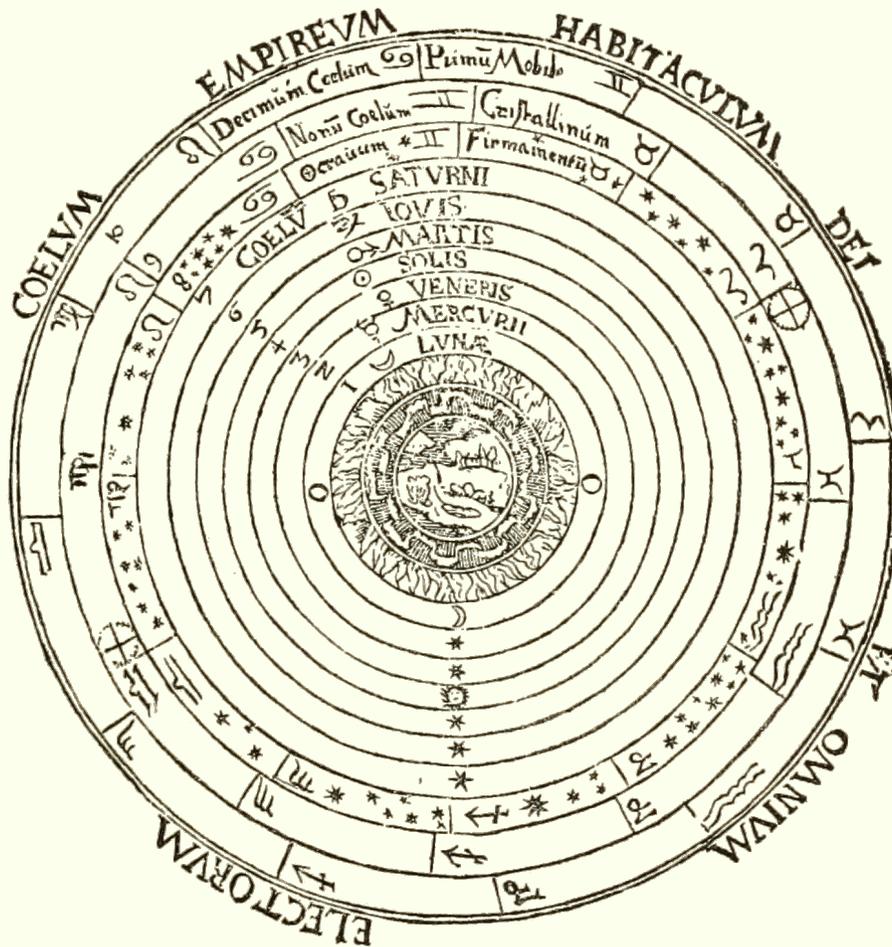


Figure 2

Shown above: the earth, the spheres of the 7 planets (the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), the Firmament which holds the stars, the Crystal Line to which they are affixed, the Primum Mobile, which, unmoved, moves the other spheres, and the realm of the Empyrean, in which God or the gods live and dwell.

Image from [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:A_short_history_of_astronomy\(1898\).djvu/133](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Page:A_short_history_of_astronomy(1898).djvu/133)

¹³ Bužarovski, 170. Bužarovski here cites Milton Charles Nahm, *Selections from Early Greek Philosophy*. (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1964), 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

This mathematical approach to music subordinated the practice of music itself to its theory (*musica speculativa*¹⁶), which was “magnificent” and seen as “more perfect than music itself.”¹⁷ At that time too, the Quadrivium, the subdivision of the Liberal Arts which mathematical music naturally inhabited along with its neighbors (arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy) was regarded as superior to the Trivium. This was to change throughout the Renaissance as the humanities of the Trivium (grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric) were elevated until ultimately the textual, rhetorical elements of music gained greater attention than their Quadrivial counterparts.¹⁸ That an understanding of the theory of music was both esteemed above the practical skill of performance and indicative of an enlightened mind (in contrast to the merely passive one of the hearer or the emotive mind of a musician) is bitingly evinced in the maxim as stated by Guido of Arezzo:

“Musicorum et cantorum magna est distantia.

Isti dicunt illi sciunt quae componit musica.

Nam qui facit, quod non sapit, diffinitur bestia.”

(“Singers and musicians, they are different as night and day. One makes music, one is wise and knows what music can comprise. But those who do what they know least are to be designated beast.”)¹⁹

¹⁶ Bartel, 11, 12.

¹⁷ Bužarovski, 172-173.

¹⁸ Bartel, 12, 18.

¹⁹ Wolff, 305.

II. Aesthetics of Musical Origin in the Quattrocento

Toward the end of the medieval period, developments in music had occurred which powerfully challenged the capacity of Pythagorean philosophy to fully address and rationalize musical components. Namely, increasingly complex counterpoint became either a problem or a challenge to theorists, who either gradually allowed cosmic theories of *musica mundana* to become briefer and simpler, or alternatively developed turgid and immensely convoluted theories to connect the new consonances and dissonances to heavenly bodies and their mathematical ratios and patterns. Opponents of Pythagoreanism were few, and they received in turn staunch responses in support of the Classical authorities, treatises that wove in new theories of rhythm and meter to match the contemporary development of mensural notation—a notation that accommodated new metrical complications (*tempus* and *prolatio*) and the use of isorhythm.²⁰ Among these treatises of the Quattrocento were included Johannes Tinctoris's *Proportionale Musices* (1472-75) and Franchinus Garfurius's *Practica Musicae* (1496).²¹ Throughout the 15th century Pythagoreanism was maintained as the primary philosophical framework for music²² and its anchoring of music in the Quadrivium as mathematically understood and perceived was not to change until a century later.

A. Cosmic (Metaphysical) Musical Origins in the Quattrocento

If music in the Quattrocento was a mathematical discipline proportionally defined, and its ratios divinely conceived, it was a no less imaginative and even mystical conception, and the question as to what its beauty was comprised of or contingent upon

²⁰ Bužarovski, 174-176

²¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

²² *Ibid.*, 177.

often emerged, especially in the writings of Marsilio Ficino. Ficino (1433-1499), a priest and Italian scholar of Plato and Aristotle, is widely credited for his large roll in the new and widespread blossoming of fascination in Greek philosophy during the Renaissance,²³ and with his Medicean connections, he was certainly well placed to do so.²⁴ Ficino was deeply versed in the classics, and from his villa north of Florence his philosophy spread across many disciplines as “humanists, philosophers, artists, poets, musicians, physicians, astronomers, and mathematicians” came to his “Platonic Academy.”²⁵ To him were owed Latin translations of all of Plato as well as writings of countless other Greek philosophers.²⁶

Ficino believed beauty to be contingent upon, but not consisting of, proper proportion. Tamara Albertini in “Marsilio Ficino: The Aesthetic of the One in the Soul” writes:

Although beauty transcends the mathematical formulation of the principles that govern the aesthetic order, it nevertheless remains dependent on them. Beauty consists “in a certain actuality, liveliness, and gracefulness” (*De Amore* 5, 6, 155), and can therefore be detached from the bodily appearance.²⁷

²³ Albertini, 84.

²⁴ Ibid., 82-83. “Through his father Diotifeci, who was the personal physician of Cosimo de’ Medici, he came as an adolescent into contact with the Medicean circle.” And later: “The intellectual climate in Florence was, however, unpropitious for this work, and the humanist Cristoforo Landino and other benefactors advised Ficino against its [*Institutiones Platonicae*] publication. Cosimo de’ Medici, who had also seen the *Institutiones*, was nevertheless convinced that Ficino possessed philosophical gifts, and he encouraged him to undertake a deeper study of Plato.”

²⁵ Ibid, 83.

²⁶ Ibid. Albertini includes in her list the works of Hermes Trismegistus, Plotinus, Dionysius the Aeropagite, Iamblicus, Athenagorus, Psellus, Alcinoous, Speucippus, Xenocrates, Synesius, Priscianus Lydus, and Hermias of Alexandria.

²⁷ Ibid., 90.

Albertini notes that in Ficino's worldview, beauty is an expression of another entity, not only a property of that which it inhabits, writing "Symmetries and proportions serve the predisposition of the body, so that beauty can shine in it. Since it is an expression of the divine goodness in the world, it is also described as a ray of light or as luminous splendor."²⁸ To Ficino, order is not beauty itself, though it is instinctively praised by the human mind:

According to Ficino, human beings are endowed with an appreciation of proportions, symmetry, and regular forms... Despite the great importance that Ficino attaches to the intellectually attractive proportions, he states clearly that the well-shaped form (*figura*) is not per se beautiful; nevertheless, it is the precondition of beauty (*pulchritudo*). The primary aesthetic object for Ficino (as for the artists of his day) is the natural body, especially the human body, which he conceptualizes as a physician by stating that the rational soul can form only the healthy body in which the fluids are "well tempered."²⁹

Tinctoris too admits a divine origin of music, and that a Christological one, having discarded already the possibility of *musica mundana*.³⁰ However, his writing retains the wonder and mystery of the Medieval conception:

And how compelling, pray, was that melody by whose power gods, ancestral

²⁸ Ibid, 90.

²⁹ Ibid, 89-90.

³⁰ Fisk, 7. "But when, as Boethius relates, some declare that Saturn moves with the deepest sound and that, as we pass by stages through the remaining planets, the moon moves with the highest, while others, conversely, ascribe the deepest sound to the moon and the highest to the sphere of the fixed stars, I put faith in neither opinion. Rather I unshakably credit Aristotle and his commentator [Thomas Aquinas], along with our more recent philosophers, who most manifestly prove that in the heavens there is neither actual nor potential sound. For this reason it will never be possible to me that musical concords, which cannot be produced without sound, can result from the motion of the heavenly bodies."

spirits, foul demons, even mindless animals and things inanimate were said to be moved! This legend, even if partly fictitious, is not entirely free of mystery, for surely the poets would not have invented such stories concerning music had they not at some time perceived, through divine inspiration, its wonderful powers.³¹

Well would both Ficino and Tinctoris have known Plato's discourse in the *Symposium* on the "Ladder of Love," wherein he orders the human loves, placing at the glorious summit the love of beauty itself:

Such is the experience of the man who approaches, or is guided towards, love in the right way, beginning with the particular examples of beauty, but always returning from them to the search for that one beauty. He uses them like a ladder, climbing from the love of one person to love of two; from two to love of all physical beauty; from physical beauty to beauty in human behavior; thence to beauty in subjects of study; from them he arrives finally at that branch of knowledge which studies nothing but ultimate beauty. Then at last he understands what true beauty is.

That, if ever, is the moment, my dear Socrates, when a man's life is worth living, as he contemplates beauty itself...No, imagine he were able to see the divine beauty itself in its unique essence. Don't you think he would find it a wonderful way to live, looking at it, contemplating it as it should be contemplated, and spending his time in its company? It cannot fail to strike you that only then will it be possible for him, seeing beauty as it should be seen, to produce, not likenesses of goodness (since it is no likeness he has before him), but the real thing (since he has the real thing before him); and that this producing, and caring for, real goodness earns him the friendship of the gods and makes him, if anyone, immortal.³²

³¹ Fisk, 6.

³² Plato, 67-68.

To Plato, love is the desire for goodness and immortality (through offspring, or more lastingly and importantly, legacy of thought), and this quest for immortality is the essence of ambition. Throughout his preceding description of beauty itself, there are countless attributes that coincide with Judeo and/or Christian attributes of the divine, making for a plethora of possibilities with which to construct a rich web of classical-theological parallelism and synthesis for Catholic theorists of the time, including:³³

1. Eternality (“It is eternal, neither coming to be nor passing away”)
2. Ontological permanence (“It is not the case that creatures remain always, in every detail, precisely the same—only the divine does that.” “It is...neither increasing nor decreasing”)
3. Perfectly beautiful (“Moreover it is not beautiful in part and ugly in part, nor is it beautiful at one time and not another...”)
4. Transcendent (“It will not appear to him as the beauty of a face, or hands, or anything physical—“)
5. Singular and incomparable to anything else (“It exists for all time, by itself and with itself, unique.”)
6. The source of all beauty, which gives without diminishing in size (“All other forms of beauty derive from it, but in such a way that their creation or destruction does not strengthen or weaken it, or affect it in any way at all.”)
7. The greatest and ultimate *raison d’être* (“That, if ever, is the moment, my dear Socrates, when a man’s life is worth living”)
8. Beholding beauty enables the production of goodness
9. Love for and production of “goodness” affords immortality and a relationship with the divine

Plato’s elevated and even stunning ode to beauty, even without a few abstractions and modifications of vocabulary (“beauty” and “goodness” exchanging for “God” and

³³ Ibid, 62, 66.

“holiness”) sounds magnificently creed-like. Similar to the medieval cosmology, Plato has devised a cohesive theory which arranges forms of beauty hierarchically. In his case, it is beauty that is first found in physical proportion, then in knowledge, and then in its purest essence. Like Plato, for Ficino beauty is something divine, a “lively,” “luminous” “actuality” enjoyable when order and proportion are in balance. Lastly, Tinctoris too unites Greek and Christian teaching as he attempts to locate a proportion in the figure who is in Christian doctrine the fount of all beauty, but also the locus of both the human and divine, earth and Empyrean: Christ. “But then, after the fullness of time, in which the greatest of all musicians, Jesus Christ our peace, under duple proportion made two natures one, there flourished in His church many musicians...”³⁴

B. Cognitive Musical Origins in the Quattrocento

If the origin of music and beauty is divine in nature then another question remains: how does it come to the pen of the composer/theorist? Peter Parshall addresses the problem of imagination and the visual arts in his article “Graphic Knowledge: Albrecht Dürer and the Imagination” in which he briefly posits that in Dürer’s view, beauty might be seen to be manifested in the portrayal rather than the form being represented.³⁵ In my view, however, this is an erroneous conflation of beauty and “skill,” of which Dürer writes, “From this it emerges that in a single day a person can draw something with a pen on a half sheet of paper, or cut something into a small piece of wood with his knife, that is more artistic [künstlicher] and better than a grand work made with the greatest effort

³⁴ Fisk, 6.

³⁵ Parshall, 403.

by another over the course of an entire year, and this gift is wonderful.”³⁶

To Dürer therefore, skill could impressively capture and depict both the beautiful and the mundane. But how? According to Parshall, the imagination was held deeply suspect throughout the Renaissance. He writes, “The Renaissance was a culture exceptionally alert to the dangers of being deceived, an unstable mental universe plagued by the threat of concealed heresies and the omnipresence of the Devil himself. In a subculture of self-consciously creative activity such worries had to be taken seriously, particularly given that artists were invested with a special responsibility to make things up.”³⁷ Parshall later recalls Origen’s assertion that hybrid forms (in Dürer’s words, a dream work, or *traumswerk*³⁸) in the visual arts are idolatry, writing:

His opinion reflected the disapproving view that the imagination was the engine of idle curiosity, a position endorsed by Christian theologians throughout the Middle Ages and well into the Renaissance. Origen concluded that hybrids are not only corrupt, but that they are by definition idolatrous: “someone makes an idol when he makes what does not exist.” Imitations of nature are not capable of being worshipped because they actually exist in the world and therefore cannot be mistaken for something divine. Hybrids, by contrast, are creatures of the imagination and are therefore unverifiable.³⁹

Music, however, is not a depiction of a visually perceived form, or if it succeeds in signifying known visual forms, it is not capable of creating distorted or hybrid forms solely on its own terms. However, the problem of the origin and nature of imagination

³⁶ Parshall, 403, referring to Dürer’s *Proportionslehre*, Book 3.

³⁷ Parshall, pg 393.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 395.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pg 396.

remained. Plato recognized that the arts present a less trustworthy version of reality than the eye itself,⁴⁰ but briefly bypassed the question of origin in his definition of musical composition as a putting together of different components.⁴¹ Did those components emerge *ex nihilo*? Unlike the visual arts, composers could not readily turn to “nature” as their guide. And yet to understand this aesthetic, it’s necessary to remember that the Renaissance concept of “imagination” was rather different than its modern meaning. To Renaissance theorists, to “imagine” was a more fanciful process than a contemplative or pragmatic recalling of an image in the mind. Certainly, in the modern sense, aesthetics and musical philosophy of the Middle Ages and Renaissance relied heavily on imaginative leaps of theory,⁴² but to compare imagination to the image-storing function of the memory⁴³ would be an inaccurate parallel.

⁴⁰ Parshall, 393.

⁴¹ Plato, 57-58. “Take a concept like creation, or composition. Composition means putting things together, and covers a wide range of activities. Any activity which brings anything at all into existence is an example of creation. Hence the exercise of any skill is composition, and those who practise it are composers...All the same, they aren’t all called composers. They all have different names, and it’s only one subdivision of the whole class (that which deals with music and rhythm) which is called by the general name. Only this kind of creation is called composing, and its practitioners composers.”

⁴² In my view, the idea of music participating in the harmony of spheres is very imaginative. In this process, music is imagined as an expression of the divine, participating in the resonance of creation and by this divine power having an effect on senses. The educated listener then listens with an attempt to bring the senses into harmony with mentally apprehended modes, and may indeed draw upon the powers of imagination to augment associations with various melodies, building up a vocabulary of emotional response. Much of the cosmos must be imagined, because it is too remote to be seen in detail. In the same way, music is often too quick to allow the listener to internalize every interval as it happens, so the imagination of the Quattrocento fills in the gaps with a fabric of philosophy and scientific conviction, as well as a wonder and awe of the divine.

⁴³ Parshall, 398. “As Erwin Panofsky and other interpreters have noted, Dürer envisions “the mind [*gemuet*] as a storehouse. This storehouse appears to be similar to, if not exactly like, conventional understandings of the memory, namely, an archive of fixed images that were literally “impressed” on the mind as if on a wax tablet. Since late antiquity this had been a favorite analogue for how the memory operated, but in Dürer’s thinking, such a straightforward model of the mind and its storage capacities was too static and not adequate to his sense of what must actually be going on. The word *gemuet* carries various implications. Meister Eckhart (ca. 1260-1317) defined it as “a dwelling for spiritual forms and sensible pictures [*ein ûfenthalt geistlicher forme unde vernünftiger bilde*].” {Grimm and Grimm, *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, Vol. 5, 1884} Much later, but well within that tradition, Geiler referred to “the eye of the mind [*das oug des gemuets*]” having the ability to see images of things that are otherwise invisible. That is to say, it sees images not of the external world or in any

To depart from modern understandings even further, the concept often carried with it associations of deception and perversity. What is essential to a Renaissance concept of imagination is the disposition of the mind in the act of imagining as being somewhat out of control, and less concerned about order and planning. Parshall helpfully delineates words commonly used to for memory, and quoting his work:⁴⁴

Latin: *imaginatio*

Middle High German: *einbilden* (“to make an interior image”)

Greco-Latin derived *phantasie*,” used in German starting in 14th century

For a darker concept of *phantasie*, Parshall writes that “*Wan* (like *phantasie*) also carries within it the potential for subversion. For example, from the late Middle Ages onward it had meant something like a delusion, a vision insinuated from without by a darker power. Delusion is what Geiler means by *phantasie*, and likely the two of them were thinking closely along the same lines.”⁴⁵

The use of the word *phantasie* is provocative on musical terms, as the secular and abstract form was to emerge later, combining these elements of flight, improvisation, and free wandering of the mind. However, these characteristics were in stark contrast to an age in which the zeitgeist was only recently according secular music a higher intellectual status. In the following century, Francis Bacon (1561-1626) would again bring up the whimsical, motion-like aspect of the imagination, as Bužarovski points out:

case not visible in the external world. Whether these are implanted in the mind (revelations) or are of its own making (inspirations) is not entirely clear. It is a modification of a standard theological distinction requiring us to turn from visible forms to invisible things, "which the eye of the mind sees through the light of God." {Ibid.}

⁴⁴ Parshall, 395.

⁴⁵ Parshall, 398.

...Francis Bacon introduced the idea that imagination is the essence of art. Although the real flourishing of the theories based on the power of imagination occurred in the 18th century, Bacon stated that “the musician who makes an excellent air, like the painter who makes a better face than ever was, does it not by rules but by a kind felicity and that Durer was a fool for trying to find a mathematical law upon which to rest his designs.”⁴⁶

The artist Cennino Cennini (1360-1427) had long ago emphasized the importance of the imagination to the painter,⁴⁷ though as Parshall indicates, ultimately, and after a short-lived experiment with flightier imaginative techniques, Dürer would find it impossible on theological-philosophical grounds to continue his exploration. The body of Parshall’s paper is an analysis of three works of Albrecht Dürer, the “Meisterstiche” or “master engravings.”⁴⁸ Between 1512 and 1516 Parshall sees an investigation on the part of Dürer into the imagination, though he never refers to it by that name.⁴⁹ In particular, he finds some of his marginalia in 1515 remarkable for its masterful spontaneity and innovation. He includes as an example *Grotesque* from *The Prayer Book of Maximilian*.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Bužarovski, pg. 180.

⁴⁷ Parshall, 396.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 393.

⁴⁹ Parshall, 403.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pg. 400., including figure caption.

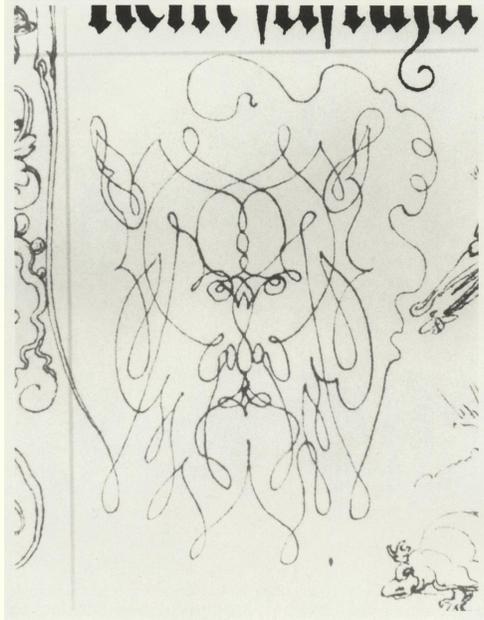


Figure 3 “*Grotesque* , 1515, pen and purple ink on vellum, from *The Prayer Book of Maximilian* , fol. 24r. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, 2° L.impr.membr. 64 (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by Bayrische Staatsbibliothek München.)”

However widespread the Italian Renaissance, its imaginative aesthetic, as aforementioned, was not to take hold as far as Germany in the 15th century, and certainly not some of Leonardo’s more charismatic statements:⁵¹

At the same time, however, Leonardo appears to have been entirely comfortable with the notion that an artist can simply make things up, just pull them out of the air. In this he is truly Faustian.⁵² Although, like Dürer, Leonardo regarded it as absolutely necessary that one build a storehouse of empirical knowledge as a foundation for all artistic invention, he nonetheless also believed that "if the painter wishes to see beauties that charm him it lies in his power to create them, and if he wishes to see monstrosities that are frightful ...

⁵¹ Parshall, 403, as he cites in 52-54:

⁵² Richter, *Leonardo*, 53, no. 18: "in regard to imitation . . . the object of the imagination does not come from without but is born in the darkness of the mind’s eye [in tal caso di fintione diremo... la immaginatane tale corpo non entra in esso senso, ma li nasce, né lV occhio tenebroso].”

he can be lord and God thereof."⁵³ Dürer, by contrast, held this realm of possibility under deep suspicion. Whereas Leonardo reiterated the established analogy between divine and human creativity, Dürer specifically ruled out the possibility of pure invention, in particular, the invention of perfect beauty, a capacity he regarded as the exclusive province of God.⁵⁴

III. The subsiding of the notion of music as a cosmic expression and the personalization of its cognitive origins

In the later Renaissance, controversy began to emerge, notably between Vincenzo Galilei (1520-1591) and Gioseffo Zarlino (1517-1590), and between Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) and Giovanni Artusi (1540-1613). For Galilei and Zarlino the clash was many-faceted and extended to broader concepts of consonance and dissonance, and naturally to proportion and ratio.⁵⁵ For Monteverdi and Artusi, on the other hand, the debate was primarily a contrapuntal one, one in which Monteverdi gave in his *seconda pratica* primacy to text rather than the earlier contrapuntal strictures of the *prima pratica*.⁵⁶

Eventually the mathematical property of music came to occupy the periphery of theoretical thought, René Descartes recognizing only pitch and duration as mathematical, while retaining the Pythagorean belief of proportion as a precondition for beauty, or

⁵³ Ibid., 54, no. 19: "Sei pittore voi vedere belleze, che lo innamorino, egli n'è signore di generale, et se voi vedere cose mostruose, che spa- ventino . . . ei n'è signore et dio." See also Anthony Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 36-38.

⁵⁴ Dürer, *Proportionslehre*, bk. 3, fol. T2

⁵⁵ Bužarovski, pg 178.

⁵⁶ Burkholder, Grout, and Palisca, pg. 296.

“pleasure” of the “senses.”⁵⁷ In the Baroque Period Jean-Philippe Rameau too believed that mathematics enlightened the mind, and that music was a science first and foremost.⁵⁸

Stephen Halliwell noted that in the 18th and 19th centuries the “language of mimeticism” was challenged and ultimately abandoned in favor of expressivity,⁵⁹ something that had not been absent from earlier theory, but which took on new forms. As identified by Halliwell, in addition to “‘transitive’ expression” (“‘arousal’ of emotion”) and “‘intransitive’ expression” (“‘objectively’ depictional”), music envisioned as “self-expression” became increasingly popular.⁶⁰ This idea of self-expression found fertile ground in the Romantic era, especially in abstract forms that could be perceived to present the psychological states or persona of composers, rather than the often text-confined depiction of sacred vocal writing.⁶¹

Still today, modern aesthetics retains the most relatable, timeless, and instinctual elements of Pythagorean thought. As Halliwell wrote,

In this respect, *ēthos* theory is one instance of a much more widely documented phenomenon, namely the tendency of human beings to hear traces of psychological “life” in musical works or performances, and to (re)enact that life in the patterns of feeling that constitute responses to music. There is less distance than one might have expected, therefore, between Aristotle’s approach to music and a modern psychological theory of musical experience which speaks in terms of the hearer’s imagining a “virtual person” within a piece of music.⁶²

⁵⁷ Bužarovski, pg. 179-180.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁵⁹ Halliwell, 257-258.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 247-248.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 238.

And so today, though *musica mundana* is largely obsolete, the ancient essence of the affective power of music of course remains relevant; though celestial influence and harmony was set aside, we still hear or imagine in music a persona, “traces of psychological life,” much like Horace’s ‘living’ song:

To which itself [the lyra] Horace by the same figure:

We are asked (if we have played anything idle together

Beneath the shade) for something that will live hence

Both for a year and more; come sing, barbiton,

A Latin song.⁶³

⁶³ Tinctoris.

Works Cited

Albertini, Tamara. "Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499): The Aesthetic of the One in the Soul." in *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, edited by Blum Paul Richard, by McNeil Brian. Catholic University of America Press, 2010. 82-91.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32b217.10>.

Bartel, Dietrich. *Musica Poetica: Musica-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music*. University of Nebraska Press, 1997.

Burkholder, Peter J., Donald Jay Grout, and Claude V. Palisca. *A History of Western Music, Seventh Edition*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.

Bužarovski, Dimitrije. "Generative Ideas in the Aesthetics of Music." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 17, no. 2 (1986): 163-84.
doi:10.2307/836662.

"Johannes Tinctoris" *Composers on Music: Eight Centuries of Writings*. Edited by Josiah Fisk. Consulting editor Jeff Nichols. Lebanon: University Press of New England, 1997.

Halliwell, Stephen. "Music and the Limits of Mimesis: Aristotle Versus Philodemus."

In *The Aesthetics of Mimesis: Ancient Texts and Modern Problems*, 234-60.

PRINCETON; OXFORD: Princeton University Press, 2002.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rn67.14>.

Parshall, Peter. "Graphic Knowledge: Albrecht Dürer and the Imagination." *The Art*

Bulletin 95, no. 3 (2013): 393-410. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43188839>

Plato. *Symposium and Phaedrus*. Translated by Tom Griffith. New York: University of California Press, 1989.

Tinctoris, Johannes. *De invention et usu musicae*. Translated by Jeffrey J Dean. Early

Music Theory: Johannes Tinctoris: Complete Theoretical Works. Accessed May

10, 2017. Posted February 26, 2015.

<http://earlymusictheory.org/Tinctoris/texts/deinventioneeetusumusice/#pane0>

=Translation.

Wolff, Christoph. *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician*. New York: W. W.

Norton & Company, Inc., 2001.