

Andrew Baker

## **THE LYRE, THE MUSICIAN AND THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN**

*This essay is an extended version of a talk I gave to Rilko (The Research into Lost Knowledge Organisation) at Rudolf Steiner House, London, on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2025.*

This is a story about ancient lost knowledge refound.

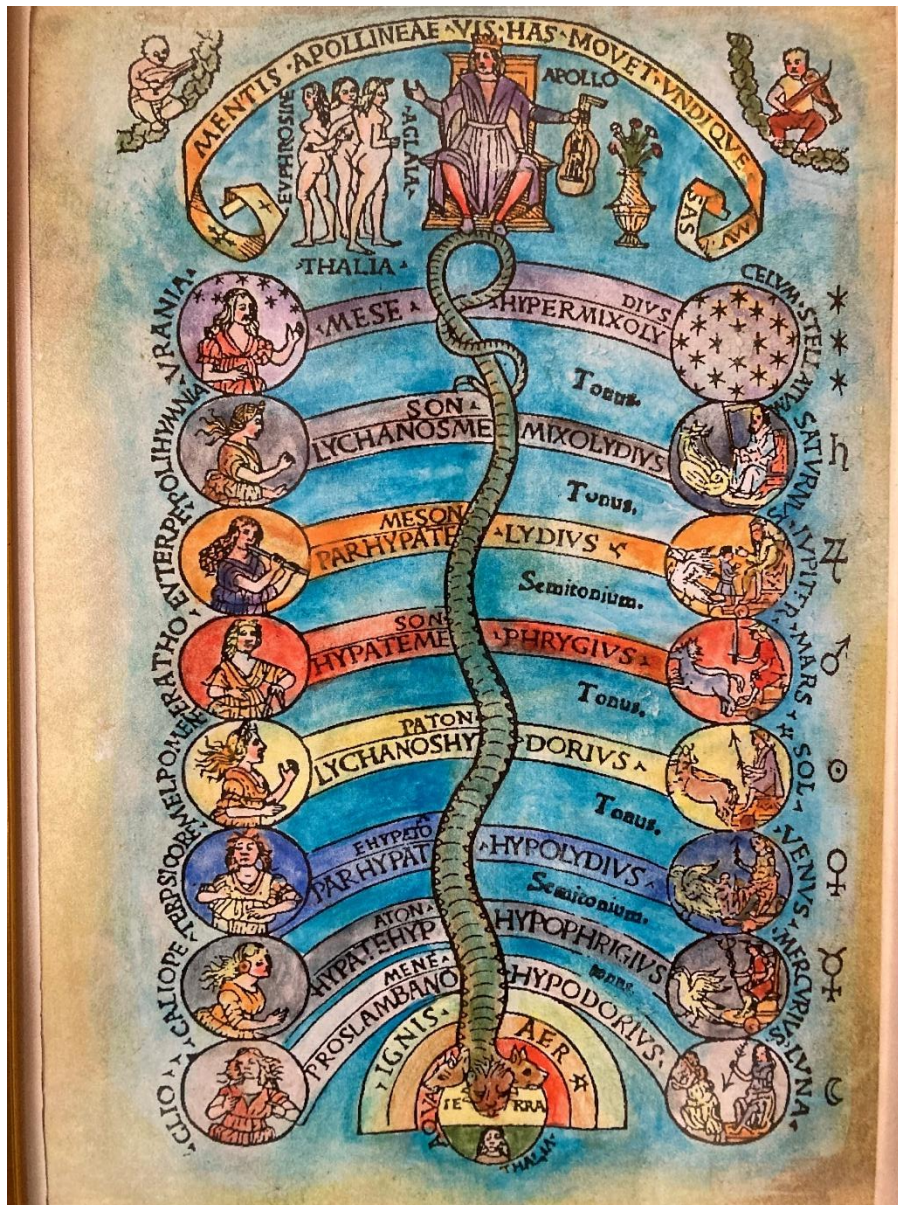
In this case it's about the ancient tradition of the sacred lyre, drawing on the work of John Curtis Franklin of the University of Vermont and a new understanding of a musical Mesopotamian tablet in the Penn Museum.

I am very grateful to my friend Professor Richard Janko of the University of Michigan for seeing that this material would be of interest to me and putting me in touch with John Franklin whom I thank for his support. His work is very much in depth and academic but explores fascinating and important worlds. I am also grateful to Margaret Barker for her support.

For me this story has been literally life changing. This story discovers answers to– or at least ways of thinking about – several questions which have haunted me for a very long time again. Who, exactly, were those syrens in a film I made over fifty years ago? What really is the significance of the modes?

The story I am telling here, though, is not personal but universal - this rediscovered knowledge dramatically changes the history of music and, inseparable from that. Religion - and yet it is a simple story about the seven-stringed lyre. The instrument might change but its music – its harmonies – are unchanging and form a continuous thread through thousands of years, a sign of a worldview – a world drawn to unity by a living power of Harmony – which has been lost and re-found over the millennia.

## GAFORI'S ILLUSTRATION



This is an illustration from Franchino Gafori's *Practica Musica* published in 1496.

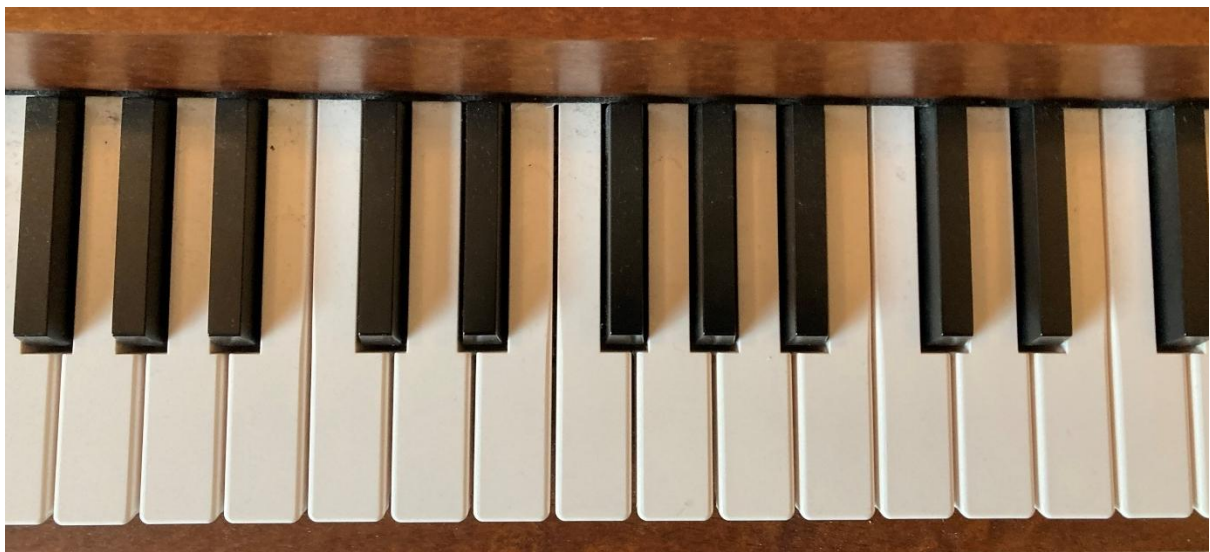
The image was coloured for me by Carl Johnson.

This is the clearest Renaissance illustration of the relationship between the musical scale and the musical modes, the celestial spheres and also here the muses.

What this shows is a musical scale - a scale ascending from A if we were to play it on the white notes of a piano.

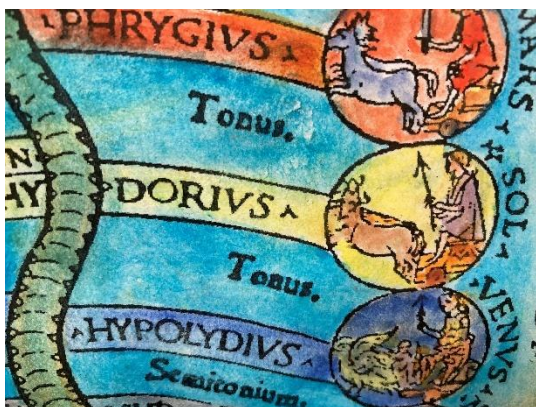
It is this precise scale that is at the centre of this story.

If you think of a piano the white notes are not all the same distance apart. Not all have black notes between them. The notes B and C are half the distance apart of the notes C and D. B and C and E and F are a semitone apart. C and D F and G , G and A and A and B are a tone apart – with black notes between them.

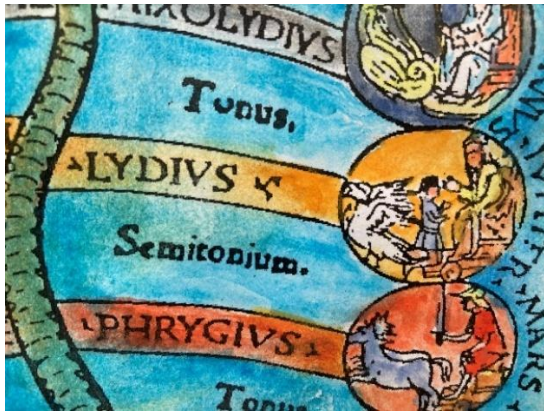


If we play a scale from any single note the order of semitones and wholetones will be different. Each scale will have a different sound – or mood. Our minor scale is a scale on A, often thought sad, a major scale is a scale on C, a brighter or happier sound.

In the music of the medieval western church the mode on D, called here the Dorian, was thought to be the most suited to devotion. We can see that the note D and its mode belongs to the Sun.



The mode on F, here called Lydian, the mode of delight, belongs to jovial Jupiter.

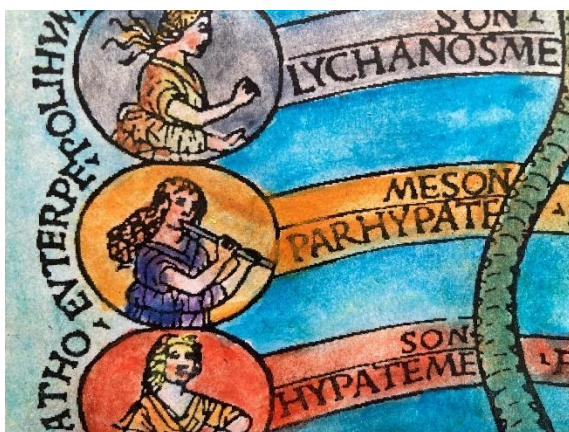


Gafori explains the influences of the heavenly spheres on our physical world. Some are feminine and some are masculine. For example:

Since the orb of Venus, delightful to view and most clear and pleasant, is humid, it is said to be pleasing at night and to emit a feminine sound. Because the orb of the sun is dry it mostly burns up in heat and energy; it is said to produce a masculine sound. The orb of Mars, warm and violent, takes pleasure in humid and nocturnal figures; it produces a sound that participates in both natures, but leaning more to the masculine.<sup>1</sup>

Gafori adds the muses to his illustration. There are traditionally nine muses. Gafori's sources are Fulgentius (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century AD) and Ramos de Pareja (c1440 -m c.1491), who took the listing of the muses from the Roman writer Martianus Capella (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> centuries AD).<sup>2</sup> Other sources give alternative allocations of muses and planets. Here eight are attached each to a tone and a heaven.

Euterpe is the giver of delight so she belongs to Jupiter.



Polyhymnia is muse of sacred song so sings for Saturn, the melancholy planet.

<sup>1</sup> Joscelyn Godwin, *The Harmony of the Spheres*, Inner Traditions International, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Godwin op. cit. p.446 and p. 448



The muse Urania belongs to the sphere of the stars.



Thalia, muse of comedy, is sometimes said to have no music but that's wrong. Comedy is the art of combination. Thalia weaves all the music of the muses into the music of earth – nature



Perhaps we should call these deities *syrens*. These allocations of muses and planets are relatively modern, late Roman. Eight hundred years earlier Plato, in the *Myth of Er*, a

story which is told at the end of his *Republic*, wrote that there are syrens who sit on the spheres singing. They are the source of the Music of the Spheres. Their individual sounds make a perfect harmony.

The Renaissance Franciscan Francesco Giorgi, in his epic *De Harmonia Mundi* (*The Harmony of the World*) (1525) wrote:

But there are symphonies which are no less signs of heaven, such as those (as Plato tells) are presided over by the various Syrens, who are said to be singers to God, who, placed in the firmament, make its influences harmonious.<sup>i</sup>

It would appear that the syrens of the heavenly spheres are not necessarily the same as the muses who inspire their various kinds of poetry, song and dance, though Gafori's allocations of muses to planets does seem to make sense in some cases, Euterpe with Jupiter and Polyhymnia for Saturn at least. It as if there is an ancient mystery behind these muses or sirens who sing the Harmonies of Spheres. Or is it that the spheres echo the muses' music? Do the singing deities have an independent and prior existence?

Gafori's illustration is a diagram of the fundamental Harmony within the world, or the cosmos, and at the same time a pattern of the archetypal qualities in the soul, as the human soul is a microcosm, a cosmos in miniature. This is an ancient idea, well known in the middle-ages. The great 13<sup>th</sup> century Franciscan theologian Bonaventure wrote:

*It should be noted that this world, which is called the macrocosm, enters our soul, which is called the smaller world [microcosm], through the doors of the five senses as we perceive, enjoy and judge sensible things.*<sup>ii</sup>

We all have this same Harmony within us.

It can be argued that harmonies come from Number. but this cosmos of Harmony is about feelings, imagination, creativity – and archetypal qualities in the world and the soul.

And here's the point of this talk. Something so simple it might not be obvious how astonishing it is.

This specific scale (seven different notes within the octave) with its associations of planets or deities, muses or syrens, is now known to have been used consistently and continuously for at least three thousand years. It is unchanging, yet unrecognised, wisdom. This musical scale has its origin in the sacred seven stringed lyre.

This is its story –

The story of the Lyre, the Musician and the Queen of Heaven.

## **APHRODITE AND KINYRAS**

The story begins on Cyprus, at Paphos. There may have been other stories in other places and other times, but this story begins at Paphos.

Perhaps 3000 years ago worshippers gathered on the beach at Paphos and remembered the birth of Aphrodite from the sea – sea almost more blue than our eyes can bare to gaze on – sea stirred by a breeze – and the goddess rising from its dancing white foam.

Daughter of Ouranos, a remote and mysterious deity - God of the heavens. His genitals were severed by his son, Cronos or Saturn, later thought of as time – thrown into the sea – and Aphrodite is born from his seed – on this beach (later other islands would clam her) - but she is a cosmic deity.

Homer thought she was the daughter of Zeus and Dione.

An ancient Homeric hymn begins:

Muse, tell me the things done by golden Aphrodite,  
the one from Cyprus, who arouses sweet desire for gods  
and who subdues the races of mortal humans,  
and birds as well, who fly in the sky, as well as all beasts  
all those that grow on both dry land and the sea.<sup>3</sup>

Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium* tells the guests at the party that there are two Venuses. Aphrodite Urania, who has no mother, born from the sea, is heavenly love. Earthly love

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.uh.edu/~cldue/texts/aphrodite.html>

belongs to Aphrodite Pandemos, but it is heavenly love that moves the stars and brings beauty into the world.

Aphrodite Urania is one of the most ancient representatives of a very ancient idea – Harmony as a force which draws things – all things – together – something both beyond Nature and yet embedded within it.

We might, though, prefer to think of heavenly and earthly love as aspects of one goddess.

The lyre is not just a symbol – it is a demonstration - of the Law – or language - of Harmony – a universal Law which is known in musical harmony and was imagined to be displayed by the pattern of the cosmos.

Kinyras was the king who played his sacred lyre for the Queen of Heaven.

This was in bronze age Cyprus.

Centuries later than this Homer wrote in his Iliad that Kinyras presented a breastplate to king Agamemnon. That was in the Trojan wars. Kinyras was old then. Aphrodite was ageless.

According to Ovid, much more recently, Kinyras was the grandson of Pygmalion and his beautiful statue, brought to life by Aphrodite. Kinyras had an incestuous relationship with his daughter Myrrha, who gave birth to Adonis. Myrrha was turned into a tree that wept myrrha.

(Robert Graves, in his *The Greek Myths*, thought the story of Kinyras and Myrrha was a myth of the temporary king marrying a priestess to prolong his reign.)

The myths are complex and change over time but the constant in this story is Kinyras's lyre. Or was Kinyras himself the lyre? The lyre is the same now as it was then – a magical artifact belonging to the Queen of Heaven.

## THE LYRE

There are other priest musicians. The goddess they serve can have other names. Kinyras is, as far as can be known, the original.

John C Franklin writes:

...in Greek evidence, 'lyre heroes' like Orpheus, Amphion, Cadmus

and Linus are seen as late mythological derivatives of the pattern.<sup>4</sup>

The seven stringed sacred lyre is unchanging. There are larger instruments with more strings but the seven stringed lyre, which sets the pattern of the seven note scale and the tuning of larger instruments. is the key to Harmony, and the cosmos. The Priest King is the Lyre. He serves the lyre, and the Queen of Heaven, but is the king simply a personification of the lyre?

The seven strings of the sacred lyre form a diatonic (white note) scale from A to G. The central string is, to us, the D. Franklin explains that tablets from the ancient civilisations of Ur, Nippur, Sippar, Assur, and Ugarit show illustrations of the seven-stringed pattern and provide evidence that this tuning system dates back to third millennium BC, in which case this story runs through 5000 years. Scholars had believed that diatonic tuning only developed in the late classical period, but the new evidence shows it was passed on through Mycenaea and possibly the Minoan civilisation

The Greeks believed that Terpander had introduced the seven string lyre, replacing a more primitive four stringed instrument. This would have been in the 7<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>5</sup> Franklin explains that Terpander must have been reviving a much older kind of music. The diatonic tuning became associated with Pythagoras, with an assumption that it required knowledge of the mathematics of harmony to tune the seven different notes of the scale. Tuning, though, be done purely by ear - by what sounds harmonious – but it is perfectly possible that the more ancient musicians knew the secrets of number long before Pythagoras. A lasting source of confusion lies in the fact that ancient Greek music often uses non-diatonic tunings, smaller or larger intervals which sound more exotic to a western ear used to diatonic tuning.

This simple diatonic musical scale, which sounds surprising if we expect ancient music to be exotic and alien, had been heard as divine, the music of the heavens, for thousands of years.

## THE LYRE AND THE COSMOS

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<sup>4</sup> Franklin, John C. "Lyre Gods of the Bronze Age Musical Koine", *The Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 6.2 (2006), 39–70.

[https://www.academia.edu/7860988/\\_Lyre\\_Gods\\_of\\_the\\_Bronze\\_Age\\_Musical\\_Koine\\_The\\_Journal\\_of\\_Ancient\\_Near\\_Eastern\\_Religions\\_6\\_2\\_2006\\_39\\_70](https://www.academia.edu/7860988/_Lyre_Gods_of_the_Bronze_Age_Musical_Koine_The_Journal_of_Ancient_Near_Eastern_Religions_6_2_2006_39_70)

<sup>5</sup> John C Franklin, "Diatonic Music in Greece: A Reassessment of its Antiquity," *Mnemosyne* 56.1 (2002), 669-702.

Though it is hard to date the origin of the association of the seven-string lyre with the planets lyre it is undoubtedly ancient, pre-Greek and possibly as old as the lyre itself.

When we look at the lyre as a model of the cosmos the central string represents the sun, which illuminates the other planets, below and above. In Greek writers this central string is called “theon”, the god. Aristotle gives the names of the strings and Plato mentions the stringing of the lyre, but they were writing about a tradition that was already very old.

The seven strings are tuned A B C D E F G.

Our note D is always the central string. This central string remains the same however we tune the lyre. To tune the rest of the strings to this original sacred scale we tune them from the central string.

The strings are tuned by ear – to what sounds to us – to nature - to be harmonious. We do not need any numbers or ratios or mathematical theories to tune the lyre. The order of strings and planets is this:

A Moon

B Mercury

C Venus

D Sun

E Mars

F Jupiter

G Saturn

The Pythagorean Nichomachus (first century AD) strangely reverses the order of Mercury and Venus which shows, I suspect, that the later Greeks and Romans had some uncertainty about the ordering of the cosmos.

Nichomachus added an eighth string, making an octave. This was attached to Cronos, or to the fixed stars. Cronos is generally taken to be the same god as Saturn. From the first century AD this eighth string is generally accepted as the note belonging to the sphere of the fixed stars. The introduction of an eighth string could have very useful symbolism in the Christian world – the idea of the Octave as the first day of a new week, a new Sunday. The classification of Gregorian chant has eight modes and medieval cosmology thinks in terms of eight spheres.

It is impossible to know when the planets were first associated with the seven-stringed lyre - possibly a millennium before Pythagoras. But which came first? Was the lyre made

to imitate the perceived order of the cosmos or was the cosmos perceived to imitate the tuning of the lyre?

The Greeks, it has to be said, did not see the distances between the planets quite like this, The Moon and Mercury appeared to them to be closer than a whole tone. I feel this is evidence that the more ancient perception of the cosmos was adjusted to imitate the lyre. Perhaps the Greeks were more accurate astronomers, (though this seems unlikely if we assume the Babylonians were especially expert in observation of the stars.

The lyre is not a symbol of the cosmos. It is a mystery in itself.

## **THE MODES AND THE MUSES**

When I first knew the Gafori diagram I might have thought that the inclusion of the muses was a poetic fantasy, perhaps something that was invented by the Renaissance imagination with its newly rediscovered enthusiasm for classical mythology. In the light of the recent research it is possible to see the muses as the most ancient and most important key to the understanding of the meaning of Harmony.

The harmonies of the lyre, the strings, had meaning. Each string and the mode centred on it has an emotional quality that seemed to reflect the symbolism of the planets but which has a reality regardless of how we imagine the cosmos.

But the lyre is more than this. It is also a living source of inspiration. Each string is a muse, with her own character.

Music itself has meaning. A single note might mean nothing, but as soon as our song moves to another note we hear a distinctive mode. The melodies centering on the seven notes of the lyre communicated seven archetypal qualities which could guide our songs and inspire our imagination.

For example:

The theon, middle string, is D, associated with the Sun. It's mode was used for "worthy melodies" matching the idea of the D Dorian mode in Gregorian chant as the most serious mode. Gafori places Melpomene, the muse of Tragedy, here.

If we sing chants in which F is dominant they will have a bright sound because of the position of the semitones in relation to F which is suited to delight and joy. This is the tone and the mode of Jupiter, or Euterpe. In modern music it's as if the harmony wants to modulate upwards a fifth.

In contrast a chant in which G dominates will tend to be sombre or melancholy. As of the music wants to modulate down a fifth, This is the tone of melancholy Saturn, or Polyhymnia.

The muses or syrens might have had other names long ago but they represent the archetypal qualities in each tone or mode and, as Franklin writes,

...a reverent, contemplative relationship between musician and instrument in which the lyre itself plays an active, even dominant role...

The...Muses (of the seven strings) lead the lyrist...into a treasure house of ideas and inspiration, provided they be cultivated with the devotions of 'skill' and 'wisdom'.<sup>6</sup>

In other word, perhaps before any association was made with the planets, the seven strings of the lyre were – not were symbols of but actually were – the sources of inspiration. Each string and the melody that flowed from it had its own quality. These qualities could be imagined as string-muses but they need not have been the same as the classical group of muses – and yet, when we look at the musical qualities of each string and its mode, there are at least some cases in which the classical muse, as illustrated by Gafori, seems to be appropriate.

This 'treasure house' has a sense of unity and completeness by being a cosmos of the seven diatonic strings. It is as if these seven archetypes together are the fundamental principals of Harmony and the key lights that rule Imagination – just as medieval philosophy would see the planetary cosmos as the pattern of the soul.

That ancient image of the cosmos is artificial, not necessarily - but possibly - an accurate image of the planets as they observed. The diatonic scale of the lyre is something found in Nature that is also the key to beauty and meaning.

Harmony comes first.

The lyre is a Cosmos held in the hand. The lyre of Kinyras, the original as far as this story is concerned, serves Aphrodite as the Queen of Heaven. The muses, whatever their names, are her handmaidens.

She is the source of Harmony. Harmony is both an energy that draws things to Unity - whether musical notes, Nature, events or lives - and the law which guides them in their formation. The harmonies of the sacred lyre are a gateway into the "treasure house of ideas and imagination."

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<sup>6</sup> John C Franklin in *Music, Text, and Culture in Ancient Greece*. United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 45.

## PYTHAGORAS WAS WRONG?

The 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Greek philosopher Pythagoras is often said to have been the one who discovered that the harmonies of musical sounds were derived from simple numerical ratios. This, in turn was evidence that everything in the world came from One, an abstract source, which some people associated with God.

Some sources claim Pythagoras had visited Egypt. It is quite possible that this knowledge of harmonic ratios is much older. It could have been known in the earlier stages of the story of the sacred lyre. Iamblichus, long after Pythagoras's time wrote:

In Phoenicia he conversed with the prophets who were descendants of Moschus the physiologist, and with many others, as well as with the local hierophants.<sup>7</sup>

Some, much later, have wondered if Moschus was Moses. Iamblichus goes on:

After gaining all he could from the Phoenician mysteries, he found that they had originated from the sacred rites of Egypt...

The diatonic, tuning of the lyre has long been thought of as a Pythagorean tuning<sup>8</sup>, based on the knowledge of harmonic ratios, but if this tuning was the tuning of Kinyras it follows that the knowledge of the ratios, or a simple awareness that Harmony came from unity, could be as ancient as the lyre.

John C Franklin writes:

The diatonic or 'Pythagorean' tuning process...is now known to have been cultivated in the Ancient Near East from the Old Babylonian period (c. 1800 BC)

This was remembered by Aristophanes as 'the method of tuning ) handed down by our forefathers'.<sup>9</sup>

The actual point in history when the mathematical basis of harmony was discovered is elusive, as is the date when it was first realised that this knowledge of number could

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<sup>7</sup> Iamblichus. The Life of Pythagoras. United Kingdom, Lulu.com, 1965, p. 7 (available on Google Books)

<sup>8</sup> John C Franklin, "Diatonic Music in Greece: A Reassessment of its Antiquity," Mnemosyne 56.1 (2002),  
<sup>9</sup>

[https://www.academia.edu/7860932/\\_Diatonic\\_Music\\_in\\_Greece\\_A\\_Reassessment\\_of\\_its\\_Antiquity\\_Mnemosyne\\_56\\_1\\_2002\\_669\\_702](https://www.academia.edu/7860932/_Diatonic_Music_in_Greece_A_Reassessment_of_its_Antiquity_Mnemosyne_56_1_2002_669_702)

justify a belief in the One, an abstract kind of monotheistic deity, which could be thought of as the source of all things.

Pythagoras was known to have been a wise spiritual leader who inspired his followers to a simple life of unity with all things, but he was probably not the discoverer of the numerical secrets of Harmony. He and Plato, whose philosophy owes a great deal to the earlier thinker, were following a much more ancient wisdom.

A 2024 Cambridge University study suggested that Pythagoras was wrong – though not that there was no Universal Harmony but that we don't necessarily enjoy music which is perfectly harmonious.

Their study, published in *Nature Communications*, shows that in normal listening contexts, we do not actually prefer chords to be perfectly in these mathematical ratios.

"We prefer slight amounts of deviation. We like a little imperfection because this gives life to the sounds, and that is attractive to us," said co-author, Dr Peter Harrison, from Cambridge's Faculty of Music and Director of its Centre for Music and Science.<sup>10</sup>

Some musical traditions enjoy the emotional effects of other tunings – or of notes that are not quite in tune – a singer or instrumentalist might "bend the note" - but their emotional effect comes from the tension between the natural harmonies and the melody.

Universal Harmony remains but deviations can be a source of delight. Perhaps our world only exists and has beauty and life because it is not quite in tune.

In fact, it is only possible to define the simplest harmonies - octave fifth and fourth – by simple ratios. The other intervals – major and minor thirds - are more difficult to define. The pursuit of a mathematical explanation for these harmonies can lead to madness. Perhaps there is no such explanation.

Gafori, whose illustration I began with, explained that Pythagoras's harmony is ideal but

...because this is mixed with corporeal material it falls from the exactness of numbers (but) in the place above us there is true and incorruptible music, as our holy church declares to exist in angelic choirs.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/pythagoras-was-wrong-there-are-no-universal-musical-harmonies-study-finds>

<sup>11</sup> Joscelyn Godwin op. cit p 184)

In spite of the imperfections of the material world writers, such as Boethius and the Renaissance Francesco Giorgi, believed that this diatonic tuning was the closest we could come to the divine music.

But music, earthly or angelic, is about feeling and imagination, not number.

## **TUNING THE WORLD**

The other important piece of evidence for the story of the sacred lyre is a Mesopotamian tablet, CBS 1766, in the Penn Museum.<sup>12</sup>

The meaning of this tablet, from about 700 BCE, has been debated for some time but has become much clearer in the light of John Franklin's research.

The seven pointed star in a circle is actually a diagram of the order in which you tune the strings of the seven-stringed lyre. This simple illustration has surprising importance. This is something that affects us all every day. We are all participating in the mysteries of the lyre.

As I have mentioned, the tuning always begins with the central string, theon, which can represent the sun. The other strings are tuned by ear from that string in fifths in this order:

D A E B F C G

To give them their planetary names the order in which we tune the strings is:

Sun

Moon

Mars

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<sup>12</sup> <https://languagelog.idc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=54528>

Mercury

Jupiter

Venus

Saturn

It's not as obvious in English, which substitutes some appropriate Norse god for planets, but this is why the days of the week are in this order.

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

This is the order we tune the lyre – String 4 1 5 2 6 3 7 - and the order in which God tunes the world.

The Greeks did not use these days of the week.

In his second century CE Roman History Cassius Dio explains that the idea of Harmony was related to the seven planets – and he adds that from ancient times the relationship of harmony and the planets was the source of the Days of the Week. He thinks this was known to the Egyptians.

The custom, however, of referring the days to the seven stars called planets was instituted by the Egyptians, but is now found among all mankind, though its adoption has been comparatively recent; at any rate the ancient Greeks never understood it, so far as I am aware.

...you will find all the days to be in a kind of musical connection with the arrangement of the heavens.<sup>13</sup>

The Greek writer Celsus wrote about the Mithraic mysteries in which initiates climbed a ladder (Latin 'scala', the root of the musical term 'scale') of seven rungs, where each rung was associated with a classical planet. The initiates ascended through the planetary spheres in this order, 4 1 5 2 6 3 7, not in the order the spheres appear in the sky.<sup>14</sup> Again, this was the revival of a very much older tradition, centuries older than the

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<sup>13</sup> Cassius Dio 37.18. Translated by Earnest Cary, quoted in Gadalla, Moustafa. *The Enduring Ancient Egyptian Musical System: Theory and Practice*. United Kingdom, Moustafa Gadalla, 2016. Available on Google Books.

<sup>14</sup> See <https://languageelog.lgc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=54528>

development of the Roman cult of Mithras, centuries before Pythagoras, and known throughout the near eastern cultures.

A 2016 book by Moustafa Gadalla (see reference below) explains that this is Ancient Egyptian musical wisdom. Throughout this story a recurring theme is that all these aspects of musical knowledge might be Egyptian, and the possibly even older than the radiantly blue beginning of Kinyras and Aphrodite.

The ancient sacred lyre tradition was passed down to the Christian world through the Hebrew Temple.

## **CREATION**

The chronology of the Hebrew religion is difficult to disentangle. When did the events happen? When were they written about?

Did the Hebrews' insistence that there could only be one God have its origin in the ancient knowledge of Unity and Harmony that is often associated with Pythagoras? There is no need to date any Hebrew awareness of this mystery of the One to the time of Pythagoras. It could be much older. Again, it could originate in Egypt, though there is reason, in the lyre itself, to trace the Hebrew knowledge of music directly back to Kinyras and Aphrodite on Cyprus.

The Hebrew God is beyond Creation yet known through Creation. We participate in Creation. Our words make God known to himself.

This was, it seems, a new idea – though who knows whether some theologians in more ancient places thought the same even when popular culture enjoyed stories of colourful deities.

In this monotheism there is no need for worldly deities or spirits within Nature because nature is sacred in itself. Everything comes from one source and has meaning by being what it is – creatures, trees, mountains, rivers.

And, also very importantly, the story of Creation means everything exists in Time. Everything has a beginning, (Aristotle taught that time could not have a beginning.) However we like to take the story of Genesis it places Creation, everything in it and everything that follows in time. Everything is a story, with a beginning, a sense that things can be timely – happening at a proper time – and a sense of events leading to an end. (Music, as distinct from Harmony, is an art happening in time.)

It was a very different way of seeing the world and our relationship with it.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.<sup>15</sup>

(Some say that the original Hebrew makes it clear that this our world, the world in which we are intimately a part, not as cosmic or universal as the English makes it – Sky and Land rather than Heaven and Earth.)<sup>16</sup>

Creation began with Light.

And God said “Let there be Light!” And there was light.<sup>17</sup>

Light is the creative force which existed before the sun moon and stars were made.

God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. The idea of the week, as I’ve explained, was ancient and comes from the tuning of the lyre. The Hebrews did not name the days after the planets – simply first day, second day and so on – but the planet Saturn was named after the Sabbath, the day of rest, which shows that they knew the same order of planets in the cosmos.

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.<sup>18</sup>

Creation was very good.

Unfortunately, the first human beings lost their harmonious relationship with the good Creation.

Job questioned why, if God and Creation was good, was his life so awful. God says:

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding.

Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it?

Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof;

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<sup>15</sup> Genesis 1:1 KJV

<sup>16</sup> <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/38447/sky-and-land-vs-heaven-and-earth-in-gen-11>

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 1:3 KJV

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 1:31 KJV

When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?<sup>19</sup>

David, later King David, father of Solomon who built the first great Temple, composed the psalms which are at the heart of worship.

David's instrument is the lyre. He is one of the succession of sacred lyre players. There is a rabbinic tradition that David's lyre was seven-stringed. John C Franklin in his *Kinyras, the Divine Lyre*, suggests this was the case. The association of David with the seven-stringed lyre is implied by his role as king, sacred player, singer - and the Hebrew name of the lyre, *kinnor*, is derived from Kinyras.

David sings praises to the kinnor, the lyre – usually translated as harp:

I will incline mine ear to a parable: I will open my dark saying upon the harp.<sup>20</sup>

And his music can be used for healing, restoring harmony in the soul:

And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.<sup>21</sup>

This story ensured that the idea that the music of the harp could be used for healing was remembered throughout the middle-ages.

The Temple was a model of Creation was God's dwelling place on Earth. One of the most important features of the Temple was the Menorah, a seven-branched candlestick made from one piece of gold. Philo, writing in the first century CE, explains the cosmic symbolism of the Menorah.

The first century AD Jewish theologian Philo described the candlestick and its connection with the order of the planets. A little less than two hundred years later Clement of Alexandria, basing his description on Philo, wrote:

The lamp...was placed to the south of the altar of incense: and by it were shown the motions of the seven planets...the sun, like the lamp, set in the midst of all the planets, dispenses with a kind of divine music to those above and to those below.<sup>22</sup>

In other words, the lamp has the same form as the seven string lyre of the Babylonian system, with the Sun as its central string.

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<sup>19</sup> Job 39:4-7 KJV

<sup>20</sup> Psalm 49:4 KJV

<sup>21</sup> 1 Samuel 23 KJV

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf02.vi.iv.vi.html>

It's worth reading Psalm 43 remembering that the lyre is the kinnor, with seven strings tuned exactly as the seven lights of the lamp in the temple.

O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.

Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp (kinnor) will I praise thee, O God my God.<sup>23</sup>

The ancient Temple was a model of the cosmos – and its liturgy helped sustain creation.

The Temple music included a varied orchestra, including the ancient kinnor, a larger harp - the nével - pipes, flutes, trumpets and percussion. The music, as an organised and regulated aspect of the liturgy, predated the building of the Temple:

And these are they whom David set over the service of song in the house of the Lord, after that the ark had rest.

And they ministered before the dwelling place of the tabernacle of the congregation with singing, until Solomon had built the house of the Lord in Jerusalem: and then they waited on their office according to their order.<sup>24</sup>

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The Menorah shows that the lyre and the image of the cosmos preserved the same order and the same musical scale – a sign aspect of the divine law of Harmony in all Nature.

Margaret Barker argues that the ancient Hebrews knew a female aspect of deity, necessarily the first thing God created, and the representation of the guiding principal in Creation.

This Lady – Asherah - would take the place of Aphrodite Urania as the personification of harmony. Take this idea of Harmony away and there's a danger that God is re-imagined as a totalitarian ruler or a God who rules by set laws rather than a divine law of Harmony within Creation and the Soul.

After the Hebrews returned from captivity in Babylon in the sixth-century BCE their monotheism became more rigorous, and this feminine imagery was suppressed. Perhaps in the world of the Temple popular mythology had become a distraction from the more cosmic meaning of the image of Harmony,

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<sup>23</sup> Psalm 43:3:4

<sup>24</sup> 1 Chronicles 6 31-32 KJV

Later in Hebrew tradition the Lady seems to have been remembered in the more abstract writings about Wisdom. Margaret Barker writes:

The mysterious Wisdom had something to do with spiritual vision, with the human mind, and with knowledge. The harmony of the world was closely connected to her way of perceiving the world, since she joined all things together. What Wisdom gave was not just knowledge and information; it was an attitude to knowledge and information such that the world was in harmony. <sup>25</sup>

## **CHRIST THE CONDUCTOR AND THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN**

Christian tradition follows on directly from the symbolism of the Temple.

The transition is something of a mystery but, in the light of this story of the lyre and harmony as the key inspirations it is reasonable to summarise what happened – as a speculation at least.

The earlier Hebrews had an earlier idea of the cosmos, with the earth as a disc with waters beneath it and a dome above. At some point, possibly with the return from Babylon (whatever that actually was) they introduced the Babylonian cosmos of planets which matched the strings of the lyre, and probably soon after the idea of the spheres which was familiar to the Greeks. This established a clear pattern of the cosmos – with the seven planetary spheres and an eighth sphere above, the stars, which could be seen as a parallel to the veil of the temple. Beyond the eighth sphere might be a ninth, the prime mover in Aristotelian terms, and God beyond.

This concept in itself provided an image of a heavenly temple, with its parallels with the earthly temple. It is also possible that the idea of a heavenly temple was boosted by the discovery of the Precession of the Equinoxes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

It seems to me, at least, that the importance of a universal heavenly temple grew with the political troubles of the last two centuries BC and this led to some sects devoting themselves to this new cosmic vision. Some may have thought only the cosmic heavens had value, others carried on the Hebrew concern for the goodness of Creation.

The letters of Paul (at least the seven believed to be authentic) support this cosmic view. There must be a priest in the cosmic temple. As we are microcosms of the cosmos that priest is within us. The priest and Messiah was called Jesus in Paul's letters but he had no interest in any earthly life of this priest. It is even questionable (according to

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<sup>25</sup> (<http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/WisdomAndTheStewardshipOfKnowledge.pdf>)

Richard Carrier) that Paul thought this priest had ever lived in earth itself. He might have done but it was the heavenly priest that mattered, who we knew in everybody. The back-story of how this priest came to be was developed a generation or two later. The Letter to the Hebrews is the clearest explanation of the new cosmic temple, which, I hope I have made clear, is not a mistaken view of the universe but an understanding of Harmony as forming principle Creation.

Musical allusions in the New Testament are rare. St Paul tells us that they sang psalms in the early church. In the context of the Temple and the more ancient tradition this must, surely, have been a far more important form of worship than might be recognised today. The song of the angels is heard on earth at the Nativity. There is singing and the playing of harps in heaven.

In other early Christian texts Christ is referred to as the cosmic-lyre player (sometimes specifically the kinnor).

Clement of Alexandria, writing around 200 CE uses elaborate musical imagery:

Tuning this world and this microcosm – I mean man, both soul and body – with the holy spirit, he plucks this many-toned instrument – man – and sings thereto for God.<sup>26</sup>

The union of many in one, issuing in the production of divine harmony out of a medley of sounds and division, becomes one symphony following one choir-leader and teacher, the Word, reaching and resting in the same truth, and crying Abba, Father.<sup>27</sup>

Medieval theology developed the idea, from Genesis, that everything is formed from LIGHT – Let there be LIGHT!

The great 13<sup>th</sup> century Franciscan theologian Bonaventure explained that, though all things had their causes and designs (“seminal reasons”) in God, their generation

...cannot take place in generative and corruptible matter except by the beneficial action of the light of those heavenly bodies that are most remote from generation and corruption; namely the sun, moon and the stars.<sup>28</sup>

The ancient cosmos is essential to the understanding of how Creation works in medieval theology. The planetary spheres play a part in the transmission of the divine

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<sup>26</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 1:5:4

<sup>27</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 9

<sup>28</sup> Bonaventure, *On the Reduction of the Arts to Theology*, translated by Zachary Hayes O.F.M., D. Th.. (Franciscan Institute 1996) p. 57

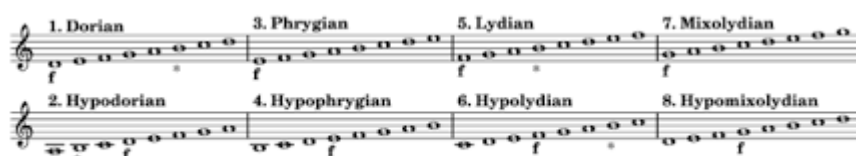
power to the material world. The original light – LUX – radiates through the Sun and the heavenly bodies, guiding the formation of everything in Nature.

But this LUX is not light in our usual sense. It is a creative energy which also encompasses sound and all the languages of the senses, sight, taste, sound, touch and smell. LUX is incorporated into Nature and forms the Universal Harmony which guides all things known through the senses. And, of course, Creation is something that is continuous. New things are continuously being formed.

The medieval philosopher happily looked to the movements of the visible stars as an indication of changes in our world. They were not physical objects themselves, but a different kind of created object, made of their own unearthly element, the quintessence.<sup>29</sup>

If we reject the ancient and medieval cosmos we need to find an alternative way of reading medieval philosophy. This is perfectly possible to do as, as has been explained throughout this story, the images of the planets and stars and the visible cosmos, and the idea of its meaning and influences, is entirely derived from Harmony and the archetypal qualities of the sacred lyre.

The Gregorian modes of the western church were a way of classifying existing chants. Though the system was not established until the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD by tradition or nature it follows exactly the seven note scale of the sacred lyre. The eight modes are arranged in the order of the days of the week – no. 1 is on D, the Sun, no. 2 on the Moon and so on. The eighth returns to D to make the octave, the Sunday of the following week.



\* Under certain conditions, the B is flatted in modes 1, 2, 5, and 6.

The Gregorian modes are numbered 1 to 8, but at some point were given Greek names, from Greek texts that were known in the middle-ages, including Boethius, but these are confusing and misplaced.

The original songs sung to the sacred lyre might have been in slightly different modes, simply moving about the seven individual notes. In Gregorian theory the modes on A B C and the eight mode are versions of the modes on D E F and G, with a lower range. These were called “plagal” modes using misunderstood terminology from the Roman theorist Boethius. Gafori explains that the inferior planets, those closer to the earth than the sun

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<sup>29</sup> See Zachary A Matus, *Franciscans and the Elixir of Life*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017

have plagal modes. These modes, for Moon, Mercury and Venus have the same mscale as the a simple mode on A B and C but the most dominant notes are D E and F. This avoids using what to us are the minor and major scales (on A and C) which might have seemed too stable and earthly, and the mode on B which was thought impossible it has a dissonant tritone (B to F) in place of a harmonious fifth.

The eighth mode has a distinct sound but it is a plagal version of the seventh and cannot be said to represent the eight sphere – the stars. It does give the symbolic eight, the beginning of a new octave.

The lowest note of the Gregorian modes are numbered in the order of the days of the week, and the order in which sun moon and planets were created,

An 11<sup>th</sup> century song demonstrates the notes of each planet as they appear in the tuned cosmos.

The order of the planets from earth to heaven  
Is similar to the harmony of pitches.  
(Cicero) traced them from the lowest numbers in ascending order thus:  
Moon, Hermes, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.  
In a similar order you should parse out pitches:  
Make the first the moon, which lies close to the earth;  
Then note how much Mercury is higher than that one,  
And the musical order computes the tone for this space.  
Venus guards the following space, fitting for a semitone. <sup>30</sup>

The distances of tone and semitone form that scale on A, exactly as in the Gafori illustration and the ancient lyre.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century Saint Francis of Assisi and his followers had a particular interest in music. Francis himself was said to sing troubadour songs accompanying himself on an imaginary fiddle made of sticks. His relationship with Nature suggests he was a new Orpheus. There is story that when he was ill an angel came to play to him on a cithera, a form of kinnor or lyre. <sup>31</sup>

From the early days there were Franciscan composers and theorists at Assisi. The earliest surviving description of the ethoi, or qualities, of the modes was written by Juan Gil de Zamora in the mid-13<sup>th</sup> century. This was copied by Renaissance writers including Juan de Pareja and Gafori.

Juan Gil says of Mode 3, associated with Mars and called by Gafori the Phrygian:

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<sup>30</sup> Text provided by Sam Barrett, Professor of Early Music, Pembroke College, Cambridge

<sup>31</sup> See Andrew Baker, *Hidden Music, a Franciscan Musical Theology*, AJB Publications, 2023

One should note that the third tone is angry and stimulating, having vigorous leaps in its contour. Whence Boethius says that Pythagoras roused some youth to health through the third tone, through mode two one returns to a gentler disposition.<sup>32</sup>

Of Mode 5, Jupiter's mode, he says:

One should note that the fifth tone is modest and delightful, cheering the sad and softening the anxious, calling back the fallen and hopeless.

Juan Gil explains that appropriate modes should be used to suit the mood of the liturgy. Mode 5 is often used for the Gradual which introduces the gospel.

Today, three or four thousand years after this story began we can still experience music – and a mystery – in certain churches which takes us back through the ancient Temple, the ancient image of the cosmos, the imagination inspired by the muses, to the seven strings of Kinyras's lyre – to the source of Harmony.

Medieval theology assumes that there is a Harmony which guides the formation of things – a universal Harmony visible in the stars which guides the formation of all things, guides the body and soul to unity and guides the working of justice and peace.

For Francis and Bonaventure – known later as the Seraphic Doctor - Mary, as Queen of Heaven is its representative, taking the place of Aphrodite Urania, but also, essentially, a human being. Christian tradition develops the Hebrew focus on this world, here and now. In the incarnation God, the One, the Word, enters this world and humanity through the embodiment of human nature and Harmony.

It is possible that there was a historical Mary, though there is no evidence for her existence. Mary as known to the early Christians, until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is this icon who demonstrates the relationship of God and Creation.

In a sermon on the Assumption Bonaventure tells us that the Virgin Mary is

...the mother of the fabric of the cosmos and the mother of angelic reparation. So Bernard (St Bernard of Clairvaux): 'Rightly then, O Lady, the eyes of every creature turn to you, through whom and in whom and from whom the kind hand of God created and recreated.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Loewen, Peter. *Music in Early Franciscan Thought*. Netherlands, Brill, 2013, p. 212

<sup>33</sup> Bonaventure, 6<sup>th</sup> sermon on the Assumption. In

In the 13th century, when Bonaventure wrote these words, other philosophers in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic worlds, influenced by rediscovered works of Aristotle, began to argue that God was remote and detached from Creation – merely the prime mover. This, as Bonaventure warned, could lead to a quite false idea of God and a devaluing of Creation.

Aware of this danger the Jewish students of Kabbalah in Gerona in Spain, led by Rabbi Isaac the Blind, developed the imagery of the ten sephiroth. This kabbalistic philosophy sees God as inseparable from Creation. The sephiroth are aspects of God through which the divine Light emanates down to every level of existence.<sup>34</sup>

The ten sephiroth are often seen as reflections of the eight spheres, with a higher sephiroth, Kether, the crown, and a lower, Malkuth, sometimes seen as the material world.

When these ten sephiroth are represented as a Tree of Life the central sephiroth is Tiphereth, like the Sun or the central light of the Menorah, radiating God's light to the others.

These sephiroth seem to me to be another way of contemplating the harmonies beyond harmony which lie beyond the musical scale. Is music a form of kabbalah?

In this same period the string muses reappear in the Persian epic *Haft Paykar* by Nizami, completed in 1197.<sup>35</sup> King Bahram Gur builds domes for his seven wives, the seven beauties, who tell him stories which guide the formation of his character. The seven beauties are the seven planets and also represent regions or countries and colours. They also belong to the days of the week in the ancient tradition but their order begins with Saturday, Saturn.

The Platonic and Pythagorean sources lie behind this story.

The lyre player in *Haft Paykar* is the king's slave-girl Fitna. Jacomien Prinz writes:

...Bahrām's spiritual growth can be attributed to the magic of music, described in the *Haft Paykar* as part of Fitna's "magic's charms" (p. 83). Niẓāmī adopted the Platonic belief that music can have a lasting positive effect on a person's character in virtue of the common harmonic nature shared by the world soul, the human soul, and the soul of music.

Niẓāmī presents Bahrām as an example of a passage in the [Republic](#), where Plato argued that: "rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, affecting it most strongly and bringing it grace, so that if

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<sup>34</sup> *The Early Kabbalah*. United States, Paulist Press, 1986.

<sup>35</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haft\\_Peykar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haft_Peykar)

someone is properly educated in music and poetry, it makes him graceful, but if not, then the opposite” (p. 1038).<sup>36</sup>

In this period, then, in the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, music (and imagination) are seen as the binding force between God and Creation as an antidote to the danger of making God detached and unknowable which might be encouraged by some followers of Aristotle.

## **HOW CREATION WORKS...**

This story is not only, I might suggest, about religion. It's about the nature of the world – the nature of Nature. Religion, as a way of life, can be a reaction to this knowledge (or supposed knowledge) of how the world works. I have passed through several religious systems in this story. There are, of course, others in which the idea of Harmony from Unity and some of the recurring images are important, but I have tried to follow a particular thread from a beginning in the blue-skied and azure-sea-d bronze age to the present.

At the heart of the story is the idea that everything that is and everything that seeks being, or even occurs, is drawn by Harmony. Harmony, very importantly, is the energy or desire to form things, things with a Unity, and the inherent Law within Nature which guides things in their formation. It is the second of these two aspects which tends to be forgotten.

In the Christian world it might be possible to imagine God entering this world as an intrusion into something detached from God, lawless, or subject to purely mechanical laws, or even fallen. But until the 16<sup>th</sup> century most religious thinkers would assume that this was not the case. Creation, as they would call it, had divine laws within it. It was Good. A more Platonic theologian would say it was never detached from God. In this more positive world of Creation the Incarnation is an act in which God is born of Mary must be in that moment, if not always, the example of Good Creation and its Inherent Law of Harmony.

A classical pagan might imagine Nature to be guided by spiritual beings of all kinds. There might be naiads in the streams and dryads in the trees. Plato would be amused by such ideas and say that things in Nature can reveal hints of absolute Truth and Beauty –

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.jhiblog.org/2025/04/16/gendered-conceptions-of-cosmic-harmony-and-the-power-of-music-in-ni%E1%BA%93amis-haft-paykar/>

God or the One. The Judaeo-Christian tradition would say everything comes from the One God and has value in being what it is, Saint Francis would say everything is our brother or sister. Platonically minded Christians and Jewish thinkers would say that God is in some way present in all things because all things emanate from and are never detached from God.

We might easily restrict ourselves to thinking about individual objects, but there are no individual objects in Creation. Everything exists in relationship – just as one note needs others to reveal its modal quality. Everything is drawn to unite with other things, to compose larger works

Harmony is a principle in Nature which draws things together and guides their Formation. Discord is a necessary part of the working of Formation. The medieval theologians knew a classic description of this in the work of the author known as Pseudo-Dionysius in his *Divine Names*.

This is a very important text. It establishes the principle that the object of the working of Harmony is Peace – or, we might also say, Justice – when diverse things come together in Unity:

For all things love to dwell at peace, and to be united amongst themselves, and to be unmoved and unfallen from themselves, and the things of themselves. And the perfect Peace seeks to guard the idiosyncrasy of each unmoved and unconfused, by its peace-giving forethought, preserving everything unmoved and unconfused, both as regards themselves and each other, and establishes all things by a stable and unswerving power, towards their own peace and immobility.<sup>37</sup>

To the 13<sup>th</sup> century theologian Bonaventure creation was an outpouring of God, divine ideas taking form through the hierarchies of angels, stars and planets and of matter. Nature depended on this law within creation, expressed by these hierarchies. God did not control and decree every detail but had established this inherent law which we might call Wisdom and see in human form in Mary as mother of Christ who contained himself all the divine Ideas.

Once the old image of the cosmos was rejected this whole system of creation became nonsense. God could be rejected entirely as having no meaning in a mechanical system, or seen as detached from Nature or as a dictator controlling every thing that had being and everything that happened, good or bad, including war, disease and natural disasters.

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<sup>37</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, Chapter 11, section 3. From [https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/areopagite\\_03\\_divine\\_names.htm#c7](https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/areopagite_03_divine_names.htm#c7)

Of course, as this essay has hoped to show, Harmony came first and is the source of the image of the cosmos.

Though the new science and cosmology might seem to demolish the idea of God some thinkers knew that there other ways of understanding the relationship of God and Creation. Creation could be newly understood as the working of Harmony.

In 18thc England platonic philosophers James Harris and Floyer Sydenham, following earlier English platonists, explained how harmony was a divine law which we shared with Mind, the Mind of God, and that Harmony is also the active force that draw works to unity. Both Harris and Sydenham show themselves to be true musicians with a knowledge of actual music and a proper understanding of Harmony. In his footnotes to Plato's *Philebus* Sydenham writes:

For Harmony and Mind are con-natural: whatever Beings therefore partake of Either, partake of the same time, of Both. – Hence it is that Musical Sounds, uttered by Human Voices, or issued from any Musical Instrument of Man's Contrivance, proceed from what is of Divine Origin within him; and the Force of them is felt only by what is of the same Origin in Others, namely Harmony and Mind.

For Nature's Self (as it were) sings continually whilst she operates; putting Rhythm into her Motions, Measure into her Materials, and Harmony into all her Forms; tempering the lulling smoothness of Concords with the rousing Roughness of well-timed Discords; framing many Systems, correspondent to each other, and composing and composing all of them in One stupendous Whole (panharmonion), comprehensive of all Harmonic Numbers. – But farther; the Human Nature, by partaking of Mind, partakes of Truth, as well as Harmony.

As Harmony comes from Mind all this is true even when we have dismissed as absurd the image of the ancient Cosmos.

## **THE MODES AND THE ARCHETYPES**

In western church music the series of eight modes seems to have been viewed as something with a special unity of its own. It was as if the series of eight distinctive moods when considered together were an encapsulation of the inner cosmos of Harmony, the full range of possible archetypal qualities.

Perhaps Pseudo-Dionysius's writing on Peace as the unity of diverse individual things had an influence on this concept. It is as if a set of works in each of the eight modes would make a harmonious and peaceful whole.

This idea of a cycle of eight pieces was most often applied in the Renaissance to settings of the Magnificat, Mary's prophetic song to God. Many composers wrote Magnificat cycles, including Palestrina.<sup>38</sup> The earliest complete cycle of eight in the list given on Wikipedia is by Pierre de La Rue who was born in 1452. Some settings of the Magnificat could be on a very large scale, over fifteen minutes, such as those in the Eton Choirbook which would be sung at King Henry VI's foundations of Eton and King's College in Vespers in honour of Mary.

An outstanding example of this is a work by Palestrina, a cycle in which the eight modes are handmaidens of Mary. This is a set of eight *Madrigali Spirituali* for five voices, published in 1581, which set eight of the canzone to the Virgin by the 14<sup>th</sup> century poet Petrarch.<sup>39</sup>

In the late 16<sup>th</sup> century Josefo Zarlino proposed a new classification of twelve modes. He added two each of what we think of today as minor and major modes, scales on A and C, which were not defined in the old eight-mode system. As Zarlino showed, it is possible to play or sing twelve distinct modes using only the seven notes of the diatonic scale. (There is no 'authentic' mode possible on B as B has no fifth. The note five notes above it as an inharmonious tritone)

Zarlino's twelve mode system was used by some composers who wrote cycles of twelve pieces in the series of modes. These included instrumental works, such as Frescobaldi's keyboard toccatas, but the system was soon forgotten as baroque music began to think in terms of major and minor keys rather than modes.

As with the cycles in the eight church modes there is a sense that to write a cycle of 12 gave the collection a unity, encompassing the range of archetypal qualities. In the case of the French Huguenot composer Claude Le Jeune there appears to be a magical intention in this. His set of psalms called *Dodecachord*,<sup>40</sup> as a whole, has been seen, by Frances Yates and others, as a device to invoke religious peace and unity.

Richard Freedman describes this use of Zarlino's twelve modes as:

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<sup>38</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Magnificat\\_composers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Magnificat_composers)

<sup>39</sup> <https://classicalpoets.org/2022/06/conzone-to-the-virgin-by-petrarch-translated-by-margaret-coats/>

<sup>40</sup> See my essay Zarlino's Paintbox on <https://andrewbakercomposer.com/hidden-music/>

...not a means to express an emotional condition but is instead a constellation of ideal forms against which a process of spiritual reflection is staged.<sup>41</sup>

The collection of modes as a whole is seen as a sacred place, an ideal unity, in which the psalms can find new meanings.

This unity of the series can equally apply to the old eight mode system and many Renaissance composers wrote sets of eight, most notably settings of the Magnificat.

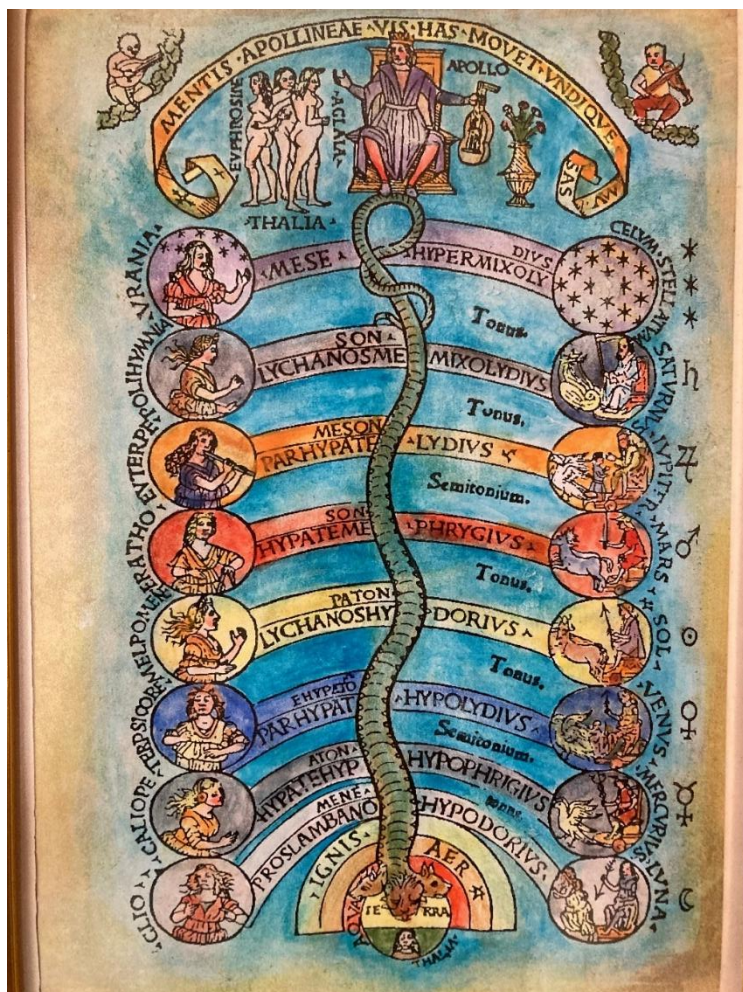
Zarlino's 12 modes are in fact pairs of versions of only six modes. He does not include modes on B, as, to him, theoretically impossible because of the tritone (B to F) in place of a fifth. But this theoretically impossible mode on B could not be more mercurial. We still have, in Zarlino, the same fundamental archetypes of the cosmic lyre, the seven planets.

## **RETURNING TO GAFORI**

Let's look at Gafori's diagram again.

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<sup>41</sup> Freedman, Richard. "Le Jeune's 'Dodecacorde' as a Site for Spiritual Meanings." *Revue de Musicologie*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2003, pp. 297–309. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4494863>. Accessed 7 Jan. 2024. P.306-7



This is a useful map of the fundamental archetypes within Creation.

Though church theorists before the 15<sup>th</sup> century do not seem to mention it the associations of tones and planets is ancient – as I have explained - and was certainly known in the middle-ages. The planetary correspondences were included in *De Practica Musica* by Ramos de Pareja, reawakening a millennia-old tradition. Ramos's work also included the definitions of the affects or qualities of the modes by Juan Gil de Zamora from the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

|                          | <i>Musica humana</i>                                   |                     | <i>Musica instrumentalis</i> |                             | <i>Musica mundana</i>    |             |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Color and element</i> | <i>Affect or ethos</i>                                 | <i>Bodily humor</i> | <i>Mode</i>                  | <i>Notes (modal finals)</i> | <i>Planetary spheres</i> | <i>Muse</i> |
|                          | sad, doleful, sluggish                                 | phlegm              | Hypodorian*                  | a                           | Moon                     | Clio        |
|                          | pious, tearful                                         | blood               | Ionian                       | C                           | Venus                    | Terpsichore |
| crystalline—water        | rousing, suitable to all effects                       | phlegm              | Dorian                       | D                           | Sun                      | Melpomene   |
| fiery—fire               | severe, rouses anger                                   | yellow bile         | Phrygian                     | E                           | Mars                     | Erato       |
| red—air                  | delightful, joyous, modest                             | blood               | Lydian                       | F                           | Jupiter                  | Euterpe     |
| yellow—earth             | pleasant, lustful, inspires youthful behavior          | black bile          | Mixolydian                   | G                           | Saturn                   | Polyhymnia  |
|                          | sweet, beautiful                                       |                     | Aeolian                      | A                           | Firmament                | Urania      |
|                          | fawning, garrulous, flattering, lustful without beauty |                     | Lochrian                     | B                           | Mercury                  | Calliope    |

\*A Greek mode rarely used in the Middle Ages.

(Devlin, Mary. *Medieval Music, Magical Minds*. United States, iUniverse, 2001.)

Gafori does alter Ramos's arrangement. Ramos gives the Ionian mode to Venus and the Aeolian to the Stars and Urania. He also includes the theoretically impossible Locrian mode (which has no fifth from its key note B) to Mercury. This creates confusion and differs from the medieval series of eight modes, Gafori returns to the order of the church modes which had been known from the writing of Boethius in the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD but he confusingly places the Hypomixolydian mode, for the stars and Urania, on a note A an octave above the lower A for the moon. In fact the Hypomixolydian is a mode with its lowest note on D. In the ordering of church modes, following the days of the week tuning order, the first mode is on D and the Hypomixolydian returns to that D, not an octave higher but an octave in terms of the days of the week and the first day of the next.

The angelic spheres are beyond the physical world so their music cannot be limited by physical harmonies. The angels sing, as Francesco Giorgi wrote:

true and incorruptible music, as our holy church declares to exist in angelic choirs.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Joscelyn Godwin op. cit. p 184)

[illegible]

The Greek modal names used by Ramos and Gafori were not used by the church before the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Mysteriously, the Greek definitions of these modes do not match the diatonic modes – their Dorian is not a mode on D - and yet the qualities of the modes do suit the Greek definitions, most obviously of Phrygian. The Greeks used more complex modes than simply diatonic. Their writings confused medieval scholars, and yet the names used by Ramos and Gafori are, we can now see, actually appropriate. Another mystery. The ancient tradition in some way lives on in this Renaissance diagram and so we can use these names as long as we remember we are not thinking of Greek modes

but the Gregorian modes. Perhaps it is wisest to refer to them by number as the Gregorian system did - 1 for Dorian and so on.

The Renaissance musicians assumed the Gregorian system was identical with ancient usage.

The singing of the Florentine Platonist Marsilio Ficino is evidence of this, Ficino sang healing songs to the lira de braccia, a type of bowed viol, using appropriate modes to match Orphic hymns to the planetary deities. The music as well as the words would bring down the influences of the planetary deities to retune the soul.

In his *De Tripli Vita* Ficino mentions only four kinds of planetary song – Apollo (the Sun), Venus, Jupiter and Mercury. He writes that only these four have song,

*Harmony belongs to these four alone, while the other three have voices but no song.*<sup>43</sup>

This is very puzzling when all the modes had been associated with the planets for centuries. Why does Ficino not sing with the Moon, Mars, or Saturn?

He is very concerned with music that can rebalance those suffering from the melancholy influence of Saturn, but the music of Saturn is not heavy or depressing. Melancholy can be a useful counterweight to excessive cheerfulness.

Ficino writes:

*The harmonies of Jove are to a certain extent grave and intense, sweet and happy with their constancy.*

*They are the opposite of Venus's, to whom we assign lascivious songs and songs voluptuous with softness.*

*If the songs are venerable, with grave and smoothness, simple and intense, they are considered Apollo's.*

*If the songs are to a certain extent relaxed and enjoyable but nevertheless sternuous and multiplex, they are mercurial.*

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<sup>43</sup> Marsilio Ficino, *the Book of Life*, translated by Charles Boer, distributed by Element Books, 1980, pp 162-3

If we assume Ficinos was singing music in the Lydian, Hyolydian, Dorian and Hypophrygian modes in these songs it is hard to relate his words to the traditional definitions of their *affects* as given by Zarlino in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, who copied these descriptions from Ramos, who derived them from the 13thc Franciscan Juan Gil de Zamora:

#### Lydian – Jupiter

*FICINO:*

*The harmonies of Jove are to a certain extent grave and intense, sweet and happy with their constancy.*

*ZARLINO:*

*Brings modesty, happiness and relief from annoying cares to the spirit. To be used for words that deal with victory. It is joyous modest and pleasing.*

#### Hypolydian – Venus

*FICINO:*

*They are the opposite of Venus's, to whom we assign lascivious songs and songs voluptuous with softness.*

*ZARLINO:*

*Frequently used by church composers. Not cheerful or elegant and therefore used in serious and devout compositions containing commiseration and fitted to matters containing tears. Called a devout and tearful mode.*

#### Dorian – Apollo

*FICINO:*

*If the songs are venerable, with grave and smoothness, simple and intense, they are considered Apollo's.*

*ZARLINO:*

*Innumerable sacred compositions are written in this mode. Its effect lies between sad and cheerful. It is best employed for setting words that are full of gravity and deal with lofty and edifying things.*

## Hypophrygian - Mercury

FICINO:

*If the songs are to a certain extent relaxed and enjoyable but nevertheless sternuous and multiplex, they are mercurial.*

ZARLINO:

*Suited to lamenting words or subjects that contain sadness or supplicatory lamentation (lamentazione supplichevole), such as matters of love, and to words that express languor, quiet, tranquillity, adulation, deception and slander. Some have called it a flattering mode. It is sadder than its principal counterpart.*

Did Ficino sing his songs in these modes? It is hard to say. There are some parallels here – relaxed/languid for Hypophrygian. Grave for Dorian, sweet and happy/modest and pleasing for Lydian. The Zarlino definition for the Hypolydian is a bit odd for Venus, but Ficino's suits the mood of the mode.

On the whole I think Ficino probably did. Did he only sing and play in these four modes?

Mercury, the mode on B, has always been a problem, but it seems possible to me that the Hypophrygian mode was always the mode of Mercury, not the theoretically impossible Locrian. If we sing a melody beginning on B with a continuous drone on that note we might naturally avoid the F above as a discordant tritone and hover around the E more – which would mean we were singing in the Hypophrygian mode not the supposed Locrian. Singing in the Hypodorian on D and hypolydian on C gives a different affect to the Dorian and Lydian. The hypomixolydian is quite unlike the Mixolydian or Ionian which it sometimes resembles.

Ficino's songs were a kind of natural magic. He would argue that they were an aspect of nature, but it all depends how you define nature. He also wrote of the muses as the spirits of the planets, who passed down inspiration, as described in Plato's *Ion*.

In his comments on *Ion* Ficino names the muses which he believes belong to the eight spheres. They are, according to Ficino:

|         |                                                                               |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moon    | Thalia "on account of her evergreen quality bestowed upon things by moisture" |
| Mercury | Euterpe "by reason of an honourable delight in weighty matters."              |

|         |                                                                              |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Venus   | Erato “on account of love”                                                   |
| Sun     | Melpomene “because it is the moderator of the whole world”                   |
| Mars    | Clio “by reason of the desire for glory”                                     |
| Jupiter | Terpsichore “giver of health to the choir of men”                            |
| Saturn  | Polyhymnia “by reason of the memory of ancient things which Saturn displays” |
| Stars   | Urania “is the voice of the starry heaven, so appointed by merit.”           |

Calliope is said to be “the voice which arises from all the voices of the spheres.”<sup>44</sup> She is the mother of Orpheus.

This list differs from the allocations of muses and spheres in the illustration by Gafori and as given in the *Praise of Musicke*.<sup>45</sup> I do not know the source for Ficino’s ordering, but it is the same as given by Gioseffo Zarlino in his *Istitutione Harmoniche*, first published in 1558.

|               | Ficino/Zarlino    | <i>Praise of Musicke</i> | Gafori            |
|---------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Earth         |                   |                          | Thalia            |
| Moon          | Thalia            | Clio                     | Clio              |
| Mercury       | Euterpe           | Euterpe                  | Calliope          |
| Venus         | Erato             | Thalia                   | Terpsichore       |
| <b>Sun</b>    | <b>Melpomene</b>  | <b>Melpomene</b>         | <b>Melpomene</b>  |
| Mars          | Clio              | Terpsichore              | Erato             |
| Jupiter       | Terpsichore       | Erato                    | Euterpe           |
| <b>Saturn</b> | <b>Polyhymnia</b> | <b>Polyhymnia</b>        | <b>Polyhymnia</b> |
| <b>Stars</b>  | <b>Urania</b>     | <b>Urania</b>            | <b>Urania</b>     |
| All spheres   | Calliope          | Calliope                 |                   |

It is interesting that all three of these agree on three, Melpomene, Polyhymnia and Urania. Gafori gives Thalia, often muse of comedy, to the earth. I have not been able to identify the source of Ficino’s order, or the other variations, but Gafori’s is from the early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD writer Martianus Cappella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (“On the

<sup>44</sup> Gardens of Philosophy, Ficino on Plato, translations by Arthur Farndell, Shephard-Walwyn, 2006, pp.57-58.

<sup>45</sup> *The Praise of Musicke*, op. cit, p, 110

Marriage of Philology and Mercury"). He gives an interesting and poetic comment on Thalia, who in this ordering belongs to the earth and who is often said to be silent:

And after her Talia is posed, as in the last place, that is the planting or sprouting of the virtues. For every virtue is sought after because of good fame. And therefore it is lifted up by a white bird, that is a swan, and put down in lakes, because the seeds of good fame are shown to be spread over the earth.<sup>46</sup>

I would say that Thalia might not have her own song but if she is seen as muse of comedy, or of bucolic poetry, her music could be said to be woven from fragments of all the muses songs.

Apart from the slight confusion of the place of Urania, taken from Ramos, I would have to say that Gafori's is the definitive allocation of modes, muses and planets. The ladies tell me that they are quite satisfied with Gafori's definitions.

I prefer to think of them as Plato's sirens. As Francesco Giorgi put it in his *De Harmonia Mundi* (1525):

*But there are symphonies which are no less signs of heaven, such as those (as Plato tells) are presided over by the various Syrens, who are said to be singers to God, who, placed in the firmament, make its influences harmonious.<sup>iii</sup>*

The Gafori definitions of the muses entered the world of western occultism via Cornelius Agrippa, who copied them in his *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (1531). This became a very influential work. It was translated into English by John Feake (1651). Agrippa gives the modes, planets and muses:

Others respecting the number and vertue of the Heavens, have attributed the Dorian to the Sun, the Phrygian to Mars, the Lydian to Jupiter, the mixt Lydian [mixolydian] to Saturn, the Hypophrygian to Mercury, the Hypolydian to Venus, the Hypodorian to the Moon, the Hypo mixed Lydian [Hypomixolydian] to the mixed Stars...they say Thalia hath no Harmony, therefore ascribe her to Silence, and the Earth; but Clio with the Moon move after the Hypodorian manner...

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<sup>46</sup> Teeuwen, Mariken. *Harmony and the Music of the Spheres: The Ars Musica in Ninth-Century Commentaries on Martianus Capella*. Netherlands, Brill, 2022, p. 214.

This was copied, with quirky additions, by the reckless plagiarist John Heydon in his *The Harmony of the World* (1662)<sup>47</sup> He rather nicely says of Thalia, perhaps with a slight memory of Martianus Cappella:

*For Thalia hath no Harmony, although she be a beauty of Nature; therefore we ascribe to her to a silent Lady that governs the Earth.*

Agrippa, writing at a time when the image of the cosmos was beginning to be questioned, usefully summarises the effects of planets on the soul (and this can be read in conjunction with the definitions of modes and muses given above, and a few pages earlier by Agrippa).

For the Moone governs the powers of increasing and decreasing; the Phantasie and Wits depends on Mercury; the Concupiscible vertue on Venus; the Vitall on the Sun; the Irascible on Mars; the Natural on Jupiter: the Receptive on Saturn: but the Will as the Primum Mobile, and the guide of all these Powers at pleasure, being joyned with the superior intellect, is always tending to good; which intellect indeed doth alwayes shew a pathway to the Will, as a Candle to the eye; but it moves not it self, but is the Mistriss [mistress] of her own operation, whence it is called Free Will; and although it alwayes tends to good, as an object sutable to it self: yet sometimes being blinded with error, the animal power forcing it, it chooseth evil, believing it to be good.

This raises the question of magic - natural magic. Ficino sang Orphic hymns to reattune the soul but was music used by magicians to affect nature, external things in the way that Agrippa implies or for physical healing, if that can be separated from imbalances in the soul.? Though there were clear biblical precedents for music used for healing (the story of David and Saul) there are no clear indications that music was used medicinally in the middle-ages. As the planets were assumed to influence nature there is no reason why music should not have been used in medicine, but the evidence is absent. By the late 15<sup>th</sup> century Ramos was able to use Arabic sources for comments about how music affected the four humours of the body (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile).

It is very hard to believe that medieval doctors did not use music in this way when they certainly did take account of the astrological influences.

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<sup>47</sup> HEYDON, John. *The Harmony of the World: Being a Discourse Wherein the Phænomena of Nature are Consonantly Solved and Adapted to Inferiour Intellects*. United Kingdom, n.p., 1662. P.49

Was music used in magical operations before or after Agrippa? It might well have been, but did the magicians understand the actual properties of music? Fludd is an example of an esoteric writer who seems not to have understood harmony. Athanasius Kircher, writing a few decades later (*Musurgia Universalis, sive Ars Magna Consoni et Dissoni*, 1650) certainly did know music and worked with composers including the great keyboard composer Froberger. Zarlino certainly maintained that music in itself had spiritual meaning through its affects. Actual musicians may not have thought of music having a direct magical influence, but they might well have continued to assume that music worked on a spiritual level and affected the soul, if not the stones and trees. Is there any magic more real than music acting as music? Musicians preserved the idea that harmony was the guiding principle of creation when the old image of the cosmos was collapsing.

Musicians save the cosmos.

We can keep Gafori, then, as a useful representation of the archetypes from which all the works of nature are woven.

As Franklin says

The...Muses lead the lyrist...into a treasure house of ideas and inspiration, provided they be cultivated with the devotions of 'skill' and 'wisdom'.<sup>48</sup>

The idea of the octave in the sense of a week leading to a new first day, is intimately related to the idea that musical octave returns to the same note with which it started and can, in theory, repeat endlessly until it leaves the possible limits of sound. The eight-mode octave can repeat infinitely, spiralling towards God. This is a mysterious image appropriate to Aphrodite Urania, as Queen of Heaven, or Queen of the Harmony of the Cosmos.

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<sup>48</sup> John C Franklin in *Music, Text, and Culture in Ancient Greece*. United Kingdom, Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 45.  
[https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Music\\_Text\\_and\\_Culture\\_in\\_Ancient\\_Greece/8ZNODwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=a+treasure+house+of+ideas+and+inspiration,+provided+they+be+cultivated+with+the+devotions+of+%E2%80%98skill%E2%80%99+and+%E2%80%98wisdom%E2%80%99.&pg=PA45&printsec=frontcover](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Music_Text_and_Culture_in_Ancient_Greece/8ZNODwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=a+treasure+house+of+ideas+and+inspiration,+provided+they+be+cultivated+with+the+devotions+of+%E2%80%98skill%E2%80%99+and+%E2%80%98wisdom%E2%80%99.&pg=PA45&printsec=frontcover)



But this image of the eight-pointed star is appropriate to the eighth sphere, the sphere of Urania, which Gafori wrongly gives to the note A an octave above the lowest note of the scale.

The idea of the octave, the new beginning, the endless cycle, cannot be pinned down to one note. This eighth sphere, which was imagined as the stars, is something quite different to the seven planets or notes of the lyre which lead upwards to it. The eighth sphere, Urania's sphere, stands, we might say, for harmony itself. It has its own mysteries. In the symbolism of the heavenly temple it takes the place of the veil before the Holy of Holies. In early Christian "gnostic" writings – though there is nothing unorthodox about this idea – it is the ogdoad, the dwelling place of Sophia or Wisdom, a place of rest (sabbat) and the Heavenly Jerusalem itself. This is an idea which

continued over centuries, or millennia. In medieval Jewish Kabbalah this is Hokmah, Wisdom. The idea of this sphere as the place of Platonic Ideas is found in Francesco Goirgi and Edmund Spenser.

In the middle ages Mary was seen (including by Francis of Assisi in *his Salutation to the Blessed Virgin*) as a personification of Wisdom, and as, herself, a form of the heavenly tabernacle, following hints in the books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus.

All these are, from our twenty-first century musical viewpoint, metaphors for Harmony as the Law within Creation.

ANDREW BAKER

25<sup>th</sup> August 2036

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<sup>i</sup> Francesco Giorgi, *De Harmonia Mundi*, 1525. My own translation from the French edition *L'Harmonie du Monde*, Paris, 1578, p.650. (The original Latin text and French edition both available on Google Books.)

<sup>ii</sup> *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of St Francis*. Ewert Cousins (Translator), Ignatius Brady (Contributor). The Classics of Western Spirituality, Paulist Press, 1988 (first edition 1978), p.69. Note: The Latin original of this passage uses the words *macrocosmus* and *minor mundus* for "microcosm".

<sup>iii</sup> Francesco Giorgi, *De Harmonia Mundi*, 1525. My own translation from the French edition *L'Harmonie du Monde*, Paris, 1578, p.650. (The original Latin text and French edition both available on Google Books.)