
Music and the Muses: The Culture of 'Mousike' in the Classical Athenian City edited by Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson

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It is well known that the meaning of the ancient Greek word *μουσική* (*mousikē*) cannot be reduced *sic et simpliciter* either to 'music' nor to any parallel word in other modern languages ('*Musik*', '*musique*', '*musica*', etc.). The Greek concept of *mousikē* covers indeed a remarkably wide range of aspects regarding religion, education, politics, and even the art of war. As a consequence, it is unlikely that a comprehensive view of such a multifarious subject can be provided by any single scholar today. This is the reason, one might guess, why the most interesting books on this subject typically take the form of a series of contributions by some of the most authoritative scholars in various aspects of *mousikē*;¹ and this volume, which comes as a result of a colloquium held in Warwick in 1999, is no exception.

The structure of the book seems designed to avoid the lack of connection and heterogeneity to which multi-authored works are prone. On one hand, the research is limited to a precise place, Athens, and to a precise period, the 'Classical Age' (fifth to fourth centuries (BC)); on the other, the division of the essays into four parts (1. *Mousikē* and Religion; 2. *Mousikē* on Stage; 3. The Politics of *Mousikē*; 4. *Mousikē* and *Paideia*) allows the reader to find his bearings in this rich field.

In the first essay, 'Muses and Mysteries' [11-37], Alex Hardie moves from the etymological relation established in several ancient sources between the *Mousai* and *mousikē* to explain the role played by music in mystery cults. One of the merits of Hardie's work is to point out that music was not only a simple accompaniment of the

¹ See, e.g., Gentili and Pretagostini 1988, Restani 1995, Gentili and Perusino 1995.

rituals, but rather a way to convey privileged knowledge and wisdom to the initiated. Particular attention is paid to the idea that music could put men in touch with the gods, and ensure a sort of afterlife through the power of memory (not by chance were the Muses said to be daughters of *Mnēmosynē*).

Barbara Kowalzig's 'Changing Choral Worlds: Song-Dance and Society in Athens and Beyond' [39–65] deals with a singular contradiction in the development of choral performances from the archaic *polis* to classical Athens. The advent of Athenian democracy seems to have entailed a widening in the social background of the performers; but, in contrast, a remarkable reduction is to be noted as regards the variety of choral *genera* in favor of the Dionysiac *choros*. In such a context, Plato's assertion of the need to have different *genera* for different gods can be interpreted as a conservative one. Some particular analyses, for instance, of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* [61ff.] also show the attempt to bring non-Attic myths to Attica. This sort of 'rewriting' of myth was possible, in Kowalzig's opinion, because choral performance, even in passing from an archaic to a democratic context, retained its aetiological power. This work, which combines both literary and sociological approaches, throws new light on crucial aspects of musical performance and is to be read as a continuation of other important studies [e.g., Musti 2000].

Choral music was also a fundamental part of political and religious cohesion not only inside the *polis* as a whole, but also between different *poleis*. By sending and receiving foreign *choroi*, Greek *poleis* asserted their own identity and, at the same time, strengthened their relationships to others. Ian Rutherford's 'Song-Dance and State-Pilgrimage at Athens [67–90] provides an exhaustive outline of different typologies of *theōria* in the Greek world as well as in non-Greek cultures both past and present, in order to sketch a possible setting for the Athenian state-pilgrimages to Apollo's sanctuaries in Delphi and Delos. No evidence remains for Athenian choral performances in Delphi during the classical period, but Rutherford's opinion that Pindar's paeans [Snell and Maehler 1989, Fr. 52h and 52e] were meant to be sung in Delphi and in Delos respectively by Athenian performers is quite convincing. Xenophon's expression $\chi\omicron\rho\omicron\delta\varsigma \epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma \epsilon\kappa \tau\eta\sigma\delta\epsilon \tau\eta\varsigma \pi\acute{o}\lambda\epsilon\omega\varsigma$ ('one chorus from this *polis*') synthesizes the difference

between the dithyrambic and the paeon *choros*, the former being narrative and open to the innovation of the ‘new music’, the latter being more conservative both in literary and in musical structure.

The first section of the book ends with Paola Ceccarelli’s ‘Dancing the *Pyrrichē* in Athens’ [91–117], a discussion of *pyrrichē* or war-dance, which, although it did not necessarily involve a sung performance, belonged to the realm of *mousikē* as well. The performing of *pyrrichē* is widespread all over the ancient Greek world. Ceccarelli, who is not new to this subject [see Ceccarelli 1998], gives here a detailed account of the iconographic and epigraphic evidence for this dance and pays special attention to its significance in various contexts (in the Panathenaia, in the Tauropolia and Apatouria festivals, in theatrical and choral performances, and in association with the cult of Dionysos and with funerary rituals). Her opinion is that in the classical period the *pyrrichē* had a symbolic value and was no longer used for real military training. Her analysis is particularly subtle in pointing out the antiquity of the *pyrrichē*, whose chorus continues to be organized according to age groups, such as boys, adolescent males (*ephēboi*), and men, even after Cleisthenes’ wealth-based reforms.

The first two papers of the second part (Eva Stehle’s ‘Choral Prayer in Greek Tragedy: *Euphemia* or *Aischrologia*?’ [121–155] and Claude Calame’s ‘Choral Forms in Aristophanic Comedy: Musical *Mimesis* and Dramatic Performance in Classical Athens’ [157–184]) are about choral performances in theatrical contexts and can be regarded as a diptych, as it were, of complementary points of view. The main problem that they deal with is whether—or to what extent—a choral song maintains its ritual meaning when performed on the stage in a tragedy or a comedy. Stehle begins by defining *euphēmia* as a sort of limitation to which the language of a prayer was subjected in order to preserve its purity. For it was by reason of *euphēmia* that prayers omitted, for example, any reference to violent death, pollution, lamentation, or any *aischrologia* (foul language or obscenity), and thus acknowledged the presence of the god. Then, she applies this to several passages of Greek tragic literature and shows how the rules of *euphēmia* were violated every time in order to make the audience aware of the distance existing between the theatrical and the ritual performance of prayer. Such a distance becomes more evident when one considers that the complexity of rhythm and dance movements in tragic choruses, not to say the use of masks, was unlikely to

make the audience identify themselves with the performers—which is fundamental in a ritual. As for *aischrologia*, while it is quite obvious to regard many Aristophanic choral passages as obscene, Stehle's attempt to mark a deeper level of aischrology even in tragedy, especially in the representation of the 'dead, sexuality, women's power in reproduction and magic' [155], is very convincing and intriguing.

Calame lays a special stress on the theater as a 'sanctuary of Dionysus' [158, 161] and, consequently, on the ritual and cultic meaning of choral performances. In his view, choral song is a sort of place where the author, the audience, and even the performers can assume the authoritative role of 'choral voice' according to the circumstances. He focuses on the choral *exodoi* of the *Thesmophoriazousai*, *Lysistrata*, *Peace*, *Birds*, *Ecclesiazousai*, and applies that semiological analysis which seems to be his favorite approach to Greek poetry.²

Aristophanes is also, as everybody knows, a fundamental source for those interested in music criticism in the last decades of the fifth century BC, when a new conception of musical composition, of metric and semantic relations between *melos* and *logos*, and even of the musician's very social position, knocked the first nails into the coffin of the old aristocratic musical world. Andrew Barker's 'Transforming the Nightingale: Aspects of Athenian Musical Discourse in the Late Fifth Century' [185–204] points out some problematic elements in the characterization of Nightingale in the *Birds*. This bird, which is supposed to remind the audience of the beautiful power of song and music, is represented here, in Barker's opinion, as a female *aulos*-player—such *aulētrides* were notoriously slaves and used also to act as prostitutes in banquets—who really plays the *aulos*. Barker is very acute, not to say ingenious, in using text-based evidence to show that Nightingale's costume was designed to allow her to play on the stage [201]. So, if we agree that the very symbol of Music is here depicted as a hired whore, we can see how conservative and pessimistic Aristophanes' position about 'New Music' was; indeed, as Barker points out, the only reason why the other characters on the stage, symbolizing the real audience, evidently love Nightingale's performance, is that they and the audience itself are supposed to be as depraved as the music.

² See also Calame 2005 and the useful review by Van Noorden [2005].

The third section opens with Eric Csapo's 'The Politics of the New Music' [207–248], the subject of which is closely linked to Barker's contribution. Csapo focuses on economic, performative, and stylistic features of the 'new music'; he then treats some other aspects of this new style which are symbolic and related to the 'collective imaginary'. The mimetic and 'expressionist' nature of this music would have been impossible without technical improvement both in constructing and playing the *aulos*. As a consequence, the *aulos*-player stopped being an amateur and became a professional; so he was hired and paid no longer by the chorus-director (*chorēgos*) as in the past, but directly by Athens itself. Such a separation between the *aulos*-player and the *choros* is reflected in the very musical structure of choral composition (such as the dithyramb), the instrument acting as a rival of the chorus rather than providing a simple accompaniment. Csapo dedicates many pages to explaining the expressive potentialities of the *aulos*, such as playing the pitch continuum between two notes and providing an unbroken stream of sound by means of a particular 'circular' breathing technique, and so on. His attempt to link these features of the *aulos* with some phonetic, syntactic, and semantic aspects of the poetry of the same period is very interesting. The repetition of single words or groups of words, frequently occurring, for example, in Euripides' late works, as well as the prolonging of the same syllable (even in the case of short syllables) on two or more different notes, are well known features of this new style; and Csapo appropriately quotes the famous passage of Dionysius of Halicarnassus [*De comp. verb.* 11] about the musical treatment of syllables and accents in some verses from Euripides' *Orestes*. But it is in the analysis of semantics that the most important elements of novelty can be found, especially where the fragmentary style of some 'new poets', with rapid changes both in the syntactic structure and in the subject, is connected with the polyphony that is possible on the two pipes of the double *aulos*—and, one might add, with the frequency of modulations (*metabolai*) during the same piece, also made possible by new devices applied to the finger-holes. As for political implications, a semantic analysis of Greek words describing the new style shows that several nouns and adjectives had political or moral overtones reminiscent of the ideas of variability, instability, or slackening. No surprise, then, that the opposition to the new music assumed the tones of political and social conservatism, and that this music was

credited with bad moral qualities such as effeminacy and a sort of non-Greek, eastern lasciviousness. On the other hand, the innovators did have their own Dionysiac—that is, genuinely Greek—tradition to refer to. Csapo's conclusion is that the myth of a 'pure' old music was an *a posteriori* construction created to oppose the rising of new social classes due to the advent of democracy.³

The treatment of the relationships between music and politics should not leave out Damon of Oa, who is supposed to be one—if not the most important—of Pericles' advisers. Robert Wallace's 'Damon of Oa: A Music Theorist Ostracized?' [249–267] gives here some hints of a discussion to be developed in a forthcoming work [249n1]. As Wallace has pointed out previously [1991], every serious study of Damon has to face the lack of sources and the difficulty of distinguishing what is to be credited to Damon himself and what was added by his successors (for example, by Plato). Wallace provides an outline of Damon's thought, which he interestingly places in the context of sophistic philosophy, thus emphasizing on one hand Damon's belief in the 'ethical' powers of music—which could have been the basis for Gorgias' reflections on the analogous powers of speech in his *Encomium of Helen*—and on the other Damon's inclination to make classifications of various rhythms and scales, a project which he could have derived from the sophist Prodicus, a friend of his. The tradition according to which Damon was ostracized, a claim some scholars have rejected, may indicate that he was a politician rather than merely a music theorist, for it seems strange that he deserved banishment only because of his musical ideas. Wallace describes the political setting of the last half of the 40s of the fifth century BC and shows how such a clever man could fall under suspicion of being an enemy of democracy, especially if his ostracism is to be placed—as the author convincingly argues—just after the ostracism of Thucydides, the son of Melesias, the oligarch leader who had been ostracized by Pericles in 444 or 443 BC. The ostracism of a music theorist appears less strange if one remembers the importance of music in its public and social context.

Peter Wilson's 'Athenian Strings' [269–306] is about the political and social perception of stringed instruments in classical Athens and

³ See also Meriani 2003a about a particularly instance of such an 'idealization' of the musical and political past.

could be regarded, in one sense, as a work complementary to Csapo's. According to a very common opinion, which has been reinforced by Nietzsche's conception of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac, the lyre and the strings in general are supposed to symbolize in ancient Greek culture the realm of social order and 'enlightened' culture, while the *aulos* had to do with uncontrolled passions and social disorder (that is, democracy in the worst sense). Wilson warns against such a dichotomy. If in an early phase, there was an opposition between the lyre as the instrument of the elites and the *aulos* as belonging to the people (*dēmos*), it is also true that it was neutralized in the late fifth century BC by the increase in professional players, some of whom, like Stratonicus, seem to have had a prominent role in music theory as well.⁴ It is very interesting that a new version of the famous myth of Marsyas, the satyr skinned alive for challenging Apollo to play appears at the same time: the satyr, who in earlier versions of the myth used to be represented as an *aulos*-player, now plays the lyre as well. The polemic against a music without order moves to a different field and addresses a new target, the instruments with too many strings; and Wilson opportunely cites Phrynus' *Cyclops* and Pherecrates' *Chiron* as the best examples that we have of the way in which the new perception of stringed instruments was elaborated by comic poets.⁵ At this time, the old-fashioned lyre becomes a symbol of musical and political conservatism; and the possession or the lack of musical culture plays an important role in the evaluation of some prominent politicians (Themistocles, Cimon, Pericles himself, Cleon). Wilson lastly suggests a charming reading of Timotheus' *Persians* as an attempt to provide an 'inclusive' and 'democratic' image of both new strings and new music.

The fourth and last section is about the role of *mousikē* in education (*paideia*). Andrew Ford's 'Catharsis: The Power of Music

⁴ Stratonicus probably belonged to the group of the *harmonikoi*, who were trying to determine the smallest audible interval through acoustic experiments rather than by focusing on mathematical ratios. On these theorists, see Barker 1978 and Rocconi 1999, 96–97. For an interesting reconstruction of what the *harmonikoi* were doing, see Meriani 2003b, 106–110; and further remarks in Raffa 2006.

⁵ As for Pherecrates' *Chiron*, one must remember, in addition to the studies cited by Wilson [287n46], the ground-breaking work by Restani [1983].

in Aristotle's *Politics*' [309–336] addresses the problem of what Aristotelian catharsis is exactly and how it works. Ford opens with some clear and up-to-date pages on the *status quaestionis* [309–311]: an opposition has emerged between the conceptions of catharsis as a 'purge' or way of eliminating and neutralizing unnecessary emotions, and as an 'intellectual "refinement"' [310] of emotions and feelings which otherwise would remain out of control. The latter interpretation, which requires that the word *mousikē* as used by Aristotle be given the wide sense of 'poetry', is acutely questioned by Ford. Given that the philosopher focuses not only on the music with words, but, as he writes explicitly, even on 'pure' ($\psi\lambda\lambda\eta$, without words) music [318], one should consider, according to Ford, the technical features of music (that is, the scales, rhythms, and so on) and the effects that they produce on the human soul. The music Aristotle imagines for the school seems to be quite different from that performed on the tragic and comic stage, the former being subjected to a series of limitations that the latter does not have. Ford's opinion is that in Aristotle's view theatrical music does not need any limitation because it is conceived for a wide and not necessarily 'educated' audience; such music, even if depraved, could not cause any harm to those who have received proper musical education.⁶ (Obviously Aristotle, in his elitist view of culture and society, does not care about uneducated people.) On the contrary, young pupils must be educated through a much more constrained kind of music. So Aristotle, because of his idea that music cannot be socially harmful when considered outside an educational context, paradoxically seems to be less prescriptive than Plato in the matter of 'public' music .

Victoria Wohl's 'Dirty Dancing: Xenophon's *Symposium*' [337–363] pays attention to the relationship between dance and philosophy in Xenophon's dialogue. In her view, two different kinds of love (*eros*) are displayed here: on one hand, there is homoerotic love,

⁶ The idea that proper musical education can provide antibodies, as it were, against the disease of new bad music is also to be found in a passage from Aristoxenus, who was a pupil of Aristotle, that is cited by pseudo-Plutarch [*De musica* 1142b–c]. As a proof, we are told that a Theban composer called Telesias (otherwise unknown) was unable to compose music in Philoxenus' modern style 'because of the very good musical training he had received when he was young' ($\gamma\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\nu\eta\sigma\theta\alpha\iota\ \delta\prime\ \alpha\iota\tau\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu\ \tau\eta\acute{\nu}\ \epsilon\kappa\ \pi\alpha\iota\delta\delta\epsilon\ \kappa\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\eta\nu\ \acute{\alpha}\gamma\omega\gamma\acute{\eta}\nu$). See also Meriani 2003c, 58–59 and Fongoni 2006.

which ensures the continuity of moral values between successive generations and has to do with the static and imitation-based educational model of Plato (education consisting in conveying the whole moral system of the elders to the young); on the other, there is heterosexual love, which is regarded as a less refined but necessary for ensuring the continuity of the species and the very existence of the *polis*. This opposition is respectively symbolized in the two characters of Socrates, the philosopher of pure *eros*, and the Syracusan dancer, who is responsible for the dirty dance with which the dialogue ends. Wohl points out that, whereas Xenophon skilfully directs some of the charges historically brought against Socrates (for instance, that of corrupting the youth) to other targets—e.g., to Lykon (young Autolykos' father), or to the Syracusan—he seems less definite about the possibility of separating the two kinds of love, given that even in such a high-minded assembly of philosophers and noble men, there is still room for staging a representation of heterosexual and 'coarse' love. Xenophon's reader is thus left with an unsolved doubt.

This book could hardly have had a better conclusion than Penelope Murray's essay, 'The Muses and Their Arts' [365–389], the aim of which is to define the variations in the Muses' field of influence throughout Greek literary history, from Homer up to the Second Sophistic (second century AD). A particular aspect of this intriguing excursus is the relationship between the Muses and the art of speech, that is, rhetoric. Murray points out that, after an isolated hint in Hesiod's *Theogony* in which the sweet and persuading words of the prince are said to be a gift of the goddesses, such a connection seems to disappear. With the advent of sophistic culture on one hand, and of literacy on the other, the Muses' role is limited to poetry: the activity of sophists, who proposed rhetoric as a set of teachable skills, seems not to need any guarantee from a god or goddess, while the reception of prose intended for private reading does not entail any specific time for performance and, as a consequence, does not call for any intervention of the Muse. No surprise, then, that we have a connection between Muses and rhetoric in the time of the Second Sophistic, when the art of speech is regarded as the center of *paideia* as a whole.

Despite the different and sometimes opposing viewpoints of the authors, the volume has a considerable degree of inner cohesion, particularly as a result of the frequent references linking one essay to the others. This helps recreate the atmosphere of the colloquium for

the benefit of those who, like the reviewer, did not have the good fortune to attend it.

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