

UNIT 1: PREHISTORY & ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

MUSIC HISTORY

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DISCOVERING MUSIC

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MUSIC HISTORY

1.- PREHISTORY

We do not know exactly how music started, but we know that it already existed from prehistoric times, because some remains of musical instruments, cave paintings and engravings containing musical theme were found.

It is believed that music could start as an imitation of the sounds of nature, as well as a call from one person to another, or from sounds made during hunting and gathering.

Music in prehistoric times was the use of voice, body (claps, percussion with the legs, steps ...) and objects: *flutes* (made from animal or human bones, with different sounds according to their length), *maracas* (made with pumpkin), animal horns, drums (hollow logs, stretched skin), etc. These primitive musical instruments were used to accompany dancing and singing, and they had a religious and magical meaning.

2.- MUSIC IN THE ANCIENT CIVILITATIONS

2.1.- MESOPOTAMIAN

Mesopotamian civilizations (Babylonians, Assyrians, Sumerians, Hittites, Persians ...) started in the year 1830 BC and remained until Babylon was conquered by Alexander the Great in 331 BC.

In this civilization, the music was highly important, as noted by the fact that the musicians (whether professional or not) were the most respected beyond kings and priests. We know these details thanks to the paintings, clay tablets and fragments of dishes that were found. They depict scenes where musicians appear in little orchestras, enlivening religious activities, leisure and everyday life (banquets, dances ...).

The most representative musical instruments are:

Strings: *lyre, harp, lute*

Winds: *trumpet, flute*

2.2.- EGYPTIAN

Egyptian civilization began around 3000 BC and remained until Egypt was conquered by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. There were a society that placed great importance on music, and music had influence in every aspects of life. Music was present in the religious and military ceremonies, parties, or any other type of celebration. Music was also important in daily activities, field and house work.

Egyptians adopted the musical instruments of the Mesopotamian civilizations, but also improved other instruments like the *sistrum of Isis*, which was a primitive wooden instrument . Another instruments were the *angular harp* or the *trumpet line (Sneb)*, used in processions. From Egypt came also the first *hydraulic organ* known, which works with water.

2.3.- HEBREW

Hebrew civilization began around 1700 BC. After dividing into two kingdoms, Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC., while Judah conquered by Babylon in 587 BC.

Hebrew music received many influences from different neighboring cultures (especially Egyptian and Mesopotamian). Although many traces of artistic or musical instruments were not preserved, we know aspects of their music through the books of the Old Testament.

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Musical instruments: *kinnor* or *harp of King David*, which was used in temples for accompanying songs, *lute*, *lyre*, *ugab* (or vertical flute, used in secular music), *shofar* (ram's horn, used in religious ceremonies), *jazozra* (silver trumpet that was used in the temple).

From the spread of Christianity (1st Century AD), the Hebrew religious music laid the foundations of early Christian music.

2.4.- INDIAN

Around 1400 BC, the first major civilizations that lived in India were set on the banks of the Indus and Ganges.

They practiced two religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, which were closely linked to culture.

In Indian music the composer suggested a melody (*raga*), rhythm (*talla*) and a pedal note (*kharaj*); from these musical elements, the musicians improvised. Thus, each musician reflected their own musical personality in the creations.

Music was essentially vocal and monodic, with a liturgical purpose, but also used as entertainment. The major source of information was the *Books of the Vedas*, which collected prayers, hymns and ritual forms.

Drum and *flute* are the only instruments considered Hindus themselves. The others were adopted from Western cultures.

2.5.- CHINESE

History in China began in about 2200 BC. through several stages and dynasties. It was a civilization with a very hierarchical society, headed by the royal family and mandarins (high civil and military posts). Chinese government attached great importance to music which was associated with the universe. In fact, every sound of the scale carried a meaning related to the planets.

The main repertoire of Chinese music was composed by hymns, ritual dances, pantomimes (the mime theater) and songs. The knowledge of this repertoire was made from many writings that left us this culture. The *Book of Documents*, *Book of Songs*, written by Confucius, and the *Book of Rites*, which contains ceremonial music, are very important documents.

The most important instruments are: *king* (stones hanging from a stick that sound when they are hit), *gong* (Chinese instrument par excellence), *kin* (zither with strings of silk) and *cheng* (organ built with a hollow pumpkin with tubes of bamboo cane).

3.- ORIGINS OF THE WESTERN MUSIC

3.1.- GREECE

Greek civilization began with the Achaean culture around 1400 BC., passing through several stages: monarchy, the birth of the *polis* (city politically autonomous), height of the *polis* and decline of empire.

Greek art searched for ideal beauty through balance, proportion and harmony.

3.1.1.- Greek musical contributions

All artists had a special recognition in this society. In fact, in the 5th Century BC., Athens went on to become the main focus of poet-musicians, with the *dithyramb* (theatrical form) as its main mode of expression.

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Pythagoras is considered the father of Greek music theory. Among other contributions of his are the demonstration of the relationship between the length-tension of a string and the pitch of the sound produced by it. The Greeks also invented the alphabetic notation (how to write music through the signs of the alphabet), which took two forms: one for instrumental music and one for vocal music.

According to Greek legend (*mythology*), the gods invented musical instruments, which is why each instrument is assigned to the worship of a god. There are many archaeological remains that confirm this.

3.1.2.- Greek musical instruments

- ✓ **Percussion:** used with the wind instruments for performances of dramas: *krotala* (keeping similarity with castanets), *Kimball* (cymbals), *triangles*, *tambourines*, *krupezion* (rattlesnake for feet), *drums*.
- ✓ **Strings:** *phormix*, *barbitone*, *zither*, *lyre* (family lute) and *harps*.
- ✓ **Winds:** *aulos* (oboe), *salpinx* (trumpet), *syrinx* (panpipes)

3.2.- ROME

The Roman civilization began with Etruscan, who, after winning several villages, founded the city of Rome in 753 BC.

After passing through several stages (monarchy, republic and empire), the Roman Empire was divided into two: the Byzantine Empire, which lasted until the Middle Ages, and the Western Roman Empire, after further subdivided into smaller empires Barbarians, fell into 476 AD.

Roman art was monumental and practical, constituting of a continuation of Greek art.

3.2.1.- The music in Roman society

As data common to all art forms (music, sculpture and architecture), we note that the Roman people copied what the Greeks developed and adapted to their needs.

Music was used to entertain official acts, solemn acts (military victories) and public spectacles (gladiatorial combats, chariot races ...). It was present in all types of parties, both popular and private, and it was part of religious ceremonies and worship of the gods.

Also, in the Roman world there was a close connection between theater and music (leaving the importance of dance and chorus, true symbols of greatness of the Empire).

There were also "*street musicians*", regarded as the ancestors of the medieval minstrels or jugglers, who earned their living through music performance and acrobatic and juggling games.

The majority of Greek musical instruments were adopted by the Romans, which shows more evidence of the many coincidences between the two civilizations.

- ✓ **Percussion:** *scabillum*, *crótalos*, *tambourines*, *rattles*
- ✓ **Strings:** *zither*, *lyre*, *harps*, *lute*.
- ✓ **Winds:** *hydraulic organ pipe* (invented in the III Century BC) that worked with water and air; several types of *horns* and *trumpets*, several varieties of *flutes* (*tibia*, the national Roman instrument).

