

Can the Ancient Understanding of Music Assist in the Contemporary Socio-Cultural Life?



Sociology

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Abstract

The main objective of this scientific study is a sociological analysis of the question: Can ancient understanding of music assist in contemporary socio-cultural life? This analysis refers to the present, when the cultural developments in general, move in a bizarre, decadent direction, where it is difficult to determine what represents the true value, and what is anti-value. Therefore, key segments of this paper will be some specific socio-cultural phenomena of concern, such as chaos in the cultural creativity, the compromising of the cultural criteria of valuation, the dilemma what is useful and what is harmful in contemporary cultural life, cultural mechanisms of defense against the onslaught of kitsch and schund, the pragmatic treatment of music in ancient Greece, and so on. In other words, the function of this scientific paper comprises in the following, which by explaining the philosophical understanding of music among the ancient Greeks, it strives to extract a vital lesson on improving the socio-cultural life in the present.

Can the ancient understanding of music assist in the contemporary socio-cultural life?

Whenever we talk about the contemporary socio-cultural life, it must be stressed that it is not easy to give any evaluation about it. Because, what I claim today about cultural lifestyle, for a relatively short time may prove to be inadequate or even false. This is so because with the incredibly speedy development of the technological world, social life is, too, dynamically changes, and hence the cultural life of people. Sometimes, watching the flow of these processes and cultural events, one gets the impression that cultural development today, in general, moves in a strange decadent direction where it is difficult to determine what real value is and what not. This general conclusion that may sound less pessimistic, is actually based on certain socio-cultural phenomena of concern, such as chaos in the cultural creativity, compromising of the cultural criteria of valuation, the dilemma about what is useful and what is harmful in contemporary cultural life, cultural mechanisms to defend against the onslaught of kitsch and schund, etc.

Bearing this in mind, I want to point out that during my many years of study in philosophy of music and the sociology of ethnomusicology, I had occasion to go into the shell of cultural and artistic life of the ancient Greeks, upon which I came to the conclusion that their philosophical understanding of culture and art, can be pragmatically used in the socio-cultural life of modern society, too. This applies particularly to the philosophical approach of the ancient Greeks toward the art of music, which as such proved to be unique and very useful to harmonious social life in contemporary poleis, which in my opinion may be useful to today's socio-cultural living, which also aspires towards that same goal.

However, the question is about what constitutes that certain ancient paradigm which could help modern societies, in improving the quality of their socio-cultural life in contemporary conditions? And indeed, if it were at all possible that their musical concept, and the various musical forms of that distant time, along with an adequate interpretation of those, influence in any form our modern life?

We will get the answer if we were to analyze the ancient Greeks' philosophical approach to the art of music, and their deep belief in the strange magical power of music. It is interesting to note that the first serious theoretical attempts to extract music from the shell of secrecy, in ancient Greece, were made by Greek philosophers. In fact, music as a set of technical problems and moral aesthetic values, enters history with the ancient Greeks.

It is interesting to note that not only almost all our knowledge of ancient music (and music in general) comes from the famous Greek philosophers, but that these thinkers themselves once sang, played instruments, and even taught philosophy accompanied by music. Considering the contribution of the Greek philosophers to the development of musical culture, I. Focht concludes that the issue of music was and remains a philosophical question.

At the very prologue of ancient philosophy, there were attempts to achieve a philosophical interpretation and explanation of the world and life through music. In fact, there were special schools of philosophy (such as the Pythagorean society), which considered music to be not only the root of all philosophical and artistic achievements, but also an inspiration and enthusiasm to perform everyday activities of people.

Those who are somewhat familiar with ancient literature, which explains the relationship of the ancient Greeks with the music, very well know that of all arts, music in particular was valued most highly. This was due to the Greeks' knowledge of the strong influence of music in humans, which of all existing arts, only music was by name connected with the god Apollo, where the phrase Apollo Musagetes comes from, which means Apollo, Leader of the Muses.

In ancient Greece, the thesis that music can play a major role in social life was generally accepted, and affecting the soul and mood of the people, especially the psychological, moral and emotional aspects. The essence of the philosophical approach to music is that similarly with philosophy, music was also dedicated to the happy life of the community, through the ennoblement of the human character, will, and sentiments. However, philosophy did this by intellectually quenching the citizens, while becoming wise and practical, people started to build the system of moral values. While music as a practical art performed this function through the cultivation of good, and the removal of admixture in the emotional structure, it rendered people noble and happy.

Therefore, knowing these circumstances well, Plato created the famous sentence about music that says "the better the music in a country, the better the country itself." From this we can understand that the quality of life in a societal community discreetly depended on the moral upbringing of quality music. Therefore, the ancient Greeks appreciated musicians more than any artistic personalities, because unlike other celebrities these individuals possessed two unusual assets. First, they are regarded as privileged people of the gods, because they were lucky to be rewarded or endowed with such a divine gift that enabled them to know the language of the sounds, except for the language of the words. Second, the musicians were special in that they performed the duties of social teachers and social doctors, because on one side they cared for the moral education of the feelings of citizens, and the other for growing social and moral balance in the state.

Given the above, I personally think that the ancient concept of music, where musical harmony is taken as a model of harmonious arrangement of a society, may in some aspects contribute to the improvement of the contemporary socio-cultural life. Thus, analyzing the specific musical forms of Ancient Greece, along with their respective influence in the socio-cultural life of that time, one can draw very useful lessons for the socio-cultural life of our times.

Thus, the musical forms that ever played the role of ennoblement of the socio-cultural life of ancient Greeks, can be useful today in terms of an adequate music education, selection of appropriate music to enhance the productivity of labor, a getaway from everyday stress, inspiring oratory, relaxation in intimate relationships, treatment of some diseases and others. In other words, the musical culture of ancient Greece occupied a special place not only in terms of educating the youth of that time, but also in terms of their proper education.

Hence, we will mention some characteristics of many well-known musical forms cultivated in ancient Greece, which today could serve the people for a healthier socio-cultural life. These musical forms: the anthem, prosody, pea not, gymnopaedia, dithyramb, tren, melika, epithalamia, scallion, and tragedy. Let us recall that each musical form mentioned individually, had an accurately determined socio-cultural role and function.

Anthem - a song which had been a psychological role because the Greeks believed that the gods who are celebrated in these poems will protect people from hazards due to living without fear and serenely;

Prosody - the song that played a particular moral function, as it served to strengthen the will and patience of the participants in religious ceremonies;

Peanot - the song with psycho-moral role for dedicating yourself to the Apollo - god of life and health, it was aimed to awaken people's feelings of health, joy, and happiness;

Gymnopaedia - was a song that had the task to refresh the psycho-physical condition of the people, as its rhythmic music made people feel good, and was usually recommended in the morning when people were prepared to carry out their daily activities;

Dithyramb - was the song psycho-moral influence intended for Dionysus - the god of wine and pleasure, people were enthused with optimism and a sense of happiness;

Tran - was a song of pure moral function, because not only caressed the wounded feelings of the relatives of the deceased, but also brought feelings of pride;

Melaka - represented the sensual-erotic poem, whose moral and educational role consisted in the fact that through the affirmation of all female values, it argued for a moral awakening of the Greek male who behaved towards women in a discriminatory manner. I thought that this method can improve the moral treatment of men towards women.

Epithalamia - was a song with a psycho-moral action with newlyweds before their first night, because its cordiality, friendliness, and solidarity in content relieved spouses from feelings of tension and defeatism, making them relaxed, and self-confident in their most intimate night;

Scullion - was a song that had a specific purist-moral role because its euphoric - bohemian character untied all to drink and sing with all participants, which enabled all participants to enter a very cheerful friendly world, where conventional rigid social norms were downcast by poem and natural feelings of relaxation, joy and delight rendered dominant;

The tragedy - as the most influential dramatic poetic-musical form had a task to purify man of immoral excesses, political manipulation and social prejudices. It turned out that the tragedy actually represent a classic poetic and musical mechanism that permitted moral catharsis and a mental metamorphosis of humans.

Besides this, the ancient Greeks knew very well that to achieve full moral and educational and socio-psychological impact on the mental structure of man, the magic of sounds (melody) only is not sufficient, but that the power of words (text) was also necessary. Because they firmly believed that as the music gives the words feelings and soul, words give to music meaning and message.

This thesis sprang from the belief that between the human soul and the music sounds, there is a mysterious causal relationship. Because not only do certain musical sounds can be merry or sad or inflame the human soul, depending on the state (mood) of the soul of the musician stem and adequate tones that such music. Thus, according to Boetius, a drunken youth went berserk listening to a song euphorically. He healed the famous philosopher and musician Pythagoras, who with the help of some special melodious songs of his youth restored reason.

Then, the famous Greek musician Timotheus of Miletus, playing some tunes on the aulos, totally managed to infuriate Alexander the Great, then a special song again pacified him. Eduard Hanslik cited the case of the Danish king Eric, that while listening to a famous musician he ordered to remove the weapons.

The artist through the music modulations threw everyone in sadness, then joy, bringing gladness in rages, whereby the king Eric broke into the door, took his sword and killed four people in its vicinity. Let us recall that the ancient Greeks used music as a moral means of harmonious socio-political organization of the country. In addition to this move is the fact that, during a crucial political rally, music was an important factor and an indispensable element for the progress and success of these political events.

It is known that the great ancient orator Demosthenes, whenever speaking of the great national assemblies, in its background engaged auletics who actually served to maintain oratory temperature in eloquent winning the audience. Once in Sparta, riots erupted in bloody political calculations, the prophecy at Delphi articulated to the Spartans in the shape of a recommendation calling Terpandar, the famous musician, for help, who with his musical skill managed to calm spirits of angered political rivals. This clearly makes it clear that the muses had floors and emotional catharsis power. Moral role of music was present at the military level, because often aulos and sword in the battlefield went hand in hand. The historian Thucydides mentions the way Lachaeadaemones always won the battles. He told them about this particular helping combat music auletics that it not only strengthened the military morale of troops but gave rhythm until final victory.

If you carefully analyze all of this I presented about the impact of music in social and cultural life of ancient Greeks, it is difficult to conclude that much of these moments can be applied today. I therefore expect two important things from this scholarly work. First, to crystallize the socio-cultural image of music, of a divine time when the myth was history, legends reality and gods-ideal personifications of people. And secondly, to help create a critical measure in our music-educational and ethical awareness, by which we today would be perceived reflection of good or bad music in socio-cultural lifestyle. This is especially important today when we live in a chaotic art (non) musical time, filled with various kitsch-like directions and aggressive iconography.

Therefore, I hope that once the reader will "hear" sociological wire music of ancient Greece presented in this paper, we can install itself in such a musical and artistic filter that the selection would have separated the noble from the socio-pathological music. And this is very important today, if we take into account the fact that music has always been and remains an important factor for (a) morality, (a) sociability and (un) happy life in a social community. Precisely for this reason, Plato even sends his message about the importance of music through his parenthesis mentioned "as muses – floors in a better state, so will be better and the state." But we must recognize that the main culprits of this whole process of socio-cultural and axiological decomposing are ourselves - people of the time confused and eclectic music. It is the people who appreciate music more as a commercial asset, and less like an artistic experience, and even less so as a moral-educational and socio-cultural need, which is in total contradiction with the ancient Greek concept of music.

Keeping in mind all this, I am convinced that once we think well about what was stated above, it is easy to give an affirmative answer to our title question: Can the ancient understanding of music help in contemporary socio-cultural life?

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