Children of Orpheus:
The Dialogue between Ancient and Modern Music

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In this lecture I would like to speak about the study of music here at St. John's College, for it seems to me one of the most unusual and most remarkable activities we undertake. There are other places where students are reading Plato and Aristotle with care and excitement, although in few of them is this reading centered in conversation rather than lectures. But there is nowhere else in this country, and perhaps in the world, where every student must become active as a composer, a singer, a performer, a critic, and a philosopher of music. Of course there are conservatories and schools of music, but even there the musical experience of their students tends to be quite specialized; performers usually do not compose, composers do not perform, and no one is thinking very much about what music signifies in the larger frame of human concern, or what it has meant to great thinkers of the past. To be sure, there are places where parts of this entire spectrum of activities are cultivated, but nowhere else is it made to be a central activity of every student who aspires to an education in the liberal arts. St. John's College is identified in the public mind largely with "great books" of philosophy and literature; its far more unusual engagement with music is not known, nor is its equally unusual engagment with mathematics and natural science, which in fact constitute over half of the prescribed course of studies here. On other occasions I have tried to describe some aspects of these scientific studies at St. John's which seem to me so compelling and from which I have learned so much. This evening I will try to express some things that emerge in our study of music which are interesting to me and which may give a sense to our visitors of what we do and even help us to gain a larger sense of the significance and importance of music to the largest human questions.

I will do so by bringing before you a *question* about music that emerged from our studies; this is only fitting since it is with *questions* that we are most deeply engaged here. It is not the only question that concerns music; in a way the most regular question we

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face is: how is this piece of music *made*? We try most of all to address it as composers of music, however haltingly. To me the most exciting and surefire aspect of our music tutorials are the places where the students all compose a Gregorian chant, or a minuet, or medieval organum, or modal counterpoint. Suddenly one must become a *maker* of music, a craftsman, and leave behind (if only for a little while) the distanced stance of the listener or critic. One tries to *make* a piece of music not out of some ludicrous imitiation of inspired and titanic Romantic genius but in the humbler spirit of the craftsman struggling with refractory materials, like someone trying to carve wood or make a table. I think this is an indispensible part of learning and thinking about what any kind of poetry might be and signify, for in Greek *poesis* means: making. Interestingly, this activity of composing is more open to all than performing; I have known students with little desire to sing who yet were able to write a beautiful Gregorian chant. Still, we all try to sing and to play a bit on the piano, for there is some essential content to those activities without which composing and listening alone would be incomplete, not to speak of the great beauty, the profound gift that is bestowed on anyone who tries to make music come alive in sound.

I will not speak further about these activities, although I hope you will catch something of what we do from the performances of the students who will perform for you later. The heart of our work in composing and performing goes on in the workshop of our tutorials and practica, as we help each other improve our compositions or try to sing better. To see that best you need to be a participant in what is an extended and engrossing work, well suited to the collective energies of a small group over many months. My lecture will concern a different, reflective facet of our work as it tries to bring into view what seems to me a central question concerning music, one which concerns the nature of music in itself as well as its significance from a philosophical perspective. My question finds its grounds in the contrast between ancient and modern, like other questions familiar to us from philosophy or mathematics which are crucial to our studies in those realms. As with these other questions, the antithesis between modern and ancient is not meant simply chronologically but rather in terms of two different attitudes towards the nature of music and its relation to man and the cosmos. Although I will use the terms "ancient" and "modern" with the common sense given roughly by "old" and "new", it is interesting that these words were used with quite opposite sense by Claudio Monteverdi and Vincenzo Galilei, the men who most self-consciously realized and shaped the modern music. So I will speak about ancient and modern music and they will speak about musica antica and

musica moderna and mean just the opposite of my terms! I apologize in advance for this confusion; perhaps the best path might have been to use Monteverdi's own terms *prima prattica* and *seconda prattica*, which mean the ancient (*prima*) and the modern (*seconda*) in the sense I will define. Yet even this curious equivocation about what is ancient and what modern proves to be significant in what follows.

I begin with what I will call the ancient, then, understanding this generally but not necessarily to mean the oldest in time, and, in certain senses, what is fundamental to all subsequent musical experience. This music is deeply grounded in the rational order of the whole world, as is set forth in Plato's *Timaeus* and summarized in the third century A.D. by Boethius in his works *The Principles of Music* and *The Principles of Arithmetic*:

> God the Creator of the great universe considered arithmetic first as the model of his reasoning and created all according to it, having rationally forged all things through numbers of assigned order to find concordance... It can easily be proved that the power of numbers is prior to music ... [for] the proportion of these same sounds in relation to each other is found in none other than numbers... the very motion of the stars is resounded in harmonic modulations... Thus we can begin to understand that apt doctrine of Plato which holds that the soul of the universe is united by a musical concord ... these ancients knew that the total structure of our soul and body consists of musical harmony.[1]

In setting forth what he calls *musica mundana*, the music of the universe, and *musica humana*, the music of the human being, Boethius shows forth the great originals from which the music of instruments *(musica instrumentis)* derive their being and by which they ought to be governed. It is in the music of the spheres that such perfection lies, even though we cannot hear it, whether through the grossness of our sensibility or through our unceasing absorbtion in that celestial sound. As Boethius says,

> the orbits of the stars are joined by such a harmony that nothing so perfectly structured, so perfectly united, can be imagined.[2]

Following him, I too will take the music of the spheres as the paradigm of what I will call ancient music. It is timeless and passionless, in the sense that it does not aim to *express* anything, does not *move* our passions. This is because it is closest kin to stillness, to the motionlessness of the divine and of number and, as Boethius says, "motionlessness is by nature prior."[3] Thus, although the stars are not at rest their motion is perfectly circular, is as close to motionlessness as is possible. It is something of this music that Pythagoras heard that day in the blacksmith shop, "by a certain divine will," as Boethius says: the octave, perfect fifth, and fourth resounding together, manifesting the mystery

that the simple ratios 1:2, 2:3, and 3:4 are sensible to us as ravishing intervals.[4] For me, this has always been a sign: we are such beings that can *recognize* these simple ratios in our hearing, in our very bodies, and not only in thought. We also recognize the irrational $\sqrt{2} : 1$ which, as Galileo Galilei pointed out, is very close to the tritone, the *diabolus in musica* of medieval musical theory. The fact that these intervals are sensuous as well as intellectual realities signifies that in us number and matter have come together, that forms have found an incarnation. Further, the fact that the octave feels so different to us than the tritone signifies that we can feel as well as know the incommensurable, that it affects us in body as well as soul.

So, although we are not excited or moved to passion by such music, perhaps we can say that we *feel* it. Passion is literally suffering ($\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\chi\epsilon\iota\nu$); we are struck by something that comes to us from without and to which we submit. In contrast, emotion suggests something coming not from without but from within us, moving outwards (*e-movere*); my colleague Mr. Bruce Venable has discussed this eloquently.[5] But perhaps *feeling* is the most apt word here, for it connotes a state which is not so much one of motion as of inner awareness. Ancient music calls as if to a paradise within us, so that we feel unsure whether we are on Earth or in heaven, because we touch something which really *is*, in Plato's words, and stand outside our ordinary selves ('$\epsilon\kappa$-$\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$), or perhaps rather we find our true selves there. This kind of music is available to us in the Gregorian chant, through which it is the historical source and fountain of all our music since that time. For as polyphonic composition began it was, of course, the chants that were the central line that held them together as their central and determinative voice (tenor). Thus it is that the music of the West until the sixteenth century was dominated by the ideal of a music which would be impassive, inward, and endlessly beautiful. [Example 1: "Resurrexi," Gregorian Introit for Easter Sunday] I never cease to wonder that this music, the first heard in the triumphal celebration of Easter in the Gregorian Mass, is so deeply mysterious and so quiet. Although in this example there is only one voice sounding ancient music is not necessarily monophonic. In one of the most fascinating and daring developments in music many such voices began to sing together, each voice independent yet connected to the whole. Here one thinks of Thomas Aquinas' argument that in the divine mind many things are thought at once.[6] In its manifold interweaving of voices such polyphonic music is a living image of the multitudinous mind of God.

Ancient music need not be explicitly "religious," either. Many secular texts were set

by composers in a polyphonic art of great beauty in which the words are not set in an expressive way but rather are adorned by the artful interweaving of melodic lines conjoining sonorous numbers both consonant and dissonant. Here the mood may be light or dark, as stems from the related word "mode," but without the passionate restlessness that will be the essential concomitant of the *change* of mood or mode, of modulation in the modern sense. Yet these moods are fundamentally alike in that their beauty is the shining forth of something clear, untroubled, serene, of something at rest, reposing blissfully in itself. The modes of ancient music have that essential likeness that Tolstoy says characterizes all happy families: not that they are all exactly the same, but that they all share a certain common happiness and beauty.

Ancient music is rich in the variety and different qualities of its modes, each of which has its own particular kind of beauty, whereas modern music, which is essentially in one mode, the major, of which the minor is a closely adjoined offshoot. There is a wonderful example in Johannes Ockeghem's *Missa cuiusvis toni*, a mass written to be sung in any of the authentic church modes.[7] Here is the "Kyrie" first sung in the Phrygian, then the Mixolydian, Lydian, and Dorian modes. [Examples 2–5:"Kyrie I" from *Missa cuiusvis toni*] One could pause for a long time here, trying to grasp the haunting differences which the several modes convey, yet what is most extraordinary is that Ockeghem thought that the same piece might be sung in four such different (yet fundamentally identical!) ways. Perhaps the essence of the musical work in this understanding is not any particular mood or mode but an enduring state of being that can be refracted into various modes, yet stands outside each of them.

But next to this ideal of *beauty* there was also an ideal of *power* already known to the Greek poets and philosophers. Boethius tells us that, in the beginning, there was "a simple music" performed on only four strings of a kithara (lyre), sounding only the intervals heard by Pythagoras in the blacksmith's shop: octave, fourth, fifth. "Thus," he says, "there was nothing unconsonant in these strings. As you can plainly see, it was an imitation of the universal harmony, which consists of the four elements. The inventor of these four strings is said to have been Mercury."[8] But although these four strings were invented by a god, he tells us that it was in the time of Orpheus, a mortal, that music changed. Successively a fifth, sixth, and seventh string was added further dividing the octave by whole tones (the interval between the fourth and the fifth) but also by semitones as well in the regular progression of what Boethius calls the diatonic order. These strings

were added by certain individuals, whom Boethius names, adding that the seven strings are "obviously an image of the seven planets." But in so doing we have moved from the four notes of the universal harmony to something closer to man, the seven planets. In so doing the semitone is introduced, a complex ratio of 256:243 and with it all the possibility of dissonant intervals which, it seems, have not so much to do with the divine or universal but rather with human character and ethos.

At this point the diatonic order has been established and with it a genus of diatonic melodies which Boethius calls "severe and natural," such as the Greek Dorian mode which Plato praised as imitating courageous, war-like deeds.[9] But having opened the door to such complex and ambiguous intervals as the semitone others entered in as well. An eighth string was introduced and, with it, the possibility of new genera of melodies called chromatic and enharmonic which rely on semitones and even more closely divided ones like the diesis (roughly a quarter tone). Boethius remarks that the chromatic "departs from natural inflection and becomes more sensual," as is suggested by its name meaning *colored.*

The power and also the danger of this new music was immediately recognized; Boethius says that "indeed today the human race is lascivious and effeminate (*molle*)" and is given over to such lascivious music. Boethius recounts that when one "Timotheus of Milesia added a string to those which were already established and made the music more complex, the Lacadaemonians expelled him from their city with an official decree.

> Since Timothius of Milesia, coming into our ancient city, forsaking the character of the city, cast aspersions on the seven-stringed kithara, and, introducing a modulation of many strings, ruined the hearing of youths; and he abused our own way, having been simple and orderly; for he begot many strings and a new type of modulation, consisting of the chromatic genus which is more effeminate, creating a great revolutionary division on behalf of the enharmonic genus; thus he was called into the Eleusian Assembly which publicly pronounced him a disgrace to his mother because of his division ... And moreover, having abandoned the seven-stringed kithara, he added an eleventh string, thus promulgating excesses...[10]

"Thus," Boethius concludes, "the zeal for music among the Spartans was so great that they thought it took possesssion of the soul itself."

In telling this Boethius relies on what he calls "common knowledge,"

> that song has calmed rages many times and that it has often worked wonders on affections of either the body or the spirit. For who does not know that Pythagoras calmed a drunk adolescent of Taormine who had become incited under the influence of the Phrygian mode, and that Pythagoras further restored this boy to his rightful senses, all by

> means of a spondaic melody? For one night this frenzied youth was about to set fire to the house of a rival who had locked himself in the house with a whore. Now that same night Pythagoras was out contemplating the course of the heavens, as was his usual custom. When he learned that this youth under the influence of the Phrygian mode would not be stopped from his crime, even by the admonitions of his friends, he order that the mode be changed; and thus Pythagoras restored the frenzied mind of the boy to a state of absolute calm.[11]

No wonder that the Spartan elders took such exception to Timothius's musical innovations, or that Plato uttered his warnings against wayward modes! All these innovations in music stand together under the sign of Orpheus, who first used their power to move the soul and its passions, to move rocks and animals, even to move Hades himself to release his dead wife Euridice at his powerful plea. Such power seems worthy of a god, and when the Greek classics became available once again in the fifteenth century, after their long absense, their new readers in Italy marvelled.

Vincenzo Galilei, writing in his *Dialogo sopra musica antica e della moderna* (1581) recounts the miracles attributed to music in the ancient texts and remarks

> For all the height of excellence of the practical music of the moderns, there is not heard or seen today the slightest sign of its accomplishing what ancient music accomplished...[12]

Note that Vincenzo understands by *musica antica* the art of moving the passions, just the opposite of what I have been calling "ancient." In fact, like so many revolutionaries he understands his innovation to be really the restoration of the rightful and original practice, which he says is

> to express the passions with greater effectiveness in celebrating the praises of the gods, the genii, and the heroes, and secondarily to communicate these with equal force to the minds of mortals for their benefit and advantage...[13]

By *musica moderna* Vincenzo understands the rationalized counterpoint such as his own former teacher Zarlino taught which I have been calling ancient and which, he says, "is not of great value for expressing the passions of the mind by means of words" mainly because of "the continual sweetness of the various harmonies" which conform so strictly to contrapuntal rules that they do not adequately use the expressive force which a freer use of dissonance will allow. Essentially, the constant beauty of their style vitiates any force of expression, which involves a departure from the ideal order of tones. In describing the failure of the music of his teachers to give adequate expression to passion, Vincenzo explicitly calls on the story of Orpheus. Their failure is like that of a certain tyrant, Neantius, who presumed to pick up Orpheus's kithara and play on it and who was devoured

by dogs in punishment. "This," Vincenzo remarks tartly, "was his only resemblance to the learned poet, sage priest, and unique musician who as you know was slain by the Bacchantes." Orpheus deserves these titles because of the miracles he accomplishes, for, as Vincenzo says,

> if the musician has not the power to direct the minds of his listeners to their benefit, his science and knowledge are to be reputed null and vain, since the art of music was instituted and numbered among the liberal arts for no other purpose.[14]

This path of power over men and nature is notably that which Vincenzo's son, Galileo, contemplated; it is striking that Galileo carried his father's researches further and seems to have been the first to note the powerful connection of the tritone with the incommensurables. It is the same path which Francis Bacon reconnoitered for the "sons of science" as they compel Nature to answer their questions so that the human commonwealth might prosper and grow stronger. Bacon does not shrink from saying that they must pass beyond the contemplation of beauty and even torture Nature before she will, at last, be compelled to express her inmost secrets. In order to show "philosophy personified" Bacon turns to the myth of Orpheus.[15] As in the ancient accounts of the quest for the golden fleece, which Bacon knew, Orpheus accompanies Jason so that his powerful singing might help the Argonauts succeed. Indeed in his *Of the Wisdom of the Ancients* (1609) Bacon interprets the story of Orpheus propitiating the infernal powers to regain his wife as signifying the way in which "natural philosophy proposes to itself, as its noblest work of all, nothing less than the restitution and renovation of things corruptible, and (what is indeed the same thing in a lower degree) the conservation of bodies in the state in which they are, and the retardation of dissolution and putrefaction."[16] Bacon does not neglect to comment on the end of Orpheus's story, saying that the natural philosopher may well fail if only "from no cause more than from curious and premature meddling and impatience." At length "perturbations and seditions and wars" surround the scientist and all his art is torn into fragments, as Orpheus was by the maddened women, his music lost among the brute noise of their attack. Thus Bacon tells us that although letters and philosophy be torn in pieces by political fury, they are not utterly lost. He says that then "a season of barbarism sets in, the waters of Helicon being sunk under the ground, until, according to the appointed vissitude of things, they break out and issue forth again, perhaps among other nations, and not in the places where they were before." The myth does not speak of Orpheus's children but it seems clear that Bacon considered them to be the "sons of science." It is they who will succeed where their father, Orpheus, failed, for, unlike him, they will not

be out-mastered by their own affections and will drink again of Helicon, the river of the Muses.[17]

In doing so, Bacon tells us, they reach the heights of human aspiration, for "as the works of wisdom surpass in dignity and power the works of strength, so the labors of Orpheus surpass the labors of Hercules." In surpassing Hercules they surpass Ulysses also, for although Ulysses could only pass the Sirens tied forcibly to the mast, Orpheus and his sons "by singing and sounding forth the praises of the gods confounded the voices of the Sirens."

In the account of Vincenzo Galilei Orpheus is victorious, indeed omnipotent. This is exactly the note with which Claudio Monteverdi's setting of *Orfeo* (1607) begins (a work given one of its first modern performances at St. John's College in Annapolis in 1959). In the prologue Music herself speaks and tells us that she "knows how to calm every troubled heart, and can kindle the most icy souls—now to noble anger, now to love." Emerging from the same circles of the Florentine Camerata as Vincenzo Galilei Monteverdi makes good the claims that Vincenzo had laid for music, and which Music herself has pronounced. In what is one of the very first operas this great master already has marshalled expressive power that does not fail to move. But how does it accomplish this? At this point the use of the term "motion" becomes austere and exact. We are moved by this music in exact analogy to the way that the Earth is moved in the new cosmology, by entering into a new state of being which transfers us from the motionless centrality of ancient cosmology. This intermediate state is restless and free to transport us to any domain of feeling or passion, just as the planets in the new cosmology are free to wander, not bound to a fixed center and at home everywhere, or nowhere.

For, unlike the ancient music which always remained within the bounds of a single mode, ruled by an invariant final note, this new music is free to travel from key to key. It can do so by means of a pivot chord, a harmony which is intermediate between different modes because it is ambiguously interpretable as belonging to either mode. As such, it is inherently unstable, like the successive passions through which we are moved. Consider, for instance, the unforgettable words of Euridice at the crucial moment of the story, when Orfeo turns around against Pluto's command, fearing that the Furies have attacked her. She says: "[Ahi, vista troppo dolce e troppo amara] Ah, sight too sweet and too bitter; do you lose me through too much love? And I, wretched one that I am, lose all hope of enjoying life and light and lose, at the same time, you more precious than all good, O my

husband." [Example 6:*L'Orfeo* Act IV, mm. 235–249] Too sweet and too bitter: precisely through this synthesis of two simple sensations does passion arise from simpler feelings, and likewise the chord of E major illuminates both "dolce" and "misera," both sweetness and misery, shining with strange light in the darkness of g minor. Connecting these harmonies her melody traverses the tritone interval between high D and $G\sharp$ showing how it is the unstable tritone which is the very heart of the technique of modulation. Indeed, there is something uncanny about this sudden reversal in the story of the tritone, the rejected stone which becomes the key of the arch.

Here the analogy might best be to the contemporary theory of radioactive transformations. The dream of the alchemists found a realization in our century in the discovery of the transformation of one chemical element into another through the intermediary of an unstable "pivot" substance, a radioactive isotope. The tritone provides exactly this source of unstable "radioactivity" that effects many modulations. Is it too extreme to propose this comparison between the development of modulatory music and the bomb?

As he loses Euridice again Orfeo feels the horror of being dragged against his will to what he calls the "odious light." The chorus of spirits immediately comments that "Orpheus overcame Hell and was overcome by his passions. Eternal fame is deserved only by him who overcomes himself." It is not an accident that the great musician, the first master of the new music of the passions, was overcome by those very passions he had summoned up. For the unclouded happiness with which Orpheus begins to lead Euridice back to the Earth is quickly obscured by passionate ambiguity. His happiness turns to doubt: is she really there? He fears that the envy of the gods stands between him and seeing her face to face, and his fear seizes upon some noise, as if that were the Furies attacking him to rob her. "What Pluto forbids, Love commands," he says, yet it is not Love which speaks to him but his own turbulent fears. The chorus seems to say that a steadfast love would have bound him not to look, but to keep faith. But it is in his very nature to turn around for it is by turning lamentation to sweetness that he has moved Proserpina to persuade Pluto to yield Euridice up.

One sees this in the very first moment Orfeo appears, on the happiest day of his life (as he himself says), the day in which "pity has stirred the soul, till now so disdainful, of the lovely Euridice," as a shepherd companion says, the day of their marriage. But, the shepherd continues, if once your laments moved the trees to weep, why do not you now cause them to rejoice with you? As our example begins the shepherd says, "May

the testimony of your heart be some happy song, dictated by love." In response Orfeo sings, "Rose of the heavens, life of the world and worthy offspring of him who rules the universe, O Sun, who encompasses and sees all from celestial circles, tell me, did you ever see a happier and more fortunate lover than I?" [Example 7: "Rosa del ciel," Act I, mm. 127–138] Surely no composer has ever faced a greater challenge: to show us the arch-musician and convince us of his transcendent mastery from the very first instant he sings. Monteverdi's insight is telling: the great musician is profoundly melancholy even when he is supposed to be happiest, and not sad in the older sense of *gravitas*, the reposeful seriousness and steadfastness which is the root and original sense of our English word (as when Walter tempted his wife Griselda, "hir sadness for to knowe" in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*).[18] This is even more striking in view of the shepherds' express request that he sing "some happy song, dictated by love" and the very style of the shepherd's own song. Orfeo's melancholy is his yielding up to the ceaselessness of his passions and it stirs the pity of Euridice and later of Proserpina because in it they recognize the bliss of passionate love, both sweet and bitter at once. It is the melancholy of extreme happiness, already somehow feeling in its intensity that the beloved must die. One thinks of the glimpses Tolstoy gives us of Anna Karenina, of her great beauty, and even more of her "shining gray eyes .. as though an excess of something so filled her whole being that it expressed itself against her will, sometimes in the brilliance of her gaze, sometimes in her smile. She deliberately tried to extinguish that light in her eyes, but it blazed out against her will in that faint smile." The eyes shine but are also dark; her face mingles vitality with "something particularly tender and caressing."[19] Perhaps something of this catches what Euridice saw and loved in his face and voice, and he in hers.

Finally, however, the incomparably moving singer is not able to control the movements of his own passions. The illimitable quality of his sensibility, which gives it its power, cannot be confined, cannot lead Euridice back to earth. In the final act we see Orfeo alone, except for Echo, who adds the note of a kind of auditory Narcissus to the scene. For as Orfeo laments his bitter grief all that comes back to him now are his final syllables, as Echo whispers: "You have lamented! Enough!" Orfeo will not heed these messages but instead reproaches Echo for not giving back to him his entire laments. As with Euridice in Hades, Orfeo does not receive back what he considers his own. Even his lamentations lead to his censure of all other women, whom he says are "proud and perfidious." In saying this he vows that "it will never happen that throgh a common woman Love will pierce my heart

with a golden arrow." In the traditional story as found in Ovid he turns from the love of women altogether to that of young boys, which shows something of the mutable quality of his passions. Ovid remarks that "he was the first to introduce this custom among the people of Thrace."[20] The maddened Bacchantes strike him down because of his disdain for the love of women.

But the opera takes another course. At this point there is an apotheosis as in ancient tragedy and Apollo appears to remonstrate with his son. "Why do you give yourself up to scorn and grief, O my son? No, it is not wise for a generous heart to become a slave of his own passions (*affeto*) ... Do you still not know that earthly delights do not last? Therefore, if you desire to enjoy immortal life come with me to Heaven, which welcomes you." (Act V, mm. 145–210) Then, when Orfeo asks in the following example, "Shall I never again see the sweet eyes of my beloved Euridice?" (using the same harrowing tritone *D* to *G*♯ that Euridice had used) Apollo replies calmly, "In the sun and stars you will be able to recognize her beautiful image." Orfeo agrees to his counsel and Apollo leads him in singing "We rise, singing, to Heaven where true virtue has its just rewards, joy and peace." They imitate each other in elaborate fioriture which are more like the abstract elaborations of pure song than like the impassioned music which Orfeo used to move men and gods. (Act V, mm. 211–250) The chorus of shepherds hail Orfeo as "completely happy, to enjoy heavenly honor there, where the good never diminishes, there, where there is never grief ... thus he receives heavenly grace who experienced Hell here below." Only in the concluding *moresca*, a lively Moorish dance, is there present any echo of the Bacchic fury, but no longer menacing.

In fact, the librettist, Alexander Striggio, had presented Monteverdi originally with a final act which includes Orfeo's death at the hands of the Bacchantes. This Monteverdi did not use, preferring for whatever reasons the ending I have recounted. This happy ending (*lieto fine*) has not lacked critics, who have found it a "letdown" not only from the original myth but also from the dramatic shape of the earlier acts. Some have reconciled themselves to it on the grounds that Monteverdi was writing for the occasion of a royal wedding celebration and thus could not have ended so darkly.[21] But there are, I think, other considerations as well.

In his chosen ending Monteverdi moves from the apotheosis of the singer of affective and passionate music to a larger view of music. As I have noted, the music of the final scene is much closer in spirit to the nobly dispassionate style which Monteverdi called "prima

prattica." It is also true that, throughout the opera, Monteverdi has used this style on many occasions for the larger choral odes such as his version of the Sophoclean chorus "Nothing is undertaken by man in vain" (Act III, mm. 404–445, clearly modeled on the chorus *πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ* from Sophocles' *Antigone*). For instance, when Orfeo begins his song to charm Charon, the boatman guarding the underworld, he sings in the same lovely but abstract manner that Apollo later takes up, with much fioriture. But when he sees how unmoved the philistine Charon is, he cries out, in an unforgettable chromatic line, "Give me back my love, O gods of Tartarus!" which leaves none of the hearers unmoved, except for the snoring boatman ("Possente spirito," Act III, mm. 160–350). Thus Monteverdi seems to reserve the seconda prattica for Orfeo and Euridice and the characters whom they address and move. In this way he encloses the seconda prattica in a larger frame which includes prima prattica as well. The ending seems to return to the prima prattica with a sense of its heavenly superiority, as if it were the heavenly reward for the hellish journey Orfeo has undergone, which finally was unsuccessful. It is here that the critics ask whether this is not cowardice or artistic failure on Monteverdi's part. Did he not want, at last, to put the genii back in the bottle after having so largely released it on the world? Or is it a heartless desire for repose and closure after so many vicissitudes? My only point is that for Monteverdi these two musics exist in a certain dialogue, and that as it stands he seems to be saying to us that in the end even the most ardent votary of the passions must lay them aside to find "joy and peace," so that "he who sows in suffering shall reap the fruit of every grace." The Platonic note of the ending is clear: instead of the beloved body, we are promised the vision of a beautiful form in the sun and the stars. Orfeo recognizes that to be worthy of his father, Apollo, he should heed this promise; of his human mother we hear not a word.

Within this larger frame I think we can locate all the music that has been written since Monteverdi's opera which is, I suggest, the central work in the unfolding dialogue of ancient and modern music. Among the succeeding masters Bach in particular balanced the two musics so that in the *St. Matthew Passion* one does not know whether to admire more the expressivity of the great aria "Erbarme dich" or the inward rapture of "Mache dich mein Herze rein." But increasingly the tide was overwhelmingly in favor of passionate submersion until that thought-provoking moment when a music lover fainted during a performance of the Prelude to *Tristan*.[22] Ever heightened expressivity must eventually lead either to such a swoon into insensibility or to a kind of satiation, of boredom. By virtue of

the very restlessness and insatiable movement that is the motive force of the passions there is finally no sufficient or satisfying passion. One passion must succeed another without end until the passionate soul burns itself out in a love-death or can feel nothing more through sheer exhaustion. As Shakespeare had said, such passion is "consumed by that it was nourished by" (Sonnet 78). Thus there is an inherent limitation of self-consumption that shadows the modern music. And what happens when it dares to consume itself to ash?

Perhaps the late music of Beethoven already shows the outcome. In his own works Beethoven had forged ever bolder and more fiery statements, throwing himself towards the extremes of defiance and passionate submission. In his final piano sonata, Op. 111, the first movement is in sonata form and is filled with passionate assertions, though tempered by a more reflective and gentle second subject. This movement might well stand as a telling example of the endless fascination of sonata form during this whole phase of European music. From this perspective sonata form represents a particular intensification of the essential movement of modern music, which takes two themes, two moods, two tonal areas, and searches out intently the mysterious transformation that unites them, as if in that intentness to seize that transformation, to grasp and try to hold its fullest power. But Beethoven's second and final movement is a series of variations, the most circular and unmoving of forms, which turn and return on themselves like the spheres. Although Beethoven raises his simple theme to some animation, it immediately subsides into a mysterious ecstasy. [Example 8: Op. 111, second movement mm. 81–100] It is as if one hears, from a great distance, the music of the spheres. Here passion has led to a kind of passion for passionlessness, to the only sensation that does not lead to satiation. When Wagner heard this in Beethoven's music he found it a melancholy too profund for any tears; to Berlioz it was terrifying, perhaps because he found such a expressive "blank" unintelligible and bewildering.[23] For Beethoven I think it was something he discerned on the ultimate horizon of his art and of his life. One sees better why he struggled so with the great forms of prima prattica in his last years, with fugue and countrapuntal artifice, for through them he was trying to reach this calm and passionless ground where, after that long struggle, he might recive a blessing.

In our century when the structure of tonality seemed to collapse under its ever extended expressivity it was to this more primal ground that composers looked. I am thinking of the crystalline tones of Webern's music, of the calm that suceeds the mortal struggle in Berg's *Violin Concerto*, of Apollo raising his lyre heavenward at the end of Stravinsky's

Orpheus, of the vision of the end of the world that concludes Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*. Although I am deeply impressed by these works I do not want to remove the sense of the *question* that remains about the ancient and the modern music. To which music should we turn for guidance and illumination? Should our lives aim towards expressivity and power or towards inwardness and beauty? And if we are tempted to dissolve the problem by fusing the two musics, to what extent can these they live together and complement each other, or to what extent must at last the primal vision absorb our energies and our restless souls, as it did for Beethoven? For my part, I hope you see the ways in which the ancient, primal music is deeply significant and important.

At least I hope that you will agree that there is no sense to the claim that the only "important" music is that of the masters from Bach on. No understanding of music can really be achieved if the great works of ancient music are not given the place they deserve, which is definitely not simply that of being a brief preparation before one plunges into the "real" music, the tonal music of Mozart, Bach, or Beethoven. To study modern music without hearing its dialogue with the ancient would be like asserting that ancient philosophy is merely a prelude to Cartesian thought. As with philosophy, the modern seems to come to us bearing the ancient in its arms.

Also, I don't think it is sufficient to study ancient music only as a theoretical discipline without hearing, singing, and (above all) even trying to compose it. Its fullness requires of us that we find out by living experience what its way with us is. Beginning one's study of music with chant has an agreeable, salutary strangeness that is very like the strangeness of the ancient works of philosophy and mathematics, so mysterious and provocative. By beginning so far from common experience one is liberated from it, to some degree, and there is a chance for a fresh start both for those who do not know or love classical music as well as for those who do. What is strange draws us to wonder and question and if there is a *question* concerning music, we are helped, perhaps, in finding our way to it.

This question is not only a matter of interest to musical afficionados but also speaks to each of us as we conduct our lives. The choice between the expressive and the inward, between passion and emotion, between power and beauty, between greatness and goodness, determines the whole stance of our being. Will we always be moving restlessly, or will our passions at last find their end? Music will help us see for ourselves. Perhaps indeed we shall rest.

NOTES

[1] Calvin M. Bowers, *Boethius: The Principles of Music* (Ph.D. Dissertation, George Peabody College, 1966), Book I, Ch. 1, pp. 28–30, 32–33; this selection (and many of the others cited below) can be found in Peter D. Pesic (ed.), *Sophomore Music Manual* (St. John's College Bookstore, Santa Fe, 1983 and following editions). Another source is Oliver Strunk (ed.), *Source Readings in Music History* (Norton, New York, 1950), pp. 79–86.

[2] Bowers, Ref. 1, Book I, Ch. 2.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[4] *Ibid.*, Book I, Ch 10.

[5] See the extremely valuble essay by Bruce Venable, "Music as a Liberal Art" in *The Great Books Today 1991* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Brittanica, 1991), pp. 287–316. Galileo Galilei's comment on the tritone is found in his *Two New Sciences*, p. 147

[6] *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Q. 12, Art. 10.

[7] For a modern edition see George Houle (ed.), *Ockeghem's* Missa cuiusvis toni (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

[8] Bowers, Ref. 1, Book I, Ch. 20.

[9] *Ibid.*, Book I, Ch. 21.

[10] *Ibid.*, Book I, Ch. 1, pp. 30–39.

[11] *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

[12] Strunk, Ref. 1, p. 306; a complete translation can be found in Robert H. Herman, *Dialogo della Musica Antica et della Moderna of Vincenzo Galilei: Translation and Commentary*, (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, North Texas State University, 1973).

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 307.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 319.

[15] I am indebted to the extremely interesting discussion given by John C. Briggs, *Francis Bacon and the Rhetoric of Nature* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1989), pp. 1–2, 134–136. For the relation between Galilei father and son see Stillman Drake, "Vincenzo Galilei and Galileo," in his *Galileo Studies* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI, 1970), pp. 43–62

[16] James Spedding (ed.), *The Works of Francis Bacon* (Garrett Press, New York, 1968), vol. VI, pp. 720–722.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 764.

[18] Chaucer, *Clerk's Tale*, l. 452. See C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge University Press, 1961), pp. 75–85.

[19] Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina* Part I Ch. 18.

[20] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Book XI.

[21] John Whenham, *Claudio Monteverdi* Orfeo (Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 35–41 (Striggio's original Act V), pp. 20–33 (Act V and its critics). See also Denis Arnold and Nigel Fortune (eds.), *The Monteverdi Companion* (Norton, New York, 1968), pp. 167–191 (on Monteverdi and prima prattica), pp. 257–276.

[22] Recounted in Elliott Zuckerman, *The First Hundred Years of Wagner's Tristan* (Columbia University Press, New York).

[23] J. W. N. Sullivan, *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development* (Vintage Books, New York,

1927), p. 160.