David's Lament:
Modes, Moods, and Melody

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in memory of Bruce Venable

The Roman philosopher Seneca described two kinds of discourse that could treat a learned subject.[1] One he calls an "exhortation to study." It addresses readers in general, particularly young ones, and offers them "persuasion, consolation, and encouragement" in their studies. The writer encourages the student's desire to cross the bridge into philosophy, and also helps build that bridge. Knowledge, and virtue, are teachable, and are ends in themselves. We must have courage and we will begin to find our way towards them. To that end Seneca says that the liberal arts "prepare the soul for the reception of virtue." For that we need an introduction, the other main sort of discourse Seneca describes.

At this juncture there stands before me a young man, about twenty, who lived about fifteen hundred years ago. He became, perhaps unwittingly, the exhorter and guide for all of Western civilization after him, the one above all who introduced music as a liberal art, an integral part of mathematics, to a barbaric world. His name was Ancius Manlius Torquatus Severinus Boethius (ca. 480-524 A. D.); he was the advisor of a barbarian king, Theodoric the Ostrogoth, who ruled in northern Italy. The sounds of Greek and Roman music still rang in Boethius's ears, and the noble aspirations of classical philosophy were living realities for him. Theodoric finally threw Boethius into prison near Milan on trumped-up charges of treason. As he awaited execution Boethius wrote a short book in which he depicted himself in prison conversing with Lady Philosophy.This work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, was the most widely read book in medieval times. His execution a year later left long memories; he is still venerated in the city of Pavia as a martyr. Boethius might have been astonished to know that his book on *The Principles of Music* was the central text for the study of music Europe for almost a thousand years.[2]

Through such a strait passage the ancient art of music has come down even to us, who have scarcely any idea of how that music might have *sounded.* It is as if no Greek tragedy were extant, but only Aristotle's *Poetics* survived to tell of them. Boethius wrote perhaps never anticipating how much would turn on his account, or how much it would be needed. This gives, I think, heightened pathos to his exhortation for us to consider the nobility and force of music. Boethius exhorts us to bear in mind that music can ennoble us, or make us more base, and he reminds us that music is so close to us that we never can escape it. He transmits Plato's idea that the soul and the cosmos are made of music. He offers us the essential bridge to philosophy: the preparation of the soul through mathematics and music.

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Boethius states that "that man is a musician who has the faculty of judging the modes and rhythms, as well as the genera of songs and their mixtures, and the songs of the poets..."[3] He testifies that various modes can exalt and inflame hearers. But what does he really mean by the modes, and what, exactly, is their peculiar force?

Modes are not simply scales, although they rely on the particular sequence of whole and half-steps that we record as "scales."[4] Modern Western music relies on only one scale, the major scale, and its closely related offshoot, the minor scale. This is in itself remarkable. Compared to our one scale, classical Indian music has over a hundred different modes or *rāgas*. Boethius knew of several modes, named after ancient nations or stocks who comprised the Greek world: Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian. The ethnic diversity of Greek modes is strongly contrasted with our own uniformity. But how could their modes have been so much more potent than ours?

Let us look carefully at our major scale and what we know of the ancient modes. They all share a common trait: they lie within the "diatonic genus", meaning that they only use alternating whole tones and semitones, following the general pattern of semitone, tone, tone. Never are two semitones put next to each other, and never do more than three whole tones follow each other without a semitone. Indeed, Boethius did know music of the "chromatic genus," in which two semitones were followed by a skip of two tones, or even the "enharmonic genus," which used quarter tones. He indicates that these other genera each had their own marked qualities.[5] Staying within the diatonic, we can look at the usual depiction of the modern scale, next to the ancient modes [see examples]. Stated in this way, they all look bland: they all are arrangements of the "white keys" of the piano starting on different notes, the C major scale on C, the dorian scale on D, the phyrgian on E, the lydian on F, the mixolydian on G. What could possibly have been so different about them?

Clearly the exact order of tones and semitones is different in each case. The major scale is

T T S T T T S

and the mixolydian is

T T S T T S T

But this detailed comparison shows yet more clearly the similiarity of these two arrangements, which only differ by exchanging the last two intervals! I will try to show you what tremendous thing lies in this exchange, but not in the abstract. My witness will be a singular work of art -- and each work of art is itself a whole cosmos, a higher authority than any theoretical argument -- Peter Abelard's *Planctus David super Saul et Ionatha.*

Abelard's life (1079-1142) was an unforgettable example of Huizinga's dictum that the people of the middle ages lived more vivid lives than we can imagine, that their joys and sorrows were both more intense than ours. The most brilliant (and possibly the most arrogant) young scholar of his day, he infuriated his elders and electrified his younger contemporaries. Most unforgettable was his passionate affair with his pupil Héloïse, herself remarkable for

intelligence and education.[6] What began on Abelard's part as cold calculating seduction ended with both swept far beyond themselves. At last Héloïse's uncle Fulbert, a canon of Notre Dame, learned the truth and Abelard offered to marry her, but secretly. Héloïse's letters later clarify that it was she who resisted the marriage, which she considered a stain both on Abelard's glory as a cleric and theologian, yet even more on his dignity as a philosopher.[7] The marriage occurred, but further scenes with Fulbert ensued, and Abelard sent Héloïse to stay in a convent, presumably to keep her out of Fulbert's way. However, Fulbert took this as Abelard's attempt to get rid of her by packing her off to a convent, and in his fury concocted a terrible vengeance: he sent his servants to seek out Abelard and castrate him. In the tumultous aftermath Abelard withdrew to the monastery of St. Denis and asked Héloïse in turn to enter religion as the abbess of a small priory that Abelard established. This she did, although she repeatedly insisted she had no vocation, and only longed to taste those carnal joys that now were impossible.

Nonetheless, she took up her duties as abbess in good faith and, over the years, engaged in a long correspondence with Abelard. In those letters we learn that he wrote love poetry for her which, though now seemingly lost, establishes him as the earliest of the French trouvères, poet-musicians who sang of the religion of Love.[8] Notably, Abelard wrote both the poetic text for these works as well as the musical setting. He also wrote hymns for Heloise's abbey (many of them only rediscovered in 1972)[9], particularly an unforgettable setting of a text for Sabbath vespers *O quanta qualia*, and a series of six works he called *planctus*.[10] These are songs of lamentation to original Latin poems Abelard wrote drawing on the Old Testament: Jacob's ravished daughter, Dinah, laments her fate; Jacob takes leave of his beloved Benjamin departing for Egypt; the people of Israel mourn Samson; David laments Abner, his murdered supporter.[11] Though each of these works combined words and music, only the sixth has survived with text and music intact, Abelard's setting of David's lament over Saul and Jonathan. The scene is drawn from 2 Samuel 1. Saul has fallen, perhaps at his own hand, during a battle with the Philistines and Amalekites, idolators hostile to the Israelites.[12] As he becomes king first of Judah and then of all Israel, David laments the death of Saul, whom David had soothed with music from his evil spirit. More bitterly, David laments the death of Jonathan, his beloved companion; Abelard follows closely the Biblical text of David's lament: "your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26)..

As one listens to this work one recognizes it as falling generally under the mixolydian mode, according to the classification of the church modes.[13] This is indicated by G being the final note of the whole work, and also by the melody conforming to the order of tones and semitones in the mixolydian mode. But the work also has a complex inner articulation which reflects the careful versification of the Latin text. Abelard chooses a line of eight syllables that he deploys with great skill and much variation of the caesurae, the break that divides the eight syllables into 4 + 4, 2 + 6, or other possibilities. He also chooses stanzas artfully; the work begins with 2 six-line stanzas rhymed aabccb, then turns to 4 four-line stanzas ddee. Then follow 9 stanzas even more tightly rhymed ffff, returning to the earlier pattern gghh for 2 stanzas, then 4 gggg, finally 2 jjkk, as the lament begins to subside. At the very end

Abelard creates a moving *envoi*, two final stanzas of only three lines each, all rhymed together as David's harp falls silent. The broken quality of the short final stanzas, broken further into individual lines by their exhaustive rhyming, mirrors the grieving singer's exhaustion. Silence falls; his hand is wounded from striking the harp, his voice and breath fail, as if death itself were overtaking the singer.[14]

Abelard deploys the mode to give musical form to this elaborate poetic construction. Next to the text I have schematically indicated the successive phrases which Abelard uses (labelled by bracketed capital letters [A-N], also listed by the text to show the way Abelard repeats, combines, and varies these phrases).[15] Notice that the first few phrases depart from G and return there, exploring both the notes immediately above G as well as those below it, as far as D Gradually the successive phrases probe upwards from G, but not directly or uniformly; the motion comes in gentle waves that periodically touch back on G, or circle around the D a fifth higher. This note D occupies a position of peculiar importance in this mode, as does the fifth degree in many modes: the "dominant" or "reciting tone" is a kind of secondary center of the mode, after the final, G.

The slow expansion of the range reaches its climax on the high G a full octave above the final G. This peak is first reached in phrase [G], just after the singer utters the prophetic cry "Woe!" Such a gradual unfolding of the mode is not only used by Abelard; it often occurs in Gregorian chants, and is also the strategy of the slow improvisatory *alap* with which an Indian musician begins the exposition of the mode, the *rāga*. Though there is a certain dramatic effect to this gradual exposition, there is also something emotionally and intellectually compelling about the slow discovery of the nature and identity of the mode. In this one realizes that a mode is not simply a collection of notes and intervals that one could grasp all at once, but a graded series of different but connected revelations, each of which takes some time to assimilate and savor. As he repeats his phrases Abelard also leads us to re-experience with ever heightened awareness the successive facets of the mode, mounting higher with his lamentation. The felt reality of lamentation also is not simply a single piercing utterance or outcry; it is keening, the manifold repeated cry of grief that rends itself over and over again.

After many traversals up and down the octave between low and high G a stark silence falls before the final two stanzas. The silent harp is mirrored by the quiet phrases hovering between D and G. The singer himself wishes that he could ever ceast to lament. The huge arch that had led to high G, the apex of the mode, now comes to rest on the G with which he had begun. As in so many earlier phrases, the dominant D acts as the intermediate, the fulcrum that balances the high and low G.

In all these phrases one realizes again that the mode is not just a certain scale or set of notes but also a family of melodic types, of motives and characteristic melodic gestures. This, too, joins it with Indian practice, for each *rāga* is recognized by the way certain telling melodic patterns or figures bring into relief the underlying intervals of the mode. These figures center on the treatment of the final and dominant, of G and D, but they also involve

crucially the treatment of the semitones in the mode. Abelard has devoted much care to the occasions and the ways in which he has interwoven the two semitones B-C and E-F into the phrases. Also important for later consideration is the way he bridges between these two sets of semitones by filling out the interval F-B. This interval, the tritone, marks the greatest distance any melody in a diatonic mode can move without using a semitone; note how [B] ends strongly outlining a tritone, as does the final phrase [N].

This leads us to the mystery with which we began. Abelard has made us feel the strange and beautiful force of the mode that has governed all of his phrases without any change or alteration. What is the source of that strange exaltation, when after all this mode is so close to a modern major mode?

The key is the absence of the leading tone, I think. If we were to change this piece to the modern major key of G it would only require changing every F to a F♯, the leading tone a semitone below the tonic G. [Example: phrases [G-I] with F → F♯] The phrases all would have nearly the same shape, only a jarring cheerfulness would obtrude from the F♯. Our experiment reveals that, indeed, that change would drastically alter the felt effect of the work. But why should such a small change have such a huge effect?

The answer lies hidden in the ordering of tones and semitones. In the diatonic order, which includes both the major mode and Abelard's mixolydian mode, there lurks a hidden force that emanates from an interval implicit in each mode: the tritone. This interval (called by moderns the augmented fourth or diminished fifth) is dissonant, although it is composed of three whole steps. In fact, it was called by the paradoxical name of *discordantia perfecta*, perfect discord, along with the minor second and major seventh. Though never used in Gregorian chant between two notes, progressons that outline the tritone B-F are not uncommon.[16] It was also known in medival times as *diabolus in musica*, the devil in music. Its ratio is 9^3: 2^6, or 729:512, which for Boethius is far less intelligible than the octave (2:1) or the fifth (3:2). But despite this it makes itself felt to the body, if not to the intellect. The tritone draws the ear to expect a resolution. In the major mode built on G, the tritone is between F♯ and C and strongly tends to contract to the major third G-B. It is crucial that this resolved interval points back strongly to G, the keynote of that scale, and to the "tonic triad" G-B-D central to the harmonic understanding of the modern modes.

What of Abelard's mode? There is, to be sure, a tritone hiding there too -- in fact, any diatonic mode *must* have one somewhere, as a little thought will confirm. A tritone must occur in any diatonic mode either because one traverses three tones (the greatest number one can have without a semitone) or by traversing two tones and a semitone. This in turn goes back to the fact that it is impossible to divide an octave into six equal tones; for this reason, the semitone was introduced so that the octave could exactly be expressed as five whole tones ad two semitones, which then must be interwoven among the whole tones in some way. Mythologically, although Mercury introduced the octave, fourth, and fifth, it seems to have be Orpheus who went on to construct the diatonic scale, and hence to introduce the semitone into music, with all its fateful effects.[17]

The tritone in the mixolydian mode is *different* than the one in the major mode, just because of the different order of semitones and tones. The Mixolydian tritone is B-F, and it tends to resolve to C-E, *not* to G-B, as the modern tritone F♯-C does. The importance of this is that, while the modern tritone always draws the ear back to the same tonic note underlying that mode (G), the mixolydian tritone draws the ear to a *different* center (C) than that of the mode.[18] The same general conclusion follows if one considers any one of the other ancient modes: their lack of a raised leading tone requires that the tritone contained in each resolves *away* from the final on which the mode is built!

This, then, is the source of the strange floating feeling that imbues Abelard's mode, and the other ancient modes as well. One's mind is being pulled towards the final, but one's senses are being drawn strongly to a *different* center, one that is a fifth below the final (C, in the case of the mixolydian). It is as if one were suspended between two centers of force, each pulling in opposite directions. What is more, since all the ancient modes have the same tritone F-B, that tritone leads to the same center for all of them: C. Thus despite the fact that each mode has a different final and a different order of tones and semitones, all these modes share a hidden, implicit center, the note C. However, the several modes differ because in each case their final (and dominant) lie at a different distance from C. So, in the case of the dorian mode, the final D hovers only one whole step above the hidden center C. Likewise, the phrygian (final E) lies a major third above C, the lydian (final F) a fourth, and the mixolydian (final G) a perfect fifth. This same relationship is reflected in the fact that in each case the tritone is found at a different place in the mode in relation to the final: closest is the lydian, where the tritone F-B lies on the final F, next closest the phrygian, whose final E lies a semitone beneath F, and furthest in the mixolydian, where final G is a whole step from F.

This account appeals to the tonal force of the tritone in a way that is, in fact, crucial to the harmonic practice of all composers since Monteverdi. The raised leading tone is essential to the modern authentic cadence, the dominant → tonic V-I that is the most commonplace gesture of tonal music. This cadence is further amplified by the addition of the dominant seventh; in C major, the dominant seventh chord is G-B-D (note the leading tone B) with the addition of the seventh F. It is precisely the tritone B-F which leads even more strongly to the tonic C than just the dominant without its added seventh.

In modern tonality the tritone is used as a motive force which reaffirms the tonal center. The ancient modes, viewed from this perspective, all exist in some tension between their final note and the hidden center implied by the tritone. Why does not one feel the mode dissociate under the tension of those opposed centers? Boethius noted that in judging music the senses and the intellect diverge. He urges us to prefer the judgment of reason to that of sense. Finally, the intellect wins out, and it is the final which prevails. But in the course of this dialectic of sense and intellect one has begun to move in a new dimension: one experiences physically the sensation of floating free of the senses. The haunting quality of the modes are, I think, a direct effect of this levitation. The sensation of floating, after all, counterpoints the pull of gravity -- the sensual forces of the tritone -- with the way one is not bound to the earth. The mode denies the supremacy of the gravitational field of the tritone; it

indicates a realm of freedom. So it is that one notices that the "political" order of notes in the ancient modes are different from those in the modern major. The final governs its notes far more gently; they float about it and move towards it without great force. The tonic of the major mode pulls very insistently on its leading tone, urgently demanding the resolution of the tritone in its own favor.

There is valuble testimony on the tritone that can be gleaned from a very different song, an anonymous Middle English lyric called *Worldes blis*, written in the thirteenth century.[19] The words express the sentiment of *contemptus mundi*, disillusionment with the world, both with its joys and sorrows. The music moves within a small set of notes, as narrow as Abelard's range was wide. Where Abelard used a compass of an octave plus a fifth (large in comparison with most Gregorian chants) *Worldes blis* lies within a minor sixth, using only the notes D-E-F-G-A-B♭ over and over again. In this narrow compass there is no tritone; this is because of the note B♭ which was a relatively late development in chant. Only the "hard" B occurs naturally in the ancient modes and the "soft" B♭ (the physical shape of ♭ records its softness) was clearly invented to avoid the tritone and to allow the creation of what Guido of Arezzo called *cantus mollis*, "soft song" in contrast to the *cantus durus*, "hard song" with the "hard" B.

The felt effect of this soft B♭ pervades the lulling sonorities of *Worldes blis*; in this work the semitone is used to give important contrast to the prevalent use of stepwise motion through whole tones. Lacking the tritone (even in outline), the semitones E-F and A-B♭ give the song its moments of quiet irresolution. Compared to Abelard's allusions to the tritone, though, *Worldes blis* alludes in a distant, muted way to the tritone's call for resolution. It is as if David's intense lament were complete, and in the stillness one heard the voice of divine wisdom singing the illusion of earthly passion and the bliss of heaven that does not fail.

David's lament is bound by the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. Yet the very act of lamenting, of singing, transcends the passions that moved the singer. As one hears Abelard's setting one is not so much sad as transported beyond the passions that set the scene. Whether the outer world is grim or glad, music offers not so much an opportunity to vent the passions -- the project of so much modern music since Monteverdi -- as to find the comfort, the ceaseless wonder and consolation, that lies in the eternal realm of tones.

In his dungeon, facing execution, the young Boethius complains bitterly to Lady Philosophy of the terrible injustice he suffers, of his unjust condemnation, of the loss of life and family. As their discourse progresses his bitter mood fades, for she shows him the hidden divinity that, in its mysterious intelligence, lies beyond the things of this world. Midway in their conversation she tells him the story of Orpheus, to show that the inability to overcome one's passions leads to a fateful turning back, and to the loss of what is dearest. Near the end, she uses the story of Hercules to exemplify the arduous trials required by philosophy to temper the soul. "Go forth then bravely following the lofty path of high example. Why do you sluggards turn your backs? When the earth is overcome, the stars are yours."[20]

Between their discourses Lady Philosophy sings to Boethius, recounting stories such as these to comfort and fortify his spirits. In his musical and mathematical works Boethius had set forth the ancient modes as part of the preparation, the initiation into true philosophy. He faced death with the sense of the relation of human feelings to the larger realities that Philosophy had disclosed to him. Ultimately, music is not only preparation; it is the living experience of the human soul breaking free of its mortal confines, touching the vesture of eternity. Listening to the modes that mediate between the soul and the stars, he heard wisdom singing.

Notes

Abelard's *Planctus David* (also referred to by its opening line as *Dolorum solatium*) is available in a performance by Paul Hillier on "Troubadour Songs and Medieval Lyrics," Hyperion A66094; it is also included by Sequentia in its "Visions from the Book," Deutsche Harmonia Mundi D113010. Mr. Hillier also sings *Worldes blis* on the same recording.

For an invaluble discussion of the issues concerning the nature of music (especially with regard to neo-Platonic thought) see Bruce Venable, "Music as a Liberal Art" and " 'Notes from Yon Exaltation Caught': Church Singing and the Fathers" in *The Great Ideas Today* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Brittanica), [1991] pp. 287-316, [1993] pp. 164-212.

1. Seneca, *Letters* 95, 65, 88, 20; see Leo Schrade, "Music in the Philosophy of Boethius," *Musical Quarterly* **33** (1947), 188-200.

2. For a complete translation with commentary see "Boethius' *The Principles of Music*, an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary," Calvin M. Bower, unpublished Ph.D. disertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, 1966. Bower aruges that much of Boethius' work is in fact a translation or paraphrase of works by Nicomachus or Ptolemy; see pp. 333-369.

3.Boethius, *Principles of Music*, Book I, chapter 34 (p. 104, Bower translation). Many of the passages discussed in this paper can be found collected in the *Sophomore Music Manual* (Santa Fe: St. John's College Bookstore, 1997 amd subsequent editions).

4. For a helpful summary of the modes see Richard H. Hoppin, *Medieval Music* (New yok: W. W. Norton, 1978), pp. 64-78; an earlier work of great importance that also discusses their relation to Greek modes is Hugo Riemann, *History of Music Theory* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1974), pp. 3-10.

5. See Boethius Book I, chapter 21 (pp. 84-85).

6.See Étienne Gilson, *Heloise and Abelard* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972).

7. Gilson recounts this story very sensitively; for a modern edition see *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, tr. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974).

8. For this judgment see Michel Huglo, "Abélard, poète et musicien," *Cahiers de civilisation medievale* **22**:4 (1979), 349-361 at 353.

9. See Father Chrysogonus Waddell, "*Epithalamica*: An Easter Sequence by Peter Abelard," *Musical Quarterly* **72** (1986), 239-271.

10. For an excellent discussion of these works see Peter Dronke, *Poetic Individuality in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 114-146; this work includes a transcription of *Dolorum solatim* on pp. 202-209.

11. For Abelard's treatment of Judaism see his *A Dialogue of a Philosopher with a Jew, and a Christian*, tr. Pierre J. Payer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1979), pp. 24-71.

12. Note the alternate account given of the death of Saul in 1 Samuel 31.

13. Since there is a passages at the beginning that goes below the final G to a low D it may more properly be classified as Hypomixolydian, the plagal tetrardus. However, most of the planctus does not go below G, as if it were simply Mixolydian. In either case, the modality of this work is somewhat exceptional.

14. For the relation of death to music see Kathi Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 270-290.

15. Here I follow the invaluble transcription and analysis given by Lorenz Weinrich, "Peter Abaelard as Musician -- I, II," *Musical Quarterly* **55** (1969), 295-312, 464-486, at 468-474.

16. See William Drabkin, "Tritone" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: Macmillan, 1980), vol. 19, pp. 154-155. Glarean observes that the tritone is "a hard fourth, and clearly unsuitable in th diatonic genus, arises from three whole tones and no one uses it as a lep in a song..." See "Clement Albin Miller, "The *Dodecachordon* of Heinrich Glarean," Unpublishd Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1950, p. 92.

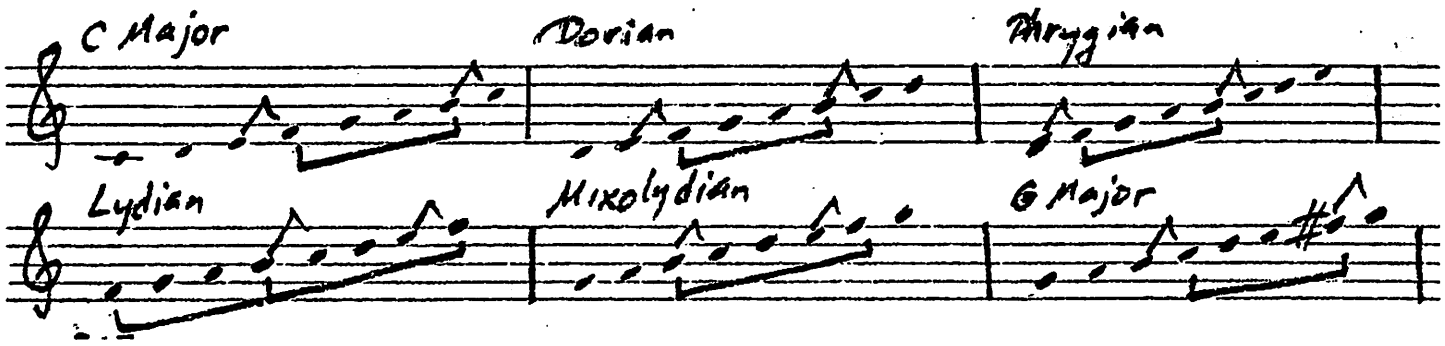
17. Boethius gives this account in Book I, chapter 22 (pp. 72ff); it is unclear, even in the mythic accounts, of exactly what Orpheus himself was supposed to have done. Boethius gives the names of the inventors of the successive strings of the cithara, who seem somehow to have been of the generation of Orpheus.

18. This observation was also noted by Leonard G. Ratner, in the context of his discussion of tonal harmony in the light of resolutions of the tritone: "*In the major scale o f C the resolution of the tritone affirms the importance of the tonal center.* However, when the tritone is resolved in the other diatonic scales, it does *not* affirm the tonal center, that is, the tone of

departure and arrival, which is 1 or 8 of the scale." *Harmony* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), p. 21 (italics his).

19. For musical transcripton see E. J. Dobson and F. Ll. Harrison, *Medieval English Songs* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 244-245; an extremely detailed discussion of the sources is given by Daniel William Goodell, "Towards a Performance Edition of the Thirteenth Century Middle English Religious Monody '*Worldes blis*'," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University, 1978.

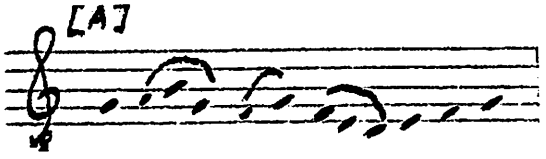
20. Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (New York: Modern Library, 1943), pp. 72-73, 99-100.

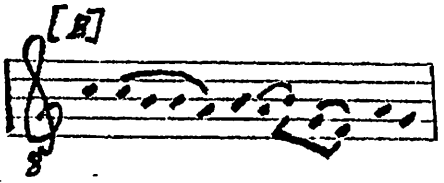


Peter Abelard
PLANCTUS DAVID

Dolorum solatium
laborum remedium
mea michi cithara,
nunc quo maior dolor est
iustiorque meror est
plus est necessaria.

As a consolation for sorrow,
as a healing for distress,
my harp for me —
now that sorrow is heaviest
and sadness most fitting —
becomes more than necessary.



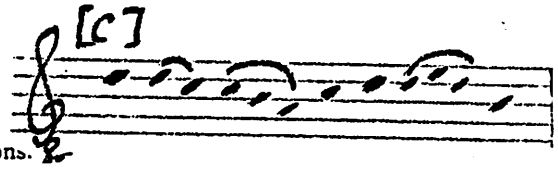


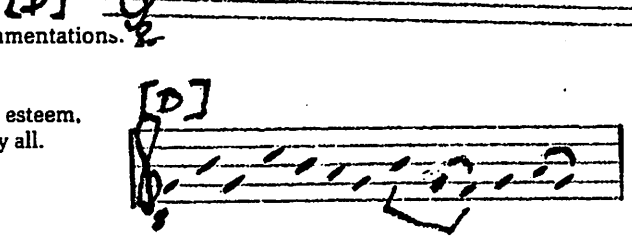
Strages magna populi
regis mors et filii
hostium victoria,
ducum desolatio
vulgi desperatio
luctu replent omnia.

The great massacre of the people,
the death of the king and his son,
the victory of the enemy,
the desolation of the leaders,
the despair of the multitude,
these fill all places with mourning.

Amalech invaluit
Israhel dum corruit;
infidelis iubilat Philistea,
dum lamentis macerat se Iudea.
Insultat fidelibus
infidelis populus.
In honorem maximum plebs adversa,
in derisum omnium fit divina.

Amalek grew in strength
while Israel fell to the ground;
the faithless Philistine is jubilant
while Judah macerates itself with lamentations.
The faithless nation hurls insults
at the faithful people.
The inimical mob is held in highest esteem,
while the Holy is held in derision by all.



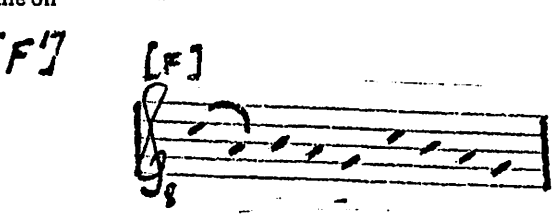


Insultantes inquiunt —
ecce de quo garriunt,
qualiter hos prodidit deus suus,
dum a multis occidit dis
prostratus.
Quos primum his prebuit
victus rex occubuit.
Talis est electio dei sui,
talis consecratio vatis magni.

The mockers say —
Behold how their God, about whom they babble,
has betrayed them. Since the overthrown King
is slain by the many gods.
He whom He first gave,
the vanquished king, is dead.
Thus stands the choice of their God.
Thus the consecration of the Prophet.

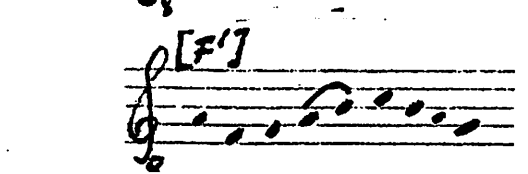
Saul regum fortissime
virtus invicta Ionathe
qui vos nequivit vincere
permissus est occidere.
Quasi non esset oleo
consecratus dominico
sceleste manus gladio
iugulatur in prelio.

Saul, thou mightiest of kings!
O thou invincible manliness of Jonathan!
He who was not able to vanquish you
has been allowed to slay you.
As if he had not been consecrated with the oil
of the Lord, (the king) is
being killed in battle
by the sword of an accursed hand.



Plus fratre michi Ionatha
in una mecum anima
que peccate que scelera
nostra sciderunt viscera.
Expertes montes Gelboe
roris sitis et pluvie
nec agrorum primicie
vestro succrescant incole.

O Jonathan, more than a brother to me,
one with my soul!
Through what sins, what rimes
was our flesh torn asunder?
Mountains of Gilboa,
you shall be without dew and rain,
and the first fruits of your fields
shall not grow for your dwellers.



Ve, ve tibi madida
tellus cede regia
qua et te mi Ionatha
manus stravit impia.
Ubi Christus domini
Israhelque incliti
morte miserabili
sunt cum suis perditi.

Planctum Sion filie
super Saul sumite
largo cuius munere
vos ornabant purpere.
Tu michi mi Ionatha
flendus super omnia
inter cuncta gaudia
perpes erit lacrima.

Heu cur consilio
adquievi pessimo
ut tibi presidio
non essem in prelio.
vel confessus pariter
morerer feliciter
cum quid amor faciat
maius hoc non habeat.
et me post te vivere
mori sit assidue
nec ad vitam anima
satis sit dimidia.

Vicem amicicie
vel unam me reddere
oportebat tempore
summe tunc angustie,
triumphi participem
vel ruine comitem
ut te vel eriperem
vel tecum occumberem.
vitam pro te finiens
quam salvasti tociens
ut et mors nos iungeret
magis quam disiungeret.

Woe, woe unto you,
soil still moist with kingly blood,
where you also my Jonathan
have been felled by an unholy hand.
There where the anointed of the Lord
and where the glory of Israel
lie destroyed, with their people,
by lamentable death.

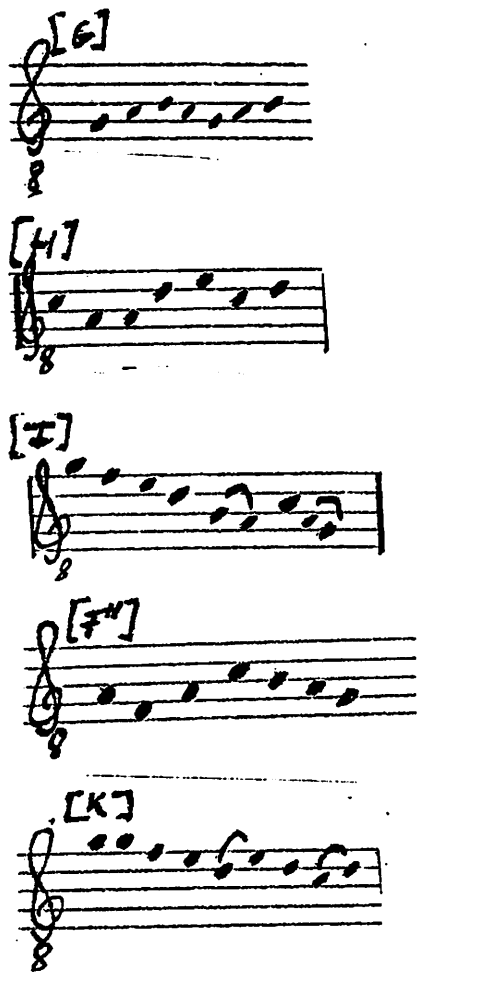
[G]
[H]
[I]
[F"]

Daughters of Sion,
lament over Saul,
whose bountiful gifts
once clothed you in purple.
For you, my Jonathan,
above all, I will have to lament;
henceforth in the midst of every joy
there will always be a tear.

Alas, O why did I agree
to such an evil resolution,
that thus I was not able to be
a shield in battle for you?
or if also wounded,
I could then have died happily,
because whatever love might do,
this it cannot surpass,
while my surviving you
is but to die continuously,
nor is half a soul
enough for life.

[K]
[G]
[H]
[I]
[F"]

At that time of extreme anguish,
the mutual turns of friendship commanded me
to be either a partaker in your triumph
or a companion in your defeat,
so that I could snatch you away
from death or rest with you
among the dead,
ending that life for you
which you had saved so many times,
that thus death,
which separates,
may bind us inseparably.



Infausta victoria
potitus interea
quam vana quam brevia
hinc percepi gaudia.
Quam cito durissimus
est secutus nuntius
quem in suam animam
locutum superbiam,
mortuis quos nuntiat
illata mors aggregat
ut doloris nuntius
doloris sit socius.

Do quietem fidibus;
vellem ut et planctibus
si possem et fletibus.

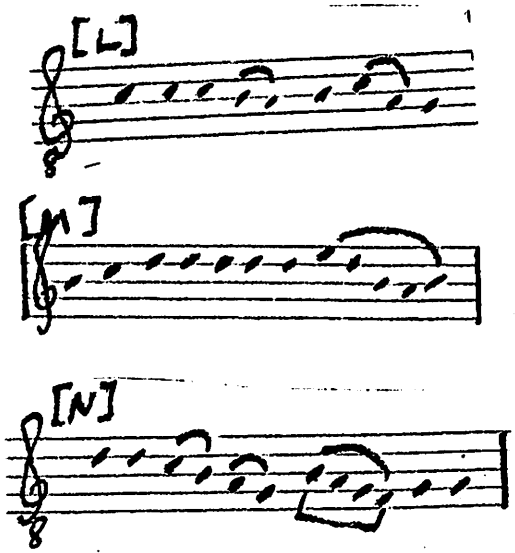
Lesis pulsu manibus
raucis planctu vocibus
deficit et spiritus.

Meanwhile, I obtained
an ill-fated victory;
so how vain and short-lived
the joy I had gathered.
How swiftly followed
the grimmest of messengers,
one who brought death
when speaking with pride in his own heart,
whom death also added to the deed
whose death he was reporting
so that the messenger of sorrow
may also be the companion of sorrow.

I give rest to my harp;
would that thus I could cease
my lamentation and wailing.

[L]
[M]
[N]

My hand is wounded from striking,
my voice is hoarse from lamenting,
and my breath, too, is ceasing.



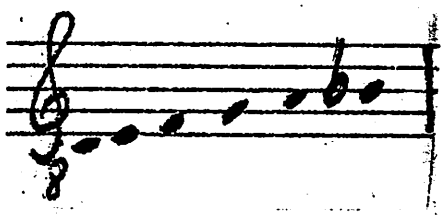
anonymous
WORLDES BLIS

Worldes blis ne last no throwe
It went and wit awey anon.
The langer that ich hit iknowe
The lass ich finde pris tharon.
For al it is imeind mid care
Mid serwen and mid evel fare,
And atte laste povre and bare
It lat man wan it ginth agon.
Al the blis this heer and thare
Bilucth at ende weep and mon.

Worldly bliss does not last for a moment;
it goes away presently.
The longer that I know it the less value
I find in it; for it is all mingled with care,
with sorrows and with ill-success, and at the last
it leaves man poor and naked when it departs.
All the bliss which is here and there amounts at
the end to weeping and grief.

Man wi sestu thout and herte
O worldes blis that nout ne last?
Wi tholstu that thee softe smerte
For thing that is unstedefast?
Thu lickest huni of thorn iwis,
That sest thi luve o worldes blis,
For ful of bitternesse it is.
Ful sore thu might been ofgast
Theer despendest eight amis,
That tharthurw been into helle cast.

Man, why do you set mind and heart on worldly
bliss that does not last?
What do you permit that you should so often be
grieved for things that are transitory? You lick
honey from thorn indeed, who set your love on
worldly bliss, for it is full of bitterness.
You may well be greatly terrified who mis-spend
wealth here, thereby to be cast into hell.



Thinc man warto Crist thee wroute
And do wey preed and felth and
mood.
Thinc wu deere he thee aboute
O roode mid his sweete blood.
Himselven he yaf for thee in pris
To beien thee blis yif thu be wis,
Bithin thee thanne, and up aris
Of senn and gin to werche good
Tharwils time to werchen is
For siker elles thu art wood.

Think man for what purpose Christ created you,
and put away pride and filth and wrath. Think
how dearly he redeemed you on the cross with
his precious blood. He gave himself as a ransom
for you, to buy you bliss if you are prudent;
bethink yourself then and rise up from sin and
begin to do good whilst there is time to act, for
certainly otherwise you are mad.

Shal no good been unforyolde
Ne no quedhed ne wurth about,
Wanne thu list man under modle,
Thu shalt haven as tu hast wrout.
Bithinc wel forthi ich thee reede
And clanse thee of ech misdeede
That he thee help at tine neede
That so deere hath thee about,
And to hevenblisse leede
That ever last and failleth nout.

No good deed shall be unrequited, and no evil
deed will not be paid for; when you lie, man,
under the earth, you shall get what you have
earned. Consider well therefore, I advise you,
and cleanse yourself of each misdeed, so that He
may help you in your need who has so dearly
redeemed you, and may lead you to the bliss of
heaven which ever endures and does not fail.