Class 3 : European Evolution

A. Songs of Praise

1. Class title 1 (*Ordo Virtutum* in Australia)

The slide shows a modern Australian performance of a sacred drama dating from the middle ages; that will be our subject for the second hour. For now, though, I want to start in the classical world.

2. Section class A (*Apollo Belvedere,* with Second Delphic Hymn)
3. Ancient musicians

The music was the opening of the *Second Delphic Hymn to Apollo*, around 150 BCE. It is one of the earliest pieces for which we have a record of the music. But the very, very earliest is actually about 1,300 years before that, a song of praise to the **Hurrian goddess Nikkal**, coming from an area in what is now Syria. The performer here, **Peter Pringle**, is accompanying himself not only on the lute but also on the pipes. These would originally have been taken by a second player, but he has sampled their sound electronically and accesses it via a pedal-board played by his feet.

4. Hurrian Hymn #6 (Peter Pringle)
5. Source of the above

I must say that this, and most of the other examples played in today's class, rather stretch my title *Music on the Stage.* That might suggest some kind of entertainment and a dedicated performance space. But the earliest music we have was not concerned with entertainment at all, but part of a sacred ritual; this is even the case with the Greek dramas we shall be seeing in a moment. This is one reason why I went straight to Asian Arts last week, because *Noh* drama at least also had a sacred function.

6. Oxford Classics Professor Armand d'Angour

I am now going to play parts of a lecture-demo by the man shown here, **Armand d'Angour**, a Professor of Classics at Oxford. He has made a study of Greek and Roman music, attempting to reconstruct pieces from the often-fragmentary sources. I'll put the complete video on the website, but it is 15 minutes long, so I can only play you the beginning and end. We come in on a rehearsal, followed by the beginning of what is actually quite a long explanation. But I'll cut through to a presentation at the Ashmolean Museum at the end, in which we will here first his reconstruction of another of the Delphic Hymns, such as the one we sampled at the beginning, and finally a piece that *is* intended for the stage, the final chorus from the *Orestes* from about 400 BCE by **Euripides** (480–406 BCE).

7. Lecture-demo by Armand d'Angour

B. The Play's the Thing

8. Section title B

It's all very well singing a chorus from a Greek play in a recital, but to have the full effect, it needs to be seen as intended, on stage. Unfortunately, this is difficult. YouTube resources for Greek plays with anything even vaguely resembling authentic music range from slim to non-existent. So I will show you four things: a college production, a professional English production in grey-on-grey video, a rather dark video of a professional Greek production, and a clip from a spoken film. Each shows a different facet of Greek drama; I am hoping that you can put them all together in your imagination.

9. Euripides' *Herakles* at Barnard College, 2019

The college production was a 2019 staging at Barnard College of Euripides' *Herakles* (Hercules). It is quite an undertaking, in that it is all done from memory in the original Greek, and accompanied by authentic-sounding music played live on the *aulos,* or double pipes. Its limitations are that the stage is small, the décor simple, and given the fact that Barnard is a women's college, the Chorus of Old Men are cast with young women. Here is part of their opening ode in which they set the stage for the play about Hercules' old age and madness by recounting the exploits of his youth.

10. Euripides: *Herakles,* first choral ode
11. Aeschylus: *The Oresteia: Agamemnon,* version by Tony Harrison

How well did you think the combination of music, dance, and singing worked? I was originally put off **Peter Hall's** production of *The Oresteia* at the National Theatre in London because of the video quality, which seems to date to before color was invented—although it is actually from 1981—but it turns out to be surprisingly powerful. *The Oresteia* by **Aeschylus** (535–455 BCE) is the only surviving example we have of a complete trilogy (the form in which the plays were originally presented, at a day-long festival); both this and the next clip come from the first of them, *Agamemnon*. Hall is clearly trying to evoke classical Greek theater. The Chorus—another group of old men—wear unchanging full-face masks in the original tradition. The composer, Harrison Birtwhistle, makes no pretence at scholarship, but he wisely confines himself mostly to rhythm, so there is almost nothing here that could not have happened on a Greek stage. I will play a section of the first chorus, which recount the events of the Trojan War, which is going on offstage, but has reached a stalemate. Tell me what you think of the technique of individual voices speaking to rhythm, and the effect when they actually start to sing.

12. Aeschylus: *The Oresteia: Agamemnon*, choral ode (National Theatre, 1981)
13. Poster for *The Oresteia*

Which was more effctive, the speaking or the singing? I don't have a poster for my other *Oresteia*, which comes from somewhere in Greece. It is certainly nowhere near as racy as this painting of Odysseus being pursued by the Furies. But it does have a certain strength; if you agree, tell me where you think this strength lies? This is the beginning of the same Chorus we saw in the National Theatre production.

14. Aeschylus: *The Oresteia: Agamemnon*, choral entrance (Greek production)
15. Poster for *The Trojan Women*

Did you see the strength in that, and if so why? One more clip, from the 1971 Michael Cacoyannis film of Euripides' *The Trojan Women.* I have been stretching definitions of music and stage quite a bit in this class however, but this takes the cake. How can I justify including not only a film clip but one that contains no music whatsoever? It is a reminder that Greek drama is not just a matter of style, but something that deals with very strong emotions. *The Trojan Women* has been described as the greatest anti-war play ever; it is about the widows and mothers of Troy waiting around after the city has fallen to discover what will happen to them. In this scene, **Andromache** (Vanessa Redgrave), the widow of Hector, is told that her son Astyanax must be killed; the Greek generals have decreed that no male heir of the royal line shall remain to pose a future threat. What makes it so moving is that the Greek messenger, **Talthybius** (Brian Blessed), has obvious respect for Andromache, and can only bring himself to relate his message by shouting it in anger. And then her reaction: it is not music, it is certainly not words, but it is an extraordinary example of when the non-verbal is the only possible response.

16. Euripides: *The Trojan Women* (Cacoyannis 1971), Talthybius and Andromache
17. — still from the above

C. Stravinsky's Oedipus

18. Section title C (Stravinsky/Oedipus)

Oddly enough, the most convincing example I know of the use of music in Greek tragedy is not an ancient reconstruction at all, but a twentieth-century work that is entirely of its time: the *Oedipus Rex* (1927) of **Igor Stravinsky** (1882–1971) and **Jean Cocteau** (1889–1963). The original play, *Oedipus Tyrannus,* is the masterpiece of the third great tragedian, **Sophocles** (497–406 BCE). It tells the story of how **Oedipus** returns to Thebes after long absence, saves its people from the plague by defeating the Sphinx, and marries its queen, **Jocasta**. But he gradually discovers that the old man he killed at the crossroads while making his way there was his father, **Laius**, and thus he is now sleeping with his own mother. Jocasta hangs herself and Oedipus puts out his eyes with her hairpin and flees the city.

19. Stravinsky and Cocteau

To keep the austere distant quality, Cocteau and Stravinsky called this an **opera-oratorio** rather than an opera. They used a translation of the Greek play into Latin, the language in which it is always sung, but Cocteau provided a spoken narration in French, which is translated into the language of the country where it is performed; in the production you are about to see, it is in Japanese. There are no duets and trios, and almost no interaction between the characters. Instead, they come on one at a time, say what they have to say in an extended aria, and the narrator and men's chorus take it on from there.

20. DVD cover of the 1992 Taymor production

For her production in Japan in 1992, **Julie Taymor** (1952–) delved into her background in **kabuki**. The presentation is formal rather than naturalistic, and any theatrical devices are clearly seen as such. The principals do not wear Greek masks, but Taymor has given them huge headpieces, with a stylized second head above their real one. They all wear large hand pieces as though they were puppets, giving their performance something of the quality of **bunraku**. We will watch the last 7½ minutes of the piece, in which we learn of the death of Jocasta (**Jessye Norman**) and watch the banishment of Oedipus (**Philip Langridge**); the conductor is **Seiji Ozawa**.

21. Stravinsky: *Oedipus Rex* (Taymor 1992), final scene
22. DVD cover (repeat)

What did you think of that?

23. *Oedipus* and *Antigone* at the Dutch National Opera

Finally, if there is time, a brief footnote. In preparing these classes, I spend a lot of time just scrolling through YouTube. Every so often I come upon a trailer of something that fascinates me. Generally I try to get the whole thing, but there are often times when a trailer is all there is. Here is one of those frustrations: a trailer of two productions at the Netherlands National Opera and Ballet, both based on Sophocles: *Antigone* by the Canadian composer **Samy Moussa** (1984–) and *Oedipus Rex*. I thought it was worth showing, if only because it has a crispness that the actual video of the Taymor sorely lacked.

24. *Oedipus* and *Antigone* at the Dutch National Opera, trailer
25. Class title 2 (still from the above)

D. The Church as Theater

26. Section title D (*Ordo Virtutum*)

Ancient Greece and Japan were not the only countries where music sung on stage began as a religious observance. The oldest known piece of music drama in Europe, dating back to the 10th Century, is the Easter ***Quem quaeritis* trope**, basically a reenactment of the visit of the Three Marys to to tomb where Christ was placed after his crucifixion, only to be told by an Angel that he has risen. Here is a video explaining it.

27. Video: the *Quem quaeritis* trope
28. CD covers: *The Play of Daniel* and *Ordo Virtutum*

Short though this is, it led to a whole host of religious reenactments over the next few centuries. For example, the Christmas story was an obvious candidate; the tradition of *crèches* and *tableaux vivants* that we see today could easily have been combined with live music and action. And it would not be long

before such music dramas would become stand-alone items, rather than performed as part of the liturgy. I will give you two very examples, both dating from the middle of the 12th Century. One, *The Play of Daniel*, is biblical, a retelling in popular style of the story of **Belshazzar's Feast**; I'll come to it in a moment. The other, *Ordo Vitutum* or *The Circle of Virtues*, is allegorical, and was written by the remarkable Abbess of the convent of **Rupertsberg** on the Rhine, **Hildegard von Bingen** (1098–1179). This was not intended for public presentation so much as a meditation and celebration for the nuns in the convent. It is the one that I know best, having done two productions of it myself.

29. Hildegard: *Ordo Virtutum* title

The plot is basically that a **Soul** (**Anima**) comes to seek admission in the company of the **Virtues**, but she is tempted away by the earthly delights promised by the **Devil**. There then follows a roll-call of the Virtues (21 as I remember) in which they arm themselves to fight off the Devil when he appears again. Sure enough, Anima reappears, penitent, and when the Devil tries to reclaim her, the Virtues bind him and cast him out. I will play these two scenes in two different production. The one with the Devil's defeat will come from a film on the life of Hildegard called *Vision*; I like it because of its simplicity, and the fact that she sets it as I did my own two productions, as something improvised by the nuns in their abbey. The first excerpt, though, comes from an Australian group called **The Song Co**. Rather than the stone walls of a convent, they conceive of the Virtues as being in some golden heaven, and the visual values are as far from that austerity as possible. But it is still a wonderful production. After I have shown them both, let's compare them.

30. Hildegard: *Ordo Virtutum*, Devil 1 (The Song Co.)
31. Hildegard: *Ordo Virtutum*, Devil 2 (from Vision film)
32. — stills from both the above

Let's talk about the piece itself, and what you thought of the two productions.

33. Beauvais Cathedral and *The Play of Daniel*

Ludus Danielis or *The Play of Daniel* is the earliest example we know of a complete musical drama written to be performed in a church. It was written for, and quite possibly *by*, the students at the school of **Beauvais Cathedral** sometime between 1227 and 1234. Although sung in Latin rhymed verse, it has no liturgical function, but seems to combine education with entertainment. The music is monophonic, a single vocal line; we must conjecture what to do with it, in terms of rhythm and accompaniment. This 2008 performance from the Cloisters in New York is a recreation of the 1958 reconstruction by **Noah Greenberg**, who concluded that such a piece must have been performed with strong rhythms, unlike the free chant of the Hildegard. I have added titles for the solo lines. But the excerpt includes two examples of **conductus** or processional music, which contain too much text to translate: one show the Satraps bringing in the sacred vessels captured from the Temple in Jerusalem (although they look quite prosaic here); the other is the entrance Belshazzar's queen. In between is the comic scene in which the King's supposedly wise men fail to decipher the Hebrew writing, the music for which is improvised.

34. *The Play of Daniel*, excerpt
35. — still from the above

E. From Church to Court

36. Section title E (*Cantigas de Santa Maria*)

I am going to stretch the idea of "Music *on the Stage*" rather farther in this closing section, but I promise you some fun. First of all, here is part of the video I shall show at the end of class—but with the sound turned off. Question: what kind of music are they playing?

37. Jordi Savall concert, silent
38. — still from the above

I don't really expect you to answer, but it's a puzzle, isn't it? A Spanish cathedral, all the folks in suits or even tuxes: some religious work, surely? But then there's that guy thrumming madly away on his guitar! It is, in fact, a concert of much older secular music that just happens to be given in a church

39. *Cantigas de Santa Maria,* manuscript

But here is one I do expect you to answer. It is a song taken from the 400 or so in the codex shown here, dating from the mid-thirteenth century. I'll play a minute or so in two different videos. And here's the question: is it sacred or secular?

40. *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, "Rosa das rosas," version 1
41. *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, "Rosa das rosas," version 2
42. — stills from the above

Sacred or secular: which is it? You can discount the visual presentation. I'm sure that the original composer did not imagine the young lady and her bearded friends strolling around in a forest; and the choice of the Madonna icon in the first is purely the work of the person who compiled the video. The words would be a give-away, if any of us understood Galician Portugese—*Rose of roses, Flower of flowers, Lady of ladies, and Lord of lords*—all attrbutes of the Virgin Mary. And it is in fact a hymn to the Virgin, like every tenth song in this large collection, the ***Cantigas di Santa Maria***; this is #10, the first of them. All the others make some reference to Mary also, but they cover a huge range. The *Cantigas* were compiled under the aegis of **Alfonso the Wise**, King of Leon and Castille; he probably wrote the words and tunes for many of them. They were a devotional exercise, of course—but they were also written for performance at his court, so if I am talking about "Music on the Stage," the stage in question is a platform in one of his state rooms, not the sanctuary of a church. Now let's listen again to the music of the two versions, 20 seconds each, in the reverse order. One difference is rather like that between *The Play of Daniel* and *Ordo Virtutum*: the woodland one has a measured rhythm, the other doesn't. But there is also a difference in the **sound**; how would you describe it?

43. Cantigas de Santa Maria, audio clips

Did you hear what I am talking about? Everything about the woodland version is utterly **Western**; even without seeing it, you could imagine White Europeans performing White European music. But if I didn't

know it was a Christian hymn, I would assume the other singer (I don't know her name) to be North African or Middle Eastern; the music itself sounds **Islamic** rather than Christian. In fact, Alfonso the Wise was wise because he encouraged the free mingling of Jewish, Islamic, and Christian cultures in his domain—a tolerance that his successors notably rescinded.

44. Hunting scene

I am including the last three pieces—one Italian, one French, one international—largely because I love them. But my argument in each case is the same. Anything as complex as these could not have arisen simply as folk songs; they required a composer, and they required musicians skilled enough to perform them. Which requires a court, which automatically makes them music to be performed on a stage. My first example, "*A poste messe*" (Take your places) is by a composer of whom little is known, **Lorenzo da Firenze** (–1372). It is a **round** for 3 voices (like "Row, row, row your boat," but much more complex). A round is called a ***caccia*** in Italian, literally a hunt, and what Lorenzo has written is a virtuoso invocation of an actual hunt. I'll begin by showing it in score to point out the entrance of the other voices (though they are played by instruments here for simplicity). Then I'll turn to a rather later painting of a hunt by **Paolo Uccello** (1397–1475). I've not translated the words, because much of this is **onomatopoeia**—sound effects, like the barking of the hounds, the calls of the hunstmen, the shrilling of horns.

45. Lorenzo da Firenze: *A poste messe*
46. Battle of Marignano, 1515

If you liked the onomatopoeia in that, just wait for this, a six-part *chanson* by **Clément Jannequin** (1475–1560) describing the victory of the French, led by the newly-crowned **François I**, over the Swiss at the **Battle of Marignano** in 1515. If I used some guesswork in including Lorenzo's *Hunt* as a performance intended for a palace, there is no doubt here. A text that praises the King by name is clearly intended for a royal celebration, and the music demands singers of a virtuosity not found outside a royal court. So here are the equally virtuoso **Kings' Singers** at a concert in London. I have provided minimal text, but I believe that the onomatopoeic sections will speak for themselves: listen for trumpets and drums in the first one, and all kinds of battle sounds in the second.

47. Jannequin: *La guerre*
48. Jordi Savall concert (repeat)
49. — the same, with Willaert text

Back to my puzzle piece at the beginning. This is really an international affair: a **Spanish** church as setting for a decidedly secular piece, a *frottola* in popular **Neapolitan** style, written in **Italian** by a **Flemish** composer, **Adriaan Willaert** (1490–1562), who at that time was choirmaster at **Saint Mark's in Venice**. The words are totally trivial; the music is a different matter entirely.

50. Willaert: *Vecchie letrose*
51. Class title 3 (Making music fun!)