

MELOTHERAPY AND THE ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

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SUMMARY. Ever since their birth, people bring music into the world -the sounds of a baby's cry sounds of release and enchainment – music that accompanies them, throughout their whole lives. Music has a direct influence upon people's psychic and upon their good or bad physical state. People have intuitively understood this ever since ancient times, when they used sounds and noises produced by the human voice or by instruments, in order to overcome day-to-day hardships and to cast out various spirits and diseases. Ancient healers used to cure the ill with the aid of magic incantations. In the ancient Western culture, music was a way of putting order into thoughts, attaining inner harmony, maintaining one's good disposition and state of health. To the ancient Eastern civilization, music was very important to man's emotional, physiological, physical and spiritual state, as they considered that music helped maintain a good balance between body and mind.

Keywords: melotherapy, music, the ancient civilizations, vibrational medicine, musical elements.

After a concert of the great violin player Nicolo Paganini in March 1831, Ludwig Borne wrote: "All those who listened to him seemed to be bewildered mystified by his performance! And there was no other way. When you listen to him, you run out of breath and even the heartbeats seem to bother your attention. Even your own heart seems to upset you, until you can no longer stand it. It feels as if your life is ending, whenever he starts playing the violin²." When writing these lines, Borne had no idea that, in the future, they would bring great service to medicine and, more precisely, to melotherapy. The great Paganini lived the act of performance very intensely and he transmitted his feelings and emotions to his audience; the sounds emitted by the magic wood of his violin produced the most pleasant alternation between emotions and thoughts in the souls of

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² Vinogradov, A. (1987), *The Condemnation of Paganini*; the Musical Publishing House, Bucharest.(chapter XXVIII, "The images of the two mirrors")

his listeners, from passion to pain or joy. His interpretative force “*used to subdue his public, it lifted, carried or let them fall... Such great power was never again encountered, to such a degree, in any other artist, compared to Paganini*”, stated the German composer, pianist and music critic Robert Alexander Schumann. (Excerpt from a lecture at the Society of History of Medicine and Pharmacy, Bucharest, 24.1.1972). After a jazz concert, Jacques Chailley stated the following: “Incited by the saxophone of a famous jazz orchestra, the spectators, most of them under the age of 20, appeared to have lost their mind; they were breaking mirrors and wrecking armchairs. Some of them were even wounded and the damages reached a few million francs.” The real-life examples mentioned above prove to us that music has a direct influence upon people’s psychic and upon their good or bad physical state. Music has always accompanied people. Upon birth, the first sounds that a person makes are the sounds of crying, of release and enchainment. In the day-to-day struggles, the people from ancient times used various methods, such as sounds and noises produced by the human voice or by instruments, in order to cast out various spirits and diseases. When making those sounds and noises, people used their own voices, as well as objects from nature: wood, stone, metal, etc. The ancient medicine men, the so-called healers, used magic incantations, which they repeated several times. The repetition played an important part in the hypnotic action performed. The incantations they used were not merely magic words, but they also had a melody which was being sung and which used to complement that magic text, in a certain way, thus healing the ill. The musical instruments used by the healers varied from nation to nation, but the predominant ones were the drum, the lyre, the pipe, the flute and the guitar. The Babylonians believed greatly in the therapeutic forces of the flute sounds, which, in their beliefs, had the force to cast out demons and bring the dead to life. According to the beliefs of ancient peoples, music was brought along by some mystical characters, by healing deities and gods. One of them was the beautiful Greek god, *Apollo*. His name derives from the Greek word *apelo*, which meant – to remove, to drive out. His calling was to reject and cast out evil, darkness and disease. This god also had a second name – *Aighenetos*. In Greek, it means rebirth, namely the one who is ceaselessly reborn. *Apollo* is usually depicted with a golden lyre, a silver bow, a quiver of golden arrows and two cups, one with nectar and the other one with ambrosia. The *lyre* is the symbol of music; the arrows and the golden quiver represent the sun and its rays, namely the power of light and the two cups stand for the power of healing, youth and immortality. He was considered a protector of the arts, of poetry and music. The ancient Greeks believed that *Apollo* brought light and warmth into people’s souls and that the magic sounds of his lyre drove out darkness and discord, instating peace everywhere.

The son of *Apollo* and queen *Coronis*, *Asclepius* was also a very good healer. They said he could cure any disease and that he brought the dead to life. He mastered the art of herbal healing, which he had discovered by chance. The legend has it that, while going towards an ill man, a snake wrapped around his arm. *Asclepius* hit the snake with a stone and it died. The female snake that was accompanying the dead one touched the latter's tongue with a blade of grass and it suddenly came back to life. Seeing this, *Asclepius* took that herb and he made a cure for people, out of it. In the Greeks' social life and mythology, *Asclepius* has a god-like nature, being considered a god of medicine. The secular healing sanctuaries that were being built were called *Asclepiions*, where medical priests - the *Asclepiads* - were treating people by various methods, among which melotherapy – the treatment through incantations, sounds and music. *Asclepius* was also called *Soter*, the Savior God and he was so loved by the people that his cult spread continuously, not only in Greece, but also to ancient Rome. In mythology, he remained the first doctor to have used music in the cure of disease. The Greeks' belief in the power of healing through music was so strong that they considered, according to the legend of *Zetos*, that *Thebes* itself would have been built with the aid of *Zetos's* lyre. Another son of *Apollo* and *Calliope*, the *Muse*, was so-called *Orpheus*, the first singer of hymns from Greece. Translated from Greek, his name means a luminous doctor. He used to enchant and mesmerize everyone with his lyre, which he had received as a gift from his father. *Orpheus* healed various diseases through music and he eased the pain caused by injuries through his voice. *Orpheus* and the *muses* are considered to be the first specialists of medicinal plants³.

As we can see, music played a very important part in the life of ancient civilizations. The myths and legends about gods were passed on orally from generation to generation and the deeds of the gods were amplified by the imagination of each generation. Those who used to spread them were the so-called *bards* or *rhapsodes*, basically folk singers. They praised men's abilities and considered humans to have special powers, as if they also had a god-like nature. One of the legends tells us of the fearless *Ulysses*, who was cured with the aid of intonated incantations. Also, the musician-poets *Arion* and *Terpandrum* cured the Lesbians and the Ionians with the aid of songs, *Hesmenias* cured the Beotians of gout, similarly, with the aid of music and *Empedocles* managed to calm down an infuriated guest also, by means of music. In ancient Greece, music was a means of disciplining thoughts, of attaining inner harmony and maintaining one's good disposition and state of health. The great *Pythagoras* believed that illness was an imbalance, a derangement of harmony, and that music – the

³ Lassere, F. (1954), Plutarque, *De la musique*, Urs Graf.

gift of god *Apollo*, was the means to restore harmony and, consequently, health. Here is what Plato says about harmony in the Third Book of the *Laws*: „How...could the smallest species of reason exist where there is no harmony? It is impossible; and the largest and most beautiful of harmonies shall, rightfully, be called the greatest wisdom that is given to the man who lives according to reason; similarly, moderation resembles harmony, more than any other virtue; it is an order, an empire over pleasures and passions. In the healthy soul there exists a necessary order⁴. ”In his opinion, the harmony of sounds largely contributed to the formation and shaping of a person’s character and to the attainment of their soul’s harmony. “⁵ Plato thought that the capacity of the human body to hear was a phenomenon of divine origin, whose reaction manifests once the sonorous movement passes through the human body, and especially through the respective “headquarters” of the three parts of the soul⁶. In one of his works, called “*Charmide*”, he reminds us of the skilful Thracian healers, who used to heal the human body and soul through music, and the healing method was the incantation. Incantations were considered philosophical healing speeches⁷. In “*De Consiliis*”, Marcus Tullius Cicero presents a very interesting case about how Pythagoras managed to calm down two drunkards who, being incited by a Bacchanalian music had broken into a woman’s house. Fortunately, Pythagoras was close by and he asked the aulos player (*aulos* – a wind instrument, equipped with a reed) to play a spondaic melody. Upon hearing that melody, the two drunkards immediately calmed down. Here are some examples:

Another story is about a courtesan who was severely annoyed by the sounds of a musical piece written in the Phrygian mode. This time, Pythagoras was also taking a walk nearby, at the time of this account, counting the stars. As he quickly figured out the causes of this woman’s reaction, the great philosopher immediately called a musician to him and asked him to play a melody in a different mode. Consequently, the lady calmed down. Pythagoras also treated a young man of jealousy with the aid of such a melody. Pythagoras’s disciples used music in order to get a good, fortifying sleep, after a day of effort. The great Pythagoras had become a demi-god to his disciples. They said that he could hear the music of moving plants, he was able to communicate with nature and animals and he could remember his previous lives.⁸ We find interesting accounts also by historian *Thucydides*, who talks about the fearless Lacedaemonians and about the

⁴ Des Places, E. (1951), *Introduction*, Ed. Lois, Paris.

⁵ Idem.

⁶ Guillaume, P. (1953), *Manuel de Psychologie*, ed. 8, Paris, P.U.F.

⁷ Schuhl, P.M. (1949), *Essai sur la formation de la pensée grecque*, Paris, P.U.F., page 71.

⁸ Carcopino, *The Pythagorean Basilica in Porta Maggiore*, page 175.

influence of sounds emitted by various instruments. He confesses that the bugle and trumpet sounds were the ones to provoke them to battle, whilst the pipe sounds calmed them down and disciplined them, in order to launch the attack.

Hippocrates, the "parent of medicine" himself made an extremely important and interesting remark. He revealed the beneficial effects of music, while stating, at the same time, that it is not just "any kind of music" that can produce a particular, desired result. Hence, Hippocrates said that music must be applied in accordance with the personality of each individual.

The great botanist of ancient Greece was fascinated by the ability of flute sounds to soothe sciatic pain.⁹ As one of the doctors of ancient Greece who gave great importance to prophylaxis, Erasistratus recommended music or sound therapy to his patients, among many other treatments. As mentioned above, music - to the ancient civilizations - was not only a means to heal, but also to purify and cast out evil spirits and diseases.

Also, the Etruscans were another ancient civilization, living in the North-West of Italy, which believed greatly in music's force to cast out evil spirits. The Latin historian Titus Livius describes the Etruscans, which used the sounds of flute and also dancing in their rituals of casting out evil spirits and eradicating plague. The medicine of ancient Rome was largely influenced by the Etruscans' medical practices and conceptions. Ancient Rome's doctors used disenchantments in treating certain diseases, as accounted by *Cato, the Elder* (234 - 149 B. C.) in his work, "*De re rustica*", translated as "*On Farming*". Music's therapeutic abilities were largely appreciated and recognized in ancient Rome, as well, also due, maybe, to the fact that most of the doctors operating in ancient Rome at that time were of Greek origin and had graduated from the medical school in Greece. One of the representatives of the Roman ancient medicine was Galen (130-200 A.D.), the doctor of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, of Greek origins. He strongly believed in music's power of healing both the human body and mind. After Hippocrates, he was the greatest doctor and reformer of the medical sciences of the ancient world. By the 18th century, his theories had been implemented in the practice of medicine. Galen thought that all the diseases emerged from an imbalance between soul and body. In his therapies, in addition to all sorts of herbal drugs, he gave a primordial importance to music. In his opinion, music was the doctor of the soul and the creator of harmony between the body and the soul. If the Western ancient culture was focusing on the study and understanding of the world from the outside, the Eastern ancient culture was focused on the study and improvement of the man himself. However, music also filled an important

⁹ Bazilevskaya, N. (1968), *Cratkaiaistoria botaniki*, Nauka Printing House, Moscow, pg.13-14.

place in the life of Eastern ancient civilizations, as well. The great Chinese philosopher *Confucius* was one of the first scholars to have noticed the therapeutic effect of music. He thought that music was very important to people's emotional, physiological, physical and spiritual state of health, as it helped maintain the balance between the mind and the body. This music-related reasoning was the cause for introducing music as a compulsory object of study of the Confucian teachings. Confucius advised his disciples to resort to music in order to cure physical, as well as mental pain, because pleasant music produces subtle changes of the body and mind, improving mood and immunity and thus accelerating the healing process. Some of the disciples of the great scholar discovered, from his practice, that music eases pain, eliminates stress and accelerates the healing process. The ancient Chinese physicians believed in the healing power of sound, in combination with breathing. They believed that certain human sounds are related to certain organs and meridians and that the making of those sounds, combined with a correct breathing could actually heal the respective organs. This healing method is being used to this day. "Music had always been considered a strong tool for action in all fields. Through the different rituals the ancients performed, using the sound's vibrational power, they could change and influence destiny, nature and animals. The magical power of music helped ancient warriors in securing their victory and the medicine man of the tribe in setting the diagnoses of diseases and cast away their evil spirits, thus restoring people's good health and states of mind. Ever since ancient times, people have noticed music's direct influence upon the human being, upon its psychosomatic state".¹⁰

All these historical data about ancient practices were not only passed on, from generation to generation, as historical events, but some of them were further developed and are still being practiced today. I have talked about this topic in one of my articles, namely in "*Modern Psychoanalysis and Melotherapy*": All the ancient civilizations – Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Chinese and Indian – have used *melotherapy* in order to attain physical comfort and psychological purification. The great Pythagoras was the one who named the process of healing through sound "*purification*". In the schools from ancient Greece and Egypt, this science was considered *sacred* and it could only be mastered by great scholars. Nowadays, *melotherapy* is a branch of holistic medicine and it is presented fairly well by the principles of modern psychoanalysis. *Melotherapy* is the art and science of using musical sounds in order to maintain and improve health. It reduces psycho-physiological stress, pain and negative states of minds, creating beneficial,

¹⁰ Gutanu, Stela (2015), *Sound therapy and her influence upon the human body*, in *Studia UBB Musica*, LIX, 1, 2015, Cluj University Press, pg. 204.

Hesychastic, uplifting mind states. Through the resonating and vibrating phenomenon of music, sounds induce the vibrations of the beneficial, healing energy of the Universe into the listeners' minds. The specialists in the field of psycho-immunology consider that illness derives from our way of thinking and understanding nature and man's place in harmony with it. Each organ of the immune system contains nerve fibres that ensure the biological link between the nerve endings and the immune system, thus postulating the relation of interdependence between a person's thoughts, attitudes, perceptions and emotions and the state of their immune system. Music is *that* particular education and culture of thought. Its sounds operate directly upon the general psychic and mental state and, therefore, implicitly, upon the immune system. Music penetrates the nucleus of every cell and makes it vibrate in unison with the harmony of the whole. It comforts us; its sounds surround us, pervading our entire being, leaving us with a sensation of profound purification. Each cell of our body is a resonator of sounds and has its particular rhythm. Each organ has its life cycles, its pulse and its musical pitch."¹¹ Music is more than a state of well-being; music is a "Universe" in itself.

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