

Is Music the Barometer of Society? Exploring How Music Mirrored Society from the Ancient World, China to Central Europe in the 21st Century

Bibi Pelić
bibipelic.com

Introduction

“If one should desire to know whether a kingdom is well governed, if its morals are good or bad, the quality of its music will furnish the answer.” — Confucius

“What music do you listen to?” Would this be a valid question to ask a presidential candidate or person looking for a high political office today? If mankind had followed the advice of Confucius, many disastrous episodes in history might have been prevented.

Music is one of the most wonderful achievements of mankind. As far back in history as we know, music has been part of man’s life. Whether it is to summon the villagers and celebrate a local deity, march to battle accompanied by the thunder of drums, or sit in an elegant salon and listen to the latest rising music star, music has played and is playing a vital role in our daily lives.

Referring again to Confucius, “Music produces a kind of pleasure which human nature cannot do without.”

In this paper we will look into another dimension of music, music as a barometer of society and political governance. If we scrape away the surface of looking at music as a pure tool of pleasure and joy, we will discover how music reflects the pulse of the society and in many cases predicts developments the society will go through. Architecture, sculpture, and painting are art forms more commonly used in mirroring society; music, however, with its unique pulse and individual development, gives us a completely new perspective.

Every historical period throughout world civilizations provides us with insightful examples of this mirroring and explains to us the character and soul of the society, its beliefs and values. This realization will help us understand why some societies succeeded while others failed. We will achieve what Dutch-American historian and journalist Hendrick van Loon described as “the importance of ‘feeling’ history (rather than to master its details...”¹

¹ Kurt Pahlen, *Music of the World - A History* (Crown Publishers, Inc - New York, 1949)

The case for music mirroring society in this paper is two-fold. The first argument is the construction of music theory as a reflection of society and political governance. We will look into and compare the music scales system of the Ancient Greeks and the Chinese dynasties, examine the importance they attributed to music and the pursuit to organize music in a scale system that would reflect their respective governance as well as their core values and beliefs.

The second aspect we will analyze is the development of music and its place in society in times of social and political upheaval. We will examine the development of music throughout the period of the Ancient Greeks and Romans to the Middle Ages. This period, spanning over one thousand years, offers us a glimpse into how music reflected the rise and fall of civilizations.

As a comparison this paper also analyzes the upheavals in Central Europe in the aftermath of World Wars I and II, the age of Communism and Fall of the Berlin Wall to our present time. The purpose of Part 3 is to illustrate the validity of points stated in Parts 1 and 2 to our modern era.

The paper is thus organized in the following way:

Part 1: Comparing the Scale Systems of the Ancient Greeks and Early Chinese dynasties

Part 2: The Rise and Fall of Music from the Ancient Greeks and Romans to the Middle Ages

Part 3: Music as a reflection of the conscience, the general will, in Central Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries

Throughout history we can find many examples similar to the ones considered in this paper. To quote again Hendrick van Loon, “For history is like life. The more things change, the more they remain the same.”²

Part 1: Comparing the Scale Systems of the Ancient Greeks and Early Chinese dynasties

What we know about the ancient world and early Chinese dynasties derives from the tangible: buildings, sculptures, various depicted objects, chronicles written by illustrious men of that time. What we know about music of those civilizations also derives from the same sources.

² Hendrick van Loon, *The Story of Mankind* (1921) CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; Illustrated edition (2016).

Music has, we may ascertain, one major disadvantage: it is not tangible; it takes place in time, not space. We do know not exactly how it sounded. Unlike our modern world where we have the possibility of reproducing music in a variety of forms, the world of the Ancient Greeks and China did not possess this possibility. Hence, our knowledge from both civilizations stems from the various writings of philosophers, court officials, painted vases, murals, sculptures, and objects.

Due to the argument stated above, the general perception persists to this day that music was not as important in the discussed societies. This paper however argues that music actually played a prominent role in Ancient Greek society and the Early Chinese dynasties. For this we will take a deeper look into the foundation of music — the scale system. The basic definition of the scale is “a progression of notes in ascending or descending order, so arranged for theoretical purposes, for vocal or instrumental exercise, or as part of a composition.”³

The Scale Systems of the Ancient Greeks

The wonderful vases, cenotaphs, marbles, poems and writings of Homer, Herodotus and others, portray a world where music was present in all aspects of life. Due to the rhythm of the verses, there is a strong belief that the reciting of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were accompanied by a musical instrument. We see something similar many centuries later in the Middle Ages with the appearance of the troubadours, bards and minnesingers in mainland Europe.

Music was also a reflection of the development of society, mirroring its rise and eventual decline. With the rise of Athens as the spiritual center of the Ancient world in the 5th century B.C.E., we find key developments in the field of music, similar in importance to what was happening at the time in politics, architecture, and literature. These developments would influence Western music for centuries to come.

The central figure of this music development was the Greek philosopher Pythagoras (c. 570-495 B.C.E.). Known today mostly for his geometry theorem, Pythagoras recognized that music sounds can be explained and organized through numbers. He observed that by plucking strings of different lengths, specific ratios produced harmonious tones, while others did not. The key finding was the ratio 2:1, whereby the frequency of one tone is twice the rate of the other. In other words, the tones sound practically identical, only one is twice as high as the other.

³ Collins Encyclopedia for Music (1984) Chancellor Press, London.

Pythagoras' findings led to the creation of scales, or as the ancient Greeks called them, modes, structuring the first and last tone on the basis of the mathematical ratio 2:1. The scale was divided into two parts, called tetrachords, with defined ratios between the tones.

Pythagoras' disciple Archytas, a contemporary and friend of Plato, carried this further. He devised three types of *genus*, a term used to describe the distance between two notes within a tetrachord. These *genera* were named: diatonic, enharmonic and chromatic.

The scale system most relevant to this paper is that devised by Aristoxenus (c. 375, fl. 335 B.C.E.) a philosopher and disciple of Aristotle. His musical treatise, *Elements of Harmony*, elaborates this system and is our main source of knowledge about music in Ancient Greece.

Taking the initiative from the attempts of Pythagoras and his disciples, Aristoxenus created a new scale system based on Greek geographical regions and ethnicities. They were as follows:

- Dorian
- Phrygian
- Hypophrygian
- Lydian
- Mixolydian
- Hypolydian
- Locrian

The Dorian scale derived from the Dorians, an Ancient Greek ethnic subgroup, the Phrygian and Lydian from non-Greek peoples in Asia Minor, and the Locrian from a region in central Greece. The prefixes *myxo* and *hypo* were added to form supporting scales, thus enriching the scope of the existing ones.

The structure of each scale differed, reflecting what was thought of as the character, voice, spirit, and mood of the particular region or people. Military music was composed using the Dorian mode, love songs using the Lydian. The scale system and its use were strictly defined.

Plato, who is also one of our main sources of knowledge on music of the time, describes in his *The Republic* the Lydian as 'wailing', the Dorian as 'militant'. The Phrygian mode reflected the Phrygian culture, described by most scholars as 'vehement and passionate.'

There are two aspects of this scales system we will now consider:

- The identification of music with regions and peoples
- The importance of the scale system for the Good of the State

1. The identification of music with regions and peoples

Reading *The Histories* by Herodotus, or *The Peloponnesian War* by Thucydides, we encounter constant politicking, warring, conflicts, and appeasements between the Greek city states. The emphasis in contemporary literature on the relationships and diversity of the city states is staggering. This demonstrates the vast importance they had for the Ancient Greeks. The Athenians were portrayed as the spiritual leaders of the Greek world, and the Spartans as militant and austere, while the city states of Asia Minor are presented as a wild and slightly barbaric world, on the frontier with the enemy from the east, the Persians.

Of course, this depended on who the author was and where he came from. Thucydides, as a retired Spartan general, happily sided with Sparta in the Peloponnesian War, praising the character and spirit of the Spartan people.

The scale system devised by Aristoxenus reflected exactly the character of Greek society. It mirrored the diversity of the Greek city states, the different temperaments, characters and spirits of the individual states. Naming the foundation of music, the scales systems, after regions and peoples and labeling the voice and character of the same, is a strong argument for the hypothesis that music in Ancient Greece mirrored the character and soul of Greek society. We may even argue that it does it more powerfully than other legacies left to us. Music, with its powerful emotional element, must have strung hearts throughout all the city states. As Plato in *The Republic* states: “Musical training is a more potent instrument than any other, because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul.”

2. The importance of the scale system for the Good of the State

“I would teach children music, physics, and philosophy; but most importantly music, for the patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning” — Plato

Plato, though not a musician himself, placed high value on music. He regarded musical education and the learning of the scales system as necessary for the education of the ruling class. In *The Republic* Plato discusses the mathematical nature of music and the modes, and the feelings associated with the modes.

Plato further states that of all the modes, only selected ones will lead to reaching the good of the State.

Interestingly, Plato chose the Dorian and Phrygian scales whose attributes lead to knowledge and the good. In his dialogue with Glaucon in *The Republic*⁴, Plato describes the Dorian mode as ‘simple’ and ‘pure’. Further, the Dorian mode possessed attributes that the guardian of the State should embody — bravery in warfare and in any enforced business.

On the other hand, Plato regarded the Lydian mode as unacceptable for a guardian of the State, as its attributes weakened the soul of the same. To argue our case for the importance of music in Greek state affairs, Plato expresses in *The Republic* the importance of the following: “Musical innovation is full of danger to the State, for when modes of music change, the fundamental laws of the State always change with them.”

Following in the footsteps of his mentor Plato, Aristotle placed similar virtues on music, albeit more in relation to music’s ability to move the human soul. He highlighted the importance of introducing music to children’s education as that is the time for speech to develop and the point during which political life begins.

Before moving on to the scales system of the early Chinese dynasties, we may conclude that the scales system of the Ancient Greeks mirrored society, its character, values, and beliefs.

The Scale System of the Early Chinese Dynasties

Archeological findings and ancient writings reveal to us that music enjoyed a high status in Chinese society and culture from earliest times. Music played a prominent role at festivals and ceremonies, like the festivals of the agricultural year, the ceremonial of the imperial court, and rituals of religion. They also reveal that Pythagoras is not the first music theorist we know of and that a scales system existed in China long before the Ancient Greeks developed their own.

Approximately 2500 years before the time of Pythagoras, Chinese legends and writings mention Ling Lun, who produced a scales system, making him the first known musical theorist in world music history. Chinese writings tell us the story of legendary Chinese emperor Huangdi, ‘The Yellow Emperor’, who in 2679 B.C.E. sent Ling Lun to the mountains to find and cut bamboo pipes that would imitate the sound of the fenghuang, an immortal bird from Chinese mythology. According to legend the fenghuang’s rare appearance foretold the harmonious reign of a new emperor. Its importance was further emphasized in the belief that the bird possessed both male and female elements, the harmony of yin and yang.

⁴ Plato Section III.399a.

Emperor Huangdi believed that by imitating the sound of the fenghuang, he would establish harmony between his rule and the universe. Ling Lun not only discovered and produced the right bamboo pipes, but he also created a whole musical system based on the vibration frequencies he found. Similar to the discoveries of the Ancient Greeks, he found that constructing the pipes in such a manner as to close the bottom, shortening or lengthening the pipes, one could produce different ratios and intervals that led to the creation of an organized scales system.

Ling Lun's musical system was based on 12 lü (notes).^{5,6} Five notes were taken to create a five-note scale called the pentatonic scale. A pentatonic scale could start from any of the 12 lü. The basic, foundation note was called huang chung or yellow bell, and this was followed by notes calculated in the interval of the fourth and fifth. The vibration frequencies of the lü created by Ling Lun were two and three, deriving from the numerals of heaven and earth, of key significance in Chinese philosophy.

As established by Emperor Huangdi, the huang chung was not only the starting note of the scale but represented the 'sound' of a new dynasty. It further represented the eternal principles of the universe and was the basis of the well-being of the state.

Subsequent dynasties placed great emphasis on achieving the correct sound and pitch for the new huang chung, and constantly tuned and retuned the foundation note till a satisfactory result was achieved. There was a strong belief that if the huang chung was not correct, chaos and political disorder would mark the dynasty's reign. In the first century B.C.E., an Imperial office of music not only established standardization, methodology and pitch, but it also strictly oversaw musical life in general.

Music and this very sophisticated musical system were thus under the direct influence and control of philosophy and government. These influences determined the two ways to look at the pentatonic scale. One was that the five notes corresponded to the five elements: earth, metal, wood, fire and water. The other, directly in relation to Chinese society, mirrored the social hierarchy as following⁷:

1st note: Kong, the emperor
 2nd note: Chang, the minister
 3rd note: Kyo, the burgher

⁵ The Pelican History Of Music, Volume One, Published 1970, Copyright Penguin Books Ltd, 1960. Chapter One by Peter Crossly-Holland. Edited by Alec Robertson & Denis Stevens.

⁶ The Larousse Encyclopedia Of Music. Seventh impression 1977. Published by The Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, copyright. Based on "La Musique: les hommes; les instruments; les oeuvres; edited by Norbert Dufourcq. Section 1, The Music Of China: History and Theory. Edited by Geoffrey Hindley.

⁷ Kurt Pahlen, Music of the World - A History (Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1949).

4th note: Tchi, the official

5th note: Yu, the peasant

With the establishment of the Imperial office in the 1st century B.C, a seven- note scale was also later used.

This brief overview of the scales system in the early Chinese dynasties brings us to two aspects of this scales system mentioned above which we will now consider:

- The influence of philosophy on the scales system
- The pentatonic scale as a reflection of society

1. The influence of philosophy on the scales system

From earliest times, music was inseparably tied to Chinese philosophy. Emperor Huangdi set the tone by recognizing and legitimizing music as an all-out power, a force on whose basic note the well-being and harmony of his reign lasted. Subsequent dynasties followed this principle. The ability of music to imitate the sounds of nature brought on the belief of a harmony between music and nature, thus harmony among the elements of the earth.

Confucius (551 - 479 B.C.E.) believed music should hold a prominent place in both philosophy and education. Music, according to Confucius, was key in cultivating the individual and bringing good governance to the state. Deeply rooted in Chinese philosophy, music thus assumed the role of a guiding force, inspiring China's finest philosophers, astronomers, scholars, mathematicians, and musicians to experiment and speculate throughout the centuries to come.

2. The pentatonic scale as a reflection of society

Whilst the Ancient Greeks named their scales after regions and peoples, thus pointing out the importance of the same to their society and culture, the structure of the Chinese pentatonic scale is an exemplary example of the influence and importance of the state in the development of music.

Setting the pitch of the first note of the scale to the ascent of a new emperor and naming the notes of the scale by social ranks may be more telling than anything else as to the society of the Chinese dynasties. We recognize here the godlike figure of the emperor and the strongly differentiated castes in society.

As with the Ancient Greeks and other old civilizations, the Chinese ruling classes recognized the power of music and its possible positive/negative influence for its governance. Together with the philosophical aspect discussed in the point above, the musical system of the Chinese dynasties had a profound impact on the perception, position and strength of culture on society.

Conclusion of the Comparison between the Ancient Greek and Early Chinese dynasties scale systems

Thus, we can see that the Ancient Greek and Chinese dynasties scales systems present a fascinating insight into the prestigious position music occupied in these great civilizations. The parallels are remarkable. Both systems were structured on philosophical and mathematical principles, serving the governing structures of the time. Leading scholars, philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers, and musicians from both civilizations recognized the power of music and its immense influence on society. Music was used for clear objectives, pointing to the beliefs and values of the society, and as a guiding force in establishing the same.

Both scale systems underlined the foundations of their respective societies. For the Ancient Greeks it was the identity and freedom of the city states. For the Chinese, it addressed the untouchable, godlike figure of the Emperor and the strict hierarchal structure that was unchangeable for centuries.

Part 2: The Rise and Fall of Music from the Ancient Greeks and Romans to the Middle Ages

From the pinnacle of the Ancient Greek era around 500 B.C.E. to the resurrection of the Greek ideal in the Italian Renaissance in the 15th century, we witness a tumultuous 2000 years in music that resulted in a disastrous downfall during the Romans and a gradual rise during the Middle Ages.

Music historians are baffled that, after the efforts and achievements of Pythagoras and his followers, as discussed in Part 1 of this paper, music suffered an unprecedented fall in the era of the great Roman Empire. After the fall of the Roman Empire, with Europe in complete disarray, a new era was gradually ushered in.

This phenomenon in music history is argued as an example of changing tides in the history of mankind. In this section of the paper, we will explain this and analyze whether music mirrored societal changes in these momentous historical periods.

To argue this case, we need to look a bit more closely into each period separately.

Ancient Greece

As discussed in Part 1, music in Ancient Greece experienced a meteoric rise, contemporaneous with developments in architecture, literature, poetry and other arts. The findings of Pythagoras and the creation of the scale system elevated the importance of music in the cultural and social life of the Ancient Greeks. We find music in the Greek theater, in religious and city festivities and ceremonies, at the Olympic games. But, as we have argued in Part 1, music played an important role in the education of the ruling class and in achieving, according to Plato, the Good of the State.

It would have been natural for the Romans to carry on the musical culture of the Greeks as they did in architecture, sculpture and literature, but this did not happen.

Rome

From a cultural perspective, the ascent of Rome marked an anomaly. The conqueror adopted the culture of the vanquished. The Romans adopted Greek literature, philosophy, theatre, and architecture. They did not, however, adopt music in the form the Greeks knew. They did not possess their sensitivity.

Instead of the sophisticated music of the ceremonies, rituals and theater performances, music was adapted to a new purpose and need. Fanfares announcing the beginning of the gladiator fights, drums proclaiming the victory of the glorious Roman army: this was the music of the day. Music was degraded to a role of accompanying these events as well as used at religious ceremonies like the Bacchanalia with a similar function. Its purpose was solely for amusement.

The question to ask ourselves here is, did music mirror Roman society? Rome was a vast political and military organization, with strong military and materialistic values, values quite opposite to those of the Greeks. Music, with its values of deeper spirituality and emotions obviously clashed with the values of the Romans. In that sense we may argue that music did reflect Roman society, acting in a minor supporting role in everyday life.

Middle Ages

The decline of the Roman Empire saw the birth of a new religion and civilization: Christianity.

The Early Christians loathed everything Roman, hence also the role of music as pure entertainment. However, Christians who came from the East brought along prayers that they chanted, similar to the Jewish temple chants.

What became more and more obvious was that chanting was more powerful and inspiring for the disciples of the new religion. As St. Augustine declared: "To sing is to pray twice."

Early on, Christian scholars recognized the power of music in religious ceremonies, but also the dangers. St. Augustine in his Confessions writes:

"Thus vacillate I between dangerous pleasure and tried soundness; being inclined rather (though I pronounce no irrevocable opinion upon the subject) to approve of the use of singing in the church, that so by the delights of the ear the weaker minds may be stimulated to a devotional frame. Yet when it happens to me to be more moved by the singing than by what is sung, I confess myself to have sinned criminally, and then I would rather not have heard the singing."⁸

The decline of the Roman Empire brought chaos, violence and insecurity to the population of the continent. Settlements centered around monasteries that provided a safe haven amidst the turmoil. Monasteries also became centers of education and of music. Monks, most notable Notker Balbulus and Notker Labeo of the St. Gall monastery in today's Switzerland translated Greek writings and created the first music treatises of the time. The chants we mentioned earlier became known as the Gregorian chant, organized and catalogued during the papacy of Pope Gregory the Great (540-604).

During the early Middle Ages, we encounter perhaps one of the most important figures of western music, Guido d'Arezzo (995-1050). A monk like the two Notkers, history attributes to Guido the musical alphabet we use to this day. He took the syllables Do-re-mi from a hymn to St. John. Originally, in ut-re-mi, ut sounded too harsh as it did not end with a vowel and was substituted with Do. Guido further made significant changes and improvements to writing music.

Music, as in the time of the Ancient Greeks, seemed to be again in the hands of an institution, only this time the church. This was however not so.

A new caste was rising, that of the knight. With Europe unsettled, wars waging and the start of the Crusades, the knights became the leading figures. They guarded settlements, roads and fought battles afar. Many stories were told. The knights and their stories became very popular, so it was often the case that the knight would take a lyre or other instrument and accompany his story with music. These singer-knights were known in the south of France as the Troubadours, in the north as the Trouvers and in German lands as the Minnesänger.

⁸ St. Augustine, Confessions Book X, Chapter 33, Paragraph 50.

Initially following church guidelines established by the monks, the knights started improvising more and more, creating a whole new musical genre. Theatrical performances were given in town squares to enhance the atmosphere of the story.

By the end of the 13th century, with the rise of towns and their burghers, the popularity and power of the knights faded. Music moved into the houses of the newly established burgher class.

And it was to change significantly. Both the Gregorian chant and the music of the knights were monosyllabic. There was one melody that everybody sang, expressing a collective ideal of Christianity. The burghers thought differently. Every burgher wanted his voice to be heard and to express himself. This change in society reflected itself directly into music. The burghers gathered at the end of the day, sang and played music together, but with each one of them contributing with their own individual voices. With a new society, new music was born: polyphony.

Polyphonic music suddenly flourished in the new town centers of Europe, such as in Flanders. Composers of polyphonic music were sought after and became the new superstars. Gradually the church recognized these new developments and started adopting the new type of music. The writing of polyphonic music gradually became more and more its own purpose, devoid of what makes music special, emotions. Secular music was finding its way into church music, which displeased a large number of the clergy.

The greatest turning point in western music happened during the Tridentine Council that took place from 1545-1563. The hardliners in the Church sought to ban music completely, as it was 'corrupting' the soul. Italian composer Giovanni Pierluigi, known as Palestrina, is said to have saved the day. He composed a polyphonic music piece called *Missa Papae Marcelli*, in which he wanted to prove that polyphonic music can serve the church in an appropriate way. Music could henceforth continue its unassailable development.

This short overview of the development of music in the Middle Ages shows us how music mirrored the changes in society. With the disintegration of the Roman Empire, music followed the trail to the monasteries which were harbors of education. The monks copied manuscripts, developed musical theory and composed chants that would be sung during religious gatherings. The ongoing violence and warring that took place gave birth to the singer-knights, taking music away from the sole possession of the church. Music reflected the uncertainty and troubles of the time. With the advent of towns and the burghers, music underwent a critical transformation to mirror the new town structures and its new class.

There are two aspects to argue in this analysis of Part 2: The Rise and Fall of Music from the Ancient Greeks and Romans to the Middle Ages:

- The development of music throughout different civilizations
- How music mirrored the transformations in society taking place across the European continent

1. The development of music throughout different civilizations

The overview given in this paper illustrates how music, after flourishing in Ancient Greece, underwent a sharp decline in importance, only to bounce back through the turmoil of the Middle Ages.

What we may conclude is that change is inescapable and certain. The highest achievements are followed by debasement of the same, followed by a new period of growth, discovery and successes. There are many examples in history to support this, perhaps all of history is a story of this process. We may argue whether music followed the changes or was instrumental in change itself. Another important point we may argue here is that if there is tangible legacy, collected knowledge is not forgotten. After many centuries, the monks at St. Gall and Guido d'Arezzo dug up the writings of the Greeks and modified it to their purpose. They recognized the value of music through the writings of Aristotle and others.

2. How music mirrored the transformations in society taking place across the European continent

The three examples in this paper undeniably argue that music directly mirrored situations and transformations in the discussed societies. In Part 2 we discussed the Ancient Greek scale system as a reflection of Greek society.

Music during the Roman period manifested the values of the society, and despite the Roman attraction to all things Greek, they did not hold music to the same value. The clash in values and beliefs was too big. The early Christians found that the chant from the Jewish temple reflected their inner beliefs and helped them spread the message of the new faith. The troubadours and trouvères mirrored the instability, violence and insecurity of the Middle Ages and the secret desire of people for calm, peace and imagination.

Finally, the rise of the towns and a new class — the burghers — led to the creation of polyphonic music, music that had multiple, equally based voices.

An interesting point to make here is that during the Middle Ages, music found its structured secular voice, and despite the grips of various religious and state institutions that follow to this day, managed to keep a path of independence. Perhaps that was the greatest victory of Palestrina at the Tridentine Council.

Part 3: Music as a reflection of the conscience in Central Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The last part of this paper takes us several centuries ahead into the 20th and 21st centuries in Central Europe. This period marked critical changes in the socio-political landscape, and in this paper we will discuss the role of music in these changes and how music mirrored society.

- Music behind the Iron Curtain
- Music after the fall of the Iron Curtain

1. Music behind the Iron Curtain

In the aftermath of the Second World War, countries of Central Europe found themselves in a completely new socio-political environment. Czechoslovakia, one of the richest and most prosperous European countries between the two world wars, a country with a flourishing cultural scene, wound up in 1948 in the Soviet-controlled part of Europe.

The thriving prewar culture had already been mostly destroyed during the first Nazi occupation in 1938, then the notorious Nazi protectorate until 1945. Leading cultural figures, many of them of Jewish origin, perished in concentration camps, while the lucky ones emigrated to the United Kingdom and the United States. Thus, the cultural scene was devoid of the class that had carried the cultural banner in the preceding centuries.

In the new Communist-run society, music, like all other aspects of life, was under the strict control of the authorities. Taking the cue from Stalin, who would personally forbid a Shostakovich symphony, authorities in Czechoslovakia kept a close watch on composers, performers and their works. Directives were issued as to how the music should sound, what emotions the music would evoke. Music had to sound in such a way as to elevate the working class, eliciting strong proletarian enthusiasm.

Composers were deemed ‘desirable’ and ‘un-desirable’. If the composer found himself ‘un-desirable’, he or she would have no chance of having his or her music performed. Obtaining the red book, membership in the Communist party, was a pretty much guaranteed pathway to success.

Communist authorities also held sway over the type or genre of music that was allowed. Western pop or rock music were mostly banned. From personal experience I know that many in the summer of 1989 did not even know who Elvis Presley was.

Notwithstanding the official policy, the music scene offered a refuge from the gloom of daily life. Concert and theater halls were packed. Tickets were inexpensive as they were fully subsidized by the government. Classical musicians professed world class playing, hoping that this could be their passport to travel abroad. And a whole underground scene was gradually growing and flourishing.

In the 1980s the rock and pop genres of music became a refuge for the young generation and a source, as would eventually prove, of dissent and resistance against the regime. The growing movement was eventually so strong that even the authorities had to back down and accept the new reality.

As argued in Parts 1 and 2, during this period yet again the ruling class puts a firm hold on music and strives to shape it and determine its purpose. It would take a revolution to take it away from its clutches.

On the evening of Friday, November 17, 1989, an unusual occurrence happened at the concert of the Czech Philharmonic. The applause suddenly turned into cries for change. That day in the afternoon, special police forces attacked a small gathering of protesters.

Over the following days protests grew and by the end of the weekend massive protests for change were fully underway. As students were the carriers of these protests turned revolution, the Czech Philharmonic gave every morning at Žofín, a concert hall on an island in the Vltava, concerts to support the students. Music by two 19th century Czech national composers, Bedřich Smetana and Antonin Dvořák, were performed. I myself was a witness to these concerts. Music was at the forefront of the revolution. Many called the Velvet Revolution the Revolution of the poets and artists.

In this brief overview of music in Communist Czechoslovakia, and its role in disassembling the regime, perhaps we witness the two-dimensional instrumental aspect of music:

- As an instrument for the promotion and preservation of the ruling class
- As an instrument strong enough to carry change and transformation

2. Music after the fall of the Iron Curtain

After the revolution I had an interesting discussion with my violin professor, an esteemed violinist and professor at the Prague Music Academy. He was surprised that suddenly culture and music were not anymore at the forefront of society.

I often think of this discussion now that many years have passed, and society has experienced momentous developments. Czechoslovakia disintegrated into two separate states, an economic boom ensued in the late 1990s and both successor states entered the European Union in 2004.

Within a few years after the revolution, the number of theaters was decimated, and concert halls were not anymore packed with the local population but with tourists. An important reason was that whilst music under Communist rule was fully subsidized by the state, now music and culture in general started relying heavily on private sponsorships and expensive tickets. With freedom of speech and movement, culture was not anymore a refuge and its role in society experienced yet another transformation.

Music, finally without any state interference or control could develop on its own accord. Experimental concerts and festivals were established. Freedom of expression led to imaginative and experimental works. Music, however, was not at the center of society anymore. It gave way to the more tangible, materialistic aspects of life. Values and beliefs had changed. The role of music had changed.

In the recent pandemic, more was spoken about the restaurants and cafes that were closed than about the closed concert and theater halls and the dire economic situation of the artists. One may argue that this is a logical consequence of the preceding developments in society of the last thirty years.

From a brief look at life in the Czech lands over the span of 73 years (1948-2021), we see that music had experienced major upheavals as to its role and purpose. The analysis in this paper of this period identifies music as a reflection of societal changes and a tool of governance and transformation. Thus, during Communism, music was positioned under the direct control of the regime with a strong purpose to promote and elevate the state system. Rebelling underground, it burst into a machine of change in 1989. Settling into its newfound freedom, music was transformed and acquired a more supporting role, reflecting the change in values and beliefs that post-Communist society adopted. A deeper crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, did not bring music to the forefront, that would have been the case in the past, but reaffirmed its current status.

Conclusion

The main goal of this paper is to argue that music from the ancient world to this day represents a reflection of society and is often one of the tools in societal transformations, no matter the continent or civilization. The Ancient Greeks, Chinese dynasties, the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, and Central Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries have illustrated similar processes that repeat throughout history.

Throughout most of history music has been a tool for governing classes to establish and promote their ideals, values and beliefs. Cultures, like the Romans, who did not utilize music in the sense of other ancient civilizations, also give us an example of a great civilization that based its values on materialism and the military. The analysis of music in Czechoslovakia under the Iron Curtain, its role in toppling the regime and its subsequent transformation in a democratic society, mirrors within a short period the ideals and values of two contrasting, antipode societies.

Another key point in this paper is to showcase the tides of history, that after a society where culture flourishes (Ancient Greece), a society succeeding it diminishes that same culture. But we also see through the music of the Middle Ages that knowledge is never entirely forgotten or rejected and that it serves as a foundation for a new beginning. We encounter this phenomenon throughout history.

This paper has also looked to lay the foundation for understanding the present and foreseeing the future. To end this paper with a quote from one of Croatia's most famous figures, Dubrovnik-born poet and statesman Ivan Gundulić (1589-1638) from his epic poem *Osman*⁹ :

The wheel of fortune spins about ceaselessly,
He who is above is cast down,
and he who is below rises up again.

⁹ Ivan Gundulić, *Osman*, 1651.