

An examination of fourth-century Christian
attitudes to music



*Ceremony with dancers and musicians, obelisk of Theodosius I,
hippodrome, Constantinople*

What did music mean to fourth-century Christians? For us music is often mere entertainment, but in late antiquity music had much wider implications. Fourth-century attitudes towards music tell us about far more than aesthetic preferences. Music echoed and represented the relationship between humanity and the cosmos: someone might censure practical music as belonging to the material world of which a Christian should no longer be part; another might promote music as part of that best portion of the world which we may offer up to God; while a third might look to music as revealing to us the harmony of the cosmos, through which we may discover God. Though Christians argued about whether or not there should be music in churches, all sides were agreed that music was powerful – the question was whether that power could be controlled and directed towards good ends.

There had always been Christian use of music, but it is in the fourth century that we find a new debate about music. Music was now openly used as a medium for theological contention, by figures as diverse as Arius and Augustine; in this context the old philosophical concerns about music's power over emotion gained a new relevance. In this essay I intend to explore the historical development of fourth-century Christian attitudes to music, and to show how those attitudes related to wider theological concerns.

Comparatively little has been written on ancient music as a whole, and studies have focussed on classical Greek music. Giovanni Comotti's *Music in Greek and*

Roman Culture is one of the few exceptions to the tendency of classicists to make music in the Roman Empire a mere appendix. Among musicologists the Christian music of late antiquity has been studied largely in the hope that it will shed light on the origins of the subsequent Western tradition of chant. Many histories of Western music mention some of the developments of the fourth century, but they tend to be seen as a prelude to mediaeval music rather than understood in their own context. Musicologists have, however, done some of the work of assembling sources for the period; source books such as Oliver Strunk's *Source Readings in Music History* and James McKinnon's *Music in Early Christian Literature* are a useful starting point, even if we have to be careful of the editors' agenda in selecting particular passages.

I shall arrange some of my considerations of attitudes to music around Niceta of Remesiana's sermon *De utilitate hymnorum*, a defence of the propriety of Christian music. Niceta was a bishop from 370, and died after 414; he was a friend of Paulinus of Nola, and known by Jerome (?341–420). Both Paulinus of Nola and Jerome corresponded with Augustine of Hippo (354–430). All these men were influential in consolidating fourth-century Christian musical developments throughout the Western church. Hilary of Poitiers (died 368) and Ambrose (?340–397) introduced Eastern musical practices, and both, like Niceta, wrote hymns. Ephraem of Edessa (died ?373) took over for the orthodox the music developed among heretical groups in the East; Athanasius (?296–373) carried with him his preferences in musical style when he went in exile to Rome.

Music in the fourth century

For an ancient definition of music we might look to Sextus Empiricus: ‘The term “music” is used in three manners: according to one manner, it is a science concerned with melodies, notes, rhythmic compositions, and parallel subjects – as we say that Aristoxenus, the son of Spintharus, is a musician; according to another manner, it is the science concerned with instrumental experience, as when we name those who use auloi and psalteries musicians and female harpers musicians. Properly and among the many, “music” is used in accord with these very senses. Sometimes we are accustomed to refer – rather improperly – with the same word to successful accomplishment in some subject. So, we say that something is musical even if it exists as part of a painting and that the painter accomplished in this is musical.’¹ The third usage corresponds to the Christian idea of spiritual psalmody; the second usage corresponds to all actualised forms of Christian music, including that heard in the churches; the first usage is found among the Christian philosophers, and is the primary subject of Augustine’s *De Musica*. As an early work on an obscure subject, probably begun before his baptism, Augustine’s *De Musica* has often been neglected, but it reveals how close an approach could be made to the philosophers without ceasing to be Christian. I intend to establish the framework of Christian attitudes to actualised music, Sextus’ second – practical – category, before examining Augustine’s attitudes to musical science: by this structure I shall echo Augustine’s own structure in the *De Musica*, where he rises through considerations of metre to pure number.

During the fourth century there was a renaissance of Christian music: new

¹*Against the Musicians* 1, *Source Readings in Music History* p. 96

forms of musical expression spread from the East, where they arose as a response to heretical groups on the fringes of Christianity, to the West, where we find Ambrose at Milan innovating in worship and writing hymns. There had of course been music in Christian worship from its beginnings. Jesus sings hymns in the Gospels,² and Paul gives advice to the Corinthians and Colossians about singing;³ but in the fourth century we can chart the progress of a new wave of enthusiasm for Christian music, and watch as theologians deal with its effects and implications. Even as Christianity continued to be firmly distinguished from all pagan practice, the new Christian theology and aesthetic of music owes much to pagan thought: Augustine's treatise, which stands in a long pagan philosophical tradition of writings on music⁴ represents a centre among Christian attitudes to music, rather than a bizarre peripheral point.

The new enthusiasm for Christian song seems to have been carried by individuals from the East to the West, where it then controversially spread from church to church. Pilgrims to Jerusalem may have exported its musical customs – Egeria, a pilgrim from Spain, wrote a diary of her visit to the Holy Land, from which they appear to have made some impact on her. Hilary heard Syrian hymns when he was exiled to Phrygia, and when he returned to the West he helped to begin a tradition of Latin hymns which continued to expand long after his death. Hilary is said to have written songs against the Arians, but he also wrote non-polemical hymns, which more straightforwardly praise Christ, seeking to join the voices of the church with those of the angels:

²*e.g.* Mark 14.26

³1 Corinthians 14.15; Colossians 3.16

⁴by *e.g.* Aristoxenus of Tarentum (fourth century B.C.), Nicomachus of Gerasa (second century), Ptolemy (second century), Aristides Quintilianus (?late third/early fourth century)

*Xriste, reuersus caelos uictor in tuos
 memento carnis, in qua natus es, meae.
 Ymnos perennes angelorum cum choris
 in hoc resurgens laeta psallam corpore.
 Zelauit olim me in morte satanas:
 regnantem cernat tecum totis saeculis.*⁵

We cannot tell how often such hymns were used within the churches – although in the conditions of the fourth century there would have been no hymn-books, the musical settings of hymns would have made them relatively easy to learn, so congregational performance was possible for at least a small repertoire. The Biblical Psalms were now often sung with a congregational response, either ‘Alleluia’ or a verse chosen from the Psalm, which allowed the participation of all without requiring everyone to be able to read or everyone to learn the entire Psalter – though in the same period some monks had begun to do precisely that. Basil had to defend his monks for their psalm-singing at vigils: ‘At first they divide themselves into two groups and sing psalms in alternation with each other, at once intensifying their carefulness over the sacred texts, and focusing their attention and freeing their hearts from distraction. And then they entrust the lead of the chant to one person, while the rest sing in response. . . . Now if you shun us because of these practices, you will shun the Egyptians, you will shun the Libyans

⁵Hilary, fragmentary acrostic Hymn 2, *CSEL* vol. LXV pp. 212 ff. – closing lines:

‘Christ, returning to heaven victorious,
 remember my flesh, in which you were born.
 Unending songs with the angel choirs
 shall I gladly sing when I rise in this body.
 Once Satan desired me in death:
 may he see me reign with you for ever.’ [my translation]

as well, and the Thebans, Palestinians, Arabians, Phoenicians, Syrians, and those who live near the Euphrates; and indeed all those among whom vigils, prayers, and common psalmody are esteemed.’⁶

The dangers of music

At the beginning of his sermon ‘*De utilitate hymnorum*’ Niceta of Remesiana notes, ‘that there are some among us, and some in the Eastern provinces too, who hold that there is something superfluous, not to say, suspicious, about the singing of hymns and psalms during divine service.’⁷ What, we might ask, was the basis for this suspicion of music? Many Christians mistrusted secular musicians. Jerome paints an image of the singer as a deadly siren: ‘Meanwhile some singer will come into the dining-room, and as he performs a selection of soft flowing airs, he will not dare to look at other men’s wives, but he will very often glance at you, who have no protector. He will speak by gestures, and a meaning emphasis in his voice will convey what he is afraid to put into words. Amid such strong allurements to pleasure as these even iron wills are overcome by desire.’⁸ Jerome here accepts the Roman stereotype of the performer as prostitute: hired musicians were not only potential sexual objects, but were already prostituting their musical skills to gain profit. While this conception of the musician might lead a pagan observer to warn the rich providers of banquets against employing hired entertainers, as lowering the dining-room to become another marketplace, Jerome looks at the situation from the viewpoint of a Christian virgin, and sees the performer as

⁶Letter 107, 3, *Music in Early Christian Literature* p. 68

⁷*De utilitate hymnorum* 2

⁸Jerome, Letter 117, 6

threatening, a corrupted and corrupting influence. To many Christians, actors in the theatres were worse characters still: actors made clear the deception of the performer, for their very purpose was to appear to be other than what they actually were. Where the regular audience of the theatres would see the bad deeds performed by actors on the stage as mitigated by the hidden difference of the actor from the acted, to a Christian the apparent bad deeds contaminated actor and audience who colluded in them. Even the ordinary musician, by reenacting an existing piece of music, pretended to face a situation that was no longer present; musical works aimed to exude emotions that their performers might not actually be feeling. While it might seem strange to us for Christians to be afraid of the dangers of something as everyday as music, we are reminded by the contemporary French economic and cultural theorist Jacques Attali that it is in reality our own modern, Western attitudes to music that are unusual – ‘Among sounds, music as an autonomous production is a recent invention. Even as late as the eighteenth century, it was effectively submerged within a larger totality’;⁹ still in the twelfth century Muslims were forbidden from eating with musicians.¹⁰ It was not only Christians who mistrusted the theatre. Some intellectuals looked back to the Classical golden age of drama in an idealised Greece, where the theatre was finally corrupted by going after ‘popularity with the masses’,¹¹ while philosophers who rated music highly rejected its vulgar use: ‘No theatre at all had as yet even been set up among the men of those days; rather music still had its abode in temples, where it was used in worship and in the praise of good men.’¹² Even this higher

⁹*Noise*, p. 3

¹⁰*ibid.* p. 12

¹¹Athenaeus, *Sophists at Dinner* 631e, *SRMH* p. 92

¹²pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music* 1140D–E(27)

usage in the temples was of course as unacceptable to a Christian as the music of the banquet, circus and theatre: to many Christians, music, along with the other popular forms of entertainment, must have seemed so misused as now to be itself irredeemably pagan. It must have been a feeling of this sort that led Niceta's opponents to wish to banish all music from Christian ears: 'Their idea is that it is unrestrained to utter with the tongue what it is enough to say with the heart . . . it is enough, they insist, if our song be silent and in the heart.'¹³ In response, Niceta argues that his opponents have an erroneous understanding of Scripture, that they are rejecting authoritative precedents, and that the music of the church can be seen to have positive results – all these arguments can be found in other Christian defences of music.

It is clear that to some Christians the new fascination with music in worship seemed a dangerous novelty. Some use of music had long been made, and Basil refers to a hymn already old by his time;¹⁴ but it had been relatively unimportant and had gone unnoticed by those who now fought against church music. Now some monks aimed to spend their whole lives singing psalms, and many ordinary Christians seem to have been attracted to Christian music at the expense of other aspects of Christian devotion. Of all forms of art, music belongs most obviously to the moment, to those who make and hear the music. There is nothing to hear before it starts or after it is finished; it does not persist in the same form, but must be experienced anew in a different recreation. Whereas the people listened to a reading from the other Scriptures, the whole congregation could join in singing a psalm, and share publicly with one another their commitment to its message.

¹³*De utilitate hymnorum* 2

¹⁴*De Spiritu Sancto* 29

Niceta had to ask for more attention to the readings – ‘Of course, you may pray privately whenever and as often as you choose. But do not, under the pretext of prayer, miss the lesson. You can always pray whenever you will, but you cannot always have a lesson at hand.’¹⁵ – whereas the Psalms drew people’s attention and entered their memories: ‘Through David his servant, the Lord prepared a medicine, powerful enough to cure the wounds of sin, yet sweet to the taste by reason of the melody. For, when a psalm is sung, it is sweet to the ear. It enters the soul because it is pleasant. It is easily retained if it is often enough repeated.’¹⁶

Augustine condemns professional musicians,¹⁷ and denounces much singing and dancing,¹⁸ even as he himself writes a treatise on music, and reveals through it an ascent towards God. Audible music is blamed for manipulating people’s emotions and persuading them to sin. ‘And you are in no way to think this was said about those numbers shameful theatres resound with,’ we are reminded, ‘but about those, I believe, the soul does not receive from the body, but receiving from God on high it rather impresses on the body.’ John Chrysostom warns against ‘cymbals, auloi, and songs full of fornication and adultery’ at weddings,¹⁹ while according to Theodoret it was the Egyptians who taught the Israelites ‘to sacrifice to idols and demons, to play, to dance, and to take pleasure in musical instruments.’²⁰ A Christian decision to disapprove of all practical music could have been justified in a relatively straightforward way: no longer was such outward action required to communicate with God; Christians should worship spiritually,

¹⁵*De utilitate hymnorum* 14

¹⁶*ibid.* 5

¹⁷*De Musica* 1.6(12)

¹⁸*ibid.* 1.2(3)

¹⁹Homily 42, 3, *MECL* p. 85

²⁰*Graecarum affectionum curatio, de sacrificiis* 16, *MECL* p. 106

not through material sacrifice or audible music. At least from the time of Clement of Alexandria it had been common to speak of a spiritual psalmody expressed in good deeds.²¹ Yet while few theologians remained untroubled by certain aspects of music, for the great majority of Christians the troubling power of music could also be directed to good ends, including contemplation and praise of God. Augustine notes that even elephants and bears are moved by singing,²² but he hoped that the highest faculties as well as the lowest could be moved by music.

The new Christian music rejected all instruments except the human voice. According to Niceta, ‘Only the corporal institutions have been rejected, like circumcision, the sabbath, sacrifices, discrimination in foods. So, too, the trumpets, harps, cymbals and timbrels. For the sound of these we now have a better substitute in the music from the mouths of men.’²³ Some of the earlier Christian writers may have allowed instruments – Clement, for example, may have allowed the lyre and cithara²⁴ – but often it is more likely, in the Psalm commentaries where most of the relevant passages occur, that they are talking about Davidic practice rather than Christian. Niceta’s description of instruments as an unnecessary material observance, although not entirely logical, is one found often in writers of the period: ‘In ancient times,’ explains John Chrysostom, ‘[the Israelites] were thus led by these instruments due to the slowness of their understanding, and were gradually drawn away from idolatry. Accordingly, just as he allowed sacrifices, so too did he permit instruments, making concession to their weakness.’²⁵ Jerome instructs that, ‘Paula must be deaf to all musical instruments, and never even know why the

²¹ e.g. *Protrepticus* 1.5, *MECL* p. 35–36

²² *De Musica* 1.4(5)

²³ *De utilitate hymnorum* 9

²⁴ *Paedagogus* 2.4

²⁵ Exposition of Psalm 149, 2, *MECL* p. 83

flute, the lyre, and the harp came into existence.’²⁶ As with their attitudes to secular music, it can seem strange to us that Christians should have apparently been so wary of using instruments. But even we make particular associations with various musical instruments – the organ, for instance, has today quite a strong association with church music; we should not be surprised if fourth-century Christians disapproved it because of the associations it had for them with the circus and pagan ceremonies. Trumpets brought to mind the advance of the Roman army; bells and cymbals brought to mind the Eastern mystery religions. Yet the Christian rejection of instruments, as associated with pagan sacrificial cults, also had pagan philosophical precedent. Most instruments are banished from Plato’s ideal city in the *Republic*: it has first been established that only the Dorian and Phrygian *harmoniai* are to be allowed, ‘“Then,” said I, “we shall not need in our songs and mele polychordia or panharmonia.” “Not in my opinion,” said he. “Then we shall not maintain makers of the trigona, the pektides, and all other instruments insofar as they are polychordic and polyharmonic.” “Apparently not.” “Well, will you admit to the city makers and players of the aulos? Or is not the aulos the most polychordic of instruments and do not the panharmonic instruments themselves imitate it?” “Clearly,” he said. “You have left,” said I, “the lyre and the kithara. These are useful in the city, and in the fields the shepherds would have a syrinx to pipe on.”’²⁷ There is not a great division of thought between only allowing these instruments and not allowing any; both moves are designed to bring purity through simplicity, by discarding the unnecessary.

For Plato as for the Christians, there was another reason for disallowing in-

²⁶Letter 107, 8

²⁷*Republic* 3, *SRMH* pp. 11–12

struments – they stir up the emotions in excitement. Niceta is keen to claim that the songs of the Church ‘put out, rather than excite, the passions.’²⁸ Basil contrasts ‘psalms, fasting and prayer’ with ‘auloi, dancing and drunkenness’.²⁹ Even when he talks about the past, Niceta is unwilling to admit any positive use to instruments: David ‘subdued the evil spirit working in Saul. Not that there was any kind of power in the harp, but, with its wooden frame and the strings stretched across, it was a symbol of the Cross of Christ. It was the Passion that was being sung, and it was this which subdued the spirit of the Devil.’³⁰ It was not, says Niceta, the harp as an instrument that worked against the evil spirit, but the object of the harp as an image. Augustine, on the other hand, seems to think that it was the lyre, or at least the music which holy David played on it, which helped Saul³¹ – and it seems rather that Niceta does not want to suggest a good outcome from the affective power of instruments than that he denies it altogether. The equivalent image in pagan authors was that of Achilles calming his anger by a lyre;³² the philosophers could come close to Niceta’s position in making it the ‘order and balance’ of music which makes us orderly, and soothes us.³³

The Christian ideal of musical performance emphasised unity and order. Niceta separates Christian singing from the pagan music of entertainment. Its sound is to be suitable for its religious nature: ‘It must not be melodramatic, but a revelation of the true Christianity within. It must have nothing theatrical about it,

²⁸*De utilitate hymnorum* 7

²⁹Homily on Psalm 114, 1, *MECL* p. 67

³⁰*De utilitate hymnorum* 4

³¹*Against Julian* 5.5.23

³²Athenaeus, *Sophists at Dinner* 623e, *SRMH* p. 86; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Musicians* 9; pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music*, 1145F(40): Iliad 9.186–189

³³pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music* 1146F–1147(43)

but should move us to sorrow for our sins.³⁴ Christians should sing in harmony with one another: ‘One of you should not linger unreasonably on the notes, while his neighbour is going too fast; nor should one of you sing too low while another is raising his voice. Each one should be asked to contribute his part in humility to the volume of the choir as a whole.’³⁵ Christian singing, Niceta goes on, is in the presence of God, not for human pleasure. There is an interesting ambiguity over whether the musical success of the singing is to be seen as important. Psalm-singing, according to Jerome, is ‘a task where real emotion is a greater requisite than a sweet voice’;³⁶ for John Chrysostom, it is ‘a sober spirit, an alert mind, a contrite heart, sound reason, and clear conscience’ that are important; it is not blameworthy if a singer ‘be feeble from old age or too young, or have a harsh voice, or be totally lacking in the knowledge of rhythm’.³⁷ This is what Niceta has to say: ‘Therefore, let us sing all together, as with one voice, and let all of us modulate our voices in the same way. If one cannot sing in tune with the others, it is better to sing in a low voice rather than drown out the others. In this way he will take his part in the service without interfering with the community singing.’³⁸ There is the implication here that something would in fact be damaged if a bad singer spoils the sound of the music.

Augustine, like many others, was ‘deeply moved by the music of the sweet chants’ of the Church. ‘The sounds flowed into my ears and the truth was distilled into my heart. This caused the feelings of devotion to overflow. Tears ran, and it

³⁴*De utilitate hymnorum* 13

³⁵*ibid.*

³⁶Letter 125, 15

³⁷Exposition of Psalm 41, *SRMH* p. 123

³⁸*De utilitate hymnorum* 13

was good for me to have that experience.’³⁹ He was of course also sensitive to the issues raised by this affection. Was it really the Christian nature of the chants that moved him, or mere beautiful sound of human creation? ‘My physical delight, which has to be checked from enervating the mind, often deceives me when the perception of the senses is unaccompanied by reason, and is not patiently content to be in a subordinate place. . . . So in these matters I sin unawares, and only afterwards become aware of it.’⁴⁰ Augustine admits that ‘a pleasant and well-trained voice’ moves him more than another, a fact which, as we have seen, some other theologians avoided facing. Augustine’s answer is to blame the hearer, not the music, if the beauty of sound is put above the truth of the words sung; ‘Thus I fluctuate between the danger of pleasure and the experience of the beneficent effect, and I am more led to put forward the opinion (not as an irrevocable view) that the custom of singing in Church is to be approved, so that through the delights of the ear the weaker mind may rise up towards the devotion of worship.’⁴¹

As Aristotle knew, music moves even the ‘lower animals’.⁴² Sextus Empiricus raises the same idea: infants are put to sleep by music, though they lack understanding; ‘so dolphins, as the account goes, delighting in the melodies of auloi, swim towards ships as they are being rowed’.⁴³ We have already heard from Niceta the suggestion that God sweetened the Psalms with music so that they please the ear, enter the soul, and are easily remembered; below we will hear from Ephraem of Edessa that the heretic Bardesan sweetened his poisonous ideas with music. Athanasius provided Augustine’s mature view of the risks of music,

³⁹*Confessions* 9.6(14)

⁴⁰*ibid.* 10.33(49)

⁴¹*ibid.* 10.33(50)

⁴²*Politics* 8.6

⁴³*Against the Musicians* 24

and we may look to him for a fuller explanation of it. Why, asks Athanasius, are words sung to melodies in the church? With Niceta, he argues that it is not for the pleasure of the ear; but neither was it because it sweetened the words or because it made them persuasive. First, he says, it was so that God would be hymned ‘not only with continuity but also with expanse of voice’, and secondly ‘because as harmony creates a single concord in joining together the two pipes of the aulos, so . . . reason wills that a man be not disharmonious with himself, nor at variance with himself’.⁴⁴ As other theologians allegorised instruments, so Athanasius allegorises the voice, in sympathy with the philosophical view of harmony underpinning the world.

The benefits of music

The fourth-century Christian enthusiasm for music was not restricted to ecclesiastical officials. Psalms were sung outside the church as well as inside it. A lack of comprehension was not enough to outweigh their musical attractiveness: ‘Virtually all know the words of this psalm and they continue to sing it at every age, without knowing, however, the sense of what has been said.’⁴⁵ Within the sources we can detect that the official provision of music was in response to a popular desire. In many places the leadership of the churches was struggling to respond to popular needs and keep control over the practices of the congregations.⁴⁶ Music is linked with the cults of the dead and of the martyrs, areas where observances of mourning and celebration were especially liable to arise by analogy with old

⁴⁴Athanasius, *Letter to Marcellinus on the interpretation of the Psalms 27*, *MECL* p. 53

⁴⁵John Chrysostom, *Exposition of Psalm 140*, *MECL* p. 82

⁴⁶*e.g.* Augustine, *Letter 29*, *MECL* p. 163

pagan ones; the vigil was becoming more popular, along with music, as another part of the complex that provided an outlet for popular expression of faith.⁴⁷ Niceta's sermon was spoken at a vigil, and is paired with another justifying vigils themselves against those 'who consider sacred vigils, which produce such spiritual fruit and are filled with prayers, hymns and holy reading, to be superfluous, otiose, or, what is worse, unbecoming'.⁴⁸ 'Can any joy be greater than that of delighting ourselves with psalms and nourishing ourselves with prayer and feeding ourselves with the lessons that are read in between? ... Only, brothers, let us please God by singing with attention and a mind wide awake, undistracted by idle talk.'⁴⁹ We might note the order here in considering Niceta's remark about the possibility of distracting 'idle talk': psalms delight; there are also prayers; there are also lessons – psalms have overtaken the other components of the service, as the major attraction. According to Basil, people sang the Psalms at home and in the market, but found it hard to remember what they had heard from the other books of the Bible.⁵⁰ Bishops tried to control other forms of music, which were too suggestive of pagan cult: 'These licentious women ... having cast the veils of modesty from their heads, showing contempt for God and for his angels, shamelessly in the sight of every man, shake their hair, as with wanton eye and excessive laughter they are driven madly to dance ... they form a dancing troop in the martyrs' shrines before the city, making of those holy places a workshop of their characteristic indecency; they defile the air with their harlot's songs, they

⁴⁷e.g. Basil, Homily on Psalm 114, 1, *MECL* p. 67

⁴⁸*De vigiliis servorum Dei* 1 – Theodoret for one was suspicious of martyrs' vigils: *Historia Religiosa* 20, *MECL* p. 106; cf. Jerome, *Against Vigilantius* 1, 1, *MECL* p. 145

⁴⁹*De utilitate hymnorum* 12

⁵⁰Basil, Homily on Psalm 1, *MECL* p. 65

defile the ground with their unclean feet.’⁵¹ In Gregory of Nyssa’s *Life of Macrina* we find him engaged in consecutive struggles to promote the official practices over popular expressions of grief. ‘The multitude of men and women that had flocked in from all the neighbouring country were interrupting the psalms with wailings. But I, sick at heart as though I was owing to the calamity, was yet contriving, so far as was possible with what we had, that no suitable accompaniment of such a funeral should be omitted.’⁵² Gregory sees unchristian disorder in such evident grief: ‘I divided the visitors according to sex, and put the crowds of women with the band of virgins, while the men folk I put in the ranks of the monks. I arranged that the psalms should be sung by both sexes in rhythmical and harmonious fashion, as in chorus singing, so that all the voices should blend suitably.’⁵³ But after his first arrangement, order breaks down again inside the church when the prayers come: ‘A woman cried out impulsively that after this hour we should see that divine face no more. The rest of the virgins cried out the same, and a disorderly confusion disturbed the orderly and solemn chanting of psalms. . . . With difficulty did we succeed in procuring silence by our gesture, and the precentor taking the lead and intoning the accustomed prayers of the Church, the people composed themselves at last to prayer.’⁵⁴ In both cases congregational singing satisfied the popular need, but the imposed ordering broke down when the singing ceased.

In the fourth century, unity of worship was an important ideal. We find this theme in Niceta’s sermon: ‘When we sing, all should sing; when we pray, all should pray. So, when the lesson is being read, all should remain silent, that all

⁵¹Basil, *Homilia in ebriosos* 1, *MECL* p. 70 – cf., for an apparently more lenient attitude to dancing, Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 5, *Against Julian* 2.35, *MECL* p. 71

⁵²*Life of Macrina* 992D

⁵³*ibid.* 994A

⁵⁴*ibid.* 994D

may equally hear. No one should be praying with so loud a voice as to disturb the one who is reading.’⁵⁵ The move to this opposite extreme from an earlier emphasis on individual expression may in part be explained by the circumstances of worship. There might be far more people in a congregation now than had ever been present at a Christian meeting in Paul’s time; Paul had already seen the need to give the Corinthians advice on how to make their meetings more orderly. Now the Christian ideal for song was not the prophetic singing of an individual, but the hymnody of a united choir. ‘These that are the light of the world, when the sun is up, or rather long before its appearance, rise from bed, healthy, alert and sober . . . arising, then, straightway from their beds, radiant and cheerful, they form one choir, and all together in unison and with clear conscience, they sing, as if from one mouth, hymns to the God of all, honouring him and giving him thanks for every benefit, whether individual or common.’⁵⁶ The choir was seen as united one with another, but also united with the greater Church, and united above all with the angels praising God in heaven. ‘From all this we may conclude that no one should doubt that this ministry, if only it is celebrated with true faith and devotion, is one with that of the angels, who, as we know, unhindered by sleep or other occupation, cease not to praise the Lord in heaven, and to bless the Saviour.’⁵⁷

It is important for Niceta to show that music came from God, that it is a gift rather than a temptation. He does this by showing its continuity through history among the greatest Jewish and Christian figures: but he needs a starting point for this process of induction, and finds one easily: ‘If we ask who was the first to

⁵⁵*De utilitate hymnorum* 13

⁵⁶John Chrysostom, *On Matthew*, Homily 68, 3, *MECL* p. 85

⁵⁷*De utilitate hymnorum* 10

introduce this kind of singing, the answer is Moses.’⁵⁸ Moses is credited with the invention of spiritual song, and with being the first to institute choirs.⁵⁹ It is interesting to note that here Niceta, perhaps as an unknowing participant in the larger Christian tradition, or perhaps consciously, echoes the philosophers’ account. It was a commonplace of musical writings to trace the origins of music, perhaps to Amphion, or to Apollo,⁶⁰ while we hear that Philammon of Delphi ‘was the first to set up choruses at the Delphic shrine’;⁶¹ pagan writers like Christian ones wished to demonstrate the antiquity of musical practice. For the purposes of such genealogical accounts, although not generally elsewhere, music was divided into the two categories of solo song and choral ode, with the second following on after music’s appearance in the first. Moses, credited with both inventions, is elevated above pagan men only capable of inventing one form.

The philosophers had long recommended practical music as a fundamental part of education. ‘“And is it not for this reason, Glaucon,” said I, “that education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else rhythm and harmonia find their way to the inmost soul and take strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace, if one is rightly trained, and otherwise the contrary?”’⁶² Music was itself divine, and had the power to control the mind, to bring order or confusion within an individual or within the state. Music might pacify the gods or excite their worshippers to violence. Corruption in music was seen as leading to corruption in all other branches of life. So education in music trained the mind and protected the city: ‘Thus if one who has been diligent in the study of music

⁵⁸*ibid.* 3

⁵⁹*ibid.*

⁶⁰pseudo-Plutarch *On Music* 1131F(3), 1135F(14)

⁶¹*ibid.* 1132A(3)

⁶²Plato, *Republic* 3, *SRMH* p. 14; *cf.* pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music* 1140B–C(26)

for its value as education has received the proper attention while a boy, he will commend and embrace what is noble, and censure the contrary, not only in music, but in all other matters as well.’⁶³ The equation could also be read in the other direction; full training in music required training in all other subjects to inform a correct judgement: ‘And so if one wishes to cultivate music nobly and with discrimination, one should copy the ancient manner. But one should not stop here; one should supplement it with the disciplines, and take philosophy for a guide in youth, since philosophy is competent to decide the point to which the various skills can be employed so as to be appropriate to the musical art, and thus determine the whole question of their use.’⁶⁴ Most Christians largely accepted this schema. For them the disorderly forms of music were those which were pagan, which did not belong to the Church. They too took music as inseparable from ideology. They asked all to participate in their music, differing from the philosophers’ allocation of music to education: but the Church was itself a school; in the monastic movement continuous psalmody sought continuous improvement.

The acceptance of non-canonical hymn-texts by orthodox Christians in this period shows that they perceived the nature of what they sang in church as categorically different from what they read: while what could be read in church was restricted to a short list of approved texts, more freedom was allowed in singing. During this period the psalms also came to be seen as different from other Scripture, and moved from being read in turn like any other passage to being used between other Bible readings.⁶⁵ In the next century this would lead to the use of

⁶³pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music*, 1146A–B(41)

⁶⁴*ibid.* 1142C–D(32)

⁶⁵e.g. Augustine, Letter 109, 10–11, *MECL* p. 163

psalms to shed light on other Bible readings;⁶⁶ already the congregational psalm was a common starting point for the sermon.⁶⁷

Music as propaganda

As with many other Christian developments, it seems that heretics catalysed the emergence of the Christian hymn in the fourth-century. Niceta sees the process in reverse when he claims that, ‘The objection to singing is the invention of heretics.’⁶⁸ That there really were significant new developments at this time is most easily seen later in the century, in the West. Augustine, among others, tells us about Ambrose’s introduction of new musical practices from the East. The Arian Justina, Valentinian’s mother, was persecuting the orthodox congregation of Milan; ‘The decision was taken to introduce hymns and psalms sung after the custom of the eastern Churches, to prevent the people from succumbing to depression and exhaustion. From that time to this day the practice has been retained and many, indeed almost all your flocks, in other parts of the world have imitated it.’⁶⁹ It is clear that the new practices, introduced at Milan during a time of difficulty, were intended to appeal to the congregation, and that they were successful in doing so: people sang ‘with both heart and voice in a state of high enthusiasm’ – these characteristics had previously recommended similar practices to fringe groups: from an orthodox viewpoint, heretics, schismatics, and gnostics.

Ephraem of Edessa is said to have launched a counter-attack against the fol-

⁶⁶e.g. Gennadius’ additions to Jerome’s *Lives of Illustrious Men* 80

⁶⁷e.g. Augustine, Exposition of Psalm 41, 1; 76, 1; 137, 1, etc.

⁶⁸*De utilitate hymnorum* 2

⁶⁹Augustine, *Confessions* 9.7(15) f.; cf. Ambrose, Letter 20.24, *MECL* p.131; Paulinus, *Life of Saint Ambrose* 13, *MECL* p. 169

lowers of Bardesan (?154–222) by appropriating their music. Bardesan’s son Harmonius had popularised his father’s teaching by setting the hymns which he had composed to attractive tunes; as Ephraem writes, ‘He fashioned hymns, and joined them with tunes; and composed psalms, and brought in moods. By weights and measures, he portioned language. He blended for the simple poison with sweetness. The sick will not choose the food of wholesomeness. He would look to David, that he might be adorned with his beauty, and commended by his likeness. An hundred and fifty psalms, he likewise composed.’⁷⁰ Some of Ephraem’s hymns face directly the various heretical groups with which his church competed:

I have chanced upon a book of Bardaisan,
 And I was troubled for an hour’s space;
 It tainted my pure ears,
 And made them a passage
 For words filled with blasphemy.
 I hastened to purge them
 With the goodly and pure reading
 Of the Scriptures of truth.⁷¹

Ephraem’s tactics apparently worked, for his Syriac poetry became the model for Christian hymnody in other languages also. Gregory Nazianzen, for example, wrote poems using the ancient Greek metres, but these did not catch on. Even around 400 we find attempts to create new works for Christians to sit alongside or replace the pagan classics. For example Valeria Faltonia Proba rebuilt shards of

⁷⁰Homily 53, ‘Against Heretics’, translated by John Gwynn

⁷¹Ephraem, 51st Nisibene Hymn, *NPNF2* vol. 13 p. 129 – 2nd stanza

Virgil's *Aeneid* and *Georgics* into a (rather shorter) Christian epic, telling of the creation and redemption of the world:

*iamque pedem referens superas ueniebat ad auras,
cum subito ante oculos ingenti mole sepulcrum,
corpus ubi exanimum positum, nec claustra, nec ipsi
custodes sufferre ualent, auulsaque saxis
saxa uident, laxis laterum compagibus arctis.
fit sonus, ingenti concussa est pondere tellus,
horror ubique animos, simul ipsa silentia terrent.*⁷²

From a few lines of Proba's work can be seen the problems with this approach: little of what was created could justifiably be placed alongside the great works of the past, and since that was an implicit target the failure to meet it was embarrassing; more pressingly, such Christianisations did not appeal to the highly educated, who preferred to read the imitated originals, and did not appeal to Christians who would not otherwise have read the originals, who needed something written to their own culture and not to that of a past elite. This kind of imitation had its brief flourishing at the time of the emperor Julian, who forbade Christians to teach pagan works, but had no lasting effect. In the Greek-speaking world the hymns that became a part of the Church's ritual were in rhythmic prose like that of their

⁷²*Centones Virgiliani, PL* vol. XIX col. 803 ff.:

'Now, returning, he was reaching the heavens above,
when suddenly before their eyes was the huge mound of the tomb,
where the dead body was placed, and neither the bar nor even
the guards themselves sufficed, and they saw rocks piled up
on rocks, what had been shut open wide.
There was a noise, the earth shook with the huge weight,
all trembled, and the silence itself terrified them too.' [my translation]

cf. Georgics 4.485–6; *Aeneid* 6.232, 11.30, 2.490–1, 2.608–9, 1.122, 9.750, 2.755

Eastern models; in the West Latin hymnody had to catch up with changes in the spoken language, where syllables were no longer divided by quantity, and stress had become decisive.

Arius, like Bardesan and Ephraem, used the genre of the theological song, music as propaganda. Besides the *Thalia*, Arius is said to have written and set to music songs for sailors, millers and travellers.⁷³ Valentinus too had written psalms to spread his opinions.⁷⁴ Augustine provides a vivid example of the way music was used to promote a theological cause in the acrostic song he wrote detailing the mistakes and wrongs of the Donatists.

*si multum malos odistis, quales habetis uidete.
 si et uos toleratis malos, quare non in unitate,
 ubi nemo rebaptizat, nec altare contra altare?
 malos tantos toleratis, sed nulla bona mercede:
 quia quod debetis pro Christo, pro Donato uultis ferre.
 cantamus uobis, fratres, pacem si uultis audire.
 uenturus est iudex noster; nos damus, exigit ille.*⁷⁵

It seems from the final lines that the song was designed to be sung in the hearing of the Donatists whom it condemns – ‘If you too put up with the wicked, why

⁷³Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.2 – see *Epitome* of Photius the Patriarch, *PG* vol. LXV col. 466

⁷⁴e.g. Tertullian, *De Carne Christi* 20.3, *MECL* p. 45

⁷⁵*Psalmus contra partem Donati*, *PL* vol. XIII col. 23–32 – closing lines:

‘If you so hate the wicked, look at yourselves.
 If you too put up with the wicked, why don’t we together,
 without anyone rebaptizing, not altar fighting altar?
 You put up with many wicked, but for no reward:
 what you owe Christ, you’d rather do for Donatus.
 We’re singing to you, brothers, if you want to make peace.
 Our judge is coming; we accept, he expels.’ [my translation]

don't we together, without anyone rebaptizing? . . . We're singing to you, brothers, if you want to make peace.' Still today differences in theology can quickly cause tensions, and quarrels over theology can divide communities. Augustine tells us of monks who, when prevented by Valentinians from using a road along which they usually went singing in honour of their martyrs, burn down one of their shrines;⁷⁶ we might prefer that Augustine had not complained when he heard the imperial order they be punished. We hear in Socrates' *Ecclesiastical History* of an escalating battle of partisan singing between Arians and orthodox, ending in a riot: 'The Arians, as I have said, conducted their assemblies outside the city. Each week when the festivals took place . . . they gathered within the gates of the city about the porticoes and sang antiphonal songs composed in accordance with Arian doctrine. This they did for the greater part of the night. At dawn, after reciting the same sort of antiphona, they passed through the middle of the city and went out through the gates and came to the places where they were wont to assemble. Now since they did not cease to speak in provocation of those who held the homoousian position – often they even sang some song such as this: "Where are they who tell of the three as one power?" – John, concerned lest any of the more simple be drawn away from the church by such songs, set in opposition to them some of his own people, so that they too, by devoting themselves to nocturnal hymnody, would obscure the efforts of others in this regard, and render their own people steadfast in their faith.'⁷⁷ After violence erupted between the two sides, the Emperor forbade the Arians to sing their hymns in public. Here, as in the orthodox understanding of congregational singing, it is solidarity that is shown by

⁷⁶Letter 50, 16, *MECL* pp. 131–132

⁷⁷Socrates, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.8, *MECL* pp. 101 f.

the song of the group. But there was also an aesthetic battle: whose songs would sound better? As in the particular case described by Socrates, in the fourth century as a whole orthodox Christians gave in to the musical attractions offered by their enemies, creating their own and taking up the methods of fringe groups.

Augustine's *De Musica*

Augustine's *De Musica* was the clearest attempt yet to appropriate and Christianise the inheritance of pagan musical theories. These theories included speculation not only about the technical matters of rhythm and harmony, but about their application to a wider philosophy. According to Aristides Quintilianus, of the two parts of the arts of music, 'The theoretical is what discerns the technical rules of the art and the main categories and their parts and, moreover, examines its beginnings from on high, its natural causes, and its consonance with things as they are.'⁷⁸ Some of Augustine's Pythagorean delight in number may seem odd: three is the first number with a beginning, a middle and an end;⁷⁹ from one to four is the 'most complete progression'⁸⁰ – but Augustine's delight is in understanding that which he knows explains all, both within music, 'the science of mensurating well',⁸¹ and throughout the whole of creation. Just as a physicist today appreciates a mathematical expression because of its explicative power, and appreciates it the more the simpler the expression, so Augustine appreciates number as the most basic element, that which creates and lies beneath all.

Augustine limits himself to speak of bounds of time which can be understood

⁷⁸Aristides Quintilianus, *On Music* 1.5, *SRMH* p. 49

⁷⁹*De Musica* 1.12(20)

⁸⁰*ibid.* 1.12(25)

⁸¹*ibid.* 1.2(2)

by human senses⁸² – by this he shows a greater respect for creation than Pythagoras. ‘The grave Pythagoras rejected the judging of music by the sense of hearing, asserting that its excellence must be apprehended by the mind. This is why he did not judge it by the ear, but by the scale based on the proportions, and considered it sufficient to pursue the study no further than the octave.’⁸³ Pythagoras, because of the imperfect ability of the mind to judge the external, rejects external apprehension of sound: he continues to hear, but reserves supremacy for the intellect’s internal reasoning over the senses. For Augustine there are limits to the senses, but first limits to human understanding. At times the pupil must hear verses, and see that they delight rather than offend.⁸⁴ Whereas for Pythagoras the perfect interval cannot be actualised by a human being, but must remain in the mind, for Augustine the best interval that can be heard reveals the perfect to the mind, and the unreachable perfection may be detected in hearing it.

Although he sees limits to the human intellect, Augustine also thinks that those limits may be pushed and slowly expanded. There are not the same limits for everyone, nor necessarily the same limits throughout people’s lives, as they continue to explore directions of thought. Augustine certainly does not think that intellectual limits prevent logic from upholding one person’s system over another’s, as illustrated by the analysis he gives of what he considers the two best types of verse. The hexameter, he argues, which is usually divided into feet of spondees and dactyls,⁸⁵ really ought to be measured as spondees and anapaests,⁸⁶ while the

⁸²*ibid.* 1.13(27–28)

⁸³pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music* 1144F–1145A(37)

⁸⁴*De Musica* 2.11(21)

⁸⁵spondee = two long syllables (— —); dactyl = long–short–short (— ∪ ∪)

⁸⁶anapaest = short–short–long (∪ ∪ —)

so-called iambic is in reality a trochaic verse.⁸⁷ The pupil is made to see the flaws in the traditional understanding: ‘Usually in this kind of line we scan nothing but spondees and dactyls, and almost no one is so uneducated as not to have heard of that, even if he is less able to do it. And so, if we should in this case wish to follow that very common custom, the law of ending has to be abrogated, for the first member would close with a half foot, but the second with a full foot, and it ought to have been just the contrary. But, since it seems very unsuitable to abolish this law and I have now learned to know it is permissible, in numbers, for us to begin with an incomplete foot, we are left to judge it is not a dactyl with a spondee here, but an anapaest.’⁸⁸ This attack on custom is carried out even though it is admitted that ‘as far as making the verse goes, there is no difference whether in this kind of line the anapaest or the dactyl is placed with the spondee’⁸⁹ – order would not be satisfied if the verse were measured in the customary way, which, Augustine contends, goes against the other rules of verse; he contrasts this with the lengths of syllables, which are arbitrary and must be learnt from authority now that they are no longer known from fluency of use in the spoken language.

Augustine’s acceptance of the conventional ways of measuring hexameters and iambics is a reminder that he is writing about fundamental truth, not discussing ways of looking at art. He does not explain how to compose the best verses, nor how to judge one verse against another, but how to tell what is a verse and how to explain its construction. Only when Augustine considers the words of a verse does he make a judgement, that it ‘sounds with the harmony of number not only to the ears, but even more is pleasing in truth and wholeness to the

⁸⁷*ibid.* 5.10(21): iamb = short–long (◡ —); trochee = long–short (— ◡)

⁸⁸*ibid.* 5.5(9)

⁸⁹*ibid.* 5.5(10)

soul's sentiment',⁹⁰ just as for the pagan philosophers rhythm alone did not have moral character.⁹¹ But the fact that rhythm by itself lacks moral character does not prevent theological implications; for Augustine there are no moral questions about God himself. Abstract rhythm may have nothing to say about humanity, but it points us towards God as the source of music's unchanging order.⁹² Augustine treats his exploration of music like the Cappadocians treat their exploration of the Trinity, marvelling at the beauty and order seen along the way as an image of what remains unseen.

Augustine does not particularise the beauty of music as existing in a particular musical work; the whole of the numerical system at which he looks displays together the orderliness of creation. Actualised rhythm in song is the response of humanity to God in order. 'But in fact, my friends, the greatest consideration, one that particularly reveals music as most worthy of all reverence, has been omitted. It is that the revolution of the universe, and the courses of the stars are said by Pythagoras, Archytas, Plato, and the rest of the ancient philosophers not to come into being or to be maintained without the influence of music; for they assert that God has shaped all things in a framework based on harmony.'⁹³

In Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* – written as part of the final book of his *Republic*, but preserved independently in Macrobius' commentary (c. 400) – the movements of the spheres are able to be heard directly, as a 'loud and sweet sound': usually the noise is 'so great that the ears of men cannot perceive it, just as you cannot look straight at the sun, and your sight and sense are deafened by its rays.'⁹⁴ As

⁹⁰*ibid.* 6.17(57)

⁹¹pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music* 1143A–B(33)

⁹²*De Musica* 6.12(36)

⁹³pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music* 1147(44)

⁹⁴*Dream of Scipio* 5/10(18)

the spheres move, they produce ‘varied harmonies smoothly by mixing high and low notes . . . composed of a series of unequal intervals which are nevertheless marked off from each other in a strict proportion.’⁹⁵ Cicero imagines the seven notes produced by the spheres holding together the cosmos. So Augustine asks, ‘And what about the supreme circuit of the heavens where the whole universe of visible bodies ends, the highest beauty in its kind, and the soundest excellence of place?’⁹⁶ Augustine’s answer is parallel to Cicero’s, though expressed in a different form: ‘Now all these things we’ve enumerated with the help of the carnal senses, and all things in them, can only receive and hold local numbers seemingly in a kind of rest, if temporal numbers, in motion, precede within and in silence.’⁹⁷ Cicero speaks through a myth, while Augustine expresses himself through more abstract language, but both see number and proportion as the basis of the cosmos. For the Christian what Plato discovered as the world-soul is God’s nature expressed in the world: harmony is the order of God’s creation, leading towards God himself,⁹⁸ just as Cicero believes that the divine can be discovered through the cosmic harmony: ‘All this, wise men have imitated with strings and voices, and have opened up for themselves a way back to this place, along with all those who with great powers of intellect have pursued divine studies in human life.’⁹⁹

⁹⁵*ibid.*

⁹⁶6.17(58)

⁹⁷*ibid.*

⁹⁸see Augustine, *De Trinitate* 4.2.4, *MECL* p. 167

⁹⁹*Dream of Scipio* 5/10(18)

The *iubilus*

A Christian acceptance of pure music is found in the *iubilus*, ‘the joyful explosion of a vocal melisma, sometimes very long, without accompanying text.’¹⁰⁰ ‘This is how he gives you a way of singing,’ explains Augustine, ‘do not seek for words, as though you could explain what God delights in. Sing in jubilation. For this is singing well to God, singing in jubilation. What is singing in jubilation? Understanding, but being unable to explain in words, what is sung in the heart.’¹⁰¹ Here rhythm and melody unite in wordless adoration of God, in a final acceptance of the inability of language to express all. Augustine points out that even ordinary joy can make us shout out in exultation. ‘A *iubilus* [shout] is a kind of sound indicating that the heart is giving birth to what cannot be spoken. And for whom is that jubilation fitting if not for the ineffable God? For the ineffable is he of whom you cannot speak. And if you cannot speak of him, and ought not to keep silent, what remains but that you utter a *iubilus* [shout for joy]? That the heart should rejoice without words, and that the limitless expanse of joy should not bear the constraint of syllables.’¹⁰² In accepting the *iubilus* Augustine allows his aesthetic sense to win over his philosophical worries. Elsewhere, against a view such as that given by John Chrysostom, that, ‘If you do not understand the meaning of the words, for the time being teach your mouth to say them, for the tongue is sanctified by the words alone whenever it says them with good will,’¹⁰³ we find Augustine advocating with Athanasius the radically different view that the words

¹⁰⁰Cattin, p. 10

¹⁰¹Augustine, Commentary on Psalm 32, Giulio Cattin p. 163

¹⁰²*ibid.*; cf. Commentary on Psalm 99, 4, *MECL* p. 158; cf. Hilary of Poitiers, Sermon on Psalm 65, 3, *MECL* p. 124

¹⁰³John Chrysostom, Commentary on Psalm 41, 2, *MECL* p. 81

are all that can really count: ‘When you pray to God in psalms and hymns, let what is pronounced by the voice be meditated upon in the heart; and do not sing something unless you read that it is to be sung, for what is not thus noted to be sung, ought not to be sung.’¹⁰⁴

Fourth-century Christians accepted the prevailing ancient view of music as powerful, a force which had to be controlled. While the evidence that has survived for us is fragmentary and incomplete, we can reconstruct at least in part the spread of hymnody and psalmody among them, the popular enthusiasm reflected in the writings and sermons of the observing elite. We can also reconstruct the positions of some of those who objected to the new emphasis on music, discovering that they differed little in underlying attitudes, and more in the answers they gave to the issues music raised. Some of those who rejected music saw it as too dangerous, aware of its use by heretics as much as by the orthodox: it made the psalms more memorable, but it might also spread new, incorrect teachings. There seems to have been no distinct section of the Church which rejected music, perhaps partly because of the way in which music, as an unwritten practice, spread from church to church when the leaders of a church wished – we hear those who were concerned speaking less often than those who approved – but also perhaps because ordinary Christians seem to have been using music in non-official observances before it was sponsored by the leadership. We find theological opponents singing their respective songs at each other, rather than arguing about whether music was an appropriate form of expression. Some music could be seen as evil and pagan,

¹⁰⁴Augustine, Letter 211, *MECL* p. 164

but even if this damned all musical instruments, music itself continued to represent beauty and reason. Music was useful for teaching, itself rational because it reflected God's rationality in ordering the cosmos.

Among fourth-century Christians were found many of the same attitudes that the philosophers had long held towards music. The limits Christians placed on musical performance, and the caution with which they treated instruments, were not uniquely Christian, though they were worked out in uniquely Christian ways. Where the ancient philosophers had wanted to show how to live a good life, Christians had a greater sense of looking forward to future life – the Church was a school, and the Christian education was not to stop at adulthood. Augustine preserves in the *De Musica* the old forms of Latin metre, making the Christian the true heir of classical Rome. In understanding all their music as sung in the presence of God Christians brought about the imagined golden age of the philosophers, when music had belonged to the temples rather than the theatres. Augustine's *De Musica*, by Christianising the philosophers' ideas about cosmic harmony, justifies aestheticism. If music is a gift from God, it is right to enjoy it, but Augustine argues further, that through the rationality of music we move towards God: Ambrose's hymn '*Deus creator omnium*' teaches us not only by its words, but by its very constitution from number.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵*De Musica* 6.2(2) ff.

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