

# **LESSONS IN MUSICAL HISTORY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649312580

Lessons in musical history by John Comfort Fillmore

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**JOHN COMFORT FILLMORE**

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MUSICAL HISTORY**



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IN  
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BY  
JOHN COMFORT FILLMORE.

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PHILADELPHIA:  
THEODORE PRESSER  
1708 CHESTNUT STREET.

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## PREFACE.

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**T**HIS little book is the result of the author's own efforts to interest his pupils in the History of Music and to give them an outline of that history, presenting its salient facts in a clearer perspective than he could find in any text-book he had tried to use. Since the book was begun, the excellent history of Dr. Langhans has appeared in English, but the translation is so clumsy as not to preclude the necessity of some other text-book for English-speaking students. There still remains the need of an exhaustive history to follow such an outline as is here attempted. Those who read German can find it in the admirable histories of Von Dommer and Ambros; but the counterparts of these works are not yet to be found in English. Chappell's history, so far as it has gone, is interesting, and instructive to discriminating readers; but its author seems too opinionated and too unbalanced to be thoroughly trusted as a guide. Rowbotham is valuable to those who can devote attention to such details as the minute study of Greek rhythms and other fine points of ancient music, and will be interesting even to those who can read it but superficially. But the second of his two large volumes already published only brings us through the music of the Greek tragedy. The histories of Burney and Hawkins are not to be forgotten, but they are, of course, antiquated. Macfarren's, Ritter's, Bouavia Hunt's, Rockstro's and others are outlines only.

The most important auxiliary to the English speaking student of musical history is Grove's "Dictionary of Music and Musicians," by far the most complete encyclopedia yet published in English, a library in itself. It ought to be accessible to every student of music. There is a short "Dictionary of Music and Musicians" appended to W. S. B. Mathews' "How to Understand Music," which will be found very handy for reference. The book itself is valuable reading, and a second volume, now in preparation, will cover important ground in the history of music. Naumann's History is valuable for its illustrations. Many of these are also to be found in Mendel's "Conversations-Lexicon," the most extensive musical encyclopedia for those who read German. A smaller, but most valuable German encyclopedia is Dr. Hugo Riemann's "Musikalisches Conversations-Lexikon." Among special histories

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Riemann's "Studien zur Geschichte der Notenschrift," is perhaps the most important contribution to our knowledge made in recent years. It ought to be translated into clear and readable English. Dr. Riemann is doubtless the greatest living musical theorist and no student of music can afford to ignore his works. Unfortunately none of them have been translated except his lecture on "The Nature of Harmony" and his "Comparative Piano School."

In biography we are better off. The series entitled "The Great Musicians," edited by Frau Huesler is strongly to be recommended. Its American publishers are Scribner and Welford, New York. Karasowski's "Life of Chopin" is now to be had in English. This is the standard biography of Chopin. Liszt's "Chopin" is interesting but is, in some respects, inaccurate and misleading. Schumann's Essays are well-known and so is Wasielwski's "Life of Schumann." It is matter of pride to Americans that the standard life of Beethoven is the production of an American, A. W. Thayer. Unfortunately, it has thus far appeared only in German. The works connected with Mendelssohn's name are numerous and valuable; his letters are especially charming. "Music and Morals" and "My Musical Memories," by the Rev. H. R. Harvies, are excellent reading. But I will not further extend a list which could hardly be made exhaustive. The student who makes his own choice of the books here enumerated will know how to discriminate as to his further reading.

*Milwaukee, Wis., November 1887.*

**J. C. F.**



## LESSONS IN MUSICAL HISTORY.

### INTRODUCTION.

IN the logical order of thought, the consideration of the *nature* of music naturally precedes the investigation of its function. But its function was undoubtedly perceived ages before there was any thought of investigating its nature on scientific principles. We shall not go astray, then, perhaps, if we first try to imagine to ourselves what the first music in the world must have been and why people practiced it. If we can get at the real motive which impelled people to make music we shall surely become enlightened as to its real function in the economy of human nature. The insight we thus gain will serve as a sure guide through all the mazes of musical history.

We may assume as certain that the first elementary efforts at music were vocal, and not instrumental. For the human voice was certainly in existence before any other musical instruments were invented. People sang before they had instruments to play on. Mothers crooned to their babes, rocking them backward and forward in their arms as they hushed them to sleep. Men shouted defiance to their enemies in inarticulate cries and yells. Young men and maidens danced, and sung to their dancing. We may be sure of these things, because they are to be found among the most primitive and savage peoples of our own time, and because we have authentic accounts of them among ancient primitive peoples. Human nature is essentially the same in all ages and under

#### INTRODUCTION.

*The nature and function of music.*

*The earliest music not instrumental, but vocal.*

## INTRODUCTION.

*The function of music is to express and excite feeling.*

*The nature of music. Primitive music made up of melody and rhythm.*

all conditions, and we cannot doubt that the impulse which leads to such manifestations now led our remotest ancestors to express their feelings in similar ways.

This phrase "express their feelings" suggests at least one of the motives which impelled people to sing. The savage yells at his enemy because his yelling is the natural expression of his emotional excitement. The mother croons to her babe because she *feels* like doing so. It is the natural expression of her emotional state. But this is not all. She does so because of its effect on the child. She knows intuitively that this monotonous, measured flow of sound, the expression of her own quiet happiness, will soothe the infant into a restful state of feeling and dispose it to slumber. The warrior feels that the expression of his rage by means of violent sounds will excite his comrades to valor and perhaps strike terror into his enemies. The singing of the dancers is equally expressive of their emotional state, and tends to excite those feelings to still greater activity. Vocal music, then, is a natural product of human nature, and its function is to express and excite feeling.

In the primitive music above referred to we find two of the essential elements of all music—*Melody* and *Rhythm*. *Melody* is a succession of single musical sounds, differing more or less in pitch. *Rhythm* is a succession of beats or pulsations occurring at regular intervals. There is a natural tendency in human nature to make all melody rhythmic. The mother's low song to her babe naturally falls into regularly recurring rhythmic divisions, accompanied by corresponding movements of the body. Rhythm is of the very essence of the dance; and the rhythmic motions of the dancers are accompanied with rhythmic

song, the clapping of hands and the stamping of feet. The element of rhythm becomes most strongly marked in war dances. In these the motions are violent, the songs loud and harsh and the rhythm often marked by the striking of war clubs on hollow logs or on some resounding instrument of percussion.

Instruments of percussion were, doubtless, the first to be invented. From marking the rhythm by pounding on a tree or post with a club, it was not far to covering the end of a hollow log with a stretched skin, thus producing a rude drum. Progress was then easy toward the whole family of drums, tom-toms, gongs, cymbals, tambourines, etc., the latter kind as soon as metals and metal working had been discovered. Wind instruments were probably invented by some such accident as hearing a broken reed give forth a musical tone when blown across by the wind. The Egyptian and Greek myth has it that the god Hermes, walking by the Nile bank, picked up a tortoise shell which had some sun-dried membranes stretched across it, and that this gave him the idea of the lyre. It is not improbable that some such accident as this really occasioned the invention of stringed instruments. Or perhaps the idea came from a tightly-stretched bowstring. However this may be, the first instrumental music must have been associated with vocal music, and must have been essentially the same in its nature and function. That is, it consisted of rhythmical successions of sounds, which owed their origin to the innate impulse to express, convey and excite feeling.

As time went on and the savage developed into the barbarian, and from the barbarian into the civilized man, there was, we know, a gradual

INTRODUCTION.

*The beginnings  
of instrumental  
music.*

*Sensuous beauty  
of tone.*