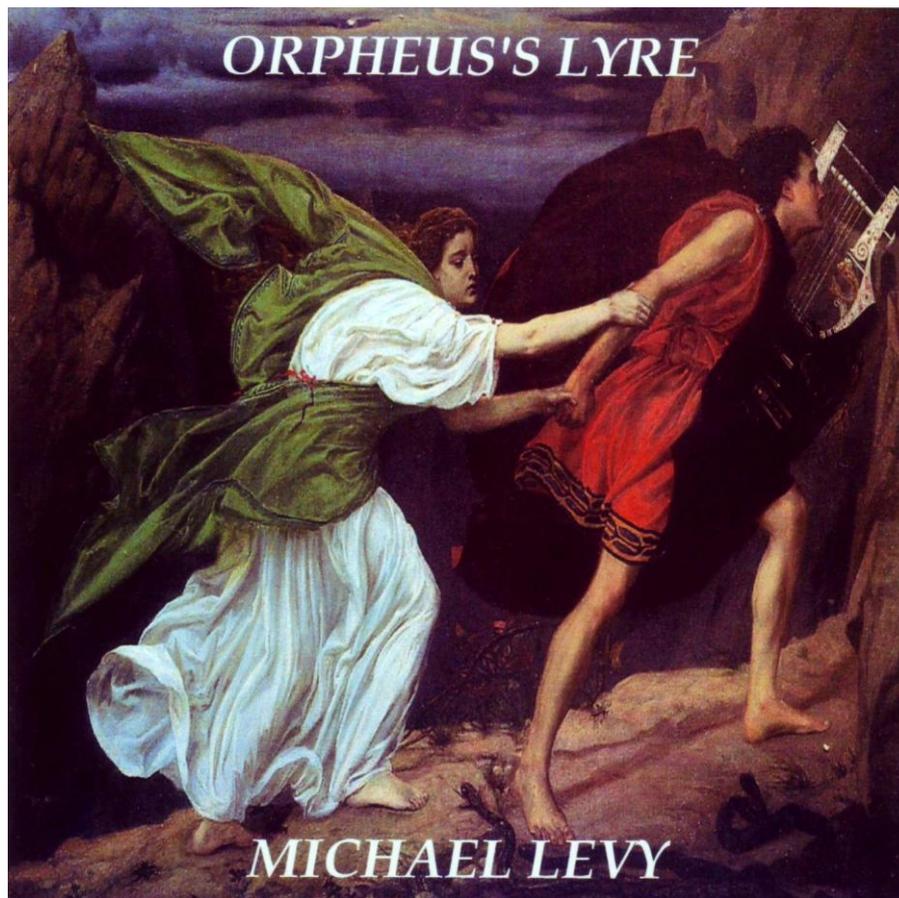


ORPHEUS'S LYRE



The composition was inspired by the timeless ancient Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice:

"Eurydice and Orpheus were young and in love. So deep was their love that they were practically inseparable. So dependent was their love that each felt they could not live without the other. These young lovers were very happy and spent their time frolicking through the meadows. One day Eurydice was gaily running through a meadow with Orpheus when she was bitten by a serpent. The poison of the sting killed her and she descended to Hades immediately.

Orpheus was son of the great Olympian god Apollo. In many ways Apollo was the god of music and Orpheus was blessed with musical talents. Orpheus was so sad about the loss of his love that he composed music to express the terrible emptiness which pervaded his every breath and movement. He was so desperate and found so little else meaningful, that he decided address Hades. As the overseer of the underworld, Hades heart had to be hard as steel, and so it was. Many approached Hades to beg for loved ones back and as many times were refused. But Orpheus' music was so sweet and so moving that it softened the steel hearted heart of Hades himself. Hades gave permission to Orpheus to bring Eurydice back to the surface of the earth to enjoy the light of day. There was only one condition - Orpheus was

not to look back as he ascended. He was to trust that Eurydice was immediately behind him. It was a long way back up and just as Orpheus had almost finished that last part of the trek, he looked behind him to make sure Eurydice was still with him. At that very moment, she was snatched back because he did not trust that she was there. When you hear music which mourns lost love, it is Orpheus' spirit who guides the hand of the musicians who play it. ([Taken from Thomas Bulfinch and retold by Juliana Podd in Encyclopedia Mythica](#))

In this piece, I explore modulating between the incredibly poignant-sounding [ancient Greek Phrygian mode](#) (this was misnamed the 'Dorian' mode in the Middle Ages) to evoke the yearning of Orpheus for his forever lost love, and the dreamy, sensual & feminine-sounding [ancient Greek Hypolydian mode](#) (misnamed the 'Lydian' mode in the Middle Ages), to paint a picture of Eurydice - the lost love for which he forever yearns...

I derive my [ancient lyre playing techniques](#) by both inferring the playing styles illustrated in ancient depictions of lyre players, studying the [lyre playing techniques still practiced today throughout the continent Africa](#) and also by a process of creative elimination, in my quest to discover *just what was conceivably possible for the imaginative lyre player of antiquity to play on the instrument...*

Indeed, the lyre lends itself to almost *limitless* [heterophonic](#) possibilities in improvising around the texture of the melody – different combinations of gentle harp-like finger plucked tones contrasting with brighter guitar-like plectrum plucked tones, strumming rhythm by means of 'string-blocking' (blocking notes not required to sound with the left hand notes whilst strumming the open strings with a plectrum in the right hand – a technique still practiced today, by the [Krar](#) lyre players of Eritrea), the use of plectrum-plucked tremolo effects (a technique used by Egyptian [Simimiyya](#) lyre players) and instead of just plucking the strings, it is also possible to hit the strings with a wooden baton, like a hammered dulcimer - a technique derived from [illustrations of musicians found in bas reliefs from the ruins of the palace of Nineveh, c.700 BCE](#), where the lyre players are clearly depicted performing this percussive style of lyre playing.

In this composition, I tune my lyre to the wonderfully pure [just intonation of antiquity](#) - unlike the horrible compromise of equal temperament, whereby each semitone is artificially made equal (in order to seamlessly transpose between different keys), in just intonation, the correct & exact ratio of pitches in a scale is precisely calculated, creating semitones of slightly different ratios, resulting in a wonderfully pure sound. In just intonation, the sound of the intervals have a unique intensity & music performed in just intonation is at the same time transformed into a sound that is both calming yet at the same time, inspiring. Just intonation was perhaps, one of the little-known wonders of the ancient world?

