THE ANCIENT GREEK TORTOISE SHELL LYRE

PERFORMED ON A KYLIX LYRE OF PAN MADE BY LUTHIEROS MUSIC INSTRUMENTS
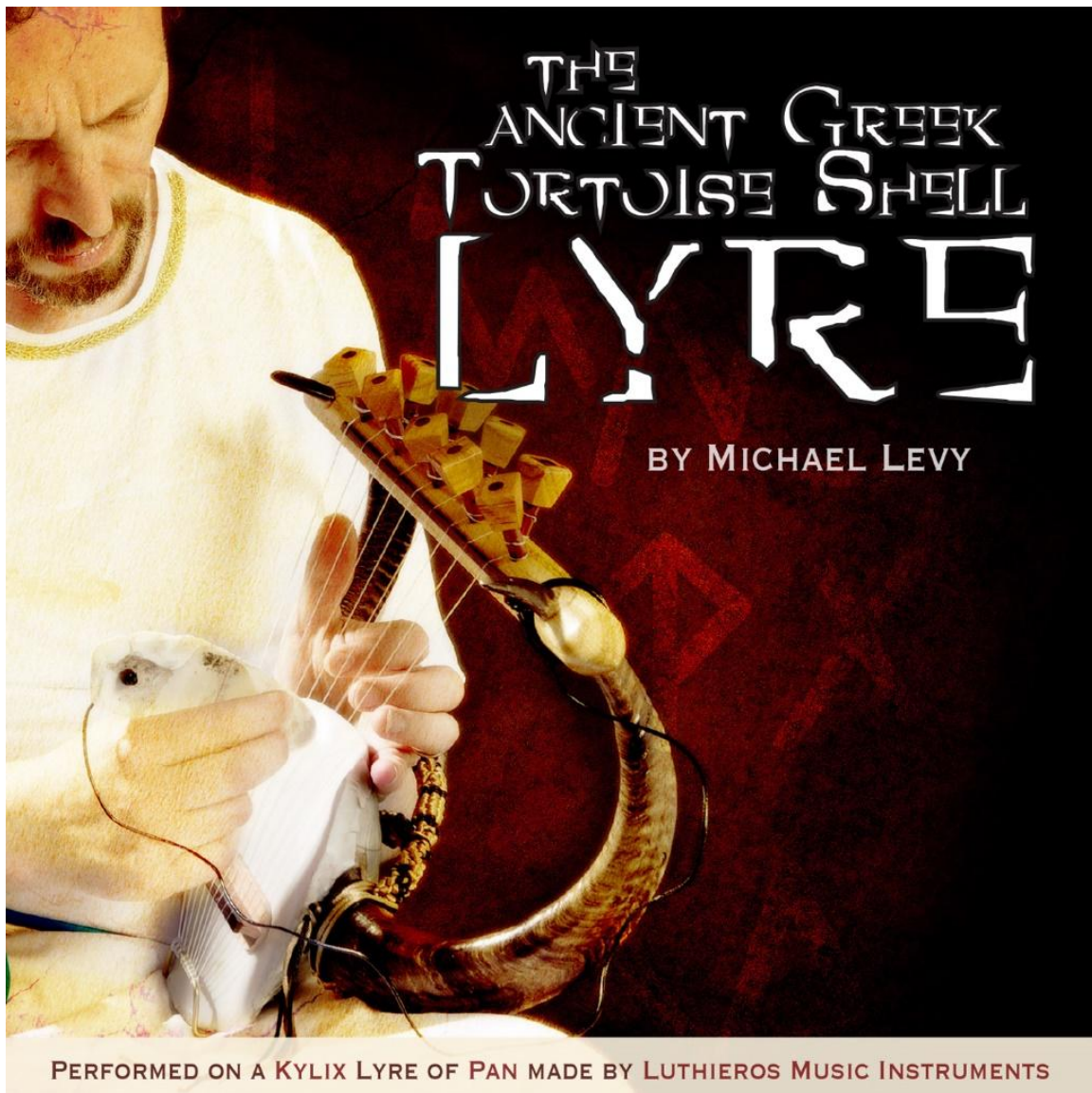
This album was inspired as a tribute to the great philosophers of ancient Greece, performed on an inspirationally authentic replica tortoise shell lyre, hand-made in modern Greece by [Luthieros Ancient & Modern Music Instruments](#), *with an actual tortoise shell for the resonator and actual goat horns for the arms of this magnificent musical instrument of the ancient Greek gods...*

Many of these compositions for solo lyre are in Plato's personal favourite of the ancient Greek Modes – the ancient Greek Dorian Mode (equivalent intervals as E-E on the white notes of the piano and confusingly misnamed the 'Phrygian' mode by medieval scholars). According to Plato in his discussion of the ancient Greek Modes in *"The Republic",* only the Dorian Mode has true moral worth, able to inspire bravery and indeed, what he considered to be the most 'manly' of the musical modes:

"Following the order of time, we come next to the passage in the Republic (p. 398), where Socrates is endeavouring to determine the kinds of music to be admitted for the use of his future 'guardians,' in accordance with the general principles which are to govern their education. First among these principles is the condemnation of all undue expression of grief. 'What modes of music (harmoniai),' he asks, are plaintive (thrênôdeis)?' 'The Mixo-lydian,' Glaucon replies, 'and the Syntono-lydian, and such-like.' These accordingly Socrates excludes. 'But again, drunkenness and slothfulness are no less forbidden to the guardians; which of the modes are soft and convivial (malakai te kai sympotikai)?' 'Ionian,' says Glaucon, 'and Lydian, those which are called slack (chalarai).' 'Which then remain?' 'Seemingly Dorian and Phrygian.' 'I do not know the modes,' says Socrates, 'but leave me one that will imitate the tones and accents of a brave man enduring danger or distress, fighting with constancy [Pg 8]

against fortune: and also one fitted for the work of peace, for prayer heard by the gods, for the successful persuasion or exhortation of men, and generally for the sober enjoyment of ease and prosperity.' Two such modes, one for Courage and one for Temperance, are declared by Glaucon to be found in the Dorian and the Phrygian." (Henry Frowde, "The Modes of Ancient Greek Music", p.7-8)

From my own experience of composing new music for solo lyre in the original ancient Greek Modes, the ancient Greek Dorian Mode does indeed have a noble quality to it, but also, I find it to be intensely introspective – perfect for expressing my evocation of some of the concepts of ancient Greek philosophy through the magic of music!

This intensity is enhanced further in these recordings, by the use [of the just intonation of antiquity](). In just intonation, only whole number ratios are used to precisely divide up the musical scale, resulting in much more pure, symmetrical sounding musical intervals (in contrast to the slightly 'shimmery', out of phase beat wave effect created by the use of irrational number ratios for musical intervals heard in modern equal temperament).

According to an article on Greece in *["The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians"](),* the original ancient Greek names for species of the octave included the following (on white keys):

B-B: Mixolydian
E-E: Dorian
A-A: Hypodorian
D-D: Phrygian
G-G: Hypophrygian
C-C: Lydian
F-F: Hypolydian

For more about what Plato & Aristotle had this to say about these ancient musical modes, please see this fascinating link:
http://www.pathguy.com/modes.htm

THE TRACKS

1. The Golden Age of Pericles – a spontaneous improvisation in the poignant, yearning ancient Greek Phrygian Mode, perfect for expressing an evocation of the lost world of the *"Golden Age"* of Athenian culture, which flourished under the leadership of Pericles (495-429 B.C.), a brilliant general, orator, patron of the arts and politician—"the first citizen" of democratic Athens, according to the historian Thucydides.

The Age of Pericles (461-429 BCE) denotes the period of history in which enabled the necessary conditions for Athens to rise as an academic and artistic superstructure which gave birth to Western Philosophy as we know it, in turn acting as the foundations of all we claim to know within our postmodern society and all its previous developments.

Some have come to know this era as *"The Golden Age"* because in such a short period of time, advancements in all fields of practice flourished by merely by questioning the foundations in which knowledge was built from and if error was identified, correcting it by re-establishing the foundations in which its conception originated. The first track sets the mood of the album by strumming the foundations in which made this album possible.

2. Plato's Symposium – this improvisation is in the warm, contented and raucous sounding ancient Greek Hypophrygian Mode - perfect for evoking images of an ancient Greek drinking party!

Plato's Symposium was the after affects of a drinking party in which an account (ultimately of many other accounts) is presented about the meanings attached to romantic love (eros). Each would present their own educated ideologies about love and its meaning for human beings. All was going well until Alcibiades crashed the party, drunk and declaring his undying love for Socrates, who did not reciprocate the feelings. Plato's masterpiece is paid homage to in

this spirited song which reflects the joys, disappointments and often time, chaotic nature of love.

3. The Garden of Epicurus - this improvisation is in the dreamy sounding ancient Greek Hypolydian Mode - perfect for evoking images of the flowers and birdsong once seen and heard in the garden of this famous Philosopher. Epicurus' hedonistic and materialistic philosophy flourished and grew amidst the privately owned groves of this Garden - apart from the city of Athens, a private space, which became a symbol for the detachment and hedonism of the Epicurean school.

Epicurus found meaning in everyday interaction. Experience the good things! What truly *are* those good things? Well that is what we need to ask ourselves. To him, *it was through the means of forming a philosophically driven family based community which focused primarily on our human relationships and intellectual development, that we could obtain happiness in this life.*

"The Garden of Epicurus" is a song attributed to the Epicurean Gardens in which Epicurus administered his school of philosophical investigations which revolved around developing strong relationships within close communities, materialism, and an ascetic form of hedonism which promotes satisfying all of our needs utilizing the bare minimum needed to fulfil those needs. He is famous for his [tetrapharmakos](#) which stood as his four ingredients to make a happy and peaceful life: 1) don't fear God, 2) don't worry about death, 3) what is good is easy to obtain, and 4) what is terrible is easy to endure. This track explores the serenity that likely would have resonated within his beautiful gardens of both physical and mental natures.

4. Rhetoric of the Sophists – this improvisation features a repetitive and reoccurring motif, to represent the concept of an unyielding dogmatic view, with decorative runs to imitate the purely rhetorical 'arguments' so typical of the Sophists, which were used to support their dogmas (theories of truth founded on unchallengeable, basic beliefs i.e. dogmas, such as the existence of the gods etc)

The [Sophists](#) were ancient teachers who travelled seeking students who would study under them for financial compensation. Most of their teachings revolved around rhetoric: the art of forming and presenting sound and convincing arguments. The Sophists were often teachers for wealthy individuals on trial who had intentions to evade punishment by learning how to rearrange the facts by repositioning the evidence to support alternative conclusions.

This track musically explores their approach, finding and repeating patterns which are in turn re-framed to fit into polar oppositions.

5. The Life of Pyrrho - [Pyrrho](#) appears to have lived from around 365–360 BCE until around 275–270 BCE. Little can be vouched first hand from the life of Pyrrho as he followed in the Socratic tradition: a life dedicated to the dialectical approach, not invested into articulating one's thoughts into letters on a page. Much of what we know about him comes from the writings of [Sextus Empiricus](#), a later Roman philosopher.

Anecdotes include questioning whether the hole in the well was real while he carelessly played about it, provoking angry dogs, ignore precipices, walking into busy streets absent mindedly, etc. Despite these rumours, he brought back from India (likely influences from teachings of the Buddha) a sceptical account on all matters. For one to attain [ateraxia](#): a state of tranquil innermost peace, they first must consider every mode of belief to be incapable of imprinting any knowledge claim, incapable of producing an accurate account of how things truly exist.

Every statement of truth can be proven nonsense, absurd, and/or infinite regress. From our limited perceptions, we do not currently possess the functionality to make truth statements which are not relative to our own shared experiences, [a priori](#) to experience itself.

This track explores many ways of looking at things without clinging to any particular thing. Although his views conflicted with any sort of [epistemological](#) inquires to be possible without first asserting something to be true without it

being known to be true to begin with, there is no measure but the individual which created that measure processing that measure. The result is to suspend judgment in all matters and from this pursuit, one will reach a state of ataraxia (the only true happiness possible for a person) and transcend their sufferings, *for those sufferings are but a result of an unfounded belief in some sort of existence and/or judgment about the things in which we experience.*

The improvisation is in the introspective, questioning ancient Greek Dorian Mode, with unsettled melodic phrases which attempt to represent this train of thought - not committing to either one specific direction or another during the process of philosophical evaluation.

6. The Paradox of Parmenides – an improvisation in the intensely introspective ancient Greek Dorian Mode, in my attempt to express the profound view of the apparently timeless nature of the universe, expounded by Parmenides and reinforced by the famous paradoxical arguments of his student Zeno:

"Zeno of Elea was an ancient philosopher who lived before Socrates and Plato. Zeno's teacher was named Parmenides, who believed and taught that the universe is one, and that its contents are unlimited. Parmenides, at the age of sixty five, is said to have met a young Socrates in Athens. Throughout history there have been many philosophers who have believed in the limitlessness of space, however, Parmenides uniquely taught that time is infinite, without beginning, end, or middle.

Parmenides believed everything must exist, which meant to him that change was an optical illusion of some kind. Since both past and future already exist, he argued that the passing of time must be unreal. And so Parmenides denied change, saying it was appearance only, and interestingly out of the same principle taught that existence or being is ultimately a oneness. Existence could not be created and was indestructible. He may have been the first Western philosopher to describe the universe as a permanent single whole, rather than a product of many parts.... Zeno most notably responded by vigorously defending his teacher Parmenides with ingenious arguments about space and time.

Zeno's most popular paradox was meant to show that change is impossible, because space is infinitely divisible. To explain, imagine we take an orange and hold it about waist high from a hard floor. Now we drop the orange. Unless we are in outer space, the orange will fall and smack the ground, coming to rest in contact with the floor. But why is the orange able to move through space if space is infinitely divisible..."
([Parmendies and Zeno](#) – www.everythingforever.com)

To distinguish Parmenides' philosophical view of the nature of the universe from [ancient Greek philosophical skepticism](#), there is a crucial difference – *skepticism must remain separate from all modes of thought which assert knowledge of any types of truth statements*. Parmenides was declaring to *know* the underlying nature of the universe: that it is one, uniform, unchanging, and imperishable. To a large extent built upon Pythagorean philosophy, Parmenides asserts the way of truth and the way of deceit. These are opinions in which present suppositions for us to consider right and wrong - whereas within skepticism there is little to no identification with what they are saying. A skeptical philosophy attempts to avoid any claims to truth.

The questioning of the ultimate value of the natural sciences is nothing new to philosophical inquiries, from the ancient world to post-modernity. Socrates had many skeptical qualities but still held belief in the good, just, and divine. The 'new skepticism' of our modern society was reintroduced by [Descartes](#) who concludes with *"[cogito ergo sum](#)"* ("I think, therefore I am"), being the only thing that he can "know". But even this ends with a truth statement, for Descartes' point was to strip away his preconceptions to find what he could know to be true (if anything). The ancient skeptics would consider a statement like this asserting more than is possible to the realm of human knowledge. Then again, the skeptics don't know anything so what do they 'know'?

7. The Death of Socrates – an improvisation in the intensely mournful ancient Greek Hypodorian Mode...

"The trial and execution of Socrates took place in 399 BC. Socrates was tried on

two charges: corrupting the youth and impiety (in Greek, asebeia). More specifically, Socrates' accusers cited two "impious" acts: "failing to acknowledge the gods that the city acknowledges" and "introducing new deities". Socrates' death was the result of his asking philosophical questions. A majority of the dikasts (Athenian citizens chosen by lot to serve as jurors) voted to convict him. Consistent with common practice, the dikasts determined Socrates' punishment with another vote. Socrates was ultimately sentenced to death by drinking a hemlock-based liquid" ([“Trial of Socrates” - Wikipedia](#))

The death of Socrates was a horrific event in which Socrates was charged of impiety and corrupting the youth. His friend asked the Oracle who was the wisest man in the world. The Oracle replied, "Socrates". When news of this returned to Socrates, he rejected it, asserting that he indeed knew nothing and because of this, there was no way he could have been the wisest man in the world. He began to indiscriminately search for individuals who knew something and as he questioned them about their knowledge, he found that their beliefs to be unfounded and rooted in the way they individually see the world, focused on the results and missing the foundational details.

This irritated some officials in which he publicly discredited and they charged him. At the trial he publicly stated his case and by majority vote was found guilty. His punishment was deemed death but Socrates also had friends in high places who arranged an escape plan in exile. But Socrates refuses, declaring that if the city he chose to spend most of his time in desires to punish him even with death, he must comply considering it was the city he invested his life into and has grown to love so much. His love for democracy ended up being his executioner. Thus, Socrates passes as his goblet of hemlock fulfils its intended purpose.

This track attempts to show respect to the world's greatest philosopher who was murdered by the very people he was trying to help. Does this history echo in different situations throughout society?

CREDITS

Special thanks to Luthieros Ancient & Modern Music Instruments for recreating the wonderfully exotic, ancient timbre of the tortoise shell lyre of ancient Greece. The model of tortoise shell lyre featured in this recording is their "King Kylix Lyre of Pan" – made for me as part of my ongoing collaboration with Luthieros in their inspirational "Lyre 2.0 Project" – dedicated to reintroducing the beautiful lyres of antiquity back into our much aesthetically poorer, bland modern musical world.

Special thanks also, to fellow philosopher and musician, Wendell Charles NeSmith, who provided me with the inspiration for the concept of this album and providing the invaluable specific historical details about the ancient Greek philosophers and philosophies upon which the concept of the album was based.