

THE ANCIENT GREEK LYRE

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MICHAEL LEVY



This unique album features 6 examples of some of the actual music of ancient Greece & 6 original compositions for replica ancient Greek Kithara lyre, in some of the original ancient Greek Modes (as described in the writings of Plato & Aristotle, some 2400 years ago) The concept of this album & my previous album, "[The Ancient Greek Modes](#)", is to recreate the both the sounds of the musical modes once used in Ancient Greece & to restore the lost sounds of the ancient Greek [Kithara](#) - the large wooden lyre once favoured by the professional musicians of Ancient Greece...



THE ANCIENT GREEK MODES

The names of musical modes in use today, (e.g. Dorian, Mixolydian etc) although having the same names as [the original Greek musical modes](#), were actually misnamed during the Middle Ages! Apparently, the Greeks counted intervals from top to bottom. When medieval ecclesiastical scholars tried to interpret the ancient texts, they counted from bottom to top, jumbling the information. The misnamed medieval modes are only distinguished by the ancient Greek modes of the same name, by being labelled “Church Modes”. It was due to a misinterpretation of the Latin texts of Boethius, that medieval modes were given the wrong Greek names!

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 what Plato & Aristotle themselves had this to say about these ancient musical modes, please see this fascinating link:

<http://www.pathguy.com/modes.htm>

More interesting reading can be found at:

<http://www.midicode.com/tunings/greek.shtml>

ANCIENT LYRE-PLAYING TECHNIQUES

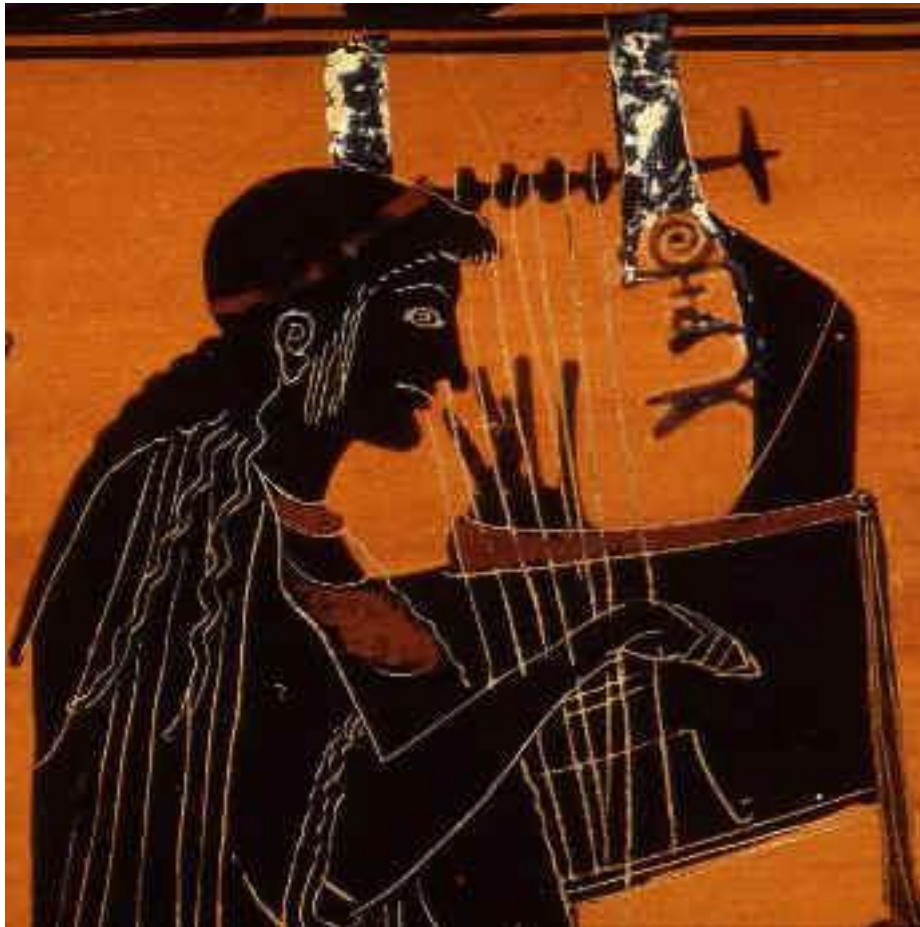
The lyre-playing techniques heard in this album, are authentically based on lyre-playing styles which have remarkably survived from Antiquity & which still can be heard today in the amazing lyres still played throughout the continent of Africa, where unlike the rest of the Western world, a precious remnant of the cross-cultural influences from the around ancient world have miraculously survived.

Some of these lyre-playing techniques include the “block & strum” method, still practiced today by the [Krar](#) Lyre players of Eritrea in East Africa – this technique allows the player to strum rhythm & basic chords on the lyre, similar to an acoustic guitar:



This technique entails blocking strings with the left hand which are not required and leaving open only the strings which form the required intervals, which then can be strummed with a plectrum in the left hand.

Ancient illustrations of Kithara players seem to infer that this technique was also prominent in Ancient Greece – many illustrations clearly depict the left of the lyre player blocking/dampening the strings with the left hand whilst strumming the open strings with a plectrum in their right hand:



I also demonstrate all the possible styles available on the Kithara. These include the use of tremolo (based on the style of Egyptian [Simsimiyya](#) Lyre Players still heard today), alternating between harp-like finger plucked tones played with the left hand, and guitar-like plectrum-plucked tones with the right hand, using basic finger-plucked intervals/chords with the left hand to form a basic harmonic background for the melodic line being played with the plectrum in the right hand (the surviving fragments of Ancient Greek music clearly imply a basic harmonic tonality to these ancient melodies (as opposed to simple folk melodies which can simply be accompanied by a drone).

THE 12 TRACKS

1) Lament of Simonides (Ancient Greek Musical Fragment - Arranged For Replica Kithara)

This lovely melody, written in the ancient Greek Hypophrygian Mode, can possibly be attributed to the ancient Greek poet & musician, [Simonides of Ceos](#). Simonides of Ceos (ca. 556 BC-469 BC) was one of the 9 great Greek lyric poets. He was born at Loulis on Kea. During his youth he taught poetry and music, and composed paeans for the festivals of Apollo. He was included, along with Sappho and Pindar, in the canonical list of nine lyric poets by the scholars of Hellenistic Alexandria. Further details can be found at:

<http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Bios/SimonidesOfCeos.html>

Although initially the piece sounds as if it is in the Ancient Greek Mixolydian Mode (the equivalent B-B on the white notes of the piano - not to be confused with the Medieval "Mixolydian" Mode, which is G-G!), the tonality of the melody actually implies the Ancient Greek Hypophrygian Mode (G-G). Maybe it is this ambiguity of tonality which creates the haunting, mystical feel of this beautiful ancient melody?

The lyrics:

Ἄνθρωπος ἐὼν μήποτε φάσης
ὄ,τι γίνεται αὔριον,
μηδ' ἄνδρα ἰδὼν ὄλβιον,
ὅσον χρόνον ἔσσειται·
ὠκεῖα γὰρ οὐδὲ τανυπτερύγου μίας
οὕτως ἅ μετὰστασις

In English:

*"You are a human, therefore seek not to foretell
what tomorrow may bring,
nor how long ones happiness may last.
For not even the flutter of the fly's wing
is as fast as change"*

2) Ancient Greek Musical Fragment (Anonymi Bellerman 97 - Arranged For Replica Kithara)

This beautiful melody, written in the haunting ancient Greek Hypolydian Mode,
was preserved in several Byzantine manuscripts - Conspectus Codicum:

V. Venetus Marcianus appl. cl. VI, saec. XIII-XIV

N. Neapolitanus graecus III. C4, saec. XV

F. Florentius Ricc. 41, saec. XVI

3) Ancient Greek Musical Fragment (POEM, MOR 1, 11f MIGNE 37, 523 - Arranged For Replica Kithara)

This brief fragment of ancient Greek melody, written in the ancient Greek
Hypodorian Mode, was preserved in several Byzantine manuscripts -
Athanasius Kircher (+1680), Musurgia Universalis 1650. Schema Musicae
Antiquae. "Bibl. S.

Salvatore, Messina, Sicilia", "Bibliothecam Graecis Manuscriptus", 17th
century.

4) Epitaph of Seikilos (Complete Ancient Greek Melody Composed by Seikilos, Son of Euterpe, 1st c. CE - Arranged For Replica Kithara)

Engraved on an ancient Burial Stele at Tralles, Asia Minor, this beautiful melody was discovered and published by Ramsay, 1883. Musical signs deciphered by Wessley, 1891. The stone itself, long preserved in the collection of Young at Doudja, disappeared after the burning of Smyrna (September 1923). It is now in the Copenhagen Museum, Inv. No. 14897:



This song, written in the ancient Greek Hypophrygian Mode, is so far, the oldest complete piece of music ever found - unlike the other precious shards of ancient Greek music which have survived; this piece is unique, as it survived in its entirety. The ancient Greek burial stele on which it was found bore the following epitaph:

"I am a portrait in stone. I was put here by Seikilos, where I remain forever, the symbol of timeless remembrance".

The timeless words of the song are:

*"Hoson zes, phainou
Meden holos su lupou;
Pros oligon esti to zen
To telos ho chronos apaitei"*

*Translation - "While you live, shine
Don't suffer anything at all;
Life exists only a short while
And time demands its toll"*

5) The First Delphic Hymn To Apollo (Ancient Greek Melody c.138BCE - Arranged For Replica Kithara)

This substantial fragment of ancient Greek music was discovered inscribed on a slab of marble in May 1893, in the ruins of the Treasury of the Athenians at Delphi. The Hymn is now preserved in the Museum of Delphi: *Delphi Inv. No. 517, 494, 499.*

There are two Delphic Hymns that have been discovered, and they were dedicated to the god Apollo. The two Delphic Hymns have sadly not survived in their complete form. However, they do survive in substantial fragments...giving just a tantalizing taste of the glory of the tragically lost, magnificent musical culture of ancient Greece.

The two Delphic Hymns were traditionally dated c.138 BC (the year of the Pythian Games, dedicated to the god Apollo) and 128 BC (The year of the Pythian Festival, dedicated to the god Apollo). However, more recent musicological research may indicate that both Hymns were actually written in 128 BCE, the year of the Pythian Festival:

"They were long regarded as being dated circa 138 BCE and 128 BCE, respectively, but recent scholarship has shown it likely they were both written for performance at the Athenian Pythaidēs in 128 BCE (Pöhlmann and West 2001, 71–72). If indeed it dates from ten years before the second, the First Delphic Hymn is the earliest unambiguous surviving example of notated music from anywhere in the western world whose composer is known by name."

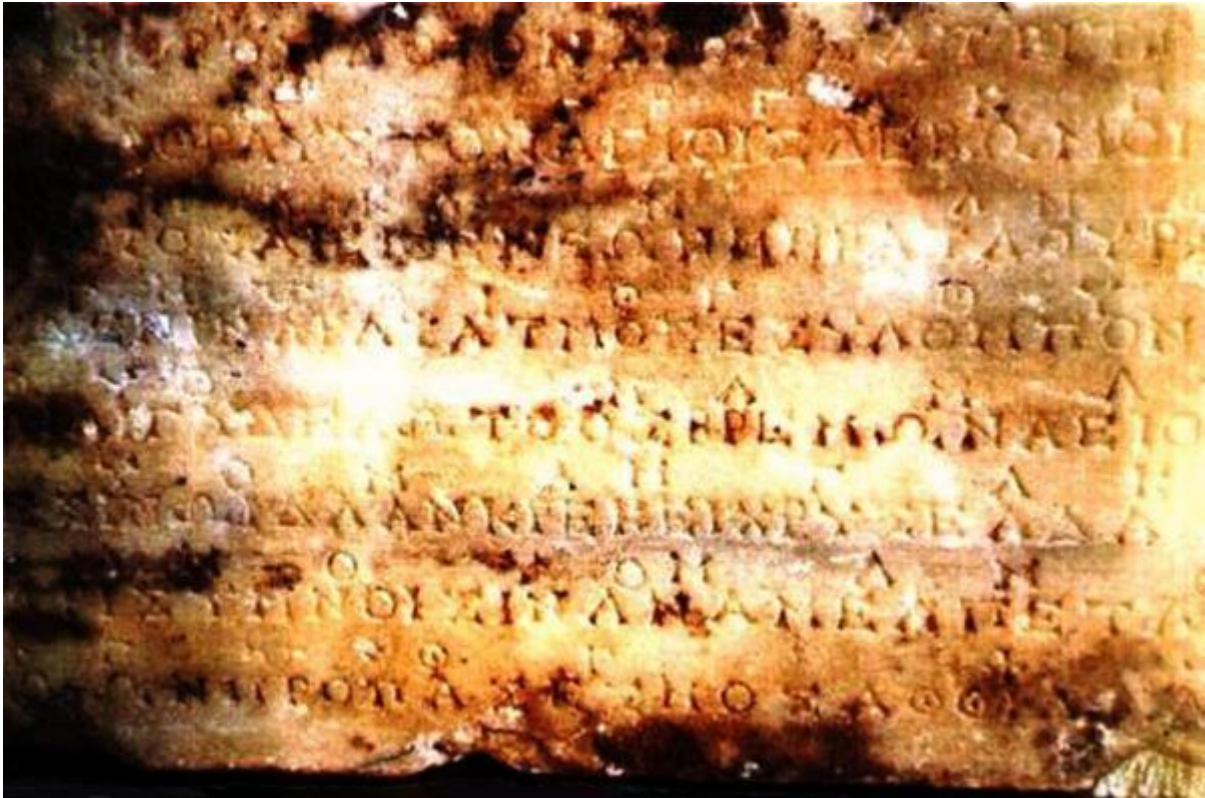
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delphic_Hymns

According to this more recent scholarship, the composer's name of the First Delphic Hymn was "Athénaios Athenaíou" (Athenios son of Athenios)

The First Delphic Hymn is written in the unambiguous alphabetical musical notation system used in ancient Greece, whereby alphabetical notation

describing the pitch of the melody, is written above the text of the song. The rhythm can easily be inferred from the syllables of the text.

This ancient Greek musical notation can be clearly seen in the image below, of the actual First Delphic Hymn, as it was found, inscribed in marble:



http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Delphic_Hymns

I have based my arrangement for solo replica Kithara-style lyre, on the first half of the fragment, which is based around the ancient Greek Hypolydian Mode.

The second half of the Hymn is highly chromatic, (the piece was written for vocal performance) and not really suitable for performance on solo enharmonically tuned lyre with limited number of strings.

In order to play chromatic accidentals on a lyre, it is necessary to stop the string with the left hand to shorten it's length to achieve the required pitch - this technique can be heard towards the end of the melody, where one of the notes of the melody is required to be lowered a semitone.

The translation of the fragment of text which has survived of the First Delphic Hymn to Apollo is as follows:

*"Hear me, you who posses deep-wooded Helicon,
fair-armed daughters of Zeus the magnificent!
Fly to beguile with your accents your brother,
golden-tressed Phoebus who, on the twin peak of this rock of Parnassus,
escorted by illustrious maidens of Delphi,
sets out for the limpid streams of Castalia, traversing,
on the Delphic promontory, the prophetic pinnacle.
Behold glorious Attica, nation of the great city which,
thanks to the prayers of the Tritonid warrior,
occupies a hillside sheltered from all harm.*

*On the holy alters Hephaestos consumes the thighs of young bullocks,
mingled with the flames, the Arabian vapor rises towards Olympos.
The shrill rustling lotus murmurs its swelling song, and the golden kithara,
the sweet-sounding kithara, answers the voice of men.
And all the host of poets, dwellers in Attica, sing your glory, God,
famed for playing the kithara, son of great Zeus,
beside this snow-crowned peak, oh you who reveal to all mortals
the eternal and infallible oracles.*

*They sing how you conquered the prophetic tripod
guarded by a fierce dragon when, with your darts
you pierced the gaudy, tortuously coiling monster,
so that, uttering many fearful hisses, the beast expired.*

They sing too,"

**6) Invocation To The Muse (Mesomedes of Crete, c.130 CE - Arranged For
Replica Kithara)**

This haunting ancient Greek melody in the ancient Greek Dorian Mode, was preserved in diverse Byzantine Manuscripts: First printed edition by Vincenzo Galilei, 1581.

Mesomedes -- Conspectus Codium:

V. Venetus Marcianus app. cl. VI, 10, saec. XIII-XIV

C. Parisinus Coislinianus graecus 173, saec. XIV

N. Neapolitanus graecus III C4, saec. XV

Ve. Venetus Marcianus graecus 994, saec. XIV

O. Ottobonianus graecus 59, saec. XIII-XIV

**7) Hymn To Hermes (Original Composition For Replica Kithara in the Ancient
Greek Lydian Mode)**

**8) Mount Olympus (Original Composition For Replica Kithara in the Ancient
Greek Hypophrygian Mode)**

**9) Ode To Aion (Original Composition For Replica Kithara in the Ancient
Greek Phrygian Mode)**

**10) Ode To Aphrodite (Original Composition For Replica Kithara in the
Ancient Greek Hypodorian Mode)**

**11) Paeon (Original Composition For Replica Kithara in the Ancient Greek
Dorian Mode)**

12) Song of Syrinx (Original Composition For Replica Kithara in the Ancient Greek Hypolydian Mode)



