

FIVE STRAIGHT LINES

ALSO BY ANDREW GANT

Christmas Carols: From Village Green to Church Choir

O Sing Unto the Lord: A History of English Church Music

Music: Ideas in Profile

FIVE STRAIGHT LINES

A HISTORY OF MUSIC

ANDREW GANT

P

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'I've tried to read a few history books myself, and ... the main problem with them is this: they all assume you've read most of the other history books already. It's a closed system. There's nowhere to start.'

Jeff, in *England, England* by Julian Barnes

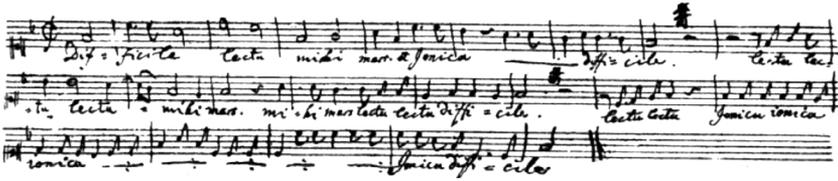
In memory of John Davey, who loved books and music

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INTRODUCTION



This is a song by one of the most sublime musical geniuses of all time.

The Latin is made up. If you pronounce it with a thick Bavarian accent, it comes out as ‘Lick my arse’.

It’s a joke, written by Mozart to poke fun at a friend.

There are lots of sublime geniuses in this book. But there’s lots of other music, too.

Inevitably, this story leads on the great works and the great lives. But it also attempts to put those lives in context. Who were these musicians? What were they like? How did they make a living (or more often, in Mozart’s case, not)? How does their music fit into the intellectual, social and technological tenor of their times? What other music did they hear? What did they sing in the pub when the concert was over? (Purcell’s rounds are even ruder than Mozart’s.)

Music and Words

One question facing the nervous writer of a book of this kind is whether there is in fact any point in using words to describe a non-verbal creature like music. Elvis Costello famously remarked that ‘writing about music is like dancing about architecture’.¹

Words are all we have.

But while some musical terms have a fairly precise, even scientific definition (an octave is the distance between two sounds created by

dividing the frequency of a vibrating wave into two equal parts – a fact known and unchallenged since at least the age of Pythagoras), most do not. The word ‘sonata’ (literally, ‘sounded’, or ‘played’, as opposed to ‘sung’) can refer to a noisy early seventeenth-century ensemble piece by the Venetian composer Giovanni Gabrieli or the knotty innards of a movement by Haydn or Brahms. A ‘symphony’ could be a little snatch of strings in an anthem by Purcell, a three-movement curtain-raiser to an opera by J. C. Bach, or to Mahler the outpouring of the whole world. Spellings, and borrowings between languages, can set up some ambiguities, too: the familiar old favourite in your front room or school hall is known as a piano, but *piano* is simply the Italian word for ‘quiet’, borrowed as a name for the new instrument because of its ability to grade volume. The Australian composer Percy Grainger waged a one-man war on Italian terms, refusing to use even the humble Italian-derived ‘violin’, preferring the more Anglo-Saxon ‘fiddle’ (to the extent of calling the cello the ‘bass fiddle’, and the viola, rather pleasingly, the ‘middle fiddle’).²

Words move through time. The word just used to describe Grainger is ‘composer’. Usage of that word has come to imply inspired thought, spontaneous utterance: making things up. In fact, its etymology also contains ideas of assembly, of putting things together, of placing working parts next to each other. It’s about artifice as well as art, engineering as much as hearing secret harmonies. Stravinsky once told a French border guard he was an ‘inventor of music’ rather than a composer.³

The English language, that rich, shifting, many-layered creature, has other words for people who make things. Someone who works with words is a wordsmith, like a blacksmith. The person who makes plays is a playwright, like a wheelwright or a shipwright. Could the composer who fashions sounds into shapes be a notesmith, or a notewriter? Not just a dreamer of dreams, but a maker of things.

Names shift in time, too. The sixteenth-century English composers William Byrd and Thomas Tallis were spelt Bird, Birde, Byrde, Byrdd and Talles, Talliss, Talless, Taliss, and other variants, in contemporary documents. Mozart, like any well-educated eighteenth-century polyglot, translated his name depending on where he was, turning his baptismal ‘Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus’ into ‘Gottlieb’, ‘Amadeus’ and hybrids like ‘Wolfgang Amadè Mozart’. Other names changed through travel, politics and

local usage: Roland de Lassus became Orlando di Lasso, Israel Beilin became Irving Berlin, Fritz Delius became Frederick, Gustav von Holst lost his 'von' and Schönberg his umlaut. Some musicians are known after the place they came from (Palestrina, Viadana, Gilles de Bins *dit* Binchois); others by nicknames or stage names (Heinrich 'In Praise of Women' Frauenlob, William 'Count' Basie, Jacob Clemens 'Not the Father' non Papa, which seems to be an obscure Renaissance in-joke). Some names still haven't quite settled into an accepted usage: scholars tussle politely over whether the celebrated fifteenth-century English polymath John Dunstable was actually Dunstaple. Suffice to say that the composer himself wouldn't have given a quilisma one way or the other.

There is, inevitably, technical language in this account. This raises the question of how we write about music. We can do this:

... the first subject is presented in the minor tonality before being developed through modal shift, retrograde, and fully worked-out triple invertible counterpoint.

Or we can do this:

I took the theme for a walk, then in the middle I changed it to major and came up with a very sprightly little tune, but in the same tempo, then I played the theme again, but this time ass-backwards; in the end, I wondered whether I couldn't use this merry little thing as a theme for the fugue? – Well, I didn't stop to inquire, I just went ahead and did it, it fit so well as if it had been measured by [my tailor].⁴

The first is an amalgam of the kind of instruction handed down by harmony and counterpoint tutors since time immemorial. The second is by Mozart.

Is one or the other what the writer and pianist Charles Rosen loftily described as 'a failure of critical decorum'?⁵

Actually, both are indispensable and unavoidable. As the lyricist Sammy Cahn said, 'You can't have one without the other.'⁶ The trick is to get the balance right.

The question of how much knowledge to assume is, of course, a matter of judgement. I hope I have flattered my reader just enough.

In any event, the cautious author can take some comfort from the fact that this is not a new problem. In the preface to his admirable *History of Music* of 1776, Sir John Hawkins forewarned his readers:

For the style, it will be found to be uniformly narratory; as little encumbered with technical terms, and as free from didactic forms of speech, as could consist with the design of explaining doctrines and systems; and it may also be said that care has been taken not to degrade the work by the use of fantastical phrases and modes of expression, that, comparatively speaking, were invented yesterday, and will die tomorrow; these make no part of any language, they conduce nothing to information, and are in truth nonsense sublimated.⁷

I will leave it to my readers to nominate the modern equivalents of Hawkins' 'fantastical phrases' and 'nonsense sublimated'. In any case, the best way to use this guidebook through the myriad mysteries of music is to have a good sound system and streaming service to hand (or, even better, a ticket for a concert or a gig), rather than rely on the slippery, insignificant and unreliable stand-ins which fill these pages, words.

And, besides, why shouldn't you dance about architecture if you want to?

The Long View

Another question facing a historian of music is: how much history, and how much music? How much about the people, and how much about the notes? The attempt to tie pretty much all of Western music together in one volume has sometimes seemed a bit like Mr Casaubon drily embarking on his 'Key to All Mythologies' in *Middlemarch*, or Monty Python's 'Summarise Proust' competition. But there are advantages in the method, as well as madness.

Taking the long view of musical history allows connections to emerge. It also invites consideration of how, and why, musical style changes over time.

All music is born in its own local context. Some transcends that context. Looking back, we tend to see the standout work more clearly than the vernacular hinterland which surrounds it and from which it

grew. The work which begins as the exception becomes the exemplar: the unique becomes the paradigm.

As well as looking at how the music changes, the long view can also allow us to look over time at how context changes. That's not just a question of performance style, crucial though that is. It's also about how listening changes. Listening has a social, aesthetic, intellectual, moral and spiritual dimension. People listen differently, as well as write and perform differently, in different eras. We need to try to understand how they did it, and what they thought they were listening for. A Mass by Palestrina reminds its congregation where they stand in relation to their God and His church. A modest little minuet by Lully is not just a pretty tune, it tickles the listener's *amour propre* by flattering him that he knows the steps, not just of the dance but of the whole ritual of precious society. A quartet by Mozart lays out the sense of order, balance and rationality underpinning eighteenth-century thought. Art had to be smuggled into a compact already signed and sealed between composer and listener, and not be allowed to show too much.

Beethoven changed all that. Beethoven told his listeners that he was ahead of them; their job was to catch up. If we don't get his meaning, it's our fault, not his.

That works if you're Beethoven.

But rolling forward the presumptions of one age into the next is an error of logic. It can lead us to look for a top genius in each generation, even if, like Macavity, he's not really there. Books like this one end up inviting you to read about composers you've heard of and like alongside composers you haven't or don't, and treat those impostors just the same.

We need to get over it. All music needs, and deserves, to be treated on its intrinsic merits. Schools and styles are not equal, successive and equivalent. Even more pernicious and damaging is the idea that popular or inherently simple music is by definition less interesting than self-appointed serious or complex music. Distinctions of that kind don't help, and have to go.

Musicians just do what they do. Some know instinctively that they are pushing music in important new directions. Others think that they are (but actually aren't). Most are just doing their job as well as they can.

The *Musikgemälde* and the Musome

As with other fields, some have turned to the insights of Charles Darwin as a way into how music changes and grows (despite being warned by one eminent musical historian about the pitfalls of ‘the pestilential analogy with biological evolution’, fit only for ‘simple minds’).⁸ Another model from natural history provides a different view of musical style spread out over time.

The German naturalist Alexander von Humboldt observed that nature exhibits similar responses when subjected to similar pressures, despite being separated in time and space. He charted these areas of similarity on a beautiful diagram which he called his *Naturgemälde*, ‘an untranslatable German term that can mean a “painting of nature” but which also implies a sense of unity or wholeness’, according to his biographer.⁹ Areas of similarity, or ‘long bands’ as Humboldt called them, are shown together on a schematic of the slopes of the Andean volcano Mount Chimborazo. Modern science calls Humboldt’s long bands ‘biomes’: classes of living things which show features in common because they are responding to similar pressures and stimuli.

Could Humboldt’s insight into nature work as a way of observing music across history? Arnold Schoenberg and Charlie Parker both found their inherited language obsolescent; both responded by deconstructing its harmony and scales. They exist in the same musical equivalent of a biome (could we call it a ‘musome?’), responding to the same forces in ways which share characteristics. Seventeenth-century court opera, nineteenth-century French grand opera, big Broadway musicals and stadium glam rock all answer the call for costly, mass live entertainment with tunes, tights, flashing lights and flummery: same requirements, same ‘musome’. The modern singer songwriter with a guitar is like the troubadour with a lute. A courtly *passepied* by the Baroque composer Michel Richard Delalande and Irving Berlin’s ‘Cheek to Cheek’ answer the same need: handing a beautifully dressed celebrity couple a toe-tapping tune to show off their moves, while everybody else looks on admiringly. *West Side Story*, on the other hand, comes from the same stable as *Rigoletto*: sophisticated technique allied to a tuneful style for serious purpose. William Byrd’s ‘captivity’ motets go with Shostakovich’s string quartets. Late fourteenth-century French *ars subtilior* is highly seasoned sensuality in the last days of a dying tradition; so are the late nineteenth-century songs of Hugo Wolf and Reynaldo Hahn.

Humboldt insisted on seeing life on earth in its entirety. Maybe his methodology can help us to see music in time as he saw nature in space, as a 'living whole', not a 'dead aggregate'.

Genus: Human; Species: Composer

Genius is, by definition, individual. But great musical creators do, broadly, have some things in common; not least, sheer hard work.

Early training is key: Benjamin Britten learnt exactly the same things from his mentor Frank Bridge as Mozart did from his father and Thomas Morley did from William Byrd (as well as some things unknown to them, of course). Music was often (though not always) the family business, surrounding the young neophyte composer not just with sounds but with the day-to-day practicalities of practice and professionalism.

All artists need routine: while ideas flow continuously (like 'a faucet', said Aaron Copland),¹⁰ working them into shape requires discipline at desk or piano – many have found early mornings best for this.

Employment is another constant. Most of music's greatest minds had to waste energy on tussles with their paymasters, and many came off worse. Lesser talents have often been better at the worldly side of things – for every Purcell there's a Nicholas Staggins, for every Shostakovich a Nicolas Nabokov. The extent to which commercial reality can be bent to meet artistic imperative (or vice versa) is another thread. Stravinsky said that 'the trick, of course, is to choose one's commission, to compose what one wants to compose and get it commissioned afterwards', as he often did.¹¹ Many, indeed most, composers still did their share of teaching and performing to help keep themselves in paper and pencil sharpeners. Britten recalled a society lady at a village tennis party asking him what he intended to do for a living. 'I want to be a composer,' the young man replied. 'Oh yes,' said the lady; 'and what else?'¹² The story is usually read as elderly incomprehension of the artistic imperative. Actually the lady was making an entirely sensible point.

As performers, composers are responsible for realising what they dreamed of at their desk. Haydn 'learned in general how musicians must be handled and thus succeeded by much modesty, by appropriate praise and careful indulgence of artistic pride so to win over

[the] orchestra';¹³ Bernstein didn't. (Though few have treated their collaborators quite as badly as Charles Mingus, who punched trombonist Jimmy Knepper in the mouth during a rehearsal, ruining his embouchure and taking a full octave off his range.)

Composers make style, but style also makes composers. Composers need technique. The job requires them to master their inheritance so that they can contribute to, build on, or kick away what they have learnt, according to their lights. What they learn is craft, grammar, manners: rules. Stravinsky liked working 'in chains', believing that 'An artist's individuality stands out more clearly ... when he has to create within definite limits of a convention.'¹⁴ Haydn's biographer Georg August Griesinger said that he 'convinced himself that a narrow adherence to the rules oftentimes yields works devoid of taste and feeling ... in music only what offends a discriminating ear is absolutely forbidden'. Rules, to Haydn, were 'like tight clothes and shoes, in which a man can neither move nor breathe'.¹⁵ But this doesn't mean the composer can kick his clothes and shoes off altogether: Haydn's young friend Mozart thought that a piece of music should be 'like a well-tailored dress', and 'must always be pleasing, in other words must always remain Music'.¹⁶ Technical analysis tells us how that is done (usually described after composers have already brought a style to full maturity). In the phrase of the pianist and music critic Charles Rosen, 'the possibilities of art are infinite but not unlimited'.¹⁷ In other words, its infinities are unfurled within deliberate limits.

What were they like? It's quite easy to come to glib conclusions about the link between personal characteristics and habits and creativity. In fact, taken as a whole, the corps of great composers shows a range of different ways of living a human life. They are, in fact, a bit like the rest of us. Some were happily married, like Bach and Purcell; others were not, like Haydn. Some exhibited a fairly intense sex drive alongside their creativity, like Mozart and Schumann; others didn't, like Handel. Some were self-absorbed and determined to the point of monomania, like Wagner; others were clearly agreeable and social creatures, loved and admired by a wide circle of friends, like Mendelssohn. All dealt with the physical realities of their times, including death, disease and dodgy medicine – between them, Bach, Purcell and Mozart buried no fewer than eighteen children in infancy. What musical potential did they bury alongside those little corpses? Where

are the ghosts of these lost infants now? Do they show up in their fathers' music or letters? It is difficult to find them. Or was it really part of the manner of the times to treat death as an incidental inevitability, explained away in conventional religious phrases? It is hard to believe it.

History: Streams and Dams

The musicologist Friedrich Blume said: 'History is an ever-rolling stream: it is the historian who builds the dams.'¹⁸ One of his precursors, Guido Adler, did much to transfer the concept of 'style-periods' from art history.¹⁹

This book is, broadly, a history of the Western, classical, art music tradition. It divides musical time into parts, varying in length from about fifty years (Classical) to about 100,000 years (prehistory), bookended by a prologue and an epilogue that peer speculatively backwards and forwards. Each part (except the first and the last) has an introduction, touching on generic issues such as the ideas and external forces acting on the music of the time; the place of the composer in society; some technical information about musical style; and a number of representative musical examples. This, then, allows the individual chapters to tell their story without having to keep stopping to explain what a fugue is: forms have a history, just like people and pieces.

The names used here for this division of musical time into strata are sanctioned by long usage. They are far from being historical fact. The borders between them can be slippery, too, which is why the dates in the part headings often overlap. But they work because they stand not just for the movement of musical style and technique, but also for the ideas, manners and beliefs which underpin it.

The novelist Henry James once said that 'we possess a great man most when we begin to look at him through the glass plate of death'.²⁰ Most of the people in this book are dead. However, the idea that a reputation is fixed and capable of being seen as a whole at the moment of its earthly accomplishment is wrong. A history of music is also a history of histories. Reputations move through time, revealing as much, or more, about the observer as the observed. Fine writers on music like Mattheson, Burney, Forkel, Griesinger and many others of their tribe confirm that the historian, like the composer, exists in

context. This is largely about the intellectual environment within which they wrote. But it's also about the repertoire they heard. Scholars writing about Baroque and Renaissance music even half a century ago simply heard less of it than we do now. Conversely, I have of necessity written here about the operas of Marschner, Meyerbeer, Mercadante and Spontini, but have never seen a note of them in the theatre, inescapable as they were in their day. Here, their contemporaries hold the advantage.

When you survey a landscape, what you see depends to a large extent on where you stand.

Welcome to the Museum: Sources, Written and Not

A number of key ideas and questions underpin the writing of musical history: Is there such a thing as a canon of great works? How do we deal with pieces and composers famous in their day but since forgotten? Who was right? If Chopin played the same piece twice in succession, but differently each time (as is claimed anecdotally), which is the real piece? Is there, in fact, such a thing? How could he write such a piece down?

Notation both charts and directs history. The vast majority of human music is never written down at all. You know lots of nursery rhymes, folk songs, football chants and Christmas carols, but you never sat down and learnt them – they're just there. That's how oral traditions work. Within the separate, parallel tradition of written, authored art music, notation has gone through a series of distinct phases, each of which had limitations which the next phase sought to address. This raises the question of the extent to which the means of expression controls what is expressed, and vice versa. Does Renaissance music not have a symbol for double-dotted notes because the style didn't need them, or did composers not use them because they had no way of writing them down? Or both? How did practicalities like the composer working ideas out on a slate before transcribing them into individual part books (not a full score) affect the actual music? Music designed to be sung from memory need never be written down at all. Irving Berlin never learnt to read music. Nor did Paul McCartney. When he tried, several times, late in his career, he gave up because what he saw squiggling along the five straight lines on the page in front of him 'doesn't look like music';²¹ for the Beatles,

the finished object was a performance or a recording, not marks on a piece of paper. The jazz pianist Erroll Garner said, 'No one can hear you read.'²²

Then there's that familiar old standby of human affairs, luck. Some music survived because the paper it was written on got used for something else – binding a set of accounts, or being stuffed into an organ pipe to stop it wheezing. Known unknowns include a complete missing cycle of Bach cantatas, or the musical riches of the royal library in Lisbon, listed in the surviving catalogue but destroyed in the devastating earthquake of 1755. Unknown unknowns remain out of reach, parallel historical universes which must exist but cannot be visited. Sources vary, too, not just because of practical things like the move from manuscript to printing but because some composers took great pains to preserve their legacy, while others did not. Relatives are inconsistent, as well: Vera Stravinsky cemented her husband's reputation after his death; Wilhelm Friedemann Bach sold his share of his father's manuscripts to pay off his debts. Written accounts have to acknowledge the context of the writer: family members like C. P. E. Bach and Max Maria von Weber write about their famous forebears with loyalty and affection; colourful characters like Mendelssohn's friend Eduard Devrient talk up their own role in significant events; witty wordsmiths like Johann Mattheson can enjoy a good story as much as historical accuracy; colleagues can be generous, rivals can be catty and jealous. Novelists have fictionalised events in composers' lives from the beginning: Eduard Mörike about Mozart, Romain Rolland on Beethoven, James R. Gaines re-inventing Bach, Elgar reimagined by James Hamilton-Paterson, who said, 'I have tried to be as factually accurate as was interesting.'²³ The English historian George Dangerfield reminds us that history 'reconciles incompatibles, it balances probabilities; and at last it attains the reality of fiction, which is the highest reality of all'.²⁴ All written sources are, to a greater or lesser extent, fictionalisations: a letter, even written the same day as the events it describes, makes choices and allowances.

Finally, a book of this kind can easily be critiqued for what it leaves out. Like a football manager reviewing his substitutions at the end of a game, I can only assess my choices when the shape of the completed whole becomes clear: should I have brought Alessandro Scarlatti on before half-time; would ten minutes of Turnage have added energy on the left wing in the closing passage of play? Enough,

perhaps, to say that the choices are mine. This is *a* history of music, emphatically not *the* history.

Come, Hear the Music Play ...

On a chilly evening in spring 1745, the petite, pretty, popular French soprano Élisabeth Duparc rose to her feet on the boards of the King's Theatre, Haymarket, to present to the fickle London public a brilliant and brooding new oratorio by George Frideric Handel: *Belshazzar*.

The words are by Handel's finest wordsmith, the gifted but grumpy Charles Jennens. Jennens begins by etching the rise and fall of human civilisations:

Vain, fluctuating state of human empire!

Vividly, he compares their fate to the course of a human life:

First, small and weak, it scarcely rears its head,
Scarce stretching out its helpless infant arms ...

Would the irascible Jennens mind a modern musical historian borrowing his sweeping imagery as a way into the history of music, both before and after that foggy spring day in London? Or would he think that the historian, as he once said of Handel, had 'Maggots in his Brain'?²⁵

Probably. But his words provide one of many possible pathways through the story which follows.

The 'helpless infant ... small and weak' is perhaps humankind's first stirrings of a feeling for pitch and rhythm. Jennens goes on:

Anon, it strives
For pow'r and wealth, and spurns at opposition ...

much as music did in Handel's and Jennens' own day.

Arriv'd to full maturity, it grasps
At all within its reach,

'full maturity' being the masterful synthesis of Mozart;

o'erleaps all bounds (Beethoven);
Robs, ravages and wastes the frightened world' (a pretty good
description of the shivering Romantic visions of Schubert
and Berlioz);
At length, grown old and swell'd to bulk enormous (Wagner);
The monster in its proper bowels feeds
Pride (Mahler); luxury (Strauss); corruption, perfidy (the
rotting death of the safe laws of tonality);
... Of her weakness
Some other rising pow'r advantage takes,
Unequal match! ... (jazz, modernism, pop);
plies with repeated strokes
Her infirm aged trunk (punk, funk, take your pick ...)
... she nods, she totters,
She falls, alas, never to rise again!

But, says Jennens, the story isn't over; it just starts again:

The victor state, upon her ruins rais'd,
Runs the same shadowy round of fancied greatness,
Meets the same certain end.

Is that the arc of the story of Albinoni and Al Jolson, of Byrd and the Byrds, of crumhorns, crab canons and Kraftwerk?

I don't know. This is a story without an end.

One of Verdi's farm labourers once expressed astonishment that his master could make money drawing little hooks on five straight lines.

Those lines haven't always been straight, and there haven't always been five of them. But they have hooked in their inky grasp some of the funniest, most profound, disturbing, moving and truthful insights into the human condition in all art.

This is their story.

PROLOGUE

THE FIRST MILLION YEARS



This is a story with no beginning.

When did two hominids first fall into step when walking, enjoying the subliminal sense of rhythm made by their footfall?

Activities which we would recognise as musical, involving the use of pitch, rhythm, heightened vocal expression and deliberately fashioned technologies, have been part of human behaviour since the advent of our species and before.

One-million-year-old tools allow us to imagine a mind in which we can, in the words of musicologist Gary Tomlinson, ‘discern foundational capacities for human music’, linking materials to the chains of gesture and social interaction required to fashion them.¹ The ‘voicescape’ of shared activities permits the idea of perhaps 500,000 years ago, a ‘protolanguage’, a concept rich in speculation and pitfalls. Tomlinson tells us that music is both related to and different from language: ‘Song offers itself, in this complex relation to language, as a second modern behaviour.’² Our next ancestors, through the most recent quarter of a million years, continued the process of making patterns and hierarchies which form the embedded fundamentals of all music, though still a long way short of anything approaching a grammar: ‘Neanderthals did not sing as modern humans do, and they did not speak a modern language; but their fashioning of the material world preserves traces of powerful cognitive patterns at once protomusical and protolinguistic.’³ Sign and symbol in the

era of *Homo sapiens* (where we talk of time in the tens, rather than hundreds, of thousands of years) provide ‘glimpses of modernity’ in which, potentially, ‘the addition of discretized pitch leaves us still in the realms of protomusicking, if on the verge of these new, transformative possibilities’.⁴ These possibilities included melodic building blocks and temporal patterns: tune and rhythm. Last in this reduction of a million years of music into a single short paragraph is the era of large-scale population movements, migrations and climate events, leading up to the first physical evidence for actual human music-making some 40,000 years ago, evidence which takes the astonishing form of real, recognisable musical instruments.

What makes Tomlinson’s account so profound and so important is that it makes clear that music is not something added to human activity at a late stage of development, to ‘colour in’ the bits of discourse and behaviour which language or social interaction couldn’t reach or didn’t want. Music is not, to borrow a famous phrase from the linguist Steven Pinker, ‘auditory cheesecake’.⁵ Marches and lullabies were not written because somebody noticed the need for them, they are inherent in that need. They are that need. Music does things in and to the brain and the body that we cannot deny or ignore.

The natural foundations of music gave rise both to its basic musical units and its functions, both traceable through time: ‘At this foundational level, not only basic capacities for music ... but also the general social uses to which it is put probably assumed familiar forms farther back in our deep history than we have thought,’ says Tomlinson. ‘Musical behaviours have changed, to be sure; but can we discern much fundamental difference between a church choir singing today and the music ... that must have resounded at [the 11,000-year-old settlement in Turkey] Göbeleki Tepe?’⁶ Composer Ralph Vaughan Williams also noted the natural, spontaneous occurrence of familiar musical shapes: ‘I once heard a Gaelic preacher ... and when he got excited he recited on a fixed succession of notes:



Now this is the basis for much folk song.⁷

We make music because we have to. Deep history confirms what it is about music that cements it at the heart of what it means to be

human: it is social, technological, linked to but different from language and sign. It is hierarchical, not just underpinning but creating human institutions. It is transcendent, allowing us to explore things not available to the senses and logic: what Tomlinson calls 'thinking-at-a-distance',⁸ the basis for all corporate and shared endeavour and ritual.

The significance of this chapter in this story is that these forces and insights embedded in our deepest past underpin all music. Sometimes they come close to the surface, without us having the slightest clue why.

And so history begins.

Part One

**MUSIC IN THE ANCIENT
WORLD (40,000 BCE–500 CE)**

