

Early Music for Meditation



MUSIC AND MEDITATION

The origin of music is rooted in the aspirations of the human spirit; together with poetry and theatre, music began with humanity's earliest rituals. While much music reflects the more visceral and tribal aspects of this genesis there has always been music that aspires to the transcendent, and it is such music that has been brought together for this 'Music for Meditation' series.

The meditative experience is one that comes naturally to us when we are fully at ease with the world, and fortunately it is an experience that can be cultivated to help to bring our scattered energies together when the demands of daily life have taken their toll. Each of the world's spiritual traditions includes practices towards this end: some use images or ideas as a basis for reflection, but many use sounds such as prayers, mantras and of course music.

One way of listening to the music on this CD is to begin by preparing yourself. First find somewhere to sit that will allow you to relax while continuing to stay alert. Then, as an orchestra tunes up before a performance, begin by tuning in to yourself: notice your weight in contact with your seat and the floor, feel the length and breadth of your back, and allow your belly to soften. Notice your feelings and thoughts - not judging them or getting tied up with them, simply taking stock of your experience in a kind way.

As the music plays, gently work at maintaining a sense of yourself as well as the music. Notice how your emotions, thoughts and bodily sensations change as you listen. Whenever you find your mind has drifted away to another topic, or you have lost track of either the music or yourself, you can gently bring your attention back to your body and to the music.

Listening to the music in this way your concentration will gradually deepen, and this experience of deep concentration is both extremely pleasurable, and deeply satisfying. In fact it is through this kind of meditative practice that it is possible to completely transcend the painful sense of dislocation that we often experience between the world and ourselves.

The greatest music is both a communication from the upper levels of human consciousness and also a way of helping us to ascend to such levels ourselves. It is this experience which is reflected in the symbolism of Jacob's Ladder, and I hope that the music in this collection will transport you from the cares of the everyday world up to the heavens.

Dharmachari Jñanagarbha

EARLY MUSIC FOR MEDITATION

'Early Music' has become a blanket term to cover a multiplicity of musical forms and styles, ranging from Gregorian chant to the sophisticated polyphony of the Renaissance and the complexities of the Baroque. This collection has been chosen with the practice of Meditation in mind. Slow pulses, soaring flutes and voices and relaxing lutes and harps prevail.

A traveller in the Middle Ages, whether pilgrim, crusader, messenger, cleric, student, beggar, merchant, king or Pope, was faced with dangers and difficulties along the road which we could barely imagine today. Every pilgrim who wanted to return home safely needed to have some facility with Latin, Greek and Arabic. Where words failed, sign languages, gestures and music helped. Musical talent was often useful in the search for food and lodging along the way, and was offered as thanks, as a symbol of gratitude and honour.

About a century after the founding of Islam, Sufism was developed, spawning a new epoch of the classical Arabic school. The Sufi and Dervish orders believed that only those who understood 'how to hear music' could experience higher truth through spiritual ecstasy. Reports of people who died while in an ecstatic trance are not uncommon in Arabic literature. The music responsible for such rapture is based on a modal system using untempered intervals. Each melody has its own scale, pitch and range. *Mevlana* (track 1) is an example of a melody that invites the listener to spend time with the music, enough to absorb and feel its full effect. This haunting piece is followed by some examples of traditional music such as the Macedonian *Nevistinko oro* (track 2), the well known *Lamento di Tristano* (track 3) and the Spanish cowherd's *Guardame las vacas* (track 4), which is the subject of so many sets of lute and keyboard variations in 16th century Spain.

English Early Music is characterised by the generation of William Byrd, a contemporary of Shakespeare. His soothing *Pavan* (track 5) is a fine example of his work, yet this collection focuses more on samples of Early Music from Europe in the Middle Ages. *Axe Phebus aureo* (track 7) and *Katerine collaudemus* (track 8) come from the collection of medieval Latin and Middle High German poems and songs known as Carmina Burana. The collection takes its name from the monastery of Benediktbeuren in Upper Bavaria, preserved in a manuscript that dates, it is thought, from about 1230, with additions from later in the century. The two hundred or so poems fall into four groups, works of moral or satirical intention (carmina moralia), songs of spring and love-songs (carmina veris et amoris), songs of drinking and gambling (carmina ludorum et potatorum), and songs of spiritual content (carmina divina).

During the first part of the 15th century, music in Italy had been completely dominated by Flemish composers, but in the 1470s a blossoming of native composers occurred. A new style of song was developed in the courts of Mantua and Ferrara called the 'frottola'. Many of these songs were composed by singer-lutenists, but this popular style was imitated by many composers including Josquin Desprez. The singer-lutenist occupied a central role in court life: not only did they play and sing for the entertainment of their own patrons, but they also performed for noble visitors at court, accompanied their lords on journeys, and were loaned to other courts. The two lute songs *La pastorella mia*, 'My little shepherdess' (track 9) and *Perla my cara*, 'My dear pearl' (track 10) are two examples of the singer-lutenist combination at its most soothing. *La traditora* (track 11) is a calming interlude.

15th and 16th century Italy attracted composers and musicians from Northern Europe to its princely courts and papal chapel. The style of the time is typified by a *Ricercar* (track 6) from the lutenist Francesco Canova da Milano, a musician who spent much of his life in the papal service or in the service of various princes of the Church. His *Fantazia Sexta* (track 14) shows lute music at its calming and meditative best.

Italian opera had its earliest experimental forms in Florence. The first opera to retain a place in the theatre was the work of Claudio Monteverdi, at the time in the service of the Duke of Mantua and the composer of varied sets of madrigals. *L'Orfeo*, the story of the legendary Greek musician Orpheus and his attempt to save his beloved Eurydice from the Underworld, through the power of music, was staged at the court in Mantua in 1607. The solo *Possento spirito* (track 15) is taken from the part of the opera when the King of the Underworld allows Orpheus to reclaim Eurydice, on condition that he does not look around to see if she is following him. In his anxiety he turns, on his way to the upper world, and loses her, to be finally reunited by the intervention of Apollo. *L'Orfeo* was followed in 1608 by *Arianna*, the story of the abandonment of the Cretan princess Ariadne on the island of Naxos by her lover Theseus. The opera is lost except for Ariadne's famous lament (track 16), the object of much later imitation. It is a sombre piece, with a single voice searing through the silence.

During the 16th century, thousands of French polyphonic songs (chansons) were composed. This type of music, which had much in common with the Italian madrigal was popular all over Europe at this time. Chansons had already been composed in the 15th century by earlier Franco-Flemish composers such as Machaut, Dufay, Busnois and Ockeghem, but the courtly manner of their music and its verse remained medieval in feeling. With the advent of the Age of Humanism however, a musical transformation was brought about through the influence of the leading composer of the time, Josquin Desprez, and his innovative compositional techniques of voice-leading and imitation. *Mille regretz* (track 17) is a tantalizingly short but haunting love song. Josquin died in 1521, the year of the Diet of Worms that divided the Habsburg territories from the Empire of Charles V and placed Martin Luther under an imperial ban. Early Lutheran music often draws on plainchant for its melodies. Other surviving popular music of the time may be heard in the music of a new Jewish diaspora, the music of Spanish Jewry, the Sephardim, expelled from Spain in 1492 as Ferdinand and Isabella consolidated their power. Those thus displaced often found a welcome in the lands of the Ottoman Empire, to which they brought linguistic and cultural traditions that still survive. *A la nana* (track 13) is an example of this tradition.

Early Music for Meditation

1	Mevlana	12:06
2	Anon: Nevestinko oro	03:16
3	Anon: Lamento di Tristano: La Rotta	04:31
4	Anon: Guardame les vacas	02:17
5	Byrd: Pavan	03:04
6	Canova da Milano: Ricercar	01:34
7	Carmina Burana: Axe Phebus aureo	05:50
8	Carmina Burana: Katerine collaudemus	03:30
9	Arcadelt: La pastorella mia	02:57
10	Anon: Perla mya cara	02:28
11	Dall'aquila: La traditora	02:25
12	Buxtehude: Nun komm der Heiden Heiland	02:26
13	Sephardic Songs: A la nana	03:01
14	Francesco da Milano: Fantasia sexta	02:24
15	Monteverdi: Possente spirto (excerpt)	03:12
16	Monteverdi: Arianna - Lament (excerpt)	01:57
17	Josquin Desprez: Mille regretz	01:54
18	Tabourot: Belle qui tiens ma vie	02:04

Total timing: 65:24



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- 1 Mevlana
- 2 Anon: Nevestinko oro
- 3 Anon: Lamento di Tristano: La Rotta
- 4 Anon: Guardame les vacas
- 5 Byrd: Pavan
- 6 Canova da Milano: Ricercar
- 7 Carmina Burana: Axe Phebus aureo
- 8 Carmina Burana: Katerine collaudemus
- 9 Arcadelt: La pastorella mia
- 10 Anon: Perla mya cara
- 11 Dall'aquila: La traditora
- 12 Buxtehude: Nun komm der Heiden Heiland
- 13 Sephardic Songs: A la nana
- 14 Francesco da Milano: Fantasia sexta
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- 16 Monteverdi: Arianna - Lament (excerpt)
- 17 Josquin Desprez: Mille regretz
- 18 Tabourot: Belle qui tiens ma vie

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