

# *Phantasia*: Epistemology into Music<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Western musical practices have been wedded to ‘theory’, in particular philosophy, since Classical Antiquity. Studying the connection can shed light on both. The notion of *phantasia* (to use the Greek form of the term) offers a fascinating case study. Derived from *phainesthai*, ‘to appear’, *phantasia* was originally a technical term of classical Greek epistemology (Plato, Aristotle), refined through distinction in Late Antiquity (Augustine). Medieval music theorists then applied the latter version to imagined sounds. During the Renaissance, the notion was further developed to designate practices of musical improvisation. These then crystallized into compositions; from the 16th century on, *fantasia*, *fantasy*, *Phantasie* has turned into the name of a musical genre. In that genre, the long-winded transformation from (and of) epistemology into music has left just a trace of the former – but a trace that has endured over two-thousand years and has even branched out east- and southwards (Türkiye, Arabia, India) is still something.

*Keywords:* *Phantasia*, fantasy, imagination, image, epistemology, music, appearance, invention, improvisation, style, genre, freedom, the picturesque, *takhyil*, *khyal*

## Platonic origin

Western musical practices have been wedded to ‘theory’, in particular philosophy, since Classical Antiquity. Studying the connection can shed light on both. An illuminating example is provided by the story of *phantasia*, an expression that turned from an epistemological term in Classical Greek philosophy into the name of a musical genre. In reality, it is a long story, ranging over more than two-thousand years.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of a journal article, it must be cut short.

The story, in essence, is this. The Greek noun *phantasia* is derived from the verb *phainesthai*, ‘to appear’. Yet the noun does not designate what appears. Rather, *phantasia* refers to a capacity: the ability to make something appear. Originally, it is not proposed as part of a theory of art. Rather, the term and the concept, Platonic innovations, belong to epistemology. Before Plato, philosophers did not distinguish between the outward sense impression and the inner image of that impression. This distinction is correlated to the Platonic contrast of *aisthēsis* and *phantasia*. *Aisthēsis* is passive, it happens to us; *phantasia*, by way of contrast, is active: making something of what has happened to us. Phantasy here, unlike a later meaning in English, is not at all the dream that lifts you off from what there is, but rather the very appropriation of what there is. Nonetheless, the same situation will appear (*phainetai*) different to different people.<sup>3</sup> The differences point to the role of their own contribution; the power to make such a contribution, then, is *phantasia*. Putting a specific interpretation on it, we might call it the capacity for representation. *Phantasia* works “through perception”, *di’ aisthēseōs*,<sup>4</sup> but goes beyond it.<sup>5</sup> As the mind is not a waxen tablet onto which the world simply stamps itself,<sup>6</sup> the active contribution is necessary if we are ever to arrive at something that deserves the name *epistēmē*, ‘knowledge’. Nevertheless, Plato’s talk of *phantasia* is not free from suspicion, spurred by the decisive criterion of truth. As the term *phantasia* derives from *phainesthai*, it inherits from that verb a semantic ambiguity: *phainesthai* can refer to the act of appearing or to the state of merely seeming to be

in a certain way, i.e., either to becoming obvious or to deceiving the beholder. In *Republic X*, the book that became famous, or infamous, for the expulsion of most art and poetry from the ideal state, Plato claims that images could be imitations of phantoms or of real things (literally: of the truth): *phantasmatos ē alētheias ousa mimēsis*.<sup>7</sup> Truth (*alētheia*) and the product of *phantasia* (a *phantasma*) here form an alternative. Augustine would later elaborate on this idea. Such suspicion, however, is not the message at large which, rather, grants a constructive role to *phantasia*. This was the lead that Plato's student Aristotle would take up.

### Aristotelian elaboration, Augustinian revision

When *phantasia*, the power to make appear, has done its work on *aisthēsis*, the result will be *phantasmata*. Aristotle claims that the soul never thinks without *phantasmata*.<sup>8</sup> *Phantasia* transposes what has been perceived by the senses, the *aisthēma*, into a mental image,<sup>9</sup> *phantasma*. It is thus placed between the senses and the intellect, and leads from the former to the latter.<sup>10</sup> There is a hiatus between perception and conception that needs to be bridged; this is what *phantasia* achieves.<sup>11</sup>

As the focus is going to move on to music in due course, the notion of a mental image seems unpropitious for the project of a history of the idea. The Greek word *phainesthai*, though, does not imply such a preference for the visual.<sup>12</sup> Yet that twist gets incorporated in the terms as well, once the Greek philosophical terminology is latinized. Thus Cicero, in the 1st century BC, translates the Greek term as Latin *visum*, 'that which has been seen'. More than a century later, Quintilian's rendering of *phantasia* is *visio*, 'sight'. Thus, at least, he restores the original active sense of the Greek term that had been lost in Cicero. Much later, from Calcidius who translated the first part of Plato's *Timaeus* into Latin during the 4th century, to Boëthius in the 6th century, *imaginatio*, the "ability to make images", became the standard Latin translation of Greek *phantasia*.<sup>13</sup> Whether along the line of Cicero and Quintilian, or that of Calcidius and Boëthius, the terms themselves indicate now that we operate with what can be seen rather than that which can be heard. Given the place of rhetoric in Roman culture, that may come as a surprise; but that same culture also entertained a fundamental bias in favour of the eye rather than the ear – a bias that proved to be the dominant force in shaping the idea.

On a systematic account, rather than along the historical narrative, *imaginatio* remains a rather heavy-handed rendering of *phantasia*. While 'the image' is already present in Plato's and Aristotle's discussions of *phantasia*, a capacity to make appear should not be restricted to images. One ought to be able to make sounds appear, perhaps even smells or tastes. It was the rule rather than the exception that meanings were bent once Greek philosophy entered the Roman world. Unusually, however, in the case of *phantasia* a Latin transliteration of the Greek word would co-exist with the Latin translation *imaginatio*.<sup>14</sup> There never was a clear demarcation between both terms.<sup>15</sup> In discussions of *phantasia* no less than in those of *imaginatio*, talk of images prevails.

Augustine, the 4th century church father, is a case in point. Mental images, he notes, do not always manifest an actual perception; they also emerge freely, in dreams, for instance, or in active phantasizing, as in the attempt to imagine something, such as a dragon. Along that line, Augustine, latinizing Greek terms, distinguishes *phantasmata* from *phantasiae*. By *phantasma* he now refers to an artificially created image in the mind, of something that has not been perceived. *Phantasia* in Augustine, by way of contrast, is the image of something perceived, stored in memory (*memoria*).<sup>16</sup> This implies a hierarchy. *Phantasma*, for Augustine, is below *phantasia*, as the latter instructs us about reality, whereas the former deceives or, at least, can deceive, and, at any rate, is not based on reality. Yet it is clear that Augustine's conceptual distinction (foreshadowed in Plato) could pave the way for a transvaluation of terms along the following line: *Phantasia* merely copies elements of the world, while in *phantasmata* the mind displays its productive power, creating things that do not exist. A millenium after Augustine, the Renaissance implemented that transvaluation.<sup>17</sup>

### Late Middle Ages and Renaissance: Three levels of musical *phantasia*

How was that transvaluation put into effect for music? *Phantasia* or *fantasia*, as it is sometimes spelled in medieval Latin, entered that art on three levels:

- (1) as a presupposition: the productive faculty of imagination and invention,
- (2) as a performance: phantasizing, the process of improvisation, and
- (3) as a result: a work, called a ‘fantasia’ or ‘phantasy’.

These three key ideas require some explication and clarification.

**Ad 1.** – The first meaning was related to music already during the late medieval period. Around 1300, theoreticians such as Guy de Saint Denis in his *Tractatus de tonis*<sup>18</sup> and Johannes de Grocheio in his *Ars musica*<sup>19</sup> connect *phantasia* with music. A striking, albeit somewhat special, example in Johannes de Grocheio’s treatise runs as follows:

Sed Lambertus et alii istos modos ad novem ampliaverunt ex novem instrumentis naturalibus fantasmias adsumentes.

But Lambert and others extended those modes to nine, drawing the *fantasia* from the nine natural instruments.

The remark is preceded by a detailed discussion why Johannes de Garlandia and other theorists before Lambert had distinguished six modes. Lambert, like Johannes de Grocheio himself a music theorist, becomes an innovator in his art as he introduces nine modes. He does so and can do so only by virtue of his ability to produce a mental image. The image is not a fantasy in the modern sense; rather it is backed up by what, allegedly, had already been there, in nature (*natura*). A strong medieval sense prevails that man must not be called creative; only God is creator. Nevertheless, Lambert’s innovation is, to put it in contemporary jargon, groundbreaking.<sup>20</sup> Most uses of *fantasia* are not; for these more mundane, but – for the history of the idea – more relevant cases, Guy de Saint Denis and Johannes de Grocheio view and present *fantasia* as a prerequisite of musical practice: Musicians must be able to imagine sequences of tones in the mind in order to be able to make music. It is just one step from here to say that a musician invents a sequence of tones freely, and in doing so manifests *phantasia*.

**Ad 2.** – There is no evidence of the second meaning during the Middle Ages; it seems to be a new coining of the Renaissance period. *Phantasia* in that second understanding refers to processes of phantasizing on musical instruments: the extemporizing of an individual player, for instance on a vihuela, that Spanish plucked instrument of the 16th century, shaped like a guitar, but tuned like a lute. A pertinent treatise of 1565, by Tomás de Santa María, a composer, theorist, church organist and Dominican monk originally from Madrid, bears the title *Arte de tañer fantasía, assi para tecla como para vihuela, y todo instrume[n]to, en que pudiere tañer a tres, y a quatro voces*<sup>21</sup>. Such a “fantasía” can be played, literally touched – *tañer* derives from Latin *tangere* –, a phrase that would make no sense with regard to the first meaning, i.e., *phantasia* as a capacity.

Like every process, *phantasia* in the second sense has a beginning and an end – again in sharp contrast to the first meaning, where *phantasia* designated a mental faculty. Philosophically, the underlying distinction is Aristotle’s contrast of potency (*dynamis*) and act (*energeia*),<sup>22</sup> common currency due to the scholastic heritage. The capacity is always there, whereas the deed occurs here and now, filling a determinate stretch of time. There is also a connection between both meanings, via the wide notion of freedom. The freedom of the first sense of *phantasia* was the freedom of invention, in contrast to discovery – which is bound by what there is. A *phantasia* (Castilian language: *fantasia*) in the second sense, however, will be considered free in another sense: as an instrumental practice that has liberated itself from traditional models of either dance music or vocal music. *Vis-à-vis* the latter, performance in the way of *phantasia* is not just free

from a text made up of words, but also free from the templates shaped by such texts even for structuring instrumental music.

**Ad 3.** – When a piece of instrumental music is titled *phantasia*, we encounter the word’s third meaning. It emerged at the same time as the second, with the rise of music printing. During the early 16th century, *phantasias* by Luis Milán were published at Valencia, those of Giovanni Antonio Castelione at Milan, those of Hans Neusidler at Nuremberg. Those who composed *phantasias* in early modern western and central Europe had a predilection for plucked instruments, then keyboard instruments. Early *phantasias* often attribute a specific function to the piece: *Praeludium*, *Preambulum*, *Prooemium*, *Intonatio*, *Intrada*. In Neusidler’s case, *Preambel* and *Fantasey* are used interchangeably. The *phantasy* is not the real thing, but merely what leads up to it. The ‘real thing’ is governed by strict form. In spite of such reservation, the genre heads to an apex early on, around and after 1600, in England, in the Netherlands, Italy and Austria. Elizabethan England also provided its early theorist, Thomas Morley:

The most and chiefest kind of music which is made without a ditty is the Fantasy, that is when a musician taketh a point at his pleasure and wresteth and turneth it as he list, making either much or litle of it as shall seem best in his own conceit. In this may more art be shown than in any other music, because the composer is tied to nothing, but that he may add, diminish an[d] alter at his pleasure. And this kind will bear any allowances whatever tolerable in other music.<sup>23</sup>

As regards the early apex, in the field of composition, John Dowland’s *fancies* should be mentioned as well as the keyboard works by William Byrd, Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck, Girolamo Frescobaldi and Johann Jakob Froberger. The form of their pieces is, due to the negative freedom of *phantasia* pointed out with regard to the word’s second meaning, highly individualized; thus we might even hesitate to speak of *phantasia* as a genre, rather than a collective name. Or it could be seen as a style, *stylus phantasticus*;<sup>24</sup> thus in the work of the German polymath Athanasius Kircher, a personal acquaintance of Froberger during his visit to Rome.<sup>25</sup> Kircher calls the “phantastic style” “liberrima, & solutissima componendi methodus”,<sup>26</sup> “the most free, most independent method of composition”.

### A genre that is no genre

What the musical concept, in all its three meanings, inherited from the epistemological concept, then, were ideas of freedom of play.<sup>27</sup> Augustine deemed the liberty and playfulness of phantasms dangerous to the soul; the Renaissance, since Marsilio Ficino, cherished the fruitfulness of imagination’s free, ludic character.<sup>28</sup> Freedom remained the hallmark of the phantasy as a genre that is no genre, in its unique career during the two centuries after Kircher, the 18th and the 19th.<sup>29</sup> To point to its eminence, it suffices to hint at such pinnacles of their respective epochs (the ‘Baroque’, the ‘Classical’, the ‘Romantic’ era) as Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Chromatic Phantasia* (c. 1720), Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Phantasia* in c minor K 475 (1784), Franz Schubert’s *Wanderer Phantasia* in C major D 760 (1822), and Robert Schumann’s *Phantasia* in C major op. 17 (1836).

I called the phantasia a genre that is no genre. For it is neither defined by a formal outline or plan, like the sonata or the rondo; nor is it defined by a specific combination of instruments, like the string quartet or the piano trio. While the phantasias I just mentioned are for keyboard instruments, a phantasia, during that epoch – early 18th to early 19th century – could also be for string quartet, like the slow movement, *fantasia*, of Haydn’s E-flat major quartet op. 76 no. 6, or for violin and piano like the one by Schubert, from his final year, 1828, D 934, or for piano, choir and orchestra – the case of Beethoven’s *Choral Phantasia* op. 80, of 1808. The only feature that defines the phantasia seems to be its indefiniteness.<sup>30</sup>

## Freedom and order

The previous consideration seems to suggest an anarchic status for *phantasia* in music. That impression is by no means far-fetched. Johann Mattheson, a leading German music theorist of the 18th century, wrote:

Noch eine gewisse Gattung, ich weiß nicht ob ich sagen soll der Melodien, oder der musicalischen Grillen, trifft man in der Instrumental-Music an, die von allen übrigen sehr unterschieden ist, in den so genannten [...] Fantasie, oder Fantaisies [...]. Ob nun gleich diese alle das Ansehen haben wollen, als spielte man sie aus dem Stegreife daher, so werden sie doch mehrenteils ordentlich zu Papier gebracht; halten aber so wenig Schrancken und Ordnung, daß man sie schwerlich mit einem andern allgemeinen Nahmen, als guter Einfälle belegen kan. Daher auch ihr Abzeichen die Einbildung ist.<sup>31</sup>

In instrumental music, there is yet another genre of melodies – or should I rather say: of musical caprice? That genre is quite different from all other ones. I am referring here to the so-called [...] *fantasie*, or *fantaisies* [...]. They are meant to give the impression that the performer improvises; nevertheless, most of them have been put on paper in a quite orderly fashion. Yet they commit themselves neither to limits nor to order, so they elude any other general designation than that of a good conceit. Their hallmark is imagination.<sup>32</sup>

In a successful performance, Johann Sebastian Bach's *Chromatic Phantasia*<sup>33</sup> presents itself as if improvised; yet it is a written-out composition. That relationship between improvisation ("Stegreif") and paper ("Papier") is not precarious, though. Audiences are aware that the improvisatory character of Bach's fantasy has got the status of an 'as if'. Thus it is a transparent semblance, based on an unwritten contract between performer and listener: 'Let's pretend ...'. Such play within the frame of mutual agreement occurs in a tension between the first and the third of the three meanings of *phantasia* that had been distinguished in the Renaissance: the subjective faculty of imagination and its product on paper, subjectivity turned into an object. There is order on that level ("ordentlich zu Papier gebracht"), the order of script, using musical notation, thus following the (not too tight) conventions that rule the relationship between signs and execution at the instrument.

What might be precarious, though, is something else. For on the next level, that of the composition, Mattheson claims, there seems to be "neither limits nor order" ("so wenig Schrancken und Ordnung"). If, along a basic – though contested – definition music is organized sound, we might even doubt whether the *phantasia*, as understood by Mattheson, still belongs to the realm of music, rather than the chaotic world of noise. That is the question implied by 18th century music theory. What, then, of 18th century musical practice, in the field of composition?

An instructive example – though not one Mattheson could have been aware of – is offered by Mozart's *Phantasia* in c minor K 475.<sup>34</sup> Is it 'without order'? Even for listeners, let alone readers, it is easy to discern, within the flow of music,<sup>35</sup> six sections in different keys. Only the first (bars 1–25) and last of these (bars 161–176) are actually 'in' c minor. Mozart was keen to make the work's audible tonal instability visible as well. He started the manuscript by placing general key signatures, but then erased them.<sup>36</sup> To leave out key signatures was not without precedent. There are no general key signatures in Bach's *Chromatic Phantasia* either; but that work never went into print during the 18th century. Why Mozart acted as he did is not difficult to guess. For one can hardly say that c minor is – as we do indeed say of Mozart's Sonata K 457 – the *phantasia*'s 'main key' ('Haupttonart'). The tone c does not constitute the work's tonal centre. Within the composition, harmonically stable areas – its second and fourth section – are in D major and B-flat major. Contrary to what 18th century listeners might have expected, *viz.* the dominant key – that would be G major – or the parallel key – E-flat major –, the actual keys of the second and fourth section are one full step distant from c. Thus Mozart places keys in the

work as part of a broader conception that is meant to startle the audience by contrasts especially of tempo, metre, register, dynamics and expressive character:

- (1) Bars 1–25: *Adagio*, c minor, 4/4 metre. A lofty slow introduction in the style of grand symphony openings. Low register. Half-close on F-sharp (as dominant of b minor or B major?).
- (2) Bars 26–35: *Adagio*, D major, 4/4 metre. Complete change of musical idiom; instead of the sonata exposition (in b minor or B major) the introduction had prepared us for, we hear a placid little instrumental song. The opening *cantabile* melody is recapitulated in bar 32, this time in higher register. In terms of harmony, the music never drops out of the tonic, subdominant and dominant of D major, thus creating a contrast foil to the chaos that is to follow.
- (3) Bars 36–85: *Allegro*, harmonically unstable, 4/4 metre. A dramatic scene, modulating wildly; starting on the dominant of a minor and ending on the dominant seventh chord of B major, moving through g minor, F major/f minor, D-flat und G-flat/F-sharp major. The piano storms through all registers. Without any connection to the preceding music, suddenly, in bar 58 (accompaniment from bar 56), a *cantabile* ‘second subject’ in F major appears; it is repeated in minor mode. The section terminates in a virtuosic cadenza (bars 82–85).
- (4) Bars 86–124: *Andantino*, B major, 3/4 metre. Once more a sheltered, narrow tonal space, as in (2), yet this time filled with dance rather than song, *viz.*, a rhythmically subtle sarabande. Change from middle register to low register.
- (5) Bars 125–160: *Più allegro*, harmonically unstable, 3/4 metre. *Tremolando* figuration, quick changes in harmony, yet unlike section (3), here the music follows the order of the circle of fifths. The surprise ending is a fall through two octaves into the dark.
- (6) Bars 161–176: *Primo tempo*, c minor, 4/4 metre. An abridged and modified recapitulation of (1) – the only recurrence in the piece –, not as low in register as the beginning.

This sequence is not logical – if ‘logical’ is construed in (perhaps loose) analogy to an inference that leads from premises to conclusion. At the start of each section, we can easily imagine the music to take a turn altogether different from the one that it actually takes, *e.g.*, dance instead of song, song instead of dance, or another distinct option. The end of K 475 circles back to the beginning; yet there is no development towards a goal – quite on the contrary. The first section, *e.g.*, suggests sonata teleology; yet the expectation is frustrated through the song or arietta that follows in the second section. Such disorder, however, is not simply disorder. Rather, it is an order produced in awareness of the order that listeners who were experienced in the style would typically have expected; the composer then counteracts that pattern. Thus he acts in a way completely different from, say, that of a potpourri composer who simply glues together popular melodies that have nothing to do with each other except their popularity.

But there is more to it. The creation of order in K 475 does not merely, in a negative vein, amount to action contrary to expectation – where the expectation that is thwarted through the composition had, positively, implied a logical sequence, broadly construed. The phantasia itself also displays order in a positive sense. It achieves that not in the way of a compelling train of thought, but in the way of a well-proportioned *gestalt*. For our aural sense, there is weight and there is counter-weight. Nothing like logic leads from one section to the next. But precisely because the sections are so disparate, they balance each other: fast *versus* slow, lyric *versus* dramatic, stable *versus* unstable, harsh *versus* gracious, dark *versus* bright.<sup>37</sup>

### The picturesque

Admiration for Mozart’s sense of balance granted, I would still want to dwell on the first of the two strata identified in Mozart’s c minor *phantasia*, the seemingly negative strategy of thwarting expectation through surprise, connecting it to the wider issue here under discussion.

It is indeed a very protracted path from *phantasia* as an epistemological concept to *phantasia* as an artistic entity in 18th to early 19th century musical cultures. Nevertheless, in the exploratory character of the latter, shared by composers as different as Bach and Schubert, I discern a persistent element of the primal cognitive impetus of the word and the concept, *phantasia*. During the latter part of 18th century, that cognitive impetus was epitomized in the aesthetic category of the ‘picturesque’,<sup>38</sup> closely associated in contemporaneous criticism with the ‘free fantasia’.<sup>39</sup> The ‘picturesque’ is not to be confused with the ‘pictorial’, though both terms derive, of course, from the same Latin word, *pictura*, ‘picture’, ‘painting’, ‘image’. Etymology tends to mislead here. While the ‘pictorial’ was, at the time, constituted by the representation of objects, the ‘picturesque’ was understood as a form concerned with abstract qualities such as variety, contrast, and surprise.<sup>40</sup> Pictures can offer examples of picturesqueness, but such static objects may not even provide the clearest manifestations of a temporal process highlighted by theorists of the ‘picturesque’, surprise.<sup>41</sup> To be surprised is to react on a cognitive level through time as it is bound up with the epistemic stance that we call expectation. Expectation is a strong belief that something will happen or be the case because it is likely. Only when an expectation is thwarted<sup>42</sup> can there be surprise.

The master improviser, composer and theorist of the free fantasia, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, called for the skill to take surprising harmonic turns – “frappant zu moduliren”<sup>43</sup>; but they could be surprising only if he knew listeners’ expectations. Whenever a play with listeners’ expectations is performed in the way it is performed in the free fantasia, it directs some of their attention to its peculiar means of doing so: We want to detect what is happening to us. “[T]he effect of the picturesque is curiosity”, said Uvedale Price, a major intellectual advocate of this aesthetic ideal towards the end of the 18th century; “by its variety, its intricacy, its partial concealments, it excites that active curiosity which gives play to the mind”.<sup>44</sup> Activity is the mark of free beings. To the extent that the picturesque fantasia is concerned with any picture at all, it suggests to listeners: ‘Form your own image!’

### Extensions, east- and southwards

At the end, it is worth going back to the beginnings. Classical Greek philosophy had its impact beyond Europe. Aristotle’s concept of *phantasia* is a case in point. It seeped into Arabian<sup>45</sup> poetics which transformed it into the idea and notion of *takhyīl*. This is not to claim that “all aspects of the poetics of *takhyīl* derive from Greek thought”; as Anne Sheppard cautions,

in a very different society from that of classical Greece, with its own distinctive forms of poetry, an originally Greek concept took on a new life and developed in new ways.<sup>46</sup>

Yet whatever the differences, the connection to thought that had been characteristic of Plato’s and Aristotle *phantasia* was maintained in *takhyīl*. Thus Al-Fārābī, in *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-Kabīr*, the *Great Book of Music*, introduces imaginative music specifically by way of distinction from music that, having no cognitive merit, is merely a vehicle of amusement. On the one hand, he says, there is the sort of music

that brings pleasure and an audible delight to the soul, and that provides relaxation to the soul without having any other impact on it.

Al-Fārābī, it should be noted, was not opposed to such music; it contributes to an agreeable ambience, he believed, when it is time to relax. But there is more than that to art. For, on the other hand, Al-Fārābī continues, there is imaginative music which

additionally provides the soul with imaginings (*takhayyulāt*), deposits within the soul visualisations (*taṣawwūrāt*) of things and inscribes the soul with matters it imitates. The effect of these melodies is comparable to that of adornments and images perceptible to the eye: for there are some which offer

merely a delightful view, and there are others which, in addition to that, imitate the dispositions of things, their emotions, their actions, their morals, their characters [...].<sup>47</sup>

The latter, and by analogy imaginative music, have cognitive merit. That is an aspect in which the idea of imaginative music in Al-Fārābī and in the European tradition coincide; but there is another aspect in which their ways part. Both concur that imaginative music must be more than just agreeable noise. Yet while the European tradition conceived of musical imagination's freedom (that quality transcending pleasure) as independence from text, handing over the genre of fantasy almost entirely to instrumental music, Al-Fārābī conceived of imaginative music as being tied to text, which would make it surpass a relaxing effect on body and mind. Words proffer ideas. Music could only attain the quality of *takhyīl*, Al-Fārābī claimed,

where poetic utterances and certain kinds of oratory are employed, and its uses depend on those of the poetic statements.<sup>48</sup>

However, these remarks of a great theorist should not be mistaken for the practice of Arabian music through the centuries. Even at the time of Al-Fārābī, his remarks were partly strategic, aiming at a “defence of music against attacks from dogmatic religious circles of his day”<sup>49</sup>. There have been, at least in later periods and up to the present, forms of imaginative instrumental music, of musical *takhyīl* not derived from or based on text, in the Near and Middle East. Even under the spell of an Orientalist fantasy, Europeans are well aware of it: Under the name of an *arabesque* in music they would understand an instrumental piece with a highly ornamented melody – something approaching a fantasia. As for Türkiye, the art music genre of the *fantezi* comes to mind.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, the focus on an individual instrumental performer in music that highlights phantasia may have been more pronounced in Europe than in Asia. An important example would be *khyāl*,<sup>51</sup> that improvisatory vocal genre performed by multiple groups (*gharanas*) of musicians in North India.<sup>52</sup>

All this, of course, is a far cry from Plato's and Aristotle's *phantasia*. The long-winded transformation from (and of) epistemology into music has left just a faint trace of the former – but a faint trace that has endured over two-thousand years and spread over continents is still something.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The article is based on a paper presented on 8 July 2022 at King's College London. I am grateful to Martin Stokes for comments.

<sup>2</sup> Accounts of the issue that ignore that story, pondering instead a host of supposedly timeless isms, do so at their own detriment. An example is Saam Trivedi, *Imagination, Music, and the Emotions: A Philosophical Study*, SUNY Press, Albany, NY 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 152c. The distinction between ‘to appear’ (*phainesthai*) and ‘to seem’ (*dokein*) is both important and contested in Plato.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Sophist* 428a; cf. *Timaeus* 52a.

<sup>5</sup> Allan Silverman, ‘Plato on *Phantasia*’, *Classical Antiquity* 10 (1991), no. 1, pp. 123–147.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus* 191c–196b.

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Republic* 598b. Cf., for a succinct discussion, Alessandro Stavru, ‘*Phainesthai* and *Alētheia* in Plato's *Republic*’, *eudia* 11 (2017), pp. 1–7. On *mimēsis* see Mitchell Miller, ‘Platonic Mimesis’, in *Contextualising Classics*, ed. Thomas M. Falkner, Nancy Felson and David Konstan, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD/Oxford 1999, pp. 253–266.

- <sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *De anima* 431a16: *oudepote noei aneu phantasmatos hē psychē*; see also *De anima* 421a8–17, 432a4–12; and cf. further *De anima* 433a9, 433a20, 433a27, 433b29 as well as *Nicomachean Ethics* 1150b28. In *De anima* 428a24–b9, Aristotle criticizes Plato’s account of *phantasia* in the *Sophist*. As it is not decisive for the purpose of the present article, this critique will not be examined here. On *Phantasia in Aristotle’s Ethics*, see the collection with this title, ed. Jakob Leth Fink, Bloomsbury, London/New York, NY 2020.
- <sup>9</sup> Aristotle considers an etymology of *phantasia* from *phaos*, “light” (*De anima* 429a), which would specifically link it with the visual sense.
- <sup>10</sup> On the intermediary role of *phantasia*, cf. Kevin White, ‘The Meaning of *Phantasia* in Aristotle’s *De Anima*, III.3–8’, *Canadian Philosophical Review* 24 (1985), no. 3, pp. 483–505.
- <sup>11</sup> On the unfolding of the idea see Henry J. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity, Interpretations of the De anima*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1996, pt. II, ch. 10.
- <sup>12</sup> The remarks Plato and Aristotle devote to *phantasia* do express that preference, but that’s another matter.
- <sup>13</sup> Cf. Peter Flury, ‘*Phantasia* und *imaginatio* im Bereich des antiken Lateins’, in *Phantasia – Imaginatio. V° Colloquio Internazionale, Roma, 9–11 gennaio 1986*, ed. Marta Fattori and Massimo Bianchi, Edizioni dell’Ateneo, Rome 1988 (Lessico Internazionale Europeo 46), pp. 69–79.
- <sup>14</sup> For the history of philosophical terminology, the *locus classicus* on translation *versus* transliteration is Cicero, *Academica* 1.7.25. See also *De optimo genere oratorum* 7.23; *De finibus* 3.1.3–2.5.
- <sup>15</sup> They have often been treated as synonyms; a modern example is Pierre Gassendi, *Syntagma philosophicum* [1658], pt. 2, *Opera omnia*, 6 vols., ed. Henri Louis Habert de Montmor, introd. Tullio Gregory, Frommann Holzboog, Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt 1964, vol. 2, p. 440: “a *phantasia*, seu *imaginatrice* vi”. For a contemporary attempt at distinction, cf. Roger Scruton, ‘Fantasy, Imagination and the Salesman’, in his *Modern Culture*, Continuum, London/New York, NY 2007, pp. 55–67. Scruton takes up Coleridge’s distinction between “fancy” and “imagination”, in his *Biographia Literaria* [1817].
- <sup>16</sup> Augustine, *De trinitate* 8.6.9, cf. 9.6.10 and 11.5.8; *De musica* 6.11.32.
- <sup>17</sup> I omit discussion of Gerard Watson’s wide-ranging thesis that the notion of *phantasia*, which in Graeco-Roman culture up to the first century BC had been confined to epistemology, was after that extended to include “the notion of the creation of an unreal and even ideal world, visualized by the artists and shared with others for their pleasure and enlightenment, the world of imagination” (Gerard Watson, *Phantasia in Classical Thought*, Galway University Press, Galway 1988, p. 59). Watson discusses Cicero, Seneca, Quintilian, Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius*), and Pseudo-Longinus (ch. 4), as well as Augustine (ch. 6).
- <sup>18</sup> Guy de Saint Denis [Guy of Saint-Denis], *Tractatus de tonis* [c. 1300], ed. and trans. Constant J. Mews, Carol J. Williams, John N. Crossley, and Catherine Jeffreys, Medieval Institute Publications, Kalamazoo, MI 2017.
- <sup>19</sup> Johannes de Grocheio, *Ars musica* [c. 1300], ed. and trans. Constant J. Mews, Carol J. Williams, John N. Crossley, Leigh McKinnon, and Catherine Jeffreys, Medieval Institute Publications, Kalamazoo, MI 2011.
- <sup>20</sup> – in the sense of upsetting the foundations, not in the sense of historical influence; cf. Christian Mayer and Karen Desmond, *The Ars musica attributed to Magister Lambertus*, Ashgate, Farnham/Burlington, VT 2015, pp. xxxi–xxxiii.
- <sup>21</sup> Tomás de Santa María, *Libro llamado Arte de tañer fantasía, assi para tecla como para vihuela, y todo instrume[n]to, en que pudiere tañer a tres, y a quatro voces*, Francisco Fernández de Cordova, Valladolid 1565.
- <sup>22</sup> Cf. Hikmet Unlu, ‘*Dynamis* and *Energeia* in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*’, *European Journal of Philosophy* 30 (2022), no. 1, pp. 17–31.
- <sup>23</sup> Thomas Morley, *A plaine and easie introduction to practicall musicke*, Short, London 1597, p. 193.
- <sup>24</sup> On *stylus phantasticus*, cf. Paul Collins, *The Stylus Phantasticus and Free Keyboard Music of the North German Baroque*, Routledge, London/New York, NY 2016.
- <sup>25</sup> Kircher included Froberger’s *Hexachord Fantasia* in his *Musurgia universalis*, with a hint to the student of its value as a model.
- <sup>26</sup> Athanasius Kircher, *Musurgia universalis*, Reprint of the edition Rome 1650, ed. Ulf Scharlau, Olms, Hildesheim 1970, p. 585.
- <sup>27</sup> To explore the notion of play in this context would go beyond the scope of this article. Much is to be learnt from Gregory Bateson, ‘A Theory of Play as Fantasy’, in his *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Aronson, Northvale, NJ 1982, pp. 454–471.
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. Eugenio Garin, ‘*Phantasia e imaginatio* fra Marsilio Ficino e Pietro Pomponazzi’, in *Phantasia – Imaginatio. V° Colloquio Internazionale, Roma, 9–11 gennaio 1986*, ed. Marta Fattori and Massimo Bianchi, Edizioni dell’Ateneo, Rome 1988 (Lessico Internazionale Europeo 46), pp. 3–20.

- <sup>29</sup> While that career was unique, it was not at all discontinuous with the previous century; e.g., J.S. Bach held Froberger's work in high esteem. See Jacob Adlung, *Anleitung zu der musikalischen Gelahrtheit* [1758], Bärenreiter, Kassel 1953 (Documenta musicologica I/4), p. 711.
- <sup>30</sup> Its versatility is set out well in Matthew Head, 'Fantasia and Sensibility', in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danuta Mirka, Oxford University Press, New York, NY 2014, pp. 259–278. In spite of the volume in which Head's chapter appears, fantasia is not a topic either, as the author realizes.
- <sup>31</sup> Johann Mattheson, *Der Vollkommene Capellmeister: Das ist Gründliche Anzeige aller derjenigen Sachen, die einer wissen, können, und vollkommen inne haben muß, der einer Capelle mit Ehren und Nutzen vorstehen will*, Herold, Hamburg 1739, pt. II, ch. 13, § 132. Cf. Roland Kanz, *Die Kunst des Capriccio. Kreativer Eigensinn in Renaissance und Barock*, Deutscher Kunstverlag, Munich/Berlin 2002 (Kunstwissenschaftliche Studien 103), p. 54. In his discussion of *stylus phantasticus* (*Der Vollkommene Capellmeister* § 93), Mattheson directly borrows from Athanasius Kircher.
- <sup>32</sup> "Caprice" for "Grillen" may be disputable, as there is, at the time (*vide* Johann Sebastian Bach, *vide* Haydn), alongside the *fantasia*, also the *capriccio*. Cf. Gretchen A. Wheelock, 'Mozart's Fantasy, Haydn's Caprice: What's in a Name?', in *The Century of Bach and Mozart: Perspectives on Historiography, Composition, Theory and Performance*, ed. Sean Gallagher and Thomas Forrest, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2008, pp. 317–341.
- <sup>33</sup> Mattheson probably knew the piece; though not printed at the time, it circulated in a number of handwritten copies in Northern Germany.
- <sup>34</sup> *Phantasia* is the title that Mozart used in the autograph; the volume of *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*, published in 1986, shortly before the rediscovery of the autograph (1990), has *Fantasie in c*. Cf. Eugene K. Wolf, 'The Rediscovered Autograph of Mozart's Fantasy and Sonata in C Minor, K 475/457', *The Journal of Musicology* 10 (1992), no. 1, pp. 3–47, pp. 12–13, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, 'Fantasia in c', in *Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke*, vol. IX/25, ed. Wolfgang Plath and Wolfgang Rehm, Bärenreiter, Kassel/Basel/London 1986, pp. 70–79. In the *Verzeichniß* of his own works, Mozart wrote: "Eine Phantasia für das Klavier allein".
- <sup>35</sup> *I.e.*, they are not separated by breaks.
- <sup>36</sup> Eugene K. Wolf, 'The Rediscovered Autograph of Mozart's Fantasy and Sonata in C Minor, K 475/457', *The Journal of Musicology* 10 (1992), no. 1, pp. 3–47, p. 27.
- <sup>37</sup> Cf. Thomas Irvine, 'Mozart's KV 475: Fantasie als Utopie', *Acta Mozartiana* 50 (2003), pp. 37–49.
- <sup>38</sup> Cf. Sidney K. Robinson, *Inquiry into the Picturesque*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1991.
- <sup>39</sup> Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, *passim*. Still indispensable as regards the 'free fantasia': Peter Schleuning, *Die freie Fantasie. Ein Beitrag zur Erforschung der klassischen Klaviermusik*, Kümmerle, Göppingen 1973 (Göppinger akademische Beiträge 1976).
- <sup>40</sup> Annette Richards, *The Free Fantasia and the Musical Picturesque*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, p. 5.
- <sup>41</sup> Cf. Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and Beautiful*, New Edition, Robson, London 1796, p. 55: "The English word [*viz.*, picturesque] naturally draws the mind towards pictures; and from that partial and confined view of the subject, what is, in truth, only an illustration of picturesqueness, becomes the foundation of it."
- <sup>42</sup> What happens may fall behind the expectation or surpass it; there is the ugly surprise and the marvellous one.
- <sup>43</sup> *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, pt. II, 2nd ed., Schwickert, Leipzig 1797, ch. 41, new § 12.
- <sup>44</sup> Cf. Uvedale Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and Beautiful*, New Edition, Robson, London 1796, pp. 105–106.
- <sup>45</sup> In my use of words, "Arab" refers to the people, "Arabic" to their language, and "Arabian" to the geographic location of Arabia and things that come from it.
- <sup>46</sup> Anne Sheppard, 'Preface', in *Takhyil: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*, ed. Geert Jan van Gelder and Marlé Hammond, Gibb Memorial Trust/Short Run Press, Exeter 2009, pt. I, pp. ix–vx, p. ix.
- <sup>47</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-Kabīr* [The Great Book of Music] [c. 950], excerpt in *Takhyil: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*, ed. Geert Jan van Gelder and Marlé Hammond, Gibb Memorial Trust/Short Run Press, Exeter 2009, pt. I, p. 19.
- <sup>48</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-Kabīr* [The Great Book of Music] [c. 950], excerpt in *Takhyil: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*, ed. Geert Jan van Gelder and Marlé Hammond, Gibb Memorial Trust/Short Run Press, Exeter 2009, pt. I, p. 20.

- <sup>49</sup> Yaron Klein, 'Imagination and Music: *Takhyīl* and the production of music in al-Fārābī's *Kitāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr*', in *Takhyīl: The Imaginary in Classical Arabic Poetics*, ed. Geert Jan van Gelder and Marlé Hammond, Gibb Memorial Trust/Short Run Press, Exeter 2009, pt. II, pp. 179–195, p. 180: "By positing music as a medium for conveying the meanings that the imaginative faculty produces, and by making melodic meanings heavily contingent upon poetical utterances, al-Fārābī establishes a respectable place for music as a serious science and a serious practice". Cf. pp. 189, 195.
- <sup>50</sup> Cf. Martin Stokes, 'Fantezi/Fantasy and *Usūl*', in *Rhythmic Cycles and Structures in the Art Music of the Middle East*, ed. Zeynep Helvacı, Jacob Olley and Ralf Martin Jäger, Ergon, Würzburg 2017 (Istanbul Texts and Studies 36), pp. 279–288.
- <sup>51</sup> The words *takhyīl* and *khyal* are etymologically related.
- <sup>52</sup> Bonnie Wade, *Khyal: Creativity Within North India's Classical Vocal Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984, is certainly not the last word on this fantastic music; but the book has – deservedly, I think – become a kind of ethnomusicological classic.

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