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Cosmic Harmony, Demons, and the Mnemonic Power of Music in Renaissance

Florence: The Case of Marsilio Ficino

Maude Vanhaelen

Introduction

Since the pioneering studies of P.O. Kristeller and D.P. Walker, modern scholars agree on the centrality of music in Ficino's thought, as both a therapeutic instrument and a way for the soul to imitate, and ultimately return to, the celestial harmony it heard in its primal, intelligible state (i.e. before being incarnated into a body).¹ Ficino follows the Platonic tradition, which links the Platonic accounts of cosmic harmony in *Timaeus* 35b–36b and Book X of *Republic*, with the famous passage of *Phaedrus* on the souls' recollection of the beauty of the heavens. As previous chapters have shown, the importance of music is determined by a specific vision of the world, where the Universe's structure is seen as a musical scale.² In Ficino's case, as first demonstrated by Walker, music is linked to his *spiritus* theory—the belief that both the Soul of the

¹ Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1943), pp. 289–323 and Daniel P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic, from Ficino to Campanella* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000) [Reprint of the 1958 edition]. See also William R. Bowen, Ficino's Analysis of Musical *Harmonia*, in *Ficino and Renaissance Neoplatonism*, ed. by Konrad Eisenbichler and Olga Zorzi Pugliese (Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions, 1986), pp. 17–27; and the fundamental contribution of Brenno Boccadoro, 'Marsilio Ficino: The Soul and the Body of Counterpoint', in *Number to Sound. The Musical Way to the Scientific Revolution*, ed. by Paolo Gozza (Dordrecht-Boston: Kluwer, 2000), pp. 99-134.

² See Pelosi's chapter in this volume at p.0. Note that the soul's recollection of divine harmony upon hearing human music was already mentioned by Ficino in one of his earliest writings (1457), *De Divino furore* (Letter 1.17 in *Marsilii Ficini florentini ... Opera & quae hactenus extitere & quae in lucem nunc primum prodire omnia ... in duos tomos digesta ... una cum gnomologia ...* (Basileae: Henricpetri, 1576) [reproduction in facsimile, with a preface by Stéphane Toussaint (Paris: Phénix Éditions, 2000)] [=hereafter *Op.*], p. 614), at a time when Ficino was probably drawing almost exclusively on Latin sources. This probably suggests that the notion was already part of the medieval tradition.

World and the human souls are linked to matter by the *spiritus*, which is also the place where music can act as a medicine and a conduit towards divine realities. Indeed, in Book III of *On Life*, Ficino gives the *spiritus mundi* a specifically astrological power, defining it as the intermediary between the heavenly bodies and the sublunar world, capable of channeling divine influence into the sensible world.³ Ficino's astrological music is also tightly connected to Apollo and the Sun, and we can safely assume, according to Walker, that Ficino's astrological music was addressed to the Sun, and 'came near to being a religious rite'.⁴ Indeed, in his commentary on Plotinus' *Enneads*, regarding a passage where Plotinus states that we can capture planetary influences by prayers, either simple or sung with art, Ficino explains that Orphic singing enables to channel cosmic influences through the *spiritus*.⁵ Yet Walker remains very cautious when it comes to describe whom these prayers were addressed to. He recognizes (not without ambiguity) that Ficino believed in the power of planetary demons (that is, good intermediary beings equivalent to Christian angels), but underlines that the magic described in the *De Vita* was not addressed to demons, but only to cosmic spirit.⁶ In other words, Walker establishes a distinction between Ficino's personal magic (which was addressed to demons) and the magic described in Book III of his treatise *On Life* (which was not, according to him, addressed to demons). The purpose of this chapter is to clarify this somewhat contradictory statement by looking at the very demonological sources Ficino used to describe the

³ This theme is also addressed in this volume by Prins and McDonald, resp. at p.0 and p.0.

⁴ Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic, from Ficino to Campanella*, p. 20.

⁵ Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic, from Ficino to Campanella*, pp. 22–23. The text is in *Op.*, p. 1747.

⁶ Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic, from Ficino to Campanella*, p. 34: 'The magic in *De V.C.C.* does not appear to involve planetary demons, but only cosmic spirit'; p. 45: 'But are we anyway sure that the magic of the *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, including the Orphic singing, was not directed towards good demons or angels? I think not'.

role of pagan demons in music. Given that these texts served as a source for both Book III of his treatise *On Life* and the Platonic commentaries, they are important to understand how Ficino's demonology developed.⁷

As Tomlinson and Prins have shown, Ficino's universe is profoundly influenced by a Neoplatonic vision of the world, where intermediary beings—angels, demons, heroes—play an important role in various rituals of purification, including music.⁸ As Prins has argued, in several passages of the *Timaeus* commentary, Ficino underlines the role of these intermediary beings in the reenactment of the music of the spheres.⁹ These beings also play an important role in maintaining the unity and the harmony of the cosmos, since they are responsible for holding together the two extremes of the

⁷ Walker's distinction between Ficino's personal magic and the magic described in Book III of the *Book On Life* has led several scholars to critique his views. See e.g. Gary Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic. Towards a Historiography of Others* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 101–105, James Hankins, 'Ficino, Avicenna and the Occult Powers of the Rational Soul', in *Tra antica sapienza e filosofia naturale: La magia nell'Europa moderna*, ed. by Fabrizio Meroi and Elisabetta Scapparone (Florence: Olschki, 2007), pp. 35–52, and Jacomien Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World: Marsilio Ficino and Francesco Patrizi on Cosmic Order and Music Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 201–207.

⁸ See Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic. Towards a Historiography of Others*, pp. 101–144 and 121–128 and Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World*, pp. 183–185. On Ficino and demons, in addition to Walker's study, see Robert Klein, *La forme et l'intelligible. Écrits sur la Renaissance et l'art moderne, Articles et essais réunis et présentés par André Chastel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 89–119; Ioan P. Culianu, *Eros et magie à la Renaissance* (Paris: Flammarion, 1984); Michael J. B. Allen, Marsilio Ficino: Demonic Mathematics and the Hypotenuses of the Spirit, in *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, ed. by Anthony Grafton and Nancy Siraisi (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1999), pp. 121–137; Cesare Vasoli, 'Ficino, la profezia e i sogni, tra gli angeli e i demoni', *La Parola del Testo* 3 (1999): pp. 147–163; Remo Catani, 'The Danger of Demons: The Astrology of Marsilio Ficino', *Italian Studies* 55 (2000): pp. 37–52; Teodoro Katinis, 'Daemonica machinamenta tra Platone e l'umanesimo: a partire da un passo del commento al *Sofista*', in *Arte e daimon*, ed. by Daniela Angelucci (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2002), pp. 83–96; Stéphane Toussaint, 'L'ars de Marsile Ficin, entre esthétique et magie', *L'art de la Renaissance, entre science et magie*, ed. by Philippe Morel (Rome–Paris: Somogy, 2006), pp. 453–467.

⁹ Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World*, pp. 93 and 114.

Universe; they can do so because their nature consists of a mixture of all elements. In addition, it is through the agency of angels and demons that human beings can be divinely inspired, often when they are most free from reason, i.e. in sleep or in an ecstatic state induced by prayer or music.¹⁰ In a frequently cited passage of his *Phaedrus* commentary, Ficino links demonic inspiration with the process of hearing: the process whereby Socrates hears his ‘demonic voice’, he explains, occurs either in the inner hearing or in the *spiritus*.¹¹ In addition, as already suggested by Prins, the harmony of the spheres, and more specifically, the description of the world as a musical scale that connects the lower levels of the Universe to the higher ones, serves as a powerful image to represent the profound affinities between the human and divine worlds.¹² This image can in turn be used to justify the use of magical practices, among which music, by imitating the music of the spheres, enables wise men to attract the influences of the planets.¹³

To date, however, there is no comprehensive study on the reception of Neoplatonic doctrines of cosmic harmony in Ficino’s thought, and more specifically on his use of

¹⁰ Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World*, p. 183.

¹¹ The text is in Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus* 3.11, ed. and trans. Michael J. B. Allen, pp. 110–113, and has been cited by Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic. Towards a Historiography of Others*, p. 125 and Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World*, p. 136. It should be noted, however, that when read in full Ficino’s statement is not without ambiguity, since he adds that, ‘Socrates is clearly stating that beyond his demon’s admonition, foresight was innate to his soul’ (‘sed praeter daemonicam admonitionem inesse praesagium animo Socrates hic plane declarat’). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

¹² Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World*, p. 78.

¹³ See Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* 42 in *Op.*, p. 1463: ‘and just as in the case of sight, he said that hearing has been given to us thanks to contemplation and discipline, so that through sensible harmony we may also dispose the motions of the soul harmoniously’ (‘et quemadmodum dixerat visum, sic et auditum contemplationis et disciplinae gratia nobis esse tributum, item ut per sensibilem harmoniam animi quoque motus harmonice componamus’, also cited in Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World*, p. 90).

Iamblichus', Porphyry's and Proclus' descriptions of music to conjure demons and reach the gods. If Ficino's description of music in his commentary on Plato's *Timaeus* and Book III of his treatise *On Life* has been extensively studied, another crucial episode in Ficino's career—the translation of, and commentary on, Neoplatonic texts related to demonic and angelic inspiration in the years 1486–1489—has so far eluded the attention of modern scholarship.¹⁴ Yet this episode is fundamental to understanding the way in which divine (including angelic and demonic) inspiration came to be understood in the fifteenth century. A closer look at these texts will enable us to determine the way in which Neoplatonic doctrines on the role of demons in music influenced Ficino's own understanding of cosmic harmony.

Ficino's Revival of Neoplatonic Demonology

In 1486, Ficino suddenly decided to interrupt his commentary on Plotinus and to devote three years to the translation of a number of Neoplatonic texts on demonology, theurgy, astrology and magic. These texts, which were completed in 1489, are as follows: *On Mysteries* by Iamblichus, some passages from Porphyry's *Sentences* and *On Abstinence*, *On Dreams* by Synesius, a treatise *On Demons* by Michael Psellus,

¹⁴ See, however, the codicological studies of Maria Rosa Cortesi and Enrico V. Maltese, 'Per la fortuna della demonologia pselliana in ambiente umanistico', in *Dotti bizantini e libri greci nell'Italia del secolo XV, Atti del Convegno internazionale di Trento, 22–23 ottobre 1990*, ed. by Cortesi and Maltese (Naples: D'Auria Editore, 1992), pp. 129–192; Sebastiano Gentile, 'Pico e Ficino', in *Pico, Poliziano e l'Umanesimo di fine Quattrocento. Catalogo della mostra: Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 1994*, ed. by Paolo Viti (Florence: Olschki, 1994), pp. 127–147; Paola Megna, 'Per Ficino e Proclo', in *Laurentia laurus: Scritti offerti a Mario Martelli*, ed. by Francesco Bausi and Vincenzo Fera (Messina: Centro Interdipartimentale di Studi Umanistici, 2004), pp. 313–362; Henri-Dominique Saffrey and Alain-Philippe Segonds, 'Ficin sur le *De mysteriis* de Jamblique', *Humanistica* I/1–2 (2006): pp. 114–124.

some excerpts from Proclus' commentary on the first *Alcibiades* under the title *De Demone et Anima* ('On Demon and Soul'), and from his *On Sacrifice and Magic* and, finally, Priscian of Lydia's paraphrase of Theophrastus' commentary on Aristotle's *On Soul*. Ficino's paraphrase of these texts was completed in 1489, and was published eight years later (in 1497) in Venice by Aldo Manuzio. As I have shown elsewhere, Ficino's intention was to collect previously unknown material on pagan demons because he was interested in the way in which one could deal with good and evil *daimones*, and more specifically in their role in dreams and other super-natural processes. In addition, these texts were giving him access to a series of doctrines that were only partially and indirectly known in the Middle Ages (through Latin sources such as Apuleius and Calcidius), and which had been misrepresented (and often condemned) by Latin Church Fathers such as Augustine.¹⁵

The circumstances surrounding Ficino's paraphrase of these texts shed further light on the significance of Ficino's project. According to P.O. Kristeller's reconstruction, by the time Ficino embarked on his reading of these demonological texts in 1486, he has completed almost half of his commentary on Plotinus, up to *Enneads* III, 2 (which corresponds to treatise 47, *On Providence*). This treatise *On Providence* is immediately followed by Plotinus' only text on demonology entitled *On Demons and our Individual Demon*. In other words, just as he was about to begin his commentary on Plotinus' treatise on demons, Ficino decided to interrupt his exegesis of Plotinus, and to study texts by other Neoplatonic authors. The reason for this is clear: although Plotinus mentions demons, his demonology is much less fully developed than that of his successors. It was only after Plotinus that Neoplatonic demonology really

¹⁵ See Maude Vanhaelen, L'entreprise de traduction et d'exégèse de Ficino dans les années 1486–89: Démon et prophétie à l'aube de l'ère savonarolienne', *Humanistica* 4–5 (2010–2011): pp. 125–136.

developed, culminating with Iamblichus' *On Mysteries*. It is precisely for this reason that Ficino interrupted his study of Plotinus for three years and devoted himself to the demonological texts mentioned above: he was trying to find in the writings of Plotinus' successors a more complete description of demons, which could clarify Plotinus' 'incomplete' doctrine. His belief in the essential unity and coherence of the Platonic tradition meant that he found it perfectly legitimate to use other Neoplatonic authors to interpret Plotinus. This is confirmed by a letter Ficino addressed to his friend Braccio Martelli, where he stated that, whilst he was spending some time in the countryside house of his patrons, the Valori, in Maiano, just outside Florence, he studied Plotinus' doctrine on demons, which he found 'very brief and obscure'. He therefore decided, he says, to read Porphyry, who enabled him to interpret Plotinus' 'divine oracles' on demons:

As I was spending the past days in Maiano at the house of Philip and Nicholas Valori, studying the nature of demons in a secluded place, Plotinus suddenly appeared and infused into us his divine oracle on demons, which he expressed in very brief and obscured terms. For that reason, it seemed reasonable to summon Plotinus' disciple Porphyry, who devoted so much time to the study of demons, and ask him to reveal to us his master's secret meaning on demons. Thus Porphyry appeared and, interrogated through Plotinus and his own demons, he revealed to us what his master had meant, and confirmed what Origenes has said about demons. Now Porphyry spoke to us in Greek; I have therefore summarized and translated into Latin what he said. If you read this summary together with the *Concord*

between Moses and Plato that I have dedicated to you, you will certainly realize the extent to which both Plato and the Platonists agree with our religion.¹⁶

Ficino's meticulous paraphrase of these Neoplatonic texts on demons includes a number of key passages on music that have so far escaped the attention of modern scholars. Yet these passages clearly demonstrate that Ficino, consciously or not, was seeking to uncover doctrines that went beyond the patristic and medieval traditions. As such, he was effectively reviving a corpus of texts that described religious rituals that had been condemned by the Church Fathers (and in particular Augustine) as evil and diabolical.¹⁷ For Ficino was convinced that pagan demonology and theurgy were legitimate religious practices. Several years earlier, in the *Platonic Theology* (written between 1468 and 1474; published in 1482), Ficino had already established a comparison between the pagan (*per philosophiam et sacrificia*, that is, Neoplatonic theurgy) and Christian rituals (*ieiunio atque oratione*, that is, fasting and prayer) which could purify the soul from the influence of malevolent demons.¹⁸ More

¹⁶ Ficino, *Letter 8* in *Marsili Ficini florentini epistole* (Venetiis: Capcasa, 1495), f. cxxxxviii: 'Cum superioris diebus apud Philippum et Nicholaum Valores in agro Maiano versarer, et in quodam ibi secessu naturam daemonum indagarem, affuit repente Plotinus divinumque oraculum de daemonibus nobis effudit verbis et brevissimis et obscurissimis involatum. Visum itaque nobis operae pretium accire Porphyrium tum Plotini discipulum perscrutandis daemonibus deditissimum, qui facile daemonicum sui praeceptoris involucrum nobis evolueret. Adventavit ergo Porphyrius et per Plotinum suum et per suos daemones advocatus aperuit nobis, quae preceptor senserat. Confirmavit quae Origenes de daemonibus disputauerat. Porphyrius quidem Graecis nobiscum locutus est verbis, quorum ego summam verbis tibi Latinis interpretabor. Hanc tu summam si cum epistola quam de Moysis Platonisque concordia tibi dicavi convixeris plane cognosces quantum non Plato solum, verum etiam Platonici cum nostra religione consentiant.'

¹⁷ See Augustine, *City of God* 8.14. On this point, see Vanhaelen, 'L'entreprise de traduction et d'exégèse de Ficin dans les années 1486–89', pp. 126–127.

¹⁸ See Ficino, *Platonic Theology* 16.7.18, ed. and trans. Allen-Hankins, vol. 5, p. 310: 'Sed eiusmodi invidorum ambitiosorumque daemonum violentiam expugnari Platonici per philosophiam et sacrificia posse putant, quod Orphici nobis Hymni demonstrant. Christus autem, verus medicus animorum,

importantly for the purpose of the present paper, Ficino believed that the ancient pagan rituals enabled the soul to perceive the marvelous harmonies of the heavens and the voices and bodies of good demons.¹⁹

Ficino's Interpretation of Cosmic Harmony in the *Republic*, the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*

Before turning to the Neoplatonic texts mentioned above, it is worth recalling here how Ficino interpreted the three key Platonic passages from the *Timaeus*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus* that determined the Neoplatonic conception of cosmic harmony. First, in his interpretation of the myth of Er, Ficino followed the traditional belief that the motions of the spheres produce harmonious sounds. Thus in his commentary on the myth of Er Ficino justifies the fact that the music of the spheres is inaudible to human ears. Here he is reusing the traditional Neoplatonic argument according to which perception must be proportionate to the object of perception, to explain—against Aristotle—why celestial melody is not audible to human ears:

ieiunio atque oratione hoc fieri praecipit' (which reads in Allen's translation: 'But the Platonists think that the violence of such envious and ambitious demons can be overcome through philosophy and sacrifices; and the *Orphic Hymns* demonstrate this to us. But Christ, the true healer of souls, teaches us that we can accomplish this by fasting and prayer').

¹⁹ See Ficino, *Platonic Theology* 18.4, ed. and trans. Allen-Hankins, vol. 6, pp. 108-110: 'Sentiri vero per illos [*sc.* sensus] saepe concentus caelorum mirabiles vocesque et corpora daemonum, quotiens aliquis ad tempus, terreno corpore derelicto, sese in corpus suum caeleste receperit. Ideo Tatius, Mercurii filius, cum esset paternis sacris expiationibusque purgatus, illico exclamavit esse se tunc in corpus immortale translatum ac intueri mirabilia et audire (which reads in Allen's translation: 'And they think that, as often as someone gathers himself again into his celestial body, having cast aside for a time his earthly body, that he will often perceive through those senses the marvelous harmonies of the heavens and the voices and bodies of demons. Hence Tatius, the son of Mercurius [Trismegistus], after he had been purged by his father's rites and sacrifices, instantly exclaimed that he had then been translated into an immortal body and seen and heard marvels').

Consider that, from the very rapid and ordinate motion of the heavens, as well as from the very powerful contact [between the spheres] there arises an immense, varied and extremely sweet melody, in which lower sounds occur from slower motions and higher sounds occur from speedier motions and moderate sounds from moderate motions. But because elemental hearing is not proportionate to the celestial melody, such sound is not audible.²⁰

In fact, as he states in a passage from the *Platonic Theology* already mentioned above, there exists another kind of sense perception, which occurs through the vehicle of soul, and enables the divinely inspired theologians to see and hear the ‘marvelous harmonies and the voices and bodies of the demons’.²¹

²⁰ Ficino, *Introduction to Republic* 10, in *Op.* p. 1434: ‘ex velocissimo et ordinatissimo coelorum motu potentissimoque contactu melodiam ingentem et variam, et suavissimam cogita procreari, graviore quidem voces ex motibus tardioribus, acutiores autem [aurem *Op.*] ex velocioribus, ex medio vero medias. At quoniam elementalis auditus ad coelestiam melodiam caret proportione, sonus eiusmodi non auditur’.

²¹ See Ficino, *Platonic Theology* 18.4, ed. and trans. Allen-Hankins, vol. 6, pp. 108-109: ‘Inesse autem idolo huic opinantur phantasiam quandam irrationalem atque confusam; sensus praeterea tales, ut per totum vehiculum videatur pariter atque audiatur, quibus sensibus proprie homines quam paucissimi utantur et raro’ (‘The philosophers are of the opinion, however, that a certain irrational and troubled phantasy is present in this idolum; and that the senses are present too such that seeing and hearing alike occur through the whole vehicle, senses properly speaking which very few men use and then only rarely’). As Pelosi has shown at p. 0, Proclus had also linked the experience of seeing and hearing to the vehicle of the soul (Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Republic* 2.154.23–155.11). On the vehicle of the soul, see Robert C. Kissling, ‘The *ochema pneuma* of the Neo-Platonists and the *De insomniis* of Synesius of Cyrene’, *American Journal of Philology* 43 (1922): pp. 318-330; Eric R. Dodds, ‘The Astral Body in Neoplatonism’, in *Proclus, Elements of Theology. A Revised Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary*, ed. by Dodds, 2nd edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), Appendix II, pp. 313-321; Maria Di Pasquale Barbanti, *Ochema-pneuma e phantasia nel neoplatonismo: Aspetti psicologici e prospettive religiose* (Catania: CUECM, 1998); John F. Finamore, *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul* (Chico, Ca.: Scholars Press, 1985); Noël Aujoulat, ‘Le corps lumineux chez Hermias et ses rapports avec ceux de Synésios, d’Hiéroclès et de Proclus’, *Etudes Philosophiques* 9 (1991): pp. 289-311; Eudoxie Delli, *Entre compilation et originalité: Le corps*

Secondly, in the *Timaeus* commentary, Ficino is often at pains to refute the opinion of the ‘natural philosophers’ (*physici*), a term which, as in Proclus, refers to the Aristotelian philosophers. Thus, regarding the structure of the Universe, he defends the view, against ‘certain natural philosophers’ (*nonnulli physici*), that both the sublunar and the divine worlds are composed of the four elements. Here he is evidently arguing against Aristotle, who had stated that only the sublunar world is made up of the four elements, whilst the superlunar world is made up of one single element, the fifth element, or ether. Aristotle had argued that in the absence of air, this made the production of sound in the intelligible world impossible, and this invalidated the theory of cosmic harmony.²² Elsewhere in the *Timaeus* commentary Ficino rejects the calumnies of ‘some people’, who argue that the soul might be formed of mathematical rather than ideal numbers, evidently alluding to Aristotle’s rejection of ideal numbers.²³ For, Ficino explains, the soul could not have access to the harmony of the Universe if it did not possess within itself the very causes of arithmetic proportions.²⁴ Finally, in his *Phaedrus* commentary, Ficino clearly links the process

pneumatique dans l’oeuvre de Michel Psellos, in *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*, ed. by Cristina D’Ancona (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 211-230. On the Renaissance reception, see Walker, ‘The Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21 (1958): pp. 119-133; Robert Klein, *La forme et l’intelligible*, pp. 89-119; Daniela De Bellis, ‘I veicoli dell’anima nell’analisi di Niccolò Leonico Tomeo’, *Annali dell’Istituto di Filosofia, Università di Firenze* 3 (1981), pp. 1-21; Brigitte Tambrun, ‘Marsile Ficin et le commentaire de Pléthon sur les Oracles chaldaiques’, *Accademia* 1 (1999): pp. 9-48; Vanhaelen, ‘L’entreprise de traduction et d’exégèse de Ficin dans les années 1486–89’, pp. 128ff.

²² See Ficino, *In Timaeum* 24 in *Op.*, p. 1448. Cf. Aristotle, *On the Heavens* 2.9.290b–291a. On Ficino’s criticism of Aristotle’s theory of quintessence, see Hankins, ‘The Study of the *Timaeus* in Early Renaissance Italy’, in *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, pp. 77–119: pp. 87–88.

²³ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 987 b 14.

²⁴ *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus* 29 in *Op.*, p. 1453: ‘Haud ab re Plato noster animam effectricem servatricem omnium naturalium musicis praecipue numeris rationibusque descripsit, numeris inquam non mathematicis, ut quidam calumniantur, sed idealibus numerorum metaphysicisque rationibus

of recollection with the process of ‘hearing’ the celestial harmony, stating that ‘we perceive the image of that beauty with our sight and hearing, as both Hermias in glossing this passage and Plotinus in his book on beauty testify’.²⁵

In two other works Ficino insists on the fact that pure souls (i.e. souls that are separate from the body), demons and stars have the power to see and hear, albeit without using sense perception, but some kind of intelligible, non sensory apprehension.²⁶ This enables him to underline the affinity between human souls and divine beings, and the soul’s capacity to become divine.²⁷ Ficino also endorses the Neoplatonic tradition

constitutam. Anima profecto non possit universam harmoniam diiudicare absolutasque proportiones promere tam in aere per musicam, quam in corpore per naturam, nisi ipsa harum causas in se haberet essetque harmonia quaedam in se subsistens super harmoniam in aliis inde factam’ (‘Our Plato does not, as some calumniators say, really describe the soul, which creates and preserves all natural things, by means of numbers and ratios that are principally musical (and by this I mean non-mathematical numbers), but is composed of the ideal and metaphysical reasons of numbers. Surely the soul could not perceive separately the universal harmony and express the absolute proportions both in the air through music and in the body through nature, if it did not possess within itself the causes of these proportions, and if there was not within itself a harmony that existed beyond the harmony which it produced in others and which derived from it’. On the harmonic structure of the soul in Ficino’s *Timaeus Commentary*, see Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World*, pp. 149–164.

²⁵ Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus* 11, ed. and trans. Allen, pp. 140–141, who refers to Hermias, *Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus* 166.8–167.28 and Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.1.3. See also *Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus* 4.8–9, pp. 204–207. Ficino’s commentary on the *Enneads* passage is in *Op.*, pp. 1574–1575, where he defends the superiority of sight over hearing and *Op.* p. 1576, where he states that ‘visible beauty is an image of the mind’s beauty; audible beauty is an image of the soul’s beauty’ (‘pulchritudo quae videtur, mentis pulchritudinem repraesentat; pulchritudo quae auditur refert animae pulchritudinem’).

²⁶ This is a Plotinian notion, see e.g. *Enneads* 6.7.6–7. It is not entirely clear what this nonsensory apprehension is; it can be intellection, or an apprehension when one is in a sort of supra-intellectual, ecstatic state.

²⁷ See Ficino, *Introduction to Plato’s Laws* 10 in *Op.*, pp. 1519–1520: ‘Notabis in sideribus esse sensus, et ut Plotinus Hermiasque disputant, visum proprie atque auditum, sed in alio quodam genere longeque praestantiore quam sensus animalium terrenorum’ (‘you will note that there is sense perception in the planets, and, as Plotinus and Hermias discuss, properly speaking sight and hearing, but of a genre that is different from and far superior to the sense perception of earthly animated beings’); *Platonic Theology* 18.9, ed. and trans. Allen-Hankins, vol. 6, pp. 166–167: ‘Neque solum

according to which Pythagoras heard the celestial harmonies deriving from the Muses.²⁸ More importantly, he is explicitly establishing a link between the myth of the cicadas in the *Phaedrus* and the myth of Er in the *Republic*. Here he interprets the cicadas as men who were transformed after their death into demons capable of reaching out the Muses through hearing and contemplation, thus perpetuating the Neoplatonic tradition:

The Muses bring us harmonious contemplations. But the men who listen to them attentively and pursue the studies they patronize and are oblivious of human affairs seem to die to the world, as the *Phaedo* [63e–68b] writes of the philosopher. But since they seem to have lived on the mind’s nourishment alone, on the convictions instilled in them by the Muses, these men who are thus dead to the world the Muses surely turn into the demons who were signified by the cicadas. These demons are said to reach eventually the Muses themselves, since

undique procul et acutissime vident [*scil.* currus animorum], sed etiam audiunt. Similiter quoque stellae omnes et daemones voces[que] faciles facile formant, et sicut absque passione ulla sunt ibi sensus, sic et voces, alerius certe speciei generisque quam nostrae. Haec Plotinus et Hermias’ (‘Not only do they [i.e. the souls’ chariots] everywhere see them [the other souls] from afar with great acuity, they also hear them. Similarly all the stars and demons easily form voices too, voices easy [to hear]; and just as the senses are without passions there, so too are the voices, being certainly of another species and genus than our own. Plotinus and Hermias affirm this’), with reference to Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.18 and Hermias, *Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus* 68.27, 69.18.

²⁸ *Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus* 3.35.3, ed. and trans. Allen, p. 172–173: ‘Calliope et Urania pulcherrimam vocem dicuntur emittere, siquidem concentus ipsi caelestes, quos Pythagoras etiam audivisse fertur, potissimum sunt ab illis’ (‘Calliope and Urania are held to emit the most beautiful note; for the celestial concords themselves, those that Pythagoras was said to have heard also, mainly derive from them’).

the souls that have already applied themselves for a long time to philosophy are recalled to celestials.²⁹

However, despite his constant engagement with the Aristotelian tradition, and his repeated statements against the ‘philosophers of nature’, Ficino never addresses directly Aristotle’s contention that heavenly spheres do not produce any sound, nor does he attempt, like Proclus or medieval theologians, to offer metaphysical solutions to Aristotle’s objections.³⁰ As we will see, Ficino is rather preoccupied with another, fundamental theological problem, which had also been central to his Neoplatonic predecessors: how to justify the use of theurgy without undermining the omnipotence of the gods. As we will see below, the existence of a celestial harmony enables him to justify the use of magical practices in religious rituals, without ever undermining the supremacy of the gods. This leads us to another, important remark. As the *Phaedrus* passage quoted above suggests, and as mentioned by Walker, Ficino did indeed believe in the existence of personal demons, and saw them as the equivalent of guardian angels. Other Platonic passages confirm this. For instance, commenting on

²⁹ *Commentary on Plato’s Phaedrus* 3.35.3, ed. and trans. Allen, p. 172–173: ‘Musae contemplationes harmonicas nobis afferunt: quicumque has attentius auscultant atque haec studia prosequuntur humanorum obliti, mundo mori videntur, quemadmodum de philosopho scribitur in *Phaedone*. Quoniam vero sola mentis alimonia vixisse videntur, Musis videlicet persuadentibus, nimirum hos ita mundo mortuos Musae in daemones illos transferunt, qui per cicadas significati fuere; qui sane daemones ad Musas tandem ipsas pervenire dicuntur, siquidem animae iam diu philosophatae ad caelestia revocantur’.

³⁰ The theme is also addressed by Pelosi and Currie in this volume, at p.0 and p.0. On medieval attempts to reconcile Boethius and Aristotle, see also Cecilia Panti, ‘Robert Grosseteste’s Theory of Sound,’ in *Musik und die Geschichte der Philosophie und Naturwissenschaften im Mittelalter*, ed. by Frank Hentschel (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 3–18 and Gilles Rico, ‘“Auctoritas cereum habet nasum”. Boethius, Aristotle and the Music of the Spheres in the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries’, in *Citation and Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Musical Culture: Learning from the Learned*, ed. by Suzannah Clark and Elizabeth Eva Leach (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), pp. 20–28.

Socrates' demon in the *Introduction to the Apology of Socrates*, Ficino unambiguously describes it as a 'particular', that is, personal, demon, and compares it to an angel.³¹ Similarly, in the *Timaeus* commentary, Ficino explains how people in choosing their life, are also appointed a demon who will preside over their life.³² In other words there is conceptual space, in Ficino's thought, for the use of music addressed to demons—both planetary and personal. As we will now see, the demonology of Iamblichus, Proclus, Porphyry and Synesius provides Ficino with a metaphysical justification for adopting such delicate practices.

Ficino, Iamblichus, and the Mnemonic Power of Music

Codicological evidence suggests that Ficino read Iamblichus' *On Mysteries* in its entirety, and that he did this so meticulously that he was able to discover that some *quaderni* of his manuscript had been misplaced.³³ In his paraphrase of Iamblichus, Ficino does not translate the whole text, but he carefully selects the passages that are of interest to him. As we have said above, most of them concern the demons and their role in prophetic inspiration, indicating Ficino's fascination for Neoplatonic demonology. In this context, Ficino emphasizes the role of music and invocations. For instance, Ficino paraphrases a passage where Iamblichus describes how divinely inspired men dance, sing and produce sounds:

³¹ See *Op.*, p. 1386–1389. I read the text in Allen, *Synoptic Art: Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation* (Florence: Olschki, 1998), pp. 197–200.

³² See *Op.*, p. 1436: 'Proinde animae eligentes vitam simul daemonem sortiuntur electae vitae ducem' ('Therefore, when the souls choose their life, they are simultaneously appointed a demon that presides over the life they have chosen').

³³ See Saffrey and Segonds, 'Ficin sur le *De Mysteriis* de Jamblique', p. 123. Ficino's manuscript is *Vallicellianus* F 20, now in Rome.

Given that there are different kinds of inspired men and of divine inspiration, as mentioned above, some of those who are inspired are moved in their whole body or in some of its parts, or conversely are at rest; similarly, they form harmonious dances and songs, or the opposites of these; similarly, their body appears to be lifted up, distended, born aloft in the air or it seems to undergo the opposites of these. Similarly they utter sounds, which are either even and continuous or uneven and interrupted by silence, and sometimes they tense the tones, sometimes they relax them.³⁴

Here the humanist is evidently interested in the way Iamblichus describes the effects of divine inspiration, of which music, dance and singing are some of the signs. However, like his Neoplatonic predecessors, Ficino is also preoccupied with another theological problem, that of distinguishing between licit and illicit religious practices. In this context, he is selecting passages where Iamblichus is justifying the use of music in theurgy whilst at the same time underlining the supremacy of the gods (or God). Thus he insists, like Iamblichus, on the fact that music can indeed affect human souls and bodies, but that it cannot be the cause of divine inspiration:

³⁴ Ficino, *Paraphrase of Iamblichus' On Mysteries*, in Ficino, *Iamblichus De mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum ...* (Venetiis: in aedibus Aldi, 1497) [Reproduction in facsimile, with an introduction by Stéphane Toussaint (Enghien-les-Bains : Éditions du Miraval, 2006)], f. B5v: 'secundum praedictam inspirantium inspirationisve diversitatem inspirati alii moventur vel toto corpore vel quibusdam membris, vel contra quiescunt. Item choreas, cantilenasque concinnas agunt aut contra. Rursum corpus eorum vel excrescere videtur in altum vel in amplum vel per sublimia ferri atque contra. Item voces edunt, vel aequales perpetuasque vel inaequales et silentio interruptas. Et tum remittunt tonos tum intendunt'. Cf. Iamblichus, *On Mysteries* 3.5.

Porphyry says that music provokes passions in the soul, and similarly quietens them and various sounds correspond to various characters too. Similarly, music changes the complexions and affections of the body, provokes and constrains madness. Iamblichus accepts this theory, but he refuses to admit that these are causes of divine inspirations. Because these are human, partly natural, partly caused by the art of theurgy, they do not have anything divine in them, which is what Porphyry seems to suppose when he says that some men are divinely inspired when they hear the sound of flutes, cymbals or tympanums, whilst others are moved by other melodies.³⁵

Ficino is here trying to justify the use of music in religious rituals, whilst underlining that music cannot be the direct cause of divine inspiration. For, paraphrasing Iamblichus, he explains that melodies are only the human manifestations of celestial motions, which in turn correspond to a specific order of gods. In other words, when a melody is produced, the corresponding god makes himself present and fills man with his presence, not because of what music provokes in our soul, but because of the congruence between that music and the god:

Different species of motion in the Universe correspond to different orders of gods and specifically. From these flow different melodies, which are in agreement, each through its own motion, to a corresponding order of gods, which are

³⁵ Ficino, *Paraphrase of Iamblichus' On Mysteries*, f. B6v: 'Porphyrius ait musicam passiones inferre animo, itemque sedare, et alios sonos [senos ed. 1497], aliis et moribus convenire. Item complexiones affectionesque corporis permutare, furorem movere, cohibere furorem. Iamblichus ista concedit. Sed negat haec esse causas afflatus divini. Quoniam sunt humana, partim naturalia, partim artificiosa. Nec quicquam in se divinum habent. Quod videtur suspicari Porphyrius dicens aliquos afflari, cum audiunt tybias, vel cymbala, aut tympana, alios vero cum alias melodias'. Cf. *On Mysteries* 3.9.

presiding over motion. Since these are everywhere and impart their powers above all to their corresponding beings, they manifest their presence when the melodies that are specifically congruent to themselves occur, *and by introducing themselves into our spiritus which are affected by these melodies*, they possess the man and fill him in completely with their own essence and power, so that the cause of inspiration is not so much a man's passion excited by music but the very congruence of music with a god, where the god is naturally present (Passages in italics are mine).³⁶

As Walker had already noted, in this passage Ficino inserts his *spiritus* doctrine, which is not in Iamblichus (see passage in italics). It is through the *spiritus*, which is affected by music, that the gods are introducing themselves in human souls and can inspire them. In fact, in what follows, Ficino adds a detailed section, which is absent from Iamblichus, where he explains how music can affect man:

The objects that pervade to the vision are certainly proper to imagination and are images of intelligible objects; those which get to the sense which is inferior to the sense of hearing, are indeed material; those which get to the sense of hearing, which is intermediary and in agreement with the soul, are introduced in the

³⁶ Ficino, *Paraphrase of Iamblichus' On Mysteries*, ff. B6v–B7r: 'Variis deorum ordinibus respondent in mundo variae motionum species, certaeque certis. Ex his vero variae profluunt melodiae, quae congruunt similiter per suos quaeque motus certis ordine diis principiis motionum. Hi cum ubique sint, et sua potissimum suis impartiant, melodiis sibi praecipue congruentibus adsunt praecipue nostrisque spiritibus per eas affectis se insinuantes occupant hominem, suaque mox essentia et potestate penitus implent, cuius afflationis causa est, non tam passio hominis excitata per musicam, quam ipsa ad deum musicae congruentia, cui naturaliter deus adest'. Cf. *On Mysteries* 3.9. This passage is also quoted, in slightly different contexts, by Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic, from Ficino to Campanella*, p. 6 and by Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic. Towards a Historiography of Others*, p. 146.

spiritus, and affect together with motion, affect and significance, the soul on the one hand and the body on the other. As such, man as a whole, according to the properties of the various melodies, becomes the receptacle of various divinities, and depending on the various kinds of inspiration those who are inspired are variously disposed—in motion, at rest and in various other dispositions. This depends more on the different divinities who inspire us than on the various kinds of music. For the effect of sound has already ceased when the god acts.³⁷

Here Ficino is establishing a parallel between the processes of vision and hearing: just as images are sent to the imagination, sounds are sent to the *spiritus* and affect body and soul, and this is precisely what makes man the ‘receptacle’ of divine inspiration. Yet Ficino insists on the fact that music cannot be the cause of divine inspiration, since the effect of sound has already ceased when the god takes possession of our soul. In other words, one can practice music and become the receptacle of the god, but the god remains the ultimate source of divine inspiration.

Paraphrasing Iamblichus again, Ficino explains that sounds and music produced on earth have a mnemonic power: when the soul hears harmonious music, it is reminded of the celestial harmony it perceived before entering matter:

³⁷ Ficino, *Paraphrase of Iamblichus’ On Mysteries*, f. B7r: ‘Quae ad visum veniunt nimis imaginaria sunt, et intelligibilia potius referunt. Quae ad sensum infra auditum materialia nimis, quae ad auditum, media et animae congruunt spirituique insinuata cum motu, affectu, significatione vehementer afficiunt animam quidem hinc, et inde corpus. Unde totus homo secundum proprietates melodiarum, evadit susceptaculum huius numinis, aut illius et qui afflati sunt aliter, aliterque se habent in motu, et quiete aliisque habitibus, pro diversitate numinum quibus afflantur principalius quam pro differentia musicae. Cessavit enim iam hic affectus soni quando deus agit’.

Whilst in the intelligible world, the soul heard the harmony of the world, of which it is reminded when it hears melodies which bear trace of divine music, and when it is reminded of the divine harmony it is forcefully affected towards it, if that is possible for souls, which have contemplated the very idea of harmony whilst in the fatherland. Thus made familiar to the god by this affect, it is inspired by the presence of a single god, and thus performs miracles. Thus the cause of this inspiration and those miracles is not a passion brought in by sounds, nor the nature of the soul composed of harmony, but the similitude to the god and the god's presence. It is even less the case that inspiration consists of the purification of superfluous and concrete things in the soul and the body through music and inspiration.³⁸

In his interpretation of Plato, Ficino often expresses the opinion that the power of music is double: it can purify the soul and bring it back to a state of temperance,³⁹ but it can also be deceitful.⁴⁰ Similarly, like Plato and Plotinus, Ficino often compares the philosopher, the musician and the philosophical lover, who are all capable of bringing back the soul to the divine world.⁴¹ Here, however, Iamblichus' conflation of the doctrine of cosmic harmony and that of the souls' recollection provides the humanist

³⁸ Ficino *Paraphrase of Iamblichus' On Mysteries*, f. B7r: 'Anima in mundo intelligibili audivit armoniam divinam cuius hic reminiscitur quando audit melodias habentes divinae vestigium, reminiscens vero ad eam vehementer afficitur, si est numero animarum, quae ipsam harmoniae ideam praecipue contemplatae sunt in patria. Eiusmodi vero affectu facta familiaris deo, iam afflatur singulari quadam praesentia dei. Unde mirabilia facit, huius ergo afflationis miraculique causa est non passio ex sonis illata, non animae natura ex harmonia composita, sed similitudo ad deum, deque praesentia. Multo quoque minus dicendum est afflationem in eo consistere, quod per musicam et afflationem ipsam superflua quaedam in anima, corporeque concreta purgentur'. Cf. *On Mysteries* 3.9.

³⁹ See, for instance, *Laws* 7.812 d–e and Ficino's interpretation of the passage in *Op.*, p. 1506–1507.

⁴⁰ See *Laws* 2 on the right kind of music, and Ficino's interpretation in *Op.*, pp. 1492–1493.

⁴¹ See *Phaedo* 60d–61b; *Enneads* 1.3.1 and Ficino's commentary on the passage in *Op.*, p. 1561.

with a further, theological justification for the use of music in religious rituals: music has a philosophical and religious power, because it is an image of God's harmonious Creation and because it can serve as a trigger for the soul's recollection of the ideal concepts it perceived in its incorporeal state. But it is never the cause of this process, given that it is only an image of divine music. In other words, earthly music can only arise (rather than create) the Ideas of perfect harmony that are already present in the soul.

Three other passages selected from Proclus, Porphyry, and Synesius, confirm that Ficino is indeed profoundly interested in finding a metaphysical justification for the use of imperfect human music. In a passage from Proclus' *Alcibiades* commentary, Ficino reiterates the belief that cosmic harmony pervades the whole Universe as well as the sublunar world, reaching as far as the beasts and the plants:

Thanks to the harmony that governs the heavens, the superior beings temper all the other things in a harmonious way. The heaven is full of consonance (*concentu*) and harmony (*concinnitas*) in its motions.⁴² Then, the divinities that are superior to us participate in this harmony, which proceeds from heaven; after them, human

⁴² It is interesting to note that here Ficino uses the technical terms *concentus* and *concinnitas* to render the Greek terms συμφωνία and εὐρυθμία respectively: the first means 'consonance' and the second means the beauty that results from perfect proportion. In medieval and early modern music theory *concentus* is the Latin translation of the Greek *harmonia*, in the sense of 'simultaneous and distinct musical sound', 'a chord' or 'a musical composition': see Jeffrey J. Dean, 'Concentus', in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, vol. 6, ed. by Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), p. 220. On Ficino's *concentus* as 'the successive harmonies of various voices in counterpoint', see Boccadoro, 'Marsilio Ficino: The Soul and the Body of Counterpoint', pp. 105-106. Ficino's *concinnitas* invokes the notion, central in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, that beauty lies in perfect proportion, which ultimately derives from Vitruvius' *eurythmia* (harmony and proportion between the various parts of a building) and is reinterpreted by Alberti as *concinnitas*. On Ficino and Alberti, see John S. Hendrix, *Alberti and Ficino, School of Architecture, Art, and Historic Preservation Faculty Publications*, 2012, Paper 25. http://docs.rwu.edu/saahp_fp/25.

life, when it is disposed correctly, receives from them the consonance of its customs and the harmony of its actions; the divine power of these same superior beings reach as far as the beasts and the plants. For they too participate by nature in this harmony. For the superior beings contain in a harmonious way all sublunar things, and they perfect them, and in turn accommodate them both to one another and to the sublunar world. They establish a harmony between the body and the intellect by means of the soul; they establish a harmony between the generation and the revolution of Sameness by means of the revolution attributed to Otherness (if I may use this word); finally, they harmonize fire and earth by means of the intermediary links. In addition they order each soul by means of harmonious proportions, and they unite each body by means of measures, which are always the same, and they bring every motion to perfection by means of musical measurements.

This means that music, just like any form of art, ultimately derives from the gods, even in its very imperfection: ‘Thus the musical disposition within us is assuredly a gift from the Muses, even if it is their very last image; *for the artistic and contemplative dispositions within us have gods as their masters and originate from them* (Emphasis mine)’.⁴³

⁴³ *Paraphrase of Proclus’ commentary on Plato’s First Alcibiades*, in *Iamblichus De mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum*, f. G6r: ‘Per harmoniam in coelo regnantem superi reliqua harmonice cuncta contemperant. Coelum concentu motionumque concinnitate plenum est. Deinde numina nobis superiora harmoniae coelitus procedentis [praecedentis *ed.* 1497] participia sunt. Post haec hominum vita recte disposita consonantiam morum et actionum concinnitatem suscipit inde, eorundem quoque superiorum munus usque ad bruta plantasque descendit. Nam haec quoque harmonicae naturaliter participia sunt. Superi nanque harmonica ratione mundana omnia continent, atque perficiunt, et invicem accommodant et ad mundum. Intellectui quidem corpus per mediam animam harmonica ratione concinant. Circuitui vero identitatis ratione constanti, generationem per

In the italicized passage, which is absent from Proclus, Ficino is at pains to show that any artistic and contemplative disposition is divine, even if it is the lowest level in the chain that links all levels of the Universe to the gods. This addition enables Ficino to justify the use of music in religious rituals: using an artistic or contemplative disposition to communicate with the gods would not threaten their omnipotence, since they are the causes of these dispositions.

In a most explicit passage from his paraphrase of Synesius' *On Dreams*, Ficino explains that the existence of a universal concord justifies the use of 'voices, materials and figures' by the philosopher. These function as symbols of divine things, and can be used to exploit the affinities between the different parts of the Universe. By 'voices' (*voces*, which renders Synesius' φωνάς) Ficino is presumably alluding to songs and incantations, and perhaps also to musical notes (which he equally renders by *vox* in the passage below). Here audible music serves as a powerful image to describe the workings of the Universe:

medium circuitum alteritati (ut ita dixerim) deputatum; igni denique terram per vincula media. Praeterea quamlibet animam harmonicis rationibus excolunt. Et unumquodque corpus similibus copulant ubique mensuris. Atque motum quemlibet musicis peragunt ubique mensuris. Habitus igitur in nobis musicus, munus quidem est musarum, quamvis earum imago postrema. Habitus enim in nobis artificiosi [attificiosi *ed. 1497*], atque contemplativi, deos praesides habent, originemque inde deducunt'. Cf. Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's First Alcibiades* 204.9–205.14 (Proclus, *Sur le Premier Alcibiade de Platon*, ed. and trans. Segonds, vol. 2 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003), p. 261). Ficino's exemplar is ms. Palatinus gr. 63, which was also annotated by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: see Megna, 'Per Ficino e Proclo', pp. 313–362. On the importance of music in politics in Proclus' *Alcibiades Commentary*, see Kalomoira Polychronopoulou and Christos Terezis, 'The Neoplatonic Approach of Proclus to Music in Relation to Politics and Metaphysics', in *Neoplatonic Aesthetics. Music, Literature, and the Visual Arts*, ed. by Liana De Girolami Cheney and John Hendrix (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 37–44.

The world concord is such that some things are drawn by others and are in harmony with them. For, since the universe is in harmony and agreement with itself, its parts must fit together in a harmonious way, since these parts are equal to the one whole. But it is worth considering whether the charms and spells of the magi tend towards this. For, just as the things in this world are mutual signs of each another, so they are reciprocally affected by each other. Assuredly he is a sage who understands the affinity between the different parts of the world. For he attracts one thing by means of another, by using voices, materials and figures present with him as tokens of things far away. In the same way within us, when the bowel is affected in a certain way, another part [of the body] also suffers with it: a pain in the finger often results in a pain in the groin, whereas many organs between the parts [that are affected by pain] experience very little of that pain. The reason for this is that they are both parts of one unique living organism, and possess something that binds them to each other more tightly than to other things. Even a stone here on earth, or a herb, has some link with a god, of those who dwell in the universe [*scil.* the encosmic gods]; in congruence with these, so to speak, he is yielding to nature and is as it were bewitched. In the same way, the musician who sounds the lowest note does not sound the note that comes immediately next, namely, the *sesquioctava* [*scil.* the ratio 9:8, corresponding to the whole tone, that is, the interval between two adjacent notes], but rather strikes the *sesquitertia* [*scil.* the ratio 4:3, corresponding to the interval of a fourth] and the high note called *nētē* [*scil.* the ratio 2:1, corresponding to the interval of an octave], because these notes produce a more consonant sound.⁴⁴ For just as there

⁴⁴ Cf. Synesius, *On Dreams* 2.3, ed. Jacques Lamoureux and trans. Noël Aujoulat (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2004), p. 272: ...ὥσπερ ὁ τὴν ὑπάτιην ψήλας οὐ τὴν παρ'αὐτήν, τὴν ἐπόγδοον, ἀλλὰ τὴν

is in the parts [*scil.* of the cosmos] a certain concord, so there is also a certain discord; for this world is not a simple unity, but a unity formed of many [*unitas in multitudine*]. There are parts of it, which agree and yet are in opposition with other parts, in such a way, however, that the opposition between these contributes to the harmony of the universe, just as the lyre is a system of dissonant and consonant sounds [*concordia discors*]. The one composed of opposites pertains to the lyre, the harmony,⁴⁵ as well as the world.⁴⁶

ἐπιτρίτην καὶ τὴν νῆτην ἐκίνησεν (‘so the musician who has sounded the *hypatē* does not sound the string that comes immediately next, namely, the *epogdoos*, but the *epitritē* and the *nētē*’). *Hypatē* refers to the lowest note on the scale, and *nētē* to the highest. *Epitritē* refers to any note that has a ratio of 4:3 towards the note mentioned before. The point of this difficult passage is that the Universe is structured by affinities between parts that are sometimes far apart. As in the case of the body, where there are affinities between parts that are distant from one another (for instance, the finger and the groin), so in the case of harmonics consonance is achieved by sounding notes that are not immediately next to one another. In this case, sounding the lowest note (the *hypatē*) followed by the note that comes immediately next on the lyre would produce a dissonance; whilst sounding the lowest note (the *hypatē*) followed by the note that is a fourth (*epitritē*) above it would produce a consonance of 4:3, and the lowest note (the *hypatē*) followed by the note that is an octave (*nētē*) above it would produce a consonance of 2:1. I thank my colleagues Massimo Raffa and Davide Daolmi for their help in interpreting this passage.

⁴⁵ Ficino’s translation is incorrect. The general meaning of the text should be ‘the one composed of opposites—whether the lyre or the world—is harmony’, corresponding to τὸ δ’ἔξ ἀντικειμένων ἔν, ἁρμονία καὶ λύρας καὶ κόσμου. Ficino made this mistake either because he translated the wrong variant reading, i.e. the genitive ἁρμονίας (present in one branch of the manuscript tradition) instead of the nominative ἁρμονία (correct reading present in the rest of the tradition), or because he misunderstood the text altogether. His personal copy of the text included both variant readings (ἁρμονίας has been corrected by an expunging dot under the letter ς). On Ficino’s copy of Synesius’ *On Dreams*, ms. *Riccardianus* 76, see *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone, Manoscritti stampe e documenti (Catalogo della mostra, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 17 maggio–16 giugno 1984)*, ed. by Sebastiano Gentile, Sandra Niccoli and Paolo Viti (Florence: Le Lettere, 1984), no. 43, pp. 55–57. *On Dreams* is at cc. 164r–187r; the passage is to be found at c. 166r.

⁴⁶ *Paraphrase of Synesius’ On Dreams*, in *Iamblichus De mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum*, f. L2r: “‘Ea est mundi concordia, ut alia trahantur ab aliis atque conspirant”. Cum enim universum hoc sibimet sit compatiens, atque conspirans, oportet, partes congruenter inter se convenire, utpote quae unius aequae totius sint partes. Consideratione vero dignum est, utrum huc tendant illices,

In other words, just as there exist, in the body and in music, affinities between parts that are far away from one another, and dissonances between parts that are close to one another, so in the Universe there are oppositions and agreements between the parts that compose it, which all contribute to the harmony of the world. It is the task of the *magus* to exploit these affinities and dissonances, just as a physician or a musician know how to use the relation between various parts of the body, or between various musical notes.⁴⁷

As we have mentioned above, Ficino considers that the soul possesses within itself the ideal structure of cosmic harmony, of which it is reminded when hearing music on earth. But Ficino goes further and describes in numerous passages the soul's power to produce harmony and restore the balance of the body.⁴⁸ In the following passage, Ficino is looking once more for a theological explanation accounting for the soul's ability to harmonize the body. In his paraphrase of Porphyry's *Auxiliaries to the*

vel motacillae magorum. Mundana enim sicut ex se vicissim significantur, sic invicem permulcentur. Iam vero sapiens est, qui mundanarum partium cognationem tenet. Trahit enim per aliud, aliud praesentia tenens, velut pignora quaedam procul absentium, voces videlicet et materias atque figuras. Perinde sicut in nobis dum interius patitur aliquid, aliud quoque compatitur malumque digiti in emunctorium saepe resultat, dum inter haec multa minime patiuntur. Ambo enim illa, et unius animalis sunt membra, et habent aliquid inter se cognatius, quam cum caeteris. Atqui et alicui deo ex deorum numero mundanorum lapis hic, herbae congruit, quibus quasi compatiens naturae cedit, ac veluti fascinator. Quemadmodum qui gravem pulsat vocem, commovet subito non proximam sexquioctavam, sed sexquiterciam et acutam nomine netem. Haec enim propius sibi invicem congruunt. Est enim in partibus sicut concordia quaedam, sic insuper, et discordia. Nam mundus hic non est simpliciter unum, sed ex pluribus unum. Suntque in eo partes partibus consentientes interim, atque dissidentes. Ita tamen ut earum dissensio ad consensionem universi conducatur, sicut lyra constitutio quaedam est tonorum dissonantium atque consonantium. Ipsum vero ex oppositis unum ad harmoniam et lyram pertinet, atque mundum'. See Synesius, *On Dreams* 2.2–3, pp. 271–272. Tomlinson quotes one section of this passage, pp. 129–130, to show the importance of sound and music for Ficino.

⁴⁷ On the image of the lyre to describe the harmony of the world, see Stéphane Toussaint, “Quasi lyra”: corde et magia. Nota sulla lira nel Rinascimento’, *Cahiers Accademia* 4 (2001): pp. 116–132.

⁴⁸ On this, see Prins, *Echoes of an Invisible World*, pp. 186–193.

Perception of Intelligible Natures (which he translated under the title *De Occasionibus*), he selects a passage where the living being is said to be analogous to a musician, who moves the harmony that is within him; the soul is described as analogous to a transcendent harmony, and the body, to the tuned strings of an instrument:

When a living being perceives, the soul appears to be analogous to a transcendent harmony, which moves by itself the strings, which are tuned, whilst the body is similar to a harmony that is immanent to the strings. But the living being is the cause of motion because it is an animate being. It is assuredly analogous to the musician, by virtue of being tuned. But the bodies that pulsate through a sensual passion seem to be analogous to the tuned strings. For in that case it is not the transcendent harmony that is affected, but the strings. And assuredly the musician moves through the harmony that is within him; yet the strings would not be moved in a musical way, even if the musician wished it, if the harmony did not authorize it.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ *Translation of Porphyry's Sentences*, in *Iamblichus De mysteriis Aegyptiorum, Chaldaeorum, Assyriorum*, ff. 11v–2r: ‘Quando enim animal sentit anima quidem similis esse videtur armoniae cuidam separatae ex seipsa cordas moventi contemperatas. Corpus autem simile harmoniae, quae inseparabilis inest cordis. Sed causa movendi esse videtur animal, propterea quod sit animatum. Quod quidem simile est musico, ex eo quod sit concinnum. Corpora vero quae per passionem sensualem pulsantur, similia contemperatis cordis apparent. Etenim ibi non harmonica quidem separata patitur, sed corda. Et movet sane musicus per ipsam quae sibi inest harmoniam, neque tamen corda ratione musica moverentur etiam si vellet musicus nisi harmonia ipsa id dixit’. See Porphyry, *Sentences* 18.8–18. For the English translation, I am indebted to John Dillon’s translation of Porphyry in *Porphyre. Sentences. Études d’introduction, texte grec et traduction française, commentaire*, ed. by Luc Brisson et al. (Paris: Vrin, 2005), vol. 2, p. 800. On Ficino’s copy of the text, *Laurentianus* 80.15, see *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, no. 95, pp. 122–123. On the history of Ficino’s translation, see Jean-Michel Flamand, *Études et traductions des Ἀπορρητά de Porphyre*, in *Porphyre. Sentences*, vol.1, pp. 285–300: pp. 285–286.

As modern scholars have shown, Porphyry's text derives from Plotinus, who used the same comparison to show that the soul remains unaffected by the sense perception that it causes in the body it inhabits. Plotinus alludes to the musical phenomenon where the vibrating string of a well-tuned instrument string can remotely cause the other strings to vibrate, a doctrine that had already been appropriated by early medieval philosophy, as Charles Burnett shows in this volume.⁵⁰ Just as the harmony can remotely cause this vibration, so the soul can cause sense perception in the body without being affected by it.⁵¹ Here, however, the passage not only provides Ficino with an image describing the soul's powers, but also presents a theological justification for the soul's capacity to produce harmony on earth. Given the context in which Ficino was reading these Neoplatonic texts, it is safe to assume that the humanist was particularly interested in the description of the living being as a musician, who can harmonize the strings, but is ultimately subordinated to the transcendent harmony. In his eyes, this image could justify the use of music in religious rituals, whilst underlining the superiority and absolute power of the intelligible harmony, sole responsible for authorizing the performance of licit practices. What is also striking here is that Ficino's interpretation strongly echoes the way in which the 12th century philosopher Hermann of Carinthia used Plotinus' doctrine of sympathetic vibration to describe the workings of the Universe and justify the use of magical practices.

⁵⁰ See Burnett, p. 0.

⁵¹ See *Porphyre. Sentences*, vol. 2, pp. 485–497. The text is in Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.6.4.41–52. Ficino comments on this passage in his commentary on Plotinus, underlining the affinities between Plotinus and Porphyry (*Op.*, p. 1717–1718), but does not dwell on the musical comparison.

Conclusion

Ficino's revival of Neoplatonic texts on demons and theurgy considerably modified the medieval conception of cosmic harmony and its cultural reception. As his exegesis of *Republic*, *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus* demonstrates, Ficino was more interested in justifying the use of some delicate religious practices than to engage with the Aristotelian tradition, which rejected the very existence of the music of the spheres. As we have seen, he refuted some important points made by Aristotle, such as the notions that the intelligible world might only be composed of ether, and that there might not be ideal numbers within the soul. However, in the texts analysed above, he never fully engaged with the question as to why the music of the spheres might be inaudible to human ears. Neither did he try, like some of his Neoplatonic and medieval predecessors, to find metaphysical solutions to reconcile the Platonic notion of cosmic harmony and Aristotle's soundless universe. As his selection of Neoplatonic passages on theurgy indicates, the Florentine humanist was above all preoccupied with how earthly religious rituals, including prayer, song, and music, could be efficient in a world where gods were necessarily omnipotent. Plotinus' belief in universal sympathy, often described in musical terms, partly explained how a magus on earth could exploit the motions of the planets without being accused of practicing illicit magic. However, the post-Plotinian tradition—from Iamblichus to Proclus—provided Ficino with further theological arguments. By adopting Iamblichus' conflation of the doctrines of cosmic harmony and recollection Ficino could describe music as a trigger for the soul to remember the cosmic harmony it heard before entering the material world. In this context, the notion of the world as a musical scale is more than an image: it functions as a powerful tool to describe

instrumental music as a gift from the gods that can be used to ascend the ladder of beings. Similarly, the existence of a cosmic harmony that pervades the whole universe means that the philosopher's prayers and songs are a genuine echo of the divine music of God's Creation.

Going back to Walker's assessment of Ficino's demonology, we can safely conclude that Ficino did adopt—albeit with some caution—the basic tenets of Neoplatonic demonology. Thus his magic, including the one described in Book III of his treatise *On Life*, was addressed to planetary demons, even if God remained the ultimate cause of earthly harmony. In this context, audible music and invocations are used to purify the soul from the influence of malevolent demons and to help the soul ascent to a supra-rational state where it can 'hear the marvelous harmonies of the universe' and communicate with the good demons.

Ficino's revival of Neoplatonic demonology represents one of the last attempts to explore and put into practice some of the most delicate doctrines inherited from ancient paganism, before the Church started to narrow down the limits of religious orthodoxy. However, even before Francesco Patrizi presented a radically anti-Aristotelian account of cosmic harmony, another, unjustly neglected figure—Francesco Cattani da Diacceto—initiated the introduction of Platonic ideas on cosmic harmony in the University, explicitly refuting Aristotle's contention that planets did not produce any sound, and defending the use of music in religious rituals to help the soul recall divine concepts.⁵²

⁵² On Diacceto's teaching at the Studio, see Armando F. *Lo studio fiorentino, 1473–1503. Ricerche e documenti*, vol. 2 (Florence: Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, 1973), pp. 218–222, where it is indicated that Diacceto was to teach Aristotle's *On the Heavens* and *Ethics*. On his refutation of Aristotle, see Diacceto, *Paraphrase of Book II of Aristotle's On the Heavens*, in *Opera omnia Francisci Catanei Diacetii* (Basileae: per Henricum Petri et Petrum Pernam, 1563), pp. 226–227. On Diacceto's defence of the use of music in religious practices, see *On the Beautiful* 2.2, in his *Opera*

omnia, pp. 35–38. On the context, see Kristeller, ‘Francesco Diacceto and Florentine Platonism in the Sixteenth Century’ in his *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, vol. 1 (Rome: Storia e letteratura, 1956), pp. 287–336. On Patrizi, see Prins’ chapter in this volume.