

Music Theory And Epicurean Philosophy

Post by "Eikadistes" of May 25, 2019 at 3:56 PM

So where do "majors" and "minors" fit into all of this? Prior to the Renaissance period, we would not have described any of the ratios that determine pitch by "major" and "minor". "Major-ness" and "minor-ness" come from tri-tones, or, a **chord** (multiple tones played simultaneously) that changes the form of a sin wave. Prior to the Renaissance period, we weren't playing with tri-tones. Monks from the Medieval period mostly sang melodies with no accompaniment, and it took hundreds of years to develop the concept of "harmony". Western music didn't become what we hear today, with multiple instruments and movements, until the *late*-Renaissance period. While there are truly fascinating mathematical patterns in music theory, and while we can diagram each and every note, interval, and chord by a rather elegant mathematics, our perception of "major-ness" and "minor-ness" largely originates from philosophers who attempted to equate emotional qualities from acoustic structures. Ultimately, music is rooted in language and culture, and our music is rooted in Renaissance-era refinement of Pythagorean theory (you can see how completely appropriate this topic is for Epicureans. Literally, the revival of classical materialism lead to a revision of idealistic music theory to the messy, emotional, asymmetrical music we know and love, today). Plato was one of the first to attempt to metaphysically link music and the human soul (and managed to be an uncompromising authoritarian while doing so). Without getting into a discussion of ancient Greek "modes" (which deserves its own thread), Plato considered--for example--the Mixolydian mode, in which the Seikilos Epitaph was written, to be an "effeminate" mode, that "discourages men" from "action". **If he were around today, Plato would have been making speeches alongside Lynne Cheney and Tipper Gore to ban hip-hop, rap, metal, hard rock, punk--you name it.** A lot of philosophers spent time assigning emotional qualities to mathematical ratios. Aristotle wasn't a cultural totalitarian like Plato, but he was equally prejudiced against certain forms of music. Of the Mixolydian Mode he said that it makes me "sad and grave". Fuck him, and fuck Plato. The Seikilos Epitaph is beautiful, and I think the Memento Mori expressions are empowering. But, within the context of our own bodies, we're both right.

Now, I want to spend some time discussing my own, subjective music theory.

There is nothing inherently absolute about "majors" and "minors", anymore than there is about "fifths" or "sevenths" or "sustained seconds" or "sustained fourths", with the sole exception--by the theory I derived-- of "augmentations". An augmentation has exactly three notes between each note, all the way up, and down the musical spectrum. It is the only one that does this. Also, it sounds weird, and really gross if you just play it by itself without context. It sounds like a mess. It is also more symmetrical to modern music than any of the other sounds. Many of us suppose a "major" chord to be the "correct" sound. It's not. It's no more special than a "minor", or than a "minor second", which also sounds like a weird perversion. My point here is that--in

my opinion--any mathematically perfect chords in contemporary music ... sound gross. Now, grotesque sounds have a time, and a place, and, depending on what's around them, relatively, can actually sound beautiful. But that too is highly subjective. But human life isn't about perfect ideals. Maybe the Star Trek aliens like music to be written with correspondance to Prime Numbers, but we don't. Our lives are hormonal, sweaty, happy, horny, hungry, scared, frightened, elated, and empowered. Our music reflects the diversity of our lives.

And, to get back to Cassius' original question, if I can answer this succinctly, "major" and "minor" are what they are because the expression of happiness (pleasure), and the expression of sadness (pain) represent the range of our colorful spectrum of our human experience, and have identified the sound of pleasure with brightness, light, gladness, and empowerment, while we identify that sound of pain as a shadow that darkens, weighs, and depresses. Subjectively, this language corresponds with the subjective experience of those sounds. So, we queue-in on those two chord structures.