

Ancient Egyptian Music

Music has been an integral part of Egyptian culture since antiquity. The Bible documents the instruments played by the ancient Hebrews, all of which are correlated in Egyptian archaeology. Egyptian music probably had a significant impact on the development of ancient Greek music, and via the Greeks was important to early European music well into the Middle Ages. The modern music of Egypt is considered as a core of Arabic music and Oriental music as it has been a source for or a main influence on other regional styles.

The ancient Egyptians credited the goddess Bat with the invention of music. The cult of Bat was eventually syncretized into that of Hathor because both were depicted as cows. Hathor's music was believed to have been used by Osiris as part of his effort to civilize the world. The lion-goddess Bastet was also considered a goddess of music.

Neolithic period

In prehistoric Egypt, music and chanting were commonly used in magic and rituals. Rhythms during this time were unvaried and music served to create rhythm. Small shells were used as whistles.

Predynastic period

During the predynastic period of Egyptian history, funerary chants continued to play an important role in Egyptian religion and were accompanied by clappers or a flute. Despite the lack of physical evidence in some cases, Egyptologists theorize that the development of certain instruments known of the Old Kingdom period, such as the end-blown flute, took place during this time.

Old Kingdom

The evidence is for instruments played more securely attested in the Old Kingdom when harps, flutes and double clarinets were played. Percussion instruments and lutes were added to orchestras by the Middle Kingdom. Cymbals frequently accompanied music and dance, much as they still do in Egypt today.

Typically ancient Egyptian music was composed from the Phrygian dominant scale, Phrygian scale, double harmonic scale (Arabic scale) or Lydian scale. The Phrygian dominant scale may often feature an altered note or two in parts to create tension. For instance the music could typically be in the key of E Phrygian dominant using the notes E, F, G sharp, A, B, C, D and then have an A sharp, B, A sharp, G natural and E to create tension.