

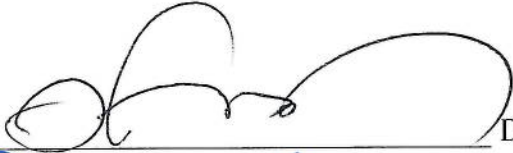
Composing *Heroides X*:
From Roman Poetry to Music

Gabriella Magnani

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree, Bachelor of Arts
(Music)

The Colorado College

4/11/18

Approved by  Date 5/14/2018
Ofer Ben-Amots

Approved by  Date May 14, 2018
Ryan Bañagale

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Introduction

Heroides X

Ovid's *Heroides* ("The Heroines") is a collection of verse epistles in elegiac couplets written from the perspective of individual mythological women from Greek mythology to the men who have abandoned them. This collection of poems is unique among surviving ancient elegy for combining features from several genres of literature and oratory: Roman love elegy and elegiac verse, of course, but also dramatic monologues; rhetorical proofs ("*sententiae*"); *ethopoeia*, a Greek rhetorical term for impersonating someone else's character; and *suasoriae*, exercises taught in Roman schools in which students write speeches from the perspective of historical or mythological figures. As Peter Knox, a recent editor of the collection, puts it, *Heroides* "may represent the most interesting example in Roman poetry of innovation in genre".¹ This led naturally to the combination of musical genres and styles, including electronically-manipulated recorded sound, the use of extended string and vocal techniques, and an unusual combination of instruments.

Born on March 20, 43 BC, Publius Ovidius Naso grew up in a wealthy household and studied rhetoric with famous professors in Rome, presumably in order to become a lawyer and perhaps eventually obtain high public office. To his father's disappointment, Ovid turned to poetry. The *Heroides* were written between 20 BC and AD 2, a period prior to his mature works in which Ovid mainly wrote elegy. During the last ten years of his life (AD 8-17/18), Ovid was exiled and lived on the Black Sea. It was during this time that he wrote some autobiographical poetry, from which modern Classicists source their knowledge of much of Ovid's biography.²

¹ Peter E. Knox, *Ovid: Heroides: Select Epistles*, (Cambridge, Cambridge U Press, 1995), 15.

² *Ibid.*, 2-3.

All of Ovid's *Heroides* are based on mythology and texts that were widely known in Augustan-era Rome. *Heroides X*, a letter from Ariadne to Theseus, has roots in Hesiod and Homer. Hesiod wrote that Theseus abandoned Ariadne while she slept on Naxos, where Dionysus discovered her.³ In Book 18 of the *Iliad*, Ariadne is mentioned as a figure on Achilles's shield.⁴ All ancient myths exist in multiple iterations, but the most important features of the myth surrounding Ariadne are as follows: Ariadne's father, King Minos of Crete, breaks an oath to Poseidon. As punishment, his wife is cursed to fall deeply in love with a bull. Their mating results in the horrifying Minotaur, a monstrous half-man half-bull, to whom fourteen Athenians per year (seven boys and seven girls) are sacrificed as compensation for the murder of Minos' son Androgeus.⁵

Theseus, a Greek warrior, volunteers as an offering in order to kill the Minotaur.⁶ Ariadne falls in love with Theseus and chooses to assist him in his quest, offering Theseus a thread that allows his escape from the complex labyrinth that houses the Minotaur.⁷ In aiding Theseus, Ariadne betrays her father and her homeland. Ariadne and Theseus escape to the island of Naxos, planning to marry in Athens; instead, Theseus leaves her on Naxos without a ship or

³ Hes. *Th.* 949.

⁴ Hom. *Il.* XVIII.590-92

⁵ Apollod. 3.1.3-.4; 3.15.8.

⁶ Most ancient sources agree that Theseus volunteered for this dangerous task (see Eustathius on Hom. *Od.* xi320, p. 1688; Scholiast on Hom. *Od.* xi.322, and II. xviii.590; Hyginus, *Fab.* 41; Lactantius Placidus on Statius, *Achill.* 192.) However, a Scholiast on Hom. *Il.* 118.590 speaks as if Theseus had been chosen by lot, and according to Hellanicus, cited by Plut. *Thes.* 17, Minos traveled to Athens and chose the victims himself.

⁷ Apollod. *Epit.* 1.8.

anywhere to flee. Most versions of Ariadne's story end with the god Dionysus finding her on Naxos and making her his bride, and some also include her consequent deification.⁸

Ovid stretches and compresses time throughout the 150 lines of *Heroides* X. In certain passages, lines of poetry describe very short increments of time, even mere instants. One passage consisting of two couplets near the start of the poem functions in this way:

*incertum vigilans a somno languida movi
Thesea prensuras semisupina manus.
nullus erat! referoque manus iterumque retempto,
perque torum moveo brachia: nullus erat!*

Waking uncertainly and languid from sleep
half lying down, I moved my hands, about to grasp for Theseus—
nothing was there! I pulled back my hands and again I tried
moving my arms across the bed—nothing was there! (9-12)

It is impossible to tell exactly how much time it takes for Ariadne to realize Theseus is not in her bed—it could realistically be anywhere between one second and several minutes—but most likely, each line that describes Ariadne reaching for Theseus would only have taken one or two seconds. The night prior, Ariadne and Theseus had created a makeshift bed out of a couch; she did not have to reach far to find him absent. By stretching out these few moments and detailing repetitive movement over several lines, Ovid allows the reader to see through Ariadne's eyes and live through her experience. The tension builds as Ariadne begins to feel anxious over Theseus' whereabouts. The dramatic irony increases this tension: the ancient audience would have been familiar with Ariadne's story and would therefore have known what was coming.⁹ Modern

⁸ In *Fasti*, a later work by Ovid, he includes a section about Ariadne after she has been abandoned by Theseus. In *Fasti*, Ovid writes about Dionysus' rescue of Ariadne, her abandonment by Dionysus, and Ariadne's transformation into a star.

⁹ It is well-documented and understood by Classicists that myths—particularly those present in Homer and Hesiod, which the myth Ariadne and Theseus is (Hes. *Th.* 949, Hom. *Il.* XVIII.590-92)—were important in Ancient Rome and would have been familiar to the majority of Romans. This is especially true of educated Roman men, for whom Ovid was writing.

readers would likely experience this tension also, since all of Ovid's *Heroides* follow a similar structure and Ariadne's is the tenth.

Later, about a third of the way through *Heroides X*, Ovid uses time in precisely the opposite way. Through comparison of two opposing emotional extremes in an ambiguous timeline, these four lines come across as lasting a considerable length of time:

*aut ego diffusis erravi sola capillis,
qualis ab Ogygio concita Baccha deo;
aut mare prospiciens in saxo frigida sedi,
quamque lapis sedes, tam lapis ipsa fui.*

I have wandered alone with disorderly hair,
either as a Bacchant spurned by the Theban god,
or I sat chilled on a rock looking into the sea,
and I was as much a rock as the rock I sat upon. (47-50)

A "Bacchant spurned by the Theban god" refers to a follower of Bacchus frenzied with love for the god they worship. This contrasts sharply with the following lines, in which Ariadne describes herself as a rock, utterly motionless. Just as a montage in a film may display a character in multiple places or performing multiple actions, the mere juxtaposition of these two extremes implies time passing during other actions or experiences that are not shown.

Ovid's epistle, written in Ariadne's voice, transports us to the moment of her desertion on Naxos. Through Ariadne's telling of her own experience, Ovid imitates sound and manipulates time to create a compelling story. By using language in this way, Ovid's interpretation of Ariadne's story invites a musical retelling through the manipulation of these same components. In my composition, *Mora Mortis*, for piano, vibraphone, violin, four vocalists (SATB) and digitally manipulated sound, I attempted to do just that.

Mora Mortis

In order to compose music that tells Ariadne's story and is based closely on Ovid's epistle, I analyzed Ariadne's emotional journey and Ariadne's shifting perception of Naxos within *Heroides X*. This exploration of the text provided the creative framework of my composition. In order to create a musical portrayal of Ariadne's story, as interpreted by Ovid, I employed instrumental techniques used in tone poems, such as creating tonal landscapes and using individual instruments to express an emotional arc. As a contemporary composer interested in all available technology, this led me naturally to experiment with manipulated recorded sounds of ocean waves to enhance the atmosphere of *Mora Mortis*. I chose certain couplets of *Heroides X* to be sung and whispered, paying close attention to the meaning of each word and phrase in order to create moments of text-painting in the vocal parts. I used an adapted version of one Greek mode, enharmonic mixolydian, as a musical indicator of Ariadne's Greekness present in Ovid's poem. In one section of the piece, I also rendered the meter of *Heroides X* rhythmically.

Ariadne's Emotional Journey

In Heroides X

Heroides X begins with Ariadne providing the context of the epistle: *quae legis, ex illo, Theseu, tibi litore mitto, / unde tuam sine me vela tulere ratem* (3-4), ("These things that you read, Theseus, I send to you from that shore / from where your sails carried your raft without me"). She then proceeds to describe waking up on the morning after Theseus abandoned her, running along the shore and screaming his name. Ariadne further recounts climbing a cliff and seeing his ship sail away until it disappears completely from view, and afterwards, returning in

tears to the bed they once shared. Here, Ariadne begins to imagine her fate, which will inevitably include her lonely death on the island. Ariadne seems regretful of her own actions that led her to betray her family and have left her stranded, and she is angry at Theseus for leaving her after all that she has done for him (most notably, providing him with an escape route after he slays the Minotaur). The poem ends with Ariadne instructing Theseus to return to her. If she has already died, Ariadne writes, “then you will carry my bones” (150).

Interpretation in Mora Mortis

Over the course of *Mora Mortis*, I attempted to narrate this journey. The piece begins with layered whispering in Latin— a disturbing effect, and a clear indication that all is not well— which was composed with the feeling of an agitated dream in mind. This is paired with recorded ocean sounds, which last throughout the piece. Together, these act as a musical narration of Theseus leaving during the dawn. The whispers then fade and disappear as the piano and vibraphone become prominent. The two keyboard instruments act as the sounds of the island that become audible as Ariadne slowly becomes conscious. The violin enters and becomes increasingly unsettled, a temperament that matches Ariadne’s heightening anxiety when she wakes to find Theseus gone. The vocalists then enter, singing Latin that translates to “I searched,” “the moon shone,” and “nothing do I see but the shore,” illustrating Ariadne’s heightening panic as she looks for Theseus. This leads into the psychological climax of the piece: the violin plays a tremolo very near the bridge of the instrument, which produces a quavering, distressed sound; the piano improvises, using specified tone clusters in growing loudness; and the vibraphone moves between ascending runs and descending fourths. These combine to create a chaotic, disturbed sensation.

The climax concludes with a guttural scream by the alto, followed by a shriek and glissando in the violin and supported by a mixture of fourths and tritones in the vibraphone part:

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Alto (scream), Violin (Vln.), and Vibraphone (Vib.).

- Alto (scream):** Represented by a five-line staff with two 'x' marks on the first and fourth lines, indicating a guttural scream.
- Violin (Vln.):** Starts at measure 32 with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It features a long note with a glissando line descending to a lower note, followed by a few more notes. Dynamics include *p* (piano).
- Vibraphone (Vib.):** Also starts at measure 32 with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (Bb). It features a series of chords, some with triplets (marked '3'). Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano).

Figure 1, mm. 30-35. Alto, violin and vibraphone.

This scream is the most direct translation from poetry to music in *Mora Mortis*, as a description in *Heroides X* is relived as actual sound. It is both unexpected, since yells are not typically found in the broad realm of contemporary classical music, and produces discomfort in the listener. It is from the audience's discomfort that the scream derives its power in *Mora Mortis*: for a moment, the listener is forced to face the anguish that Ariadne experiences in Ovid's epistle as she watches Theseus' ship sail away.

Following this intense emotional release comes the second vocal section, beginning with a tenor-bass duet sung a cappella. The lyrics here translate to "the concave rocks returned your name," and serves as a heavy-hearted descent from the intensity of the previous section. The alto and soprano voices then take over the tenor-bass duet but in a new key, and the piano and vibraphone enter, playing a series of five high-pitch dissonant chords underneath the vocalists. This destabilizes the vocal harmonies as well as the meter, with 4-beat and 5-beat patterns on top of one another, a musical indicator of both the unevenness of the echoes and of Ariadne's complex emotional response to her isolation. Then come several vocal swells, each identical save

for the soprano note, sung atop the vibraphone playing the rhythm of the elegiac meter in an F octave. These swells represent the swell of the ocean and of Ariadne’s finally slowing breath. Afterward is a moment of silence and then the final segment: a revisitation of the piano and vibraphone parts from the beginning, representing the unrelenting waves of Naxos. In this reiteration, the violin is added, which adds a desperate final melancholic quality. The piece ends as it began: the four starting lines of *Heroides X* whispered and overlapping to produce an anxious, fever dream-like feeling and a symbolic return to the confused sleep from the beginning of the piece.

There are three sections of *Mora Mortis* in which Latin text is sung or whispered. The piece begins and ends with the same four lines, each line whispered by one vocalist on repeat and out of sync with the others. The soprano whispers “*quae legis, ex illo, Theseu, tibi litore mitto*” meaning “These things that you read, Theseus, I send to you from that shore;” the alto, “*unde tuam sine me vela tulere ratem*” meaning “from where your sails carried your raft without me;” the tenor, “*in quo me somnusque meus male prodidit et tu*” or “on which my sleep and you so wickedly betrayed me” and finally, the bass whispers “*per facinus somnis insidiate meis*” which translates to “you, who plotted insidiously while I slept”:

<i>quasi niente, cresc. al p</i>	;; QVAE LEGIS, EX ILLO, THESEU, TIBI LITORE MITTO ;;
<i>quasi niente, cresc. al p</i>	;; UNDE TUAM SINE ME VELA TULERE RATEM ;;
<i>quasi niente, cresc. al p</i>	;; IN QUO ME SOMNUSQUE MEUS MALE PRODIDIT ET TU ;;
<i>quasi niente, cresc. al p</i>	;; PER FACINUS SOMNIS INSIDIATE MEIS ;;

Figure 2, mm. 3-4 and 59-60. SATB.

Together, these four lines make up the second and third couplets of *Heroides X*, providing context for the ensuing letter (and of *Mora Mortis*). By having the vocalists whisper these lines over top of one another, the idea of Theseus plotting while Ariadne sleeps is described sonically by the restlessness of the overlapping words.

Later, the vocalists sing the words “specto,” “luna fuit,” and “nil nisi litus habent”. These words and phrases are from one passage of *Heroides X: Luna fuit; specto siquid nisi litora cernam / quod videant oculi, nil nisi litus habent* (17-18) (“The moon was shining; I looked if I should see anything but the shore. From what my eyes can see, nothing do they find but the shore”):

Figure 3, mm. 16-21. SATB.

I chose these two lines for both the sound and meaning of the words. It is filled with the letter “i”, which makes an “ee” sound in Latin, as well as with hard “t”s and “c”s, which gives the couplet a satisfying musicality that is easily rendered in composition. The repetition of specific consonance and assonance in the Latin also causes the sounds of the language to be perceived as quite dissimilar to English. This “foreign-ness” is a theme I intentionally explored in my decision to use Latin instead of English in the piece: the use of a foreign language creates a sense of dissociation and alienation from the music, which is very similar to the way Ariadne must have felt as she wandered, lonely, on Naxos. From this couplet, I chose specific words and phrases

that I felt summarized the concept in fewer words in order to explore a compositional style that was built from fractured ideas, layered and alternating between voices.

The third passage of Latin text in *Mora Mortis* is simply the line *reddebant nomen concava saxa tuum*, which, as I mentioned earlier, translates to “The concave rocks returned your name” (22). In *Heroides X*, this line comes just after *interea toto clamanti litore ‘Theseu!’* (“All the while I shouted along the whole shore, Theseus!”) and just before the couplet *et quotiens ego te, totiens locus ipse vocabat; / ipse locus miserae ferre volebat opem* (“and as much as I called you, just as much the place itself called you. The place itself wishes to bring help to the miserable woman.”) Here, Ariadne anthropomorphizes the rocks as screaming for Theseus along with her, a heartbreaking description of her pain that literally and figuratively amplifies her suffering. I played with this description of Ariadne’s echoing bellows against the rocks both in the vocal and instrumental parts of this latter section of *Mora Mortis* in multiple ways: in the instrumental parts, with repetition and rhythmic permutations, and vocally, by ending each with two held notes, one full step apart, as seen in Figure 4:

The image shows a musical score for two voices, Tenor and Bass, covering measures 35-39. The lyrics are "red-de-bant no-men con-ca-va sa-xa tu-um". The score is written in 6/4 time. The Tenor part (top staff) starts with a *mp* dynamic and a half note, followed by quarter notes for "no-men", then a triplet of quarter notes for "con-ca-va", another triplet of quarter notes for "sa-xa", and finally a half note for "tu-um". The Bass part (bottom staff) starts with a *mp* dynamic and a whole note, followed by quarter notes for "no-men", then a triplet of quarter notes for "con-ca-va", another triplet of quarter notes for "sa-xa", and finally a half note for "tu-um". Both parts end with a half note. The dynamics change to *mf* for the triplet sections.

Figure 4, mm. 35-39. Tenor and bass.

Holding two notes so close in pitch creates a physical vibration as the waves of the dissonant notes collide in the air, an effect that mimics the physical tremor of an echo.

Ariadne's Perception of Naxos

In Heroides X

Ariadne's perception of the island on which she is stranded changes substantially throughout the course of *Heroides X*. At the start of her letter, Ariadne writes matter-of-factly about her natural surroundings. This transitions into a view of the island as pitying Ariadne, even attempting to help her summon Theseus by echoing her screams. However, once Ariadne observes Theseus' ship, too far to sea to reach physically or vocally, her portrayal of Naxos becomes empty and inhospitable. Here, Ovid plays with the idea that Theseus is so important to Ariadne that his leaving becomes symbolic of all life disappearing from the island. Eventually, Naxos transforms into a merciless and deadly place in Ariadne's view. Throughout *Heroides X*, Ariadne describes the sound of the waves and the "cruel wind", symbolic of her isolation and impending death.

Interpretation in Mora Mortis

In my composition, I primarily considered Ariadne's perception of Naxos in terms of her entrapment by the ocean. The description of the sound of waves and wind prompted the majority of the piano and vibraphone parts, as well as the inclusion of digital sound. The dark chords in the piano signify the ceaseless beating of waves onto the shore. They are rhythmically unpredictable measure-to-measure, but on a larger scale, they become continual and incessant, mimicking Ariadne's description of the ocean. One example of the piano and vibraphone parts working together in this way is shown in Figure 5:



Figure 5, mm. 58-60. Vibraphone and piano.

The vibraphone part in this section shifts by one sixteenth rest each measure. The change is subtle enough to be hardly noticeable on its own, but when paired with the piano chords, creates a disturbing sensation. The bell-sound of the vibraphone chords indicate that which is ordered and human, and the piano represents the unceasing ocean surf. The clash between the two parts creates the feeling that nature will not conform or bend to human will.

Ocean Sounds and Digital Manipulation

In order to create digital ocean sounds for *Mora Mortis*, I used the website “Radio Aporee” to identify two sound recordings of waves that were captured on Greek islands. I chose recordings from Sifnos and Paleokastrites and proceeded to digitally manipulate them using Ableton Live 9. I applied a combination of low shelf, peak, and notch eq filters that slowly shift throughout the piece, highlighting different frequencies but continually blocking the majority of the middle range and predominantly accentuating the lower frequencies. Resonators were set in octaves: in one sample, F#, and in the other, F. I chose F# because it is the tonic of the enharmonic Mixolydian mode that I employed throughout *Mora Mortis*, as will be explained in the upcoming section about Greek modality. After experimenting, I found that adding resonators

in octaves of F in the second sample, set somewhat quieter than the F#, provided a muddy, dark tone.

I used reverberation heavy-handedly, staying between 85% and 100% wet for the entire duration of the piece. I found that when the reverberation was set at 100% wet, it produced an otherworldly echo, like the sound of a conch shell through a megaphone heard from underwater. This added to the murky tone and helped obscure the origin of the sound. I employed an auto-pan between left and right speakers, with an amount of 64.3%, a rate of 0.13 Hz, and a 180° phase. The settings of the two samples are identical, set just slightly out of sync with each other, inkeeping with the cloudy, ambiguous quality. Lastly, the loudness of the samples changed throughout *Mora Mortis*, and in some sections are almost inaudible.

Elegiac Meter

Background and history

All of Ovid's *Heroides* are written in elegiac meter. Along with Catullus, Ovid is considered the most important Latin elegist. With the exception of *Metamorphoses*, written in the Homeric dactylic hexameter, all of Ovid's major poems are written in elegiac couplets, including *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, *Fasti*, *Tristia*, and *Ibis*. In Ancient Greece, long before Ovid or the Roman empire, the meter was associated with funeral lamentation, but eventually acquired the overwhelming connotation of erotic love.¹⁰

Unlike meter in the English language, Latin meter has nothing to do with stressed or unstressed syllables. Instead, it only affects the length of each syllable as it is spoken. Each couplet in elegiac meter consists of one line of hexameter and one line of pentameter:

¹⁰ Alexiou, Margaret, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, (Cambridge, Cambridge U Press, 1974), 104-6.

– ◡◡ | – – | – – | – ◡◡ | –◡◡ | – x
 Quae legis, | ex ill|o, The|seu, tibi |litore |mitto

– ◡◡ | – ◡◡ | – | –◡◡ | –◡◡ | –
 Unde tu|am sine |me|vela tu|lere ra|tem.

Feet are made up of either two long syllables or one long and then two short syllables, notated as – – and – ◡◡ respectively. The line of pentameter is always divided into two halves of two and a half feet each. To illustrate, here is the scansion of one line of *Heroides X*.

The stressed and unstressed syllables of Latin are an important component of elegiac meter as well, interacting with the long and short syllables in specific ways. Often, at the start of one line in elegiac meter, the long syllables will not align with the stressed syllables, creating slight unease. However, by the end of the line they are perfectly matched, which creates a feeling of closure. Here is an illustration of this motion, using ticks to indicate stress:

‘ ‘ ‘ ‘ ‘ ‘ ‘
 – ◡◡ | – ◡◡ | – | –◡◡ – ◡◡ |
 Unde tu|am sine |me|vela tu|lere ra|tem.

Meaning is created in *Heroides X* by many different means. The musicality of the meter is one clear way that Ovid imparts significance to certain lines, either by finding a rhythmic closure or not.

Use in Mora Mortis

In *Mora Mortis*, I utilized the rhythm of elegiac meter in the composition of the vibraphone part. Long syllables became half notes, short syllables quarter notes, and stressed syllables accents:



Figure 6, mm. 45-55. *Vibraphone*.

The inclusion of the elegiac rhythm does not allude to a specific couplet of *Heroides X*; rather, it hints at Ovid’s poem as a whole, in which he treats time very fluidly. Further, the rhythm implies the mourning and erotic love connotations of the meter itself. By combining the meter and the stresses, as Ovid does, I also imparted a sense of rhythmic closure, hinting that the piece (and likely Ariadne’s life) will soon be coming to an end.

Greek Modality

Explanation of basic concepts

In *Mora Mortis*, I made use of an adapted Ancient Greek mode: enharmonic Mixolydian. In order to understand the interval structure of the chromatic Mixolydian mode, several principals of Ancient Greek music theory must first be understood. Firstly, in the Ancient Greek world, fourths, fifths, and octaves were considered concordant; thirds and sixths were regarded as dissonant. (Something about just intonation, and a whole step or tone to the Greek ear defined as “the interval by which a fifth is greater than a fourth.) All Ancient Greek music was conceived from a fundamental tetrachord, or a fourth interval with two notes in between, dependent on whether the scale in use was diatonic, chromatic, or enharmonic. The interval structure of diatonic tetrachords forms what modern listeners would understand as a Phrygian tetrachord, consisting of a half-step and then two full steps (e.g. E F G A). Chromatic tetrachords consist of

two half steps followed by a minor third jump to the fourth (e.g. E F F# A). The enharmonic scale compresses the intervals at the beginning of the tetrachord even further by using quarter tones. It consists of two quarter steps and ends with a major third leap, also referred to as a ditone. Using arrows to indicate a note raised by a quarter tone, an enharmonic tetrachord beginning on E would be E E F A.¹¹

Tetrachords were joined to form larger combinations of intervals in one of two ways: conjunct tetrachords and disjunct tetrachords. Conjunct tetrachords are formed when the top note of the initial tetrachord acts as the bottom note of the second. For example, if E is the bottom note of the first tetrachord, A would act as the top of that fourth and the base of the second fourth, with a top note of D. Disjunct tetrachords, on the other hand, insert a whole step in between the top of the first tetrachord and the start of the second, forming an octave.¹² The Damonian scales are the oldest Ancient Greek modes for which there are records, and they consisted of Dorian, Aeolian, Phrygian, Lydian, Ionian, and Mixolydian.¹³ Variations of Dorian and Phrygian, Hypodorian and Hypophrygian were also in use, but were unnamed until the late fifth or early fourth century B.C.¹⁴ Each exists in three iterations: enharmonic, chromatic, and diatonic.¹⁵ Using $\frac{1}{4}$ tone, $\frac{1}{2}$ tone, tone, $1\frac{1}{2}$ tone, and ditone to represent these three scales:

enharmonic: $\frac{1}{4}$ 2 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ 2 $\frac{1}{4}$

chromatic: $\frac{1}{2}$ $1\frac{1}{2}$ 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ $\frac{1}{2}$ $1\frac{1}{2}$ $\frac{1}{2}$

diatonic: 1 1 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ 1 1 $\frac{1}{2}$

¹¹ West, M. L., *Ancient Greek Music*, (Oxford, Oxford U Press, 1992), 161-62.

¹² Ibid., 160-61.

¹³ Ibid., 179-183. As a point of clarification: though the Greek modes in use today derive their names from these Ancient Greek modes, the scales themselves have no connection.

¹⁴ Ibid., 183.

¹⁵ Ibid., 162, 183.

These scales were all permuted into the modes listed above.

Enharmonic mixolydian mode and use in Mora Mortis

I chose to use enharmonic Mixolydian because both enharmonic scales and the Mixolydian mode were associated with mourning: the ancient writer Damon wrote that “vocalists of the tragic stage... use enharmonic” and in *The Republic*, Plato states that the Mixolydian mode was threnodic and that it was suitable for women.¹⁶ I decided, for the purposes of *Mora Mortis*, to stick with both Western equal temperament and to avoid quarter tones. Therefore, I adapted the enharmonic Mixolydian scale by replacing each pair of quarter tones with a single half tone:

enharmonic Mixolydian:	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	2	$\frac{1}{4}$	$\frac{1}{4}$	2	1
	∖			∖			
adapted version (without quarter steps):	$\frac{1}{2}$		2	$\frac{1}{2}$		2	1

By adapting the mode in this way, certain characteristics of enharmonic Mixolydian remain audible, such as both major third intervals (written here as “2”) while allowing standard tuning for all the instruments used in *Mora Mortis*.

I employed this simplified Ancient Greek mode in several ways in *Mora Mortis*. The vocal parts are based directly on this mode, though the key moves throughout the piece. This is true of both distinct passages that include singers, the “*specto*” section and the “*reddebant nomen*” section. The violin, also, plays predominantly within the adapted enharmonic Mixolydian mode. Lastly, the climax of *Mora Mortis* employs tone clusters and vibraphone phrases based on the enharmonic Mixolydian mode:

¹⁶ Ibid., 248. Plato, *Republic*, 3.10.

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for Violin (Vln.), showing a single note with a tremolo effect. The middle staff is for Vibraphone (Vib.), marked 'freely, out of time' and 'mf', with a melodic line and a cue to stop playing. The bottom staff is for Piano (Pno.), marked 'mf' and 'fff', with a series of tone clusters that become increasingly disturbed and eventually decay naturally.

Figure 7, mm. 25-31. Violin, vibraphone, and piano.

Here, the pianist improvises rhythmically and by arranging specific tone clusters: [A C D E \flat], [B \flat C D F \sharp], [F \sharp A B \flat C E \flat], [A B \flat C F \sharp] and [D A B \flat] in fixed octaves. In F \sharp , the notes of the adapted enharmonic Mixolydian scale that I used (and written here with the accidentals of the B \flat major scale for clarity) are F \sharp , G, B \flat , C, and E \flat . These notes make up the majority of the tone cluster notes. In composing this section, I began by improvising using only notes in this mode, eventually modifying the tone clusters by adding extra-modal notes to emulate the sound of crashing and echoing rocks.

Conclusion & Reflection

Reflection of process and end result

The composition of *Mora Mortis* was a long, meandering process. I spent months attempting to compose, in bits and pieces, ultimately using only about 10% of this work. It was frustrating and difficult, and at times I did not believe that I would be able to finish. But the creative process is a strange and mysterious one, and my entire composition suddenly came

together in just a couple of weeks. It was still difficult, and I made myself sit down and work every day, but the process felt completely different: ideas were coming to me more fully formed and the transitions between different ideas felt natural instead of forced. Like a plant that finally emerges from bare soil, I believe that ideas were developing beneath the surface for months, and the tedious labor was what allowed me to compose the final piece.

The instrumentation of *Mora Mortis* went through several iterations. Originally, I had wanted to use the same instruments that I had composed for at the International Summer Academy of Music in Ochsenhausen, Germany, which consisted of piano, cello, and percussion, and I also had a desire to write for voices, fueled mostly by the wonderful experiences I have had singing with the Chamber Chorus with Deborah Teske. Then I reconsidered, and began composing for piano, flute, and mandolin tuned to $\frac{1}{4}$ steps, thinking that flute had a relationship to an Ancient Greek aulos, a wind instrument often depicted on clay pots and artwork, and that the mandolin was similar to the Ancient Greek lyre.¹⁷ However, I decided that it would be too difficult to find a mandolin player skilled enough to perform the part, since it is an unusual instrument. I then encountered a violinist who was excited to be a part of the process, and it was suddenly clear that I should compose for violin. Flute and violin were too close in range for the harmonies that I envisioned, and I resolved to remove the flute and reintroduce percussion (specifically, vibraphone). Locating four willing singers helped to solidify the choice to write for vocalists. *Mora Mortis* represents the second time I have composed for vibraphone, and the first time for violin and singers.

¹⁷ Ibid., 81-84; 48-50.

Future movements

I plan to write two succeeding movements to *Mora Mortis*: *Semianimis* (“Half alive”) and *Vestigia* (“Remains”). All three titles are quotes from *Heroides X*, and each has to do with Ariadne’s anticipated death within a different context and with distinct connotations. Each movement will run roughly the same length as *Mora Mortis*: four to five minutes. While *Mora Mortis* condenses Ariadne’s experiences over the course of one full day into four and a half minutes, the second movement, *Semianimis*, will do the opposite: its approximately four minutes will elongate time, considering just ten seconds of Ariadne’s experience. Lastly, *Vestigia* will be composed in “real time”, detailing four minutes of Ariadne’s day over the same length of music. Connecting all three movements will be the recording of ocean waves, a continuation of the digital manipulation I created for *Mora Mortis*. The filters and effects will be slowly removed, revealing the unmistakable sound of waves during the final, “real time”, movement.

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