

## **Animals Making Music**

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Sumerian lyres, which flourished between 2700 and 1800 BCE, are known to us both as extant instruments and as pictures. Their sound-boxes resemble bovine bodies, and they have bovine heads which further enhance the resemblance. The resemblance goes further than generally thought.

There are many other examples of connections between animals and music. Zoroastrian scriptures relate that earliest man, Yima, received a golden trumpet from his God, Ahura Mazda who urged Yima to use them to call animals. Many Oxus trumpets have survived from about 2000 BCE, and some are golden. Indeed, they can mimic female deer calls, which have a powerful influence on male deer, particularly at the time of rut. At roughly the same time, on seals from the Indus civilization, tigers are shown listening to music.

Animals also played music west of Sumer. On a stone relief from Tell Halaf (900-700 BCE) they walk on hind-legs and play. A large feline is shown with a lyre, a horse-like animal with an aulos, a small feline with a circular frame-drum, and two smaller animals with tiny instruments.

Further west, in Egypt, the topos is found already on one of the earliest monuments, a palette from ca. 3000 BCE. An animal with long ears (donkey?) walks like a human and blows the end of a long, vertically held, stick. Presumably, it is a hollow tube blown like a flute or didgeridoo.

Also from Egypt is the Erotic-Satirical cartoon (ca. 1200-1100 BCE) with extraordinary erotic scenes and an equally extraordinary animal orchestra. Four large animals stand on hind-legs and play music. A donkey blows double-pipes, a crocodile strums a lute decorated with a bird's head, a lion plucks a fat lyre, and a donkey plays an arched harp. Animal musicians are also painted on Egyptian ostraca. The genre seems well established around the early second millennium BCE.

The subject goes much further back – to the Paleolithic. A French cave, *Les trois frères*, at Les Eyzies has an image of a human disguised as a bull, and he seems to hold an instrument (flute, reed-pipe, musical bow?) near his mouth. It dates to ca. 13,000 BCE.

These examples involve large animals and are quite different from scenes of small birds flying near instruments. The subject is common, but the animals don't play instruments. Their song may simply invoke melodious sounds.

The topic broadens if we consider the Egyptian god Bes. He was a bow-legged dwarf with a lion's mane behind a wide human face, and he was shown with strong affinities to music. He repelled evil, protected women in child-birth, and enjoyed the company of musicians.

In all cases, except in the Paleolithic cave, the protagonists are modeled as genuine animals, not as disguised humans.

Did the ancients believe that animals could play and enjoy music? Or did they view the animals the same way as ancient Egyptians saw deities with animal faces? Consider the goddess Hathor who, as Hornung has shown, was sometimes represented as a slim woman with a pair of cow horns, sometimes as a pure animal form, sometimes as a cow head with human attributes, and occasionally as a woman with a complete cow's head. Each representation brings out different aspect of Hathor. Likewise, different scenes of bull lyres may bring out various aspects of its inherent properties.

To understand the animal nature of Sumerian lyres, we need to examine the Plaster Lyre in the Iraqi Museum, Baghdad. (I did so in the Fall of 1988 while attending the Babylon Festival. I shot many photographs of the lyre, and these have helped me make a reconstruction.) It is the only lyre where the box was not flattened by the soil. Its three-dimensional structure survived because the sound box had been buried in a vertical position. Sir Leonard Woolley had observed a narrow hole in the ground and poured plaster -of-Paris into it. The hole, it turned out, was the remnant of a decayed lyre. The plaster filled some parts of the cavity and showed the shape of the lyre. It had protruding shoulders, protruding hips, and slimmer parts in between. In other words, the lyre box had been bull-like not only in two dimensions, but in three. All other lyres had been crushed flat, and Woolley restored them with flat sides. They are now center-pieces of museums and icons of books on Art and Music History. Perhaps, all should be re-restored with shoulders, hips, etc. It would help us focus on the animal-nature of early music.