

INSTRUMENTAL INSIGHT: THE MEANING OF PAUL'S MUSICAL REFERENCES IN 1
CORINTHIANS FOR MUSICAL PRACTICE IN THE CHURCH

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INSTRUMENTAL INSIGHT: THE MEANING OF PAUL'S MUSICAL REFERENCES IN 1 CORINTHIANS FOR MUSICAL PRACTICE IN THE CHURCH

Many questions surround the understanding of how the early Christian community utilized musical instruments in their worship gatherings, if they used them at all. Because of a lack of clear treatments of music in the New Testament, many New Testament scholars and music historians have been agnostic or skeptical about whether or not the early churches used musical instruments. Due to later negative statements by a few Greek and Latin church fathers towards pagan musical practices, some assume that the New Testament apostles and early churches also exhibited a negative attitude towards musical instruments. However, several texts in 1 Corinthians offer fodder for examining the presence and use of musical instruments in the early Christian community at Corinth. After examining the cultural contexts of music in the first century Greco-Roman world, their intersection with Paul's discourse in 1 Corinthians, and Paul's specific statements about musical instruments and singing in the church's worship in 1 Corinthians, it seems probable that (1) playing musical instruments was a regular cultural phenomenon present among the Corinthian Christians, (2) that Paul accepts the use of musical instruments in general, and (3) he encourages their use in the community's worship gatherings.

Musical Contexts of 1st Century Corinth

The musical context of first-century Corinth suggests that musical performance with instruments was pervasive and common in personal, social, political, and religious life. If this is

true of Corinth then it may have some bearing on the musical practice of the Corinthian church and Paul's approach to music in 1 Corinthians. Many scholars have ignored the implications of Paul's familiarity with musical instrumentation due to a lack of commentary elsewhere in the New Testament itself compared with later comments about musical instruments made among the early church fathers. Those who have interacted with Paul's statements about musical instrumentation typically either prioritize the Jewish background for Paul and posit a cautious or positive attitude towards instruments and music of a Jewish hue,¹ or they prioritize the Greco-Roman cultic background and posit a negative attitude towards instrumentation as a reaction against any appearance of pagan worship practices.² Most likely, though, both Jewish and Greco-Roman musical practices influenced the early church, and, further, no clear line divided these practices from one another in areas like musical instrumentation.³

Greco-Roman writings indicate that music was pervasive in both the cultic and other spheres of Greco-Roman life in Corinth. While music may have originally been cultic in origin, in the Greek world it had grown into many more facets of life by the classical era. Musical instruments of all kinds, but especially the lyre or kithara (a plucked stringed instrument) and the

¹ Victor H. Matthews, "Music and Musical Instruments: Music in the Bible," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992) 4:930-934; Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 39-52.

² Andrew B. McGowan, *Ancient Christian Worship: Early Church Practices in Social, Historical, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014) 12-14, Calvin R. Stapert, *A New Song for an Old World: Musical Thought in the Early Church*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), and Johannes Quasten, *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, trans. B. Ramsey (Washington, DC: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1983) all emphasize the later reaction by the church fathers against music used in later Greco-Roman cult practices, and they seem to read this into the New Testament writings. Wendy J. Porter, "Misguided Missals: Is Early Christian Music Jewish or Is It Greco-Roman?," in *Christian-Jewish Relations through the Centuries*, ed. Stanley Porter and Brook Pearson (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2004), 202-27, advocates a more balanced, integrated approach that recognizes significant influences both from Jewish worship and from Greek and Roman musical practices.

³ Porter, "Misguided Missals," 221 points out that even the use of the Greek term "Synagogue" indicates a less than clear distinction in cultural influence between Jews and Greeks in the first century.

aulos (a reed instrument), were used not only in religious ceremonies but also in war, in work, and in private and civic events. There was almost no area of life not engaged in instrumental music.⁴

Musical instruments were used in war *not* in any religious way, but purely to motivate and keep the troops disciplined. Most often trumpets were used in war, or some sort of percussion, for keeping the beat of the march. Auloi were used too in some situations, including for ship rowing and at one point in the Spartan infantry. In addition to generating signals for war, these instruments were also meant to keep up the soldiers spirits, entertain them, and help keep large groups synchronized in their movements. Musical instruments were used in many similar ways in workplaces, for women at looms, for field hands in planting and harvesting, and for craftspeople at their benches.

Musical performers were also employed both in Greek and Roman cultures for private or semi-private events like weddings and funerals, while these had religious connotations, these kinds of family events were a part of the everyday rhythms of life in the ancient world, with which almost every person would be involved regularly. In the Greek world especially, instrumental music along with singing had a major role in the symposium, or dinner party. Music at these events, while sometimes—but by no means always or normally—religious in content, was purely for private entertainment. Symposia were common practice throughout the Roman world of the first century and would have been known to Romans and Jews.⁵

⁴ See especially the treatment in M.L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1994), 13-38. See similar treatments in John G. Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999) and Joachim Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁵ Cf Philo *Contempl. Life*, where Philo treats the musical aspect of these parties positively and even tries to favorably compare them to a similar practice among a Jewish sect, although he condemns the lewdness of the typical Greek practice.

Musical instrumentation also played an important role in civic life. Special civic events and parades would include musical performances. Plays were extremely popular, with Greek theaters often having seating for 15,000–20,000 spectators. They included not only sung choruses accompanied by the kithara or the aulos, but also featured—in the Hellenistic and early Imperial eras—musical interludes and performances woven into the play. Finally, athletic contests, like the Isthmian and Pythian games included competitions in musical performance for both instrumental performances and singing accompanied by the kithara or the aulos. These musical contests continued from the classical era and into the first century.⁶

Archaeological evidence suggests that the Corinthian Christians would have been surrounded by regular community musical performances, if not participants in them. While the Corinthian Odeon may not have been built yet in Paul's day, the Corinthians had recovered the Isthmian Games, had a large theater, and several temples. In addition to private and civic events where music was present, most of the Corinthians in Paul's day, if not Paul himself, can be assumed to have participated at some level in these other institutions. They would have attended plays filled with music at the theater, cheered on the musical contests at the Isthmian games, and probably participated in cultic ceremonies that included music at the various temples.

As for the Jewish background, literary evidence suggests that instrumental music in worship was a significant part of Jewish worship that likely carried over in some fashion to the Christian community. The prescriptions for the use of musical instruments in the psalms and the Old Testament regulations for music in worship must have had some impact on the early church community. The Septuagint provided these regulations and psalms to the Greek speaking diaspora communities, and the Dead Sea Scrolls confirm that musical instrumentation was still

⁶ See Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 14.

associated with psalm singing and various liturgical functions.⁷ The New Testament authors show the early Christian community making use of both Old Testament Psalms and new psalm-style hymns in their prayers and praises, so the associated musical tradition likely ported over to the Christians. It would be very odd indeed to sing “praise him with stringed instruments and the flute! Praise him with loud cymbals! Praise him with clanging cymbals!”⁸ and then proceed to continue chanting without accompaniment.

Specific References to Musical Instruments and Venues in 1 Corinthians

But how did the church in Corinth interact with musical instruments? The textual evidence of 1 Corinthians suggest that the Christian community in Corinth was in contact with diverse uses of Greco-Roman musical instruments, and perhaps Jewish synagogue practices as well. Every major kind of musical instrument is in mentioned in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians,

⁷ Horns or trumpets are mentioned in the dead sea scrolls several times. 4Q493 possibly references an apocalyptic scene similar to the War Scroll, but more likely it is giving instructions for the priests and Levites in the use of trumpets for battles and public assemblies. The word trumpet is used at least eight times in fourteen verses, primarily with reference to signaling in battle. But they are also mentioned for liturgical uses (trumpets of remembrance, v2; trumpets of the Sabbaths, vv 13-14). The War Scroll also gives extensive instructions for the use of trumpets in the apocalyptic battle between the Sons of Darkness and the Sons of Light (1Q33 II, 16-III, 11). Notably, the last instructions suggest a liturgical or other praise setting, “on the trumpets for the way of return... to enter the congregation in Jerusalem, they shall write, ‘Rejoicings of God in a peaceful return’” (III, 11). The Damascus Document mentions trumpets used for assembly at the temple for worship (CD-A XI, 21-XII, 1). 11Q19 stipulates the use of trumpets for “proclaiming a memorial” for the Feast of Trumpets before the Day of Atonement (XXV, 204). 11Q13 seems to imply that a trumpet is to be blown at the coming of Melchizedek, the anointed savior of the Sons of Light (II, 25; cp Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16; Rev 10:7; 11:15). Horn and Trumpet are interpreted allegorically to refer to two “books of the Law” in 4Q177 vv13-14). Finally, one hymn may mention blowing blasts on a rams horn in praise of the Lord (4Q409 I, 5-6).

Stringed instruments are mentioned a several times, much more often in contexts of singing, prayer, or praise. The apocryphal psalm of David, Psalm 151 (which also appears in Greek in the Septuagint), says, “my hands fashioned a pipe, my fingers a lyre, and I glorified the LORD,” presumably meaning these instruments would be used for private or public praise (11Q5 XXVIII, 4-5). The superstitious *Songs of the Sage* mention lyres as accompaniment to singing of God’s compassion (4Q511 10 I, 8-9). Lyres or harps are mentioned four times in the Thanksgiving Hymns, the first of which is intriguing. The wicked “intone their dispute against me on the lyre, and compose their complaint to music” (1QH^a XIII, 31-32). A later hymn recounts the use of the lyre in lament (XIX, 25a-25) as well as in praise to God along with the harp, timbrel, and flute (26-27). In response to victory over the Sons of Darkness, the War Scroll prescribes writing on a banner “Songs of joy for God on the ten-stringed harp” (1Q33 IV, 5). Finally, the closing prayer or hymn of the Sectarian Charter includes the line “With knowledge shall I sing out my music, only for the glory of God, my harp, my lyre for His holiness established” (1QS X, 9).

⁸ Psalm 150:4b-5, NET Bible.

and he also makes use of several venues at which the Corinthians would have been exposed to or even participated in musical performances.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1 Paul mentions the cymbal (κόμβαλον) and “echoing brass” (χαλκὸς ἠχῶν). Because the meaning of χαλκός is uncertain, this passage is the only one of the musical passages in 1 Corinthians that has elicited significant debate and comment (either as a resonator, a brass object, or repetitious metonymy for a cymbal). While cymbals were used in pagan ceremonies, percussion was used for a variety of occasions and featured prominently in Old Testament worship practices.⁹ While the New Testament mentions several instruments multiple times, this is the only place the cymbal is mentioned.

In 1 Corinthians 14:7-8 Paul mentions the other three major types of instruments. First, he mentions the aulos (αὐλός), often translated “flute,” probably here referring to the common Greek double pipe. This was a reed instrument and one of the two main instruments used in all kinds of Greek music. In the biblical literature these are usually associated with mourning or parties, and they do not seem to appear much in a liturgical context.¹⁰ Here in verse 7, Paul is addressing a congregation that should be much more familiar with the Greek use of the aulos for a variety of occasions including private entertainment, parades, temple worship, theater performances, and music contests.

⁹ Ivor H. Jones, “Music and Musical Instruments: Musical Instruments,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992). Cf. Braun, Joachim, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 44-45.

¹⁰ Isa 5:12; 30:29; Jer 48:36; Matt 9:23; 11:17; cf Jones, “Musical Instruments,” 4:936; Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel*, 43.

Second, Paul mentions the kithara (κιθάρα), sometimes erroneously translated “harp,” occurs several times in the New Testament, all either here or in Revelation.¹¹ The kithara or lyre was a stringed instrument that was plucked with the fingers or strummed with a plectrum and thus could serve double duty to carry the rhythm of a song, much like the modern day guitar. It functioned famously and commonly as an accompaniment to song, and was used prominently in Jewish worship from at least the time of David through the second temple period.¹² In the Greco-Roman world the kithara was as popular as the aulos and used on many of the same such occasions (contests, theater performances, and private entertainment). The main difference, functionally, between the two was that the same person could both sing and play the kithara.

Third, Paul mentions the trumpet (σάλπιγξ), which also shows up later in 15:52. While the Greeks did use trumpets, the salpinx had a particularly robust history in both the Jewish and Roman spheres. This Greek word for trumpet translates both the Hebrew “ram’s horn” (shofar) and trumpet (hasosera) in the Septuagint, which were used for signaling in military operations, announcing a convocation of the people, or for congregational worship.¹³ While lyres, harps, pipes, and cymbals were prescribed to the Levitical musicians, trumpets seem to have been reserved especially for the priests, and the use of these instruments in Israel seems to have

¹¹ 1 Cor 14:7; Rev 5:8; 14:2; 15:2; 18:22; but also likely referred to in the verb ψάλλω for either playing a kithara or singing with the accompaniment of a kithara or similar stringed instrument, e.g. LXX Ps 12:6; 26:6; 56:8; 70:22-23; 107:21; 143:9; cp Rom 15:9; 1 Cor 14:15; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16.

¹² 1 Sam 16:16; 1 Chron 15:16; Neh 11:22-23; 12:27-43; cf Jos. *Ant.* 11.4.2 §80; 1QS X, 9; see Jones, “Musical Instruments,” 4:937.

¹³ Jones, “Musical Instruments,” 4:936.

continued into the first century at least in the temple and some other worship venues.¹⁴ And there seems to be a messianic, apocalyptic theme associated with the trumpet.¹⁵

The Romans used three different kinds of trumpets, not only for signaling, but also as parts of small ensembles for various occasions like funeral processions.¹⁶ The Greeks restricted its use primarily to signaling in military contexts, but it also featured in athletic and music competitions like the Isthmian games to announce the beginning of a competition or the judges' decision.¹⁷

In addition to mentioning various instruments, Paul refers to several locations for public musical performance throughout his first letter to the Corinthians. In 3:5-4:5, Paul builds an extended metaphor based on a building program for a temple. While Paul may have in his mind the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, he probably is building on the Corinthian's familiarity with Greek and Roman temple building projects.¹⁸ Therefore, he may have drawn up images of music-infused temple rites with this metaphor. (Although, this would still apply if Paul was intentionally bringing up the Jerusalem temple, since it was the hub of instrumental performance in Israel's worship before its destruction in AD 70.)

¹⁴ Cf 1Q33 II, 16-III, 11; 4Q409 I, 5-6; 4Q493; 11Q19 XXV, 204; CD-A XI, 21-XII, 1. These all mention or prescribe uses of trumpets in the Qumran community for both warfare and worship.

¹⁵ 11Q13 II, 25 depicts the sound of trumpets at the return of Melchizedek. Cp Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16; Rev 10:7; 11:15

¹⁶ John G. Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 179-82.

¹⁷ Jones, "Musical Instruments," 4:938.

¹⁸ Brad Bitner, "Paul's Paradigm for Building Up the Church: Architecture and Authority in 1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5," conference paper (Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting, 2019) argues that Paul's knowledge of contemporary Greco-Roman building project contracts in his structuring of 1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5.

Paul also mentions the theater in 4:9-10 (and possibly alludes to the theater in 13:1, if the “echoing bronze” in fact refers to theater resonators).¹⁹ The theater in Corinth during Paul’s time there could have seated up to 14,000 spectators, and it would have been busy hosting classical dramas, musical performances, and possibly gladiatorial fights, among other activities. While the classical theatrical performances that originated in Athens were closely tied to religious celebration, it seems that by the first century diaspora Jews were comfortable attending some such events.²⁰ So it seems that Paul and the Corinthians would likely have been well acquainted with the theater, even if there is no direct evidence Paul himself attended. Almost everything associated with the theater would have included instrumental music of various sorts from the chorus music and interludes of plays to virtuosic music productions, so the Corinthian Christians’ proximity to the Corinthian theater would have made them intimately acquainted with Greco-Roman musical practices.

Finally, Paul makes reference to the athletic complex, the Stadium and the Isthmian games, in his analogy to the athletic competition in 9:24-27. When Paul says “all those who compete (ὁ ἀγωνιζόμενος)²¹ exercise self-control in everything they do,” he could easily be referring to the musical contestants (kitharodes, kitharetas, aulodes, and auletes) as much as the chariot drivers, runners, and wrestlers, who all competed for prizes, money, and fame at the

¹⁹ 15:32 may also allude to the theater (the one in Ephesus in this case) if Paul is referring to the gladiatorial and animal-fighting spectacles. And in the very next verse, 15:33, Paul likely quotes from a famous play, Menander’s *Thais*.

²⁰ *Arist.* 284; *Phil. Abr.* 177; *Flacc.* 38; *Leg. Gai.* 368. There is also inscriptional evidence in the second century of Jews having their own section in a Greek theater, see Adolf Deissmann, *Light From the Ancient East*, 451.

²¹ Several translations translate this participle as “an athlete” (ESV, NRSV, NABRE), but this term in English is certainly too narrow for the context of the Panhellenic games to which Paul likely refers. “One who competes/strives” may be better (AV, NIV – surprisingly more literal here).

games. Much like with the theater, diaspora Jews likely attended the sporting events, and so it may not be much of a stretch to imagine early Christians, perhaps even Paul, attending as well.²²

The musical background of the first-century Corinth would have been diverse, and performances of music with instruments pervasive. Robust Greco-Roman musical traditions and the many contemporary uses of musical instruments would presumably have shaped the early Christians living in Corinth. Paul also demonstrates his familiarity with these practices by weaving these common experiences of the Corinthians into his correspondence. Knowing the background and recognizing Paul's familiarity with the Greco-Roman musical practices in Corinth may help inform how the early Christian communities of the New Testament interacted with music and musical instruments.

Paul's Attitude Towards Music in 1 Corinthians

The textual evidence of 1 Corinthians suggests that Paul accepted Greco-Roman musical instrumentation as a legitimate cultural expression that he could participate in "as one not under the law (τοῖς ἀνόμοις),"²³ Albeit, he likely had some constraints, being "under the jurisdiction of Christ (ἔννομος Χριστοῦ)."²⁴ He also may have encouraged the Corinthians' use of their music in the church's gatherings and worship.

Paul's missiological statement in 9:19-13 indicates that he would accept various cultural practices, if those practices helped to advance the gospel. Surely this would include common musical practices, provided they were not being actively involved in pagan worship. In fact, his

²² Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology*, 3rd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 14-15. He mentions Philo's apparent freedom to attend wrestling matches in *Quod omnis probus* 26 as support.

²³ 1 Cor 9:21.

²⁴ Ibid; cf BDAG 338.

following treatments of sports and idol worship indicate that the Corinthians were engaged with their neighbors in their regular cultural practices. For example, they seem to be competing in athletic contests (9:24-27), eating dinner with idol worshipers (10:23-30), and perhaps even sacrificing at the temples depending on what is implied in 10:14-22! While Paul does correct some of these practices, he also seems to leave the door fairly wide open in the case of dining with idol worshipping neighbors. In the case of his sports analogy, Paul makes no negative comments when given the opportunity. Clearly, Paul is not focused on athletics in this argument, but he seems to accept the reality of participation in the Greek athletic competitions to the extent that this experience connected to his readers.²⁵ So, from these passages, Paul seems to embrace high degree of flexibility and acceptance in cultural engagement, while eschewing only explicitly idolatrous or immoral practices.

As seen above, Paul displays common familiarity with musical practices in Corinth. For a polemical letter in which he brings up topic after topic for correction, Paul never makes much comment on musical practices when he has the opportunity. This is significant precisely because of the connections between music and Greco-Roman religion. At the very least then, Paul sees the use of musical instruments as a relatively insignificant issue. But as with his positive uses of the athletic metaphor throughout his letters, perhaps his familiarity indicates a positive attitude towards musical instruments.

Paul's first explicit reference to an instrument in 13:1 connects an "echoing brass or a clashing cymbal (γέγονα χαλκὸς ἤχων ἢ κύμβαλον ἀλαλάζον)" to speaking in tongues without

²⁵ Gal 2:2; 5:7; Phil 2:16; 3:14; Col 2:18; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 2:5; 4:7; While Paul always speaks about sports in metaphors, these appear frequent and are always positive. This does not prove that Paul or the Corinthians engaged in athletic competition, but the athletic competitions must have loomed large in their lives in some form. It seems most likely that the Corinthian Christians were at least spectators, even if none were contestants.

love. Fee argues that Paul uses this language to set up his discussion of intelligibility in chapter 14.²⁶ If so, Paul is using the “clashing cymbal” to depict the nature of non-loving tongue speaking. Some commentators take this to mean, as Fee, that “to speak in tongues as they were doing...with no concern for building up the community, is not merely to speak unintelligible words; it makes one sound like the empty, hollow noises of pagan worship.”²⁷ This may be the case, since cymbals and drums were used in the Greek world almost exclusively in the cults of Bacchus and Cybele.²⁸ However, Paul’s emphasis is on the nature of loveless tongue-speaking, not a discourse on worship practices, so he is likely referring specifically to the *sound*.

The “echoing brass (χαλκὸς ἠχῶν)” compounds the problem of interpreting this passage. The word for brass (χαλκός) commonly refers to metals such as “copper, brass, or bronze” or “anything made of such metal,”²⁹ and never occurs as a musical instrument. Therefore, various solutions have been proposed. Paul could be referring to the characteristics of the metal itself when struck. This has some parallels in classical literature which mentions people using or acting like resonating bronze with a put-offish result.³⁰ Others have proposed that this refers to acoustic

²⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 698.

²⁷ Fee, 700-701.

²⁸ M.L. West, *Ancient Greek Music*, Paperback (New York, NY: Clarendon, 1994), 124-126; Landels, *Music in Greece and Rome*, 83, points out that there are very few actual depictions or examples of cymbals in the Greco-Roman world and they could not be very similar to modern cymbals that are thin and make a washy, clashing sound. Instead, ancient cymbals were more bell like, occurred in pairs, and likely matched to make distinct notes. See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1037.

²⁹ BDAG 1076

³⁰ Herodotus *Hist.*4.200; Plato *Prot.* 329a

vases that acted as resonators for the Corinthian theater.³¹ However, both of these options are tentative and downplay or ignore the fact that Paul is making a *musical* analogy. This is especially clear if Paul is setting up for 14:7-8, where he will pick up this analogy.

Partially for this reason, Anatheia Portier-Young points out the parallel nature of “echoing brass” with the “crashing cymbal,” and argues that Paul likely uses “brass” here as another word for cymbal.³² In this way the brass (χαλκός) does not have to mean anything other than “brass,” while in context it refers to a cymbal, and the whole phrase is pleonastic and refers to a cymbal or cymbals.³³ She also points out that the singular of cymbal (ἡ κύμβαλον) may be significant, since all known cymbals in the Israelite worship and the ancient world seem to have been used in pairs and almost always in conjunction with other instruments. This, in conjunction with Thiselton’s observations of the use of the verb “wailing (ἀλαλάζον)” with “cymbal” here,³⁴ indicates that Paul contrasts the harmony of the body “rejoicing together (συνχαίρει)” in 12:26 with a lone cymbal, not shrilly, but pitifully ringing out its single note alone and disjointed from

³¹ W.W. Klein, “Noisy Gong or Acoustic Vase? A Note on 1 Corinthians 13.1,” *New Testament Studies* 32: 286–89; cf T.K. Sanders, “A New Approach to 1 Corinthians 13:1,” *New Testament Studies* 36: 614–18. cp Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth*, 75-76, who argues against this due to a lack of evidence that the theater at Corinth had such resonators in the time of Paul and that they would not likely have been effective against the background noise of the large crowds in the tens of thousands. However, Landels (an expert in ancient engineering) in *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 192-195, explains that the system was not intended for speaking but for musical performances as the resonators were arranged to amplify specific pitches of the Greek scale system.

³² Anatheia Portier-Young, “Tongues and Cymbals: Contextualizing 1 Corinthians 13:1,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 35 (n.d.): 99–105.

³³ cf BDAG 142.1aβ for the use of ἡ as pleonastic connector in a parallel construction.

³⁴ Thiselton, 1037-1039; BDAG 41.1.

its context. Thus, Paul does not regard *cymbals* negatively, but rather their use outside their place as a supporting role in a larger ensemble.³⁵

Paul next reintroduces this theme in 14:7-8, where he begins to compare tongues with revelatory (e.g. prophecy) and teaching gifts. He sets up the comparison at the beginning of verse 7, “in the same way, in regard to inanimate things which make sounds (ὁμοῦς τὰ ἄψυχα φωνὴν διδόντα), either an aulos or a kithara (εἴτε αὐλὸς εἴτε κιθάρα)...” Stating that these are inanimate (τὰ ἄψυχα) merely serves to contrast them to human voices, which Paul has been addressing up to now.³⁶ While it is true that the noun “aulos” only appears here in the New Testament, most of the commentators miss the fact that the verb for “playing the aulos (αὐλέω)” is used five times in the New Testament.³⁷

Paul’s rhetorical question compares a distinction between notes (διαστολὴν τοῖς φθόγγοις) with being able to recognize (γνωσθήσεται) what is being played (τὸ αὐλούμενον ἢ τὸ

³⁵ Contra Eric Werner, “‘If I Speak in the Tongues of Men...’ St. Paul’s Attitude to Music,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 13 (1960): 18–23. Werner’s argument rests on tenuous interpretations of the passages in question and assumes that Paul’s pharisaic training caused him to resent instrumental music as unclean and syncretistic. On this last point, Werner primarily relies on Philo and the Dead Sea Scrolls to support his view of the first-century Pharisees’ attitude rather than consulting the rabbinic literature or Josephus. Josephus describes one typical use of Auloi for funeral services (*Jewish War* 3.9.5 §437) without any negative bias, and several Mishnaic passages prescribe the use and treatment of musical instruments for various life events (*m. Shabbat* 23.4; *m. Ketubot* 4.4; *m. Baba Mesia* 6.1), everyday use (*m. Kelim* 11.6–7; 16.7–8), and at festivals and temple worship (*m. Arakhin* 2.3–6; *m. Middot* 2.6; *m. Sukkah* 4.1; 5.4–5; cf *m. Qinnim* 3.6). On the first point, Werner neglects the context and function of Paul’s statements to the Corinthians. As this paper endeavors to demonstrate, Paul does not urge the Corinthians to repudiate musical instruments, but instead assumes the use of music instruments and uses them as examples of how to appropriately wield spiritual gifts.

³⁶ Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 495-496.

³⁷ Matt 9:23; 11:17 || Luke 7:32; 1 Cor 14:7b; Rev 18:22. Cp the noun κιθάρα: 1 Cor 14:7a; Rev 5:8; 14:2; the noun for “one who sings and plays the kithara,” κιθαροφδοῦς: Rev 14:2; 18:22; and the verb “to play with the kithara,” κιθαρίζω: 1 Cor 14:7b; Rev 14:2.

κιθαριζόμενον). Comparing these instruments to the Corinthians seems in line with 13:1, where Paul is referring to the instrument as analogous to the person and the sound as analogous to the use of their gift.³⁸ If he is instead referring to the instruments as the gifts they have, then he is differentiating between using tongues intelligibly or not, as a child first learning to play an instrument might drone away on one note or strum all the notes cacophonously at once, rather than playing the appropriate notes for the song. While auloi and kitharai were traditionally only used alone in the Greek world,³⁹ the Romans and Jews both used these instruments in ensembles as well.⁴⁰ So Paul may continue to play into the idea of the church playing harmoniously together, while not stating explicitly that the instruments are being used in this way.

Paul continues the metaphor with trumpets (σάλπιγξ) in 14:7, moving from a more broad focus on instruments in general, to a trumpet call in particular. While trumpets were used for signaling in war as in this example, as seen above, they were also used for a variety of musical and liturgical purposes. In 1 Corinthians 14:7, Paul focuses on their use in signaling because a signal more explicitly bears meaning similar to a verbal communication with a specific meaning. However, these could be confused, as in Petronius' *Satyricon* when dinner guests pose a mock funeral and their trumpeting is mistaken for a fire alarm.⁴¹

³⁸ On γέγονα in 13:1, see Thiselton, 1039 and D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 75-76. They both rightly make the grammatical connection that the instruments themselves are what a person without love in the use of their gift "become," but may miss the point that Paul's focus is on the result, the sound the instrument produces, which then may have implications for the person. However, the grammar does seem to rule out taking the instrument as the gift and the person as the performer, which may have been the way the Corinthian's envisioned themselves.

³⁹ cf Fee, 735 n484.

⁴⁰ Portier-Young, 102-104. See also Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome*.

⁴¹ Petronius, *Satyr.* 78. This work may have been extant when Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians in the mid-1st century, but it does not have much of a textual history and may not be written by the author usually attributed to it.

Paul’s focus in 1 Corinthians 14:7-8 is on the proper place and use of these instruments as analogous to how spiritual gifts ought to work in the church. For Paul, intelligible, well-played or well-sounded instruments that produce pleasing or helpful sounds are good and preferable to amateur or unskilled playing. This parallels his vision for gifts in the church, they ought to be pleasing or helpful to the body of believers as they gather together. He shows at least some working knowledge of these instruments in Greco-Roman life, familiar in first-century Corinth, and apparently portrays skillful playing positively.⁴² Thus, from these passages it seems Paul has a positive view of musical instruments.

In addition to mentioning instruments explicitly, Paul encourages forms of praise – singing (ψάλλω) and bringing hymns (ψάλμα) – which probably employ musical accompaniment. In 14:15 and 25 Paul uses the word “sing praises” (ψάλλω) or the noun (ψάλμα) which is usually translated “hymn.” BDAG, based on William S. Smith’s study, claims, “Those who favor ‘play’ ... may be relying too much on the earliest [meaning] of ψάλλω.”⁴³ But its basis for this is on several passages in the LXX of the psalms which use “sing” without explicit reference to playing an instrument. The problem with this view is that these passages likely imply the use of a lyre as accompaniment to the singing, in line with the common Hellenistic usage of the term.⁴⁴ It is unlikely that it lost this direct association with accompanied singing, since its original use, exclusively for “plucking” a stringed instrument, features just as or even

⁴² Cf. Psalm 33:3.

⁴³ BDAG 1096.

⁴⁴ LSJ 2018.II.2; MM 697; “ψάλλω” and “ψάλμα” in Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. by Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015).

more prominently in the Septuagint.⁴⁵ Thus, it seems probable that Paul was actually encouraging forms of worship that included musical instruments in 14:15, where he speaks of singing both with his spirit and his mind, and in 14:26, where he describes members bringing a “song” or “hymn” to the group’s meetings.

Conclusion

It has been argued that music, and musical instrumentation, was a pervasive, common phenomenon in the first century Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds that likely bled into the early Christian community at Corinth. The presence of musical instruments and music venues in 1 Corinthians demonstrates that Paul and the Corinthian Christians were in contact with, if not directly involved in, the common musical practices of their surrounding culture in some form. Paul’s argumentation in 1 Corinthians seems to indicate that he had a relatively positive view of music and musical instrumentation, and in fact encouraged the use of musical instruments in the Corinthian church’s gatherings as accompaniment to psalm or hymn singing. Therefore, 1 Corinthians, seen against its cultural backdrop, opens a window into the musical world of the early church, and shows that the celebration always characteristic of God’s people shines just as brightly and rings just as loudly in the early days of the Christian movement.

⁴⁵ LXX 1 Kngdms 16:16-23; 18:10; 19:9; 4 Kngdms 3:15; Pss 32:2-3; 67:26; 70:22-23; 97:5; 107:21; 143:9; 146:7; 149:3; cp Rom 15:9; 1 Cor 14:15; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; cp Jas 5:13. There is also a parallel in LXX Psalm 46:8 to “singing with understanding (ψάλλατε συνετῶς).”

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