**A SONG FOR ST. CECILIA'S DAY,** 1687

BY JOHN DRYDEN

**Stanza 1**

From harmony, from Heav'nly harmony

This universal frame began.

When Nature underneath a heap

Of jarring atoms lay,

And could not heave her head,

The tuneful voice was heard from high,

Arise ye more than dead.

Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,

In order to their stations leap,

And music's pow'r obey.

From harmony, from Heav'nly harmony

This universal frame began:

From harmony to harmony

Through all the compass of the notes it ran,

The diapason closing full in man.

**Stanza 2**

What passion cannot music raise and quell!

When Jubal struck the corded shell,

His list'ning brethren stood around

And wond'ring, on their faces fell

To worship that celestial sound:

Less than a god they thought there could not dwell

Within the hollow of that shell

That spoke so sweetly and so well.

What passion cannot music raise and quell!

**Stanza 3**

The trumpet's loud clangor

Excites us to arms

With shrill notes of anger

And mortal alarms.

The double double double beat

Of the thund'ring drum

Cries, hark the foes come;

Charge, charge, 'tis too late to retreat.

**Stanza 4**

The soft complaining flute

In dying notes discovers

The woes of hopeless lovers,

Whose dirge is whisper'd by the warbling lute.

**Stanza 5**

Sharp violins proclaim

Their jealous pangs, and desperation,

Fury, frantic indignation,

Depth of pains and height of passion,

For the fair, disdainful dame.

**Stanza 6**

But oh! what art can teach

What human voice can reach

The sacred organ's praise?

Notes inspiring holy love,

Notes that wing their Heav'nly ways

To mend the choirs above.

**Stanza 7**

Orpheus could lead the savage race;

And trees unrooted left their place;

Sequacious of the lyre:

But bright Cecilia rais'd the wonder high'r;

When to her organ, vocal breath was giv'n,

An angel heard, and straight appear'd

Mistaking earth for Heav'n.

**GRAND CHORUS**

As from the pow'r of sacred lays

The spheres began to move,

And sung the great Creator's praise

To all the bless'd above;

So when the last and dreadful hour

This crumbling pageant shall devour,

The trumpet shall be heard on high,

The dead shall live, the living die,

And music shall untune the sky.

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**Summary**

John Dryden wrote his ode entitled “A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day” in 1627 to celebrate the memory of St. Cecilia, a holy Christian lady who sacrificed her life in Rome in the year 230 AD. She is much-loved as a saint and great patron of music. Her music had divine qualities.

The poet explains the genesis/creation of this universe by the power of divine music. The poet imagines that the universe evolved through the power of music. The power of heavenly music brought together the various elements of the universe to make it a compact whole. The power of nature could not function, as the planets were in a disorderly position. The atoms of the universe were disorderly. Order comes from harmony and harmony is created with the power of music.

The poet believed that the universe came into existence because of this divine music. Music was in orderly form and it brought the elements of the universe in harmony with one another. The music created by the almighty ran through all the length and breadth of the musical scale. Every note of the musical scale was sounded in the creation of all sorts of living objects. Creatures from the smallest size to the biggest were created by the power of different musical notes. In the end God created man.

Then Dryden points at the importance of music. When Jubal the father of music, sounded the strings of his stringed musical instrument and produced music, his brothers and sisters were charmed on hearing that sweet music and stood around him to listen to that music. They thought that instrument to be something divine, which could produce music of divine quality.

Then all fell on their faces to praise and worship that instrument. That instrument was made from a big shell. They imagined that there must be some God inside the shell, because such a music could only be created or produced by the God.

Dryden goes on to explain the effect of the tunes of different musical instruments on the mind of man. The sound of the trumpet and the drum is loud and harsh. The notes or rhythm of these instruments raise the feeling of anger and fear. These encourage man to take up arms to fight or wage war against their enemy. The repeated sounds produced through the beating of drums attract attention of people. This encourages people to face the attack of their enemies in defense. This sound encourages people to make use of weapons.

The poet then describes flute’s sound or music. Flute can captivate any person who listens to the music produced by it. Its music has a melancholy effect. Dryden is of the opinion that its music seems to be the complaint made by a lover, who is unable to meet his beloved.

Music produced by lute is used for songs sung at the time of funeral. Its tune is like the songs of birds. Similarly violin reveals the great pain of the lost hopes. The notes produced by the violin express great pain and anger of heart for the lady love who has deserted her lover.

The poet describes the music instrument called ‘Organ’. The Organ was invented by St. Cecilia. It is beyond the powers and capacity of man to fully praise the Organ. When St. Cecilia struck the notes on her Organ, it produced heavenly music. It produced feelings of love and praise for God. When the Organ’ s music was heard by an Angel, he came down to earth mistaking it for heaven. He listened to St. Cecilia’s song.

The poet also tells about the music produced on the Lyre of Orpheus. Orpheus is the Greek God of music. His song had such power that even lifeless objects got life on hearing it and followed him. Even trees uprooted themselves and followed Orpheus under the impact of his music.

In the concluding lines, the chorus tells us that the music which created the universe would also cause the end of the universe. On the final doom’s Day of Judgment, Gabriel will appear and blow his trumpet aloud. With the effect of this sound the dead would be filled with life and raise from their graves to hear the judgment. The living persons would die. God would pronounce his final judgment according to the good and bad deeds of people. Thus the same power of music which made order from disorder would produce disorder from order.