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**Conference "Thought on Music in the Abrahamic Tradition" (The State Institute for Art Studies together with the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Centre, Moscow, 7-9 November 2017**

**Lecture (Thursday 9 November 2017, 10.30-11.30)**

**Title**: Marsilio Ficino’s *Timaeus* Commentary: Musical Speculations of a Renaissance Interpreter

**Abstract**

Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) was one of the Renaissance’s defining scholars. Among his most important works was his *Timaeus* commentary. Despite the influence of Plato’s *Timaeus* in previous times, it was only with Ficino that the Latin West got its first complete translation. As one of the few Renaissance scholars to confront the challenges of Plato’s influential but also complex text, his commentary made Ficino the leading theoretician of the harmonics it propounds, but also an important interpreter of the ideas about music theory and practice it involves. In this paper, I address two questions central to Ficino’s interpretation of the *Timaeus*: why did he choose the theory of cosmic harmony from the dialogue as a matrix for his account of a physical world already undergoing radical change? And why did he want to revive Plato’s theory of the ethical power of listening? By investigating both Ficino’s interpretations of harmonics and of the physical and psychological mechanisms of perception and hearing, this paper argues that he used them above all to substantiate the biblical ideas that the world is a harmonic creation, that man is created with an immortal soul, and that the purpose of life is divine enlightenment. Furthermore, it demonstrates how Ficino revived Plato’s view of the delight taken in auditory perception to formulate a new music therapy in terms of a curious mixture of Neoplatonic and fifteenth-century scientific technical terms. Consequently, musical delight results from the correct perception of a sensory object as an imitation of divine harmonic order.

**2. Conference "Thought on Music in the Abrahamic Tradition" (The State Institute for Art Studies together with the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Centre, Moscow, 7-9 November 2017)**

**Conference paper (Thursday 9 November, 16.00-17.00)**

**Title**: Marin Mersenne on the Power of David’s Lyre, Kabbalah and Sympathetic Vibration

**Abstract**

In music textbooks and explanations of the power of music on the mind of the listener, the story of David, who lifted Saul’s spirits by playing on his lyre (1 Sam 16:23), was a commonplace till far in the Renaissance. In the Middle Ages the biblical verse was usually repeated without any further explanation, but Marsilio Ficino (1433 – 1499) went further by expanding on the possibilities that the power could come from either the instrument or its tuning. He used the concept of sympathetic vibration (a harmonic phenomenon produced in a formerly passive string that responds to external vibrations to which it has a harmonic likeness) as an occult power to explain that bodies can act on each other at a distance. Moreover, he used this concept in a musical context as a model to explain musical communication. Marin Mersenne (1588 –1648) scrutinized this theory in his *Quaestiones celeberrimae in Genesim* (1623) by demolishing part of its Neoplatonist and Kabbalistic underpinnings. Moreover, in his *Harmonie Universelle* (1636) he expanded on the idea that the power of music must be searched for in the musician and the response to his music in the listener. In this paper, I will explore Mersenne’s criticism of Neoplatonist and Kabbalistic theories of sympathetic vibration and the alternative he offered for them to demonstrate how the concept transformed from an occult power to a central component of a mainstream explanation for musical communication in his philosophy.

**3. Lecture Moscow State University, Friday 10 November, 16.30-18.00 (see: Facebook announcement)**

**Title**: Marsilio Ficino’s *Timaeus* Commentary: Musical Speculations of a Renaissance Interpreter

**Bio**

Jacomien Prins is a visiting scholar at the University of Utrecht. She has worked extensively on the interaction between music theory and philosophy in the Renaissance. Her work includes *Echoes of an Invisible World: Marsilio Ficino and Francesco Patrizi on Cosmic Order and Music Theory* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), *Sing Aloud Harmonious Spheres: Renaissance Conceptions of Cosmic* Harmony (London: Routledge, 2017), and an edition and translation of Marsilio Ficino’s commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus* (Harvard University Press, the *I Tatti Renaissance Library* series (ITRL), forthcoming). She is currently working on a book project titled *‘A Well-tempered Life’: Music, Health and Happiness in Renaissance Learning.*