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## Edward Burne-Jones' Art and Music: A Chant of Love

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### ABSTRACT

This essay examines Edward Burne-Jones' (August 28, 1833–June 17, 1898) artistic concepts of *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting, so is poetry) and *ut pictura musica* (as is painting so is music), a comparison of poetry, music, and painting depicted in his imagery of the *Female Musician* of 1866 (at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, UK, Fig. 1), and *Music* of 1877 (at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, UK, Fig. 2). The comparison or *paragone* between music and art is viewed here in two ways: 1) in a natural realm as an expression of love for a muse, Maria Cassavetti Zambaco; and 2) in a metaphysical realm as a vehicle of artist expression for depicting beauty. Painting and music are then poetical guidance for Burne-Jones' manifestation of love. Maria is Burne-Jones' model, muse, and sorceress. His paintings are depictions of musical scenes that capture a poetical world of ardent and endless love, as well the world of the senses, a physical realm, and the world of aesthetics, a metaphysical realm.

**Keywords:** Edward Burne-Jones, Maria Zambaco, paragone (comparison), music, love, art, Pre-Raphaelites.

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*"If music is the food of love, play on!"  
William Shakespeare, opening words of Twelfth Night"*

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## 1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to examine Edward Burne-Jones' (August 28, 1833–June 17, 1898) artistic concepts of *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting, so is poetry) and *ut pictura musica* (as is painting so is music),<sup>2</sup> a comparison of poetry, music, and painting depicted in his imagery of the *Female Musician* of 1866 (at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, UK, Fig. 1), and *Music* of 1877 (at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, UK, Fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> The art historical and iconographical comparison or *paragone* between music and art is viewed here in two ways: 1) in a natural realm as an expression of love for a muse, Maria Cassavetti Zambaco; and 2) in a metaphysical realm as a vehicle of artist expression for depicting beauty. Painting and music are then poetical guidance for Burne-Jones' manifestation of love. Maria is Burne-Jones' model, muse, and sorceress. His paintings are depictions of musical scenes that capture a poetical world of ardent and endless love, as well the world of the senses, a physical realm, and the world of aesthetics, a metaphysical realm. Here the aim is to demonstrate Burne-Jones' artistic originality in visually combining art and music as well as in composing musical instruments to decorate his paintings.



Fig. 1: Edward Burne-Jones, *Female Musician*, 1866. Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK  
Photo credit: Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, UK

<sup>2</sup>The ancient poet Horace (65–8 BCE) pioneered this concept in *Ars Poetica*, 361–65, quoting the Latin phrase of the classical historian and biographer Plutarch's "poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens" ("poetry is a speaking picture, painting is a silent [mute] poetry"). He, in turn, was quoting the phrase from the Greek poet Simonides of Keos' (556–468 BCE) *De gloria atheniesium*. See Wesley Trimpi, "The Meaning of Horace's *Ut Pictura Poesis*," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 36 (1973), 1–34; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. and ed. Edward Allen McCormick (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1984), Introduction; and Lee W. Rensselaer, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: Norton, 1967), Introduction, for a cultural and historical discussion of the concept and its application in art. See also <<http://www.collegeart.org/pdf/artbulletin/Art%20Bulletin%20Vol%2022%20No%204%20Lee.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup>A study for this painting is now in the Lloyd Webber Collection. The drawing inscription reads "EBJ to Owl." The word "owl" refers a nickname Burne-Jones gave to his patron Charles Augustus Howell during the 1860s. Their friendship subsided when Howell started meddling in his love affair with Maria.



Fig. 2: Edward Burne-Jones, *Music*, 1877. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK  
Photo credit: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK/Art Resource, NY AA563025

This essay benefited from the scholarship of Martin Harrison and Bill Walters, *Burne-Jones* (London: Barie and Jenkins, 1973); Maria Teresa Benedetto and Gianna Piantoni, *Burne-Jones* (Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta, 1989); Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1998); Stephen Calloway and Lynn Federle Orr, eds., *The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde 1860–1900* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2013); and, in particular, the writings of Edward Burne-Jones' spouse, Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, 2 vols (London: McMillan Company, 1904).

## 2.0 Burne-Jones and Music

Burne-Jones' evocative and enigmatic paintings of *Female Musician* and *Music* arouse in the viewer complex and personal feelings, as well as intricate aesthetic perceptions in art. The visual imagery and its signification becomes a catalyst for comprehending metaphysical notions about creativity. He is able to immortalize them in an aesthetic form of beauty. In these paintings, Burne-Jones manifests the intricacies of, and bonds within, the creative arts, poetry, painting, and music as well as the reflections of the human spirit. His quest for creating beautiful forms is explained in his aesthetic *paragone* for the arts and views about art. Burne-Jones explains what painting means to him, viz., that a painting is an image of beauty: "I mean by a picture a beautiful, romantic dream of something that never was, never will be—in a light better than any light that ever shone—in a land no one can define or remember, only desire—and the forms divinely beautiful—and then I wake up."<sup>4</sup> He searches for a classical metaphor to express his dream and existence, i.e., a pursuit for a canon of art that results in his adage: *To love beauty*. His aesthetic quest is reminiscent of the Renaissance philosophy of beauty or Renaissance Neoplatonism. In this philosophy, "beauty consists of a certain charm" as something spiritual that transcends sensual experience and makes us long for the origin of what we perceive.<sup>5</sup> In Renaissance art, a visual example is Botticelli's imagery, in his *Primavera* of 1475 (at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence), which emphasizes this spiritual concept of ideal beauty rather than the physical reproduction

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<sup>4</sup>See David Cecil, *Visionary and Dreamer: Two Poetic Painters, Samuel Palmer and Edward Burne-Jones* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 143, quoting from a letter Burne-Jones wrote to Morris.

<sup>5</sup>Marsilio Ficino, *Symposium*, I.3, in *Opera* (Basel, 1561); Marsilio Ficino, *Sopra Lo Amore* (Milan: SE SRL, 2003), Chapter 1, on the beauty of love and on the beauty of the beautiful; André Chastel, *Marsilio Ficino et L'Art* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), 81–83, on the beautiful; and, for a study on the impact of Marsilio Ficino's Neoplatonism and Renaissance art, see Liana Cheney, *Botticelli's Neoplatonic Images* (Potomac, MD: Scripta Humanistica, 1993), *passim*.

of beauty as it exists in nature. Favoring this concept, Burne-Jones elaborates on the Neoplatonic idea of beauty by creating an idealized image that combines beauty and arouses love.

Burne-Jones' creativity is revealed not only in composing paintings with musical instruments, but also in constructing musical instruments. His fascination with music includes designing, decorating, and purchasing pianos. In 1860, Burne-Jones commissions Frederick Priestly to construct an upright piano, with an American oak case and painted in shellac varnish, as a wedding gift for his wife Georgiana, as noted by the inscription on the name board *F. Priestly, 15 Berners Street and Oxford Street*. Burne-Jones decorates the panels above and below the keyboard with the medieval story of Chant d'Amour (Love Song). In *Edward Burne-Jones Memorials*, Georgiana comments: "On the panel beneath the keyboard there is a gilded and lacquered picture of Death, veiled and crowned, standing outside the gate of a garden where a number of girls, unconscious of his approach are resting and listening to music" (Fig. 3).<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 3: Frederick Priestly, Piano, 1860. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England  
Photo credit: Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England

Burne-Jones composes a drawing of *Georgiana Burne-Jones at the Piano*, where the inscription on the back of the drawing states:

*Georgie was a talented musician, playing the piano well and possessing a good singing voice, with which she would render the early songs and border ballads so popular in her circle at this date. The piano she plays in our drawing is reminiscent of the small upright, made by Priestly of Berners Street in unpolished American walnut, which was given to her as a wedding present and decorated by Burne-Jones (Fig. 4).<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>6</sup>Today the musical instrument is at the Victorian and Albert Museum in London, England (Museum No. W.43-1926). For image, see <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O58869/piano-priestley-frederick/>>.

<sup>7</sup>The drawing of Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, Bt., A.R.A., R.W.S. (1833-98) *Georgiana Burne-Jones at the Piano*, with inscription "G B-J by E B-J" (on an old label attached to the backboard), pencil, 3¼ x 3 7/8 in. (9.5 x 9.8 cm.), was sold by Christie's Auction House at King Street in London, Sale 7363, Lot 1 on February 28, 2007. Originally the drawing belong to a descendant of the sitter, Georgiana, via her daughter, Margaret Mackail, her granddaughter, Angela Thirkell, and her great-grandson, Colin McInnes, as an anonymous sale at Christie's, London, June 7, 1996, lot 555. See Judith Flanders, *A Circle of Sisters* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), pl. 7.



Fig. 4: Edward Burne-Jones, *Georgiana Burne-Jones at the Piano*, 1860. Pencil drawing with inscription 'GB-J by E B-J'. Private Collection. Photo credit: Christie's of London, Auction, Lot 1, Sale 7363, February 28, 2007.



Fig. 5: Edward Burne-Jones, *Graham Piano*, 1879-1880. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England. Photo credit: Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England

Burne-Jones also receives several commissions from friends and patrons to design and decorate grand pianos. For William Graham, he decorates a grand piano as a wedding gift for Graham's daughter, Frances. In addition to designing the musical instrument, he also commissions the piano's construction by John Broadwood of London in 1879. The company built the grand piano as a traditional harpsichord, supported by a trestle stand and decorated in the style of the Arts and Crafts Movement.<sup>8</sup> Burne-Jones then composes numerous drawings for the paintings on the piano's lid. Appropriately, the narrative story is based on the musical legend of Pindar's Orpheus and Eurydice (Fig. 5).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup>See Stephen Calloway and Lynn Federle Orr, eds., *The Cult of Beauty: The Victorian Avant-Garde 1860-1900* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 2013), Introduction; Rosalind P. Blakesley, *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Phaidon Press, 2009), passim; and Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Beauty and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), passim.

<sup>9</sup>See George Miles, *Classical Mythology in English Literature: A Critical Anthology* (London: Routledge, 1999), 54, for Pindar, *Pythian Odes on Orpheus and Eurydice*, 4.4.315. One of Burne-Jones' sketchbooks is at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and contains numerous drawings for piano's decorations; see <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1078498/sketchbook-burne-jones-edward/>>.

The piano decoration is embellished by a monochrome medallion around the side of the lid with the classical saga. Inside the lid, Mother Earth intertwines her offspring around the branches of a large vine tree while the spirit of music moves the poet Orpheus. Burne-Jones also completes designs for a grand piano for Alexander Ionides in 1893. The piano was also manufactured by Broadwood, in oak, stained and decorated with gold and silver-gilt gesso, and is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 6: Edward Burne-Jones, *Clavichord for Margaret*, 1897. On loan at the National Trust at Standen, UK  
Photo credit: Aymer Vallance, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones Baronet* (London: The Art Journal, 1900), 25

In late 1897, Burne-Jones commissions Arnold Dolmetsch to construct a clavichord case for his daughter Margaret (Fig. 6).<sup>11</sup> The signature and date of the maker appears inside the clavichord as *Arnold Dolmetsch-mefecit-londioi-mdxcccxvii-osio*. The overall exterior of the case is painted red like a Chinese lacquer. On the left there is a large laurel wreath encircling the Latin words *Clavis Cordium* (Key Board), alluding to the musical instrument. In the center, a large poem, also in Latin, honors Margaret,<sup>12</sup> while on the right a haloed female figure (Saint Margaret) controls a dragon on a leash. Behind her, a large ribbon with the inscription *Margareta*, the name of Burne-Jones' daughter, wraps around a plant with three white margaritas. Inside the clavichord, under the strings, the background design, colored in light green tones, is decorated with a climbing vine of red roses; on the right side of the design, a young woman, crowned with flowers and dressed in white, gathers roses from the vine.

Burne-Jones makes models of musical instruments for his paintings, ranging from hand-organs or clavichords to various string instruments such as harp, dulcimer, and psalter. Although Burne-Jones played the piano for enjoyment, these musical instruments were not performance pieces but decorative inventions for study purposes, to be incorporated in his paintings.<sup>13</sup> He also commissioned

<sup>10</sup>See no author, *Morris and Company* (London: The Fine Art Society, 1979), No. 26. For an image and information on the Ionides Collection, No. W23–1927, see <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O86392/grand-piano-burne-jones-edward/>>.

<sup>11</sup>See Angela Thirkell, *Three Houses* (London: Moyer Bell, 1995), Chapter IV, no pagination. Thirkell, the granddaughter of Burne-Jones, states that the purpose of the commission was a gift to her mother, Margaret, from her grandfather, Burne-Jones. Margaret, known as Mrs. J. W. Mackail, donated the clavichord to the Royal College of Music in London. The curator of the Royal Academy of Music in London, Gabrielle Rossi Rognoni, informs me that the clavichord is “presently on loan at the National Trust at Standen, UK. There were three of this model made and one other survives, privately owned in Guildford, and it was decorated by Helen Coombe, later the wife of Roger Fry.”

<sup>12</sup>Burne-Jones' poem reads in Latin:

Mi-quo-laeter-quoove-Plorem—indit-artifex-sonorem:me—musarum-priscvm-florem—musa-morte-suscitat-  
rvrsvs—ergo-vox-desveta-sonat  
plorans-sonat-laeta-qua—docvinqve-Margareta-clavi—chordam-reserat—

<sup>13</sup>See Aymer Vallance, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones Baronet* (London: The Art Journal, 1900), 28, Figs. 54 and 55, for Burne-Jones' constructed psalter and harp, respectively.

models of musical instruments for study purposes in order to include the correct image of the musical instrument in his paintings, e.g., the long horn seen played by the Archangel Michael in *Last Judgment* of 1897, commissioned for one of the large stained glass windows in the church of St. Philip's Cathedral at Birmingham.<sup>14</sup>



Fig. 7: Edward Burne-Jones, *Clavichord for Margaret*, 1897. On loan at the National Trust at Standen, UK  
Photo credit: Aymer Vallance, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones Baronet* (London: The Art Journal, 1900), 25



Fig. 8: Edward Burne Jones, *Psaltery*, 1870s. Private Collection.  
Photo credit: Aymer Vallance, *Sir Edward Burne-Jones Baronet* (London: The Art Journal, 1900), 28, Fig. 55.

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<sup>14</sup>This church has a special meaning for Burne-Jones. He was a native of Birmingham and was baptized in this church. In 1833–84, when the church chancel was extended, Burne-Jones was commissioned by Bishop Bowlby of Coventry to decorate it with stained glass windows. Although poorly paid, Burne-Jones completes *The Ascension*, *The Nativity*, *The Crucifixion*, and later *The Last Judgment* for the church. See Simon Bradley, "The Stained Glass" *Birmingham*, in Andy Foster, ed., *Pevsner Architectural Guides* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 45; and Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones*, 2 vols. (London: McMillan Company, 1904), 2:172. Hereafter *BJ Memorials*.

Of the musical models that Burne-Jones constructed, only two have survived: a harp and psaltery (Figs. 7 and 8). These models were part of his son's collection (Sir Philip Burne-Jones, known as Bart),<sup>15</sup> and Burne-Jones shows them in his paintings, for example the psaltery in *Female Musician* and the harp in the decorative design for *Love Among the Ruins* of 1872, in *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* by William Morris (Fig. 9).<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 9: Edward Burne-Jones, *Love Among the Ruins*, 1865-70. Illuminated page in William Morris' *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.  
Photo credit: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rubaiyat\\_Morris\\_Burne-Jones\\_Manuscript.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rubaiyat_Morris_Burne-Jones_Manuscript.jpg)

In other paintings, Burne-Jones will repeat the same motif of the musical instrument, for example in *Study for Music*, a drawing of 1865-70 (at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, UK, Fig. 10), *Lament* of 1865-66 (at the William Morris Gallery, UK), *Love Among the Ruins* of 1870, 1894 (at the National Trust, Wightwick Manor, UK), and *The Sleeping Beauty Series* of 1885 (at the Ponce Museo de Arte in Puerto Rico, Figs. 11 and 12).



Fig. 11: Edward Burne-Jones, *The King and Court*, *Sleeping Beauty Series*, 1885. Museo de Ponce, Puerto Rico  
Photo credit: author. Courtesy of the Museo de Ponce, Puerto Rico

<sup>15</sup>See n. 12.

<sup>16</sup>See n. 12.



Fig. 12: Edward Burne-Jones, *Sleeping Princes*, *Sleeping Beauty Series*, 1885. Museo de Ponce, Puerto Rico  
Photo credit: author. Courtesy of the Museo de Ponce, Puerto Rico

Inspired by the signing gallery of Luca della Robbia's *Cantoria* of 1431–38, in marble (at the Opera del Duomo in Florence), which he probably saw in his many trips to Florence in 1859, 1862, 1871, and 1873 and whose Oronzio Lelli's replica casts were purchased in 1877 and on view at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Fig. 13),<sup>17</sup> Burne-Jones paints images of female musicians who are engaged in the art of music, transforming the perception of viewing a sculptural form into a painted image—an enchanting *paragone*.



Fig. 13: Oronzio Lelli, *Cantoria*, 1877, casts after Luca della Robbia, *Cantoria*, 1438. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England  
Photo credit: author

### 3.0 Burne-Jones' Female Musician

Burne-Jones' *Female Musician* of 1866 (at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester, UK, Fig. 1) depicts a solo musician. Seated on a marble parapet in an open veranda, the solo musician pauses while holding her psalter. She is dressed with a red tunic, an allusion of her poetical inspiration—the Platonic *furor poeticus*, which I have expanded to include *furor artisticus*, meaning the inspiration or passion of the artist. The bluish landscape parallels the melancholic mood of the muse. In the landscape a few feathery trees are seen. It is the season of Spring. Surfacing above the parapet is an olive branch, a mythological symbol of peace and glory, which is associated with a muse, a poet, or a musician, even a young maiden or a bride. Burne-Jones' muse might represent Erato, the Muse of lyrics, love, and erotic

<sup>17</sup> In 1891, Luigi del Moro reconstructed Lelli's casts after Luca's *Cantoria* as seen today (Museum No. 1877-44). See <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/users/node/15373>>.

poetry. In the Orphic hymn to the Muses, it is Erato who entertains Apollo and the Muses on Mount Parnassus. However, for compositional inspiration for the seated muse, Burne-Jones looks to the Vatican Muses, in particular Thalia (Greek name for flourishing), Muse of Comedy, of the third century BCE. Burne-Jones saw this marble statue during his several trips to Italy between 1859 and 1873. Undoubtedly, the classical stance of the seated figure recalls as well the ancient sculptor Phidias' seated goddesses from the Parthenon's East Pediment of 438 BCE (compare Figs. 1 with 14 and 15), at the British Museum of Art, which Burne-Jones often visited.<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 14: Phidias, *Female Goddess* (flipped image), Parthenon, East Pediment, 438 BCE. British Museum, London, England  
Photo author. Courtesy of the British Museum, London, England



Fig. 15: Phidias, *Female Goddesses*, Parthenon, East Pediment, 438 BCE. British Museum, London, England  
Photo author. Courtesy of the British Museum, London, England

<sup>18</sup>See Martin Harrison and Bill Walters, *Burne-Jones* (London: Barie and Jenkins, 1973), 56–57. Burne-Jones spent a great deal of time at the British Museum, admiring the classical sculptures. British poets as well were impressed by the Elgin Marbles at the British Museum; see M. A. Goldberg, “John Keats and the Elgin Marbles,” *Apollo* (November 1965), 370–78.



Fig. 16: Phidias, *Female Goddesses*, Parthenon, East Pediment, 438 BCE. British Museum, London, England  
Photo author. Courtesy of the British Museum, London, England

The solo *Female Musician* pauses while playing her instrument in order to meditate or nostalgically recall a moment from the past. Burne-Jones alludes to an aesthetic, suspended moment in time, what in the *Laocoön*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing refers to as a pregnant moment in a work of art. The depiction of an image in a suspended aesthetic moment in time means that nothing needs to be deleted or added to comprehend the image; that is, it is the capturing of a perfect moment in time and space for the creation of a work of art.<sup>19</sup> Burne-Jones is familiar with Matthew Arnold's (1822–88) poetry from his studies at Oxford, and he is aware of Arnold's publication of a poem on the *Epilogue to Lessing's Laocoön* of 1867.<sup>20</sup>

In the *Female Musician*, Burne-Jones' *paragone* is at so many levels: 1) the painted image depicting a musician with a musical instrument; 2) the painting simulating the pose of a sculptural form; and 3) the simulated painted sculptural form revealing the influence of a poem, implying Horace's motto *ut pictura poesis*. However, in reference to Burne-Jones' imagery of a musician, one could modify Horace's motto to imply *ut pictura musica* (as is painting, so it music). Music, like painting, as part of the Sister Arts, evokes, manifests, and composes beauty.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön of 1766*, trans. and ed. Sir Robert Phillimore, Bart. (London: George Routledge & Sons, and MacMillan, 1874 reprint), Introduction, xix, in particular, xxv, for a discussion on Lessing's perception of painting and sculpture: "[Lessing] saw that the artist had only a moment in which to tell his tale, and the choice of this moment was everything ... that [this moment] should be the one which was most fruitful or pregnant with suggestion, which allowed the freest scope to the imagination of the spectator, who the more he looked at what was represented, the more he ought to exercise thought." See also J. G. Herder, *Selected Writings on Aesthetics*, trans. and ed. Gregory Moore (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 97–99, for a criticism of Lessing's pregnant moment; and Sarah Lippert, ed., *Gotthold Lessing's Legacy: Space and Time in Artistic Practice and Aesthetics* (London: I.B. Tauris, forthcoming 2016).

<sup>20</sup>In the poem, Arnold claims that poetry is superior to painting and music because it captures in words the movements and vicissitudes of life that cannot be visualized in painting or be heard with sounds or in music. He also notes that since ancient times, the Greeks postulated that painting and music were artist expressions more powerful than poetry. See Matthew Arnold, *The Poems of Matthew Arnold, 1840–1867* (London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1867, reissued in 1909), 413, for Arnold's poem on Lessing.

<sup>21</sup>See Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts: The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 4, 6, 9, and 206, "Music, the most abstract of all the arts, produces scenes that are as vividly visual as words can make them."

The solo *Female Musician* contrasts with the duet in the *Music* of 1877 (at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, UK; compare Figs. 1 and 2). In *Music* Burne-Jones creates a composition similar to the *Female Musician*: a classical or Renaissance garden marble bench, which decorates an enclosed veranda, separating an interior open space with an exterior landscape space. Burne-Jones is familiar with Italian Renaissance marble benches, since he interprets the composition of Fra Filippo Lippi's *Seven Saints* of 1449, which he studied at the National Gallery of Art in London in order to compose a similar painting, the *Three Saints After Lippi* of 1870, now on display at the Ponce Museum of Art in Puerto Rico.

The female musicians form a twosome. One stands while playing a type of viola and looking at a sheet of music held by her seated companion. The standing musician is dressed in flaming red, while the seated muse is dressed in green. The window seating area where she sits is covered with a blue mantel. The propped-up pillow on the left balances the composition with the vase containing spring flowers on the right of the bench. The step-stool made of marble elevates the seated musician. Their action of engagement in their performance as a duet is contrasted with the solo musician who is meditating.

#### 4.0 Burne-Jones' Music

Burne-Jones composes two versions of *Music*. When he commences to paint the first version in 1875, he describes it as “a small picture for two girls a viol and a scroll,” and at the end of the year, Burne-Jones notes “two girls with a viol and scroll, in red and green dresses.”<sup>22</sup> Two years later he paints a second version, which is now located at the Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. Burne-Jones describes that *Music*: “finished replica of two girls with a viol and scroll. Graham.” William Graham, one of his most important patrons, commissions the second version of *Music* for his brother, John Graham. In a letter of April 22, 1976, Graham writes to Burne-Jones: “The little picture of 2 girls with music instruments that are to be for my brother.”<sup>23</sup> Graham's brother, in turned, sold it at Christie's on May 5, 1894, and it eventually is donated by the estate of Jean Preston to the Ashmolean Museum (WA2008.15, Fig. 2).

In the background or exterior view an extensive Spring landscape is seen with depictions of lakes, rivers, mountains, hills, and castles in the distance—a combination of a Venetian and English landscape. The serene mood of the exterior is reflected in the interior, where the musicians pose to read or to interpret a musical notation.

The *Music's* composition is an elaboration from earlier studies that Burne-Jones composes on the same theme. One is a watercolor of 1865 at the Ashmolean Museum that depicts two female figures in a cloister. One is holding a folder with writing inscriptions, while the other is resting a musical instrument on her lap. They are both seated, one on the ground and the other on a garden stool. Both female figures gaze at each other, unlike the painting of *Music*, where the figures are engaged in their performance, one standing reading the musical score while the other, seated and crowned with laurel, is chanting it or humming it. In the watercolor imagery, the female figures are both crowned with laurel, suggesting that they are muses of art: a poet and a musician. Burne-Jones creates another visual version of *ut pictura musica*.

The drawing at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery also depicts two musicians who are engaged in reading music. It is probably a preparatory drawing or study for the painting *Music* (compare Figs. 2 and 10). In the composition of the figures, Burne-Jones continues to integrate his classical interest in Greek sculpture in his compositions. His numerous visits to the British Museum to study the antique collection, in particular the Elgin Marbles, is revealed in this drawings as well as in the painting. Phidias' female figures from the East Pediment of the Parthenon are of major focus (Figs. 14, 15 and 16). Once again Burne-Jones constructs several *paragoni* in this painting as well, from painting to music, drawing to painting, and painting to sculpture, thus creating an aesthetic image (compare Figs 2, 10, 15 and 16).

<sup>22</sup>See Colin Harrison and Christopher Newall, *The Pre-Raphaelite and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 196, n. 2.

<sup>23</sup>Harrison and Newall, *The Pre-Raphaelite and Italy*, 196.

He follows Walter Pater's recommendation to painters, that they should elevate their work to "the condition of music' so that the medium might be freed from a prosaic documentary or narrative purpose."<sup>24</sup>

Most of the Pre-Raphaelite artists embrace some of the principles of the Aesthetic Movement, "art for art's sake,"<sup>25</sup> considering art devoid of moral or sentimental signification and narrative purpose. The quest is to emphasize beauty as the only concern for art. The leading exponents of this movement are the literati John Ruskin, Walter Pater,<sup>26</sup> and Oscar Wilde.<sup>27</sup> Influenced in particular by John Ruskin's writings and his moral and aesthetic rejection of modern civilization, artists such as William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones embrace the Aesthetic Movement, but for different reasons. Both artists pursue beauty through art because they are animated by nostalgia for the medieval world. Under this spell, these Pre-Raphaelite painters rediscover the Celtic myths and Arthurian legends and become deeply absorbed in the fairy-tale of Shakespeare's comedies. Burne-Jones' paintings create a whole world of legends and myths whose spiritual origin lies not only in the Middle Ages but also in antiquity. He rejects contemporary reality, desperately escaping in dreams and fantasy, thus transmitting in his painting metaphysical, moral, and aesthetic ideas dear to his heart, which binds him securely to the use of the world of legends and myths. Burne-Jones combines in his imagery his personal quest for the narrative, while paralleling the Aesthetic Movement for the artistic pursuit for beauty, a visual necessity, a code to live by, and an aim to live beautifully and be surrounded by beautiful things. His cultural symbolism is a consequence of his professional knowledge of the ancient mythologies bequeathed to him by the classical tradition of his English cultural milieu, i.e., his training in the classics at Oxford and his visual familiarity with the extensive classical collection displayed at the British Museum. Personally, his affair with Maria Zambaco also facilitates the mythical imagery of beauty portrayed in his paintings.

## 5.0 Burne-Jones' Maria Cassavetti Zambaco

Maria Cassavetti Zambaco (1843–1914) is a beautiful Greek artist, daughter of wealthy Anglo-Hellenic merchants, Euphrosyne and Demetrios Cassavetti (Fig. 17).

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<sup>24</sup>Harrison and Newall, *The Pre-Raphaelite and Italy*, 196, citing Pater's proclamation and elaborating by noting, "Music was perceived as an art form that depended entirely on the sensuous response of the listener and which required no interpretation for its appreciation."

<sup>25</sup>A term based on the French slogan "l'art pour l'art," coined by French philosopher Victor Cousin; see Gene H. Bell-Villada, *Art for Art's Sake & Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology & Culture of Aestheticism, 1790–1990* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), Introduction.

<sup>26</sup>Burne-Jones is likely aware of Walter Pater's philosophical writings, particularly *Plato and Platonism* (London, 1893), 241–44, where Pater discusses Plato's notions of Beauty and Nature. See also Robin Spencer, *The Aesthetic Movement: Theory and Practice* (London: Studio Vista Ltd., 1972), 37; and Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Edward Burne-Jones: Mannerist in an Age of Modernism," in *Pre-Raphaelite Art in Its European Context*, ed. Susan Casteras and Alicia Faxon (Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Press and London: Associated University Presses), 103–16.

<sup>27</sup>John Ruskin: *The Elements of Drawing* (1852; New York: Dover Publications, 1971); *The Stones of Venice* (1853; Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2003); *Modern Painters* (1843–53; New York: Knopf, 1989), and *Pre-Raphaelitism* (1851; Baltimore: Penguin Press, 2010); Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1869–73; New York: Dover Publications, 2005); and Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890; New York: Modern Library, 1998).



Fig. 17: Edward Burne-Jones, *Maria Zambaco*, 1870. Clemns-Sels-Museum, Neuss, Germany  
Photo credit: Clemns-Sels-Museum, Neuss, Germany

In 1860 she marries a Greek physician, Demeter Zambaco, and moves to Paris have two children, a boy and girl.<sup>28</sup> Because of marital problems, Zambaco leaves her husband in Paris and moves with her two children to London to stay with her Greek family. Her family and uncle, Alexander Constantine Ionides, Greek Consul in London are patrons of Burne-Jones. In 1866 Burne-Jones is commissioned by the Cassavetti family to paint a portrait of Maria. Seeing her for the first time, in 1866, Burne-Jones exclaims: “She is the most beautiful Greek woman.”<sup>29</sup> And their love ignites. She immediately becomes Burne-Jones’ model, lover, and muse for the rest of his life. Sadly, their romantic interlude lasts till 1872, during which time a tragic attempted double suicide fails. Burne-Jones returns to his wife, Georgiana or Georgie, who was aware of the situation and comments, “Heart, thou and I are here, sad and alone” in her book on Burne-Jones,<sup>30</sup> while Maria moves temporarily to Paris to resume her career as a sculptress. As the romantic affair ends in a melodrama, the literary writer William Rossetti (1829–1919), brother of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, recounts with sadness the love-tragedy:

*Poor old Ned’s affairs have come to a smash together, and he and Topsy [Morris], after the most dreadful to do, started for Rome suddenly, leaving the Greek damsel beating up the quarters of all his friends for him and howling like Cassandra, Georgie staying behind. I hear today however that Top and Ned got no further than Dover, Ned being so dreadfully ill that they will probably have to return to London.*<sup>31</sup>

Notwithstanding, throughout his life, Burne-Jones continues to evoke his love for Maria in saying: “So constant of heart am I” ... and ...” that I think so still.”<sup>32</sup> In his paintings Burne-Jones will never depart from the magic beauty and unending love for his muse Maria. He fused her Greek origin and her

<sup>28</sup>See Penelope Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975), 112–14, for a discussion on the life of Maria Zambaco.

<sup>29</sup>Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones*, 114–15, 119, and 147, recounts how in an undated letter to F. S. Ellis, Burne-Jones praised Maria. For Burne-Jones’ depictions of Maria, see Liana De Girolami Cheney, *Edward Burne-Jones’ Mythical Paintings* (London and New York: Peter Lang, 2014), 31–33, 39–40, 54–55, and 71.

<sup>30</sup>See *BJ Memorials*, 2:1. See also Fiona MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination* (London: Farber and Farber, 2011), 213 and 241. Dante Gabriel Rossetti described Georgie as a “charming and most gifted little woman,” while Burne-Jones says about her, in their early days of the marriage “she was a gentle woman”; MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite*, 212. Fortunately, Georgie had a close friendship and platonic love for William Morris that sustained her throughout her difficult time with her husband; *ibid.*, 241.

<sup>31</sup>See Oswald Doughty and John Robert Wahl, *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 2:685.

<sup>32</sup>Fitzgerald, *Edward Burne-Jones*, 114–15, 119, and 147; Christopher Wood, “Maria Zambaco,” Entry in *Dictionary of Artist’s Models*, ed. Jill Berk Jiminez (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2001), 577–78; and MacCarthy, *The Last Pre-Raphaelite*, 198, 202–03, 205, 207, and 209–14, for a discussion on the passion of Burne-Jones for Maria.

physical beauty in his aesthetic concept of a beautiful classical female, which is visualized not only in his love song paintings but also, in particular, in his many portraits of her, including *Portrait of Maria Zambaco* of 1870 (on gouache at Clemns-Sels-Museum, Neuss, in Germany, Fig. 17).<sup>33</sup> He reveals this parallelism and the signification of this painting for him in the *Portrait of Maria Zambaco* of 1870, where Maria is depicted opening an illuminated manuscript where, at the top of the page, the *Le Chant d'Amour* portrayed in the miniature book is of the image seen at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Burne-Jones depicts another version of this theme, which is on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Le Chant d'Amour* (signed and dated, EBJ 1865).

To emphasize his amorous liaison with Maria, Burne-Jones depicts a plumed peacock arrow pointing to the musical love imagery. He enwraps the arrows with a *cartellino*, with the inscription "Mary Aetat XXVI, August 1870 EBJ pinxit" ("Mary at age 26, August 1870, painted by EBJ"). The unveiling of the love between Burne-Jones and Maria is seen in the image, where she points to the illuminated book; Burne-Jones' *Chant d'Amour* is inspired by the theme of an old Breton song, "Helas! je sais un chant d'amour, Triste ou gai, tour à tour" (Alas! I know a love song, sad or gay, in turn).<sup>34</sup> The allusions of her name, Maria, rooted in the Egyptian words *mr* or *mry*, which signifies "my beloved or beloved lady," and in the Latin word *mare*, meaning sea, are both revealed in Burne-Jones' dedicatory inscription and the overall bluish tonality in the color of the painting.

Several allusions and associations of love are depicted, such as the cupid pulling the blue-colored curtain to reveal the beautiful woman, Maria, a type of a Greek Aphrodite. She is robed with a deep green aquamarine dress and wears a large lapis-lazuli necklace, tones of colors, which not only embellish her attire, but also allude to her name. Further references to love are the inclusion of flowers, such as the pink primrose and the blue iris. The primrose alludes to the renewal of love and devotion. Maria is holding the flower in her hand and pointing to the miniature of the *Love Song*. The blooming blue iris, too, conveys deep sentiments of affection. Not by accident, the Greek word for "rainbow" is "iris." With the application of the intense blue color in the background of the curtain, the iris and the lapis-lazuli necklace, Burne-Jones is visualizing, through the symbols of the color, his complex feelings for Maria. On the one hand, blue as a lunar color alludes to a heavenly sphere and spiritual beauty, and it is associated with Venus, the Goddess of Love.<sup>35</sup> Burne-Jones loves Maria as a beautiful Greek goddess. On the other hand, blue alludes to notions of fidelity, constancy, and loyalty.<sup>36</sup> Burne-Jones feels these sentiments toward Maria, although he promised the same feelings to his wife Georgiana. Burne-Jones' relationship with Maria must have fascinated the artist on several levels, human, artistic, and spiritual. Parallelism of these levels between Burne-Jones and Maria focuses not only on the physical or gender issues but also on the aesthetic or artistic quest. Both were artists—a painter and a sculptor; both were fascinated by classical art—Burne-Jones having studied the classics at Oxford and constantly viewing Greek sculptures at the British Museum in London, Maria being Greek by origin and culture; and both aimed to create beautiful forms in art.

The *putto* unveils not only the beauty of the model but also the signification of the model for the painter. The gemstone and the flowers both allude to sentiments of friendship, truth, and unending love as well as spiritual communion of the mind and body. Similar to the image in the miniature, the *Love Song* is a suspended melody, an allegory of music; so is the painted portrait of Maria, which is a poised similitude of Burne-Jones' loved one, an unveiling of image of love as well as an allegory of painting. Burne-Jones, here, is assimilating and modifying the ancient Greek motto of Horace's *ut pictura poesis* into *ut pictura musica*.

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<sup>33</sup>See Julia Ionides, *Memories by Luke Ionides* (Ladlow, UK: Dog Rose Press, 1996), 69 and 78–79.

<sup>34</sup>Stephen Wildman and John Christian, *Edward Burne-Jones: Victorian Artist-Dreamer* (New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1998), 98–100.

<sup>35</sup>Ami Ronnberg and Kathleen Martin, eds., *The Book of Symbols* (Cologne: Taschen, 2011), 650–52.

<sup>36</sup>J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 40.

## 6.0 Conclusion

Edward Burne-Jones' paintings of Maria Cassavetti Zambaco in *Female Musician* and the *Music* reveal complex notions of *paragone*, combining a visual realization of a natural realm with the aesthetic realm. The natural or physical realm is composed of an image that includes visual elements of art and principles of design—for example, drawing versus painting or painting versus sculpture—as well as the projection of auditoria and tactile experiences—for example, music versus painting, music versus sculpture, music versus poetry, or painting versus poetry. The aesthetic realm unifies the quests of the *paragone*, that is, the aim of the comparison between the Sister Arts—music, painting, and poetry—is, for Burne-Jones, to arouse love and create beauty. As he notes, “Only this is true, that beauty is very beautiful and softens, and comforts, and inspires, and rouses, and lifts up, and never fails.”<sup>37</sup> Thus Burne-Jones' aesthetic allusions are manifested in his love for the classical beauty Maria.

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<sup>37</sup>William Gaunt, *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1942), 152. Burne-Jones is aware of Walter Pater's philosophical writings, particularly *Plato and Platonism* (London, 1893), 241–44, where Pater discusses Plato's ideas of Beauty and Nature. See also Robin Spencer, *The Aesthetic Movement: Theory and Practice* (London: Studio Vista Ltd., 1972), 37.

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