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**Using Music Software to Explore Ancient Rhythm**

The rhythms of Classical lyric poetry, expressed in the patterned sequences of long and short syllables in cola, periods, and strophes, find a parallel neither in modern Western music nor in other surviving traditions of world music. Though scholars from the time of Boeckh (1806) to Pearson (1990) have argued that the feet of lyric verse should be set to isochronous musical measures by manipulating the relative durations of long and short syllables, the *communis opinio*, based on a preponderance of the evidence, is that ancient Greek song through the Classical period followed the principle that a long syllable has twice the duration of a short syllable. Unfortunately, this principle has been an obstacle to the recitation of lyric poetry due to the complexity and apparent irregularity of the resulting rhythms.

Using commercially available music notation software, we can create and listen to any rhythm we postulate. A practical method is to create a rhythm track which signals the durations of syllables in a poem, without melody, over which we can recite the poem. This will not give us an absolutely correct re-creation of ancient rhythm. Even with fixed syllable durations, we face decisions about such questions as the overall tempo to follow, whether or not to allow pauses between periods, and, if we do pause between periods, how long to pause. The location of period end itself may be a controversial issue, which must be determined on grounds beyond the scope of this presentation. At another level, the recitation of any poem will involve slight variations from the mechanical regularity of our computer-generated rhythm track; these variations contribute to the expressive phrasing of the text. The variations of pitch required by the accents of words and suggested by the larger units of connected discourse will also interact with the rhythmic structure of the poem.

Though we cannot claim a correct re-creation of ancient rhythm, we can develop a recitation of a poem that is consistent with our best understanding of the principles of ancient rhythm. The result is foreign to our tradition of musical rhythm, but it is aesthetically accessible; we can perceive beauty even where we may not understand it. The use of a computer generated rhythm track allows us to be transparent about the choices we do make, and to compare different versions.

The ideas presented will be illustrated by a recitation of Pindar *Pythian 8*. A scanned text and the accompanying MIDI file can be downloaded at [www.tadorapress.com](http://www.tadorapress.com).