



## THE ORIGINS OF SACRED MUSIC

In most cultures, music has traditionally evolved in two ways: sacred music (the music of the temples and churches), and temporal music (the music of the people).

The origins of sacred music in many religions around the world is strikingly similar. The development of temporal music has many different paths and deserves to be the subject of separate articles.

In Hinduism, the *Rig Veda*, the oldest known collection of Sanskrit hymns, was passed down for over a thousand years through a solely oral traditional. Priests would chant the *Rig Veda*, originally in a monotone. Over time, a note higher or lower than the original tone would be used, to emphasise or accent a particular word or phrase. This led to the creation of the characteristic tri-tone Rig Vedic chant.

By the time of the *Sama Veda*, for the first time, seven notes were used while chanting, and those seven notes constitute an octave. The *Sama Veda* is believed to be the origin of Indian classical music – both the Carnatic and Hindustani traditions. Post the Vedic period, Indian classical music continued to develop as



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a single style, until the 12th century CE, where Islamic influences in the Northern parts of India led to a separate Hindustani Classical music, which became the music of the courts. Carnatic music, the Classical music of

Southern India continued along Vedic traditions and remained the music of the temples. Most of the earliest and best-known composers of both traditions were considered poet-saints or ascetics, like Thyagaraja or Mirabai.

In central Europe, around the 9th century CE, Gregorian chants were developed in the Roman Catholic Church. Monks would chant Latin hymns in a monotone, also called plainsong. As the plainsong developed to involve more notes, simple repetitive melodic patterns were created. Gregorian chants had a simple method of notation, with words written below the notation. The melodies were in six note patterns, and accordance with simple scale patterns known as modes. There were originally four modes, then eight and finally twelve. Early polyphony, or different voices singing different melodies, was developed during this time. Polyphony is the foundation for modern harmony.

Since then, sacred music in both traditions have developed in very different ways, and it could be difficult to identify the common roots, but it's always fascinating to see how similar origins in different points of time in different parts of the world have led to beautifully distinct musical styles.