

HARMONIA
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I first encountered the story of the ancient Greek goddess, Harmonia, at a Sacred Theatre workshop led by my wise teacher, [Peggy Nash Rubin](#). Peggy is a Shakespearean director, actor and scholar who founded the [Center for Sacred Theatre](#) in Ashland Oregon. I found her work to offer a beautiful marriage of many things I love – theatre, self-development, play, community and spirituality.

Peggy told me that Harmonia -- the goddess of concord, harmony and cosmic balance -- was the daughter of Aphrodite (the goddess of love) and Ares (the god of war). The way I remember Peggy telling the story is this – Harmonia struggled to bridge the differences between her parents. Though she failed at that task, she became beautiful in her attempt.

At first, I found it surprising that Love and War combined to create Harmony. I thought of harmony as being something nice – pleasing to the ear – easy. As I studied this idea more deeply, I learned that harmony is much more dynamic and alive than that. What creates harmony in music is a recurring pattern of tension and release – dissonance that resolves to harmony again and again. Even the music of J.S. Bach – considered by many to be innately harmonious and pleasing – is full of dissonance. More than 50 percent of the intervals in any of his pieces are dissonant. This movement between dissonance and harmony reminds me of ...well...life. Our hearts beat in a pattern of tension and release. Our lungs inflate and deflate. Women give birth through a series of contractions. Our muscles work best in balanced cycles of work and rest.

Nature, too, follows its cycles of seasons. As I write this blog, we are in the middle of snowy mid-winter cold snap. The Mississippi River is frozen and the trees are bare. In this time of cold and stillness, it's hard to imagine the long, green days of high summer. This tension will give way to that warmth eventually.

The most satisfying stories contain this pattern of tension and release. Without a conflict or dissonance, there is no tale to tell. And the most interesting people I know have passed through many cycles of challenge, learning and resolution.

I am blessed to spend a fair amount of my life singing harmony with other people. Often when the singing begins, our voices are at war with each other. We are inhabiting the Ares part of Harmonia's genealogy. We sing too loudly. Someone drags behind the beat while someone else rushes the rhythm. The sound waves we are creating are literally banging into each other.

As we continue to sing and listen, though, an alchemy begins to happen. Our breathing aligns. Our ears entrain. We make minute adjustments in how we are singing. Different notes and disparate voices begin to meld into one harmonious whole. We step into the mysterious space between Love and War and do our ancient dance of tension and release – together.

What could be better than that?

