

Elsie Hamilton in Adelaide
Unusual Form of Musical Study

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By Mr Hooper Brewster-Jones

Miss Elsie Hamilton, the talented Adelaide pianist, who left for Europe in 1910 after a brilliant pianoforte recital in the Adelaide Town Hall, returned on Saturday by the Oronsay on a visit to her brother Mr Bert Hamilton of East Terrace.

After five years' study in musical composition under André Gedalge, professor at the Paris Conservatoire, Miss Hamilton in 1915 visited London and met Kathleen Schlesinger, the great musical antiquarian. From this meeting came about the resolve to devote her talents to a study of the earliest Greek modes as a basis of composition and the very promising career of a pianist was abandoned. Kathleen Schlesinger had rediscovered the true tuning of the Planetary modes of Pythagoras of Samos – the founder of Greek music and philosophy, who was teaching his countrymen about 550BC. This Planetary system was so named because each planet such as Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury and the Moon had its own scale of definite intervals and its "ethos" – or character.

Miss Hamilton, who has trained her ear to distinguish between the tuning of these scales – as exemplified in museum specimens of primitive pipes and the folk-singing of present-day peasants who have inherited these idioms – and our well-tempered scale finds great beauty in them. Curiously enough, she is able to enjoy the musical language of today equally with these strange sounds of the past despite the fact that for a score of years she has immersed herself in the latter whenever possible.

The practical application of Miss Schlesinger's theories upon the scale building of Pythagoras which Miss Hamilton has carried out, has been through the medium of certain orchestral instruments and voices. Gathering about her a following of twenty enthusiasts, she formed an orchestra consisting of a specially-constructed flute (the work of Miss Schlesinger) harps, lyres, a number of stringed instruments and a clarinet. Miss Hamilton, by adopting a system of harmony based on the Greek tetrachords has composed works for this orchestra which are regularly performed in Stuttgart, Germany, where it is stationed. Many other German centres have been visited and considerable musical interest has been aroused by this unusual music which demands specially trained musicians and specially tuned instruments for its performances, every player possessing a monochord from which to take the correct intervals in tunings.

Miss Hamilton is not concerned with the question of the general adoption of her method but enjoys the thrill of exploiting the resources of her medium in collaboration with her small coterie of musical enthusiasts abroad. She will return to Stuttgart in January to continue her activities.