INFORMAL:

The prehistoric era in world history kicked off around 3 million years ago, when our handy friend homo habilis appeared on the scene. In Europe, about 1.8 million years ago, his successor, homo erectus - the upright man - showed up. The first signs of human activity on our continent are traced back to what is now Spain. But here's the thing: even though this is the longest period in human history, we don't know a ton about the music or cultural development because it's really hard to study.

We do think, though, that music has been hanging out with humans since the get-go, serving all kinds of purposes.

There are a few theories about what music might have meant to early humans. Maybe it was tied to the development of speech, human or bird calls, and shouts. These calls also played a part in communication. Music was probably also tied to human emotions, expressed through primal shouts; or to movement, like clapping, stomping, hitting different body parts, and creating all sorts of sounds that way.

This last theory is backed up by the discovery of prehistoric instruments. Mainly, we're talking about drums made from hollow tree trunks, things that could be hit: sticks, slabs, tubes, and rattles made from organic materials.

From the Paleolithic era, we have the first flutes, whistles, and pipes made from bones, like bird or reindeer bones, with holes made by humans. One of the most famous finds from the Ice Age is a 5-hole flute found in the Hohle Fels cave in Germany. It's dated to about 35,000 years ago, and the coolest part is, the holes are arranged in such a way that it can play a pentatonic scale - a scale still used today, especially in popular music like blues, rock, jazz, pop.

From the Bronze Age, we have metal horns, which were built to resemble animal horns. This instrument was probably used for communication (it could be heard from a long distance) and was used during hunts. Excavations and cave paintings indicate the instrument was primarily found in Scandinavia - Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. It's called the Lur.

We also learn about the prehistoric era from cave paintings. From these sources, we can tell that music had a ritual and magical function. It was present during important tribal events, connected with fertility, celebrating births and deaths, initiation rituals, hunting, symbolism of the seasons, earth, moon phases, and so on.

FORMAL:

The prehistoric period in the history of the world begins approximately 3 million years ago and is associated with the emergence of the skillful human (homo habilis). In Europe, his successor, homo erectus – the upright man – appeared around 1.8 million years ago. The first traces of human activity on our continent come from the areas of present-day Spain. Despite this being the longest period in human history, due to the difficulty of its study, we possess little information about music or cultural development.

However, it is assumed that music accompanied humans from the beginning of their development, fulfilling various functions.

Several theories exist about what music may have meant for primitive man. It could have been related to the development of speech, human or bird calls, and shouts. These calls also served a communicative function. Music was likely also related to human emotionality, expressed through atavistic shouts; or motor skills and movement, such as clapping, stamping, hitting different body parts, and thus generating a variety of sounds.

The latter theory is supported by archaeological discoveries of prehistoric instruments. These were primarily drums made from hollow tree trunks, things that could be struck: sticks, slabs, tubes, and rattles made from organic materials.

From the Paleolithic period, we have the first flutes, pipes, and whistles hollowed out in bones, such as bird or reindeer bones, and possessing holes created by humans. One of the most famous finds from the Ice Age is a 5-hole flute found in the Hohle Fels cave in Germany. It is dated to about 35,000 years ago, and most interestingly, the holes are arranged in such a way that they allow playing a pentatonic scale – a scale still in use today, especially in popular music such as blues, rock, jazz, pop.

From the Bronze Age, we have preserved metal horns, which in their construction resembled animal horns. This instrument most likely served communication (it was audible at a great distance) and was used during hunts. Excavations and wall paintings indicate the existence of the instrument primarily in the area of Scandinavia – Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. It is called the Lur.

Information about the prehistoric era is also derived from rock paintings in caves. From this source, we can learn that music had a ritual and magical function. It was present during significant tribal events, associated with fertility, the celebration of birth and death, rituals related to initiations, hunting, the symbolism of the seasons, earth, moon phases, and so forth.

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