

Hermes and Aphrodite

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Lively (♩=180) D G D A⁷

Now, Her-mes was a ma-le god, and Aph - ro-di - te was-n't,
The fat, smooth mid-dle of these worms is known as the cli - tel - lum

G D A⁷ D (2)

And earth-worms are her - maph-ro-dites: each has both sex-es pre-sent.
To sci - en - tists, but not to dea - lers in fresh bait who sell 'em.

G A⁷ D A⁷

Though earth-worms, one by one, are small, to - ge-ther they are might-y,

G D A⁷ D

And ev-ery one heeds Her-mes' call, for each is Aph-ro - di-te.

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for the song 'Hermes and Aphrodite'. It is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The tempo is 'Lively' with a quarter note equal to 180 beats per minute. The score consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a repeat sign and a double bar line. The lyrics are written below the notes. Chord symbols (D, G, A7) are placed above the staff. A second ending is marked with '(2)' at the end of the second staff. The piece concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

Let's sing about the common worms that occupy the garden.
Without them, soil would lose its tilth, resist the rain, and harden.

Though earthworms, one by one, are small, together they are mighty,
And every one heeds Hermes' call, for each is Aphrodite.

Now, Hermes was a male god, and Aphrodite wasn't,
And earthworms are hermaphrodites: each has both sexes present.
The fat, smooth middle of these worms is known as the clitellum
To scientists, but not to dealers in fresh bait who sell 'em.

Though earthworms, one by one, are small, together they are mighty,
And every one heeds Hermes' call, for each is Aphrodite.

Each worm has all the organs to participate in sex. It
Produces sperm in segment ten, while through fifteen they exit.
Receptacles in nine and ten receive the sperm of mating,
While in thirteen, the eggs, still immature, remain in waiting.

Though earthworms, one by one, are small, together they are mighty,
And every one heeds Hermes' call, for each is Aphrodite.

So, when the eggs are ready, the clitellum starts secreting
A ring of mucous that the worm moves out of by retreating.
As fourteen passes through the ring, the eggs are added to it;
Then ten and nine add partner's sperm as they are passing through it.

Though earthworms, one by one, are small, together they are mighty,
And every one heeds Hermes' call, for each is Aphrodite.

Origin of the song: When I once greeted my friend Mary Sprunger-Froese with "Good afternoon, sir or madam, or both if you happen to be an earthworm," she seemed puzzled. I explained that an earthworm was a hermaphrodite. She asked whether Hermaphrodite was a Greek goddess like Aphrodite, and I jestingly replied that Hermaphrodite was two Greek god(esse)s, Hermes and Aphrodite. I asked Julie Gordon, sitting in the next row, "Isn't that right?", and I was quite surprised to hear him say "Yes". I then felt compelled to do the research to confirm this accidental discovery and reveal to the world the truth about earthworm sex.

Primary references:

Buchsbaum, Buchsbaum, Pearse, and Pearse -- Animals without Backbones. The University of Chicago Press
Nichols -- The Oxford Book of Invertebrates. Oxford University Press
Darwin -- The Formation of Vegetable Mould, Through the Action of Worms. Dover

The ring slips off the front to form an egg case or cocoon,
From which a tiny worm or two will hatch when opportune.

The earthworm's not of single sex, like every boy or girl:
Should one say "he" or "she" or "it", or just stick to the plural?

Though earthworms, one by one, are small, together they are mighty,
And every one heeds Hermes' call, for each is Aphrodite.

Now, earthworms are invaluable, for, by their daily toil,
They aerate, mix, and thus renew the bulk of Nature's soil.
Their tunnels let in air to reach bacteria microbic,
Without which, soil would sour through decay that's anaerobic.

Though earthworms, one by one, are small, together they are mighty,
And every one heeds Hermes' call, for each is Aphrodite.

The food that worms cannot digest is passed out in their feces,
And quickly turned to humus by some soil bacteria species.
Great boulders sink when undermined by earthworm populations;
By Darwin's time, the work of worms had buried Rome's foundations.

Though earthworms, one by one, are small, together they are mighty,
And every one heeds Hermes' call, for each is Aphrodite.

The first time land is plowed, new species take the old ones' places,
But, for one year, the soil's enriched by rotting old worms' traces.

Give thanks to Aphrodite and give further thanks to Hermes!

Oh, what a creature of great worth the common garden worm is!

Though earthworms, one by one, are small, together they are mighty,
And every one heeds Hermes' call, for each is Aphrodite.

Howard L. Kaplan 172 Howland Avenue Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5R 3B6

howard@thrinberry-frog.com <http://www.thrinberry-frog.com>

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