

The Burgundian school

Throughout the first half of the fifteenth century, the successive courts of the Dukes of Burgundy were known for the brilliance of their music. At the time, the dukes were powerful rivals of the kings of France and allies of the English, ruling over a territory that covered most of eastern France and the Low Countries (Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands). They attracted the leading musicians of the day. The most significant of these was **Guillaume Dufay** (c. 1400-74). Dufay was born in Cambrai, France, and trained in Italy, including two periods with the papal choir. In addition to the dukes of Burgundy, his patrons included the dukes of Ferrara and Savoy. He maintained a connection with Cambrai, and lived and worked there for the last sixteen years of his life.



This illustration shows Dufay with a portative organ and Binchois with a harp.

In many ways Dufay's music is a fusion of late mediaeval French music with the early Renaissance style from Italy. Dufay seems to reject the complicated style of the previous era in favour of clear melodies and sharply defined rhythms. He is said to have introduced the fauxbourdon technique to written music. Fauxbourdon is a musical texture made up of three voices, a plainchant melody with the lowest voice running in parallel motion a sixth below, and a middle, unwritten part at a fourth below the top note, creating in essence an inverted triad, which produces a very consonant sound. In his later career, he is also noted for expanding the standard number of voices in a musical work to four. He wrote all kinds of music, secular and liturgical, including many chansons and motets, and at least nine complete masses. His mass settings are for four voices and use a *cantus firmus* taken from plainchant or a popular melody in the tenor line, which he works into each section of the mass. He used the popular song *L'Homme armé* as the basis of one of his masses, and for another, his own ballad *Se la face ay pale*.

A contemporary of Dufay's was **Gilles Binchois** (c. 1400-60), who served Philip the Good of Burgundy for 30 years. Binchois is particularly known for his mastery of the secular chanson. Burgundy's alliance with England explains the influence of the English composer **John Dunstable** (c. 1385-1453) on Dufay and Binchois. Dunstable was in the service of the Duke of Bedford, who was the military opponent of Joan of Arc. The harmonies in Dunstable's masses, motets and secular songs were in the English tradition, more consonant, full of sonorous thirds and sixths.



Gilles Binchois

The Franco-Flemish school

The Franco-Flemish school was the style of music that dominated European music in the last half of the fifteenth century. It was called that because the most important musicians came from northern France, Flanders or the Netherlands. These musicians travelled all over Europe and served in many royal courts, including the Medici in Florence and the Sforza in Milan. Most significant were Johannes Ockeghem, Jacob Obrecht, Clément Janequin and especially, Josquin Desprez.



This manuscript illumination shows Ockeghem leading a group of singers.

Johannes Ockeghem (c. 1410-97) was Flemish. He first appeared in musical records as a singer in the Antwerp Cathedral; he served as composer to three French kings, and was made treasurer of the abbey of Saint-Martin at Tours, where he died at the age of about 87. Ockeghem is important for his work with the cyclic mass, based on the concept that the different parts of the Ordinary should be pulled together with the use of one melody or chant. He was a master of the canon technique, a form of imitation in which a melody is imitated strictly in one or more other parts at different time intervals. In his *Missa prolationum*, he uses two two-part canons at different rates of speed. Ockeghem's compositional style for his masses was different from that of his secular music. They were more solemn, usually written in four voices and with longer melodic lines. His three-voice chansons make greater use of melodic imitation and have simpler rhythms. He left 14 masses, 10 motets and 20 chansons.

Jacob Obrecht (1452-1505) was born in Bergen-op-Zoom, Brabant, now a part of the Netherlands. He is known to have worked at Cambrai Cathedral in France, the cathedral at Bruges in Flanders, and at the court of the Duke of Ferrara, where he died of the plague in 1505. Obrecht's surviving works include 27 masses, 19 motets and 31 secular pieces. Most of his masses are for four voices using a *cantus firmus*, usually in the tenor voice, but sometimes in the other voices as well. The motets are generally celebrations of the Virgin Mary, such as *Salve Regina* and *Alma Redemptoris Mater*.

The Franco-Flemish school

Josquin Desprez (c. 1485-1521) is the most significant composer of the Franco-Flemish school. He was born in Hainaut, near the present day border of France and Belgium. He served the Sforza family in Milan for about ten years, and then went to the papal chapel in Rome. He worked for Louis XII of France and the Duke of Ferrara, before returning to Condé-sur-Escaut in his native region to be the provost of Notre-Dame church for the last sixteen years of his life. His peers considered him the greatest musician of his period, combining technical ingenuity with the ability to express emotion.

Josquin is best known for his choral liturgical works, his main contribution being his development of the motet. He used a four-voice imitation technique in which each voice enters singing in imitation a modified version of the pre-existing chant melody. After all have entered, there is a free section where the musical elements become more elaborate. This increases tension, which is released with a cadence. Josquin's cadences are called overlapped, because the next section of entries in one voice is begun as the other three voices sing the last note of the current cadence. This technique of four-voice imitation in which the melodies for each voice are based on the pre-existing melody is called "motet style."

He left 20 masses and more than 100 motets as well as a number of chansons. Among Josquin's masses are the *Missa l'Homme Armé Sexti Toni* (Sixth Tone Mass on *L'Homme armé*), and the *Missa Malheur me bat*. The *Missa Pange Lingua*, considered one of his masterpieces, is written in motet style.

Clément Janequin (c. 1485-1558) was the leading sixteenth-century French chanson composer. He wrote 286 chansons, the best known of which are program chansons like "La Bataille de Marignan," which features battle sounds, "Voulez ouïr les cris de Paris," imitating the cries of street vendors in Paris, and "Le Chant des oiseaux" with bird songs. He was one of the few composers who never had a regular, important post with an aristocrat or prince of the Church.



Manuscript showing a four-part section of the *Pane Lingua* Mass



Josquin Desprez



A page from Josquin's manuscript of *Déploration de Guillaume Crétin sur le trépas de Johannes Ockeghem*, an elegy written on the death of Ockeghem

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina



Palestrina

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-94), called Palestrina after the town where he was born, spent most of his life composing music for three of the great Roman churches. When the Bishop of Palestrina was elected as Pope Julius III in 1550, Palestrina was made music director for the Julian Chapel choir and therefore in charge of the music at St. Peter's Basilica. He lost this position when the next pope refused to allow married men in the choir. He spent sixteen years as music director at two other important churches in Rome, before returning to his old position at St. Peter's. He was later given the title of master of music at the Vatican Basilica. Palestrina considered entering the priesthood when his wife and two elder sons died in the plague epidemic of 1580, but instead married a wealthy widow a year later. Pope Gregory XIII asked Palestrina to restore the plainsong then in use in the church to a more authentic style, but he never completed this monumental task. He remained at his post as music director of the Julian Chapel choir, in spite of several attempts to lure him away, and published a great deal of music in the last years of his life.



An engraving used as the title page of Palestrina's first book of masses showing the composer presenting a printed copy of his work to Pope Julian III

Palestrina was a prolific composer, writing more than 100 masses and about 400 motets, of which 250 remain. His style is noted for its balance, purity, control and clarity and its emphasis on the integrity of the texts. He achieved this in two ways. First was the control of the melodic line in his works so that the movement was essentially in small steps with very few leaps, and any leaps that do occur are balanced by movement in the opposite direction. Second was his control over dissonance. He makes use of dissonance, but the dissonant notes are usually of short duration or off the beat, and immediately resolved. He balanced polyphony and harmony in his works so that the words were particularly clear and in a natural rhythm. His masses were written in many different styles. Some used a traditional *cantus firmus* in the tenor line, others were based on the canon technique, still others on parody technique, using fragments of already existing music. He also wrote a number of masses in free style, in which all the musical ideas were entirely original. Perhaps his most famous mass is the *Pope Marcellus* mass, written for six voices and performed *a capella*, without accompaniment. Six voices were quite typical for the all-male church choirs of the time. The highest voice was sung by boy sopranos, the alto by male altos or countertenors, with two tenor and two bass lines. Palestrina's motets are nearly as varied as his masses. The 29 motets based on the biblical texts from the *Song of Solomon* incorporate many madrigal techniques.

Orlando di Lasso

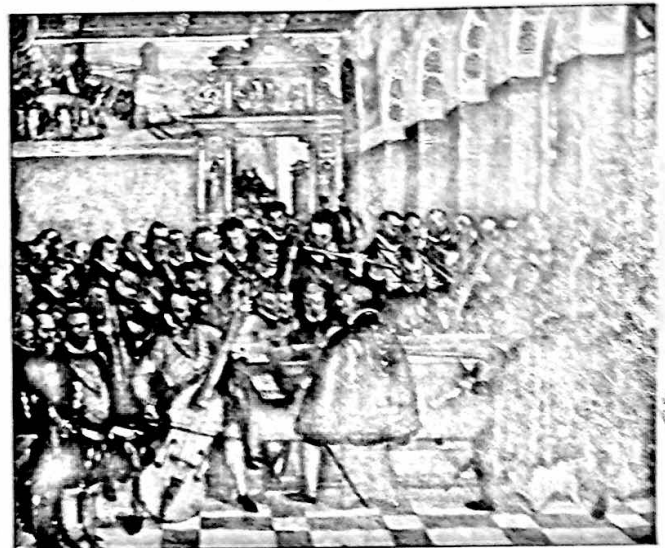
Orlando di Lasso (c. 1530-94) was a Flemish composer who went to Italy at the age of 12 or 14, working at several courts until he was appointed music director at the important church of St. John Lateran in Rome at the age of 21. From there he moved to Munich, where he was in charge of the chapel for the Duke of Bavaria until his death. Lasso wrote over 2 000 works, most of which were published during his lifetime. Many were sacred motets and madrigals, but he also wrote secular music in several international styles. His chansons in the French style were often based on the poetry of Pierre de Ronsard and Clément Marot, but he also wrote German lieder and drinking songs, as well as delicate Italian madrigals. His best known work may be a collection of psalm settings called *Psalmi Davidis Poenitentiales*.



Orlando di Lasso

Tomas Luis de Victoria

Born in Spain, Tomas Luis de Victoria (c. 1548-1611) ranks with Palestrina and di Lasso in significance, although he has many fewer works to his credit. Victoria studied in Rome, perhaps with Palestrina, and then worked there for a time. When he was 30, he became chaplain to the dowager empress Maria, widow of Maximilian II, the Holy Roman Emperor. When she entered a convent in Madrid, Victoria went with her as her priest and organist and remained there until his death. Victoria wrote liturgical music almost exclusively. His compositions include 21 masses and 44 motets as well as some psalm settings, hymns, and several Magnificats. He brought intense dramatic feeling to his music, a certain Spanish mysticism, and his harmonies were more chromatic than those of his contemporaries. He was a master of imitation and the reworking of existing musical material. His choral works were accompanied by instruments doubling the vocal parts, and the organ parts foreshadow the Baroque continuo.



Orlando di Lasso at the harpsichord conducting the musicians of the chapel of the Duke of Bavaria

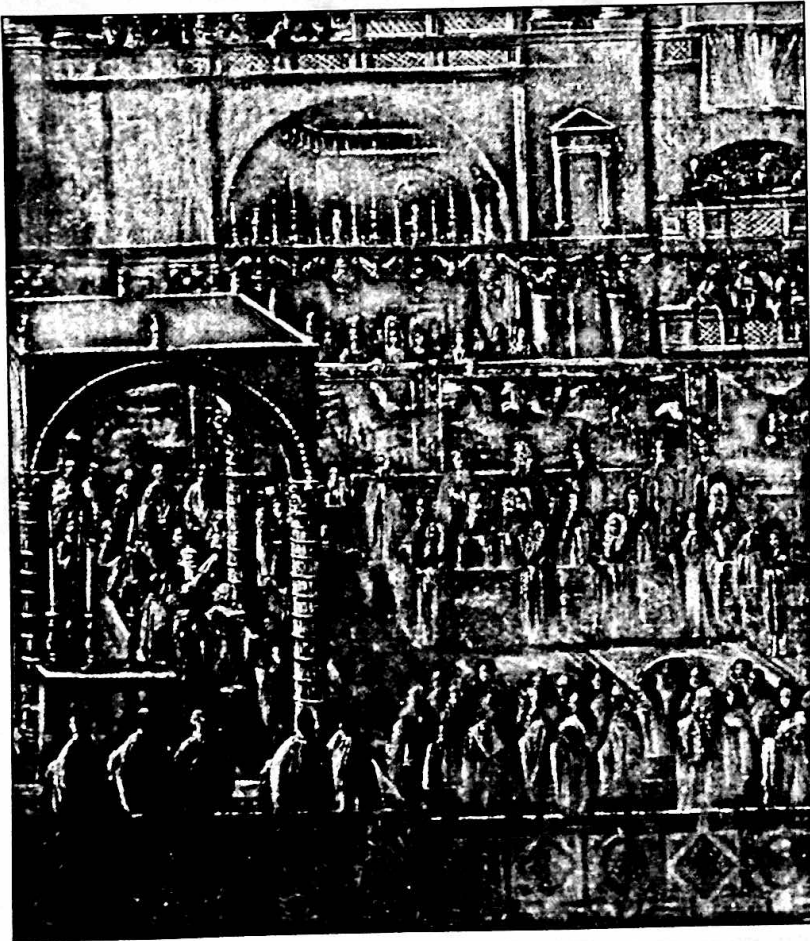


Orlando di Lasso's choir at the Bavarian Court Chapel

Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli

Andrea Gabrieli (c. 1510-86) and his nephew Giovanni (c. 1556-1612) were the pre-eminent composers in Venice. Both were organists at St. Mark's Cathedral there. The cathedral's architecture and acoustics suggested certain possibilities to Andrea and he sometimes divided up his choirs and instrumentalists so that the people in the audience would hear the music coming from different directions. He is best known for the large choral and instrumental works he wrote for ceremonial occasions, although he also was an active madrigalist. Giovanni Gabrieli studied under his uncle and accompanied him on foreign travels, which undoubtedly helped the younger man to achieve a reputation abroad. Giovanni also studied under Orlando di Lasso in Munich. Giovanni developed the concept of multiple choirs to the full. Working with so many singers caused him to move away from polyphony and towards a homophonic style; having all the singers singing the same word at the same time made the words much clearer. Giovanni was one of the first composers to add dynamic markings to his scores, and

he often specified the make-up of the choirs and which instruments were to be used, exploring the possibilities of balance between voice and instruments. His emphasis on dynamic contrast, particularly in his *Sonata pian' e forte* for strings and wind instruments, and his development of the concerto-type style is a bridge to the Baroque period.



A ceremony at St. Mark's showing one ensemble of musicians in a gallery

There was probably another group on the opposite side, unseen by us.

The English school

Thomas Tallis (c. 1510-85) is perhaps the most important composer of English sacred music of the first half of the sixteenth century, responsible for introducing European style polyphony to England. He served Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth I as an organist in the Chapel Royal, and his career spans the transition in England from Catholicism to Protestantism. His surviving works in Latin include three masses, two Magnificats, two Lamentations and 52 motets. Two of these works in particular demonstrate Tallis's command of polyphonic technique, the motet *Spem in alium*, written for 40 voices, and the seven-part *Miserere nostri*, a canonic masterpiece. He was one of the first composers to set words to music for the Anglican service, as well as writing over 20 anthems and three sets of psalms. He also left 23 keyboard pieces.



Thomas Tallis



William Byrd

William Byrd (1543-1623) is the greatest English composer of the latter half of the sixteenth century. He was a protégé of Tallis, and shared the post as organist for the Chapel Royal with Tallis for a few years. The two men were granted a monopoly for printing music and music paper by Queen Elizabeth. Byrd was raised a Catholic under the regime of Mary Tudor, but he does not seem to have been persecuted for his religion when Protestantism returned under Elizabeth. He wrote music for both Churches, including three Latin masses and many motets, the best known of which is *Ave verum corpus*. He also wrote two complete Anglican services, and more than 20 anthems with organ or other instrumental accompaniment. Byrd is also noted as a composer of keyboard works, both for solo instruments and ensembles. His many pieces for the virginal set the standard for later English composers. Many are dance movements in which he illustrates his skill with variations. He also wrote four Fantasias in three to six parts for viol consort and secular vocal music for voice and viol consort.



A manuscript of a piece of Tallis's church music



The title page from the first book of keyboard music to be published in England. It contains pairs of dances by William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons.

The English school

Thomas Morley (c. 1557-1602), a composer, organist and theoretician, was the first of the English madrigalists. A pupil of Byrd, he was an organist at St. Paul's and later at the Chapel Royal. He also inherited Byrd and Tallis's monopoly on music printing in England. Morley was trained in Byrd's polyphonic tradition, but he became interested in the possibilities offered by the Italian madrigal set to English texts. He wrote two collections of canzonets (which he called "little short songs") and then began composing and publishing madrigals. His madrigal style shows

clarity of texture, sprightly rhythms and warm harmonies. His *Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* was the most celebrated English music theory book of the period.

As well as being a composer, John Dowland (c. 1562-1626) was also a singer and virtuoso on the lute. He spent a number of years on the continent and brought back many new ideas. He was the outstanding composer of the ayre, a form of solo song with lute or instrumental consort accompaniment that was particularly popular in England in the late sixteenth century. Many ayres resemble dance music, and they often have the same music for each stanza.

IX. CANTVS
O chrestall teares, like to the morning dewes, which
sweety weeps in to thy Ladies cheek, and in the dewes make the
dampng flowers, for in your drops of pure breath, to quench up the thoughts
of my desires, which they were found whilst I from her departs.

Multi-metrical light and heavy learning lessons
O chrestall teares of my desires
Which sweetly like the morning dewes,
For quench up the thoughts
of my desires, which they were found
whilst I from her departs.

Soprano
O chrestall teares, like to the morning dewes, which
sweety weeps in to thy Ladies cheek, and in the dewes make the
dampng flowers, for in your drops of pure breath, to quench up the thoughts
of my desires, which they were found whilst I from her departs.

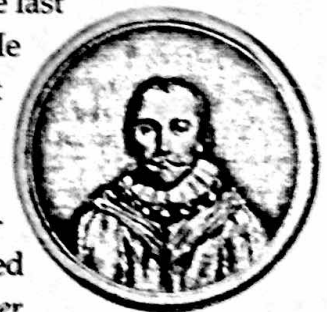
BASSVS.
O chrestall teares, like to the morning dewes, which
sweety weeps in to thy Ladies cheek, and in the dewes make the
dampng flowers, for in your drops of pure breath, to quench up the thoughts
of my desires, which they were found whilst I from her departs.

TENOR.
O chrestall teares, like to the morning dewes, which
sweety weeps in to thy Ladies cheek, and in the dewes make the
dampng flowers, for in your drops of pure breath, to quench up the thoughts
of my desires, which they were found whilst I from her departs.

"Go christall tears" from Dowland's *First Book of Songs or Ayres*

This song is printed so that in addition to the solo voice and lute version on the left, three additional voice parts are found on the other side so that four singers sitting around a table could read it.

Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625) is one of the last composers of the English Renaissance. He was made organist of the Chapel Royal at the age of 21, and he remained so for his lifetime. He was well-known for his church music, and his anthems are particularly distinguished. He is also acclaimed for his madrigals, particularly *The Silver Swanne* and *What is Our Life?*. He was an eminent organist and virginalist; many of his virginal pieces survive in manuscript form.



Orlando Gibbons