

The mass

By the end of the Middle Ages, composers were primarily writing polyphonic music for the main parts of the mass. The five parts of the mass that are sung every day—the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, and *Agnus Dei*—are called the Ordinary, and it was on these five sections that Renaissance composers concentrated their efforts. They wanted to make the music of the mass more of an organic whole even though they were separated during the service. One of the ways they did this was to base them all on the same original source, called the *cantus firmus*, often a plainchant melody or a popular song. Usually the source is most obvious in the tenor voice, but it often appears in the other voices as well. Another unifying aspect of the music was the use of imitation. Composers also tied everything together by using a similar opening for all five sections. Another type of mass was the parody mass, in which the musical material is taken from previously written motets, chansons or madrigals. The pre-existing work was usually broken into fragments and used in different places in the mass, surrounded by new material.

The opening section of the mass, the *Kyrie*, is a prayer for mercy. Its language is Greek, as opposed to the Latin of the rest of the mass, and its form is ABA: three repetitions of *Kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy), three of *Christe eleison* (Christ have mercy) and a final three of *Kyrie eleison*. The second section is the *Gloria* (Glory to God in the highest), and the third is the *Credo* (I believe in one God, the Father Almighty), the Christian's statement of faith. The fourth part is the *Sanctus* (Holy, holy, holy) ending with the Hosanna (Hosanna in the highest) and the Benedictus (Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord). The last section, the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world), ends with the words *Dona nobis pacem*—give us peace. This five-section form of the mass was solidified during the Renaissance and is still standard in Roman Catholic churches today.

This mass is being celebrated with a choir and an instrumental ensemble.



La Messe de saint Grégoire, unknown French painter, fifteenth century



An illuminated manuscript showing a *Kyrie*

The motet

Another important form of liturgical music in the Renaissance was the motet, although its form had little in common with the motets written in the Middle Ages by composers like Pérotin and Machaut. Renaissance motet is a short setting of a Latin text consisting of smaller sections written in a mixture of homophony (melody supported by chords) and imitative polyphony. The words are religious, often from the Bible, and they offered composers more flexibility than the mass, in which the words are invariable. They could choose texts that expressed the dramatic or mysterious aspects of religion, which offered the opportunity for richer, more expressive music. Often motets were written in honour of the Virgin Mary. Renaissance motet is a vocal work entirely, sung in four parts by a small choir. One of the most important composers of the Renaissance motet was Josquin Desprez (1440-1521). He was of the Franco-Flemish school and completed the transformation from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

New forms

New musical forms for use in the Church service appeared with the Reformation. The Lutheran Church in Germany introduced the chorale, with the entire congregation singing unaccompanied in unison. The texts were often translations from Latin plainsong texts set to simple secular song melodies. Subsequently, harmony was created with the addition of a choir, or instrumental accompaniment, like an organ. Until about 1700, none of the other Protestant Churches allowed hymns without biblical texts, and their congregational music was primarily based on texts from the Book of Psalms. In England, the Anglican Church developed the anthem, the counterpart of the Roman Catholic motet.

Lucas Cranach,
Martin Luther

Luther was a fine singer and played the flute and the lute.



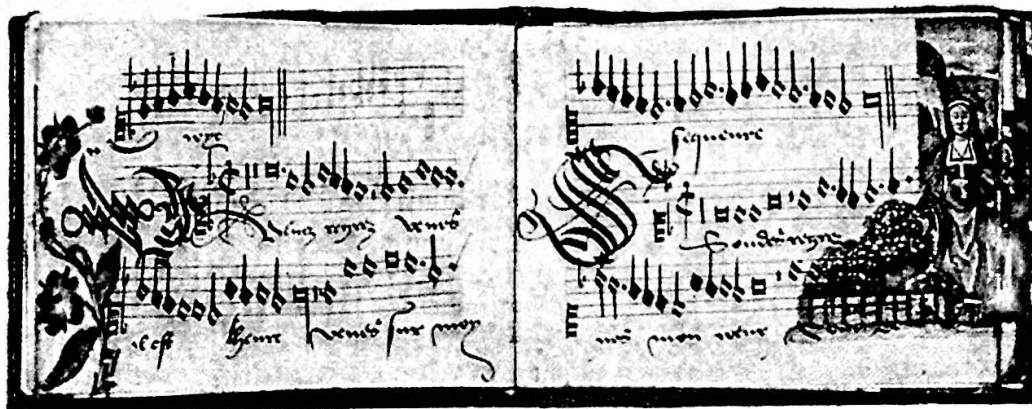
The first few bars of Luther's most famous chorale, *Ein Feste Burg* (A Mighty Fortress)

The chanson

The chanson was a great favourite at the court of the dukes of Burgundy, who were important patrons of the arts in the early Renaissance. Chansons were written for three voices, with either or both lower voices being instrumental. The texts used were the courtly love poems of the French Renaissance, and the forms followed the poetic structure. If there were repeated sections in the text, this was also the case with music. The poetic forms used were the rondeau, the ballad and the virelay. By the end of the fifteenth century, a new style of chanson was being written. Flemish composer Josquin Desprez moved to four voices singing the same text, sometimes using a melody-with-chord structure, in others using imitation. In the sixteenth century, fifth and sixth voices were added.



A flutist and a lutenist playing a polyphonic chanson



This collection of love songs and ballads is called *Le Chansonier de Tournai*.

A line of musicians and spectators separates two songs in a manuscript of *La Bataille de Marignan* by Clément Janequin.



The madrigal



A young
Claudio
Monteverdi

Another type of secular song, the madrigal, developed in Italy, although it ultimately flourished in several European countries. Madrigals originated in the fourteenth century, then went into a decline and re-emerged in the sixteenth. One important predecessor of the madrigal was the frottola, a song with instrumental accompaniment, generally a soprano or alto melody and two harmonizing parts below. Later frottolas were written with four voices, each provided with text, perhaps doubled by instruments as well, preparing the way for the four-voiced madrigal.

The sixteenth-century madrigal is a vocal piece for a small group of singers, perhaps just one per part, set to the text of a short poem, usually five to fourteen lines, with the last two lines being a rhyming couplet. The favourite topics were love and nature, but they also dealt with humour, political satire and portrayals of city and country life. The musical techniques were homophony and imitative polyphony, as in liturgical music, but madrigal composers worked even harder to express the meaning of the words directly in the music. Developing contrasts between the different emotions aroused by the music was a measure of the composer's skill.

The earlier Italian madrigals were primarily written for the enjoyment of the performers, but as the form developed, composers increasingly sought to impress their audiences with the virtuosity of the singers and their own expressivity. The best known composers of Italian madrigals were Flemish composers working in Italy, like Adriaan Willaert and Orlando di Lasso, and Italians like Palestrina and Andrea Gabrieli. The form lasted into the early decades of the Baroque period. One of the late masters was Claudio Monteverdi, who is perhaps best known as an early Baroque opera composer.

The madrigal was particularly popular in England, and English composers like Thomas Morley, William Byrd and Orlando Gibbons adopted the Italian madrigal as English poets had adopted the Italian sonnet. Sometimes they translated from the Italian—in 1590, a group of madrigals was published under the title *Italian Madrigals Englished*—but they also wrote their own madrigals with English texts. Often these were lighter and more cheerful than the Italian madrigals.

Composing for instruments

During the Middle Ages, instruments were mainly used to double or substitute for vocal parts in a work, or to provide dance music. In the Renaissance, however, composers began to write music to showcase instrumentalists and their talents. By the late Renaissance, works were being written for specific instruments that took into account their capabilities and limitations.

Instrumental music in the Renaissance was written for four main instruments or groups: the lute, the organ, stringed keyboard instruments and instrumental ensembles. The lute was an extremely popular instrument. It was tuned much like the guitar, but it had double strings. The soundbox was half-spherical and the finger board angled back from the flat side of the body. The organ, because of its involvement with liturgical music, was a very important instrument. Other keyboard instruments included the harpsichord, virginals, and spinet, which were sounded with a plucked string, and the clavichord, whose strings were struck by a metal tongue, or tangent.

Instrumental ensembles incorporated various combinations of available instruments: viols, woodwinds and brasses. Viols come from a different family of instruments than the modern violin. They have sloped shoulders and frets on the finger board, and a much softer sound. Most common was the viola da gamba, or "leg viol" which was held in the lap or between the legs like a modern cello. They came in soprano, alto, tenor and bass sizes. There were also viola da braccias, or "arm viols," which were played like a violin. Renaissance woodwinds included the recorder, and the transverse flute, played sideways, like the modern flute. There was also the shawm, a double-reeded instrument that is the ancestor of the oboe. The krummhorn was another double-reeded instrument with a nasal buzzing sound. Available brass instruments were the sackbut, an early trombone, and the trumpet, which was not very popular. There was also the cornetto, which was kind of a hybrid; it had a trumpet-like mouthpiece but was made of wood with holes in its body and covered in leather. It sounded rather like a soft trumpet.

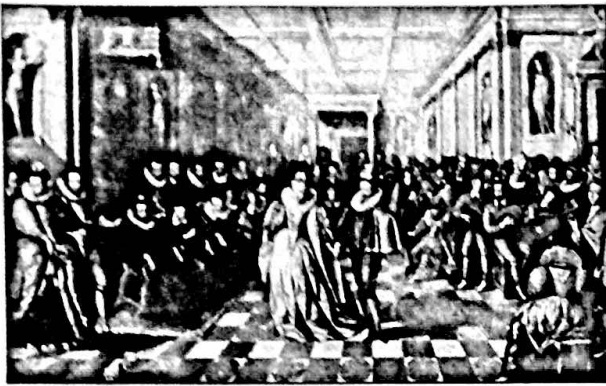
At first the violin was seen as a kind of "country cousin" to the viol, unfit for sophisticated performances and reserved for peasant dance forms. Only in France was it prized, and there it replaced the more awkward viol.

This picture shows a group of instrumentalists that includes two singers, a flute player, a violist, a lutenist and someone playing a portative organ.



This ensemble includes outdoor instruments, like the crumhorn, pipe and tabor and shawms.

Dance forms



Jean Patin, *The Duc de Joyeuse's Ball*

Renaissance dance forms were generally composed in pairs as they had been in the Middle Ages, although sometimes composers wrote sets of three or more, suggesting the beginnings of the dance suites of the Baroque period. The dance pairs were usually contrasting in tempo and metre, but linked by the same melody. The slow and stately pavane in duple metre was followed by the vigorous galliard, in triple metre, which had four hopping steps and a leap that the men took higher than the women. Another common pair were the allemande and the courante, the former being a slow, flowing dance, and the latter faster, with running steps. With the advent of music publishing, collections of dance music were available both for solo instruments and ensembles.

Keyboard forms

Organs differed from other keyboard instruments of the period in that the organ was able to produce a sustained note for as long as the organist held the key down and there was wind in the bellows. So Renaissance organ music shows a combination of long notes and chords plus the same rapid passages and trills and different ornamentations that the other keyboard instruments could play. Preludes were works that were played as an introduction to a larger composition, and they were very popular for organ, as were fantasias and toccatas. The latter are sometimes hard to tell apart, but the toccata is characterized by sections of rapid, showy passages designed to illustrate the performer's technique.

Other forms

The *ricercare*, written for various instruments ranging from organ to lute, has several themes which the composer develops through imitation. The name is applied to a variety of pieces, but the classic sixteenth-century *ricercare* was like a motet, with several sections, each using imitation. The *canzona* was derived from the French vocal chanson, alternating between polyphonic and chordal sections. It almost always began with the same rhythmic pattern, a half note followed by two quarter notes. Instrumental *canzonas* developed in the late sixteenth century. The keyboard *canzona* was highly polyphonic and is regarded as a precursor to the Baroque fugue; the instrumental *canzona* featured contrasting tempos and rhythms and is seen as the ancestor of the Baroque trio sonata.



Les Anges musiciens, by Hubert and Jan van Eyck, shows an angel at the keyboard of a portable organ.