

## **MSC 1003 – Music in Civilization Summer 2018**

**Prof. Smey**

**Class 1, Monday June 11**

### **FIRST HALF**

#### **PART I – Intro to Class**

This was a walk-through of the class syllabus. For homework, students must check out <http://davesmey.com>, download the syllabus, and read it carefully. (In addition, you are supposed to do some other brief tasks - figure out whether you are going to obtain the text, get a solution for your in-class journal, create an account on the site, and do a brief survey.)

#### **PART II – Why is Man Musical**

Here I argued that, because music seems to be a universal element in all cultures, it may be instinctual or innate. Thus, many have tried to develop theories on what survival advantage music may have offered early man. There are three popular theories on the evolutionary purpose of music:

TRIBE – Music is useful for tribal cohesion and war-making.

MATE – Music is useful for attracting a mate.

BABY – Music is part of early mother-baby communication, “motherese.”

(In addition, students in class often come up with lots of other good theories, such as the idea that music has a psychological benefit for regulating mood etc., and I usually discuss how music and religious practices go very well together. The belief in a spiritual world of some sort does seem to be similarly universal and instinctive.)

However, Steven Pinker in *How the Mind Works* has famously argued that music is “evolutionary cheesecake,” that it has no direct purpose but developed out of other more basic survival abilities like language and motor skills.

The purpose of this section was just to get us started and stimulate some thought – it is not quiz material.

## PART III

### Intro to the Medieval Period (476-1450)

The dates for this period are set at the fall of the Roman empire (476 C.E.) and, a little more vaguely, at the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century (ca. 1450).

We discussed the overall social structure of the time, which is known as **Feudalism**. The typical feudal city-state is divided between the local aristocracy, the serfs or peasants who do all the hard labor, and the clergy who are representatives of the Catholic church. In the early Medieval period the Church is the main source of music. (Later there is also a flourishing of secular music at the aristocratic Court, which we will discuss in session 2.)

In class we watched a clip from *Terry Jones' Medieval Lives* which emphasized that the church was the social center for the town peasants, the “place where they had their parties.” Jones mentions soccer matches, amateur theater, and priests brewing beer.

Also, I emphasized that the church is the “keeper of knowledge” – the priesthood is the only profession where everyone can read and write, and part of the job of the monastery is to keep a library and to make new copies of books by hand. The church usually provided some education for the young males in the town, in part to recruit new people into the priesthood.

The priests in the monastery follow an elaborate schedule of worship, with many services each day, and all of these are sung. Certain prayers that are sung every day, such as the *Kyrie eleison*, get fairly elaborate melodies, but other texts that will only be used once and then put away are read off with a “reciting tone” – they are sung on a single note, so that the final result is sort of like an auctioneer.

The vast majority of the music from this period is *anonymous*, meaning that we don't know who wrote it. Thus, there are really only a few specific people we are going to focus on from this time. The first is **Pope Gregory the Great** (c. 540-604). There is no doubt that Gregory earned his title of “the Great” – he made a lot of reforms to church services and help strengthen the influence of the office of Pope, at a time when Rome was otherwise in decline. Centuries later a legend arose that he also composed all of the melodies that were sung in the church, which is why the music of this period is named after him – we call it **Gregorian Chant**.

(However, Modern historians can't find any evidence that the legend is true! Some even think that people are confusing Gregory the Great with another Pope Gregory, Gregory II.)

We talked about how the Medieval church was obsessed with synchronizing their activities across all of Europe, so that everyone would do the same things at the same time. In order to standardize the music we need a form of **musical notation**. If you look at a page of written-down Gregorian chant you can see that it basically works the same way that our modern notation does. This development is hugely important for the history of Western music!

We listened to one example of Gregorian chant, a setting of the *Kyrie eleison*, a standard prayer that is part of the Catholic Mass. It is the only part of the liturgy that is in Greek – the rest of a typical Mass would be done in Latin.

## SECOND HALF

### Part IV - Diving deeper in the musical properties of Medieval music

We spent this part looking more closely at some Medieval music, and we learned a few musical concepts that are going to be useful in the following weeks.

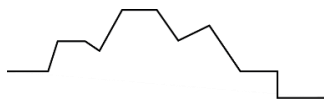
We started by listening to another *Kyrie eleison* and observing the properties of Gregorian chant.

- 1) It usually presents a text in Latin (though our *Kyrie* is actually Greek!)
- 2) Usually performed with all singers, no instruments. (People often use the term *a capella* for this, which literally means “in the church style.”)
- 3) Usually performed by all men or all women.
- 4) Doesn’t really have a strict pulse or rhythm. The melodies flow somewhat freely, following the pauses in the text, and the singers have to pay attention to each other and stick together.
- 5) It is **monophonic**, presenting one unaccompanied melody and no other parts.
- 6) The way they stretch out syllables in the text and give them lots of notes is called **melismatic** writing. (Each place in the music where they do this can be called a **melisma**.)

### TEXTURE

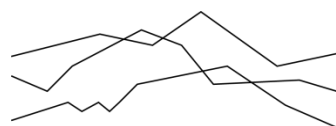
Observation #5 led us to a digression about our three main texture terms. In general I would define texture as “the way a piece is put together” or the “pattern” it makes in “musical sound-space.” These are pretty abstract definitions, though – it’s probably clearer to just look at some specific examples of different kinds of textures.

**Monophonic** music (or **monophony**) presents a single musical part – everyone performs the same line and there are no other parts. Here is a crude illustration of an imaginary unaccompanied musical line:

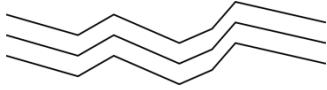


The vast majority of music from the Middle Ages is monophonic.

**Polyphonic** music (or **polyphony**) presents multiple parts, which are composed so that they fit together in a somewhat complex or chaotic way. Each part will occasionally “work against” the others so that it seems somewhat independent and “sticks out” here and there. I sometimes illustrate polyphony as though it is a sort of musical spaghetti, like so:



There is a third textural concept called **homophony** which we will encounter soon, in the Renaissance period. Here the parts move together to present a smooth, blended sound.



So polyphony and homophony are very similar concepts – they both involve multiple parts. Some pieces seem like a mixture of the two approaches. It is usually possible to decide whether a composer is thinking mostly polyphonically or homophonically, though – we’ll see pretty clear examples of consistent homophony later!

### **Part V - Hildegard of Bingen**

We also talked a little bit about **Hildegard of Bingen** (1098-1179), a radical Priestess from the Rhine area of Germany. She has over 70 musical compositions to her name, which is a lot for a Medieval composer. However, this was only a small fraction of her output. During her lifetime she was most famous for writing about her prophetic visions, and she also wrote quite a bit about herbal medicine and other “alternative” treatments.

We will learn one Hildegard composition for the quiz (“O rubor sanguinis”).