

## MSC 1003 – Music in Civilization, Spring 2018

Prof. Smey

Class 3 Notes, Thurs, June 13

### INTRO TO THE RENAISSANCE

#### The Renaissance (1450-1600)

There are some **revolutionary developments** that mark this period as a departure from the Middle Ages.

Perhaps the most important is the Gutenberg's invention of the printing press around 1439. (In music, Ottaviano Petrucci is the first to print polyphonic music in 1501 – he is "our" Gutenberg.)

This is also the "Age of Discovery," in which European nations begin to explore (and exploit) the rest of the globe. Portugal begins to explore the coast of Africa in 1419, and Columbus sets sail for America in 1492.

Finally, this era sees the break-up of Christianity into multiple strands, with Protestantism founded by Martin Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* in 1517, as well as the splitting off of the Church of England in 1538.

However, there are also **continuities**, ways in which European society remains largely the same.

There is still a pretty clear division between aristocrats, priests, and peasants (i.e. the feudal system.) Despite the existence of large kingdoms, Europe is really still fragmented into small city-states. And, in a trend that began in the late Middle Ages, cities continue to grow, supporting the existence of a fourth class of individuals, the independent tradesmen, merchants, and bankers. In particular, the Medici family of Florence, Italy amass fantastic wealth (through banking) and manage to buy their way into the aristocracy.

#### Humanism

Advanced education for elite men begins to center around the classic works of ancient Greece and Rome, as people study Cicero, Aristotle, and Plato (among others) as a rite of passage into adulthood.

This is a philosophical shift from the God-centered world of the Middle Ages. The valuing of ancient, non-Christian thinkers and the belief that contemporary man could achieve similar things is called **humanism**, and this sort of education eventually became known as "the humanities."

(This is, of course, not to say that European society was not still thoroughly religious. Humanists studied these pre-Christian works alongside religious documents, and they sometimes made texts that mixed religion and ancient philosophy together.)

## The Arts

In the arts we see a new concept of the artist as an individual genius, rather than an anonymous craftsman. Figures such as Leonardo da Vinci become well known for their creativity and intellect.

In class we looked at some technical advances in visual arts. I showed Raphael's *School of Athens* [1510], with its use of 3D perspective and portraits of ancient Greek philosophers, and Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Ambassadors* [1533], which featured that strange distorted skull at the bottom.

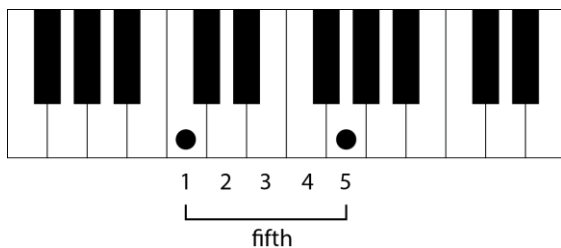
## Sacred Music in the Renaissance

We started this part by going back to Guillaume de Machaut's *Messe de Notre Dame*, from around 1360. I often say that Machaut is writing the "music of the future" in the 1300s – there are a lot of ways in which the Renaissance composers simply copied what he did.

However, one way that later composers disagree with Machaut is in their idea of the best way to combine notes into *harmonies*. As usual, in order to understand this we need to back up a bit and talk about some technical aspects of music.

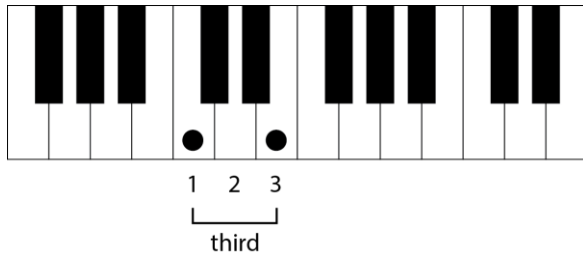
Combinations of notes that sound pleasant and stable are called *consonant*, whereas more "difficult" combinations of notes that seem to clash with each other are *dissonant*. Most music involves some alternation between consonances and dissonances.

Here's the interesting part: Medieval composers and Renaissance composers seem to have disagreed on what the best consonance is. Medieval composers loved *fifths* – the interval you can make if you go to the piano and count off five white notes:



To us today, a fifth by itself can sound a little "empty," "cold," or even "spooky." Medieval composers, however, gravitate to this sound over and over again.

Renaissance composers, on the other hand, discovered that they prefer thirds.



Thirds generally sound “fuller” and “prettier” than fifths. So, in general, Renaissance music also tends to sound fuller and prettier as well.

In class we spent some time listening to tracks and guessing which ones were Medieval and which were Renaissance.

### **Josquin des Pres, *Ave Maria***

Another new development in Renaissance sacred music is the popularity of the **motet**.

We’ve already learned about the musical **Mass**. We saw how Machaut is famous for standardizing the polyphonic Mass, taking the parts that were used every day at Church and giving them very elaborate music.

A **motet** is not part of an official Church ceremony. Instead, it takes a new sacred text in Latin (usually a carefully chosen passage from the Bible) and creates a piece out of that. It is usually one, single movement, not a set of five like Machaut’s Mass. So, you wouldn’t use a motet as part of church services – instead, they were often presented on a special occasion, like the consecration of a new cathedral or a wedding.

I spoke a little about how Josquin des Pres (c. 1450 - 1521) was like many composers of his day, traveling from court to court in Italy, making fancy church music and secular entertainments for wealthy aristocrats. He managed to build a reputation of simply being the best at what he did, and he commanded a relatively high fee.

The *Ave Maria* is a motet that sets text from a few different prayers praising the Virgin Mary. It is notable for its **imitation** technique, in which short melodic ideas are passed from voice to voice. This creates structure – if a composer is using imitation it gives more “purpose” to the notes in all of the parts.

We watched a youtube animation of the piece in which the notes were rendered as colored blocks, which made the imitation easy to see (and hear.)

I also tried to show how the music seems to have some parts where Josquin is trying to match the meaning of the words in the music. This “musical symbolism” is all “extra” information that is not on the quiz! Craig Wright also writes a little about it in the text.

## **Palestrina and the Counter-Reformation**

So this is normally where we would talk about Palestrina (c. 1525-1594), the leading composer in the late Renaissance. This material has been spun-off into an [online unit](#), and [exercise #3](#) asks you questions about it.

### Interlude: Duple and Triple Meter?

One concept we need at this point is the idea of a duple or triple “metric pattern” or “beat pattern.” This is just the pattern of beats in the music, which might influence how you dance to it and how a musician would count it.

I’m not sure how much time we’ll have for it in this class. I have a whole big thing about it.

The basic idea is pretty simple. Most of the music in the world is in a **duple meter**, which you would count out by saying “1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2” or “1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4.” (We consider counting in four to be basically the same as counting in two, since they are both multiples of two.)

However, some music is in **triple meter**, which you would count “1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3” like a waltz! Obviously a waltz is a different sort of groove, it feels different and you’d have to dance to it in a different way.

That’s the difference between duple and triple in a nutshell. If I do a more elaborate presentation in class I’ll come back and revise this document, too.

## Secular Music in the Renaissance

So now let’s pick up where we left off in the world of secular music, listening to pieces that were made for use “at court” for the entertainment of the upper class. Secular music continued to develop in the Renaissance, evolving out of things we saw in the Medieval period.

## Secular Vocal Music = Madrigals

You may remember that in the late Medieval period the fashion was for troubadour and trouvère-type songs at court, which presented sophisticated, poetic words set to monophonic melodies.

By the Renaissance these songs have evolved into *madrigals*, a more complex, polyphonic kind of secular piece. (The people composing this stuff aren't troubadours any more, they are called *madrigalists*.)

Like the work of the troubadours, these songs will tend to be in the local, vernacular language (French, Italian, English, etc.)

The texts tend to be humorous and "clever."

They are polyphonic, not monophonic.

And finally, they frequently indulge in a technique that can be called "tone painting." (This is my preferred term for it. The book uses "word painting" and "madrigalism.") This means that the composer tries to depict the meaning of the text in the musical notes.<sup>1</sup>

Our homework and quiz piece is [As Vesta was from Latmos Hill Descending](#) by Thomas Weelkes (1576-1623), and in it we can hear lots of tone painting. Whenever the text speaks of ascending the hill, the musical lines also go upwards, and when the characters are going down the hill the musical lines also go down. There is also some play with the words "two by two," "three by three" and so on, which are set with pairs of voices, then trios etc. There is detailed commentary on all this in the book, p. 79 in the eighth edition and pp. 83-84 in the seventh.

I also played one "bonus" madrigal, ["Now is the Month of Maying" by Thomas Morley](#). This one doesn't feature any tone painting as far as I know, but it is amusingly naughty. Sexual innuendo was a common feature of this kind of entertainment.

## Instrumental Music

For the most part the people of the Renaissance have the same instruments we saw in the Medieval period, including the recorder, shawm, crumhorn, viol, lute, and harp. The main new development is the popularity of *consorts* – collections of an entire family of the same sort of instrument, from small to large.

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<sup>1</sup> Students sometimes misunderstand the meaning of "tone" here – it doesn't necessarily mean the overall "mood" or "vibe" of the piece. We are using it as a synonym for "note" – so you could also call it "note painting" or "sound painting." Creating a certain mood (like happy or sad) throughout the whole piece isn't really tone painting – it's more when the composer reacts to something in the words at a specific moment and matches it with the notes.

We saw a recorder consort play [John Dowland's Earle of Essex Galliard...](#)

and we saw a viol consort play [the same piece](#).

In general, this polyphonic dance music was still conceived for generic instruments – you can play them on whatever consort you might have, you can mix different kinds of instruments, and you can even mix vocals and instruments. The title pages of this kind of music usually advertised its versatility “for singing or playing.”

There are also a few new instrumental developments.

- The *sackbut* is invented – this is early form of the trombone, which looks quite similar to the modern version.
- Lute music becomes more interesting thanks to the use of a special kind of notation called tablature. We heard a man play [John Dowland's Frog Galliard](#).
- Early forms of the harpsichord begin to crop up and so we have our first good keyboard music. The *virginal* was particularly popular in England – this is a small, rectangular-shaped harpsichord that could fit on a table top. We saw someone play [William Byrd's Rowland on a virginal](#)

## **Pavane and Galliard**

Finally, we looked at the Renaissance dance pieces that we will study for Quiz #1 – an anonymous Pavane and Galliard.

I’ve got infographics up on [a youtube video](#), but let me also summarize the useful information here.

Both of these dances appear in an anthology called *Musicque de joye*. It was published around 1550 by Jacques Moderne, a French printer of music. The actual composers of these pieces are unknown.

The Pavane and Galliard were often paired together. The Pavane is a slow dance in duple meter, performed by couples who hold hands and do a walking step forward and back. The Galliard is faster, in triple meter, and it is more active – here dancers leap upwards on almost every beat.

In our recordings the Pavane is played on a consort of viols, and the Galliard is played on shawms.