The Middle Ages

450 - 1450
The Middle Ages

- Fall of the Roman Empire (450 AD)
- The “Dark Ages”
- The black plague (around 1350)
- The 100 Years War (1337 – 1453)
- Rebirth of cultural growth
  - (Beginning around 1000 AD)
  - Construction of Romanesque churches, Monasteries and Gothic Cathedrals
  - Founding of Universities
  - The Crusades (1096 – 1291)
Society

- Sharp division between classes
  - Nobility
    - Owned land
    - Lived in fortified castles
    - Served as armored Knights in wars
    - Most were illiterate
  - Peasants
    - Lived in one room huts
    - Often owned nothing (everything belonged to the Feudal Lord)
    - Many were serfs – basically slaves to the nobility
    - Almost all were illiterate
  - Clergy
    - Roman Catholic church had powerful influence
    - Monks had monopoly on learning
    - Clergy were generally literate

- Feudal system and church authority both weakened by the end of the fourteenth century.
Most important musicians were priests
  - Boys received music education in church schools
  - Women were not allowed to sing in church choirs, only in convents (where there were only women)

Most music was vocal

Around 1000 AD organs and bells became common in cathedrals.

Other instruments were used outside the church
Gregorian Chant

- Gregorian chant – an unaccompanied melody set to a sacred Latin text.
- Monophonic in texture
- Enhanced specific parts of religious services
- Flexible rhythm with no meter and little sense of beat
- Melodies tended to be free flowing and move by step
- Pitch range was narrow
- Named after Pope Gregory
- Scales used were church modes
  - Consisted of 7 tones like major and minor scales, but with different patterns of half and whole steps.
  - Basic scales of the middle ages
  - Used in sacred and secular music
- Listening:
  - Alleluia: Vidimus stellam
Hildegard of Bingen

- 1098 – 1179
- Abbess of Rupertsberg
- Creative
- A Visionary
- A Mystic
- Politically active both within and outside of the church.
- Wrote monophonic sacred songs
- First woman composer from whom a significant number of works have survived.
- Example of her work:
  - Listening: *O successores*
  - The recording uses a drone – one or more long sustained notes accompanying a melody, which may have been used at the time.
Secular Music in the Middle Ages

- Troubadours and Trouvères – poet musicians among the French nobility, men and, in southern France, also women who sang mainly love songs.
- Around 1650 of these melodies have been preserved.
- Wandering minstrels
  - traveling musicians with no civil rights
  - on the lowest rung of society with prostitutes and slaves
  - Primary source of information
  - A few found steady work in service to the nobility
- Listening:
  - *Estampie* (thirteenth century)
Development of Polyphony

- **Organum**
  - Two lines moving in parallel motion at an interval of a fourth or fifth. This was often called “parallel organum” due to the parallel movement.
  - The first harmonies added to Gregorian chant
  - Between 900 and 1200, organum became truly polyphonic
    - Second line became more independent
    - Chant was sung in very long notes while the added melody, on top, was sung with shorter notes.
School of Notre Dame

- Paris – center of polyphonic music after 1150
- Notre Dame Cathedral
- Two significant composer/choirmasters among the first known by name.
  - Leonin and Perotin
  - They and their followers became known as “The School of Notre Dame”
- Developed measured rhythm sometime between 1170 and 1200
  - Definite time values
  - Clearly defined meter
  - Notation now indicated pitch and rhythm
  - The Triad was still considered a dissonance and used sparingly, but became more common toward the end of the Middle Ages
• **Listening Example: Alleluia: Nativitas by Perotin**
  • First known composer to write in more than two voices
    • *Alleluia: Nativitas* has three

• **Cantus Firmus**
  • A chant used as the basis for polyphony, a preexisting melody which provides the foundation for the other voices.
Fourteenth Century

- A time of disintegration
  - 100 Years War
  - Black Plague
  - Weakening of the feudal system and the Catholic church
  - Literary works stressed sensuality more than virtue
  - Secular music became more important than sacred music
  - Polyphonic music was no longer always based on Gregorian Chant
    - Drinking songs
    - Imitation of bird calls, dog barks and hunters shouts used
    - Evolution of notation – composers could now indicate almost any rhythmic pattern
    - Beats could be subdivided into twos as well as threes. (Previously only a division of three had been used as this represented the trinity.)
    - Use of Syncopation become common
Significant Composers

- **Francesco Landini**
  - ? – 1397
  - Italian
  - Born near Florence
  - Blind from childhood
  - Organist, poet, scholar, inventor
  - Works consist exclusively of Italian songs for two or three voices.
- **Ballata** – Italian poetic and musical form that originated as a dance-song
- **Sackbut** – an early trombone
- **Shawn** – early double-reed instrument, ancestor of the oboe, bassoon and English horn.
- **Listening Example:**
  - *Ecco la primavera* by Francesco Landini
Guillaume de Machaut

- About 1300-1377
- French, born in province of Champagne
- Theologian, poet, musician
- Served various royal families
- Secretary and chaplain to John, king of Bohemia beginning around 1323
- In later years served as a church official in Reims.
- Wrote mainly courtly love songs, but also some significant sacred compositions.
Listening examples:
- Puis qu’en oubli sui de vous (Since I am forgotten by you; around 1363)
  - Rondeau – one of the main poetic/musical forms of fourteenth and fifteenth century France.
- Two phrases:
  - a begins with long notes, pauses in the middle and ends with an incomplete cadence
  - b begins with short notes, flows continuously and ends with a complete cadence.
- Both phrases contain syncopation
Notre Dame Mass, *Agnus Dei* (mid fourteenth century)

- Arguably the finest composition of the era.
- Probably composed in the early 1360s for performance at the cathedral of Reims.
- First polyphonic treatment of the mass ordinary by a known composer.
  - Mass ordinary consists of five texts that remain the same from day to day throughout the church year.
  - Five sung prayers of the ordinary: Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei.
- Since the cantus firmus is rhythmically altered within a polyphonic web, it is more of a musical framework than a tune to be recognized.
- The harmonies of *Agnus Dei* include stark dissonances, hollow sounding chords and full triads.
- Three part form: A B A (Three section division is thought to symbolize the Trinity.)
Basic Terms

- Gregorian Chant
- Church modes
- Drone
- Organum
- Cantus firmus
- Ballata
- Mass ordinary
The Renaissance

1450 - 1600
Renaissance Society

“A rebirth of human creativity”

A time of exploration and adventure

- Christopher Columbus (1492)
- Vasco de Gama (1498)
- Ferdinand Magellan (1519-1522)

Curiosity and individualism

- Leonardo DaVinci (1452-1519)

Influence of Humanism

- Focus on human life and accomplishments
- Not concerned with an afterlife
- Captivated by the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome
Humanism’s influence on the Arts
- Revival of the use of nudes
- Realism and use of linear perspective
  - Raphael
  - DaVinci
  - Michelangelo

Decreasing influence of the Catholic Church
- The Reformation – Martin Luther (1483-1546)
- No longer monopolized learning
- Printing with movable type made books available to the masses.
Music in The Renaissance

- Invention of printing also made music more available
- Every educated person was expected to be trained in music
- Musicians worked in churches, courts and towns
- Women functioned as virtuoso singers at several Italian courts
- Court music directors composed music for entertainment and worship
  - Polyphonic music now performed by entire choirs of male voices
- Musicians enjoyed a higher social status than ever before
- Composers sought credit for their work
- Flemish composers the most prominent in early Renaissance (now Belgium, the Netherlands and northern France)
- Italy emerged as the leading music center in the sixteenth century
Vocal music still more important than instrumental

Close relationship between words and music

**Word Painting** – musical representation of specific poetic images (similar to our modern program music in use of musical images)

No extreme contrasts

Texture

- Mainly polyphonic
- Four, five or six voice parts of nearly equal melodic interest
- Imitation among voices common
- Some use of homophonic texture
- Fuller sound than medieval music
- Bass register used, expanding pitch range to four octaves
- Richer harmony
- Stable, consonant chords favored
- The golden age of *a cappella* – unaccompanied vocal music
- Parts written exclusively for instruments rarely found in vocal music
Rhythm and Melody

- Rhythm more a gentle flow than a sharply defined beat
- Each melodic line has great rhythmic independence
- Melody moves along a scale with few large leaps
Sacred Music in the Renaissance

Two forms:

- Motet – a polyphonic choral work set to a sacred text other than the ordinary of the mass
- Mass – a polyphonic choral composition made up of the five sections of the mass.

Significant composers:

- Josquin Desprez (about 1440-1521)
  - Contemporary of DaVinci and Columbus
  - He had an international career
  - Born in the province of Hainaut (now part of Belgium)
  - Lived most of his life in Italy
  - In later life served Louis XII of France
  - Had great influence on other composers and praised by music lovers, including Martin Luther
His works

- Wrote Masses, Motets and secular vocal music

Listening Example:

- Ave Maria...virgo serena (c. 1475)
  - Use of imitation, phrase first presented by the soprano voices
  - Each voice enters while the preceding voice is in the middle of its melody creating a continuous flow.
  - Melody of the opening phrases adapted from Gregorian Chant
  - The rest of the melody is original
  - Texture varies from two, to three, to four voices
  - Imitation between pairs of voices – duets in high voices imitated by lower parts
Palestrina and the Renaissance Mass

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (about 1525-1594)

- Italian
- Music Director for St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome
- Devoted to the Catholic church
- Work consists of 104 Masses and 450 other sacred works
- Best understood as part of the Counter-Reformation
  - Council of Trent (1545-1563)
    - Church music was attacked for:
      - Use of secular tunes
      - Noisy instruments
      - Theatrical singing
      - Complex polyphony obscuring the texts
    - Called for return to Gregorian Chant
- Palestrina’s Masses are considered models of technical perfection for students of counterpoint.
Listening: Pope Marcellus Mass

- Written for *a cappella* choir (no accompaniment)
- Six voice parts
  - soprano, alto, two tenors and two basses
- Sounds fuller than Deprez due to the use of six parts instead of four
- Each section begins with a thin texture, then adds the other voices
- Very full rich sound when all voices have entered
- Listening example: *Kyrie*
Secular Music in the Renaissance

- Development of printing helped spread secular music
  - Thousands of song collections became available
- Every educated person was expected to play an instrument and read music
- Secular music was written for solo voice or groups of solo voices accompanied by one or more instruments.
- Imitation of natural sounds (bird calls, street cries) continued
- Rapid shifts of mood common (unlike sacred music of the day)
Secular Forms:

- Madrigal – a piece for several voices set to a short poem (usually about love)
  - Combines polyphonic and homophonic textures
  - Uses word painting and unusual harmonies more than the Motet
- Originated in Italy around 1520
- Italian Madrigalists
  - Luca Marenzio (1553-1599)
  - Carlo Gesualdo (about 1560-1613)
- The Madrigal was very popular in England beginning around 1588
  - English madrigals were lighter and more humorous than the Italian form
  - Greatest importance during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603)
- Thomas Weelkes (1575-1623)
  - Finest of the English madrigalists
  - Listening example:
    - As Vesta Was Descending (1601)
    - Much use of Word Painting
The Renaissance Ballett (Fa-La)

- A simpler type of music than the madrigal
- A dance like song for several solo voices
- Like the madrigal it originated in Italy, but was cultivated in England
- Thomas Morley (1557-1603)
  - English composer best known for Madrigals
  - Also wrote Ballets
- Listening Example:
  - *Now is the Month of Maying* (1595) by Thomas Morley
  - Clear beat of an English folk dance
  - Each stanza consists of two repeated parts
    - aa bb both end with a fa-la refrain
  - Use of polyphonic imitation among the voices
Still accompanied voices, but became more common as instrumental only

Often used for court dances
- pavane (dule meter)
- passamezzo (dule Meter)
- galliard (triple meter)

Some common instruments of the day:
- Harpsichord (solo)
- Lute (solo)
  - Lute song: Simpler than a madrigal, for solo voice and lute. Homophonic texture, the lute part secondary to the voice. Listening: Come Again and In Darkness Let Me Dwell, John Dowland
- Trumpets
- Shawm
- Sackbut
- Cornett
- Organ (solo)

Today’s standardized orchestra did not exist. Many combinations of instruments were used

Listening: Trepischore: Passamezzo and Galliard
Venice became the center of instrumental and vocal music during the sixteenth century.

Focal point was St. Mark’s Cathedral.

Adrian Willaert (about 1490-1562), Andrea Gabrielli (1520-1586) and Giovanni Gabrielli (1555-1612) were among the finest composers of the Renaissance. Together they and their followers made up the Venetian School.

Parts are now written exclusively for instruments (Before they merely doubled the voices).

Tendency toward a more homophonic texture emerged.

Use of multiple choirs.

Giovanni Gabrielli

- Organist at St. Mark’s until his death.
- Advanced the use of the *polychoral motet* – motets for two or more choirs, often including groups of instruments.
Listening Example:

- Plaudite (Clap Your Hands) (1597)
- Polychoral Motet
- Intended for a joyful celebration at St. Mark’s
- Gabrielli exploits the “stereophonic” possibilities of St. Mark’s by rapidly tossing short phrases back and forth between the three separate choirs.

St. Mark’s where Gabrielli’s Music would have been played.
Basic Terms

- Word Painting
- A Cappella
- Motet
- Mass
- Madrigal
- Ballett (fa-la)
- Lute
- Venetian School
- Polychoral Motet