

The Medieval Era

Composers

Dufay, Guillaume (1400-1474)

Guillaume Dufay composed music from the late Medieval era into the early Renaissance. He was born in the Duchy of Burgundy, which is today known as Cambrai, located in France. His birthplace was one of the major musical centers of the world. This area influenced many of the composers who lived during the Renaissance. Throughout his life, Dufay resided in many different Italian cities, which brought a high degree of worldliness to his music.

The music of Dufay was very calm, soothing, and had direction and clear distinctions. This was in opposition to the typical music of the late Medieval era, which was often harsh and rhythmically complex. As time progressed, and musical norms started changing, so did the music of Guillaume Dufay. He began to explore the music of four voice vocal texture, which became a distinct Renaissance musical characteristic. He was one of the catalysts who helped Medieval music to move forward and transition into the Renaissance age.

de Vitry, Phillippe (1291-1361)

Phillipe de Vitry was one of the most important composers involved with Medieval music. He was the author of a prominent music theory text, called the *Ars Nova*. In this work, he showed how he would like to expand the rhythmic resources offered to composers, introduced new rhythmic schemes and a new mensural notation system. This new system remained an important notational device for over a century after his death. He made the first use of binary rhythm and is thus considered to be a mathematical and philosophical genius of his time period. Additionally, he is credited with being one of the main developers of the [motet](#). He is one of the first composers to discover and use isorhythm; a single rhythmic figure continually repeated by a voice.

The only surviving works of Phillippe de Vitry were his motets. They are mostly secular, although some took on religious tones. Most of his motets were on political, as opposed to romantic, topics. He wrote his secular pieces in Latin, instead of French. He was seen as a prodigy, as he wrote about the issues of his time period and put them into musical form. Vitry is hailed today for his music theory that spurned the whole *Ars Nova* era of the Medieval era and for his own emotional motets. He used new modes of musical idiom that would not be refined until years after his death. He left a lasting impression on the musical world.

de Machaut, Guillaume (1300-1377)

Born around the year 1300 in France, Guillaume de Machaut was one of the most famous composer of the Medieval era. His most well known work is the *Mass of Notre Dame*. Written in four voice form, this piece showed his mastery of composition, and served as a textbook example of Medieval [counterpoint](#). He was also well known for his French poetry, songs, and manuscripts prepared for French royalty.

Guillaume de Machaut travelled Europe during his lifetime. In addition to composing, he also was involved with the political events of the time. He surrounded himself with royalty and honorary people.

Guillame de Machaut is considered to be an avant garde composer. His style dominated the Ars Nova period of the Medieval Era. He made little changes to rhythm and meter in his music but added his own interpretation and emotional depth to his pieces. He was also famous for his poetry, which was often set to music and conveyed messages of love.

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