

THE MEDIEVAL ERA

VOCAL SECTION

During the Medieval Era, there were many forms of vocal music. They were very simplistic in nature.

FORMS

Plainsong

One of the most common vocal forms of the time was called plainchant, the Gregorian chant, or plainsong. It is known that this form of vocal music was the main root of *polyphony* during both the Medieval era and in the Renaissance era.

Secular Song

While little secular song had been preserved to date, it was still a very important musical form during the Medieval era. It was very similar to *plainsong* in that it had single note notation, had no accompaniment, and was written in the *monophonic* style. The difference between secular song and plainsong was its meter. It was mostly written in triple meter. Additionally, it also dealt with a wider range of subjects than the very religious plainsong. Furthermore, secular song had clear phrase and sectional structure, was written in most vernacular languages instead of the Latin-only plainsong, and used shorter and more regular rhythms.

Polyphony

One of the greatest musical achievements in the history of music occurred during the Medieval era. This was the coming of polyphony. Polyphony is two or more vocal parts, each with its own individual melodic importance within a work. The earliest known polyphony occurred in *secular music* of the 8th century. However, from the 9th to the 13th centuries, polyphony grew in style and popularity and evolved into church music, which was based on plainsong.

ARS ANTIQUA

Ars Antiqua is the time period between the mid 1100s to the end of the 1200s. This phrase means "The Old Art." This was a time during the Medieval Era when polyphony developed even further.

Notre Dame Organum

The Notre Dame organum developed shortly after the year 1150. In this form of polyphony, there were two parts sung by solo voices, alternating with sections of plainsong sung by a choir. Appearing for the first time was dicant style. This style had sections in which the tenor part contained shorter and measured notes.

Polyphonic Conductus

The polyphonic conductus was in wide usage during the beginning half of the 13th century. The tenor part of this musical form was composed, instead of borrowed from plainsong, as it was in organum. Additionally, the parts moved together rhythmically, and the piece was written for two to four parts. The polyphonic conductus was composed in non-liturgical or secular form.

Motet

Around the year 1250, the *motet* became the main polyphonic form. It started to replace organum and conductus. A motet consisted of specific musical guidelines. A plainsong was sung by the tenor voice, and above it, two other parts were sung in faster moving notes. It was written in either sacred or secular style (in Latin or in vernacular) and usually was played in triple meter with clashes of *dissonant* intervals.

Hocket

Hocket was a form of polyphony that was often found in the music of the late 1200s to the 1300s. It was a technique that interrupted the melody line by frequently placing rests (which alternated between two voice parts) into the piece.

Rota

Although not many works had this form during the Ars Antiqua stage of the Medieval Era, the rota still was present. It was a round or canon in which two or more parts carried the same melody at different times.

Rondellus

The rondellus was a three part, secular form, in which exchange occurred between the three different melodies. This polyphonic work involved all the parts starting together rather than starting consecutively. Each part then rotated the melody.

ARS NOVA

The Ars Nova, or "The New Art," took place during the end of the Medieval era while foreshadowing some of the Renaissance trends that were to come.

Madrigal

Written in two vocal parts, this musical form was the first polyphonic form to appear in Italy. The *madrigal* had each stanza written in duple time and ended with a ritornello section in triple meter.

Caccia

The caccia was at its musical height from 1345 to 1370. It was the primary musical form that employed the canon within it. The canon was based on a continuous imitation of two or more parts. The two upper parts were sung in strict imitation with long intervals between the two parts while the third lowest part was composed in slow moving notes and was probably played on an instrument.

Ballata

This form came about after the madrigal and the caccia and originated as a dance song. The ballata had a sectional structure with refrains, called *ripresa* sung at the beginning and end of each stanza.