

The Renaissance

Composers

Byrd, William (1543-1623)

William Byrd was born in the county of Eincolnshire, England (the same place where Robin Hood lived). William Byrd was a composer of music for both the Protestant and Catholic churches. For the Protestant church, he composed Great Service and Short Service. For the Catholic church, he composed *masses*, hymns, and *madrigals*.

During his childhood, he was probably one of the Children of the Chapel Royal in London, since it is known that Byrd was raised listening to music composed by Thomas Tallis. Tallis was the organist and choir director of that Chapel. At age twenty, he became Organist of the Lincoln Cathedral in his home town and later became a Gentleman at the Chapel Royal. He became the organist at the Chapel and worked along with his mentor Thomas Tallis.

Byrd is famous for writing extraordinary masses, *motets*, vocal and solo songs, and for chamber music composed for strings without voice. He is well known for his madrigals as well. *The Sweet and Merry Month of May* is very typical of the madrigals that Byrd wrote. He was described as a man with natural gravity and piety. He was versatile in instrumental form too, as he also wrote chamber music. During his life, he was considered the foremost composer of keyboard music in all of Europe. Byrd composed and excelled in writing sacred, secular, vocal and instrumental music and left a lasting impression on the musical world.

Desprez, Josquin (1440-1521)

Throughout his life, he was by far the most sought after composer in all of Europe. He was born in the Duchy of Burgandy, now Belgium, and spent his life living in various Italian cities. He retired to Conde in Northeast France.

He helped to spread *polyphony* in Northern Italy. In Josquin's extended works, a certain subtlety and serenity were always included, (a characteristic of the Franco-Flemish school). The repertoire of his music surviving today is rather large and is made up of motets, masses and secular songs, in both French and Italian. He was a master of four-voice and other large textures, as well as parodies, light songs, and French chansons. Because of his human quality, quantity, and technical mastery, Josquin is still extremely renowned and respected as a composer today.

Gabrielli, Giovanni (1554-1612)

Born in Italy in 1554, Giovanni Gabrielli was a composer of sacred and secular vocal music. He also composed music for string, keyboard, and wind ensemble pieces. He is best known for his perfection of the *cori spezzati* musical form, in which choirs or performing groups are broken up into sections and dispersed in and around the performance space. Gabrielli was also famous for his chromatic motets written about damnation and hell. Additionally, he was a promoter of the music of Monteverdi.

Gibbons, Orlando (1583-1625)

Orlando Gibbons lived during the historical high point of English music. Gibbons is renowned as being the greatest English composer of his generation. He was born in Oxford, played and taught music to royalty, and died at the age 42.

Along with other composers of the time, Gibbons wrote new music and developed new techniques for consort music. He also is famous for his sacred choral music, English anthems, and verse anthems. Additionally, he wrote consort songs for vocal madrigals and solo songs with viol consort accompaniments. His madrigal *The Silver Swan* is well known. His music remains well loved today and his choral music is constantly played as part of the English Cathedral repertoire.

Ockeghem, Johannes (1410-1497)

Ockeghem is known as one of the fathers of Renaissance music. He was born in 1410 and became one of the most respected composers of the fifteenth century. Very little of his musical repertoire survives today. He is known for his motets, masses, and secular chansons.

Stylistically, Johannes Ockeghem was very distinct. In his vocal pieces, he placed an emphasis on expressive and complex bass lines. This new emphasis on lower textures allowed Renaissance composers to have a wide range of diversity in their music. Ockeghem has been described as a purely technical master. He is also considered to be a pioneer of western polyphony and one of the supreme masters of lyrical and contrapuntal invention.

Palestrina, Giovanni (1525-1594)

Giovanni Pierluigi de Palestrina was an Italian composer who wrote over one hundred settings of the mass. He composed sacred music and was an important musical figure of the Renaissance. He is best known for his "seamless texture" of polyphony.

His prominent works are his First Book of Masses, the Mass of Marcellus, and his First Book of Motets. He composed masses, motets, and sacred works. *Adoramus te Christe* is an example of his sacred music. His music is marked by purity, clarity, terseness, simplicity, and the omission of secular elements. Because of all of his worthy compositions, he earned the title "Prince of Music," which was engraved on the leaden plate that marks the tomb on his grave. He died in 1594, but his influence lasted for many eras past his death.