

The Renaissance (1400 – 1600 C.E.)

The Renaissance encompasses Western music history from 1400 to the beginning of the 1600's. This period in time marked the rebirth of humanism, and the revival of cultural achievements for their own sake in all forms of art, including music. The word "Renaissance" in itself is defined as a "rebirth" or a "reconstruction".

During this time, artists and musicians produced works that displayed more artistic freedom and individualism. This creativity allowed artists to abandon the stricter ways of the Medieval Era. Their art forms rediscovered the ancient Greek ideals. The great masters of the Renaissance were revered in their own lifetimes (rather than after their deaths), which was different from most of their Medieval predecessors. With the new printing techniques, music and musical ideas were able to be preserved and distributed to the people.

The distinctive musical sounds of the Renaissance era were comprised of a smooth, imitative, *polyphonic* style, as seen in the music of Byrd, Palestrina, and Lassus. While *sacred music* remained of great importance, *secular music* was starting to become increasingly common. Therefore, the polyphonic style was not only used in sacred music, but also in secular *madrigals*.

The repertoire of instrumental music also began to grow considerably. New instruments were invented, including two keyboard instruments called the clavichord and virginal. In addition, many existing instruments were enhanced. The lute became the favored instrument of the time period, and it was established as the standard instrument for family music making during the 16th century.

and *motets* were the primary forms for sacred vocal polyphony. These were accompanied by the lute or a small instrumental ensemble or consort. Secular vocal forms included motets, madrigals and songs, while instrumental pieces were usually short polyphonic works or music for dancing.

Renaissance polyphony was harmonious when compared with the medieval style. Imitation was a method that composers used to make elaborate music more coherent and to give the listener a sense of arrangement. Imitation, where one melodic line shares, or "imitates," the same musical theme as a previous melodic line became an important polyphonic technique. Imitative polyphony can be easily heard in the music of Byrd, Gibbons, and Gabrieli. Additionally, the masses and motets of composers such as Josquin also displayed the imitative polyphonic style. Imitative polyphony was so important that it continued into the Baroque period, especially in sacred music for the church.