

THE RENAISSANCE

VOCAL

15TH CENTURY

English and Burgundian Music

FORM

During the beginning of the Renaissance period, musical form followed the same basic principles that were used the medieval era. However, techniques evolved and new styles emerged.

The three main forms used up to the sixteenth century were *mass*, *motet*, and chanson. They were similar in that they all were *polyphonic* in texture, had four to six parts, and were all composed for voice. Additionally, the carol was also a popular Renaissance form.

Mass

The mass was a standard liturgical form. It was polyphonic in style, with *plainsong* used for the tenor parts. Sometimes secular tunes would be used for *cantus firmus*. The mass had a regal mood to it and was of considerable length. It was divided into five sections, or movements, and used sacred Latin text.

Motet

A motet was a sacred choral composition based on a single Latin text and sung in all voice parts. The top voice was greatly emphasized. The motet short in length, and written in one continuous movement. It was also written on a variety of different subjects, usually derived from the Bible.

Chanson

The most popular and common secular music during the early Renaissance was the polyphonic chanson. It was reminiscent of the solo song, which used the principal melody in the top voice. These secular texts were written in French. The chanson had the same polyphonic texture of the mass but was more rhythmic.

Carol

During the Renaissance era, the carol was a popular music form in England. It consisted of two parts and was sung to a religious poem of numerous stanzas with the same music and refrain.

Franco-Flemish Music

FORM

The Franco-Flemish school of music was at its height during the 1400s. The Franco-Flemish composers were more interested in creating new techniques within the popular existing forms, as opposed to inventing new form types.

Canon

The *cannon* made its first appearance during the 1300s in the popular caccia of the medieval era. It was abandoned at the turn of the next century and reappeared with new popularity during the latter part of the 1400s. The new canon employed some interesting techniques.

1. Mensuration canons-several voices carrying the same melody at different rates of speed.
2. Retrograde canons-the melody is sung backwards.
3. Augmentation canons-the time values of the notes increase in the imitating voice.
4. Double canons-four parts with two different melodies, each canonically imitated. (55)

Mass

A new form of mass emerged, called the cantus firmus mass. Here, each successive section of the ordinary had the same melody. These cantus firmi were usually written in the plainsong style, but sometimes secular music was used. Most of the time, these masses were based on cantus firmus.

Motet

There was less use of cantus firmus in motets than in masses. The Franco-Flemish motet made use of sections written in duet style, chordal style, fugal or imitative style, and free non-imitative *counterpoint*.

Secular Music

The chanson remained the dominant form of secular music, as it had been in the English style. The Franco-Flemish school made variations to it and made it less sectionalized. Lieder, a *monophonic* or polyphonic German secular work, gained popularity from the end of the 1400s to the end of the 1500s.

16TH CENTURY

It is in the 1500s that the Renaissance reached its height. In terms of vocal polyphony, the Renaissance exhibited monumental growth.

Throughout the sixteenth century, vocal polyphony reached its ultimate degree of perfection. Religious music was no longer led by the Roman Catholic Church, as Protestant music was also coming into common usage. While the vocal style still dominated the musical world, instrumental style began to increasingly appear. Secular music gained additional popularity, and schools besides the dominating Franco-Flemish one evolved all across the globe.

ROMAN CATHOLIC MUSIC

Form

Throughout the 1500s, liturgical music grew in size, technique, and usage. Religious music was still dominated by masses and motets. Also, some non-liturgical forms began to develop and became somewhat popular during the second half of the Renaissance.

Mass

The main type of mass used during this time was the cantus firmus mass. It used plainsongs and secular melodies. Another common mass used during the sixteenth century was the parody mass, which had a complete secular chanson or motet altered to fit the text of the ordinary mass. After the early 1500s, completely canonic masses became less and less commonly used.

Motet

The motet did not change much in form or technique. In fugal motets, each successive phrase of text introduced a new concept or theme that was then imitated in other voices. Some motets divided the text from one line to the next so that more than one voice sang each new line of text.

Non-liturgical forms

The most popular non-liturgical form of the time period was the laude. This was a religious song of praise that was given a simple polyphonic setting in chordal style. Its text was in either Latin or Italian.

Schools

Although the Franco-Flemish school still dominated the musical world, other schools became important, and developed music themselves. These schools were the Spanish school, the English school, the Venetian school, and the German school.

REFORMATION MUSIC

The Protestant Reformation led to many new developments in church music. Roman Catholic church music still dominated the era, but Protestantism added creative innovations to the music world.

Germany

Martin Luther, who sparked the Protestant Reformation, with his *Ninety Five Theses*, in 1517, believed strongly that music should be involved in church music. He felt that the congregation should participate in the service, especially in hymn singing.

Chorale

The *chorale* was one of the most important musical forms to come out of the Protestant Reformation. It was a hymn that was meant to be sung by the congregation. At first, chorales were monophonic and then progressed to four part harmony. Eventually, the chorales were used in more elaborate settings and were performed by choruses. Choral *preludes* were *contrapuntal* arrangements of chorales which were played on an organ.

France

In France, the Huguenot movement yielded an important literature of psalms set to music.

Psalms

Biblical psalms were translated into French verse and then set to melodies. These psalms were meant to be sung in unison by the congregation and also to be sung at home. Additionally, four part harmonization and more elaborate contrapuntal arrangements of psalms were developed in this era.

England

Church Music

Psalm singing also became popular in England during the second half of the Renaissance. The English mass equivalent of the Catholic mass was called the "service." This mass was set to texts in a polyphonic manner. Besides services, two other forms of polyphony were present at this point in time. These were the Catholic anthem, which was a catholic motet with an English text, and the verse anthem, which alternated solo and choral sections and used organ or string accompaniment. In addition, Anglican chant was based upon Catholic plainsong. The English language now replaced Latin texts, and the melodies were given metrical organization.

SECULAR MUSIC

Secular music of the time developed into wider geographic areas during the second half of the Renaissance. It continued to grow and diversify in form and style well into the 1600s. Secular music of the time had specific rules, according to Hugh M. Miller:

1. As in the 14th century, secular music again rivaled sacred music, largely because of the widespread renaissance spirit of secularization and also because poetry was flourishing.
2. The rise of national schools was even more pronounced in secular than in sacred music, although the influence of Netherlands composers was still strong.
3. Secular music flourished in all European courts under the patronage of nobility
4. It should be remembered that Renaissance secular music everywhere was intended as entertainment for amateur performers rather than as concert music.
5. It was composed and performed as chamber music for a few participants rather than for large choral ensembles.

Italian Form

During the late 1400s, popular vocal forms, referred to collectively as the vocal canzoni, appeared in Italy. These forms of music were generally in four parts, strongly metrical, predominantly chordal, and had dance like rhythms to them. These forms came right before the 16th century *madrigal*. The madrigal developed from the 1500s to the 1600s, and had more expressiveness to it, was more contrapuntally elaborate, and was more polished overall.

French Form

The most popular secular form in France was the polyphonic chanson and the solo chanson with contrapuntal accompaniment. While some chansons were in chordal style, others had more elegant counterpoint with imitation. The chanson measures, a type of chanson from the late 1500s, made use of quantitative rhythms, which stressed syllables were given twice the note values of unstressed syllables, resulting in frequently shifting meters.

English Form

English madrigals were popular during the sixteenth century. An English madrigal used five voices. It was written in a light and leisurely manner. A form of the madrigal called ballett was also popular. It used refrains in lively contrapuntal style alternating with chordal style for the stanzas.

German Form

A popular type of secular music in Germany during this time was the polyphonic lied. This was written in four voices with imitative counterpoint. The basis for this form was often popular songs. Another popular German form during the Renaissance was quodlibet. This form had various popular tunes and their texts humorously combined in a contrapuntal manner.

Spanish Form

The main Spanish secular form during the Renaissance was the villancico. The villancico was a four part work, written mostly in chordal style, with a regular metric construction. This was based on a three stanza poem and was musically structured according to the formula A B B A. This form of music was performed as solo songs with instruments playing the lower parts.