

Renaissance Music

The Renaissance period was a time of renewed interest in exploring all aspects of living. Musically, vocal music was the most important, and polyphonic music (many melodies) was emphasized. Techniques and mechanics of melody writing were combined, with attention given to the musical ideas and the beauty of the sound.

The great composer of this century was the Italian Palestrina (1525 -1594). He wrote in almost every style available to him, and his works were often used as models by other composers.

Even though we have talked mostly about the music of the Church, the polyphonic music of the Renaissance was not all religious. In the 16th Century, secular (non religious or "popular") polyphonic music came into being. It was livelier and more rhythmic than the music of the church. The Madrigal was one of these early types of "music for fun".

The point to remember when discussing the music of the Renaissance is the importance of polyphony. It is this combination of a number of melodies overlapping by entering and leaving at various times which separates Renaissance music from that, which was to come later.

RENAISSANCE INSTRUMENTS

Some of the instruments of medieval times, such as recorders and shawms, still remained popular during the Renaissance. Others, like the lute, were altered and improved. And, of course, several new types of instrument were invented.

Many instruments, such as recorders, viols, shawms and crumhorns, were made in families - the same instrument in different sizes, so that there was a variety of pitch-ranges but a blending of timbre within each family. In England, a family of viols was known as a 'chest', since that was how these instruments were stored when not in use. Elizabethans called a group of instruments playing together a *consort* (similar in meaning to 'concert'). If instruments making up the consort were from one family only, it was called a *whole consort*; a *broken consort* consisted of a mixture of various instruments from different families - so that the sameness of the kind of sound was 'broken'.

Crumhorn	in this instrument, shaped like a walking stick, a wooden cap enclosed a double reed, giving a rather soft but very reedy tone.
Rackett	a low-pitched double reed instrument with a rather buzzing tone-quality. Nine parallel tubes were coiled inside a cylinder that was only a foot high.
Cornett	curved, made of wood or ivory and often bound with leather; with a trumpet-like mouthpiece, but finger holes like a recorder. The tone could be varied from soft and mellow to extremely brilliant.
Sackbut	a name, popular in England, for the early kind of trombone. The bell was less flared, giving a rounder, more mellow tone.
Trumpet	the tube was now folded to make it more manageable, until the valve system was invented in the 19th century though, the limited notes available could be obtained only by varying lip-pressure.

Sacred Music

MASSES and MOTETS

Music of the Catholic Church. Composers were now writing their music for at least four parts. (Composers had begun to explore the range of pitch below tenor - by writing a part we now call Bass.

GERMAN CHORALE

In 16th Century Germany, where the Protestant church led by Martin Luther was seeking ways of bringing its people into a more direct contact with God, there grew up a tradition of hymn writing to be sung in German by the whole congregation - rather than Latin by a trained choir.

The tunes were sometimes newly composed, sometimes adapted from plainchant or even popular songs.

A German hymn tune is called a Chorale.

CHURCH MUSIC IN ENGLAND

Besides many motets and masses composed for Catholic Church services, some composers wrote ANTHEMS to be sung by the choir during services in Protestant churches. The ANTHEM grew out of the motet, but it was sung in English not Latin.

There are two types of Anthem:

FULL ANTHEM: sung by choir throughout, usually unaccompanied.

VERSE ANTHEM: verse sung by one or more soloists, accompanied by organ or viols, alternate with sections where the whole choir joins in.

16TH CENTURY VENICE

St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice. There were two organ lofts and two choir galleries set high up on opposite sides of the building. This gave composers opportunities to write for two separate choirs. Pieces in this style are described as POLYCHORAL - meaning music for more than one choir. A phrase from the left is answered by the same, or perhaps a different phrase from the right.

Venetians were fond of using instruments as well as voices in their church music and so included various instruments, each group linked to its own choir.

Some of the most impressive polychoral pieces are by **Giovanni Gabrieli**.

Secular Music

There are an amazing variety of styles which express every kind of human mood and emotion.

Some are very contrapuntal using imitation, whilst others are mainly chordal. The rhythms are clear cut and borrowed from dance music.

MADRIGAL

Usually one singer per part, performed in homes of keen music lovers everywhere.

In England there came to be three kinds of madrigal; the ballet, the *ayre* and the madrigal proper. **Thomas Morley** was the most famous English Madrigal composer.