

# Medieval Music

## Introduction

Most of us listen to many different types of music, and we all have a favorite style. It might be rock, country, rap, classical, or anything in between. But in the middle ages, there wasn't nearly as much to choose from. Until about 1000CE, religious church music was the only known musical genre. But before I go into detail about medieval music, I'll give a brief history of how it developed.

## History

Greece: ~Ancient Greek culture was infused with music on nearly every level.  
~As proof, their god Apollo is often shown playing the lyre. It is no coincidence that Apollo, protector of music, poetry and light, was the most beloved ancient Greek gods.

Byzantine: ~Byzantium music was based on Greek music, but was distinctively of the church.

~This culture played an important role in the transition from antiquity music to medieval music.

## Early Middle Ages: Music of the Church

~The early middle ages were dominated with church music.

~Christianity was not accepting of the arts because it saw them as a continuation of pagan civilization.

~Organizers of the church realized that some music could be developed to fit within the framework of the Christian doctrine.

~When Gregory the Great ascended the papal throne in 590 AD, he banned all kinds of music except music connected with liturgy. (Various religious ceremonies)

~Most instruments were rejected, except for the organ.

~Although secular music must have existed, through 1000CE, the chants of the church are the only surviving music.

~Gregory the Great, and several successive popes, organized and codified the unrecorded melodies used by the church singers. He also established the rules for the solemn chant. (Gregorian chant)

### Gregorian Chant

- ~Gregorian Chant was the predominant type of music in the early middle ages.
- ~The chant was exclusively vocal and entirely monophonic. (Meaning that there was only a single melodic line- no harmony or other voices.)
- ~It was written in what is called square notation.

### Origins of Music Notation

- ~The square notation evolved from more primitive types of notation.
- ~The earliest manuscripts contained nothing but the texts, and choirs had to memorize the melodies.
- ~In order to ease the burden, various signs, called neumes, were written above the words. They indicated the rise and fall of the voice, and came into use around the ninth century.
- ~Guido d'Arezzo invented staff lines in about 1000 CE to show the intervals between notes. This was the notation used in Gregorian chant, and was used for the rest of the Middle Ages.
- ~FYI: Arezzo also invented the *do re mi fa sol la* system of syllables that is still used as a teaching device.

Slide 6 This is a surviving manuscript of Gregorian chant notation.

### The Late middle Ages: rise of polyphony

- ~In the ninth century, polyphony, which is the sounding of more than one melody, began to be developed.
- ~This is considered to be the most significant event in the history of Western music because it allowed for a great expression of creativity and artistry that was missing in simple chants.
- ~The oldest documents of many-voiced music were written in the second half of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and called organa.

### The School of Notre Dame

- ~During the twelfth century, Paris became the cultural and intellectual center of Western Europe.
- ~One group of avant-garde composers who worked near the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris became known as the Notre Dame School of Polyphony. They produced a large body of sacred music, but the majority of the contributors remain anonymous.
- ~The only composers that are known to have worked there are Leonin and Perotin, both of whom were mentioned by an anonymous English student who was studying at the Notre Dame in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century.
- ~These composers are attributed with the *Magnus Liber Organi*, (The Great Book of Organum), a compilation of medieval music.

### Ars Antiqua

~Léonin, Pérotin and the other anonymous composers whose music has survived are representatives of the era of European music history known as the ars antiqua.

~It occurred approximately between 1170 and 1310.

~During this period, rhythmic notation appeared, and the motet was developed. (the motet was a rhythmic, choral composition.)

~During this time, instruments became more commonly used. If a singer was not available, an instrumentalist would play his part.

### Secular Music

~So far, I've talked about religious music, but after 1000 CE, music began to be developed outside of the church.

~The Troubadours first appeared in southern France, and were musicians who composed in a poetic style. They were often aristocratic poets who composed their own melodies but left the performance to men called jongleurs. The first known troubadour is William IX, a duke of Aquitaine.

~These men roamed through France, England, Germany, and Italy, and were influential in the development of European art music.

~They sung heroic and amorous epics, and about courtly love.

~Troubadour songs were frequently accompanied by instruments such as fiddles, harps, horns, and lutes.

~Trouveres were other poet-composers who were strongly influenced by the Troubadours.

### Dances

~Dancing was a favorite pastime in the middle ages, and dance songs often consisted as both an instrumental piece and a poetic form.

### Ars Nova and Transition to the Renaissance

~The Ars Nova was the period directly following the Ars Antiqua, from the fourteenth century to the beginning of the Renaissance.

~It's hard to say when the Middle Ages ended and the Renaissance began because it was a gradual change.

~ During this transition, music became more complex and refined.

~ The musical Renaissance truly began when, in the fifteenth century, music became more humanistic. As the people became more concerned with science and the earth, music moved away from the church and became more involved with the people.