

II. THE MIDDLE AGES

II-1. MUSIC IN THE MIDDLE AGES (450-1450)

Objectives

The section provides a brief overview of the medieval period (dark ages, Romanesque, and Gothic periods) and defines the roles of the three principal social classes of the time: nobility, peasantry, and clergy. The uses of instruments in the predominantly vocal music of the period are discussed, as is the ambivalent attitude of the church authorities toward musical instruments.

Suggestions

1. Discuss the prejudice inherent in the term “Middle” Ages. Can we conceive of 1,000 years of western history (thirty generations!) in which virtually nothing of significance occurred? Try to develop a picture of medieval life with students through a free association exercise. Ask students to name people or events from the Middle Ages. Personalities should include legendary ones, for often the students can associate more quickly and familiarly (assuming the associations are correct). Robin Hood, Richard, John, and the Magna Carta can be discussed briefly, for they bring the time alive, and anchor the people and events to a specific date (1215). The heroes of the medieval romances (a genre that will serve as the impetus for romanticism) such as Roland, Siegfried, Ilya Mourometz, el Cid, Lemminkäinen, *et. al.*, could also be mentioned.

2. Discuss the social groupings of the Middle Ages, and then compare to present day America. Do we have a nobility and a peasantry? How does the power of the church today compare with then? If there are classes today, are there musical associations?

3. The mention of Hildegard of Bingen should whet one’s appetite for more information on the status of women in music. There is no question that women have been ignored in standard writings on the subject, and it is time their roles are recognized by examples of women composers and performers. A highly recommended resource for further information is *Women Making Music*, edited by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (*WMM*).

4. In discussing the restrictions, formulas, and sacred emphasis of the Middle Ages, consider that the pictorial arts were under similar restraints. The Byzantine icon *Madonna and Child Enthroned* is a perfect example of how an anonymous painter transcended the strict formal rules. As described by H. W. Janson (*History of Art*, Prentice Hall, 1966, p. 178), the work, although painted in the thirteenth century, “reflects a type several hundred years earlier. Echoes of the Classicism of the Second Golden Age abound: the graceful pose, the rich play of drapery folds, the tender melancholy of the Virgin’s face, the elaborate, architectural perspective of the throne (which looks rather like a miniature replica of the Colosseum). But all these elements have become oddly abstract. The throne, despite its foreshortening, no longer functions as a three-dimensional object, and the highlights on the drapery resemble ornamental sunbursts, in strange contrast to the soft shading of hands and faces. The total effect is neither flat nor spatial but transparent, somewhat like that of a stained-glass window.” Does this icon have a “calm, otherworldly” vision comparable to the “calm, otherworldly” sound of Gregorian chant mentioned in the text? Can further analogies be fruitfully discussed?

Questions and Topics

1. What was the attitude of the church toward the use of musical instruments?
2. Describe the musical life of a major cathedral.

3. Plato and medieval music.
4. The attitude of the church fathers toward music.
5. Music's place in the medieval university.

II-2. GREGORIAN CHANT

Objectives

The nature of chant is defined, and the role of Pope Gregory in its organization is explained. The “otherworldly” sound of chant is partly traced to its characteristic scales, the so-called church modes. One chant, the *Alleluia: Vidimus stellam*, is singled out for study in both modern and medieval chant notation. Hildegard of Bingen’s *O successores* is presented as a late example of Gregorian chant.

Suggestions

1. In order to help students understand the church modes and their use, play the familiar major and minor scales first, and then help the students sing several of the modes. For fun, sing the song mentioned in the text, *What Shall We Do with the Drunken Sailor*? Explain that the modes can be defined by means of the white notes on the piano, and help students to write them out in notation.

2. Compare the medieval chant notation of the *Alleluia: Vidimus stellam*, its modern transcription, and standard notation. Since there are no bar lines, how can there be rhythm? Quickly review the basic rules for pronouncing church Latin, and then ask a student to read the text. After following the transcribed notation, encourage the students to follow the chant notation.

3. With over twenty CDs to her credit, Hildegard of Bingen has become a major personality in early music. Her fame is deserved: not only did she compose a significant number of antiphons, responsories, and sequences, but also the earliest extant liturgical morality play, *Ordo virtutum*, which “predates by about two centuries any other works in this genre” (*WMM*, p.28; the work has been recorded by Sequentia, BMG 05472-77394-2). Three of her works, with commentary by Barbara Jean Jeskalian, are included in James R. Briscoe’s *Historical Anthology of Music by Women (HAMW)*. Three of her antiphons are available from the Hildegard Publishing Company (HPC), and the fact that the company was named after her gives some indication of her renewed stature. The text gives brief biographical details, and then provides a Vocal Music Guide with original text and English translation for the chant *O successores*. An amazing work for its time, it is included in the recordings.

4. Discuss the merits of the second Vatican Council’s decision to institute the use of the vernacular in place of the traditional Latin liturgy. Ask your Catholic students to describe the musical life of the churches they attend. Is the ability of the congregation to understand every word worth sacrificing the large body of chant that has sprung up around this liturgy?

Questions and Topics

1. What are the characteristics of Gregorian chant?
2. How are the church modes different from the major and minor scales?
3. What is the general structure and character of the chant *Alleluia: Vidimus stellam*?
4. Discuss the names of the church modes and the origins of these names.
5. The liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church.
6. Music in the Roman Catholic Church today.

II-3. SECULAR MUSIC IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Objectives

This section provides a very brief introduction to the secular music of the period. The life of the jongleur is described, as is that of the musical poet of this age of chivalry, the knight. The subject matter of their songs is discussed, and it is emphasized that, unlike chant, the secular songs probably had regular meters with clearly defined beats. An estampie is discussed as an example of instrumental music.

Suggestions

1. Discuss the importance of dancing to the nobility, and the use of music for accompaniment. Referring to the illustration in the text, discuss earlier forms of dancing. Possibly some of the students have had experiences with country or square dancing that they can share. Have the students ever seen, heard, or danced to music provided by only one or two musicians, such as those portrayed? Play the estampie and review the above comments. Is it danceable? Would it be sufficient for a small group, as in the illustration? What element of music is the most important for dancing? Must there be harmony?
2. Discuss the concept of the nobility as composer-poets. How does this compare with the standard conception of the Age of Chivalry? As examples, see the trouvère virelai *Or la truix* and the minnelied *Willekommen Mayenschein* by Neidhart von Reuenthal, both included in Parrish and Ohl's *Masterpieces of Music Before 1750 (MM)*. Both pieces are quite short.
3. Recorded examples and illustrations of medieval instruments can be found in David Munrow's *Instruments of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Angel SBZ-3810) with the Early Music Consort of London. The book contained in the record set has many illustrations, which should be used while the recording is played. See also *Instruments of the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Vanguard 71219/20) by the Musica Reservata of London, or any number of CDs listed under "Early Music" in the *Schwann Opus* guide. Comparisons can be made, both favorable and unfavorable, with modern instruments.
4. The passing mention of Beatriz de Dia is another opportunity for bringing in the role of women in music. Information is scant, but her portrait and her song *A chantar m'er de so*, the only surviving example of a troubadour song composed by a woman, are included in *WMM*, pp. 48-49. Considering that half your class is probably female, the poem, contrasted with the typical male themes, should make for a lively discussion.
5. Rebecca A. Baltzer (University of Texas) highly recommends Margaret Switten's video production of Jean Renart's *Romance of the Rose, or of Guillaume de Dole*. "The video is charming, full of knights, ladies, song and dance, a tournament, and a trial by ordeal. The heroine suffers grave injustice that threatens to ruin her life, but she seizes the initiative by going to court and insisting on justice—and she has an interesting way of achieving it." Available from Margaret Switten, Teaching Medieval Romance, Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, MA 01075.
6. Discuss the status of the wandering minstrel in comparison to the composer-poets. Are there similar differences today between the professional popular or folk musicians and other segments of society?

Questions and Topics

1. What was the subject matter of French medieval songs?
2. Compare the rhythm of the Gregorian chant with that of the trouvère songs.
3. The Virgin Mary in the secular love songs of the French Middle Ages.
4. The rhythmic modes in troubadour and trouvère songs.
5. Instrumental accompaniment in the troubadour-trouvère repertory.

II-4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLYPHONY: ORGANUM

Objectives

The evolution of polyphony is traced from its beginnings in simple parallel organum, through the addition of contrary motion and rhythmical independence, to the complex creations of the members of the Notre Dame school, Leonin and Perotin. A three-voiced organum by Perotin, *Alleluia: Nativitas*, is discussed as a representative composition of the Notre Dame school.

Suggestions

1. Review texture by asking the class to sing a familiar song (*America, Mary Had a Little Lamb*, etc.) in unison. Discuss the natural division of voices, and the perfect intervals (octaves between sexes, fourths and fifths between registers S, A, T, B). Introduce parallel organum, and ask them to sing the song again, this time concentrating on the organum, or use the examples of parallel organum found in *HAM* (I, 25; recording MHS OR-350).

2. As a step toward the Notre Dame school, discuss melismatic organum. The section of the *Benedicamus Domino* from the school of St. Martial (*MM*, 8) is suggested because it is short, and the students should be able to hear the two voices distinctly, concentrating on the chant.

3. Discuss Paris as the intellectual and artistic capital of Europe after 1150, and the importance of Notre Dame Cathedral (note the illustration in the text). Discuss the school of Notre Dame, and Perotin's *Alleluia: Nativitas*. Play or sing the chant given in the text. After playing the recording (on CONNECT MUSIC and the mp3 set, or via the music download card), point out the two distinct styles of writing in the tenor, unmeasured and measured. Considering the physical environment for which this work was intended (the great open spaces of the Gothic cathedral), are there any acoustical reasons for the sustained nature of the music?

Questions and Topics

1. Trace the evolution of organum from its simplest to its most complex style.
2. Describe measured rhythm and the rhythmic innovations of the Notre Dame composers.
3. Describe the sound of medieval polyphony, based on your experience with Perotin's *Alleluia: Nativitas*.
4. Medieval theorists on consonance and dissonance.
5. The music of Leonin.
6. The music of Perotin.

II-5. FOURTEENTH-CENTURY MUSIC: THE "NEW ART" IN ITALY AND FRANCE

Objectives

This section discusses the *ars nova* in Italy and France during the fourteenth century and explains the cultural milieu in which this musical development took place. The rhythmic characteristics of the new music are defined, and the increasing secularization of music during this period is illustrated by Landini's *Ecco la primavera*. The career of the leading French composer of the time, Guillaume de Machaut, is

briefly traced. The section ends with a definition of the mass ordinary and a study of the Agnus Dei from Machaut's *Notre Dame Mass*.

Suggestions

1. Review the section in the text dealing with the fourteenth century, stressing the breakup of feudalism, the rise of the middle class, the emergence of the vernacular, and other factors encouraging the rise of secular music. Depending on your relationship with the class (and administration?) you may wish to discuss literary works of the fourteenth century which, as the text puts it, "stressed sensuality more than virtue." Examples: the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron*.

2. Francesco Landini's *Ecco la primavera*, a ballata about the joys of Springtime, is presented as an example of a secular song in the new syncopated style. The text has the original Italian, with English translation. If you wish to discuss other works by this composer, you might consider his ballata *Amor c'al tuo soggetto* included in *HAM* (I, 53; recording MHS OR-437), but the students might be more interested in Judy Collins's performance of his *Lasso! di donna*, as arranged by Joshua Rifkin and included in her album *Wildflowers* (EKS-74012). Mixed in with popular and folk songs in a contemporary vein, does Landini's ballata seem out of place?

3. Discuss Machaut's career as priest, secretary, courtier, and church official, as described in the text. If you wish to relate this to modern times, how does his career compare with that of today's "serious" composer? In what sense has the university replaced the court and cathedral as a patron of music? How does a priest come to write love songs? Discuss the importance of the mass in the Roman Catholic Church, and its various sections. Point out the sections of the mass ordinary, and the importance of Machaut's setting as the first polyphonic treatment by a known composer. Draw attention to the Agnus Dei, as discussed in the text, then play the work (3:03).

4. Discuss the use of modern versus period instruments and the various performance techniques used prior to the early nineteenth century. If possible, listen to a piece from the fourteenth or early fifteenth century recorded both on period and modern instruments. What is the student's reaction? Discuss which performance they prefer and why.

Questions and Topics

1. Describe the career of Guillaume de Machaut.
2. Discuss the rhythmic innovations of the "New Art."
3. Describe the form and stylistic characteristics of Machaut's *Notre Dame Mass*.
4. Musicians at court in the fourteenth century.
5. Love songs: poetry and music, idealized and realized.
6. Reasons, musical and nonmusical, for the decline of liturgical music during the fourteenth century.