

HISTORY OF WESTERN MUSIC

THE MIDDLE AGES (450–1450) → 5th–15th centuries

Religious music

From approximately A.D. 350 to 1100 Medieval art and music were generated from primarily monastic sources. This means that composers and artists were primarily associated with the Roman Catholic church and lived in monasteries. These monks or priests believed that the gifts that they were given in art and music were talents given by God, and therefore, any work that they composed was meant to glorify God. Consequently, up until about 1100 the vast majority of art and music was provided by **anonymous** sources, meaning sources without specific names attached to them.

Perhaps the chief beauty of the cathedral of *Santiago de Compostela* is the 12th century *Portico da Gloria*, behind the western facade. It is a masterwork of **Romanesque** sculpture built between 1168 and 1188 by Master Mateo. In the archivolt are represented the 24 Elders of the Apocalypse, who are tuning their musical instruments.

Elders tuning the organistrum
(in the archivolt)

From approximately 350 to 1100 the vast majority of music was **monophonic**, meaning a single melodic line without accompaniment. This monophonic music with Latin text was in the form of what is known as **Gregorian Chant**, named after Pope Gregory (590-604), who organized the chants into a specific order and had them published and communicated to churches throughout Europe and the Roman Empire, which had adopted the Roman Catholic tradition.

Plainchant : (= *cantus firmus*) The official monophonic unison chant with Latin texts, originally unaccompanied, of the Christian liturgies. The scales used by plainchant are the *gregorian modes*.

Gregorian mode (or *church mode*) : is one of the musical scales used in Gregorian chant.

There are three melodic styles of chant: **syllabic**, in which each syllable of text is set to a single note; **neumatic**, in which two to a dozen notes accompany a syllable; and **melismatic**, in which single syllables may be sung to dozens of notes.

From the end of the 9th century, composers began to write two or more lines of melody which were sung at the same time. This is known as **the birth of polyphony**.

Notre Dame in Paris was the centre of musical creative activity throughout the 13th century. Both belonging to the **Notre Dame School of Polyphony**, the french composer *Leonin* (1150-1201) was among the first known composers to write two lines to be sung together (*Organum*); and around 1200, a composer called *Perotin* (c.1200) began to write three or four lines of melody (*Organum* and *Motet*).

Notre Dame de Paris ('Our Lady of Paris' in French) is a **Gothic**, Roman Catholic Cathedral.

Surviving manuscripts from this period include the **Codex Calixtinus** of Santiago de Compostela (12th century).

Organum is a *plainchant* melody (cantus firmus) with at least one added voice to enhance the harmony, developed in the Middle Ages. A supporting *bourdon* may be sung on the same text, or the melody is followed in parallel motion (*parallel organum*) or a combination thereof.

Motet : ('motet' derives from the French 'mot', 'word') By the thirteenth century, the motet became a polyphonic composition that included liturgical and secular texts as well as a *plainchant* (cantus firmus). Sometimes two upper voices have different words and even languages.

Musical Notation: It was not until perhaps the ninth century that a basic system of notation was developed. Nearly all the music preserved (until the twelfth century) was written for the church.

The names ut (C), re (D), mi (E), fa (F), sol (G) and la (A) used in Spanish, French and Italian were given to musical notes by the monk of the Benedictine order Guido d'Arezzo (990-1050) using the following hymn:

Secular music

Music was also used for entertainment. From around the 10th century, men and women called **minstrels** went from place to place singing songs, playing instruments, juggling and performing acrobatics.

Some noblemen became famous poets and composers. They were known as **troubadours** or trouveres in France (and Minnesinger in Germany). They performed for kings and wealthy people, and they usually sang simple love songs, e.g. *Alfonso X el sabio* ("the Wise" or "the Learned") and *Martín Códax*.

From the beginning of the 14th century, composers such as Guillaume de Machaut (around 1300-1377) began to write music with more complicated rhythms and adventurous melodies. This new style became known as **Ars Nova** which means "new art".

MUSICAL STYLE

Monophonic Style

- A simple *monophonic* texture might be enriched by the use of drones (bourdons) and (in secular music) percussion.
- Rhythm was often not notated. We assume that it was tied to text in vocal music and to dance in instrumental music.

Polyphonic Style

- Non imitative *counterpoint*, with voices moving at different rhythmic speeds, is the primary texture.
- Pieces are often built on a *cantus firmus*, and the structure is formed from repetitions of that melody.

Medieval composers

Leonin, Perotin, Alfonso X el sabio, Martín Códax.