

Music of the Renaissance Period 1450 -1600

Sacred Music

Plainchant

Early singing in the Renaissance period was in the form of **Plainchant**.

Plainchant was very simple and moved mainly by step. It was sung by monks.

This means it was sung in Latin.

It was sung in **Unison** (everyone on the same part) and **A cappella** (unaccompanied).

It was free flowing so did not have a sense of fixed time signature. This is called **Irregular Meters**.

Plainchant had a **Melismatic Word Setting** (lots of notes sung to one syllable).

This is the opposite of a **Syllabic Word Setting** (one note per syllable).

Modes

Modes were early scales. They used only the white notes of the keyboard. There are

seven modes, one for each note. If the music is based on a scale it is described as

Modal. It is safe to say that all Renaissance Music is modal.

Choral Music

Choral Music (Music written for Choirs) was very important in the Renaissance period.

Sometimes Choral music is sung by male voices only e.g.

Treble Voices (Boys with unbroken voices)

Counter Tenors (The male equivalent of the female Alto, unusually high male voice)

Tenors (Normal high range male voice)

Bass (Lowest male voice)

Often Choral music is sung by a mixed voice choir e.g.

Soprano (High female voice)

Alto (Low female voice)

Tenor (High male, normal range)

Bass (Low male voice)

This is shortened to **SATB**.

Choral music often uses **Imitation** (one part copying another) and

Suspension (A note held over from one chord into another before being resolved).

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The Mass

A Mass is a Roman Catholic Church Service.

It is sung in Latin and has a **Fixed text** (the same words).

It has 5 Sections. These are...

Kyrie Eleison

Lord Have Mercy

Gloria

Glory to God in the Highest

Credo

I believe in one God

Sanctus or Hosanna or Benedictus (These are interchangeable)

And finally **Agnus Dei** *Lamb of God*

*You need to remember these Latin words. If you hear them then you know you are listening to a **Mass** and not a **Motet**.*

The Mass has stayed the same to this day.

It has 3 or 4 vocal parts which are sung in **Harmony** (different notes of a chord sung together).

This is the opposite of **Unison**.

The texture is usually **Polyphonic** (weaving parts which move at different times),

but the texture can also be **Homophonic** (Parts moving together) .

The Mass in the Renaissance Period is often sung **A Capella** (unaccompanied) .

If instruments are present they usually double the voice parts.

All **Sacred** music was performed in the church.

Sometimes the choirs were arranged, one on either side of the church.

This created an early stereo effect called **Antiphony** .

Music written for two choirs or ensembles separated in this way is called **Antiphonal**.

The Motet

The **Motet** has all the characteristics associated with the Mass but the composer can use **any** Latin text as it is not part of the fixed Church service.

The Anthem

The **Anthem** has all the characteristics associated with the Mass and the Motet but it is sung in **English**. This makes it straightforward to identify.

Secular Music of the Renaissance Period 1450 -1600

The Madrigal

The Madrigal was the main form of vocal music in England in the Renaissance Period
There are **three** different forms of Madrigal.

The first two types are sung by choirs.

They have lots of vocal parts and are always unaccompanied:-

The Madrigal Proper

The Madrigal Proper is **Through-composed** in Structure.

This means the music **changes** with each verse to deliver the meaning of the words.

It is also very Polyphonic and full of imitation.

The Ballett

The Ballett is **Strophic** in structure.

The Music for each verse is the **same** .

It has a Homophonic texture and always has a 'Fa,La,La,' refrain.

The Air

The Air is a song as we typically know it. It is sung by a solo singer who is accompanied by the Lute or Guitar.

It is **Strophic** in Structure.

The Consort

In the Renaissance period there were simply not that many different types of instruments. They were usually grouped together in groups called **Consorts**.

E.g. A Consort of Viols or a Consort of Recorders.

These Consorts played Music for dancing .

The two main types of dance are:-

Pavan

This was **Slow** with **two beats in a bar**. A good way to remember this is because Pavan has **two syllables**.

Galliard

This was **Lively** with **three beats in a bar**. A good way to remember this is because Galliard has **three syllables**.