

Renaissance Terms

Cantus firmus: ("Fixed song") The process of using a pre-existing tune as the structural basis for a new polyphonic composition.

Choralis Constantinus: A collection of over 350 polyphonic motets (using Gregorian chant as the cantus firmus) written by the German composer Heinrich Isaac and his pupil Ludwig Senfl.

Contenance angloise: ("The English sound") A term for the style or quality of music that writers on the continent associated with the works of John Dunstable (mostly triadic harmony, which sounded quite different than late Medieval music).

Counterpoint: Combining two or more independent melodies to make an intricate polyphonic texture.

Fauxbourdon: A musical texture prevalent in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, produced by three voices in mostly parallel motion first-inversion triads. Only two of the three voices were notated (the chant/cantus firmus, and a voice a sixth below); the third voice was "realized" by a singer a 4th below the chant.

Glogauer Liederbuch: This German part-book from the 1470s is a collection of 3-part instrumental arrangements of popular French songs (chanson).

Homophonic: A polyphonic musical texture in which all the voices move together in note-for-note chordal fashion, and when there is a text it is rendered at the same time in all voices.

Imitation: A polyphonic musical texture in which a melodic idea is freely or strictly echoed by successive voices. A section of freer echoing in this manner is often referred to as a "point of imitation"; Strict imitation is called "canon."

Musica Reservata: This term applies to High/Late Renaissance composers who "suited the music to the meaning of the words, expressing the power of each affection."

Musica Transalpina: ("Music across the Alps") A printed anthology of Italian popular music translated into English and published in England in 1588.

Odhecaton A: This set of 96 pieces published by Petrucci in 1501 is the first collection of polyphonic music printed entirely worth movable type. [A major breakthrough in the history of music printing].

Old Hall Manuscript: This mid-14th-century royal collection contains nearly 150 pieces of English sacred polyphony.

Orchesographie: The most detailed instructions on dance choreography and dance music of the Renaissance are contained in this 1588 source.

Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practical Music: An important English musical treatise published by Thomas Morley in 1597.

Simultaneous Composition: The process of considering and writing all voice parts of a musical composition at the same time, which allows for imitation, better voice leading to control dissonance, and consideration of a fundamental harmonic bass line.

Successive Composition: The process of writing a musical composition one layer at a time (in the Medieval and Renaissance eras, usually the tenor voice, then the top voice, then the middle voice).

Texture: The number of musical lines in a composition and their interrelationship to each other (monophonic, homophonic, polyphonic, imitative, etc.).

Treatise: In music, this is a formal written document that studies some aspect of music theory and/or performance practice.

Trent Codices: A collection of seven large music manuscripts compiled in the mid-1400s (now housed in Trent, Italy) that contain mainly sacred vocal music composed between 1400 and 1475. With more than 1,500 separate works and 88 different named composers represented (as well as many anonymous pieces), this is the largest and most significant single European musical source of the Renaissance.

Renaissance Genres

Anthem: A sacred polyphonic vocal work with an English text, used in the liturgy of the Anglican church.

Carol: A name for an English two- or three-part setting of a religious poem in popular style, often with alternating solo and choral portions.

Chanson: In the Renaissance, this is a French song for several voices, which may be accompanied by instruments.

Consort Music: Music written for "consorts" of instruments, such as recorders, viols, lutes.

Cyclic Mass: In Renaissance music, a "cyclic mass" was a setting of the Mass Ordinary (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei) that shared a common musical theme in each movement (usually a cantus firmus), thus making it a unified whole. A famous example of a cyclic Mass is Dufay's *Missa Se la Face Ay Pale*, which uses the tune from his own one of his own love songs (*Se la Face Ay Pale*--a chanson) as a cantus firmus in each movement.

Frottola: An important type of Italian secular song from c1470-1530, with three or four voices in a light homophonic style (some sung solo with instrumental rendering of the other voice parts).

Lute Ayre: In the Renaissance, ayres ("airs") were smooth "air-like" solo songs sung in English, most often with lute accompaniment, hence the term "lute ayre."

Madrigal: In the Renaissance, these were expressive unaccompanied secular settings for three to six voices, each on its own part. The madrigal began in Italy in the 1520s (Arcadelt), became more elaborate and chromatic from 1550-1580 (de Rore, Marenzio), and then made its way to England where it was anglicized into the English madrigal tradition of the late 1500/early 1600s (Morley, Weelkes). In Italy, this genre continued to be important as a means of continued experimentation and expression in the early Baroque (Monteverdi, Gesualdo).

Mass: The approximately 25 prayers that lead to and follow the taking of communion. There are two types of mass prayers: The "Ordinary" (5 everyday prayers--Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Agnus Dei) and The "Proper" (20 prayers that are appropriate only for a certain day, such as Easter or Christmas, according to the liturgical calendar of saints and holy days). A "musical Mass" often refers to a musical setting of just the Mass Ordinary. (see "Cyclic Mass," above)

Motet: In the Renaissance, this is a sacred polyphonic choral setting with a Latin text, sometimes in imitative counterpoint.

Parody Mass: During the 1500s, this is a Mass that uses multiple voice parts from another pre-existing work (such as a polyphonic section of a motet or chanson) as some of its main melodic material. This often includes using this borrowed polyphonic material as a "motto" theme to start each Mass movement.

Villancico: A common musical/poetic genre of folk songs in Spain and Portugal, sung with or without instrumental accompaniment. Songs can be love-related or devotional in nature.

Renaissance Instruments

Clavichord: An early keyboard instrument that produces a unique delicate sound as its thin wire strings are struck from below by brass tangents attached to the keys.

Lute: This pear-shaped plucked string instrument with a fretted neck was by far the most popular household solo instrument of the Renaissance.

Sackbut: A Renaissance/Baroque trombone, similar to a trumpet except it uses a telescopic slide to change pitch.

Shawm: This is a term for a double-reed instrument used in "high" (haut) ensembles.

Vihuela: A guitar-shaped string instrument from 15th- and 16th-century Spain, usually with 6 doubled strings.

Viola da Gamba: A bowed instrument held between the legs, having 6 or 7 gut strings and movable gut frets. A member of the family of viols that pre-dated the modern violin family.

Virginal: This is a common English name for a harpsichord (in honor of Elizabeth I--the Virgin Queen of England).

Renaissance Composers and Theorists (in chronological order)

Early Renaissance Composers and Theorists

John Dunstable (c1390-c1453): This early 15th-century English composer began the transition to the Renaissance with a triadic sound that came to be known on the continent as the "Contenance Angloise" (the English sound). It has a very different sound than the Medieval French Ars Nova or Italian Trecento. *Quam pulchra es* [motet] c1430

Gilles Binchois (c1400-1460): An early French (Franco-Flemish) Renaissance composer of church music and secular chansons that were known for their elegant melodies and were often borrowed and used as cantus firmi by other composers.

Guillaume Dufay (c1397-1474): A French composer known for both his church music (Masses and motets) as well as his secular songs (chanson). He was one of the first to adopt the English triadic sound (the "Contenance Angloise") on the main European continent, and he was the first composer known to have used a secular cantus firmus for a cyclic Mass. *Se la face ay pale* [chanson] c1430s; *Missa Se la face ay pale* [cyclic Mass--using the chanson as a cantus firmus] c1450s

Johannes Ockeghem (c1410-1497): This French (Franco-Flemish) composer of Masses, motets and songs (chanson) is considered the most influential composer between Dufay and Josquin.

Mid-Renaissance Composers and Theorists

Josquin des Prez (c1450-1521): This French (Franco-Flemish) composer of Latin Masses/motets and popular songs in many languages, was the greatest composer of his generation, and is considered the first master of the High Renaissance style of imitative polyphonic vocal music. *Ave Maria...virgo serena* [motet] c1510; *Mille regretz* [chanson] c1510

Marchetto Cara (c1470-1525): An Italian composer and lutenist, known mostly for his frottoles (light, catchy secular songs that were a precursor to the Italian madrigal).

Juan del Encina (1468-c1530): Composer of Spanish secular vocal music ("canciones"), also a playwright, poet and priest.

Ludwig Senfl (c1486-1542): Born in Switzerland, he moved to Germany, studied and worked with the famed German musician-composer Heinrich Isaac. Senfl later became the leading German-speaking composer of his time, during the beginning of Luther's Protestant Reformation.

Late Renaissance Composers and Theorists

Giovanni da Palestrina (c1525-1594): Known for his Masses and motets, this Italian was the most important Renaissance composer of sacred Catholic music. This composer exemplified the spirit of the Catholic Counter-Reformation movement and is said to have saved polyphonic church music. *Missa Papae Marcelli* [Mass] 1562

Orlando di Lasso (c1530-1594): This French (Franco-Flemish) composer wrote many famous Masses and motets as well works in every main European genre and language, and was highly influential at the same time as Palestrina. *Justorem animae* [motet] c1590

Claude LeJeune (c1528-1600): This French (Franco-Flemish) composer is known for his delightful homophonic "Parisian" chansons, such as "Reveci venir du Printemps" (c1565). *Revecy venir du Printemps* [chanson] c1565

William Byrd (c1539-1623): This late Renaissance English composer wrote sacred Catholic and Anglican music, as well as secular vocal polyphony, keyboard (virginal) music, and consort music. *Sing Joyfully Unto God* [anthem] c1590

Thomas Morley (c1557-1602): This late Renaissance English composer and theorist is known for his light Elizabethan madrigals and his treatise *A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practical Music* (1597).

Robert Croo (dates unknown): This late Renaissance English musician is known only for publishing in 1591 the music for A Coventry Carol, a well-known anonymous carol from a Christmas play called *The Pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors*.

Thomas Weelkes (1576-1623): This late Renaissance English composer wrote madrigals, Anglican church music, and a few examples of instrumental consort music. *As Vesta Was From Latmos Hill Descending* [madrigal] 1601

John Dowland (1563-1626): This English late-Renaissance composer, singer and lutenist is best known for his melancholy lute ayres (solo songs with lute accompaniment). His most famous work is his *Lachrimae Pavan* (1596, for instrumental viol consort), which was then transformed into his most famous lute ayre *Flow My Tears* (1600).

Transition to the Early Baroque

Carlo Gesualdo (1566-1613): This late Renaissance/early Baroque madrigalist developed an intensely-chromatic and mannered style following his involvement in the murder of his wife and her lover. *Moro, lasso al mio duolo* [madrigal] 1611

Claudio Monteverdi (c1567-1643): This Italian was a transitional figure who began composing in the late Renaissance style and then became the most influential composer of the early Baroque. His most important works are early Baroque operas (such as *L'Orfeo*, 1607), experimental madrigals, and Catholic sacred music. His daring use of dissonance to express the meaning of the text is called the "seconda pratica".

click on a name, title, term for more info or to view a YouTube clip of the work

	1400	1450	1500	1550	1600	
Late Medieval						Transition to early Baroque
early Renaissance						
1400						
1450						
1500						
1550						
1600						
rise in imitative echoing, number of voices, vocal counterpoint						
“High Renaissance”						
early Baroque						
ultra-expressive						
experimental						
dissonance already in Italy						
musica reservata						
Musical instruments:						
- Viola da gamba (more info)						
- Shawm (more info)						
- Lute (more info)						
- Virginal (English harpsichord) (more info)						
- Sackbut (more info)						
- Vihuela (Spanish) (more info)						
- Clavichord (more info)						
Cantus firmus						
Anonymous						
<i>Sumer is icumen in</i>						
c.1260						
England						
DUNSTABLE						
<i>Quam Pulchra Es</i>						
motet						
[sacred]						
“Contenance Angloise”						
DUFAY						
<i>Se la face ay pale</i> [secular]						
chanson (French song)						
Senfl (Swiss)						
LE JEUNE						
<i>Reveyez venir du Printemps</i>						
chanson (French popular song)						
JOSQUIN DESPREZ						
<i>Ave Maria... virgo serena</i>						
motet [sacred]						
<i>Missa Se la face ay pale</i>						
chanson [secular]						
<i>Mille regretz</i>						
Binchois						
<i>Ockeghem</i>						
<i>fauxbourdon</i>						
LASSO (Lassus)						
(similar to Palestrina)						
<i>Justorum animae</i>						
motet [secular]						
PALESTRINA						
<i>Pope Marcellus Mass</i>						
(Mass)						
GESUALDO						
<i>Moro, lasso</i>						
(Italian madrigal)						
frottola (CARA)						
(Italian popular song)						
villancico (ENCINA)						
(Spanish popular song)						
Orchesographie						
Odhecaton A						
Glogauer Liederbuch						
Trent Codices						
Musica Transalpina						
Plaine and Esie						
Introduction to Practical Music						
THEORISTS TREATISES MANUSCRIPTS						
Old Hall Manuscript						