History of the ars nova movement

Ars Nova

Ars Nova is a musical style that flourished in France in the Middle ages between the period 1310s till about 1400. It is translated " New Art". During this time, the mode, time and pronation of music began to shift. Time signatures were born and there was a new structure to music and how it was made and performed. Different styles were developing, and the people of this time began to hear new sounds they had never heard before.

Before Ars Nova, music was free, there was a moveable C clef as well as no time signature. Gregorian Chant was the style of the medieval period; a one-line chant in which the choir or congregation sung in unison. There was no such thing as a time signature or polyphony in which different sections would sing different parts together. There was so much freedom. There was no time or pitched notation that it is a wonder how they knew what to do. Most of the music that survived from the Medieval Era was sacred. They adored the Mass which was their main source of music. Then polyphony was born, and a new era arose. The people of that time began to create rules and notations which made it more complex and creative.

During Ars Nova new music was formed. This new music increased the attention of secular music. There began new musical concepts. These composers during Ars Nova expressed a new freedom in composing and creating different time signatures. There grew a tolerance for tempus imperfectum which was a double meter.

IID: The Ars Nova in France states, " This old system duple divisions of the beat (as in 2/4 or 3/4 meter), while feasible, were neither theoretically

recognized nor adequately provided for, thanks to the longstanding mystical belief in the perfection of the number 3 (the Trinity, etc.). Until the 14th century ternary divisions (equivalent to our 6/8 or 9/8 meter) were the norm. The 14th-century theorists, interested more in practicality than in numerological mysticism, placed duple and triple mensuration on an equal footing."

Before, music was only known for something that was used in the church, but now it was being heard from all over. You could walk down the streets and hear secular music being played in different venues. Secular forms and lighter melodic figures are being seen more than ever: isorhythm, melody, accompaniment, new dissonance, as well as contrapuntal freedom. Ars Nova was really a spectacular time for music.

Phillippe de Vitry was one of the first composers during Ars Nova. Vitry was born in 1291 and passed in 1361. The term Ars Nova comes from the final words of a treatise attributed to Vitry. Vitry was a composer, poet, church canon, and an administrator for a duke, a king, and a bishop. Vitry was mostly known for musical notation during Ars Nova. The article " Britannica" states, " Vitry was the author of a famous treatise of music called Ars Nova, he dealt with theoretical aspects of French music explaining new theories of mensural notation and detailed various meanings of coloured notes. This introduces durational symbols in the new notation system"

You can plainly see this in Phillippe de Vitry's " In Arboris". This piece was written in 6/8 time. Listening to the song you can clearly feel the beat or " tap your tow" to the main beats. Vitry wrote this piece in three voice parts:

two melodic lines on top of the tenor line. One part is holding out longer note values which created a foundation to build melodic lines; this will be the tenor line. The notation of this piece began to become familiar. The note values were forming " rules" for music that is currently used in the modern world today. This made it easier for us to understand the music being written as well as being able to sing or play it.

For the first time ever, both double and triple divisions of note values were possible. Note-shapes retained their value regardless of context. This made syncopation possible. Mensuration signs indicated the divisions of time and prolation. Before the invention of time signatures, singers were singing on moveable C clefs without any proper notation. This made it possible to sing together and sing polyphony, two pitches sounding at once.

These patterns became longer and slightly more complicated. They became less of a melody and more like a foundation to the system. Repeated melodic figures were called Color, but they were not necessarily rhythmic and may not have been repeated right away. With two or more voices singing at the same time it became difficult for the voices to be able to sing all throughout the entire repertoire. Hocket was the term for resting. One voice sings while the other is resting in an alternating fashion. Hocket was developed in the 13 [th] century.

Ars Nova began to rise in the Masses as well as in secular music. Polyphony was being used in the Mass. Instead of just hearing one individual note and sound, you began to hear multiple notes and sounds whether singing together as one or as individuals. This might not seem too uncommon for our

ears today because of all the different sounds and voices we hear on a normal basis, but during the Middle Ages, this was quite a change because they were accustomed to hearing one sound or one unison voice at a time.

Another famous composer during the time of Ars Nova included Guillaume de Machaut. Machaut was born in 1300 and passed in 1377. Throughout Machaut's lifetime he composed many major musical works and narrative poems. Machaut became the leading composer of de Vitry's style of French Ars Nova. He was the first composer to arrange his works during his lifetime. Machaut also discussed his working methods, which was uncommon at the time. He personally paid for the preparation of several manuscripts of his works. Machaut would begin writing the poem then later adding music to it. Machaut wrote that he was happiest in life when the music was sweet and pleasant to the ear. One of Machauts pieces included the *Messe de Notre Dame* which translates to Mass of our Lady.

Messe de Notre Dame was composed by one composer and was one of the earliest polyphonic settings of the Mass Ordinary. *Missa de Notre Dame* was celebrated every Saturday and performed at the Mass for the Virgin Mary. During the *Missa de Notre Dame* in the Introit it begins on a chant which we would normally hear, but changes in the Kyrie. Beginningin the Kyrie were polyphony was used as we began to hear four different voice parts. Each part had their own melody but were singing either the same or similar text. Before polyphony was used, the Mass was made up of primarily chants in unison. After Machaut's death, an oration for Machaut's soul was added to the service.

The article " Britannica" states, " The Ars Nova technique of isorhythm (repeated overlapping of a rhythmic pattern in varying melodic forms) is an employed characteristic of Machaut's writing". It continued to be performed until about the fifteenth century. This Mass included recurring motives. The tonal focus during the first three movements was on D and on F in the last three. All six movements were for four voices, this included a contratenor which moved against the tenor but in the same range.

Machaut was one of the main composers who dealt with polyphonic songs. Form fixes, French poetic forms, had an upbringing during Ars Nova. Chansons, French songs, became known as ballade, rondeau and virelai. All of these consisted of complex patterns of repeated verses and refrain in two main sections.

Ballade was a three-stanza refrain with the last line of the stanza acting as the refrain. The stanzas were typically three to eight lines and the rhyme scheme went ababbcbC. Rondeau or Rondel involved an alternating singing of the refrain elements by a group and the other lines by a soloist. The verses, sometimes rhyming with the refrain Schematically. The rhyme schemes went AB aAab AB where " A" and " B" were the repeated refrain parts and " a" and " b" were the verses. Lastly, the Virelai was the most common verse forms set to music. This included three stanzas with a refrain before and after each with each stanza in Bar form with a rhyming scheme AbbaA. This was typically written three to five lines per stanza.

More polyphonic songs were born giving ideas into new forms and new musical rules and sounds which were unique to the ear during this era.

Polyphonic song, chansons, and songs also included Cantus, Ritornello and Caccia. Cantus was the act of singing songs and drinking beer. Such songs and groups that participated were found in many languages such as Dutch, French, German, English, Latin, and Afrikaans. Ritornello was the final lines of a madrigal. This was usually in a rhyme scheme and meter that contrasted with the rest of the song. Caccia was a part of a song in canon from portraying the hunt of village scenes. It usually employed sounds such as the cries of beggars and vendors to the sounds of dogs barking. This was a song that included sounds that we would normally be heard on the streets.

Ars Subtilior, translated " Subtle Art", composers across southern Italy at the court of the Avignon pope, cultivated complex secular music. Form fixes of both double and triple meter using coloration was a continuation of Ars Nova transitions in polyphony songs. Pieces were notated in over imaginative shapes and love songs intended for an elite audience included as well in Ars Subtilior. Voices were in contrasting meters and conflicting groupings. Rhythmic intricacy was not known again until the twentieth century. Harmonies were purposely buried through rhythmic division. McComb states, " The Ars Subtilior was a shift of practice. Some of Machaut's late songs could be described as Ars Subtilior in style. There was a thread of personal continuity which may have been analogous to e. g. Beethoven and the beginning of the Romantic movement".

Lastly, composer Francesco Landini, was born 1325 and passed in 1397. He was an Italian composer, singer, poet, organist, and instrument maker. Landini was blinded during his childhood from smallpox. He devoted his life to music and mastered many instruments, singing, and writing poetry as well

as composition. Landini worked as an organist at the Florentine monastery of Santa Trinita in 1361. Landini was known for moving an audience. His music was so powerful that writers commented on the sweetness of his melodies more than anything else.

Landini's foremost exponent of the Italian Trecento style, sometimes called the Italian Ars Nova, most of his surviving works were purely secular. His works included 89 ballate for two voices, 42 ballate for three voices, nine in both two and three voice versions and several madrigals. Ballata's were simply songs with dance in them. Almost all his works were preserved in the Squarcialupi Codex, a collection of works, which represents almost a quarter of all surviving 14 [th] century Italian music.

The Landini Cadence was a formula where the sixth degree of the scale was inserted between the leading note and its resolution on the tonic. This was not original nor unique to Landini, but he was the only one who used it consistently throughout his music. Schulter stated, " The Landini cadence is a more generally pervasive in the music of the 14 [th] century. It is described in its most characteristic form as a variation of the harmonic progression in which unstable sixths expand to a stable octave".

Musica ficts is a term used to describe pitches. These are pitches that were slightly higher or lowered and out of the ordinary of the system being used at this time. Musica ficta could either be notated or added to the performance later. Musica ficta was used outside of the system of " correct" or " true" music as defined by the hexachord system of Guido of Arezzo. This was the lifting or lowering of a pitch known today as sharps of flats. Double

leading-tone Cadence was another name for a type of Landini Cadence. Phrygian cadence was another variation for the Landini cadence when a half cadence ending on the fifth had the upper part moving to the sixth degree just before the final note.

Musical rules were being developed during the Medieval and Renaissance Era. Beginning in the Medieval Era with single line chant, church music was predominated, the troubadours as well as church modes. In response to single line chant, Ars Nova resulted in a lot of experimenting with sounds, forms, poems, writings, and even art. Composers of this time were beginning to find out what sounds, out of the norm, would complement another. They would also create some basic rules for music which would soon become rules developed during the Baroque Era.

During the Renaissance Era, when polyphony was developed, there became a separation of sacred and secular music. Both were tolerated. Polyphony consisted of two or more melodic lines, independent of each other, but still pleasing to the ear in imitative counterpoint. During the Renaissance Era in Ars Nova composers began to experiment and more and more became tolerant of hearing multiple sounds as well as different sounds.

Many different forms were developed during this time as well as many composers who each brought their unique sound and forms to the table. Beginning with Phillippe de Vitry, he introduced isorhythm, which was the color melody with talea rhythm on the bottom; and the idea of using a rhythm that repeated over and over. Vitry introduced to us Hocket and

Contratenor. Voices which were being heard and the layering of parts (polyphony) was born.

Machaut introduced form fixes and all the different types of Chanson, from Virelai to Ballade to Ritornello to Caccia. Some of these songs were introduced to us including the sounds that we wouldn't normally hear in musical setting but rather on a normal day to day basis on the streets. Sounds such as dogs barking or a beggar on the streets.

Finally, Landini brought us Cadences. A formula where the sixth degree of the scale was inserted between the leading note and its resolution on the tonic. Although, this wasn't necessarily unique to Landini himself, he used it quite regularly in his works.

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