

Vocal development throughout the renaissance, classical, and baroque periods assi...

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The development of vocal music is a wide spread journey, filled with many changes and branching off of core ideals. In order to understand the origins of the music we listen to today, we must understand the past, and how music has developed. Three periods vital to the development of vocal music includes the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Baroque era. The music of the Middle ages was very religious. According to Music: The Art of Listening, the only type of music that was even recognized that the time was sacred church music .

Vocal music in the Medieval period was characterized mainly by chanting religious texts to simple melodies. For example, the Gregorian chant was usually sung a capella in unison, with a monophonic melody. During this age, women were not allowed to sing publicly. It was felt that the place of women should be in the home, and women could informally sing there, but not in the church. Women still, however, still engaged in chants, as seen with famous female composer Hildegard of Bingen. Influenced by the Gregorian chant, she moved in a different direction, still chanting, but expanding the vocal range of the chant.

This form of expressive chant allowed her compositions to be more powerful, and, in a sense, supernatural and ethereal. Another genre of medieval music was the English round. During the Middle Ages, polyphony, a composition that involves more than one line simultaneously became more prevalent in the works of many. One of the most common characteristics of an English round is canon. A canon consists of voices singing the same melody, but entering at different times, such as is seen in “ Row Your Boat”.

Medieval Mass music was another significant genre that came out of the Middle Ages. Many composers of this time period began to set religious texts to music. Guillaume de Machaut was the first composer to create a composition for all five parts of the Ordinary of the Mass. This Ordinary of the Mass is the part of the Mass that never changes, and includes Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. The Renaissance was a period of flourishing, as many began to move away from the Middle/Medieval ages.

The Middle Ages mainly consisted of vocal music that was very religious; music that was used to emphasize religious texts, and not appreciated for the compositions themselves. The Renaissance moved to change that. The Renaissance was also known as the “Golden Age of Polyphony” which, unlike the Middle Ages did not consist of much linear polyphony, but rather each voice being of equal importance. There were two main types of music heard during the Renaissance: sacred music, and secular music. Sacred music of the Renaissance consisted of motets, chorales, and psalm tunes.

The Protestant Reformation, led by Martin Luther, strived to involve the people of the church in the worship services more. Martin Luther felt as though if sung in Latin, a lot of these hymns would never fully have an impact on the people of the church. As a result, he composed what is known today as a Lutheran Chorale. Here, parts of the service were still sung in Latin, but a great number of parts were performed in the vernacular. Another great influence on the Protestant Reformation was John Calvin, who felt that Latin should be completely eliminated from Mass.

He started a genre that was made up of psalm tunes sung only in the vernacular. Both genres contained homophonic textures. In order to combat the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church began what was known as the Counter-Reformation. Renaissance motets are religious pieces containing great amounts of imitative polyphony as well as word painting, or using the music to paint a picture of the words being sung. The leader in using this style of imitative polyphony was Josquin Desprez, even though the most well renowned composer of this time was Giovanni Pierluigi Da Palestrina.

Palestrina adapted the techniques of imitative polyphony and word painting in his Renaissance Mass Movement. Though he was more constrained in his compositions, he made the compositions easy to understand, and beautiful in the simplicity. He was the most known for his work during the Counter-Reformation as he remained within reasonable boundaries, yet adapted the style of Josquin Desprez and made his compositions more expressive and easy to understand, whether one is educated or not. Secular music was also an immense part of Renaissance vocal music.

While an emphasis on religious music remained present, more and more composers began to steer away from it, creating pieces made solely for entertainment. One of the kinds of songs that came about because of this change was the madrigal. Though it shared many similarities with the Renaissance motet, such as its polyphonic texture, the differences were incredibly apparent. Unlike a Renaissance motet, which was religious, sung in Latin, and conservative, the madrigal was performed in vernacular, secular in its text, and dramatic in its expressive style .

There were enormous amounts of dramatic word painting, as many composers and performers used the madrigal to depict a variety of emotions. English madrigals, especially, were festive, humorous, and not as serious as the Renaissance motets seen in the sacred music of the Renaissance. Another interesting and important aspect of secular music is the role of women. Women composers and performers were looked down upon in times before these. During the Middle Ages, and even with the sacred music of the Renaissance, it was felt that their place was in the home, not performing.

Now, women sang in a variety of ensembles publicly. As the world moved away from sacred church music, and renaissance music, it moved toward a new movement called the Baroque era. Secular renaissance music called for more light-hearted, humorous, and emotional music. The Baroque period took those notions and dramatically exaggerated them, creating vocal music that was extremely dramatic and expressive of one's personal thoughts and feelings. Homophony and polychoral music became significant defining characteristics of the Baroque era.

Homophony was of great importance to the composers of Florence, who, in essence, wanted the text of their compositions to speak for itself.

Instrumental chords and works accompanied their compositions, but were never really that important as the words sung. Venetian music consisted of polychoral music, or: "music by several spatially separated choirs of voices and/or instruments". In essence, there were at least two choirs, whether vocal or instrumental, that performed at the same time. Also, Venetian

composers, “ contrasted sonorities of various voices and instruments of large and small ensembles” .

Furthermore, during the Baroque era, instrumental music became more significant to music, as can be seen with the development of dynamic by famous composer Giovanni Gabrieli. In his most famous work *Sonata piano e forte*, he uses the Venetian style of music, with two choirs, one to show the softer dynamic, and one to show the louder dynamic. These two choirs were separated spatially, but they joined together and certain times, which is something commonly done during the Baroque era. Harmony also became an important part of the Baroque era. Until this period, there were two modes, major and minor scales.

During the Baroque era, a tonal system was put into place, one that we still use today. In this system, every note on each of these scales is related to every other note, and the pitches are closely related. Harmony was seen very clearly in the works of the composers of Florence. In these works, there was a melody, and the voices sung in harmony with that melody. Overall, vocal music changed a lot from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance to the Baroque era. From being only used for sacred church purposes and worship in medieval music, vocal music developed to be more complex and diverse.

During the Renaissance music, some composers began to move away from the strictly religious music, while others adapted the new changes into their religious works. By the beginning of the Baroque era, many composers became more dramatic and expressive in their work, most of it being composed for entertainment purposes rather than religious. From simple

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monophonic textures and chants to homophonic textures and songs, these time period have been essential in the development of the music we listen to, even today.