

Listening log: music in the middle ages and renaissance essay

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When thinking of the time slot on which two extremes meet to produce the most fascinating art, the Middle Ages and Renaissance come to mind first. While the music that was inspired by the ideas of the Middle Ages was “prim and proper,” almost stiff, the music of the Renaissance blew one’s spirit away with its grandeur (Wright 48); yet both cross at certain point, making it obvious that one followed another, which makes it worth considering some of the Renaissance and Middle Ages music closer.

The first musical piece to start with, *O Rubor Sanguinis* by Hildegard von Bingen, is the exact representation of the time when the church had absolute power over people – with the lyrics in Latin, the bass line ostinato that reminds of the martyrdom, and the crystal-clear voice that rings of heavenly bliss.

Another peculiar piece of music that is worth considering closer as a specimen of the Middle Ages and Renaissance art is Guillaume de Machaut’s *Messe de Nostre Dame*. Solemn and slow, it seems a much more serious work that offers the audience a much darker travel into the depth of the spiritual world, which is rather characteristic of France of the Middle Ages.

It is much longer than the previously discussed work; containing five parts, i. e., Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus and Angus Dei, it somewhat reminds of a story, with a beginning, an outset, a denouement, a climax and an end. Like *O Rubor Sanguinis*, *Messe de Nostre Dame* is also performed in Latin, which truly is a mark of its time and morals.

The third musical piece, Ave Maria by Prez, might seem very similar to the Messe de Nostre Dame, mostly due to the fact that the song is performed in soprano and countertenor. The high-pitched voices of the singers make it sound like a church choir; however, there are certain differences between the works mentioned above and the given artwork.

To start with, Ave Maria is often referred to as a motet. The above-mentioned fact predetermines the overall tone of the melody – with the uplifting notes and a very high-pitched voice of the singer, Ave Maria is performed a cappella, which is alone very impressive. Sounding so clear that it feels like a choir of angels singing, it makes one feel the shivers of delight running down the spine.

Finally, Palestrina's Pope Marcellus Mass should be discussed. Sung a cappella by a choir of male and female performers, Pope Marcellus Mass, like the rest of the songs on the list, was written to be performed in a church, since in Middle Ages and Renaissance, church had great power over the population of most of the European continent, as it has been stated above.

Offering a truly inspirational experience, the given composition helps one see the Middle Ages and the Renaissance in the smallest detail. However, it is worth noting that the choir that is usually supposed to help the audience hear the entire palette of sounds and tell a story sounds a bit messy; it seems as if Palestrina tried to incorporate too many ideas in his swan song. A composition that offers a real spiritual journey, Pope Marcellus Mass is a true representation of the Middle Ages and renaissance.

Bingen, Hildegard von. O Rubor Sanguinis/Favius Distillans [Sequentia]. 5 Sep. 2012. Web.

Machaut, Guillaume de. Messe de Nostre Dame. 26 Nov. 2012. Web.

Palestrina, Giovanni Pierluigi. Pope Marcellus Mass. 17 Nov. 2008. Web.

Prez, Josquin des. Ave Maria. 7 Jul. 2008. Web.

Wright, Craig. The Essential Listening to Music [With Access Code]. Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2010. Print.