

Music of the middle ages history essay



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In English History, the Middle Ages were the middle period between the decline of the Roman Empire and the Renaissance. The Middle Ages had the other appellations, which were Dark Ages and Medieval era. Generally, the Middle Ages began when the Roman Empire fell, which were about the years between 1066-1485. The empire was too large, thus there were two emperors who ruled during the Middle Ages, which were Constantinople and Rome.

Historically speaking, there were three classes of people during the Middle Ages – the first class was the nobility, such as kings, princes, and wealthy. The second class consisted of the clergy, which were the priests who worked in the church and monks who lived in monasteries. The third class was included the rest of the people, such as farmers and peasants.

During Middle Ages, feudal system took place, which means the upper nobility class maintained control over the lower classes. The conquerors used the concept of feudalism to reward their followers for help in the conquest of their countries. Everyone owed allegiance to the King and their immediate superior as they lived under the Feudalism. Furthermore, everyone was apprehended to pay for the land by providing some services, which we called taxes nowadays, such as completing any chores required, providing trained soldiers to fight for king and providing equipment such as clothes and weapons for the soldiers.

Generally, wealth, power and status, and the feudal system controlled the daily life in the Middle ages. In the most cases, upper classes had more rights and privileges compared to the lower classes. Conventionally, the

nobles one was in the upper class. Their daily life would start at dawn. They had to pray and have breakfast as first meal. They had to attend to the reports, complaints and disputes regarding the tenants' issues, political discussions and decisions. They would enjoy some arts such as poetry and music at their break time. After that, they will have weapon practise. After meal, they went for hunting, hawking or inspecting estate. After supper, they will spend time on entertainments, such as music, dancing, jugglers, acrobats, jesters. Nevertheless, the bedtime of the nobles were depended on their own tiredness. In spite of that, the Noblewoman in the middles ages also followed the similar schedule as her lord. However, the noblewoman didn't participate in any of the conference of her lord; she only had discussion on tournaments, betrothals, marriages, poetry and courtly love. A noblewoman is in charge of overseeing the education of the upper class girls who had sent to their households. A noblewoman also had the responsible to accompany their husbands whenever they go. If her husband has other duty and absent in the house, she would be expected to be in charge of the finances of the manor to collect the rents. Leisure time for noblewoman was spent on embroidery and dance practise.

The daily life of a knight also followed a similar routine as the nobles. Most of the time of knight spent on practising his weapons skills and maintained his body stamina. They might include in the discussion with lord on warfare strategy. Nonetheless, there were more refined and elegant culture progressed during the Middle Ages, thus, knights were anticipated to the rules of Chivalry and courtly love. They had to spend some time on dancing practise. Furthermore, it was important for a knight to be able to play the

musical instrument also. In order to increase their horsemanship skill, they will accompany their lord in hunting, hawking or inspecting the estate.

Consequently, lower class was the peasant. As the history stated, the daily of a peasant in the Middle Ages was hard and unpleasant. They had to work as a labour for the lord for two to three days each week, especially the busy seasons such as ploughing and harvesting. They started their day as early as three o'clock early in the morning. During the dawn, they worked in the fields to reap, sow, plough, bind, thatch, haymaking, thresh and hedge. Working hours for them will extend during the summer times. By the way, they made their own tools and utensils by using wood, leather, and the horns from animals. Notwithstanding, the lower class women were expected to help their husbands with daily works, such as cooking, cleaning, washing, tending the vegetables plot, collecting berries and herbs, and taking care of children.

Subsequently, there were few predominant festivals that celebrated by the people during the Middle Ages, such as Christmas, Easter and May Day. Other than that, they did not work on Sunday and had roughly eight weeks holidays in every year. They had entertainments such as games, hunting, hawking and animals entertaining also common in that era. However, the types of entertainment varied according to the classes of the person. Upper classes usually organise feasts, banquets, jousts and tournaments. Nonetheless, there were several games can be played by both of the Upper classes and the lower classes or by adults and children, including board games, dice games, card games and sporting games whereas for outdoor activities included archery, bowls, early golf, wrestling and so on.

Furthermore, entertainers such as Jesters, Mummers, Minstrels and Troubadours, acrobats, jugglers and conjurers also widespread and well-known during the Middle Ages.

In the early Middle Ages, the artists mostly consisted of monks and priests who were based in monasteries. However, we can see the flourishing and enhancement of Gothic Art in the Middle Ages which were mastered by the great artists. Initially, the art of Middle Ages influenced by the Byzantine art style, however, the artists broke away the influences and developed the Gothic and Middle Ages visual art. Generally, the Middle Ages artists, sculptors and painters brought a significant impact to the Renaissance art style also. There will be a brief introduction to the famous Middle Ages artists: Lorenzo Ghiberti, a famous sculptor and painter; Donatello, greatly occupied with statuary work which was held in high regard by the Romans; Giotto di Bondone, an architect, sculptor and painter; Cimabue, last great painter of Byzantine style; Filippo Brunelleschi, architect, sculptor and architect; Fra Angelico, a Florentine artist who specialised in religious painting.

Music of the Middle Ages

Western music started to cultivate about 500 to 1400 A. D. in Europe because of the development of social and religious aspects. During the Middle Ages, the Church had become the significant impact of social life, learning, and the arts. Sacred music was the most predominant because of the domination of the early Catholic Church in the period of 12th to 13th centuries. During 590-604, Gregorian Chant had developed as plain chant.

During 695, organum developed as an early form of counter point. Between 1150-1250, the Notre Dame School of polyphony started the rhythmic notation.

Consequently, Secular music flourished by the earliest form of music, which was Gregorian Chants. The term “ Gregorian” originated from Pope Gregory I (reigned 590-604). He codified the musical notation of Gregorian Chant during the sixth-century. Meanwhile, Gregorian Chant was easily affiliated as sacred music by the Christian Church. Sooner, it became as the fundamental part of Christian worship. Nevertheless, Gregorian Chant is monophonic, which the music only composed by single melodic without any accompaniment or harmonic support. Practically, Gregorian chant has no meter at all. However, it does have a rhythm of groups of 2 or 3 notes, more flexible in rhythm. Additionally, it has a unique scale structure as it is written on a stage of four lines, and it is vocal music as it can be sung. By the way, the Gregorian Chant is a modal music which is written in scales of very particular sounds, which serve to express varied feelings, such as happiness, withdrawal, sadness and serenity.

Historically, Christianity had become the only recognised religion during the Middle Ages, in the form of Catholic religion. Thus, sacred music had been presented as a music that played during the services and rituals of the Catholic Church. Sacred music or Secular music was widely influenced during the Middle Ages. They were as popular as our pop music today. Besides being religious used in church, secular music also included different types, such as love songs, political satire, dances and dramatically works. For most of the part, the monophonic secular song was accompanied by instruments

and singers. The pieces of secular music have regular meter and clearly defines beat although there are no indication of rhythm. It generally brought out the themes of chivalry and courtly love. At that time, secular music prospered in the hands of the few well-known French composers or musicians, French trouveres and troubadours.

On the other hand, Organum commenced as a way to decorate chant around 9th to 11st century. It was the beginning of the different types of early polyphony where polyphony is the concept of more than one single melodic line at a time. It generally known as a creative work harmonized against melodies of Greogorian Chant. The monophonic chant worked as basic of the building structure for organum. The initial chant of the piece known as the cantus firmus. The melody movement became slower and ronlike when the notes are harmonized against singles notes from the cantus firmus. Thus, there will be some difficulties to recognize it. Furthermore, it originally written in parallel motion, therefore the voices can remain at a constant interval. Organum implied the style of singing sacred melody into parts 4 or 5 notes apart. There are few types of organum, such as the parallel organum, converging parallel organum, melismatic organum and free organum.

The Notre Dame School is a style of writing organum developed by composers at the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris. The Notre Dame School known as the earliest surviving polyphony that is composed and read from notation and contains more than two voices. Thus, it generally became the center for polyphonic music in Paris. There were two famous composers came from this school, which were Leonin and his student Perotin. Leonin

was credited with compiling the *Magnus Liber Organi* which means The Great Book of Polyphony. He used all styles of Organum, especially the descent organum where the chant is not melismatic. He also changed the organum style. Meanwhile, Perotin wrote Organum Duplum, triplum, and quadruplum. He used techniques such as voice exchange where voices trade phrases. His pieces were longer and grander than Leonin's pieces, but they both served the same purpose. They created a clearly defined meter with the measure rhythm with definite time values. Initially, the compositions were having the fixed meter, but after that, most of them were subdivided into three beats per bar.

Likewise, there were so many musical instruments that can play during the Middle Ages. Generally, the musical instruments divided into three categories, which were wind, stringed and percussion musical instruments. There were harp, fiddle, rebec, psaltery, dulcimer, hurdy-gurdy and viol in the stringed musical instruments. Moreover, for wind musical instruments, they had flute, trumpet, pipe, shawn, recorder, bagpipe, crumhorn, gemshorn, and lizard (an s-shaped horn). Also, drum, cymbal, triangle and tambourine can be seen in the percussion musical instruments.

On the whole, we can see the evolution of music throughout the Middle Ages. Initially, monophonic had been presented then evolved to simple polyphony. Simple polyphony has the characteristic where the the melody is harmonized in straight 4th and 5th intervals. After that, Complex polyphony was flourished with different intervals against the melody. Then, it amplified into more complex polyphony with differing rhythm, melody and harmonized melody almost independent. In other respects, composers of Renaissance

polyphony frequently used the plainchant melodies of Gregorian chant as the foundation for their sacred works. We can see the evolution of Gregorian chant to Renaissance developed gradually. Along with the evolution of Gregorian Chant, secular music also had been modified in the later Renaissance. Secular music in the Middle Ages was played with instruments, whereas the instrumental dance music did not come into the later Renaissance. Additionally, the Notre Dame also evolved after five centuries, the music was slowly supplanted by the smoother contours of the polyphonic music, which is generally known as the Ars Nova.

During the Middle Ages, there were numerous prominent musicians: Hildegard von Bingen, the earliest female composer, she wrote the earliest known musical drama entitled “The Ritual of the Virtues.”; Moniot d’Arras, a composer and troubadour who wrote sacred monophonic songs, his famous piece is “Ce fut en mai.”; Guillaume de Machaut, an avant garde composer, representative piece is “Messe de Notre Dame”; Leonel Power, prominent composers of the 15th century, famous piece is “Alma redemptoris mater”; John Dunstable, an English composer, wrote sacred pieces and secular songs; Gilles Binchois, an organist at Mons Cathedral, wrote church music, secular chansons and motets, notable piece is “Triste plaisir”; Perotinus Magister, a French composer, wrote organum, first composer to use polyphony in his works; Guido de Arezzo, a composer, music theorist, teacher, choirmaster and monk, famous works are *Micrologus de disciplina artis musicae*, *Ut queant laxis* and *Micrologus*.