# Music Appreciation - Chapter 2
# Ars Nova to Early Renaissance

French and Italian Music In The Fourteenth Century

I. General Background

A. The Church's Declining Authority
The 14th century was an unstable and secular age. The authority of the Church was undermined by the exile of the pope to Avignon (1305-78) and a schism between rival popes (1378-1417). Human reason became an authority in its own sphere, independent of church control.

B. Social Conditions
The growth of cities, great plague (1348-50), the Hundred Years' War (1338-1453), and political changes challenged the old order. Great literary works by Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Chaucer appeared in vernacular languages, and humanism renewed the influence of Greek and Latin literature on Western culture.

C. Musical Background
Philippe de Vitry (1291-1361) helped to develop a new style that used duple as well as triple divisions of the long and breve and notes shorter than the semibreve. This style, known as the Ars nova ("new art" or "new technique"), became the reigning style in France until late in the I 4th century.

II. The Ars Nova in France

A. The Roman de Fauvel and Vitry

The Roman de Fauvel (1310-14) is a satirical poem with interpolated music, including 34 motets. By this time, motet texts were usually secular and often referred to contemporary events. Five three-part motets in this work are by Vitry, considered the outstanding French poet and composer of the early 14th century. The motets of Vitry and other 14th-century composers use isorhythm (same rhythm).

B. The Isorhythmic Motet
The tenor in an isorhythmic motet is composed of a repeating series of pitches, called the color, and a repeating rhythmic pattern, called the talea. These are joined in varying ways:

one may be longer than the other; their endings may coincide or overlap; when the color repeats, the talea may appear in diminished durations. Upper voices may also be isorhythmic in whole or in part, if they feature repeating rhythmic patterns coordinated with repetitions in the tenor. Isorhythm gave unity and form to motets, even when the structure was not fully audible.

C. Guillaume de Machaut
The leading poet and composer of 14th-century France was Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300-1377). His isorhythmic motets are longer and more complex than Vitry's and frequently use hocket.

D. Machaut's Secular Works
Machaut wrote many secular songs: 19 monophonic and polyphonic lads, 25 monophonic and 8 polyphonic virelais, 22 polyphonic rondeaux, and 42 polyphonic ballades. The virelai, rondeau, and ballade are called formes fixes (fixed forms); each one features a particular pattern of rhymes and repeating lines of poetry called refrains, and the rhymes and refrains are coordinated with repeating segments of music.

1. The virelai has the form AbbaA, in which A is the refrain and both A and a use the same music. The b section often has open and closed endings.

2. The ballade has the form aabC and usually has three or four stanzas, each ending with the same line of text (C). Musically, the endings of the a section and the C section may be similar or identical. Ballades with two texted voices are called double ballades.

3. The rondeau has the form ABaAabAB, with a refrain in two parts (A and B), the first repeating in the middle of the stanza. The stanza uses the same two sections of music as the refrain, a and b, but with different words. The polyphonic songs are for one or two singers and instruments. Unlike the motet, in which the tenor was written first, in the secular songs the voice part is the principal line and was written first. This treble-dominated style of a

voice and instrumental accompaniment is called cantilena style.

## E. Machaut's Mass

The most famous musical work of the 14th century is Machaut's Messe de Notre Dame (Mass of Our Lady), a four-part setting of the Mass Ordinary. The Gloria and Credo are syllabic, with all four voices declaiming the text together, and end with isorhythmic Amens. The other movements are isorhythmic, often including isorhythm in all or most voices, and their tenors are drawn from plainchant melodies for the same texts from the Ordinary of the Mass. (The Mass was written or compiled cat 1364 as a Mass to the Virgin Mary to be performed nearly weekly at an altar in the Rheims cathedral, where Machaut was a canon.)

## F. Sacred Polyphony in the 14th Century

The secularization of 14th-century society led to a decline in the composition of liturgical works in France and Italy, and church criticism of complex and virtuosic music further discouraged composition of sacred polyphony, especially in Italy.

## III. Italian Trecento Music

## A. The Trecento

In Italian, the 14th century is referred to as the Trecento (tray-CHEN-toe), after the Italian formula for dates, 1350 being spoken as "mille trecento cinquanta" (thousand three hundred fifty). Most Italian music of the time was monophonic and unwritten, and most church polyphony was improvised. Secular polyphony was cultivated among the elite in certain cities in northern Italy, especially Florence, where the Squarcialupi Codex, the most important manuscript of 14th-century Italian music, was copied.

## B. The Madrigal

The 14th-century madrigal (not to be confused with the 16th-century form) is a work for two voices without instrumental accompaniment. It uses a poem of two or three three-line stanzas followed by a couplet. The stanzas are all set to the same music, while the closing couplet, called the ritornello, is set to new music in a different meter

## C. The Caccia

The caccia, a mid-14th-century form, features two voices in canon at the unison over a free instrumental part. The texts were often about hunting or other action scenes, with the appropriate sounds imitated in the music.

## D. The Ballata

The ballata evolved from monophonic dance songs with choral refrains (from "ballare," to dance). The polyphonic ballata of the late 14th century was a lyrical piece whose form resembles the French virelai (AbbaA).

## E. Francesco Landini

Francesco Landini (ca. 1325-1397) was the most important Italian composer of the 14th century. He is best known for his ballate, and wrote no sacred works. In a ballata, a three-line ripresa or refrain (A) precedes and follows a seven-line stanza. The stanza's first two pairs of lines, called pied), present a new phrase (b), repeated with open and closed endings, and the last three lines, the volta, are set to the music of the refrain (a), for an overall form of AbbaA. Landini has lent his name to the Landini cadence, in which the usual cadence formula of a sixth expanding to an octave between cantus and tenor is decorated by the upper voice descending a step before resolving to the octave

## F. Performance

The superius (top part) of a secular song is vocally conceived, while the tenor and often the contratenor (third part, filling out the harmony) appear to have been intended for instrumental performance. However, any part could be sung or played or shared between voice and instrument. Vocal pieces were sometimes played by instruments, with embellishments added to the vocal line, and some instrumental versions were written down.

## IV. FRENCH MUSIC OF THE LATE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

## A. Late Fourteenth-Century French Secular Music

In the late 14th century, many French and Italian composers were active at courts in southern France. They wrote mainly French

secular song, using the formes fixes, in a style that was both refined and complex.

B. Rhythm
Rhythm in this style was especially complex, with subdivisions, syncopations, hocket, and different meters in different voices. Because of the technical complications, this style has been called the Ars subtilior (the subtler manner). This sophisticated style, intended for the most cultivated listeners and the most practiced performers, began to wane by the end of the 14th century. Partial signatures, in which the voices have different signatures (most often, the lower voice or voices have a signature of one flat while the others do not), were often used throughout the 14th and 15th centuries.

V. Musica Ficta
Performers in the 14th century often altered notes chromatically, particularly at cadences. The practice of altering notes chromatically in performance is called musica ficta. Modern editors often suggest where musica ficta should be supplied by indicating accidentals above or below the affected notes.

VI. Instruments
Music manuscripts of the 14th century do not specify which parts are vocal and which are instrumental, for each piece could be performed in a variety of ways. Polyphonic music was probably most often performed with one voice or instrument on a part, usually featuring a variety of instruments rather than instruments from a single family. Instruments were classified as relatively loud (haut or "high") or soft (teas or "low"). Loud instruments such as shawms, cornetts (wooden instruments with cup mouthpiece and fingerholes), slide trumpets, and sackbuts (predecessors of the trombone) were often used outdoors; soft instruments such as the harp, vielle, lute, psaltery, portative organ, transverse flute, and recorder were used indoors, and percussion was used in both environments.

VII. Summary

The 14th century is characterized by an emphasis on secular music; greater diversity and complexity in rhythm; a growing sense of harmonic organization; more use of imperfect consonances; musica ficta; cantilena style; the continuation of the motet as a secular genre; and new genres of secular polyphony.

ENGLAND AND THE BURGUNDIAN LANDS IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

I. English Music English music made important contributions to the development of an international style in the first half of the 15th century. The cantilena style began to be used in some motets and Masses as well as in secular music.

A. General Features
Medieval English music favored the major mode, homophony, fullness of sound, and much use of parallel thirds and sixths. Works of the Notre Dame school were known in Britain, and British composers of the 13th century wrote conductus and motets that use similar procedures.

Fourteenth Century

The main surviving sources of 14th-century English music are fragmentary manuscripts from Worcester Cathedral, containing works for the Mass, motets, and conductus. The English cultivated forms that resemble rounds, such as the rota, a canon at the unison over a repeating bass, and the rondellus, in which voices in the same range exchange phrases to create an effect like a round.

A frequent occurrence in English music is parallel motion in thirds and sixths, such that the interval between the outer voices is a sixth and between the bottom and middle voice is a third, resolving to an octave and fifth respectively at cadences. This style could be improvised to a given melodic line; such improvised counterpoint was known as discanting, and this texture of parallel sixth and third chords is sometimes called English discant. The late-13th century English rules for discanting are the first to forbid parallel fifths and octaves, a rule for all subsequent counterpoint for the next six centuries.

C. Fauxbourdon
These parallel sixth-third streams of English music may have inspired the Continental technique of fauxbourdon, prominent cat 1420-50. A fauxbourdon is a piece in which two notated voices, usually a paraphrased chant

and the tenor below it, move mostly in parallel sixths, resolving to an octave at cadences, and a third unwritten part is sung a fourth below the superius, producing parallel thirds with the tenor. The same texture was often used in fully notated music. This led to a new style in which the principal melody was in the upper voice, the others moved in a similar rhythm and became almost equally important, and the music was suffused with imperfect consonances.

## D. The Old Hall Manuscript

The main source for early- 15th-century English music is the Old Hall manuscript. It includes motets, hymns, sequences, and Mass movements from cat 1370-1420, in styles ranging from isorhythm and cantilena style to cantus firmus settings on a plainchant melody. The influence of English style on Continental composers was celebrated in a poem of about 1440 that praised the "contenance angloise" (English guise) of "lively consonance."

## E. John Dunstable

John Dunstable (ca. 1385-1453) was the leading English composer of the first half of the 15th century. He served for a time in the English possessions in France, which helped bring his music to the Continent. He wrote in all the prevailing genres and styles of polyphony.

## F. Dunstable's Three-Part Sacred Works

Dunstable is best known for his three-voice sacred works. They use a variety of techniques, including a cantus firmus in the tenor, an ornamented chant melody in the treble, and free counterpoint not based on chant.

## G. The Carol

The 15th-century carol is a setting of a religious poem in English or Latin, often on the birth of Jesus, with a recurring burden or refrain and a series of verses. It evolved from an earlier form of carol, which was a monophonic dance song with a refrain.

## H. The Fifteenth-Century Motet

In the 15th century, the isorhythmic motet waned in popularity. The term motet came to be applied to a polyphonic setting of a Latin text other than part of the Mass Ordinary.

## II. Music in the Burgundian Lands

## A. The Dukes of Burgundy

The late 14th and the 15th centuries saw a great expansion in the size and power of the duchy of Burgundy, until the death of the last duke in 1477. The dukes maintained a chapel that included about two dozen musicians, and they also employed a number of instrumentalists for secular music. Their lavish patronage for music helped nurture musicians, so that most of the leading composers of the 15th and early 16th centuries came from their lands, mainly from modern-day Belgium and northeastern France. Musicians traveled with their patrons or moved to new positions in other regions, and their interactions with musicians from all over Europe led to the development of an international style that blended elements of French, Italian, and English styles.

## B. Dufay

Guillaume Dufay (c. 1400-1474) was educated at Cambrai in the duchy of Burgundy, served several patrons in Italy and Savoy in the 1420s and 1430s, returned to Cambrai, went back to Savoy in the 1450s, and finished his career at Cambrai, making him a truly international composer. He synthesized in his music aspects of all existing styles to create a cosmopolitan idiom.

The main genres of the period were Masses, Magnificats, motets, and secular chansons to French texts. The chansons continued the formes fixes and three-voice treble-dominated texture of the 14th century, but the melodic style was smoother and the harmony more consonant. Triple meter and compound meters were far more common than duple meter.

## C. The Burgundian Chanson

In the 15th century, chanson (song) was the term for any polyphonic setting of a French secular text. Most chansons were in the form of a rondeau. Music: NAWM 28

## D. Binchois

Cilles Binchois (c. 1400-1460) was the other major Burgundian composer of Dufay's generation. He was best known for his chansons.

## E. Burgundian Motets

Motets in this period were often written in the style of the chanson, with the main melody in

the treble. supported by the tenor, with the contratenor to fill out the harmony. The superius was often paraphrased from chant. This use of chant was quite different in concept from that of the 13th- and 14th-century motet, which used the chant melody as a harmonic basis rather than as the principal melody.

F. Masses
After about 1420, composers regularly set the five main texts of the Mass Ordinary (excluding the Ite missa est) as a musically unified polyphonic cycle, creating the genre of the polyphonic Mass.

1. Some Masses were unified simply by musical style.
2. A plainsong Mass based each movement on a plainchant for that text.
3. Musical means of unification involved using the same musical material in each movement. One early form was the motto Mass, in which each movement begins with the same music or motive, called a head motive or motto.
4. The most important form was the cantus firmus Mass or tenor Mass, which used the same cantus firmus in every movement. This form was developed by English composers and by 1450 became the predominant type of polyphonic Mass cycle throughout Europe. Cantus firmus Masses were often also unified by a head motive (but are still called cantus firmus Masses, not motto Masses).

The cantus firmus was usually placed in the tenor in long notes and treated in isorhythmic fashion. Below it was a contratenor bassus (low contratenor) or bassus (bass) to provide a harmonic foundation; above it was the contratenor altus (high contratenor) or altus (alto); the top part was called by a variety of names, including superius (highest part), cantus (melody), and discantus (discant). The cantus firmus could be taken from chant or from a secular song, and the Mass was named after the borrowed tune. One of the most frequently borrowed secular tunes was L'Homme arme' (The Armed Man). Dufay and others also wrote Masses based on tenors borrowed from polyphonic chansons.
Although cantus firmus Masses used learned devices (such as extensions of isorhythm), they conformed to the style that prevailed after 143O, with careful control of dissonance, emphasis on consonance, equal importance of voices, smoothness of melody, four-voice textures, and some use of imitation.

THE AGE OF THE RENAISSANCE: MUSIC OF THE LOW COUNTRIES

I. General Characteristics

A. Humanism
The Renaissance was not a musical style, but a period of history marked by the rediscovery and renewed influence of ancient Greek and Roman culture, led by the movement called humanism. Although no ancient music was known, many ancient writings on music were rediscovered during the 15th century. Ancient writers' descriptions of the emotional effects of music caused some in the Renaissance to criticize the lack of such effects in the music of their own time.

B. Words and Music
Humanism encouraged composers to pay increasing attention to the meaning, sound, form, and rhythm of the texts they set. Whereas text underlay had often been left to the singers, 16th-century composers sought to fix it precisely, for good accentuation. There was not one musical style in the Renaissance, but a general search for means to please the human senses and express human emotions.

C. Italy

Humanism and the arts thrived particularly in Italy, where rulers of small citystates and principalities sought to outdo each other in their patronage of literature and the arts. Many of the composers they employed were from France, Flanders, and the Netherlands, particularly from the former Burgundian lands. These composers were influenced by the simple popular music of Italy, and the combination of northern and Italian elements helped to produce the international style of the 16th century.

D. Music Printing
Johann Gutenberg developed the art of printing words from movable type in 1450, and by 1473 books of chant were being printed the same way. Ottaviano de' Petrucci (1466-1539) of Venice was the first to print polyphonic music from movable type, using three impressions (for the staff lines, for the notes, and for the

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text) to create beautiful and clear books. Pierre Attaingnant (ca. 1494-ca. 1551) of Paris was another well-known printer, who used a more complex type that allowed printing in a single impression. Most works were published as partbooks, one book for each voice or part (superius, altus, tenor, and bassus). Printing allowed wider distribution of music at a lower cost and less time spent recopying by hand, creating the first real market for music as a commodity.

E. Simultaneous Composition

In a style that demanded full harmony and careful treatment of dissonance, and especially when working with imitative counterpoint, it became difficult to keep to the old method of writing a complete superius or tenor, then adding the second part, then the bassus, and finally the altus. Instead, composers in the 16th century began to work out all the voices simultaneously, sometimes using a score to see all the parts at once. (This practice is known as simultaneous composition, in contrast to the successive composition of voices one after another in music of the 15th century and before.)

II. Northern Composers and Their Music

Most prominent composers in the period 1450-1550 came from France, Flanders, or the Netherlands. Many of them served at least some of their career in Italy.

A. Johannes Ockeghem
Johannes Ockeghem (ca. 1420-1497) was born in the north and spent most of his career in the service of the kings of France. He was famous as a composer and as a teacher of many of the leading composers of the next generation. He wrote 13 Masses, 10 motets, and about 20 chansons. He extended the range of the bassus down to low F, giving a fuller and darker sound, and all four voices tend to be equally active. His melodic lines are long and sinuous, with varied rhythms and many changes of direction as they wind to their goal. They often overlap to create a continuous flow with few pauses. Ockeghem creates contrasts of light and dark by varying the texture, setting some passages for only two or three voices and sometimes alternating between high and low pairs of voices.

B. Canon
Ockeghem seldom uses imitation in his Masses, but does use canon, which at this time meant a procedure for deriving more than one voice from a notated voice. His Missa prolationum uses mensuration canons, in which one notated line generates two voices through a different mensuration sign. Ockeghem's Missa cuiusvis toni (Mass in any mode) can be read in any of four clef combinations, each resulting in music in a different authentic mode. These arcane procedures demonstrated the composer's skill, but were often inaudible and did not interfere with the appealing surface of the music.
C. The Generation after Ockeghem
Many composers of the next generation were taught or influenced by Ockeghem. They worked in Italy as well as the north and blended Ockeghem's style of long-breathed overlapping melodies in intricate polyphony with the Italian style's less serious mood, simpler texture, greater interest in homophony, more distinct rhythms, and more frequent phrase articulations.

D. Jacob Obrecht
Jacob Obrecht (ca. 1452-1505) was trained in the Low Countries and worked there and in Italy. His works include 29 Masses, 28 motets, and numerous songs and instrumental works. His treatment of the cantus firmus in his Masses is quite varied and shows considerable originality. Like others of his generation, Obrecht uses imitative counterpoint frequently.

E. The Chanson
Composers of Ockeghem's generation introduced more imitation into the chanson, but continued to use the old formes fixes. Antoine Busnois (d. 1492) was one of the best-known chanson composers of the late 15th century. Some chansons were very popular, being recopied and published repeatedly. Chansons were freely altered, arranged, and transcribed for instruments, and either the superius or the tenor of a chanson could be borrowed to serve as a cantus firmus for a Mass.

F. The Odhecaton
The first volume of polyphonic music printed from movable type was the Harmonice musices odhecaton A, published by Petrucci in Venice in 1501. This was an anthology of chansons from

cat 1471500 in both older and newer styles. The newer style favored a four-voice texture instead of three voices; more imitation between the voices; greater equality of the voices; and a clearer harmonic structure. By the early 16th century, composers abandoned the formes fixes for more varied poetic and musical forms. They also began to conceive all voices simultaneously rather than one after another. Many chansons were settings of popular tunes, treating the borrowed tune like a cantus firmus or in paraphrase.

## III. Josquin des Prez

### A. Career
Josquin des Prez (ca. ]440-1521) was considered the best composer of his time and is one of the greatest of all time. He was born in north-central France and served patrons in Italy and France. His works, which include about 18 Masses, 100 motets, and 70 secular vocal works, were published and recopied more widely than any other composer of his day.

### B. Masses
Most of Josquin's Masses use a secular tune as a cantus firmus. One Mass uses a soggetto caYato to honor his patron, the duke of Ferrara. An imitation Mass (also called parody Mass) is based, not on a monophonic tune, but on all the parts of a polyphonic work. This is not a contrafactum (in which a new text replaces the original words, without changing the music). Rather, the entire polyphonic texture is reworked to create something new, and each movement of the Mass reworks the chanson or motet in a different way.

### C. Text Setting
Most manuscripts and printed books of the 15th and early 16th centuries do not specify precisely which syllables of the text go with which notes of the music. The influence of humanism and of Italian popular songs (which were mostly syllabic) led Josquin and others to match the music more carefully to the accents and rhythms of the words. One Italian technique was falsobordone, in which root-position triads harmonize a recitation formula in the upper voice; some of Josquin's early motets use a similar texture. Josquin was renowned for suiting the music to the text, and in his late motets sought to depict the meaning of the text as well.

### D. Musica Reservata

Some 16th-century writers use the term musica reservata for music that reflects the meaning and emotions of the words. Josquin may have originated this practice. His music may be the first to be expressive of the emotions suggested by its text. In a Josquin motet, each phrase of text receives its own musical figure, which is usually treated in a point of imitation, with the full four-voice texture reserved until the drive to the cadence at the end of a musical sentence.

### V. Summary
The international style of the early 16th century featured a four-voice texture with independent, singable lines of nearly equal importance, composed simultaneously rather than line by line around a cantus firmus. The Mass, motet, and chanson were the preferred genres, and all used phrases in imitation interspersed with homophonic textures.

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