



A R E B I R T H :  
M U S I C O F T H E  
R E N A I S S A N C E





## Chapter 6

# T H E M U S I C A L R E N A I S S A N C E

In the fifteenth and sixteenth century, we see great changes and advances in European culture, literature, art, and music. These changes, however, did not all take place simultaneously to form a singular new style; rather, the changes were constant, continually overlapping one another. More and more composers began taking positions outside of their native countries, leading to an internationalization of musical styles within compositions. A renewed interest in ancient Greek theory and ideals led to a stronger focus on the words of songs themselves: setting music with a proper declamation of the text and a consideration for the emotion and meaning of the text being set.

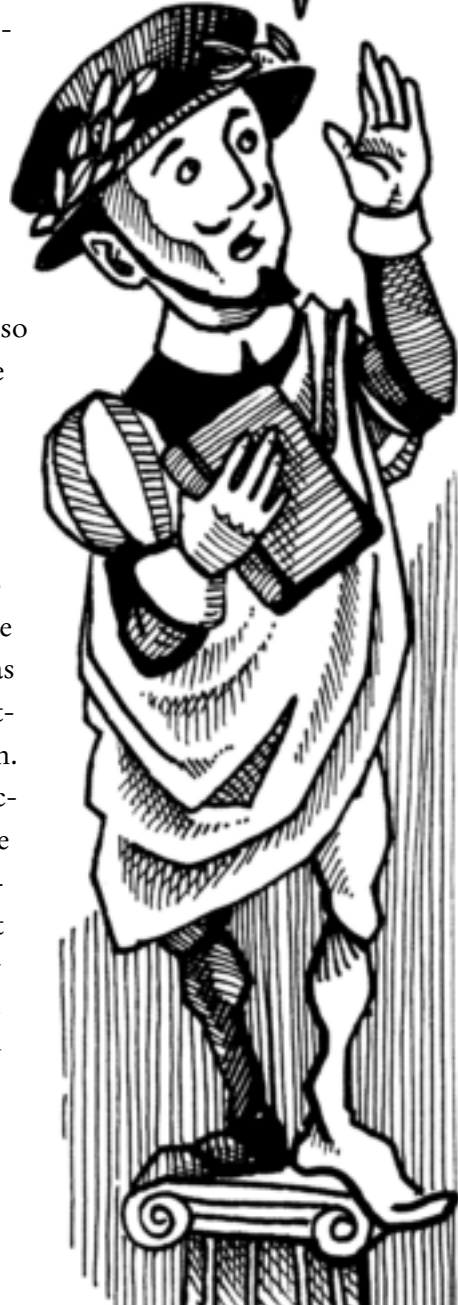
The humanist movement (the term comes from the Latin *studia humanitatis*, the study of the humanities) was by the single most influential intellectual movement of the Renaissance. **Humanism** was

## THE MUSICAL RENAISSANCE

a revival of ancient thought, philosophy, and learning, and the interest in the study of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and moral philosophy stemmed from the renewed interest in classical Latin and Greek writings. In art and music, artists also turned to classical models in their own artistic and musical creations, with beauty, structure, and naturalism being important influences. Humanism did not contradict or undermine the role and prominence of the Church; rather, humanism worked alongside Christian doctrine to bolster people's minds, spirits, and ethics so that they might lead lives of virtue and service.

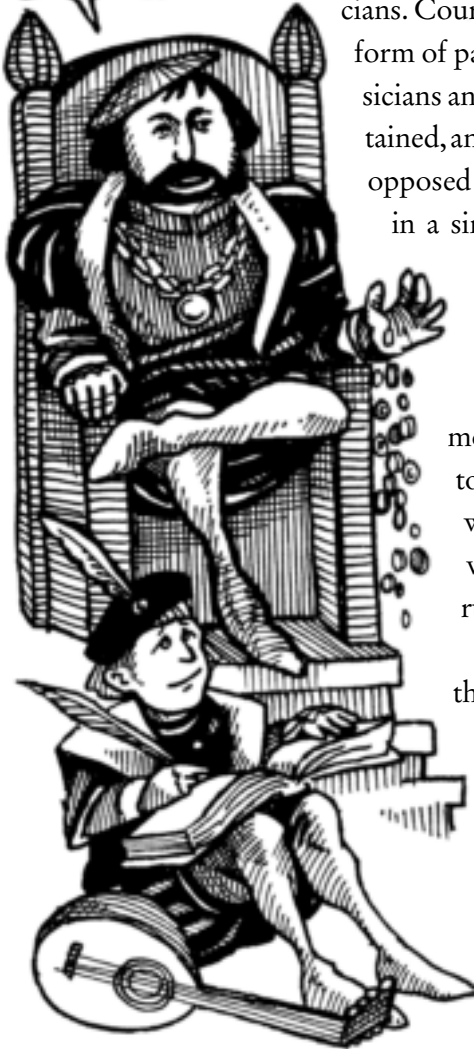
The development of music in the Renaissance paralleled the humanist movement. Prior to the fifteenth century, it was uncommon to consider a composer having a unique personal compositional style, but as the Renaissance developed, the artist in his own right became the norm. Composers sought clarity and structure in their music, expanded the range of pitches used in their compositions, and employed more contrast in their works (sections with many high pitches versus many low pitches, sections with full textures—many voices—and sections with sparse textures—fewer voices).

AN ODE TO  
APDLO-BUT  
DON'T WORRY  
IT ISN'T A  
RELIGIOUS ODE.



## A REBIRTH: MUSIC OF THE RENAISSANCE

WRITE ME  
ANOTHER  
PIECE OF  
MUSIC.



Musicians' training, employment, and travels were key to the development of music in the Renaissance. An increase in musical institutions and patronage created an unprecedented number of opportunities for musicians. Court chapels became the most common form of patronage, where groups of paid musicians and clerics regularly composed, entertained, and performed for a particular ruler (as opposed to being confined to music-making in a single building). These chapel musicians provided music not only for church services, but also for the entertainment of the court. Like having the finest garments and the most opulent palaces, rulers sought to have the most excellent music, which was both enjoyable and, conveniently, a demonstration of the rulers' wealth and power.

Aside from providing a place for the creation and performance of new music, the court chapels brought together musicians from a host of various regions. This, in turn, led to the development of increasingly cosmopolitan musicians. English, French and Italian musical traditions coalesced and synthesized into new internationalized styles of music because of the constant exchange of regional and national traditions, genres, and ideas. Later in the Renaissance, the cosmopolitan musician will not only be able to compose music in his own nationalistic styles, but also in the styles of other regions. Italian composers will write French chanson, and German composers will write Italian madrigals.

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Along with changes in regional styles of composition, new methods and textures of composition also developed during the Renaissance. As mentioned previously, most polyphonic compositions focused on a higher, melodic voice superimposed upon a fixed line of existing music. In the Renaissance, composers moved toward greater equality of voices, paid more attention to the dissonances created by vertical sonorities (and avoided them), and sought to make each individual voice part interesting and gratifying to sing.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there was also a renewed interest in Greek theory, philosophy and ideals. The Pythagorean tuning system (remember, simple ratios of 2:1, 3:2, and 4:3 were perfectly tuned) served medieval music well, as only perfect fourths, fifth and octaves needed to sound in-tune; unfortunately, this meant that all other intervals<sup>2</sup> were severely out of tune. With a great interest in new consonant sonorities, it became necessary to devise new tuning systems to allow a greater number of intervals to sound in-tune. One solution was *just intonation*, where the major third and minor third intervals were considered consonances, with their ratios approaching 5:4 and 6:5. The problem with this tuning system is that while some fourths, fifths, and thirds sounded in tune, others must be out of tune. First

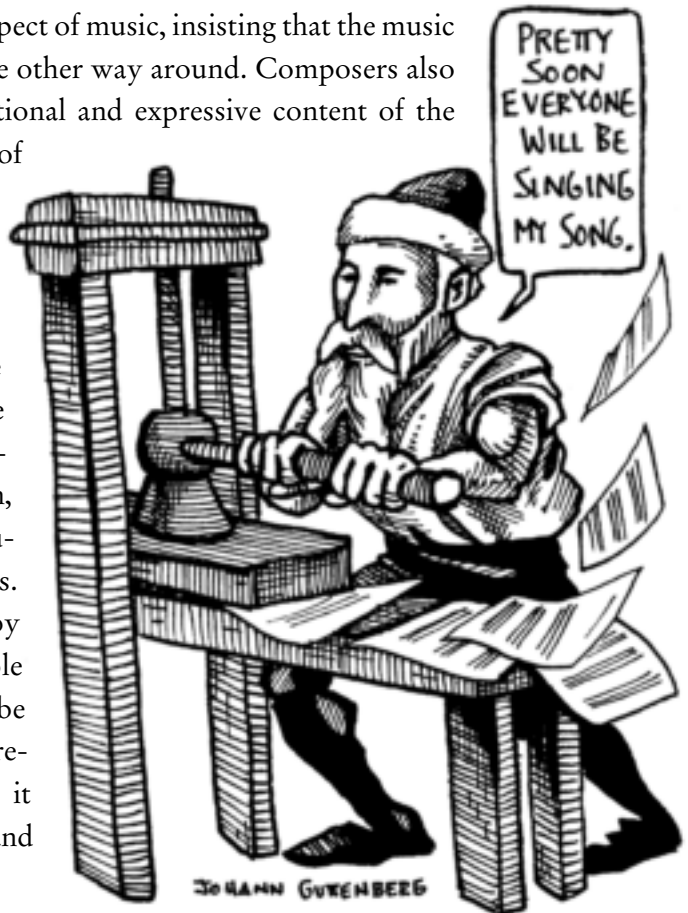
described in the late 1500s, *equal temperament* became the standard tuning system (and still is today), with each semitone being exactly the same distance from the next semitone. The result of this is that thirds, fourths, and fifths are ever-so-slightly out of tune, with the octave being the only perfectly tuned interval.

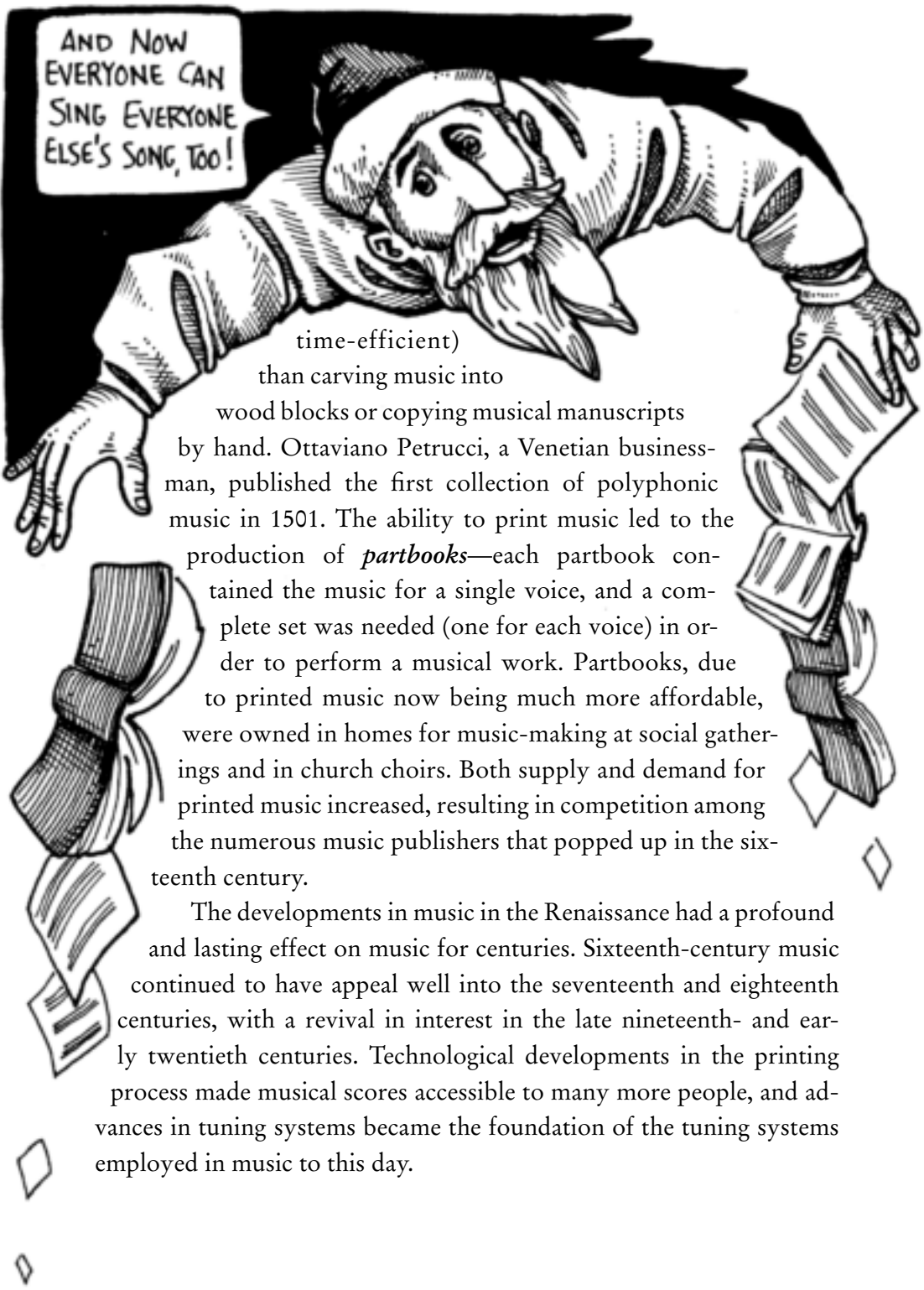
<sup>2</sup> An interval is the distance between two notes that sound either simultaneously (harmonically) or sequentially (melodically). The vertical sonorities that composers are concerning themselves with are based upon the harmonic intervals created when multiple voices are singing simultaneously.



While people in the Renaissance could easily experience ancient art, poetry, and architecture, they unfortunately could not experience ancient music. Ancient Greek writings, however, were able to give people of the Renaissance insight into the ideals of ancient music, and those writings influenced Renaissance musical compositions and music in society. In ancient Greek society, music was a requirement of every person's education—educated persons were expected to be able to read music, sing music at sight, and take part in group forms of music-making. The ancient Greeks also saw an inseparable relationship between poetry and music. In the Renaissance, this translated to composers paying much closer attention to the organization and syntax of the text they were setting. They also placed importance on following the natural rhythm, pacing, and accentuation of the text. Previously singers had the freedom to sing the words as they sought fit, but Renaissance composers took back control of this aspect of music, insisting that the music serve the words and not the other way around. Composers also aimed to capture the emotional and expressive content of the poetry through careful use of specific intervals, melodic contours, and textures.

The development of movable type and music printing in the Renaissance proved to be one of the most important advancements in the production, duplication, and distribution of music to the masses. Perfected around 1450 by Johann Gutenberg, movable type allowed for notes to be assembled in any order, rearranged, and reused, and it was much more practical (and





AND NOW  
EVERYONE CAN  
SING EVERYONE  
ELSE'S SONG, TOO!

time-efficient) than carving music into wood blocks or copying musical manuscripts by hand. Ottaviano Petrucci, a Venetian businessman, published the first collection of polyphonic music in 1501. The ability to print music led to the production of *partbooks*—each partbook contained the music for a single voice, and a complete set was needed (one for each voice) in order to perform a musical work. Partbooks, due to printed music now being much more affordable, were owned in homes for music-making at social gatherings and in church choirs. Both supply and demand for printed music increased, resulting in competition among the numerous music publishers that popped up in the sixteenth century.

The developments in music in the Renaissance had a profound and lasting effect on music for centuries. Sixteenth-century music continued to have appeal well into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with a revival in interest in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries. Technological developments in the printing process made musical scores accessible to many more people, and advances in tuning systems became the foundation of the tuning systems employed in music to this day.



## Chapter 7

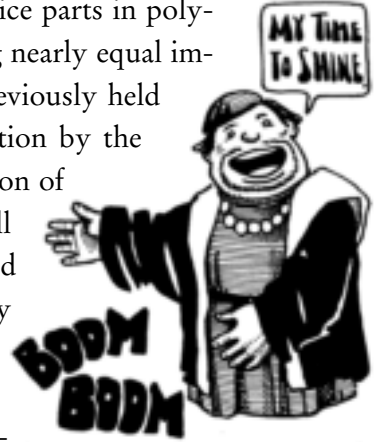
### J O S Q U I N : T H E N E X T G E N E R A T I O N

*M*any composers in the Renaissance contributed to developments and innovation in music, so many that it is beyond the scope of this book to identify and discuss all of them! This chapter is dedicated to several Franco-Flemish composers born around the middle of the fifteenth century who represent a significant shift in the compositional styles of the Renaissance. Three of the most prolific composers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were Jacob Obrecht (1457 or 1458-1505), Heinrich Isaac (ca. 1450-1517), and the estimable Josquin des Prez (ca. 1450-1521). These three had illustrious international careers, and the cosmopolitan nature of their lives is reflected in their music, a combination of both French and Italian characteristics.

The music of Obrecht, Isaac, and Josquin (known by his given name because “des Prez” was a nickname) shared a number of elements of



style. The chosen text for a piece of music now largely determined the musical form of vocal works. Individual voice parts in polyphonic works focused on singability and having nearly equal importance among all parts. The tenor (which previously held the cantus firmus) was replaced in this generation by the bass, the lowest sounding voice, as the foundation of harmony. The Franco-Flemish composers still borrowed melodies from both secular and sacred sources, but they tended to distribute the melody among all voices instead of committing it to a single voice. The mass and the motet remained the most significant forms of musical composition, and this generation of composers broke away from the *formes fixes* that predominated in the early Renaissance.



Jacob Obrecht composed about 28 motets, 30 masses, and a number of secular songs and instrumental pieces. Obrecht's contribution to the development of polyphonic music is his extensive use of imitation in his works. Earlier in the Renaissance, imitation between voices (where one or more voices would echo the same melody as the first entering voice) was not very common. Obrecht changed this, with many of his works focusing on points of imitation, a series of imitative entrances by the vocal forces.

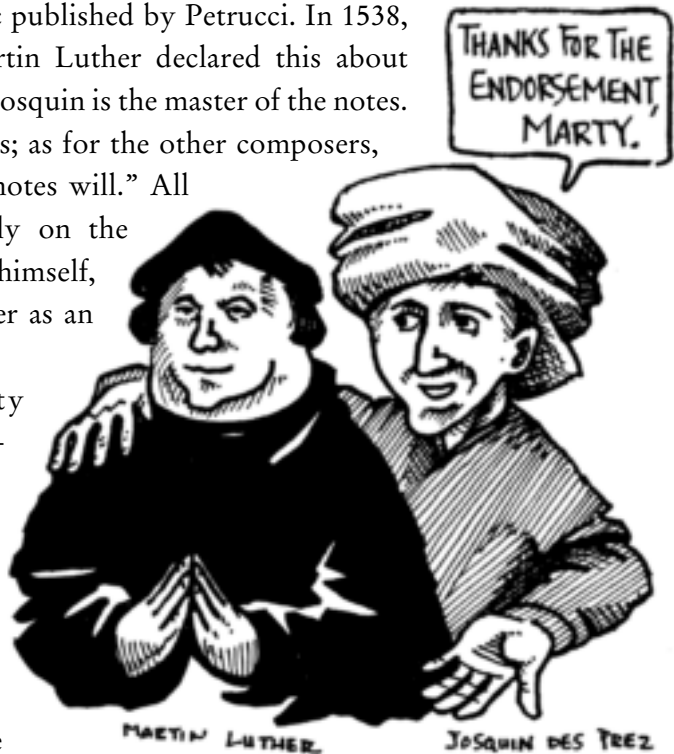
Heinrich Isaac, too, was a major player in the music world at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Isaac was employed by two of the most famous and important patrons in Europe. From 1484 to 1492 he served as a composer and singer for Lorenzo de' Medici in Florence, and beginning in 1497, he served as the court composer for Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I at Vienna and Innsbruck. Sacred music was his niche, with Isaac producing an incredible output of 35 masses, 50 motets, and the *Choralis Constantinus*, a prolific compendium of musical settings of the text



and melodies of the Mass Proper for most of the church year. Isaac is known for his use of both polyphonic and *homophonic*<sup>3</sup> textures, often alternating between the two textures within a song or mass movement.

There are not many composers who have experienced the renown, respect, or influence than Josquin de Prez. Josquin worked in the most prestigious courts and churches in France and Italy, and his motets, masses, and songs were revered, performed, and imitated both during his lifetime and for nearly a century after his death (a rarity in a time when music more than 20-30 years old was deemed old-fashioned and not worthy of performance). Further proving Josquin's relative fame, Petrucci published three books of Josquin's masses with numerous reprints to meet demand; in contrast, no other composer had more than a single volume of music published by Petrucci. In 1538, Reformation leader Martin Luther declared this about Josquin and his music: "Josquin is the master of the notes. They must do as he wills; as for the other composers, they have to do as the notes will." All of this reflects not only on the importance of Josquin himself, but also on the composer as an individual artist.

The more than fifty motets composed by Josquin demonstrate his unique style and the free composition, clarity in form, tuneful melodies, and use of both imitation and homophony already in use



<sup>3</sup> *Homophonic textures are described as settings where the voices move in the same rhythm with the same text simultaneously; the voices are not independent of each other as they are in polyphonic music. A good example of homophonic music in today's culture would be the church hymn written in four parts.*

in the late-fifteenth-century. Josquin's renown comes mostly from his treatment of the texts, aiming to reflect the meaning of words through *text depiction* (instances where the music aims to paint an aural image of the words) and through *text expression* (where the overall musical work seeks to convey the emotional content of the words). The philosophy that music could convey extramusical meaning such as emotions was a common one for the ancient Greeks. But between antiquity and the late fifteenth century, this philosophy seemed to have been lost on composers of music—if they did attempt to convey emotion through music, they did so in a way that we cannot understand.

Josquin excelled not only in his composition of motets, but also in the ingenuity of his masses. His masses drew from a genre of masses called mass cycles. Mass cycles use five sections of the Mass Ordinary (*Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei*) as the five movements of the composition. While earlier masses created a musical link between two movements, the mass cycle of the fifteenth century unifies all of the movements with some type of recurring musical material. Earlier mass cycles used a single melody as the beginning pitches in one or all voices (called a *motto mass*), or a recurring melody in one voice (called a *cantus-firmus mass*). Josquin was innovative in that he based

his masses on all voices of the borrowed musical material, such as a motet or chanson.



Imitating another polyphonic work, the *imitation mass* became one of Josquin's crowning achievements. In instances where he did use a single melody as the unifying musical device, he paraphrased the tune in all of the voices (not just in a single voice), creating what is now known as a *paraphrase mass*. If you are thinking that these two types of masses would sound the same, you're right! The only difference between the two masses is the music they borrow from: the imitation mass borrows from a polyphonic work (such as a motet), while the paraphrase mass borrows from a monophonic source (such as a chant).

The fifteenth century represented a time for both the old and the new. The formes fixes reached their climax in this century and were eventually abandoned for free compositional forms. The vocal ranges of music expanded greatly, voices gained greater independence and equality simultaneously, imitation became increasingly common, and the treatment of borrowed musical material grew in freedom. Josquin and his generation shifted focus to the text, in form, declamation, depiction, and expression. The new technology of music printing cemented Josquin's place in the music history books as one of the greatest composers of his generation and possibly of the entire Renaissance.



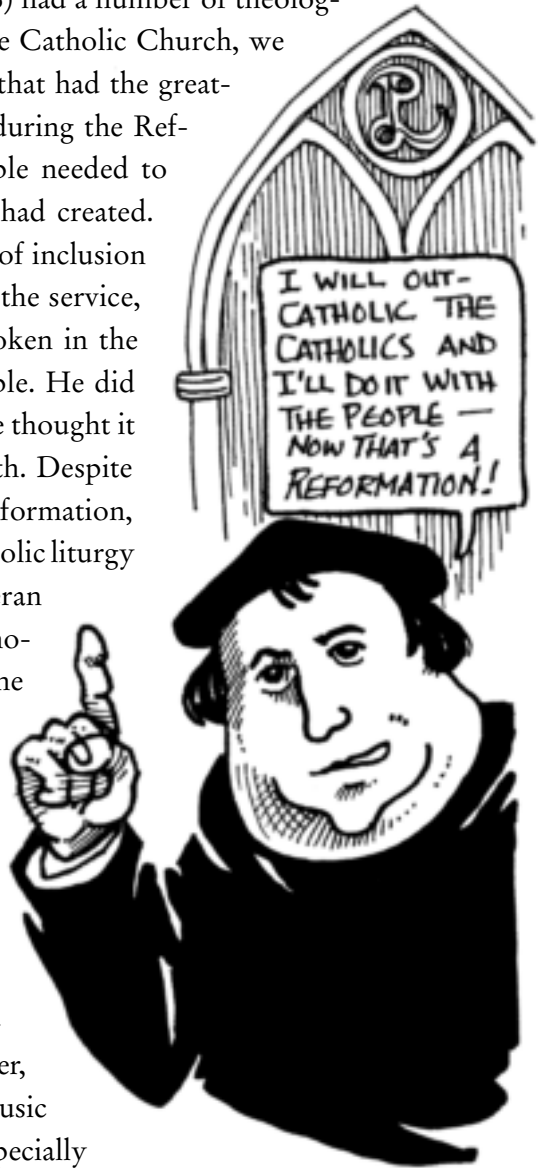
## *Chapter 8*

# T H E   R E F O R M A T I O N A N D   I T S   E F F E C T O N   M U S I C

*A*t the beginning of the sixteenth century, nearly all of Europe was united by a single Catholic Church, which was centered in Rome and supported by political leaders across the continent. By the middle of the century, this unified belief system that had existed since the Middle Ages was no longer intact. Beginning as merely a theological dispute, the Reformation exploded into a full-out rebellion against the Catholic Church, starting in Germany with Martin Luther, then spreading to most of northern Europe. The Calvinist movement, headed by Jean Calvin, swept across Switzerland and the Low Countries to France and Britain, while the politically-motivated Church of England began to take hold in much of England, with King Henry VIII at the helm.

While Martin Luther (1483-1546) had a number of theological qualms with the teachings of the Catholic Church, we will only examine the philosophies that had the greatest impact on music in the church during the Reformation. Luther felt that the people needed to play a larger role in the church he had created. One principle way to create a sense of inclusion was to limit the amount of Latin in the service, with the majority of the service spoken in the vernacular, the language of the people. He did keep some Latin in the services, as he thought it important for the education of youth. Despite the uproar he caused with his Reformation, Luther, in fact, kept much of the Catholic liturgy intact in the Lutheran service! Lutheran churches continued to employ Catholic chants and polyphony, although the texts were sometimes changed to German translations or entirely new German words.

Luther himself was a musician; therefore it follows that music would play a central role in the Lutheran service. He was a composer, an instrumentalist, and a singer, and as noted in the previous chapter, he greatly admired the polyphonic music of Franco-Flemish composers, especially Josquin. Likewise, he held a deep admiration for the Greek philosophy of the ethical and emotional power of music. Luther believed that through communal (congregational) singing, worshipers would be united in their faith and praise of God. This was a contradiction of Catholic customs, where normally only the celebrants and the choir would perform music in worship services.



## THE REFORMATION AND ITS EFFECT ON MUSIC

The most important musical form to come from the Lutheran Church (and the Reformation, for that matter) was the congregation hymn, known as the *chorale* since the late 1500s. Like many Protestant services today, worshipers would sing several chorales congregationally throughout a worship service. While known today as four-part harmonized hymns, chorales in Luther's day consisted only of a single melody based on a metered, rhymed, and strophic poem without harmonization or accompaniment. Creating an entire body of music for worship throughout the church year in a short amount of time would be no easy feat, and so the Lutherans looked to a number of sources to quickly assimilate their canon of sacred music. In addition to new compositions, the three main sources for chorales were existing German devotional songs, adaptations of Gregorian chant, and secular songs given new words (a practice called *contrafactum*). Aside from saving an immense amount of time composing entirely new music, use of existing Catholic music in new ways drew a connection to the past and asserted Lutheranism as part of a long-standing Christian faith. All told, the Lutheran church had more than 700 chorale melodies in its body of service of music by the year 1600.



The second largest form of Protestantism (second only to Lutheranism) was the Calvinist movement, led by Jean Calvin (1509-1564). He shared some beliefs with the Lutherans, such as rejecting papal authority, but asserted many of his own beliefs, including the belief that all people are predestined for either salvation or damnation. His church spread across Europe, resulting in the Presbyterian church in Scotland and the Puritans in England. The most important aspect of Calvinism is the belief that worship should focus on God alone. Thus, Calvinists stripped their church of all things superfluous, distracting, or ornamental: decorative paintings, sculptures, stained-glass windows, instruments, and polyphonic music were all banned from the church.



In contrast to Luther who used various non-scriptural texts in music, Calvin asserted that only biblical texts, particularly the psalms, be sung in the church. Psalms, of course, are not uniform in length, making singing them quite difficult for congregations.

Calvin's solution to this was the *metrical psalm*—rhymed, metered, strophic psalms that had been translated into the vernacular

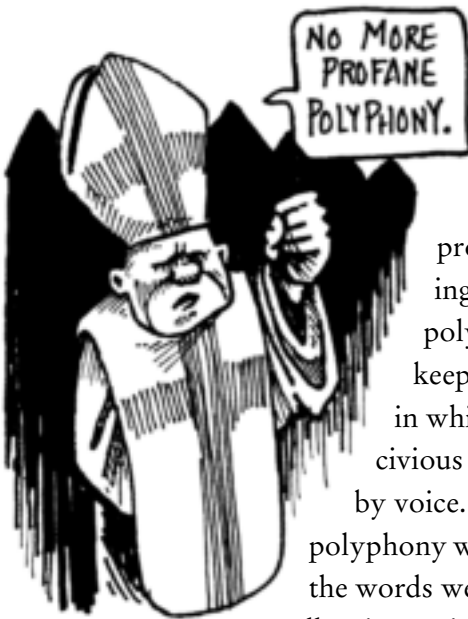
and set to new melodies or existing chant tunes. These metrical psalms were then collected and published in books called psalters.



The third major branch of the Protestant movement in the sixteenth century was the Church of England, a politically motivated creation by King Henry VIII after disagreements with the pope in regards to his marital situation with Catherine of Aragon. Church music changed drastically in the Church of England. New musical forms were created for the church services, now in English, although the monarchy still allowed some composition of Latin motets and masses. Queen Elizabeth I placed value in the tradition of Latin sacred polyphony, and so she still allowed the use of Latin in some churches. John Taverner (ca.1490-1545) and Thomas Tallis (1505-1585) were important composers in the early and middle parts of the century, but William Byrd (1540-1623) was the eminent English composer in the late Renaissance.



Byrd composed a host of Anglican church music, from Great Services, to psalms, to full anthems, but he is best known for his Latin masses and motets. Despite the religious revolution mandated by the royal family, Byrd remained a staunch Catholic, which at the time was an act of treason and punishable by death. He wrote many of his works for liturgical use by Catholics who celebrated Mass clandestinely. Fortunately for Byrd, he was protected by Queen Elizabeth from prosecution because he was a loyal subject and servant to her. Byrd's split allegiances between the Catholic Church and the Church of England, embodied in his dual output of Catholic and Anglican music, were representative of the larger religious divisions across Europe.

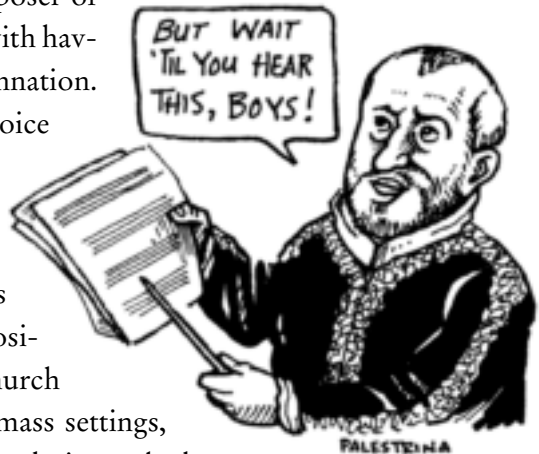


In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church initiated a number of measures known as the Counter-Reformation.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) proclaimed most of these initiatives, going so far as to recommend a ban on most polyphonic music in Mass: “Let them keep away from the churches compositions in which there is an intermingling of the lascivious or impure, whether by instrument or by voice.” In essence, the Council declared that polyphony was prohibited except in instances when the words were unobscured and comprehensible to all. Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525 or 1526-

1594), the leading Italian composer of church music at the time, is regarded with having rescued polyphony from condemnation. Legend tells that he composed a six-voice mass (known as the *Pope Marcellus Mass*) in which the music was reverent and the words unobscured.

Palestrina has been referred to as the “Prince of Music” and his compositions the epitome of perfection in church music. He composed more than 104 mass settings, as well as a number of motets. His style is marked by tuneful, elegant, and easily singable melodies, discreet treatment of dissonance, and careful attention to text setting with subtle text depiction. Palestrina’s style of composition was carefully preserved and then studied by future generations, eventually serving as the quintessential model of the *stile antico* (old style) for seventeenth-century composers and scholars.





## *Chapter 9*

M A D R I G A L S  
(THEY AREN'T ALWAYS  
ACCOMPANIED BY DINNERS)  
A N D O T H E R  
S E C U L A R S O N G S

*W*hile the battle over religion (and the musical consequences of the Reformation) was raging across Europe in the sixteenth century, musicians were busy fostering new secular musical forms with their own nationalistic styles and identities. The interplay between poetry and music became increasingly important, especially in regards to realizing fully the emotional, visual, and accentual content of the poetry being set to music. The technological breakthrough in printing in 1501

provided additional impetus for the composition and dissemination of secular song across Europe in the sixteenth century.

Secular song took many forms in the sixteenth century, with style, form, and name dominated by the particular region in which the composer lived. In Spain the *villancico* became the predominant song form;

its Italian counterpart was the *frottola*. The

French continued composing their chansons, and both the Ital-

ians and the English composed the well-known madrigal. Music played

an important part

in the royal court of Ferdinand and

Isabella in Spain,

and they promoted the creation

of a uniquely Spanish musical

genre to help unify their country.

The villancico was a short, strophic song

usually on a rustic or popular topic. While

the form might vary from one villancico to

another, they all consisted

of a refrain and one or more stanzas. They often would have a contrasting section, followed by a concluding iteration of the refrain. The

tune was nearly always placed in the highest voice part, with other parts optionally sung or played on instruments below it. Many villancicos were published in collections to be sung by a solo voice and accompanied by a lute.



The Italian frottola was very similar to the Spanish villancico: it was a strophic song that was set mostly syllabically with the melody in the uppermost voice. Also like the villancico, the frottola was usually sung by a single voice, with the other voices played on instruments. While not rustic or popular in subject, the frottola generally featured simple music set to earthy or satirical texts. These frottole were quite fashionable in the Italian courts, resulting in composition of the genre nearly exclusively by Italian composers.

The most enduring song form to come from sixteenth-century Italy was the madrigal, and arguably the most important genre of the Renaissance. Its role in music history is bolstered by an increasingly heightened sensitivity to the meaning and impact of the text in composers' musical settings. Composers placed unprecedented emphasis on expressing every nuance of the poetic text. The expressivity, drama, and imagery of the madrigal not only established Italy as a musical leader in Western music, but also set the stage for the future development of dramatic music such as opera.

The formes fixes that had dominated for several hundred years were now a thing of the past. Recall that the formes fixes were just that: music and poetic lines were repeated in specified patterns. Even the villancico and frottola were strophic (repeated music for each strophe of poetry). But the madrigal was through-composed, meaning that new music was composed for every line of poetry. The poetry used for madrigals came from a variety of sources, from sonnets to freer poetic forms. Major poets were often the source for madrigals,





including the famous Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca, 1304-1374). Composers of madrigals (called madrigalists) aimed to recreate the ideas, images, and emotions of the poetry as vividly as possible. The earliest madrigals were written for four voices (here voices should be taken literally, one singer per voice part), later expanding to five voices and then six or more. These madrigals were exceedingly popular in Italian culture, with singers often

performing them for their own enjoyment, as well as for the enjoyment of others in social gatherings, after meals, and in meetings of the academic community.

The madrigal's influence was not confined to the borders of Italy. Transcripts of Italian manuscripts eventually made their way to England, which motivated English composers to try their hand at writing in the style, in the hopes of making a profit. The other important song form to originate in sixteenth-century England was the lute song, a solo song with instrumental accompaniment (usually a lute). While not nearly as expressive in the text declamation, the lute song aimed to capture the overall emotion of the text, which was usually of a much more personal nature.

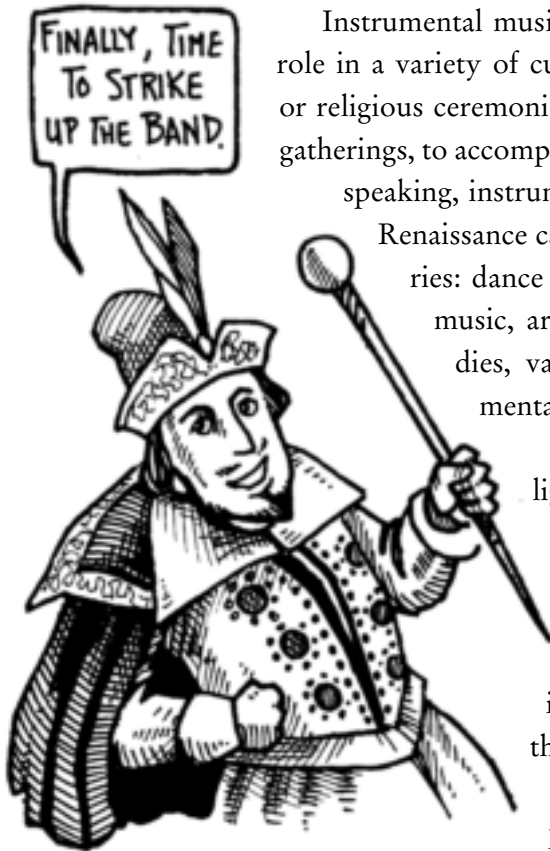
The madrigal truly brought Italy to the forefront of musical composition in Western Europe, and Italy would continue to be a leader throughout the upcoming Baroque era. As mentioned before, the painstaking attention to text depiction and text expression reached new heights, and eventually paved the way for even more dramatic text setting, such as opera. While madrigals themselves varied in popularity, it is certain that they had a profound and lasting impact on vocal music.



## Chapter 10

### S T R I K E   U P T H E   B A N D : I N S T R U M E N T A L   M U S I C T A K E S   T H E   S T A G E

*U*p until now, we have focused exclusively on vocal music, as the vast majority of music that was written down until the sixteenth century was indeed vocal music, sometimes with accompanying instruments. Of course, instrumental music was not absent from society; rather it was generally only used in fanfares or to accompany dancing, and not so much for pure listening or playing. Cultivation of instrumental music by churches and patrons increased significantly in the 1500s, and this is reflected in the preservation and dissemination (aided by printing) of instrumental music from this era and through the creation of new instruments.



Instrumental music in the Renaissance played a role in a variety of cultural situations, from public or religious ceremonies, to entertainment for social gatherings, to accompaniment to dancing. Generally speaking, instrumental music composed in the Renaissance can be divided into five categories: dance music, arrangements of vocal music, arrangements of existing melodies, variations, and abstract instrumental works.

Dancing was one of the highlights of European society in the Renaissance, and knowledge of dance was expected of those in the upper social classes. In addition to improvising tunes or playing them from memory, instrumentalists also played from printed collections that were

published for instrumental groups, lute, or keyboard<sup>4</sup>. Published dance movement served one of two purposes in the Renaissance. One, dance music written for ensembles (groups of players) was functional in that it simply accompanied dancers. Two, dances pieces for solo lute or keyboard were intended for the enjoyment of the player and/or those listening to the music. Dance music for ensembles was usually simple, with a melody played by a single instrument and accompanied by the rest, while solo dance music was highly stylized, often featuring ornamental and decorative flourishes. In any case, dance music conformed to preexisting dance forms that dictated that a particular meter, tempo, rhythmic pattern, and form be followed.

<sup>4</sup> *In the Renaissance, the principal keyboard instrument was the harpsichord. The harpsichord has one or multiple keyboards called manuals, and pitches were created by a small quill plucking a string when a key was depressed. In comparison, the modern piano creates sound by striking a string with a small hammer.*



Paradoxically, another principal source of instrumental music was existing vocal music. While it was previously common for instruments to double the voices of singers in the performance of vocal music, it became increasingly common in the sixteenth century for instrumental ensembles to play vocal music without any voices at all!

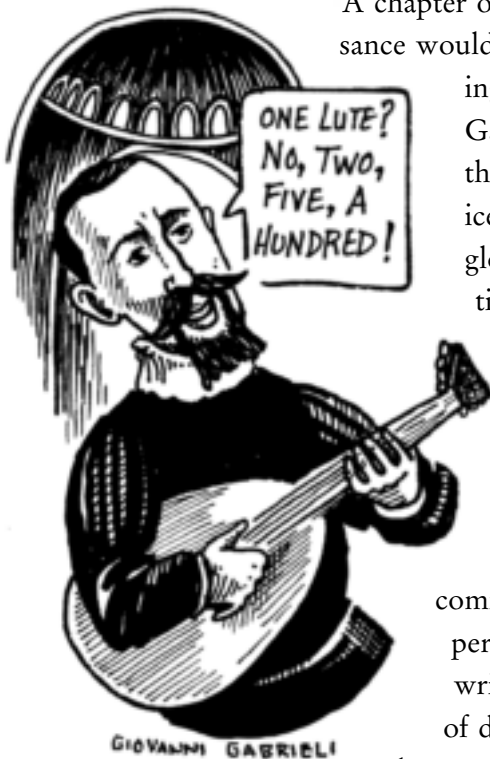
Keyboardists and lutenists, too, would play arrangements of vocal works, either improvising them or playing them from a published manuscript called an *intabulation*.

Like the vocal music we've examined to this point (such as the imitation mass), instrumental music also incorporated existing melodies in new compositions. It was common for church organists in particular to improvise or compose music based on Gregorian chants or other liturgical melodies. In the Lutheran church, they used German chorales as the source material. Many times, the verses of chorales would alternate between congregational singing and a setting for choir or organ, with organists typically improvising their verses of the chorale.

The ability to improvise on a tune was considered a valuable skill, and the ability to do so while accompanying dancing incredibly important. *Variations* was the style of improvisation most common during the sixteenth century. An instrumentalist would begin by starting with a specific melody, either existing or newly composed. Then, without any pause or interruption, the instrumentalist would play a series of variations of that theme. This style of instrumental music was useful in creating fresh, interesting takes on existing music, as well as demonstrating the skill and virtuosity of the performer.



While the first four categories of instrumental music are based on vocal or dance music, composers did write abstract instrumental works, instrumental compositions to be played or listened to for their own sake. The principal form of keyboard music written in an improvisatory style was the *toccata* (from the Italian *toccare*, “to touch”). The name served to remind the listener that the music was being created by an actual person. Other forms of abstract instrumental music include the *ricercare* (from the Italian “to seek out”), whose music was imitative and motetlike, and the canzon.



A chapter on instrumental music in the Renaissance would not be complete without mentioning

Giovanni Gabrieli (ca.1555-1612). Gabrieli served as a church musician in the glorious St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice. His compositions represent the glory of Venetian church music (particularly for the grandiose basilica),

with many of his works to be performed by multiple choirs or instrumental ensembles. This genre of composition for multiple choirs was called polychoral motets. Music for divided choirs was not uncommon before Gabrieli, but he took the performing forces to new heights, often writing music for as many as five choirs of different vocal and instrumental timbres. Sometimes, these choirs would be di-

vided spatially as well, perhaps with choirs in the two organ lofts, one on each side of the altar, and yet another choir on the floor.

Regardless of the impetus or occasion for the composition, instrumental music in the sixteenth century took the stage in a major way, setting the scene for future instrumental works including the seventeenth-century *sinfonia* and the eighteenth-century symphony.