

HISTORY OF WESTERN MUSIC I

MUS 3314-1

Dr. Tony Mowrer

Chapter 4

French and Italian Music in the Fourteenth Century

Ars Nova

c. 1322 Philippe de Vitry wrote a treatise titled *Ars Nova*. This treatise described the style of music prevailing in France at that time and the title of the treatise came to denote that musical style. *Ars Nova* is used to describe the musical style that prevailed in France through the first half of the 14th century. The new art was controversial. It had two chief elements, both relating to rhythm.

1. Composition was moving away from triple toward duple.
2. The use of four or more semi-breves were considered to be equal to a breve.

During this time more secular than sacred music was composed and the motet became more and more secular.

The earliest document from the time is a manuscript of the satirical poem, *Roman de Fauvel* (c. 1310-1314). It included 167 pieces of music, 34 of which were polyphonic motets.

Philippe de Vitry was a very influential and talented composer. Under his influence, composers began to think of a motet tenor as consisting of two parts.

1. Melodic intervals---*color*
2. Rhythmic pattern---*talea*

The color and talea could be combined in various ways. Motets in which the tenor was constructed through repetitions of the color and talea were called *isorhythmic motets*. *Iso* means same.

Listen to **NAWM 1:47-52**

Manipulations and repetitions of the rhythm and melody are not apparent to the ear. Composers took (*still take*) great delight in concealed meanings.

Guillaume de Machaut (c. 1300-1377) was the leading *Ars Nova* composer of the early 14th century in France. Machaut made considerable use of the *hocket*. Most of his motets were traditional AND *pan isorhythmic*, meaning that all the voices made use of isorhythms rather than just the tenor.

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Twenty-five of his songs were *chanson ballades*, more commonly called *virelai*. These had a specific form.

- A (refrain)
- b (first part of the stanza)
- b (repeat of the first part of the stanza)
- a (last part of the stanza with the music to the refrain)

Machaut wrote monophonic and polyphonic *virelais*.

Much of Machaut's music was in duple.

Listen to **NAWM 1:53-55**.

He begins to include the milder sonorities of the 3rd and 6th and we begin to hear a sense of harmonic order. Machaut also moves the principle voice to the top!

His ballade was a characteristic piece. This would include three or four stanzas sung to the same music, each stanza ending with a refrain. A double ballade had two voices, each one having their own text.

With Machaut, the *rondeau* also became popular. The form of the *rondeau* is

AbaAabAB

Listen to **NAWM 1:52-55**

(Capital letters indicate the refrain of the text. Lower case letters indicate that only the music is the same. The text is different.)

Machaut was rather ingenious with his compositions.

Ma fin est mon commencement et mon commencement ma fin. (My end is my beginning and my beginning is my end) Here, the melody of the topmost voice is sung backwards by the tenor and the second half of the countertenor's melody is the reverse of its first half.

Prior to Machaut, most masses consisted of individual parts just put together. Composers didn't just sit down to write a mass. There were four complete masses written prior to Machaut by anonymous composers. Machaut's *Messe de Notre Dame* is probably his most famous composition and probably the most famous of the 14th century because it is a four part setting of the Mass Ordinary. Machaut intended it to be sung as a single composition.

Listen to **NAWM 1:56-58**

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Italian Trecento Music

Composers who knew notation wrote much secular music for the entertainment of the nobility. Most other music remained unwritten. Most church music continued to be improvised. Italian music of the 14th century came to be known as *trecento*. It was largely secular in nature and included three different types of music. The largest collection of *trecento* is found in the *Squarcilupi Codex*.

1. Madrigal
2. Caccia
3. Ballata

Madrigals were generally written for two voices. The texts were idyllic, pastoral, or amatory. There were usually two or three line stanzas. The stanzas all had the same music (strophic form). There might be an additional pair of lines at the end of each stanza that was called the *ritornello*---a refrain---that would have different music with a different meter from the stanzas, themselves.

Listen **NAWM 2:1**

The Caccia---chase---consisted of two voices in canon at the unison. They might include hockets, echoes, etc.

The Ballata was originally a song to accompany dance. Early ones were monophonic. Later, they were polyphonic and are similar to the French virelai.

Listen to **NAWM 2:2-4**

The foremost Italian musician of the 14th century was Francesco Landini (c. 1325-1397)--p. 113. He wrote only secular music, including:
90 2 part ballata and 42 three part ballate

In Landini's music, we find greater use of 3rds and 6ths and even full chords. Analyze **NAWM 2:2-4**.

Regarding performance of music, there was no uniform manner of performance. All that seemed to matter was that the notes be sung. Instruments and voices could be on any line, regardless of the score.

In the late 14th century in France, music consisted primarily of ballade, virelais, and rondeaux for solo voice with supporting instrumental tenor and countertenor. These were mostly love songs.

This music had remarkable rhythmic flexibility. Note pp. 118, 119. They used hockets and other complex rhythms. At times, it is almost multi-rhythmic.

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One should also take note of the decorations on the music---note pp. 118, 120. Listen **NAWM 2:5**.

Musica Ficta---literally, feigned music---the use of notes raised or lowered through written accidentals or in performance. These occurred especially at cadential points. Sometimes this was for the sake of beauty.

Note cadential types on p. 121.

From c. 1450-1550, accidentals were left out of the manuscript.

Composers continued to work with notation so there would be uniformity of performance. A significant effort was put into notating duple meter. Note pp. 123-125.

Manuscripts frequently do not suggest specific instruments. Therefore, we don't really know a lot about them. What we do know comes from paintings and other sources. Note p. 126.