Chapter 4

The Middle Ages: 400 - 1400 A.D.
Two Historical Periods in Middle Ages

Early Middle Ages = 400 to 1000 A.D.
Later Middle Ages = 1000 to 1400 A.D.
Middle Ages: Historical Background

Countries as we know them did not exist.

Early in the Middle Ages the class system was based on feudalism--kings, queens, nobles, and servants. Later in the Middle Ages, villages were formed with a more centralized economic system involving trade and commerce.

A middle class arose in the later Middle Ages--bankers, traders, merchants, shippers; these helped break down the feudal system.
Middle Ages: Historical Background

Most people lived in poverty and spent their lives working in miserable conditions.

Wars were frequent and all serfs (servants) were expected to fight them when the ruling nobleman called upon them.

Diseases and infections were often fatal without antibiotics, vaccines, or sterile procedures.
Middle Ages: Historical Background

The spread of Christianity increased the availability of learning.

- Monks kept literature and scholarship alive.
- Education became more widespread.
- Universities sprang up.
Middle Ages: Historical Background

Towns were centers of cultural exchange.

- The arts (music, painting, poetry, sculpture, and architecture) flourished.

Most artistic endeavors were sponsored by the Catholic Church.

Center of artistic endeavor was the **cathedral**—a large Catholic Church with a bishop.
Medieval Music: General Characteristics

Earliest written examples of music of this period are from the 8th or 9th century.

The Catholic Church dominated Medieval Music.

- Much of the music was liturgical music--music used in church services.
- Ceremonial music (for processions and coronations) was also composed.

Other kinds of music were folk songs, work songs, dances, and instrumental pieces.
Medieval Music: General Characteristics

In the later Middle Ages, two new innovations emerged.

- **Secular** (non-religious) song
  Topics such as love, and political loyalty were prevalent.

- **Polyphony**—music with more than one melody line or part sounding at the same time
Music of the Middle Ages: Plainchant

**Plainchant** = vocal music for church services.

Thousands of chants were composed from 400 to 1000 A.D.

Pope Gregory I (540 - 604 A.D.) catalogued this music.
**Music of the Middle Ages: Plainchant**

**Monophonic**—only one line of music is sung at a time.
- Several people may sing in unison.
- This music is extremely varied.

Text settings—simple to complex
- **Syllabic**—one note per syllable
- **Melismatic**—many notes per syllable
- **Neumatic**—several notes per syllable
Music of the Middle Ages: Plainchant

Plainchant is based on special scales called **modes**.

- These scales are patterns of half and whole steps, like major and minor scales, but each pattern is different.
- Since the pattern of half and whole steps is different for each mode, each has a characteristic sound, different from the others.
Music of the Middle Ages: Plainchant

The names of these modes are:

- **Dorian** (D to D on the keyboard)
- **Phrygian** (E to E on the keyboard)
- **Lydian** (F to F on the keyboard)
- **Mixolydian** (G to G on the keyboard)

The notes are written from highest to lowest since pieces generally descend to the keynote.
Music of the Middle Ages: Plainchant

The rhythm of plainchant flows along without measured strong and weak beats.

The modes sound very “other worldly” and give the music a spiritual character.

Plainchant is only one musical line, so the listener can focus on the contour (shape) of the melody.
Kyrie Eleison

Part of the Catholic Mass

Words are in Greek (not Latin):
- Lord Have Mercy (3 times)
- Christ Have Mercy (3 times)
- Lord Have Mercy (3 times)
Music of the Middle Ages: Secular Song

Rise of secular song is dated to the 12th century.

Troubadours (poet-musicians who composed songs for performance in small aristocratic courts of Southern France) were active.

In Northern France, these were called trouvères.
Music of the Middle Ages: Secular Song

Troubadours and trouvères wrote their own poetry and music. Subjects they favored were love, duty, friendship, ceremony, and poetry.

Primary topic = courtly love.
- Idealized vision of a remote, unattainable woman
- Lover pines away and pleads for some sign of her favor.
Beatriz de Dia—Female Troubadour of 12th Century

Beatriz de Dia

- Known as Countess of Dia.
- Lived in late 12th century.
- Wife of the Count of Poitiers and lover of a well-known nobleman.
“A chantar”

A strophic song—same music repeated for all the stanzas of the poem

Beatriz de Dia addresses her lover who has treated her badly.

In a French language known as Occitan (sometimes called Provençal)
“A chantar”

Accompanied by a string instrument known as a *vielle* (a bowed instrument) and a low wooden flute. These instruments provide an introduction and an ending to the song, along with interludes between stanzas.

Flute and drum accompany the 2-line ending (*tornada*).
“A chantar”--Form

Seven Phrases
- A phrase--ends in half cadence in E.
- B phrase--ends in full cadence in D.
- A phrase repeats.
- B phrase repeats.
- Two joined phrases with A ending--ends in half cadence in E.
- Phrase B--ends in full cadence in D (a 2-line ending called a tornada).
Music of the Middle Ages: Polyphony

Idea of composing polyphonic music first arose in the 10th century, but it took hold around 1200 A.D.

Compositions with 2, 3, or 4 voices were written to celebrate the feasts of the church year.

Cycle of life revolved around the church at this time.
Music of the Middle Ages: Polyphony

Greatest amount of polyphonic song in the 12th and 13th centuries was composed in Paris. Two important composers of polyphonic song were Leoninus and Peritonus. They were probably officials at the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.
Music of the Middle Ages: Polyphony

Created a collection of polyphonic compositions called *Magnus Liber Organi* (Great Book of Polyphony).

Started by Leoninus.

Perotinus added to it and extended the music’s range and scope.

Book contains elaborate polyphonic compositions for the main feasts of the church year.
Viderunt Omnes

Composition by Perotinus (c. 1170 - c. 1236)

Based on a plainchant of the same name.

Sung right in the middle of the Mass for Christmas Day.

Some of piece is polyphonic (for soloists) and some is monophonic (for choir).
Viderunt Omnes

Piece has rhythmic contrasts as well.

- Monophonic sections are free flowing.
- Polyphonic sections are marked by very clear-cut rhythms.
Viderunt Omnes

Polyphonic sections--melody
- Bottom voice starts with sustained tone that turns more rhythmic.
- Middle voice is more complex.
- Upper voice is extremely elaborate and melismatic.

Piece retains the original plainchant upon which it is based. The chant is embedded throughout the piece.
Music of the Middle Ages: Late Medieval Polyphonic Song

By the 1300’s, secular song and polyphony came together. France and Italy were the centers of the art of polyphonic song. Master French composer was Guillaume de Machaut.
Guillaume de Machaut (c. 1300 - 1377)

Educated at Rheims in northeastern France.
Well known as an administrator, poet, and composer.
Held positions in courts of well-known French aristocracy, including the Duke of Normandy who became King Charles V of France.
Guillaume de Machaut (c. 1300 - 1377)

Probably an administrator at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. He wrote some sacred music, but most of his pieces are polyphonic secular songs.

Music is full of little rhythmic and melodic motives that tie it together.

Rhythm combines duple and triple meters and is very fluid.
Doulz Viaire Gracieus

A setting of a poem that has a two-line refrain.

- The refrain comes at the beginning and at the end, and its first line comes in the middle of the poem as well.
- This type of poem is called a rondeau.
Doulz Viaire Gracieus

Prevailing meter is triple, but sometimes the music is in duple meter.

Medieval music does not use bar lines, so the meter could be very flexible.

Piece contains many chromatic notes for color.
Doulz Viaire Gracieus

Voice is accompanied by a recorder (below) and a lute (above).

Accompanying parts are quite independent, but the three parts together create beautiful and interesting harmonies.
Music of the Middle Ages: Late Italian Polyphonic Song

Italian musical style was more lively and down-to-earth than the French style.

A particular type of song was the hunting song--called a *caccia*.

- A musical *round*--parts sing the same music but come in at staggering times.

Lyrics are realistic and lively.
Voices usually engage in dramatic dialogue.
The End of the Middle Ages

At the end of the 14th century, the French and Italian musical styles began to merge.

- More commerce between the 2 countries
- Political alliances
- Split in the Papacy in 1378 A.D.
The End of the Middle Ages

Two Popes existed from 1378 to 1417 A.D. They presided over the church simultaneously. This was called the Great Schism. One Pope was in Avignon, France; the other was in Rome, Italy.
The End of the Middle Ages

Papal court at Avignon spent a lot of money on music. French and Italian composers lived at the Papal court and learned from one another. The mingling of styles affected both sacred and secular music. The new international style set the stage for the next era--The Renaissance.
The Medieval Audience

Two types of audiences:
- Human
- Divine

Plainchant and liturgical polyphony--audience was God.

Secular songs--audience was the aristocratic elite: kings, queens, dukes, duchesses, lords, and ladies of small courts throughout Europe.

The rest of the population’s musical interests are unknown.