spiritual, educational, and artistic issues for Western Europe. We generally call this the theocratic age, encompassing approximately the years between 600 and 1400, the Middle Ages.

Sing It, Don't Swing It: Music in the Early Church

The early Church sought to differentiate itself from pagan and Jewish ritual. To that end, it developed three essential corollaries regarding the nature and use of music in Christian worship. These corollaries will help us to understand the nature and purpose of the music we're going to examine in the next chapter.

1. Music, as a "beautiful" thing, is useful only if it reminds us of divine and perfect beauty.
2. Music must teach Christian thoughts. Nonvocal music cannot do this. Therefore, strictly instrumental music must be rejected.
3. Large choruses, "bright" melodies, and dancing are associated with pagan festivals. These must all be rejected!

Now, for us, today, these corollaries might create the impression that the early Church was a repressive and anti-artistic institution. It was not. It was an island of civility and culture attempting to survive in a sea of barbarity and ignorance. Without strict rules and regulations, without the suppression of the individual ego for the greater good of the greater number, it's unlikely that the early Church would have survived the onslaughts of the first four hundred years of the Middle Ages—often called the Dark Ages.

The Music of the Medieval Church

Hyperbole and the occasional bright spot aside, the years between roughly 600 and 1000 CE—and in particular, 600 to 800 CE—were a wretched time for most of Western Europe. Generally (but accurately) speaking, public safety and the advanced technologies of the ancient world were lost, leaving most Western Europeans to live in extremely primitive conditions. The feudal system, which tied the bulk of the population to the land, was little short of slavery. For the overwhelming majority of people, life was indeed nasty, brutish, and short. The Christian Church, which promised a glorious afterlife following the trials of mortal existence, provided the ray of light and hope in this otherwise dark landscape.

The great legacy of the medieval Church was the Christian conversion of Europe and, with it, the rebirth of European civilization. During these otherwise dismal years, the Church stood as patron of art and education, of civility and literacy. The libraries and scriptoria of the medieval Church managed to save and preserve a body of knowledge and literature that would otherwise have been lost forever.

The role of music in the early medieval Church was twofold. It was used to create a mood conducive to long hours of prayerful contemplation. And it was used to embellish the formal services, to make them more impressive and more solemn. The medieval Church saw music not as a humanistic pursuit, but rather as a tool of ceremony and ritual.

of events—the so-called Babylonian Captivity, the Great Schism, and the Black Death—cumulatively brought about the end of the theocratic age.

As the Church was losing its absolute grip, a political and spiritual crisis took place. Increasingly powerful secular rulers began to contest the Church's right to rule and, especially, to tax in their lands. By the mid- to late fourteenth century, the growing power of secular courts resulted in an intellectual and artistic swing toward things nonreligious: secular ideas, secular art, and secular literature. For example, the fourteenth century saw the growth and development of vernacular literature, with much of it—such as Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*—satirizing matters of Church and faith. We are witness to the beginnings of a new humanism and a new classicism, as Roman and Greek art, literature, and philosophy offered pre-Christian models for life, thought, and art in a time of Christian crisis. The impact of all of this on music was profound, as a body of secular composed music intended to intrigue, edify, and entertain its listeners emerged from the pens of composers for the first time since the demise of the ancient world.

Music in the Fourteenth Century

Gnarly Modern Music: The Ars Nova
The musical cutting edge of the fourteenth century was occupied by a group of composers living and working within the institutional confines of Paris's Notre Dame Cathedral. This second Notre Dame School of composers is referred to as the ars nova, the "new art," in order to distinguish them from the first school (which included Léonin and his colleagues), a group referred to as the ars antiqua, the "old art." The music of the fourteenth-century ars nova epitomizes this era of rapid change and diversity. Much of their music is secular, and it is often of daunting complexity, with rhythmic systems carried to incredible extremes.

MUSIC BOX

Guillaume de Machaut, "Quant en Moy" (ca. 1350)

Machaut was born around 1300 and died in 1377. He was the whole package: aside from being the outstanding composer of the ars nova, he is also considered the greatest French poet of his time. Many of his compositions are of extraordinary complexity, including one called "Quant en Moy," which translates as "When, to me."

"Quant en Moy" is a secular polyphonic work that sets to music two different love poems sung by two different singers, a soprano and a tenor, simultaneously. It uses a technique called isorhythm, which assumes that rhythm and pitch can be manipulated separately. In an isorhythmic composition, complex rhythmic patterns are repeated over and over again even as the pitch material develops freely. In "Quant en Moy," the soprano sings a poem in which the isorhythmic pattern is forty beats long, and the tenor simultaneously sings a different poem in which the isorhythmic pattern is twenty beats long. Once every stanza, the patterns merge into something called a hocket, an amazing effect by which the two voices rapidly alternate, like the teeth of a zipper, before sailing off into the next stanza.

It's all eye-crossingly complex. We will not witness such systemic complexity in Western music again until the 1940s and '50s.

Note the following:

- The isorhythmic structure is not a "surface" element of the music but rather a subliminal presence.
- A third melodic part in the instrumental accompaniment consisting of a plainchant holds the whole thing together. God is not absent after all; he may be out of sight, but he's not out of mind. This accompanimental plainchant becomes a metaphor for God's presence in all things, religious and secular.

example of polyphony. The word *polyphony* means "many sounds," so what we have here is the simultaneous presence of multiple melodic parts.

From the standpoint of composition, the invention of composed polyphony was the Big Bang. In creating music featuring two or more simultaneous melodic parts, a specialist is going to have to make all sorts of compositional decisions regarding harmony and coordinated rhythm that don't have to be made in the creation of a plainchant. To use a cooking analogy, it's the difference between having cereal for dinner and cooking a five-course meal with paired wines. Preparing such a dinner requires knowledge, planning, taste, technical acumen, and execution.

Composed polyphony also required a universally understood system of music notation. With the development of polyphony and notation came the concept of the composer: the musical creator as a combiner and builder.

MUSIC BOX

Léonin (ca. 1150–ca. 1201), *Organum Duplum* on "Alleluia Pascha Nostrum" ("Hallelujah, Our Passover") (ca. 1180)

Léonin was a musical functionary of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, and one of the earliest composers whose name we know. The work that follows (in modern notation) is an organum, a two-part composition in which a plainchant ("Alleluia Pascha Nostrum") is joined to a freely composed part. Léonin's is an example of a florid organum, in that the freely composed part is quite ornate and is heard above the long-held tones of the plainchant below it.

This is ornate, carefully *composed* music that needs to be performed by trained specialists working in close cooperation with each other. It is an appropriate metaphor for the twelfth century and the flowering of culture, complex architecture, specialization, and civic cooperation that marked the time.

And the Walls Came Atumblin' Down: The Fourteenth Century

The neatly closed medieval universe based on the omnipotent power and absolute authority of the Church came to an end during the fourteenth century. It was an end that did not happen quietly. A series

> • "Quant en Moy" is "spiky" and foreign-sounding to our ears. The complementary concepts of harmonic consonance and dissonance, as we understand them today, had not yet evolved, and the isorhythmic patterns give this music a rhythmic "edge" that militates against natural vocal declamation. Nevertheless, the music is brilliant, clever, and utterly representative of its time.

It has been suggested that the musical complexity of the ars nova mirrors the architectural complexity of the Notre Dame Cathedral itself, with its incredible arches, its flying buttresses, and its riotous surface detail, and that these Notre Dame–based composers sought musical analogs for the architectural structures and details they observed every day.

The secular, intellectually complex music of this period mirrors a fragmented and anguished age, an age in which composers of such music sought to create order in an increasingly disordered world. It was during the fourteenth century that Western music diverged from the medieval Church's primarily ritual use and ceremonial view of music, and back toward being a more humanistic art that could be consumed for personal edification and/or amusement.

Going Gaga for Greek: The Rebirth in Full Swing

The secularism and growing fascination with antiquity that characterized much of the art of the fourteenth century continued unabated into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is not an overstatement to say that the experience of rediscovering ancient Greek and Roman culture overwhelmed Europe during these centuries, a period now generally referred to as the Renaissance.

To a great degree, the Renaissance was a response to the breakdown of the absolute authority of the medieval Church. Where the medieval man said, *Credo ut intelligam*, meaning "Understanding can

come only through belief," the evolving spirit of the fifteenth century said, *Intelligo ut credam*: "Belief can come only through understanding." This intellectual shift can be observed in several major trends:

- **Classicism.** The Renaissance was fascinated by the language, literature, philosophy, art, and architecture of ancient Greece and Rome. But more than just the accomplishments of the Greeks and Romans, the thinkers of the Renaissance were inspired by the ancient view of humankind. Thus inspired, humanism emerged as the dominant intellectual movement of the Renaissance. It focused on human life and accomplishments rather than on religious doctrine and the afterlife.
- **Exploration.** The Renaissance saw the voyages of Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, and Ferdinand Magellan.
- **The Protestant Reformation.** The power of the Roman Church was profoundly shaken by the Protestant Reformation, led by Martin Luther.
- **Education.** The rise of secular power meant the rise of secular education. Aristocrats and the upper middle class hired scholars to educate their children.
- **The printing press.** The dissemination of knowledge took an incalculable leap forward with the invention of movable type around 1450. The first plainchants were published in 1473, and the first polyphony in 1501. Not until the invention of the Internet (thank you, Mr. Gore) will we see an equivalent jump forward in the speed of information transfer.

Sometimes technology is our friend, and sometimes it isn't

Just as e-mail would seem to have done away with the ancient art of handwritten letters, so the advent of printed music brought an end to the exquisite art of hand-copied, illuminated music manuscripts.

of civility and public safety followed. Trade routes were reestablished, wealth was created, and with it, those extraordinary hubs of interdependent human activity called cities began to dot the Eurolandscape. Cities can exist only in an environment of cooperative specialization: different folks govern, import the food, export the offal, teach the young, and so forth. The Christian Church, the civic lynchpin of the age, was the dominant spiritual and educational institution in the new European cities. And the buildings with which the medieval Church celebrated itself became a metaphor for God's power and magnificence.

The High Middle Ages saw an explosion in architectural technology, as first Romanesque—that is, Roman arch–based architecture—and then Gothic architectural styles were born. Construction on the "new" Canterbury Cathedral was begun in 1070. The cornerstone of Notre Dame in Paris was laid in 1163; in 1260 the Chartres Cathedral was consecrated; and construction on the great cathedral of Cologne began in 1248 (though it was not completed until 1880!).
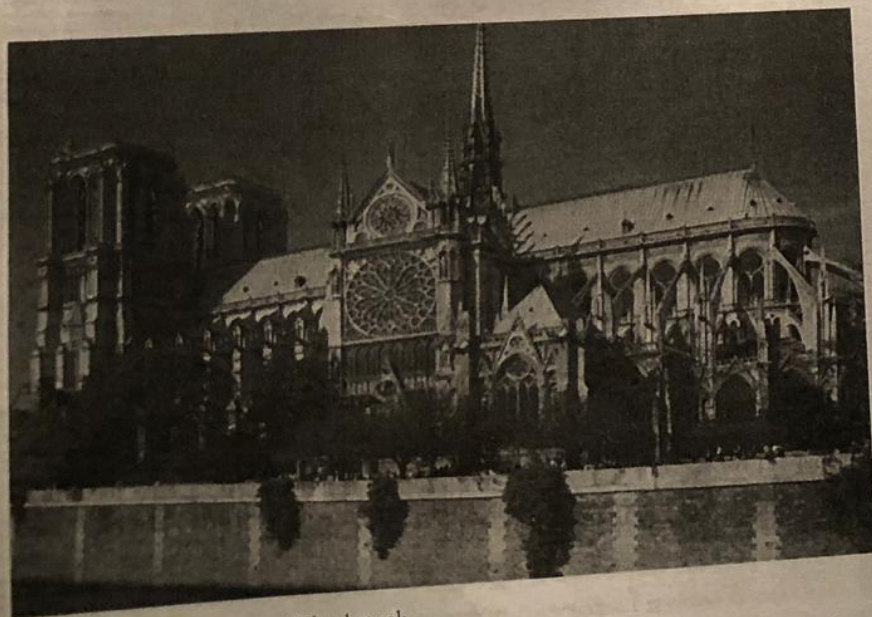

Notre Dame iStockphoto/Thinkstock

That communities could afford to expend their resources on these huge architectural marvels is further evidence of the growing wealth and security of Western Europe in the years after 1000 CE. The complexity and magnificence of design and detail inherent in these Gothic cathedrals are mirrored in the "new music" being composed for worship in these churches, music that features multiple and often very complex simultaneous melodies set in a texture called polyphony.

Polyphony is a musical texture in which two or more principal melodic parts are heard simultaneously. For example, here is a melody we all know as "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and for which we have varying degrees of affection. In the spirit of pedagogical investigation, I would ask you to sing it:

Row, row, row your boat gent - ly down the stream.
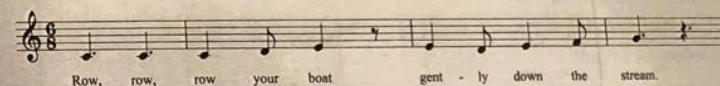
Now get the gerbil. Sing it together, but in an overlapping fashion, as a round.

Row, row, row your boat gent-ly down the stream, etc.

Row, row, row your boat
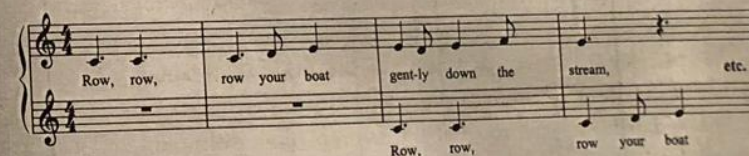
While you and the gerbil are each singing the same melody, you are *not* singing it at the same time. Thus, once the second voice enters, two principal melodic parts are simultaneously present, neither of which is more (or less) important than the other. This is an

The music of the early medieval Church is today generically referred to as plainchant. It's called plainchant because it is unadorned and unaccompanied, consisting, as it does, of a single unaccompanied melody line, a musical texture called monophony, meaning one sound.

Try it at home! Sing in the shower. Your unaccompanied voice is singing in a monophonic texture. Having left the shower, grab your wife or husband, partner, children, cat, or gerbil (okay, maybe not the cat), and sing the same thing *together*. Despite the fact that there is more than one voice singing, the voices are singing the same single, unaccompanied melody at the same time. It is still monophony; you are still creating a monophonic texture.

MUSIC BOX

Plainchant

The number of different plainchants created over the centuries is *huge*. Yet the characteristic sound of plainchants remains fairly consistent from type to type and century to century. Enter the word *plainchant* in your search engine of choice and begin listening. Plainchant melodies will be characterized by the following:

- a monophonic texture;
- for ease of singing, a relatively conjunct melodic contour (*conjunct* meaning no large intervals between one note and the next) and a restricted range (no notes too high or too low); and
- rhythms based strictly on the articulation of the words being sung (meaning no steady, dancelike beats; if you can dance to a plainchant, you've been sipping too much sacramental wine). Plainchant is music of the soul and the voice, not the pelvis.

Miraculously, plainchant has the same power to calm and enlighten today as it did a thousand years ago, which is, I think, an ongoing testament to its power, beauty, and artistic truth.

The repertoire of medieval plainchant is often referred to as Gregorian chant, in honor of Pope Gregory I, who reigned as Pope (Bishop of Rome) from 590 to 604 CE. Contrary to the popular image, Gregory I had nothing to do with the creation of plainchant. His name is associated with this body of music because it was during his reign that the Roman Catholic Church sought to assert its authority over the churches of Europe by codifying and standardizing liturgical procedures, including music.

Truly, there is no *I* in *chant*. The musical functionaries who created, memorized, and taught by rote the huge body of plainchant to the church community were not making music to express or glorify themselves. Frankly, that's a concept that would have been utterly foreign to them. They were creating music to glorify God, music that would help to create a meditational state during the countless hours church functionaries spent in prayer; music that would facilitate the memorization of huge amounts of liturgical text; music that could calm the mind and render it susceptible to divine influence. This was the role of music in the medieval Church. And while popular music—romantic songs and simple dance music—existed in the medieval world, it was the church music that was ultimately notated (i.e., written down) and which became the basis for the composed music of centuries to come.

In terms of sheer number and variety, the plainchant repertoire represents the single greatest body of music created by Western culture. It is the only music that has survived in written form from the Dark Ages.

The High Life: The High Middle Ages and the Rebirth of Western European Civilization

The impact on music of the rebirth of Western European civilization was profound, and nowhere was it greater than in the invention of composed polyphony between the years 900 and 1000. Let's unpack this. As the Western European population was Christianized, a degree

We can see these huge hymnals today in the church and cathedral libraries of Europe: massive medieval and early Renaissance collections of plainchant, copied and illuminated by hand on vellum. These volumes are big: stick four legs on 'em and you've got yourself a coffee table. The expense of producing these books was prodigious, so a church would buy one such hymnal for all to share. It would be placed on a stand at one end of the choir loft. Anyone with bad eyes sat close to it, and those with good eyes sat farther away. In such a way, a single book could serve an entire choir.

- **Painting and sculpture.** Inspired by the glories of classical art, Renaissance artists depicted the world around them with a new clarity and perspective. A golden age of art ensued, one that saw the lives and creations of such artists as Donatello, Botticelli, da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian.
- **And finally, music.** The humanist Greek ideal of music was taken to heart by Renaissance composers, who sought to create more expressive and expressively "meaningful" music based on what ancient Greek writers and philosophers claimed their music was capable of doing. Many important and influential church officials also wanted the Church's sacred music to employ a more emotionally immediate vocabulary than that of earlier times. Those who read ancient literature asked themselves why their contemporary music did not move them the way the ancient Greeks claimed their music moved them. Bishop Bernardino Cirillo, an outspoken critic of the liturgical music of his time, wrote, "Thus the musicians of today should endeavor in their profession to do what the sculptors, painters, and architects of our time have already done, who have recovered the expressive art and power of the ancients" (Grout, Palisca, 4th ed., 199).

Of course, it's one thing to demand that musicians recover "the expressive power and art of the ancients" and another thing actually to be able to do so. The great challenges facing the composers of the fifteenth century were to decide what exactly their music

should express and then to figure out how precisely to express it in a way that would move its hearers in a manner analogous to the music of the ancients.

It's the *Words*

At a time when the overwhelming bulk of all composed music was vocal, the composers of the fifteenth century came to realize that the expressive message of the music lay in the words. Therefore, expression in music was indelibly tied to clear vocal articulation: the rise and fall of melody and musical rhythms should be a function of verbal articulation, the better to project the words clearly and unambiguously. For Renaissance composers, clear vocal declamation of the words being sung became the essential element in musical expression: if the words carried the essential expressive message of a piece of music, then the words had to be clearly understood.

Along with this doctrine of articulation was the developing idea that the music itself should reflect and intensify the actual meaning of the words, a process called word painting or tone painting.

The Renaissance expressive notions of clear vocal articulation and word painting found their ultimate manifestations in the Mass and the madrigal, the two most important musical genres of the late sixteenth century.

A musical Mass is the setting of certain parts of the daily Mass to music. Such a Mass was to most Renaissance composers what the symphony was to eighteenth-century composers and opera to a nineteenth-century composer: the ultimate test of compositional prowess. The greatest composers of the Renaissance—Josquin des Prez (ca. 1450–1521) and Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (ca. 1525–1594)—were also the greatest composers of the Mass.

There were a variety of different Masses, all of which were based upon a single, preexisting melody line, usually a plainchant. However, one type, the so-called imitation Mass, employed as its theme

a melody drawn from the secular repertoire. The creation and popularity of imitation Masses in the early sixteenth century demonstrate that the composers of these Masses were given an extraordinary degree of creative freedom by a relatively tolerant Church.

Soon enough, Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses (posted as a protest on a church door in the city of Wittenberg in 1517) put an end to the Church's tolerance and led to the seismic upheaval that was the Protestant Reformation.

The World Turned Upside Down: The Protestant Reformation and the Counter-Reformation

The Reformation shook the Western world to its core. The so-called Counter-Reformation followed, as the Catholic Church, battered but not broken, sought to discover and then address those laxities that it believed had led to the Reformation in the first place. Among the most important acts of the Counter-Reformation was the convening of a task force called the Council of Trent, which met for eighteen years in the northern Italian city of Trento, from 1545 to 1563. Every aspect of the Church fell under the council's scrutiny; and it had something to say about pretty much everything, including music.

Among many other things, the council objected mightily to the increasingly secular and personally expressive nature of late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century church music. Imitation Masses, overly complex polyphony, and even the *pronunciation* of church-trained singers were censured by the council.

The next generation of church composers, with Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina in the lead, managed to create a new sort of sacred music, one in tune with the council's pronouncements. However, for the most part, the council's dictates tended to stifle innovation, which, as a result, was lavished on the secular music of the late sixteenth century, most notably on an emerging genre called the madrigal.

A madrigal is a secular, unaccompanied vocal work for four to six individual voices. What set madrigals apart from other contemporary genres of late Renaissance secular vocal music was that they combined "elevated" poetry with suitably "elevated" music. Another thing that set them apart was their "free" mixing of polyphonic and homophonic sections, something very unusual in music of the late Renaissance. In the artistically repressive environment of the Counter-Reformation, during which experimentation was absolutely verboten in church music, the

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525–1594) The Teaching Company Collection

madrigal, as a secular art form, became the most experimental, the most avant-garde musical genre of its time.

At the heart of the genre lies a compositional technique called word, or tone, painting. Word painting is the creation of a musical gesture that illustrates the meaning of a word or a group of words— for example, by setting the words *running down the hill* with a fast, descending musical scale. Thus, madrigals are "about" their words and about illustrating the meanings of those words, and in this they are the ultimate manifestation of the Renaissance's infatuation with the "word."

In their desire to evoke the word musically, mid-sixteenth-century aestheticians and philosophers wrote lengthy tracts on how best to marry music and words. Whole essays and dissertations were written on what sorts of musical gestures were appropriate to illustrate what sorts of words.

Thus, the madrigal, as a genre, became bound up with finding a musical way to express the literary meaning of a poem. The madrigal became the last expressive step before the invention of opera,