

Music 160: Lecture 20: Introduction to the Renaissance
[Speaker: Keri McCarthy]

[On Screen]
[00:00] Introduction to the Renaissance
Keri McCarthy

[Keri McCarthy]: Today we are going to talk about an overview of the Renaissance period. The Renaissance starts roughly around 1400 and lasts till about 1600 when the Baroque period comes rolling on in. During these 200 years we start to see a resurgence in interests appealing to the arts and more so to the growing middle class. There are a lot of features about the Renaissance that I find to be really interesting and engaging. And that also impacts the way that the music from this time period is understood. Humanism is probably the most important concept from the Renaissance. It is one of the most important concepts in western music history as a whole. And I'd like to talk about humanism in terms of what came before it, which was an emphasis on religion and the church being the largest social and of course religious feature of the community, but also when we get to the Renaissance time period humanism is an understanding that people are equally important maybe here on Earth.

The way that I like to describe humanism as a whole is yes we want to make sure that we are getting up to heaven when we die so we want to live in an ethical way but we might as well make sense of what we are doing down here while we're here. So there is a large resurgence in arts and in music, in writing and literacy because as well there is a rising middle class particularly in Italy. We think about the middle class. Italy is a boot, there is a lot of water. There are a lot of people with boats who can bring things to other areas and allow those boats and bring materials to other regions of the world. And so that middle class then needs something to do with their free time and they start to pick up instruments. They start to pick up music along with that. And more importantly perhaps is the concept of literacy. The printing press is established in the 1450s and printing press for music 1501 with the Petrucci press. And so these elements really impact who is using music and for whom the audience for whom music is being composed. So both of those features are really fairly important when we consider Renaissance music. We end up with a lot more secular music than we had published anyway and available. Music that we talked about from the Medieval period that was secular in nature was mostly rote. It wasn't written down; there was no need to write it down. But with an increase in literacy during the Renaissance by the end we have a new musical form called the Madrigal that was designed entirely for people who were literate to be performing around the dinner table at night. These are sort of musical jokes and even in a way a musical jigsaw puzzle as we'll talk about later when we are talking about that musical form.

So in humanism the idea that we can spruce up the church, we can add sculpture, we can add painting, we can add music, we can add dance forms, and just basically the creation of our artistic life here on earth is a really important factor in the renaissance as a whole. It does occur largely in Italy to start with. What else is happening during this time? Take a look in your text book and notice the difference between a medieval painting which looks very flat and two dimensional. They figure out things like something small in the center looks further away than something large at the front so we start to get a foreground and a background in terms of

painting. Architecture is far more intricate and we can create larger buildings, larger structures. Art has an aesthetic value and it is interesting to note with humanism that humanism doesn't at all degrade religion. It allows for fruition of a social life outside of the church. But the end goal for everyone is still to end up in heaven and so there are a lot of religious materials that are being created specifically for church services. The church is still a very important part of community life. It is just not the only place for communities to meet and get together and socialize.

So let me think, what else. Ah Crusades. Crusades are important because as people start fighting in the Middle East we have historians who are taking the texts from ancient Greek out of the Middle East. They were set there, of course we talked about this earlier, when Rome falls all of those ancient Greek texts are transferred to the Middle East where things are far more stable. When stability changes in the Middle East with the Crusades those texts come back up through Spain and in to Italy. Composers and historians of that time are interested in translating and understanding what music was like in ancient Greece. And one thing that they focus on a little bit is how music can affect ethos or effect behavior. How it can change an environment or change a community for the better. So they start trying to create music that would have the ability to change people's character, their emotions, to convince people to go to war perhaps in terms of the Crusades. Or to convince them to behave in a more socially appropriate way. And so we see music start to reflect those same ideals that we've seen before from ancient Greece. This time from texts that are returned from the Middle East. So humanism, literacy, ancient Greece, and Rome are some of the themes that we'll talk about when we are talking about sacred and secular music of the Renaissance.