Renaissance Music, music of Europe during the period known as the Renaissance. In musical terms, the Renaissance is usually taken to cover the period from c. 1400 to c. 1600.

New Directions

In 1477, the theorist Johannes Tinctoris spoke of the recent emergence of a new art in music, the "fount and origin" of which were the English composer John Dunstable and the Burgundian Guillaume Dufay. Martin Le Franc, in his poem *Le Champion Des Dames* (1440-1442), had also spoken of a new style adopted by Dufay and his contemporary, Gilles Binchois, following Dunstable, a so-called "contenance angloise" distinguished by a sweeter use of consonances and, by implication, a tempering of the "mathematical" techniques characteristic of Early Music in the High Middle Ages. Dunstable and Dufay certainly exploited medieval constructional procedures—both wrote isorhythmic motets—but did so within new sonic frameworks defined by triadic harmony and clearly articulated tonal centres, and to new expressive ends.

With the generation of composers after Dufay, most notably the Flemings Johannes Ockeghem and Jacob Obrecht, medieval principles of cantus-firmus construction (in which a pre-existing plainchant melody is heard in the slow-moving tenor part) became an alternative within a broader range of compositional techniques. Instead, the most distinctive style of Renaissance music is imitative polyphony, where all the voices move at the same speed and share in motivic development by combining points of imitation in a way later known as fugue. The *Missa Pange Lingua* by Josquin Desprez, perhaps the greatest composer of the High Renaissance, takes a plainsong not as a long-note cantus firmus but instead as a source of melodic ideas treated imitatively through all the voices. This new way of conceiving and controlling musical space was taken up with enthusiasm by the post-Josquin generation, reaching a classical peak in the sacred music of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina—his plainchant-based *Missa de Beata Virgine* (published in 1570) uses the same technique—and it lasted, if with an increasing sense of archaicism, through the 17th and 18th centuries.

Birth or Rebirth?

The extent to which the new polyphonic styles of the 15th and 16th centuries belong to the broader cultural movement of artistic rebirth known as the Renaissance is a matter for debate. That, in turn, depends on one's definition of "Renaissance" as a chronological (1300-1600 or, say, 1400-c. 1540?) and geographical (Italian or pan-European?) phenomenon. The geographical question is important: the impetus for the musical Renaissance came largely from northern composers trained in Burgundy, northern France, and Flanders—even if many (such as Dufay and Josquin) migrated to Italy, their works breathe a different air from the Italian art that for many lies at the heart of the broader Renaissance. And although there are tempting parallels to be drawn between the new sense of depth and control of musical space apparent in imitative polyphony and the development of perspective in contemporary painting, or between the new expressiveness of this style and the more human and directly emotional aspects of the Renaissance arts in general, the music of the period lacks what is often treated as a chief defining feature of the Renaissance: the conscious return to and reinterpretation of Classical models.

This is easily explained: no examples of ancient Greek or Roman music survived for direct imitation. Certainly Renaissance musicians knew the famed power of music in Classical mythology—Orpheus became a totemic figure—and had access to Greek (Plato, Aristoxenus) and Roman (Cicero, Quintilian) texts dealing both with music theory and with the potential ethical and rhetorical power of music. Some 16th-century theorists—notably the Roman Nicola Vicentino and the Florentine Vincenzo Galilei—even sought to recreate the ancient Greek modes and *genera,* developing new theories of chromaticism and tuning systems. There is also some evidence of improvised styles of music-making (for example, in the circles around Marsilio Ficino in late 15th-century Florence) similarly linked to the Humanist impulse. However, these were often deemed freakish experiments: for mainstream musicians, Classical Antiquity provided at most an ideal to which they might only aspire.

New Social Trends

The complex interactions between composition and performance, and the role of improvisation, make it difficult to base any account of specifically "Renaissance" music on stylistic criteria alone. One solution is to focus more on the new contexts and functions which this music served. The Church continued to require music for the daily liturgy and devotional practices: so strong was the impulse for music in worship that it could resist all but the most extreme of reforming movements (whether Protestant or Catholic) in the 16th century, despite the fears of sensual excess and spiritual distraction that had caused concern at least from St Augustine onward. However, the new secular demands of Renaissance society expanded significantly the boundaries for contemporary musicians. Music's long-standing place within ceremonial became accentuated by the politics of spectacle as embraced by the Renaissance courts, none of which could afford to be without its group of professional singers and instrumentalists: the grand theatrical entertainments known as *intermedi* make the point well. Also, the emerging role of the courtier as an educated connoisseur of taste—witness Baldassare Castiglione's etiquette manual *Il Libro del Cortigiano* (1528)—ensured a key place for vocal and dance music in entertaining the nobility, using the arts to articulate and display the social cohesion and distinction of an elite. Meanwhile, the burgeoning mercantile classes created a new market for music for voices and/or instrument(s) for popular consumption.

All this had a significant effect on the employment possibilities for, and the artistic standing of, the talented musician, who was increasingly able to claim status, to reap (sometimes huge) financial and other rewards, and thereby to rise above the class of manual artisans: composers such as Josquin or, later, Adrian Willaert (director of music at St Mark's, Venice, from 1527 to 1562) became "gods of music". The enhanced mobility of musicians (like other artists) in this period is striking as composers and performers took advantage of trade-routes and political alliances to further their wide-ranging careers: the distinguished madrigalist Luca Marenzio was one of several composers to journey from Italy to Poland, and a number of Spanish and Portuguese composers made their home in the New World. Furthermore, the invention of music-printing by Ottaviano Petrucci around 1500, and subsequent technical developments such as the single-impression printing method developed by Pierre Attaingnant in Paris in the mid-1520s, created a cheap and effective way of disseminating music for profit: as a result, one can speak almost of a mass music industry, with the great printing-houses of Paris, Venice (Antonio Gardano and Girolamo Scotto), Antwerp (the Phalèse dynasty) and, later, London (Thomas East) increasingly creating and defining a market for their wares. Printing changed drastically the intellectual and other frontiers of the known world, not least in terms of permitting the reliable transmission of authentic texts on a scale never possible within a manuscript tradition.

New Genres

The impact is clear on music itself, in terms both of the emergence of the international musical language of imitative polyphony pioneered by Josquin and of the genres that defined the activities of contemporary musicians: Mass settings for the liturgy; motets for liturgical, para-liturgical, or devotional use; songs to vernacular texts (Italian and English madrigals, French chansons, the German Lied, the Spanish *villancico*); and music for one or more instruments (lute, harpsichord, recorders, viols) whether in "abstract" forms (the imitative ricercar or chanson-style canzona) or as dances. These genres interacted in intriguing ways: witness the so-called "parody" Mass reworking a pre-existing sacred, secular, or even instrumental setting. However, at the same time, each of these genres and their associated styles generated their own histories, pursuing separate if related paths as composers exploited the power of print to preserve and understand their pasts and thereby create their futures.

Such potential for fame had its price in terms of the standardization and codification of styles and genres. However, composers unable or unwilling to commodify their artistic output could still rely on the special tastes of individual patrons who in turn were often anxious to exploit distinctive musical styles intended for limited specialist consumption. The notion of a *musica reservata* intended for a special environment (for example, the intensely expressive *Lagrime di San Pietro,* written for the Duke of Bavaria by Orlando di Lasso), or the *musica*

segreta created by the virtuoso performers at the court of Duke Alfonso II d'Este in Ferrara, went far beyond the norm of day-to-day music-making, and was highly prized as a result.

Even within the broad international context, significant variants reflect specific regional circumstances: compare from the second half of the 16th century the serene, balanced Counter-Reformation polyphony of Palestrina in Rome, the mystical sensuality of the Spanish Tomás Luis de Victoria, and the ceremonial splendour of the Venetian Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli. Such variants become still more distinct moving north of the Alps. The recusant William Byrd in England was associated with at least one Italian, Alfonso Ferrabosco the elder, and Heinrich Schütz in Germany studied in Venice both with Giovanni Gabrieli and, later, with Claudio Monteverdi. However, their respective styles—as in Byrd's gradual-motet "In Tempore Paschali" or Schütz's madrigal "Ride la Primavera"—have a local flavour. Indeed, England, somewhat isolated (for both geographical and religious reasons) from the European mainstream, was able to pursue separate lines of development throughout the 16th century, as the sonorous music of Byrd's teacher, Thomas Tallis, reveals. The Elizabethan Renaissance was itself a later phenomenon conditioned by special circumstances and fostering uniquely English styles and genres: the verse anthem (such as "When David Heard" by Thomas Weelkes), the English madrigal (such as "The Silver Swan" by Orlando Gibbons), and the lute ayre (such as "Come Again, Sweet Love" by John Dowland).

Changing Styles

Again, this raises the question of chronology. It seems foolish to expect all the arts in all places to move in similar directions at the same time, although advocates of the *Zeitgeist* (the "spirit of the age") as a determinant of human cultural activity inevitably pursue such direct chronological, geographical, and cross-disciplinary comparisons. Certainly, by the time the English Renaissance was at its height, the arts in Italy were moving in a different direction. On the one hand we see the revisionist pressures of the Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation as the Catholic Church sought an effective response to the Protestant challenge: one musical result was the raising of the works of Palestrina to canonic status. On the other, increasing demands made of music to express and arouse the passions of the soul attenuated the classical balance typical of the Renaissance style. The intensely erotic chromaticism of the late 16th-century madrigal—witness the works of Carlo Gesualdo, such as "Dolcissima Mia Vita"—may have impeccable Humanist credentials, but it suggests a style collapsing under pressure of the demands now made of it. Whether one treats such Mannerist tendencies (here and in the other arts) as indicative of a new style-period or as a *fin-de-siècle* tendency of the Renaissance, things were changing, and not always, contemporaries felt, for the better.

A further blow to Renaissance imitative polyphony was dealt by the emergence of new declamatory, text-expressive, and dramatic styles for solo voice and basso continuo, particularly in Florence: witness the solo songs of Giulio Caccini's *Le Nuove Musiche* (1602) and the first opera to survive complete, *Euridice* (1600), by Jacopo Peri. The Florentines sought to reform a contrapuntal style deemed by definition incapable of expressing a text and arousing the emotions. Typically, they invoked the model of Greek tragedy to justify their new experiments. It is ironic—if characteristic of this problematic period—that so quintessentially "Renaissance" an activity as looking back to Classical antiquity should have led so directly to the destruction of the Renaissance musical style, and to the emergence of techniques that rightly or wrongly are generally defined as Baroque in scope and intent.

However, if one takes into account 16th-century improvisatory styles and performance practices (solo song, ad hoc combinations of voices and instruments, unwritten virtuoso embellishment, etc.), the Florentine "new music" and operatic recitative have clear roots in the recent as well as the distant past. One might say the same of perhaps the greatest composer of his time, Claudio Monteverdi. The introit of Monteverdi's 1610 *Vespers,* "Deus in Adjutorium", seems fully Baroque in its sonic splendour, strong rhythms, and vibrant mixture of voices and instruments. But here, too, Renaissance techniques (not least, cantus-firmus organization) and performance practices make their effect. One lesson is that musical styles, like styles in all the arts, do not change overnight. Another is that we have yet to appreciate fully the rich complexity of the music of perhaps one of the most exciting periods in the Western art tradition.