Rounds to Roundelays: A Survey of Period Music
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Introduction

The 11th century marked a significant turning point in Western Music: **Composition** replaced improvisation: for the first time a piece of music existed, independent of an actual performance. **Musical notation** (an art of the ancient world lost in the Dark Ages) allowed sound to be written down in a definitive visual form, and could be executed whether or not the composer was present, by people unfamiliar with the piece. **Principles of order** developed: theory of 8 modes, and rules governing rhythm and consonance, came into being. **Polyphony** began to replace monophony.

Ars Antiqua - sacred music of the 12th & 13th centuries

The *Ars Antiqua* (ancient technique) period spans roughly from 1170 to 1310, in which polyphony, in use as early as the late 9th century for improvisational performance, began to be truly composed. The term *Ars Antiqua* is most commonly used to refer specifically to sacred music from this period, the dominant forms being:

1. Plainchant (also called plainsong, Gregorian Chant) is a monophonic form used in Catholic liturgy, being a single, unaccompanied line for voice with a fairly free rhythm. The Latin lyrics are scriptural or praise-based, used in Western European Christian services as early as the 3rd C, but did not begin to be written down until the advent of neumatic notation in the 9th C.

2. Organum is an early polyphonic form for 2 or 3 voices, in which one voice, the *Vox Principalis,* performs an existing plainchant while another voice, the *Vox Organum*, sings a simple harmony. There are three ways in which organal harmonies were created; in **parallel motion**, the harmony line moves completely parallel to the melody at an interval of a fourth, fifth or octave. In **oblique motion**, the harmony line begins and ends in unison with the melody, then remains on the starting pitch until the melody reaches a designated interval (fourth, fifth or octave), from there moving in parallel at that interval. In **contrary motion**, the harmony moves in parallel with the melody but inversely, so that it descends in pitch the same interval that the melody ascends, and vice versa. A fourth, less common form extends the

3. Motet is a complex form of polyphony in which an existing plainchant was supplemented by one or two melodically and rhythmically independent lines, creating true counterpoint with multiple interacting melodies rather than a single dominant melody with harmonization.

4. Conductus is a non-liturgical form of homophonic sacred music. Unlike the organum and motet forms, which grew out of existing plainchant, conductus pieces were freely composed original melodies with accompanying harmonies, usually for 2 or 3 voices and with Latin text.

Troubadour/Trouvère Forms - secular music of the 12th & 13th centuries

While professional performers were common fixtures at court well before the 13th century, known as jongleurs, minstrels, etc., the period of 1170~1220 was the pinnacle of the troubadours' art form: the *chanson* - literally, 'song.'

1. Epic/Chanson de Geste is a long-form (~4,000 lines) narrative lyric in which mythological, heroic or otherwise notable events are related, their height of popularity being circa 1050~1250; early epics were undoubtedly sung, but over time recitation with accompanying instrumentation also became common. Form varied by region/culture: in France, the chanson de geste was typically 10-syllable lines arranged in stanzas of varying lengths, whereas English epics were told in the Germanic tradition of alliterative verse.. **Lai** is the later French form (**lay** in English), written in octosyllabic couplets and set in stanzas of varying length which had non-repeating unique musical phrases. *Lais* were mainly composed in France and Germany, during the 13th and 14th centuries. A Provençal term for a similar kind of poem is **descort.**

2. Early Chanson

　　　Canso/Canzone/Chanson Courtoise/Grand Chant are all terms for the narrative love-lyric most popular in 12th/13th C, concerning courtly love and all the emotions such love could incite. The form was always strophic with three sections: an introductory stanza called the *exordium,* in which the composer presents his subject, followed by the body of the piece in several stanzas, and ending in either a *tornada* (short stanza giving resolution) or an *envoi* (addresses to the patron, referencing the composer). Bernart de Ventadorn (1130~1200) is one of the most famous and lauded composers of this genre.

　　　Sirventes is a chanson concerning politics, often satirical or critical, rather than love; typically they were parody lyrics set to pre-existing canso, and could range from light satire to vitriolic denouncement. Bertran de Born is considered the foremost composer of sirventes.

　　　Tenso/Tenzone is a musical dialogue/debate,

Ars Nova - music of the 14th century

　　　The *Ars Nova* (new technique) period spans roughly from 1310 to 1377, in which neumatic notation was replaced by the new mesural notation, allowing precise pitch and rhythm to be recorded. Isorhythm came into use, particularly in motets, and secular music overall began to reflect the complexity found previously only in sacred music. Another notable feature of this period is the combining of the secular with the sacred, blurring the line between these previously distinct genres. Sacred texts were set to popular tunes, plainchant were combined with secular melodies, and love songs even found their way into the liturgy in the form of motet-chanson.

1. Motet/Motet-chanson of this period took the same general form as those of the preceding century, but began to combine secular and sacred music, outraging the Catholic Church. Plainchants were drawn out, simplified, and matched with secular, vernacular lyrics to form complex polyphony.

2. "Burgundian" Chanson is the term for the complex style of chanson originating in 14th century France, generally referring to any French narrative, secular lyric, but specifically referring to one of the three *Forme Fixes* (fixed form), strophic songs ordered by strict and complex rules:

- **Ballade** - three stanzas of eight lines rhyming *ababbcbc*, in which the final (*c*) line is a refrain repeated at the close of each stanza. The first two lines of a stanza form a musical phrase, which is repeated for lines three and four, but with a different ending, followed by a new musical phrase for lines five through seven plus the refrain, which sometimes reflects the second ending found in line four (giving an overall *aab* musical pattern). The most famous of this period, composed by Guillaume de Machaut, were written for one, two, three or four voices, or for a single voice with various instrumental accompaniment.

Gais et jolis, liez, chantans et joieus
Sui, ce m'est vis, en gracieus retour } a
Pleins de desir et en cuer familleus
De reveoir me dame de valour, } a
Si qu'il n'est mauls, tristesse ne dolour
Qui de mon cuer peüst joie mouvoir: } b
Tout pour l'espoir que j'ay de li veoir.

- **Virelai** - a three stanza piece which opens with a five line refrain, forming, with the sixth and seventh line, a single musical phrase with the rhyme scheme *AABBAab* (capitals representing the refrain). The next section rhymes *bbabba* with a new musical phrase of three lines, repeated. The third section repeats the first musical phrase, again with *aabbaab* rhyming. This pattern continues for two more stanzas, closing with an last iteration of the refrain. The overall musical pattern is therefore *Abba, Abba, AbbA*. Guillaume de Machaut is a well-known composer of polyphonic virelai. Early virelai, called **bergerette,** followed these conventions but consisted of a single stanza, with the *AbbaA* pattern shown at right, and were typically monophonic.

Plus dure qu'un d'yamant
Ne que pierre d'aymant
Est vo durté
Dame, qui n'avez pité } A
De vostre amant
Qu'ocïes en desirant
Vostre amitié.

Dame vo pure biauté
Qui toutes passe, à mon gré } b
Et vo samblant
Simple et plein d'umilité
De douceur fine paré } b
En sousriant.

Par un acqueil attraiant,
M'ont au cuer en regardant
Si fort navré
Que jamais joie n'avré, } a
Jusques à tant
Que vo grace qu'il atent
M'arez donné.

Plus dure etc. A

- **Rondeau** - an eight line piece in which the opening two lines form a refrain, each with its own musical phrase, with all subsequent lines using one of these two phrases according to rhyme. The standard form is *ABaAabAB*, in which capitals represents the refrain, illustrating both the rhyme and musical pattern. Rondeaux can be either one-part or polyphonic. **Triolet** is a another term for this early style eight line rondeau. **Rondel** is a 13 or 14 line variation, with the form *ABba abAB abbaA(B).* In the 15th and 16th century, rondeaux were composed with couplets in place of each single line, so that the *ABaAabAB* form was retained but applied to a 16 line composition, shown at right.

Ma belle dame souverainne
Faites cesser ma grief dolour } A
Que j'endure pour vostre amour
Nuit et jour, dont j'ay tres grant painne } B

Ou autrement, soies certainne,
Je finneray dedens brief jour. } a
Ma belle dame souverainne
Faites cesser ma grief dolour } A

Il n'i a jour de la sepmainne
Que je ne soye en grant tristour } a
Se me veullies par vo doulcour
Secourir, de volonté plaine } b

Ma belle dame souverainne
Faites cesser ma grief dolour } A
Que j'endure pour vostr amour
Nuit et jour, dont j'ay tres grant painne. } B

3. Ballata is a Spanish form similar to the French *forme fixes*: first comes a refrain, called *ripresa*, with *aa* rhyming, sung to a single musical phrase; next is the verse stanza, comprised of two *piede*, with a *bc* rhyme and sung to a new musical phrase, and the *volta*, with a *cd* rhyme and sung to the same melody as the *ripresa.* The piece then ends with the refrain.

Gia da rete d'amor libera et sciolta / Era questa alma et hor e in pianti volta	*ripresa*
Che tue eterna bellezze al mondo sole / Qual non ebbe Dyana in fonte o in riva	*piede 1*
Con sembianti leggiadri et con parole / Han d'ogni alto parlar la mente priva	*piede 2*
Pero nympha celeste tanto diva / Ne me sia dal bel viso merze tua	*volta*
Gia da rete d'amor libera et sciolta / Era questa alma et hor e in pianti volta	*ripresa*

Ars Subtilior

The *Ars Subtilior* (more refined/subtle technique) period is also know as manneristic, or Post-Machaut style. It immediately followed and grew out of the Ars Nova style. Papal Avignon was the center of the movement, spreading to Italy in the early 15th century; ironically, there was a much greater emphasis on secular than sacred music in this period. Common forms were ballades, virelais, and rondeaux for solo voice with supporting instrumental tenor and contratenor parts. The majority of songs were love songs, with most texts written by the composer. The style is characterized by complicated rhythms and syncopations, and the solo voice is given rhythmic flexibility "as though composer had tried to capture and fix in notation the free, rubato-like delivery of a singer." Another characteristic of this time period is notational tricks and novelties, such as color coding, or drawing the music within pictures. Sometimes the trick is that the song itself is the topic – Senleche's *La harpe de melodie* is a picture as much as a piece of music, or Matteo da Perugia's *Andray soulet* is a canon singing about being a canon.
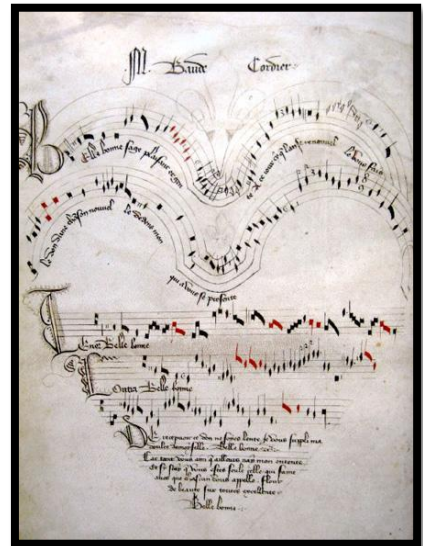
Renaissance

The Renaissance was a time of great increase in musical activity. More music was composed and performed than any previous age. The rise of the printing industry allowed music to be disseminated on a wider scale, and there was greater access for amateur musicians. European culture became more secular, which allowed secular forms such as Ballad, and Madrigal to flourish. For the first time, the entire chromatic scale was used, and the counterpoint of the 16th century was much more complex than previous eras.

1. Ballad is a form of secular, narrative song which evolved from earlier popular forms. Typically in the vernacular, ballads were largely disseminated orally, so that variant forms of the same song could exist in different times or regions. Ballads are almost always written in four-line quatrain stanzas, generally with an *abcb* rhyme structure (although *abab* is also found). The true 'ballad metre' is alternating lines of iambic tetrameter (8 syllables) and iambic trimeter (6

syllables); while most ballads are written in iambic meter of some form, the number of syllables in each line could vary, making the defining and categorizing of ballads difficult. The Spanish **romanceros**, for instance, were octosyllabic and used consonance rather than rhyme. Ballads are always strophic, usually with a single musical phrase repeated for each stanza, and can but do not always include a refrain.

2. Frottola is a secular Italian form from the late 15th/early 16th century, being a homophonic song with simple diatonic harmonies and the melody in the upper voice. It was usually performed a cappella, or by a soloist, with the other parts as instrumental accompaniment. This allowed the singer to improvise freely, especially at principal cadences. In the 1510's & 1520's, a large number of frottole were published for voice and lute. There are many sub-types of frottole: *barzelletta*, *capitolo*, *terza rima*, *strambotto*, *canzone*.

3. Lauda/Laude is the religious equivalent of the frottola. Laude were devotional songs, sung in Italian or Latin in non-liturgical gatherings. Melodies were often borrowed from secular songs. Laude influenced later composers such as Palestrina and Victoria.

4. Madrigal is the most important type of Italian secular music in the 16th century. It was through the rise of the madrigal that Italy became the center of European music. Madrigal is a general term that includes many different types of poetry: *sonnet, ballata, canzone, ottava rima,* and poems written expressly to be set to music as madrigals. The most typical style of poetry was a single stanza with a free rhyme scheme, and of seven- or eleven-syllable lines. The madrigal evolved from frottola, but used more serious poetry, often by a major poet such as Petrarch or Bembo, rather than by the composer. A madrigal could be polyphonic or homophonic. Earlier examples usually had 4 voices, but after 1550, 5 voices became the rule, and up to 8-10 voices was possible. Sometimes an instrument could substitute for a voice, but usually madrigals were sung. Madrigals were sung at all types of social gatherings, including court, and meetings of academies. Earlier madrigals were mostly sung by amateurs, but around 1570 professional singers became more common.   Madrigals were also sung in theatrical productions. The output of madrigal writing was enormous--2000 collections were published between 1530-1600. The most prominent composers included Costanzo Festa, Adrian Willaert, Jacob Arcadelt, Cipriano de Rore, Giovanni Palestrina, Orlando di Lasso, Luca Marenzio, Carlo Gesualdo, Claudio Monteverdi. Hans Leo Hassler (German) William Byrd, John Dowland, Thomas Morley, Thomas Weelkes, and John Wilbye.

5. Musique Mesurée is a French experimental style, practiced by a group of poets and composers who formed the *Académie de Poésie et de Musique* in 1570. The poet Jean-Antoine de Baïf wrote poetry in the ancient Greek and Latin style of long and short syllables, which were set to music by Le Jeune, Maduit, and other composers. This music followed strict rules of long notes for long syllables and short notes for short syllables. Since the French language doesn't differentiate between long and short syllables, this music used constant changes between duple and triple meter to illustrate changes. While these groups were too awkward to survive long as a musical style, it paved the way for irregular groupings of rhythm in the later *air de cour,* which was the most popular style of French vocal music after 1580.

Miscellaneous Forms

The following forms do not easily fit into any of the previously discussed musical periods, as they appeared in gradually evolving forms throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

1. Carol is a form which meant different things in different periods. Originally, carols (from French **carole**, called **villancico** in Spanish) were vocal pieces for accompanying circle dances, popular from the 1150s through the 1350s. In the 14th century, they began to be used a processionals during festivals and holidays, some written to be performed as part of religious mystery plays. These processional carols were strophic as a rule, generally having two or three voices, occasionally four, a the chorus and solo or unison for the verse; the chorus was almost always in Latin, while the verse could be in Latin but was often in the vernacular. Carols continued to be sung at festivals through the end of our period and into the modern era, although while carols sung at Advent, Christmas and Epiphany retained their popularity, carols for other festivals fell out of use, so that in modern times this form is associated almost exclusively with that time of year.

2. Mass is a choral composition which sets portions of the liturgy, usually in Latin. A mass can be a cappella, or accompanied by instrumental music. The earliest masses are set to Gregorian chant. The first polyphonic mass was written by Machaut, and his Messe de Nostre Dame is considered the most famous mass of 14th century. Most 15th century masses were based on a cantus firmus, usually taken from Gregorian chant, and most commonly sung by the tenor voice. This melody was used over and over within the mass, which made it a cohesive work.

Composers such as Guillaume Dufay and Johannes Ockeghem used secular tunes for their cantus firmi, but this practice became less common in the 16th century.   The most important 16th century composers were Palestrina, Byrd, and Victoria. Palestrina preferred to use his cantus firmus in all the lines, rather than confining it to the tenor.

3. Rounds, called 'rota' in the earliest English sources and 'roundelays' in late period, are a familiar form in which two or more parts form an 'infinite canon.' All parts sing an identical melody, but with staggered entrances so that polyphony is created from overlaying the melody's various musical phrases. Some period rounds have an additional harmonizing line called a **ground,** which is a repeated musical phrase harmonically related to the melody.
- **Caccia** is the Italian name for a style of three-voice round popular in the 14th century (called **chace** in France). These rounds were typically on the subject of hunting, and featured natural imagery and animated scenes. Caccia often had strict canon in the upper two parts and a third, non-canonical line filled with onomatepoeia serving as the ground. Chace, however, were typically strict three-part canon.
- **Catches** are a late 16th century type of round in which rests in the melodies' phrases combine to form new sentences across the parts, usually used for a humorous effect.

4. Ode (Classical/period definition) is a complex lyrical stanza adhering to strict rules, dedicated to glorifying a person, event or rhetorical subject, originating in ancient Greece. They could be

sung by soloists, recited with accompanying instrumentation, or sung by choruses in dramatic performance. In late 16th C England, poets resurrected the form, but did not adhere to the same rigid form of the originals. In modern colloquial usage, an ode is any piece dedicated to a person, event or subject and its glorification, therefore describing the subject and not the form.

5. Lament is any piece which expresses sadness, grief, loss or mourning. Like ode, lament refers to the subject of the piece rather than its lyrical or musical structure.

Instrumental & Dance Forms

Social dancing was widespread in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Men and women of breeding were expected to know how to dance, so a considerable part of the instrumental repertoire consisted of dance pieces for lute, keyboard or ensembles. In the 16th century, dances were no longer improvised as in the late Middle Ages. Dances were written out and printed. Dance forms usually had clearly marked and quite regular rhythmic patterns and were divided into distinct sections. Melodies could be ornamented, but counterpoint was rare, and dances were often grouped in pairs or threes.

1. Allemande is a dance that originated in the 16th century, in duple meter, which was derived from German dances popular at that time.

2. Estampie is a 13th or 14th century dance which could be monophonic or polyphonic. It contained several sections (*puncta* or *partes*) each of which was repeated. The first statement ended with an open cadence, and its repetition ended with a closed cadence. The same open and closed endings were usually used throughout. The **istanpite**, a 14th century Italian dance derived from estampie, is a more complex variation of the same form. Estampie was probably replaced in the early 15th century by the **basse dance/bassadanza**.

3. Galliard (Gagliarda) is a lively french or italian dance from the 15th century or earlier, in simple triple time, which is often paired & contrasted with the slower Pavane. The following description is from Morley:

> After every Pavan we usually set a Galliard (that is a kind of music made out of the other), causing it go by a measure which the learned call 'trochaicam rationem,' consisting of a long and short stroke successively, for as te foot trochaeus consisteth of one syllable of two times and another of one time so is the first of these two strokes double to the latter, the first being in time of a semibreve and the latter of a minim. This is a lighter and more stirring kind of dancing than the Pavan, consisting of the same number of strains; and look how many fours of semibreves you put in the strain of your Pavan so many times six minims must you put in the strain of your Galliard. The Italians make their Galliards (which they term Saltarelli) plain, and frame ditties to them which in their masquerades they sing and dance, and many times without any instruments at all, but instead of instruments they have courtesans disguised in men's apparel who sing and dance to their own songs.

4. Pavane (Pavana) is a dance of Italian origin, in simple duple time, It is a slow, stately dance, often followed by the much livelier Galliard. Morley's description:

> The next in gravity and goodness unto this is called a Pavan, a kind of staid music ordained for grave dancing and most commonly made of three strains, whereof every strain is played or sung twice; a strain they make to contain eight, twelve, or sixteen semibreves as they list, yet fewer than eight I have not seen in any Pavan. In this you may not so much insist in following the point as in a Fantasy, but it shall be enough to touch it once and so away to some close. Also in this you must cast your music by four, so that if you keep that rule it is not matter how many fours you put in your strain for it will fall out well enough in the end, the art of dancing being come to that perfection that every reasonable dancer will make measure of no measure so that it is no great matter of what number you make your strain.

Glossary

Cadence - melodic or harmonic progression signalling the end of a comp., section, or phrase.
> - Closed Cadence--ends on the tonic (1st) feels like the end.
> - Open Cadence--usually ends on the 4th or 5th. Feels like an ending, but not as final as the closed cadence--feels like it's leading to the next line.

Canon - melody which occurs in different lines at different times, creating polyphony.

Cantus Firmus - A melody line, usually taken from plainchant, which is used as the basis of a polyphonic composition, a backdrop for the other lines.

Counterpoint - see **polyphony.**

Homophony - a dominant melody line with one or more lines of accompanying chords.

Isorhythm - use of a repeated rhythmic pattern, independent of melody/movement in pitch.

Melisma - lyrical music in which multiple notes may be sung to a single syllable.

Monophony - solo or unison one-part melody.

Neumatic Notation -

Polyphony - two or more parts, harmonically related, but with independent melody and rhythm.

Strophic Form - piece containing repeated melodic phrases, i.e. verses, choruses, etc.

Syllabic - lyrical music in which there is one note to each syllable.

Through-composed - piece in which each melodic phrase is new and not repeated.

Recommended Reading / Works Cited

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