

Renaissance Music

The Renaissance musical period in Europe lasted from about 1400 to 1600 A.D. Renaissance composers wrote mainly for singers, although they wrote some instrumental music as well. Many Renaissance composers used **polyphony**, which is the use of more than one melody at the same time. Some important Renaissance composers were Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina, Josquin Des Prez, Heinrich Schütz, Claudio Monteverdi, Orlando Gibbons, and Girolamo Frescobaldi.

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina wrote 375 motets, 104 masses, and many madrigals. Palestrina was gifted as a choir conductor, singer, and organist, but he is known today as a composer. During the Renaissance, Palestrina wrote music for the Catholic Church, whose leaders were concerned that **sacred music**, or church music, was becoming too much like **secular music**, or everyday music.

Sacred **vocal music**, or church music that is sung, was the most important and popular type of music during the Renaissance. It came in the form of **masses** and **motets**. A mass is a type of church music sung by a choir. It is usually accompanied by musical instruments. A motet is sung by a choir, usually without accompaniment, and it can have up to twelve different voice parts. Palestrina and Josquin Des Prez were two important composers of sacred vocal music.

Secular vocal music, or everyday music that is sung, came in the form of **madrigals** during the Renaissance. Madrigals are songs for two or three voices. The madrigal was invented in Italy. It later became popular in England at the end of the sixteenth century.

Instrumental music, or music played with instruments, was not as important as vocal music, but it still existed. At first, instruments only accompanied voices, and were rarely played by themselves. Composers finally started writing for instruments alone near the end of the Renaissance period, although they continued to accompany singers. In England, it was popular to write for the **viol**. The viol is a stringed instrument like the violin. The keyboard was popular everywhere.

The Renaissance period was an important time in musical development. Instruments became more popular in music, music became more popular in the church, and music became much more complex and formal. Composers during the Renaissance period paved the way for great composers over the next few hundred years: Dietrich Buxtehude, Johann Pachelbel, Arcangelo Corelli, Henry Purcell, Georg Frederick Handel, and Johann Sebastian Bach.