Music was not strictly liturgical or religious in nature in the period of time known as the Middle Ages. Before 1000 A.D., it is difficult to find any examples of popular music sung outside the confines of the church. Songs with texts in Latin may have been written for the general populace, but the line between religious poetry and secular lyrics was inherently blurred. However, just as liturgical codices were being written for members of the clergy, books of secular poetry were written for the courts of the aristocracy. The largest book that preserves Latin secular songs is the *Carmina Burana*, written in the late 13\textsuperscript{th} century. It is unknown who specifically wrote these songs, as music of the Middle Ages was freely copied and performed by artists all around Europe. The performers of secular songs for the royal courts and members of the general populace were known as jongleurs.

**Party Time!!**

Jongleurs, or “jugglers”, tackled many more forms of entertainment than mere juggling. These men and women were singers, instrument players, storytellers, dancers, mimes, acrobats, and magicians. These wandering “jack-of-all-trades” traveled from court to court performing for the highest members of the aristocracy, or they would apply their craft in the marketplace to earn money for their next meal. Jongleurs soon became social outcasts; for all their talents, they were seen as some of the lowest figures on the social scale. Even the great medieval writer Petrarch wrote of the jongleurs: “People of no great wit, but with amazing memory, very industrious, and impudent beyond measure”. Ironically, these outcasts were responsible for the dissemination of Latin secular song and influenced other artists and composers to write additional contributions. Those most affected by the work of the jongleurs were the troubadours and trouveres of France.

Troubadours were poet-musicians living in what is now southern France around the 12\textsuperscript{th} century. The name comes from the verb “trobar”, which means “to compose in verse”. Scholars have attributed the beginnings of lyric poetry with the troubadours, but are unsure why the region of southern France was the birthplace of this new tradition. Between the years 1140 to 1220 is when the troubadours flourished in southern France, and we have about 275 melodies that currently survive. Though some traveled extensively from the southern province of Aragon to as north as Limousin, many troubadours consisted of members of the aristocracy, and even include...
kings in their number. Duke William IX of Aquitaine (1071-1176) himself produced eleven poems that were sung by minstrels, and is considered one of the earliest known troubadours.

Poetical and musical structures of troubadour melodies are greatly varied. Many songs are designed to be accompanied by musical instruments and dancing, and some are meant to be performed by a solo artist or a chorus. The subject matter that was used ranged from political and moral topics, but the subject that mostly defined troubadour poetry was courtly love. A favorite genre of troubadour melodies was the pastourelle, in which a knight pursues a shepherdess who either succumbs to his advances, or cries for help and drives the knight off. Sometimes a narrator would act as the speaker, or a duet would be sung between two performers acting out the parts of the knight and the shepherdess. More episodes could be added to the melody and acted out by a group of performers accompanied by instruments to form a musical play. Adam de la Halle (c. 1237-1287), known as the last of the troubadours, wrote the most famous of these musical plays, *Jeu de Robin et de Marion* at around 1284. Another type of poetry was the sirventes, or “song of service”. In one of the few troubadour melodies that does not concern courtly love, the singer performs a service to his lord in which he was a retainer. Later, the sirventes eventually was sung on any topic except love. Though not a melodic form, the chanson de geste, or “song of deeds”, was extensively used in the Middle Ages. An epic narrative poem recounting the heroic deeds of national heroes, almost none of the music has been preserved. The most famous chanson de geste is *The Song of Roland*, dating back to the 11th century.

Right: A troubadour performs for a royal Medieval court.

Another poetical type of dance song of the troubadours is the instrumental estampie. Sometimes the estampie could be monophonic, other times polyphonic, and could be accompanied by instruments such as the harp, lute, drums, or other wind instruments. The portative organ was small enough to be carried by a strap around the neck, and trumpets, recorders, and flutes were also commonplace.

The trouveres were the northern counterparts of the southern troubadours living in France. While dance songs in the southern part of France were transmitted throughout the country, the trouveres drew new forms that became what is known as the formes fixes, or “fixed forms” of later French poetry: the rondeau, the ballade, and the virelai. Adam de la Halle’s *Jeu de Robin et Marion* is written as a rondeau, a form that has unison choral refrains in the poetical pattern AAbbaB. Such refrains have found their way into the popular music of today, which we know as the chorus. Counterparts of the jongleurs of France, the German Minnesingers operated in ways very similar to the troubadours and trouveres. While closely related to their French counterparts, the Minnesingers performed their version of poetical form by using what is called Bar form, characterized by the pattern aab, which would be passed down for centuries to come.
Music in the 13\textsuperscript{th} Century

By the beginning of the 1200’s, musical polyphony was in widespread use throughout Europe. Organum and outdated forms like the conductus were no longer used, and the motet would remain the dominant form for the next fifty years. Motets were primarily composed in French and Latin, starting from the addition of texts to pre-existing clausuale, making them practically identical in the first half of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century. One major departure in the latter half of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century which continued into the Renaissance was the use of polytextuality, or the use of more than one text in the same motet. Double motets contained two upper voices, while triple motets have three, each with its own unique text. Four voiced motets are extremely rare, and the three voiced motet became the standard form.

The dividing line between music of the Middle Ages and music of the Renaissance is the fact that Medieval music created a diversity of styles by making each part of a single motet as independent as possible. Each voice has a distinct melodic and rhythmic character that weaves in and out of the harmonic texture that sometimes does not resolve until the very end of the piece. Renaissance music is characterized by heavy consonances and unity in movement by all voices, focusing on a more “vertical” structure. By contrast, the independent, flowing lines of the Medieval motet creates a “horizontal” feel that is unique in the development of polyphony thus far. In addition, Medieval music does not reflect much, if any, emotion or great meaning in its texts. The Renaissance begins the tradition of emotional expression which would not reach its peak until the later works of Ludwig van Beethoven.

In addition to stylistic evolutions in 13\textsuperscript{th} century music, theoretical and notational advances were also being made. During the second half of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century, theorists began creating differently shaped notes to indicate specific values. Franco of Cologne, who was discussed in the Part 2 of Chant in the Middle Ages, built a system of long and short (breve and semibreves) notes that was termed “Franconian”. His treatise \textit{Ars cantus mensurabilis} (The Art of Mensurable Song) in around 1260 provided the starting point for all future developments in music notation. Our modern equivalent of whole, quarter, and eighth notes generated from the advancements made from Franconian notation. These advances would play a large part in the changes and diversity brought by the fourteenth century.
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**Reaching Toward a New Art**

While the 13\(^{th}\) century is characterized by stability and the end of the tumultuous “dark ages” that has become the symbol of the Middle Ages, the 14\(^{th}\) century marked a turning point in the development of music, as well as the development of mankind. The authority of the Christian Church with the center of its power in Rome had not been questioned or challenged in nearly a thousand years. It was the influence of the church, after all, that reintegrated a society suffering from disease, invasion, and corruption after the fall of the Roman Empire. However, some 900 years later, the church no longer held the supreme power over government and politics of which it once boasted. The corruption that plagued Rome had infiltrated the clergy, with high elected officials living corrupt lives to expand their wealth and power. Even the office of the pope was no exception; for over thirty years there had been rival claims to the papacy, sometime as many as three rivals competing against each other. These events foreshadowed the reformations of the Renaissance, particularly of the Protestant faith. The separation of church and state grew larger in the minds of the people, and they turned their attention from matters of faith to a greater participation in science, industry, and the arts.

In music, the French particularly were bored of what they termed the outmoded styles of the previous century. They soon called their music an *ars nova*, or “new art”. Though we may find in our modern era that this “new art” is not so much a musical revolution as much a refinement and elaboration of existing forms, it nonetheless inspired composers and musicians of subsequent generations to experiment with new forms and means of expression all the way through the 20\(^{th}\) century. The world of European literature also flourished with new works, including Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. The term “ars nova” originates around 1320 from a treatise by Philippe de Vitry of the same name. Praised by Petrarch as “the one real poet of France”, de Vitry’s (1291-1361) biography is largely unknown. Given the fact that only four motets can be authenticated as composed by de Vitry, it is ironic that he gave the name to all musical advancement in the 14\(^{th}\) century. Even more strange, de Vitry’s treatise merely outlines a new set of notational principles. However, he does receive credit for the practice of duple meter on the same level as triple meter, which until then had been exclusively practiced by composers. He is also credited for the first use of stems on certain notes, a practice that continues into the present day. The first collection of musical works containing de Vitry’s and others’ advancements of the Ars Nova is known as the *Roman de Fauvel*.

*Left: Philippe de Vitry (1291-1361)*

**The Roman de Fauvel**

The *Roman de Fauvel* is the first collection of music reflected in the Ars Nova. There are 167 pieces that are catalogued in the manuscript, of which 34 motets are in polyphonic style. The significance of the title comes
from a lengthy poem by Gervais de Bus, which narrates a medieval satire on social and political corruption. Fauvel, the main character, is a donkey, who travels through the aristocratic circles receiving the respect of the corrupt priests, magistrates, and nobility. The name Fauvel itself reflects the nature of these characters, as each letter stands for a different sin: Flattery, Avarice, Violence, Envy, and Lust. The word *fauve* is also the color of a dingy reddish-yellow, as Fauvel is not worthy to possess the bright colors of human virtue.

Of the 34 pieces of the Roman de Fauvel, only one is a four-part motet. Latin texts are the dominant language in the manuscript, as there are only four French texts throughout. Some of the motets are cited in the Ars Nova treatise by Philippe de Vitry and are believed to be his own compositions. One particular motet, *Garrit gallus – In nova fert*, uses a technique that became the defining feature of motets in the 13th century known as *isorhythm*.

The tenors, or lowest voice, of de Vitry’s motets provided some of the earliest examples of isorhythm, a technique that would be largely copied and improved upon for the remainder of the Middle Ages. The tenors are laid out in segments of identical rhythm, forming patterns called *talea* (cuttings). Each tenor, called the *color*, was stated repeatedly in the same rhythm, though not with the same sequence of notes. When the original tenor was repeated note for note, it would be a repetition of a color, while many talea could be used for each statement of the tenor. The reason why each melodic statement of the tenor was called the color is because composers such as de Vitry would label each repetition of the main tenor theme in a different colored ink. They hoped that this would facilitate the performers to read the music more easily and effectively.

Factors such as these caused composers to alter the style of their polyphonic technique. The tenors became longer, the rhythms became more complex with each talea, and motets that were created in this style became known as “isorhythmic motets”. It should be noted, however, that Philippe de Vitry cannot be credited with the “invention” of isorhythm, as motets were composed even before the 14th century that exhibited signs of lengthening tenors and composing rhythmic variations on their melodies. The 14th century composers such as de Vitry brought isorhythm to the forefront as the leading compositional technique through most of the remaining century. Thus isorhythm became the most complex and elaborate musical form ever written by Medieval composers.

“Yo, Gio!!”

The man, the myth, the legend. **Guillaume de Machaut** is considered by most Medieval scholars to be the most prolific, and greatest, composer of the Middle Ages. Though younger than his contemporary Philippe de Vitry, Machaut’s compositional output far exceeds his counterpart and is considered the last of the trouvers. Born in Champagne in northern France, Machaut became court secretary to King John of Bohemia in his early twenties. Hardly anything is known of his early life, but we do know that Machaut gained fame not only as a composer, but as a poet as well. All of the texts in Machaut works were written by him, of which there are over 400 separate examples. In fact, his poetry helps us learn more about his personal life, such as that he had gout and blindness in one eye, or his survival of the Black Death which destroyed much of
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Europe’s population in 1348. He is certainly one of the few composers of the Middle Ages, or at any era for that matter, to gain fame as a composer and live to enjoy it.

Machaut is not only known for his mass production of compositions, but also for his ability to write for the multiple genres, both sacred and secular, of his generation. The fixed forms: the ballades, rondeau, and virelai, in addition to his motets, are just as impressive as his sacred forms, most notably the Messe de Nostre Dame.

Above: Guillaume de Machaut (c.1300 – 1377)

Some of Machaut’s notable achievements as a composer include his ability to shape his poetic stanzas into complete works which could stand on their own as separate pieces. His skillful understanding of the manipulation of rhythmic and melodic motifs allowed Machaut to unify his many different ideas into one complete flowing unit. More importantly, Machaut developed the technique of isorhythm so it would not only be used in the tenor, but all voices of his works, in what is termed pan-isorhythmic. In his Messe de Nostre Dame, which is the first polyphonic Mass attributed to a single composer, all six movements are comprised of four voices and is organized to be performed as a single composition. No other composer in the Middle Ages would match the success of Guillaume de Machaut because no other composers could successfully write in all the forms and styles of his age. Even following the transition into the Renaissance, Machaut remains a superior figure in his compositional achievements.

The Ars Nova in Italy

Though most of the languages used for composition in the 14th century were either French or Latin, Italian began to be accepted as a style for lyrical verse with the arrival of The Divine Comedy, written by Dante Alighieri in 1307. Dante originally speculated about writing his work in Latin, but reconsidered and wrote it in his native Tuscan dialect, establishing Tuscan as the primary Italian dialect. Though the Italian Ars Nova does not form part of the Ars Nova of Philippe de Vitry, it heralded the way for Italian composers of the 14th century to make their mark on Medieval history, which is known today as Italian trecento music. The term “trecento”, or “1300’s” is the accepted way of labeling the Italian musical achievements of the 14th century.

While most music of the Italian trecento was largely improvised, only composers associated with the church were trained in notation techniques. While secular Italian music before 1330 has mostly been lost to history, codices such as the Rossi Codex and the Squarcialupi Codex preserve the three secular song forms in the Italian Ars Nova: the madrigal, caccia, and the ballata.
The madrigal is the first form of Italian secular poetry to have been given polyphonic settings. The name comes from the word *matricale*, meaning “herd”, describing a type of rustic, pastoral poem. Many madrigals cover a wide range of topics and style, particularly courtly love or satire. The form of the madrigal consists of a number of three-line stanzas (aab), in which the two voices have the same text. The Italian composer Jacopo da Bologna excelled in this form, such as in the case of the madrigal *Fenice Fu* (“A phoenix”).

The caccia, or “chase”, is typically in three-part polyphony, the upper parts forming a verbal canon. The name itself gives the form its meaning, as the caccia could mean a hunt, referring to the chase of one voice after another. Sometimes composers would add realistic sounds into the music, such as a horn call or bird songs. Realistic techniques such as this were also added to other forms, such as the madrigal or the French virelai, a technique that continues through the present day.

Finally, the ballata is the closest to the provincial Italian folk dances, even in its polyphonic form. The word “ballata” originally described a song to accompany dancing, and was primarily monophonic throughout the 13th century. Although a few monophonic ballata songs from the 14th century have been preserved, most of the examples from after 1365 are for two or even three voices.

**Francesco Landini**

Landini comes from what is known as the “second generation” of Italian trecento composers. Born around 1325 near Florence, Landini was blind from birth as a victim of smallpox. Nonetheless, Landini became the most celebrated Italian composer of the 14th century even though most of his biography remains unknown. He is shown in the picture below playing the portative organ; he was said to be such a celebrated performer that he was crowned with laurels (an extremely high honor) by Peter, King of Cyprus. Though it is believed that Landini traveled throughout northern Italy, particularly Venice, he spent most of his life in his native city of Florence, where he died in 1397. He is buried in the Church of San Lorenzo where he served as organist.

Landini wrote no sacred works. His secular music numbers about 90 two-part and 40 three-part polyphonic works. Because of his advancements in the traditional Italian music of the above listed forms, he is considered by many scholars to be the Italian equivalent of Guillaume de Machaut.

One of Landini’s unique techniques was to ornament a passage starting from a major sixth to the octave by having a lower neighbor leap up a third in the upper part, such as in the ballata *Non avra ma’ pieta*. This has become known as the “Landini cadence”. Another characteristic of Landini’s Italian style was to write a melisma on the first and penultimate syllable of a poetic line.
Landini employs heavy consonances such as thirds and sixths, although his phrases always end on a fifth or an octave. The early Medieval practice of parallel seconds or sevenths, such as in the music of Perotin, start to vanish entirely in the wake of the Renaissance. While Landini seemed limited in his scope of creating purely secular music, his prodigious output and unique thematic treatment recognizes him in a class of his own.

They Don’t Make ‘Em Like They Used To

Scholars, historians, and theorists differ on when exactly the Middle Ages ends, and the Renaissance begins. It is impossible to put an exact date on the changing of an era, like a starter’s pistol. Instead, only an estimate on when the greatest changes from one era to the next can be made to create a loose boundary between the two. Countries and fashions do not change overnight. Even with the development of polyphony centuries before, composers still wrote monophonic songs. Though new practices came into existence and changed the face of music history, older, more antique styles did not lose their effectiveness immediately. Music in the 1400’s continued much as it had from earlier years, while at the same time developing new innovations that would characterize the transformation at the end of the Middle Ages. Composers of the early 15th century became aware that their art was something completely original and represented a new development in musical form and expression.

One of those new developments at the end of the 14th century was characterized by extreme rhythmic complexity known as manneristic style. Harmonies are distorted through multiple suspensions, syncopations, and complex part writing. The reason why composers intentionally complicated their music such as this was to give each line its own sense of rhythmic independence. While the tenor was originally composed, a composer could experiment with a variety of rhythmic obstacles, completely negating any sense of rhythmic continuity. The composer Baude Cordier’s rondeau Belle, bonne, sage, is a perfect example of how unusual rhythmic patterns can add further dimension to a piece. It is interesting to note that composers such as Cordier enjoyed writing his pieces in the shape of the poem’s theme. For example, the famous virelai La Harpe de melodie by Jacob Senleches is actually written in the shape of a harp and Tout par compass sus compose by Cordier is in the shape of a compass (see below). This explosion of rhythmic diversity would not be repeated again until well into the 20th century. Pitch, too, was experimented upon. Alterations of notes by half-steps and whole-steps outside a given key were performed, sometimes for no reason other than personal taste. A note outside the given key of a piece was called “outside the hand”, in reference to the Guidonian Hand covered in Chant in the Middle Ages, Part 1 (right). This continued until the mid 16th century where accidentals were used instead of entire modal transpositions. But perhaps the most striking developments of music into a more international style came from the contributions of English composers.
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The English Transition into the Renaissance

“*I am Arthur, King of the Britons.*” “*King of the who?*” “*The Britons, King of the Britons!*” “*Who are the Britons?*” “*We are! We are all Britons, and I am your King!*” “*Didn’t know we had a King.*”

-Monty Python and the Holy Grail

Between the 11th through to the early 15th century, there is no evidence to suggest that England was responsible for any major changes in musical development in Europe. For that period of approximately four hundred years, there are only four preserved manuscripts whose origins are mostly French, particularly from the school of Notre Dame. The first sizable manuscript that can be attributed entirely from English composers is the Old Hall Manuscript, which dates from the early fifteenth century. In this case, it is important to note the difference between English composers and English music. The school of Notre Dame, in addition to the French and Italian Ars Nova were both known to English composers, in which their works reflect those continental styles. It was the purely English development of these styles that we get what has been termed a truly “English sound”. For example, an interesting characteristic of English polyphony is that it serves almost a purely liturgical purpose. This does mean that secular music did not exist in England, only that there are no records of it. Because the English were using older styles that were no longer in use on the continent, their development of those styles differed greatly from mainstream Europe. One of those changes included the use of major tonality in contrast to the modal system. Instead of giving each individual line its own rhythmic independence, a more homophonic approach was used to unify each line into a cohesive, more “vertical” unit. The English also preferred more consonances to the vanishing dissonances of the French motet, such as writing more sixths and thirds in parallel motion (parallel fifths and octaves were not allowed, however). The technique known as *fauxbourdon* allowed a piece to be accompanied by a lower voice in parallel sixths, provided that each phrase resolve in an octave. By the mid 14th century, parallel unisons, fifths, and octaves were outlawed, and all rhythms in
dissant gave a chordal effect, known as **homorhythmic style**. English music would eventually find its way to the European countries of the mainland through the large number of works copied into manuscripts in the first half of the 15th century.

**Dun-Da-Da-Dun-Dunstable!**

The efforts of English composers may have been chiefly responsible for the origin of the musical Renaissance, but it was **John Dunstable** who was chief among them. Known as “the greatest English composer of his day”, Dunstable was the only composer whose music of the new style was practiced and preserved on the whole of Europe. John Dunstable (c. 1390-1453) spent his life in the service of the English duke of Bedford. Almost nothing is known of his early life, as is the case with most Middle Ages composers. Seventy of his compositions have been preserved, although it is unknown how many more he wrote. He continued to use isorhythm in his motets, but his use of panconsonant style and vertical harmonies cannot be classified as a “Medieval style”. In Dunstable’s music, the chordal polyphonic writing is dictated by successive consonant triads. As such, polyphony in the Renaissance starts to lose the independent sense of individual lines and becomes more homogeneous in character. In this we find a fundamental shift in the way music was composed and the dividing line between Medieval music and music of the Renaissance. This English tradition, with Dunstable at its head, brought about the end of music in the Middle Ages.

**For Review:**

- While secular music of the Middle Ages was being written in conjunction with liturgical music, no recorded example exists before 1100 A.D.
- The performers of this secular music were called **jongleurs**, and provided entertainment to aristocrats and peasants alike, though they were considered low in social standing.
- The southern French **troubadours** and the northern counterparts the **trouveres** spread secular music throughout Europe with new forms such as the **pastourelle** and the **chanson de geste**. Instrumental dances of this type were called **estampie**.
- These secular songs led to the three *forms fixes* or “fixed forms” of dance music: the **rondeau**, the **ballade**, and the **virelai**. Each song type differs in poetical structure, and the subject matter ranges from politics to satire, but especially courtly love.
- Motets in the 13th century started to use multiple texts for each individual line, called **polytextuality**.
The 13th century also saw the rise of the Ars Nova, or “new art” in France. Drawn from the notational achievements of Franco de Cologne, the Ars Nova was merely a refinement of already existing musical forms.

The Roman de Fauvel manuscript is the most complete collection of pieces in the Ars Nova style. Some of the motets are attributed to Philippe de Vitry, who treatise on music gave the Ars Nova its name. De Vitry also composed his motets in a new style called isorhythm, which repeats melodic sections of the tenor (called the color) and alters them rhythmically (called a talea).

The greatest French composer of isorhythm, and perhaps the greatest and most prolific composer of the Middle Ages, was Guillaume de Machaut. He wrote over 400 collected works, including the famous Messe de Nostre Dame, the first complete Mass to be attributed to a single composer.

In Italy, composers of the 14th century Ars Nova were called trecento composers. The chief styles of the trecento movement were the Italian madrigal, the ballata, and the caccia. Francesco Landini was considered the greatest composer of the Italian Ars Nova.

One of the most striking developments of music in the Middle Ages was known as manneristic style, or the blurring of rhythmic integrity through multiple suspensions and syncopations. The manneristic style did not last long in favor of the more vertical harmonies of the Renaissance.

The final transformation into the Renaissance was headed by the English style of composing, led by John Dunstable. Music is laden with heavy consonances and less independence of individual lines.

Suggested Listening:
Bernart de Ventadorn (c. 1150-1180): Can vei la lauzeta mover
Adam de la Halle (c. 1237-1287): Jeu de Robin et de Marion
Instrumental Dance: Istampita Palamento
Anonymous polytextual motet: Amours mi font/En mai/Flos filiu eius
Philippe de Vitry (1291-1361): Garrit Gallus/In nova fert/Neuma
Guillaume de Machaut (c. 1300-1377): La Messa de Nostre Dame; Rose, Liz
Jacopo de Bologna (14th century): Madrigal: Fenice Fu
Francesco Landini (c. 1327-1397): Ballata: Non avra ma pieta
Baude Cordier (c. 1380-1440): Rondeau Belle, bonne, sage
Jacob Senleches (14th century): Virelai: La Harpe de melodie
John Dunstable (c. 1390-1453): Quam pulchra es; Veni sancte Spiritus