

## A Brief History of Classical Music Part 1 - Medieval Music

Contributed by RickPaul  
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Writing was not a skill in abundance at the time and so any type of production of written work was time consuming as well as expensive. The majority of the work that has survived is of a religious nature as the holy institutions of the time had more resources than most non-religious ones. This has resulted in a lack of knowledge in what music was popular outside of the churches of the time.

Looking back at the music we find that in the beginning it was mostly monophonic and homorhythmic as it was simply sung text with little or usually no instrumental accompaniment. Later in the period musical notations begin to develop that denote polyphonic and generally accepted practices come into use that demonstrate this. Harmony in fifths and later fourths appear in the latter half of the period as do other more complex notations including multiple lines of repeated vocals, multiple texts and notation for instruments.

Several instruments currently used in Classical music were also used during the Medieval Music era. Some have changed form and the methods for playing have transformed, but in general the instruments are the same. For example the flute, then made of wood could be played either in a side-blown or an end-blown fashion where today most flutes are silver and side-blown whereas the recorder has retained both its shape and method of playing into the present. Other instruments like the pan flute are less popular now but can still be found in use on occasion and the earliest variation on the trombone, organ and fiddle emerged.

Stringed instruments were generally plucked during the Medieval music era and popular instruments included the lute, mandora, psaltery and dulcimer which later became a struck instrument. The Byzantine Lyra, the first recorded bowed instrument, was in use during the period as was the hurdy-gurdy, a mechanical, hand-cranked violin-like instrument with a bow.

Surviving music from this time includes a wide variety of Gregorian Chant, Ambrosian Chant, Musica Enchiriadis, Codex Calixtinus of Santiago de Compostela, and the Winchester Troper. While much of the music was anonymous it is believed that several poets and lyricists lent their talents to this endeavor and include names like Pope Gregory I, St. Godric, Tutilo and Hucbald. Later in the period (after 1150) Notre Dame required a large amount of music to be created and Paris became a center for the creation of that music which became known as Ars antiqua of which surviving pieces include Codex Montpellier and Codex Bamberg with authors including Leonin, Perotin and Petrus de Cruce. Another form of music that survived is the troubadours, who sang about romantic love, war and chivalry and the Trouveres singing of similar themes but at a slightly later period (12th into the 13th centuries).

Medieval music ended the period with the Ars Nova which began around 1310 and saw progressively more complex music including polyphony in secular music which had only been in sacred music previously. Most of this period's music was French but some was also Italian and German.

The end of the period is still under some debate. It is generally agreed that the Renaissance ended the period but as it took some time to spread from Italy to England there is a body of music that is transitional in nature and so does not properly fit into either era. Generally it is agreed that the medieval music period ended around 1400-1450.

#### About the Author:

P.G. Wordhouse writes on a variety of topics including music, technology, electronics and travel. The Classical Music series of historical articles was inspired while listening to music at [Classicalconnect.com](http://Classicalconnect.com), a free classical music site.