Chapter 4

French and Italian Music in the Fourteenth Century
Prelude

Fourteenth century experienced terror and turmoil

- Hundred Years’ War (1337–1453) between France and England
  - disrupted agriculture, manufacturing, and trade
- prolonged economic decline
- 1348–50 Great Plague (Black Death) wiped out third of population
- circumstances combined to spark peasant and urban rebellions
Church in crisis; supremacy of pope questioned

- election of French pope
  - 1309–1377 popes resided at Avignon
  - under control of French king
- 1378–1417 Papal Schism: rival claimants to papal throne
- corrupt life of clergy
- sharp criticism, rise of heretical movements
Science and secularism
- science separated from religion
- philosophers distinguish between divine revelation and human reason
  - spurred advances in science and technology
  - increasing interest in the individual; growing secular movement

The arts
- growth of literacy; works in vernacular
  - Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1307)
  - Boccacio’s *Decameron* (1353)
  - Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400)
The arts (cont’d)

- Giotto (ca. 1266–1337), Florentine painter
  - more naturalistic representation
  - symmetry of composition, sense of depth
- sacred compositions continued to flourish
- cultivation of secular song

Ars Nova (*New Art or New Method; early 1320s*), treatise

- attributed to Philippe de Vitry (1291–1361)
  - French musician, poet, and bishop of Meaux
Prelude (cont’d)

Ars Nova (New Art or New Method; early 1320s), treatise (cont’d)

- Ars Nova denotes French musical style, first half of fourteenth century
  - innovations in rhythm and its notation; carried to extremes
- Jacques de Liège
  - objected to “imperfect” duple division and use of syncopation
  - defended “perfect” triple division
Ars Nova (*New Art or New Method; early 1320s*), treatise (cont’d)

- important new genre: polyphonic art song
  - motet topics became more political
  - structurally more complex
  - use of isorhythm
- Guillaume de Machaut and Francesco Landini
  - important composers of polyphonic songs
The Ars Nova in France

Roman de Fauvel, narrative poem

- satirizes political corruption, secular and ecclesiastical
  - Fauvel symbolizes world turned upside down
  - his name is acrostic for sins he personifies
    - Flattery, Avarice, Villainy, Variète ("Fickleness), Envy, and Lâcheté ("Baseness")
- 1317 illuminated manuscript
  - 169 pieces of music interpolated within the poem
  - most are monophonic; Latin chants to secular songs
  - thirty-four motets, included first examples of Ars Nova style
The Ars Nova in France (cont’d)

Isorhythmic motets

• Philippe de Vitry’s motets, earliest examples of isorhythm (“equal rhythm”)

• tenors laid out in segments of identical rhythm
  ▪ may recur up to ten times in one piece
  ▪ extends Notre Dame clausulae practice
  ▪ fourteenth century longer, more complex rhythmic patterns
  ▪ tenor moves slowly, foundational structure

• recurring elements in most tenors
  ▪ talea: repeating rhythmic unit
  ▪ color: recurring segment of melody
Ex04-01
Isorhythmic motets (cont’d)

- from *Roman de Fauvel* (NAWM 25)
  - tenor, three statements of the color
  - color divided into three equal parts, fits three statements of talea
- isorhythm occasionally applied to other genres
  - movement from Machaut’s Mass (NAWM 26a)
- isorhythmic designs: singers grasp shape, commit to memory
Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300–1377)

Leading composer and poet of French Ars Nova

- born to middle-class family, northeastern France
- educated as cleric in Reims, took Holy orders
- 1323: service of John of Luxembourg, king of Bohemia
  - described travels and military campaigns in his poetry
- 1340–1377 resided in Reims, canon of the cathedral
- strong support from royal patrons
Leading composer and poet of French Ars Nova (cont’d)

- compiled his complete works
  - illuminated manuscripts
  - self-awareness as creator
- major works include: *Messe de Nostre*, *Hoquetus David*, twenty-three motets, forty-two ballades, twenty-two rondeaux, three-three virelais
Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300–1377) (cont’d)

- **Motets**
  - twenty-three motets (ninteenth isorhythmic) from early in his career
  - longer and more rhythmically complex
  - clever use of hocket in upper voices
    - hocket (French *hoquet*, “hiccup”)
    - two voices alternate in rapid succession

- **Mass:** *Messe de Nostre Dame* (Mass of Our Lady), early 1360s
  - polyphonic setting of Mass Ordinary
Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300–1377) (cont’d)

Mass: *Messe de Nostre Dame* (Mass of Our Lady), early 1360s (cont’d)

- conceived as one composition
- performed in Reim into fifteenth century

- movements linked together by style and approach
  - recurring motives and cadence tones

- isorhythmic movements: Kyrie, Sanctus, Angus Dei and Ite, missa est
  - each use different cantus firmus

- discant movements: Gloria and Credo
Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300–1377) (cont’d)

- Mass: *Messe de Nostre Dame* (Mass of Our Lady), early 1360s (cont’d)
  - syllabic, largely homorhythmic
  - both movements end with elaborate isorhythmic “Amens”
- Kyrie (NAWM 26a), 4-part isorhythmic movement
  - tenor: cantus firmus melody of Kyrie chant
    - divided into taleae of different lengths
  - contratennor, second, supporting voice coordinated with tenor
Breve
  - Perfect
  - Imperfect

Semibreve
  - Perfect or major
  - Imperfect or minor

Minim
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Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300–1377) (cont’d)

- Mass: *Messe de Nostre Dame* (Mass of Our Lady), early 1360s (cont’d)
  - also is isorhythmic
  - same range as tenor, has its own talea
  - forms harmonic foundation with tenor
  - opening Christe: contrast of rhythmic rest and activity
    - upper two voices move more rapidly, syncopated
    - partly isorhythmic
    - rhythmic activity: repeating figuration, unifying motives

- Love songs
  - continued trouvère tradition
Love songs (cont’d)

- songs performed as entertainment in courts
- wrote monophonic pieces in standard poetic forms (*formes fixes* “fixed forms”)
  - *formes fixes* derived from genres associated with dancing
- *Douce dame jolie* (Sweet lovely lady, NAWM 27), monophonic virelai
  - innovative rhythm, supple syncopations
Polyphonic songs, chansons

- treble-dominated style
  - cantus or treble carried the text
  - cantus supported by slower-moving untexted tenor
  - one or two untexted voices may be added

- *Rose, liz, printemps, verdure* (Rose, lily, springtime, foliage, NAWM 28), 4-voice rondeau
  - rondeau, “fixed form”
  - long melismas, up to four measures
  - varied rhythms; not isorhythmic
Guillaume de Machaut (ca. 1300–1377) (cont’d)

Polyphonic songs, chansons (cont’d)

- ballades
  - Machaut wrote more than forty ballades
  - most serious of the *formes fixes*
  - philosophical or historical themes; celebrate event or person
Italian Trecento Music (from “mille trecento,” Italian for 1300)

- Fourteenth-century Italy, collection of city-states
  - each cultivated its own cultural traditions
  - music accompanied every aspect of social life
    - most music never written down
    - church polyphony mostly improvised, few notated works survive
    - Italian trovatore followed troubadour tradition
  - secular polyphonic songs
    - composed and sung as refined entertainment for wealthy patrons
Fourteenth-century Italy, collection of city-states (cont’d)

- Florence important cultural center fourteenth to sixteenth centuries
  - home to Dante and Boccacio, and most famous Trecento musician, Landini

- Squarcialupi Codex: source for Italian Trecento polyphony
  - named for Antonio Squarcialupi (1416–1480), Florentine organist, owned but did not compile
  - 354 pieces, mostly two or three voices, twelve composers
Italian Trecento Music (from “mille trecento,” Italian for 1300) (cont’d)

- Fourteenth-century Italy, collection of city-states (cont’d)
  - secular forms: madrigal, caccia, and ballata

- Fourteenth-century madrigal
  - idyllic, pastoral, satirical, or love poems
  - usually set for two or three voices
  - *Non al suo amante* by Jacopo da Bologna (NAWM 30)
    - poem by Italian lyric poet Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374)
Italian Trecento Music (from “mille trecento,” Italian for 1300) (cont’d)

- Fourteenth-century madrigal (cont’d)
  - characteristic rhythmic variety and fluidity
  - differs from French chanson
    - two voices relatively equal, occasionally echo one another
    - long melismas on last accented syllable of each line
    - more florid in upper voice, without syncopations

- Ballata
  - became popular later than madrigal
  - influence of treble-dominated French chanson
  - “ballata” (from ballare, “to dance”), originally meant “a song to accompany dancing”
Ballata (cont’d)
- two to three polyphonic voices, date from after 1365
  - form resembles single stanza of French virelai

Francesco Landini (ca. 1325–1397)
- foremost Italian musician of the Trecento, leading composer of ballate
  - blinded by smallpox during childhood, turned to music
  - master of many instruments
  - organist at the monastery of Santa Trinità in 1361–65
### Madrigal

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### Ballata

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Ex04-03

countertenor

tenor
Francesco Landini (ca. 1325–1397) (cont’d)

- chaplain at church of San Lorenzo
- wrote no sacred music
- major works: 140 ballate, 12 madrigals, 1 caccia, 1 virelai

- *Non averà ma’pietà* (She will never have mercy, NAWM 32)
  - later style, 3-voice ballata
  - treble-dominated
Francesco Landini (ca. 1325–1397) (cont’d)

- solo voice with two untexted accompanying parts
- concern for text declamation: melismatic passages never interrupt middle of a verse

- Landini’s style:
  - sweetness of harmonies, contain 3rds and 6ths
  - graceful vocal melodies, mostly stepwise
  - Landini cadence
    - progression of M6th to the octave
    - ornamented by lower neighbor leaping up a 3rd in top voice
Caccia

• parallels French chace
  ▪ popular-style melody set in strict canon, lively descriptive words

• caccia and cacce mean “hunt”
  ▪ pursuit of one voice after another
  ▪ sometimes applies to subject matter of text (NAWM 31)

• caccia has free untexted tenor in slower motion below
  ▪ unlike French and Spanish counterparts
French influence

- late 1300s, increased contact between Italian and northern composers
- Italian national characteristics lost
- contemporary French style absorbed
- especially noticeable after papal court moved from Avignon
- Italians wrote songs to French texts in French genres, often in French notation
Ex04-04

a. Strict modal forms

b. Chromatically altered forms

c. Form with double leading tones
The Ars Subtilior

Later fourteenth-century polyphonic songs

- Ars Subtilior ("the subtle art")
  - phrase derived from Philippus de Caserta (fl. 1370s) treatise
- papal court at Avignon main patron of secular music
- chivalric and ecclesiastical society allowed composers to flourish
  - polyphonic songs: *formes fixes*, ballades, rondeaux, and virelais
  - mostly love songs
  - fascination with technical possibilities, new extremes
Later fourteenth-century polyphonic songs (cont’d)

- music more refined and complex
- elevated style matched in manuscripts
  - fanciful decorations, intermingled red and black notes
  - ingenious notation
  - occasional caprices; love song written in shape of heart, canon in shape of circle
- intended for professional performers, cultivated listeners
Rhythmic complexity

- new notational signs and practices
  - voices in contrasting meters and conflicting groupings
  - beats subdivided in many different ways
  - phrases broken by rests, suspended through chains of syncopations
  - harmonies blurred through rhythmic disjunctions

- *En remirant vo douce pourtraiture* (While I gazed at your sweet portrait, NAWM 29), ballade by Caserata
English Polyphony

- English polyphony, abundant in fourteenth century
  - particularly sacred genres
  - distinctive sound and other qualities
  - impact on Continental developments in the fifteenth century
Postlude

Fourteenth century presents variety of new forms and practices
  • Ars Nova: sophisticated system for rhythmic notation
  • isorhythm: structural device to control and organize
  • emphasis on structure and rhythmic play

Polyphonic composition in France
  • polyphonic Mass Ordinary movement and cycle
  • isorhythmic motet
  • secular love songs in poetic fixed forms
New genres emerged in Italy

- Mass, motet, and refrain song
- Italian style:
  - smoothness of melody
  - clarity of declamation
  - prominent harmonic 3rds and 6ths

Two composers dominated scene

- Machaut in France
- Landini in Italy
- by 1400, French and Italian styles merge
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- Review Materials, including chapter quizzes, listening quizzes, outlines, and flashcards.
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by

Barbara Russano Hanning

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