

# The Interplay between Music and Society in the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Baroque Periods

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Tuesdays, 3:30-5:00

September 1 through September 22

## Syllabus

### Lecture 1

The focus of this lecture will be the official music of the Middle Ages. The Middle ages, spanning about one thousand years, was completely dominated by the Church which employed the composers, dictated them *what* to compose and *how* to compose following strict rules that had developed over centuries. And since the music belonged to God, the composers remained anonymous and had no artistic freedom. Sacred music was the only music that was written down. Secular music, mainly dance music and songs, was mainly improvised and passed on aurally.

### Lecture 2

Turning to the Renaissance, I will talk about how music changed when the Church lost its monopoly on music as more composers were employed by kings and noblemen wanting music to be written for stage performances and festive events. This change from sacred to secular employment gave rise to an unprecedented blossoming of artistic freedom and musical development. Furthermore, the ground breaking invention of movable type and printing caused musical works as well as composers' fame to spread all over Europe and led to a competition between the Church and Monarchs to attract the best composers. I will also discuss how the study and idealization of the Classical world, attaching prime importance to human rather than divine matters, gave rise to Humanism, and discuss how the Reformation and Counter Reformation changed church music.

### Lecture 3

Lecture three will address the High Renaissance and the importance of dance as a

necessary social skill for the nobility and “a healthy and desirable social intercourse” for finding a suitable love interest. I will further introduce the new genre of instrumental music and one of its clever uses; and how the study of ancient Greek culture and plays subsequently led to the invention of opera. I will then turn to the Baroque era and one of its profound developments, the writing of full-fledged operas and building of opera houses with wondrous stage machinery and sensational effects inspired by the Renaissance *intermedio*, and the moving of opera out of private courts and into the public domain.

#### Lecture 4

My last lecture will cover the many ground breaking developments of the Baroque time period, including the switch to major and minor keys, equal tuning of instruments, instrumental music, oratorios, masses, and cantatas. I will cover the lives of the era’s most important composers, Vivaldi, Handel, and Bach, and in particular focus on Bach, whose struggle for a good livelihood forced him to write what his patrons wanted, and work unbearably hard, and yet at the same time produced music of incomparable ingenuity.