

**Renaissance.** In the conventional periodization of Western music history, a term denoting the era from about 1430 to about 1600; this period coincides with the later phases of the broad historical development in Western culture, society, art and technology (c1300–1600) for which the French term 'Renaissance' has been in use since Michelet (1855), who coined it for general history.

1. Introduction. 2. Music historiography and the Renaissance. 3. Music and the concept of rebirth. 4. Conditions and trends. 5. Current views of the Renaissance as a period.

1. INTRODUCTION. The perspective adopted by Michelet was given world-wide currency by Burckhardt (1860), whose influential essay portrayed Italy as the source of a vast cultural transformation that began in the 14th century, gradually spread new forms of thought to northern Europe after 1500 and marked the emergence of a period of civilization that extended in some spheres until the later 17th century.

That the term literally means 'rebirth' is not an anachronistic exaggeration but is justified by the tendency of influential thinkers and writers in the period 1400–1600 openly to repudiate the 'Middle Ages' (a term not then invented) and to venerate antiquity as a model. In view of divergent approaches to the problem it is useful to distinguish two meanings that historians often attach to the term 'Renaissance': a narrow view that holds that it was primarily a movement, which aimed to restore the philosophical and artistic values of classical antiquity; and a broader view – that it can effectively denote an era of fresh beliefs and attitudes in individuals and ultimately in society, an age of discovery and accelerated change, in which innovations were justified by an appeal to their affinity to a 'golden age' of the past.

Although there are controversies over the degree to which the developments stressed by Burckhardt and other Renaissance historians were literally epoch-making, none have denied their importance. Among them are the rise of secular humanism as an educational programme emphasizing rhetoric, grammar and moral philosophy, in opposition to the metaphysical scholasticism of the Middle Ages; the growth of historical thought and the recovery and criticism of ancient texts as a basis for the 'new learning'; the spread of literacy and alteration of patterns of thought signalled by the invention of printing; the break with traditional spatial concepts in cosmology and geography through the discovery of the New World and the Copernican revolution; the upheaval of the formerly stable though complex world of medieval Christianity through the definitive break embodied in the Protestant Reformation; and in the visual arts a new interest in classical principles of form and in the expression of immediately perceptible human situations and feelings, as opposed to the more spiritual, abstract and attenuated expressive modes of medieval art.

2. MUSIC HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE RENAISSANCE. The spell cast by Burckhardt on mid-19th-century intellectuals soon captured music historians as well as others and led to pursuit of the problem of the 'Renaissance' in music. That users of the term then and now have often failed to distinguish the broad and narrow meanings mentioned above is not peculiar to music history but is an inevitable consequence of the rapid popularization, and eventual decline in force, of Burckhardt's original concept, which soon came to be applied to virtually any phenomenon that fell within the accepted chronological limits. As early as 1868 Ambros conceived the 15th and 16th centuries as a substantially unified period, a view adopted by many later writers,

including Pirro, whether or not they employed the term 'Renaissance' (for a survey see Blume). The divergent thoughts on periodization in the generations after Ambros are illustrated by Riemann's proposal to set the 'Early Renaissance' as far back as 1300–1500, and by Edward J. Dent, who (in *Alessandro Scarlatti*, 1905) identified the 'Renaissance' with the rise of monody about 1600. However, with the subsequent borrowing of the term 'Baroque' from the history of art (especially by Curt Sachs in 1919) the rise of opera and its concomitant developments came to be seen as the opening of a new era, while the end of the Renaissance was set in the first decades of the 17th century. Attempts have been made (e.g. by Wellesz) to date the beginnings of the Baroque period as far back as about 1540. Other scholars have tried to interpose a distinctive period of 'Mannerism' (yet another term borrowed from art history) between the Renaissance and Baroque periods, but this proposal has met with wide opposition and is far from being generally accepted. It now seems to be agreed that in music a period marked by substantial unity of outlook and language came into being in the second half of the 15th century and that its principles were not definitively displaced until about 1625. It is also agreed that this period can be called the 'Renaissance', yet often for no better reason than that it falls within the later phases of the Renaissance in the broad sense; this neutral approach, which is no more than an assertion of chronological coincidence, is tacitly adopted by Reese in his *Music in the Renaissance*. A more controversial though more challenging view is that the 'Renaissance' in the narrow sense – the revival of antiquity – did have a perceptible influence on musical thought and, to some extent, practice, and that certain aspects of the cult of classicism affected music, though inevitably less directly than in art and architecture.

3. MUSIC AND THE CONCEPT OF REBIRTH. In literature and the visual arts the idea of 'rebirth' gained ground much earlier than in music. From the mid-14th century, Italian and especially Florentine writers often claimed that a single extraordinary artist or writer had recalled to life an art that had been neglected during the 'dark ages' that had intervened since ancient times. Thus about 1350 Boccaccio (*Decameron*, vi, 5) said of Giotto that he 'brought back to light that art which for many centuries had lain buried under errors', and in 1400 the Florentine historian Filippo Villani wrote of Dante that he 'recalled poetry as from an abyss of shadows into the light'. In the 16th century this idea was widely repeated, receiving its most authoritative formulation from Vasari in the preface to his *Lives of the Painters* (1550). For him the earlier history of painting had been marked by utter decline in the period of the 'barbarian' invasions of Italy and by rebirth in the 13th century, beginning with Cimabue and Giotto, followed by later stages of improvement leading to its summit of perfection, exemplified by Raphael and Michelangelo, in his own time. (For a full account of the growth of this idea see Ferguson.)

Among writers on music the first to reflect something of this view was Tinctoris, though his linked treatises (written c1474–84) still seem largely medieval in approach and form a kind of summa of the musical knowledge of his time. Yet they also reveal his considerable inclination towards humanist learning, probably reflecting the environment of late 15th-century Naples, in which they were written. In the preface to his *Proportionale* (c1476) he cited Plato as an authority for the Greek view that the sci-

ence of music was 'the mightiest of all' and that no one ignorant of music could be considered truly educated. He mused on the fabled power of music to move 'gods, ancestral spirits, unclean demons, animals without reason, and even things insensate' and observed that in recent times, specifically around 1440, thanks to Dunstable and his generation, there had been a marvellous increase in the possibilities of music. In the preface to his counterpoint treatise (1477) Tinctoris stated flatly that in the opinion of the learned no music composed before about 40 years earlier was worth hearing. The music of Dunstable, as followed by Dufay, Binchois and later masters, began a 'new art'.

In the 16th century the notion of rebirth borrowed more heavily from literary and artistic sources, presumably as musicians came to know and appreciate them better. The Florentine academician Cosimo Bartoli, in a heavily eclectic passage (published in 1567, though the fictitious date of the dialogue is 1543), said of Ockeghem that he 'rediscovered' music, which had virtually died out, and compared him with Donatello as the rediscoverer of sculpture; Bartoli then compared Josquin and Michelangelo as 'prodigies of nature' who followed in the paths of the pioneers and excelled all others in their respective arts. In 1558 Zarlino, evidently following Vasari not only in general line of argument but perhaps more specifically as well, fully embraced the anti-medieval position. He described the music of the ancients as representing a 'height of perfection' and medieval music as reaching the 'lowest depths' and portrayed Willaert, his own teacher at Venice, as a 'new Pythagoras' who had sought out new possibilities and brought music to its flourishing state.

More significant than these claims and comparisons is the actual contribution of the humanist movement to the gradual recovery of the ancient texts on which modern writers could base their knowledge of Greek music. Thin and inaccurate as such knowledge inevitably was, in the absence of practical monuments of ancient music itself, the writers of the period nevertheless did acquire or make available the greater part of the entire literature of ancient theory or commentary, so much so that by the end of the 16th century they knew about as much of this literature as is now known. Until about 1470 the central authority for knowledge of ancient music was Boethius. In the last third of the 15th century, however, the new printing of pedagogical and encyclopedic works brought into circulation the writings of Isidore of Seville and Quintilian, published in 1470; the latter was specially important for Renaissance theories of education. By 1500 Plato's complete works were available for the first time in Latin in the translation by Marsilio Ficino, along with the *Poetics* of Aristotle. While the influence on scholasticism of Aristotle's methods had long been felt in medieval music theory, his *Poetics* had not been known; in the 16th century his views of music were rivalled in importance by those of Plato, which, however, were less visible in tradition-bound music theory than in writings by literary men and were only later adopted directly by musicians. By 1518 Gaffurius had arranged for the translation of the surviving treatises on music by Baccheus, Ptolemy and Aristides Quintilianus. By 1588 Zarlino could claim (in his *Supplimenti musicali*) to have read these men, as well as Euclid, Nicomachus and a number of others; in 1562 the first translation of Aristoxenus's *Harmonics* had been brought out at his instigation. Salinas in 1577 was able to produce an elaborate discussion of Greek theory, and in 1581 Vincenzo Galilei's *Dialogo della musica antica e della moderna* was the first to publish three Greek compositions – the hymns of

Mesomedes, known through the Byzantine tradition.

The 'classicizing' trend is also visible in numerous other treatises of the period, though less as antiquarianism than as justification for innovation. One is Glarean's *Dodecachordon* (1547), the broadest attempt of the period to modify the traditional modal system by extending the Boethian eight-mode system to 12 modes, identifying the names of these with the so-called ancient modes insofar as these could be understood. Nicola Vicentino's treatise *L'antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica* (1555) is a more radical work, an attempt to demonstrate the validity not only of the diatonic tone system but of the chromatic and enharmonic genera of the ancients and to show how these could be used in contemporary polyphony. The spirit of classical revival is still strong in the series of writings on the nature and ethos of ancient music produced by Girolamo Mei, Vincenzo Galilei, Giovanni de' Bardi and others connected with the Florentine Camerata, which gave intellectual substance and authority to the experiments in expressive settings of dramatic poetry that led to the emergence of opera in the 1590s.

4. CONDITIONS AND TRENDS. As prevailing concepts of music were gradually transformed in the late 15th century and early 16th, they were also affected by a vital change in the technological basis of the production and transmission of music from composer to public. The beginnings of music printing as a commercial activity (1501), with Venice as the initial and leading centre but with rapidly growing competition elsewhere in Europe, not only brought more music into circulation but ensured its distribution more widely, more rapidly and in more uniform texts than before. Printers often produced editions of substantial size (press runs of 500 to 2000 copies are documented throughout the 16th century), and the scope of consumption must have increased enormously. A new and vast bourgeois public was rising, made up largely of performing amateurs for whom music was essentially a higher form of recreation, and it was served by a tide of polyphonic collections, principally of secular music. This trend is visible in successive stages in Italy, France and Germany, and, late in the century, in England, during the latter part of Elizabeth I's reign and much of James I's (roughly 1588–1620), when the aesthetic and technical traditions of the Italian madrigal were imported wholesale into England to meet the demands of a newly curious and cultivated public. Side by side with this secular development went the increasing publication of sacred music in all its forms and varieties, both Catholic and Protestant, devotional and liturgical, Latin and vernacular. Though the social conditions for the performance of sacred polyphony are less well understood than those governing secular music, it must be assumed that many amateurs who sang madrigals and chansons also sang motets and that the flow of publications was in part designed for the use of religious institutions of all kinds, in part for laymen aware of the heightened role of music in the intensified religious atmosphere engendered by the wars of religion that racked the century. By the mid-16th century, then, music had shed its former identity as a pure science of relationships, in the medieval sense, and had settled into the European consciousness as a form of expression closely allied to poetry and religion and suitable for ritual and festive occasions, and as a form of pleasurable leisure activity normally carried on in the home or academy. There naturally followed an increasing market for handbooks that would teach amateurs the rudiments of music; in the Elizabethan period, in some ways a

microcosm of the age as a whole, the chief example is Morley's aptly named *Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke* (1597).

This social role was matched by a new view of the function of music, beginning in the late 15th century and taking firm hold in the 16th – that the main aim of music was to heighten the meaning of a text. For this the central classical authority was Plato, chiefly *The Republic*, book 3, in which the thesis is laid down that 'the *harmonia* and the rhythm must follow the sense of the words'. At least some 16th-century writers were aware that this was inherent in the Greek view of music as including not only melody and the characteristic *harmoniae* of various regional idioms, such as 'Dorian' or 'Phrygian', but also the text and even the physical gestures of mime or dance that accompanied the recitation of lyric or dramatic poetry. As Isobel Henderson put it, 'Greek music was mimetic or representative – a direct photography (as it were) of mental objects formed by the ethos and pathos of the soul' (*NOHM*, i, p.385). The union of poetry and music was seized upon as an ideal by Renaissance musicians and by many poets (e.g. Ronsard), and Plato's words were cited by many musicians, including Zarlino (see Strunk, p.256), Bardi (*ibid*, p.295) and G.C. Monteverdi (*ibid*, p.407). That this view emerged from the humanist revival of Plato is evident from its appearance as early as 1506 in a passage by Vincenzo Calmeta (cited by Pirrotta, p.38), and it was soon given much wider currency by Sir Thomas More (*Utopia*, 1516) in a passage stressing the capacity of music to express the inner meaning of words. That not only bookish musicians but seasoned practitioners with few literary pretensions subscribed to it is shown by much evidence, including a letter written by Palestrina to the Duke of Mantua (on 3 March 1570) praising a motet composed by the duke both for its 'beautiful workmanship' and for the 'vital impulse that it gives to its words, according to their meaning'.

Related to this was the notion that it is through text expression that music has power to move the soul and to reproduce the marvellous effects attributed to it by the ancients, in the arousal and subduing of the passions. An oft-told tale was one in which Alexander the Great was said to have been unwittingly aroused by music from his banquet table to arm himself for war and was then restored to the banquet when the musician changed his 'tune' and manner of performance; still more pervasive were the legends of Orpheus, the favoured mythical musician. While Zarlino and other moderate critics believed that music of their time, if properly allied to words, could move the souls of its hearers, others denied that polyphony could accomplish anything of the sort, citing principally the relative unintelligibility of the text resulting from overlapping declamation caused by contrapuntal imitation.

This complaint came from many sides, including (in 1549) the Italian Bishop Cirillo Franco, who argued that in the Mass 'when one voice says "Sanctus" another says "Sabaoth" so that they more nearly resemble cats in January than flowers in May', and Galilei expressed similar views in 1581. In sacred music solutions of various types are found, the most drastic of which was the writing of extended or entire sections or movements in a strict or slightly modified choral style; this approach was explicitly attempted by certain north Italian composers (e.g. Vincenzo Ruffo) working in the aftermath of the Council of Trent. The famous *Missa Papae Marcelli* by Palestrina was evidently intended as an attempt to reconcile the claims of text intelligibility with those of inherent musical interest, and the perhaps apocryphal tales of its success in

persuading churchmen at Trent not to abolish polyphony can be taken as a special instance of the general belief in the power of music when properly adjusted to words. A more drastic solution was the complete break with polyphony implied by the Florentine Camerata, whose spokesmen also rejected the efforts of even the most expressive-minded madrigalists to achieve rhetorical effects through word-painting, as in the later madrigal in Italy and in England. The monodists, on the other hand, sought to convey the expressive meaning of a text as a whole. What is actually involved is two opposed aesthetic positions: the word-painting of the madrigalists, whether Marenzio or Weelkes, may seem excessively preoccupied with the single word only if it is not seen as a means of obtaining maximum variety of tempo, harmonic content and texture within a normal framework of five or six voices; while the expressive purposes in monody, lacking all possibility of textural variety, are achieved through means that make the most of the nuances of the solo voice.

It is increasingly clear that solo singing with instrumental accompaniment, far from being a 'discovery' at the end of the 16th century, had long been practised and indeed had never been completely displaced by polyphony. The varied methods of performing polyphony regularly included the singing of a principal vocal part (at times the tenor but more often the soprano) of a chanson or madrigal to the accompaniment of a lute or other instruments. The tradition in Italian secular music for this type of performance not only went back to the frottola but predated the coalescence of that mixed genre into a semi-polyphonic literature, and it was above all in Italy that it continued to flourish. What Einstein called 'pseudo-monody' was 'pseudo-' only in the sense that it was not regularly written out and was rarely published in this form, though there are important exceptions, such as Willaert's arrangement of madrigals by Verdelot for solo voice and lute (1536). How important solo singing was may also be judged from the writings of such observers as Paolo Cortese (1510) and the famous words of Castiglione (*Il cortegiano*, 1528): polyphony is good but 'to sing to the lute is much better, because all the sweetness consisteth in one alone and a man ... understands the better the feut manner and the air or vein of it when the ears are not busied in hearing any more than one voice ...' (Hoby translation: *The Book of the Courtier*, 1561). The new monody around 1600 can thus be seen partly as a change in the norms of representing music – for now the melodic line and the harmonic progressions of its accompaniment were fixed in notation for the first time – and partly as the raising of a long-established tradition to a higher level of dramatic intensity, adapted to dramatic poetry. Thus the roots of 'Baroque' music can be discovered to be buried deep in the 16th century. However, even if the overlapping of polyphonic and monodic tendencies can be seen to have endured much longer than is commonly thought, the full decline of polyphony as a form of expression did not set in before the early 17th century, and the 'Renaissance' can thus be justified as a period extending to about that time. A factor that is still poorly understood is the presumed change in social conditions for music that may have accompanied the decline of vocal polyphony; but this would doubtless have to be studied on a regional basis, as it differed sharply from one country to another.

While the 16th century witnessed a vast growth of solo and ensemble instrumental music for keyboard, string and wind instruments, this kind of music had little place in the aesthetic notions associated with the 'Renaissance', even though justification could have been found in ancient texts

for admitting some degree of ethical power to instrumental music. On the whole, instrumental music remained subordinated to vocal music, and much of its repertory was in varying ways derived from, or dependent on, vocal models. Nevertheless the continued cultivation of accompanied solo singing tended from early in the period to glorify the virtuoso instrumentalist as well as singer, whether or not these were embodied in the same person, as in the case of such virtuosos as the lutenist–singer Pietrobono of Ferrara. His followers in the 16th century were similarly admired, though most of them specialized as singers, lutenists or keyboard players. By 1536 it was conventional rhetoric, yet characteristic of the time, when the renowned vihuelist Luis de Milán was compared in the preface to his *Libro de vihuela* with ‘el grande Orpheo’.

5. CURRENT VIEWS OF THE RENAISSANCE AS A PERIOD. Even among scholars whose views coincide on the basic musical developments of the period, there is frequent disagreement on the relative importance of the various technical and aesthetic features that are cast into relief and thus in the resulting historical profile of the entire era. Reese saw in Renaissance music essentially a series of significant further advances upon the conquests of the Middle Ages, among them, in the later period, ‘a rhythmic fluidity and complexity that part-music has never surpassed’, the fuller realization of the potentialities of the triad, the regulation of dissonance and thus the rationalization of intervallic content, the expansion of tonal range and the growing homogeneity of voices through contrapuntal imitation. He saw the Renaissance as a period of matchless cultural unification in music, a period in which composers throughout Europe in the 16th century ‘spoke one musical language’.

To this gradualist and evolutionary thesis can be contrasted a theory of the Renaissance that stresses its departure from the Middle Ages and its revolutionary importance as an era, a view that has been advanced chiefly by Edward Lowinsky in a number of articles (most comprehensively in 1954). He saw the age as not merely embodying a decisive array of transformations that set it off definitively from the period of medieval scholasticism but also as a period in which musicians desired ‘to arrive at a musical expression free from all shackles’. He submitted the following ‘theses’ in justification of the use of the term and concept ‘Renaissance’ for the later 15th century and the 16th: (1) that in the 15th century there was a steady growth and reorganization of musical institutions related to the migration of northern composers to Italy and the interaction of northern and southern traditions; (2) that music of the period was characterized by a broad ‘emancipation’ from medieval constraints, including the *formes fixes* of poetry, rhythmic modes, isorhythm, the cantus firmus principle and Pythagorean tuning; (3) the criticism of medieval aesthetics; (4) ‘emancipation’ from the older modal system, and the development of harmony – *musica ficta* and the introduction of chromaticism and modulation; (5) a transition from a ‘successive’ to a ‘simultaneous’ conception of part-music; (6) the enlargement of tonal space; (7) the rise of expressivity and a new relationship between words and music; (8) the development of vocal and instrumental virtuosity; (9) the increasing autonomy of instrumental music; and (10) a repudiation of authority on the part of musicians.

While some of these ‘theses’ refer to broadly identifiable properties of music of the period, others are exaggerated and inflated, for the question of whether they were absolutely new or were only newly developed phases of

formerly existing tendencies requires substantially greater evidence than is presented for them, and in some cases evidence for continuity is simply omitted. For example, while the cantus firmus principle undoubtedly receded in importance as a compositional device in the 16th century compared with the 15th, it not only maintained a role of some substance in both sacred and secular polyphony but if anything grew in importance as a didactic device and in instrumental music. Further, the sharp distinction that Lowinsky drew between the ‘successive’ and ‘simultaneous’ conception of parts is a conceptual distortion, since it is not really clear what ‘simultaneous’ could literally mean in the actual work of composition. Moreover, the insistent use of words such as ‘shackles’ and ‘emancipation’ is tendentious and one-sided; it fails to allow for the possibility that the Renaissance can be distinguished from the Middle Ages by other means than as a period of alleged ‘freedom’ in contradistinction to – the contrast is inevitable – ‘tyranny’. A more fruitful way of treating the evidence may be to suggest that a new era came into being through the exposure of music and musicians to a new set of prevailing aesthetic and philosophical impulses, combined with a new set of social and technological conditions and with steady developments in the autonomous aspects of musical technique. There is no reason to claim that this was a ‘better’ age than its predecessor, yet it does appear to have been new in sufficient measure to warrant a separate historical identity, in part carrying forward certain tendencies of the Middle Ages, in part breaking with them. The refinement of these perceptions, together with the creation of new knowledge on which they may be based, is a major task of further research.

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