

EXPLANATION 2.2: THE FRANCO-FLEMISH SCHOOL

THE FRANCO FLEMISH SCHOOL

In the court of Burgundy, which occupied what is now Holland, Belgium and northeastern France, the dukes of Burgundy - vassals of the King of France - maintained a prestigious musical chapel with composers, choirs for the music of religious services and minstrels (musicians and servants at the same time) such as trumpeters, drummers, harpists, lutenists and vihuelistas.

The chapels of the court of Philip the Good, which reigned from 1419-1467, and that of Charles the Bold until 1477, were the best in Europe with musicians of various nationalities. The court of Burgundy became an important cultural center. This group of composers is called the Burgundian school, or more commonly, the Franco-Flemish school.

All these composers (see below) are part of the Franco-Flemish school, although some of them worked in Italy or in other countries. Their compositions were mainly masses and motets, with a characteristic style that uses counterpoint, dense textures and soft rhythms (not very marked ones) in which the clarity of the structure is subordinated to the exuberance of polyphony. Only well into the 16th century the hegemony of these Nordic composers decreased when Giovanni da Palestrina emerged in Italy and other styles such as that of the Spanish school.

PERIODS OF FRANCO-FLEMISH SCHOOL

1420-1460

- First generation of composers: **Dunstable, Dufay and Binchois.**
- They compose masses, motets and Burgundian chansons. These chansons are French poems polyphonically harmonized (settings). It is loving, intimate, cultured and refined music reflecting the lavish lifestyle of the court.
- Musically they use the fixed forms: rondeau, ballade and virelai, although the last two tend to disappear. It is the first phase of the Franco-Flemish school. See:
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPYmHyv1KeE> (Dunstable)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zD8LoZti7g> (Dufay)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MITDlkxmUgI> (Binchois)

1460-1490

- Second generation of composers: **Dufay, Busnois and Ockeghem.**
- The latter stands out by its technical capacity of composition using counterpoint with great virtuosity.
- There are new developments such as the canon technique and the various derivations of counterpoint: inversion, retrogradation, retrograde inversion, augmentation and diminution. See:
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LqdMiSCe-A> (Busnois)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWLSLAujZzI> (Ockeghem)

1490-1520

- Third generation of composers: **Obrecht, Isaak, Mouton and Josquin**, the latter being the most important.

- Care is taken that the text is understandable in their works through its correct accentuation.
- Material borrowed from chansons is used, which is modified through imitations or other compositional processes. See:
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qx_JjPrh5M (Josquin)

1520-1560

- Fourth generation of composers: **Gombert, Clemens non papa, Janequin and Willaert.**
- The latter is the most experimenter of all. He put great emphasis on the pronunciation of the text and on knowing what syllable was going with what note since sometimes the copyists were wrong when copying the scores.
- Motets are preferred with 5 or 6 voices instead of 4. The cantus firmus is abandoned and the motet is played by sections using imitation.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxx7Stpx7bU> (Gombert)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4w04D_wuzPE (Janequin)
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPtJmTMnFL4> (Willaert)

1560-1600

- Fifth generation of composers: **Philipus De Monte and Orlando di Lasso.**
- The latter is undoubtedly the most important composer with more than 700 motets. He uses homophonic counterpoint mixed with contrapuntal texture and introducing madrigalisms - adornments with melodies that evoke the text like notes that rise (sky), 2 or 3 notes with regular rhythm (murmur of water), etc. See:
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cZMP2Xm6qQg> (De Monte)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKE2EMnWT_g (Di Lasso)

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. **What countries occupy today what in the 15th century was Burgundy?**
2. **Why did the Dukes of Burgundy have a musical chapel?**
3. **What instrumentalists did the chapel of the Burgundians have?**
4. **What is a minstrel?**
5. **What are the two names by which the Nordic musicians of this period are known?**
6. **What are the two religious musical forms most used in the Renaissance?**
7. **What are the 3 most notorious musical characteristics of the style used by the Franco-Flemish composers?**
8. **In Franco-Flemish music, what musical aspect is more important, the form or the polyphony?**
9. **Why did the importance of Nordic composers begin to decline?**
10. **Name one composer of each generation.**