Chapter 3: The *Ars Nova*: Musical Developments in the Fourteenth Century

I. Early Fourteenth Century

A. Introduction

1. Changes in notation in the thirteenth century allowed for musical experimentation in the early fourteenth century.

2. Fourteenth-century composers understood that they were doing something different, as evinced by two treatises: *The Ars novae musicae* by Jehan de Murs and the *Ars nova* by Philippe de Vitry.

B. Music from Mathematics

1. During the fourteenth century, mathematics expanded and music followed suit.
   a. A fourfold system existed for musical time. Each of those listed is a subdivision of the previous: Maximodus, Modus, Tempus, and Prolatio.
   b. Each of these could be divided into two or three parts.

2. Not everyone liked the innovations of the *Ars nova*.

C. Music about Music

1. Another new idea in the *Ars nova* concerns a growing realization of self-awareness as composers of art.

2. Music composition is seen as an art, not a craft.

D. Establishing the Prototype: The *Roman de Fauvel*

1. The earliest surviving pieces in the *Ars nova* style are found in the *Roman de Fauvel*.
   a. The title character’s name has multiple meanings and is an acrostic of terms modeled on the seven deadly sins.

2. The motet *Tribum/Quoniam/MERITO* exemplifies the early *Ars nova* motet.
   a. It is allegorical, relating to real political events.
   b. It is polytextual.
   c. The rhythmic and notational features are new.

E. Isorhythm

1. As a way of confirming a hidden order and unity behind the complex world, *Ars nova* composers sought to unify their music through the use of isorhythm.
   a. Isorhythm denotes recurring patterns: in rhythm the talea, in pitch the color.

2. *Tribum/Quoniam/MERITO* is an isorhythmic motet.

II. Machaut

A. Machaut: Poet and Musician

1. Machaut is considered the greatest poet-composer of the *Ars nova*.
   a. He follows in the trouvère tradition.
   b. He wrote in a variety of genres.

2. Analysis of isorhythmic motet: *Felix virgo/Inviolata/AD TE SUSPIRAMUS*

B. *Musica ficta*
1. The chromaticism found in Machaut’s motet is called *musica ficta*.
2. *Ficta* was usually added orally, not notated.
3. Analysis of *Felix virgo/Inviolata/AD TE SUSPIRAMUS* demonstrates *musica ficta* in the music of Machaut.

C. Machaut and the Art of Courtly Song
   1. Machaut enjoyed a widespread reputation as a skilled poet.
      a. He traveled widely.
      b. His fame grew throughout his long life.
      c. He was probably paid by patrons honored in his works.
   2. Machaut’s works include long narrative poems that sometimes included inserted musical interpolations.
      a. These works, such as *Le Remede de Fortune*, continue traditions seen in the troubadour and trouvère repertories.

D. The Top-Down Style
   1. Motets were composed from the bottom up (on a cantus firmus), but chansons did the opposite.
   2. Most of Machaut’s virelais were monophonic.
   3. In a polyphonic virelai, *En mon cuer*, the top part has the text but the bottom does not.
   4. Both of these virelais approach cadences from below.

E. Machaut’s *La Messe de Nostre Dame*
   1. Machaut’s best known work, *La Messe de Nostre Dame*, is uncharacteristic.
      a. This is a complete setting of the Mass Ordinary—the earliest to survive.
   2. Special Mass collections, Votive Masses, were used in memorial chapels. These also contributed to the interest in setting the Mass Ordinary polyphonically.
   3. Machaut’s *Messe de Nostre Dame* is a tour de force of *Ars nova* aesthetics.

F. Canons
   1. Another clever technique employed during the *Ars nova* is canon.
      a. *Ma fin est mon commencement* is one such example.
         1) The music mirrors the text as a pun.
      b. The name for canons became *chace*—a literal chase of one part behind another.

III. Other Aspects of Fourteenth-Century Music

A. *Subtilias*
   1. As the fourteenth century went on, subtlety became a desirable feature in composition.
   2. Philippus de Caserta wrote a treatise that explained the advanced notation necessary to convey all the subtle aspects of this style.
      a. *Subtilias* includes polymeters.
      b. The notation includes odd-looking symbols and different colors of ink for different meters.
      c. *En remirant*, by Caserta, demonstrates the virtuoso aspects of composition associated with *Subtilias*.
3. *Subtilias* extended throughout Europe, as far as Cyprus (thanks in part to the Crusades).
4. The Chantilly Codex is a famous source of *Subtilias* repertory.
5. Solage’s famous *Fumeux fume* represents the height of *Subtilias* complexity.

B. “A Pleasant Place”: *Trecento* Vernacular Music
1. Italian composers saw nature as something to be enjoyed, not overwhelmed by.
2. The poetry of Dante represents this value.
3. The main song genre of the *trecento* was the *madrigal*, a vernacular poem of two or more three-line stanzas.
4. The main manuscripts containing *trecento* repertory are large, elaborately decorated volumes, similar to the chansonniers in France.
   a. The Squarcialupi Codex is a particularly noteworthy example, copied around 1415.
   b. In this manuscript, the contexts are organized by composer.
5. Bologna was an important musical center.
6. *Trecento* notation differs from that of the *Ars nova* because the former grew out of Petronian notation, the latter out of Franconian.

C. The “Wild Bird” Madrigals
1. Jacopo da Bologna’s *Oselleco salvagio* is a music-about-music piece that tells us something about what was desired in *trecento* music: The music must be as sweet and moderate as the scene painted by the text.
2. Jacopo set this text twice, and the second abandons the moderation inherent in the first, and it is a *caccia*.

D. Landini and *Ballata* Culture
1. In his treatise on music, Jacopo mentions another genre: the *ballata*, which resembles a virelai and came to displace the pride of place held by the madrigal.
2. The last generation of *trecento* composers set the ballade like a French virelai.
3. The master of the *ballata* was the blind organist Landini.
4. His pieces were arranged and copied into a keyboard manuscript known as the Faenza Codex, arranged (an intabulation).

E. The Motet as Political Show
1. French and Italian styles converged into an International style in the late *Ars nova*.
2. The pinnacle of the motet was in Italy, as composers were part of the competition between city-states.
3. Composers who mastered techniques of musical architecture produced elaborate works that served to legitimize their patrons.
4. Several of these composers were from France and Flanders.
5. The first was Johannes Ciconia.

F. Du Fay’s *Nuper rosarum flores*
1. Du Fay’s *Nuper rosarum flores* is famous for a number of reasons, most of which relate to the manipulation of numbers relevant to the reason for its composition.
a. It is the third of three motets written for Pope Eugene IV.
b. Du Fay wrote the motet for the dedication of the cathedral in Florence, the architect of which was Brunelleschi.
c. The proportional relationship of the mensuration mirrors the physical properties of the temple of Solomon, according to the Bible, which Brunelleschi used for the cathedral in Florence.

G. Periodization
1. Dividing music into stylistic periods is a tradition, but one that has its flaws.
2. We must be wary of “essentialism”—the process of associating a stylistic trait as being something “essentially” Renaissance or Medieval.
3. For where we are now (chronologically in this text), the beginning of the Renaissance is tricky—historians of different subject begin it at different times, so how can we say $X$ is Renaissance, if it is not representative of the period in history (in general)?
4. Three main concepts drive the definition of “Renaissance” across disciplines: secularism, humanism, and rebirth of interest in art and philosophy of pre-Christian antiquity.