

# GET YOUR TEETH INTO MUSIC HISTORY



*A brief introduction  
to the*

*Renaissance  
Era*



# THE RENAISSANCE ERA

1400—1600

## KEY ELEMENTS

### FORMS

- Mass
- Motet
- Hymn

### RHYTHM

- Introduction of meter
- Syncopation used heavily

### HARMONY

- No complete cadences used
- Harmony came from melody
- Mostly perfect octaves, perfect fifths and perfect fourths
- Modal
- Harmony introduced during the era

### TEXTURE

- Linear
- Either polyphonic or homophonic

### SOUND

- Women added to songs
- Instruments added for accompaniment

### MELODY

- Lots of notes used
- Used imitation including transposition, canon, augmentation, diminution, retrograde and inversion

### COMPOSERS

Byrd, Palestrina, Gesualdo, Garielli, Desprez,  
Dowland, Gibbons

# MEET CARLO GESUALDO



- He was born in 1564 and died in 1619.
- He was born into a noble Neapolitan and eventually became Prince of Venosa.
- He wrote both secular and sacred music.
- In 1590, he murdered his guilty wife and her lover.
- He published six volumes of madrigals and two books of motets.
- A characteristic of his music is the use of extremely chromatic harmony

## *The Motet*

- The motet originated in the 13th century.
- The name comes from either the Latinized version of the French *mot* which means “word” or “verbal utterance” or the Latin *motus* “movement”
- The term Motet is given to a number of varied choral compositions.
- It originally used words which were of a religious nature and were in Latin.
- It would have a tenor voice as its foundation with the other parts often singing different, and sometimes, unrelated tunes over it. They would also use different words.
- Over time it began to use French Secular texts.
- A motet generally has between 4 and 6 voices.
- Isorhythms were developed and introduced. An isorhythm is a short repeating rhythm in one of more voices.
- During the Renaissance era, all the parts used the same text.



*Carlo Gesualdo  
1564—1619*



*Cover from one of Gesualdo's books of  
Madrigals*

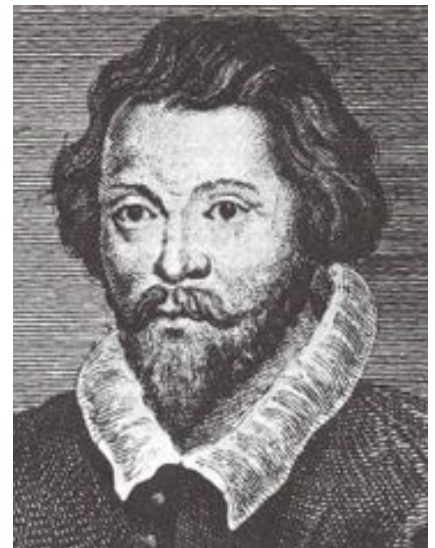
# MEET WILLIAM BYRD



- He was born in England in 1539 and died in 1623.
- William Byrd is considered to be one of England's greatest Renaissance composers.
- His keyboard works are considered to mark the beginning of the Baroque organ and harpsichord style.
- Byrd wrote a great deal of sacred music including settings of the Mass for 3, 4 or 5 voices.
- He also wrote a number of secular works for voice and used a number of different instruments as accompaniments.
- He was the organist and member of the private religious establishment, the Chapel Royal during the reign of the protestant queen, Queen Elizabeth I.
- He remained a devout Roman Catholic despite this.

## Word Painting.

- During the Renaissance era, vocal music was more important than instrumental music.
- Music was written by composers using techniques to enhance the meaning of the text.
- Word painting was a technique used to do this.
- It is a musical representation of poetic images.
- For example, the words *rising to heaven* might be set to a rising melodic line and the act of running might be heard with a series of rapid notes.
- In Renaissance music, emotion was usually expressed in a moderate, balanced way, with no extreme contrasts of dynamics, tone colour, or rhythm.



William Byrd  
1539—1623

Example of written music from  
the Renaissance era.



# MEET GIOVANNI PALESTRINA



- He was born in Palestrina, Italy in c.1525 and died in Rome, Italy in 1594.
- He was primarily a composer of sacred music.
- He did write some secular madrigals later in his life but was 'embarrassed' by them.
- His music has been recognised as providing clarity and balance.
- The way he combined the various high and low voices allowed him to create various tone colours.
- His sacred music is often considered to be "perfect" sacred music.

## Imitation

- Renaissance composers would use a great deal of polyphony in their music. Polyphonic music is music with parts for several independent voices or instruments.
- A key device that they used to help create the texture found in their music was **imitation**.
- Imitation is where one voice introduces a musical idea and then another voice imitates, or copies, this idea.
- For example,



*extract from Thomas Tallis: Anthem,  
Heare the voyce and prayer of thy servants.*



*Giovanni Pierluigi Da Palestrina  
c.1525-1594*

### *Pope Marcellus Mass (1562—1563)*

- *This mass is considered to be Palestrina's most famous.*
- *It was long thought that it convinced the Council of Trent that polyphonic masses should be kept in Catholic Worship. We now know that it did not play that role.*
- *It does however reflect the council's desire for clear projection of sacred text.*
- *The mass is written for an a cappella choir of 6 voice parts: soprano, alto, two tenors and two basses.*



# INSTRUMENTS OF THE RENAISSANCE

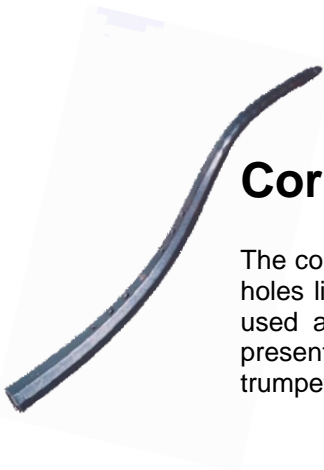


## Shawm

An ancestor of the oboe, the shawm was a double reed instrument. It had a very brash, reedy sound and finger holes like a recorder.

## Recorder

A wooden instrument with finger holes, the recorder has a conical bore and is gently tapered towards the end.



## Cornett

The cornett was a curved instrument with finger holes like a recorder, made of wood or ivory. It used a mouthpiece similar to those used on present day brass instruments and had a brash trumpet-like sound.

## Crumhorn

A double reed instrument which had a cap over the reed, the crumhorn had a soft tone produced by the player blowing into the cap. It was shaped a little like a walking stick and had finger holes similar to the recorder.



## Sackbut

The sackbut was an early type of trombone. It had a smaller bell than the modern trombone and as a result it had quite a round and mellow tone.





## Trumpet

The renaissance trumpet was a similar shape to the modern trumpet. It did not have any valves and different notes were produced by changing the lip pressure on the mouthpiece.

## Viol

The Viol was the most important string instrument family of the Renaissance period. The instruments had six strings over a fretted fingerboard and a flat back with sloping shoulders. They were played with a bow. The smaller instruments were played upright on the player's knees. The larger ones were played upright between the player's knees, a little like the modern cello.



## Lute

The lute usually had 12 strings tuned in pairs stretched over a fretted fingerboard like a modern guitar. The neck was bent back almost at right angles to the fret board and the body had a pear shaped sound box.



## Harpsichord

The harpsichord is a keyboard instrument where the strings are plucked by a metal quill. It generally has two rows of keys.



## Virginal

The virginal was played in a similar way to a harpsichord, but the strings ran parallel to the keyboard. This allowed the instrument to be smaller and to fit into the rooms of the period.

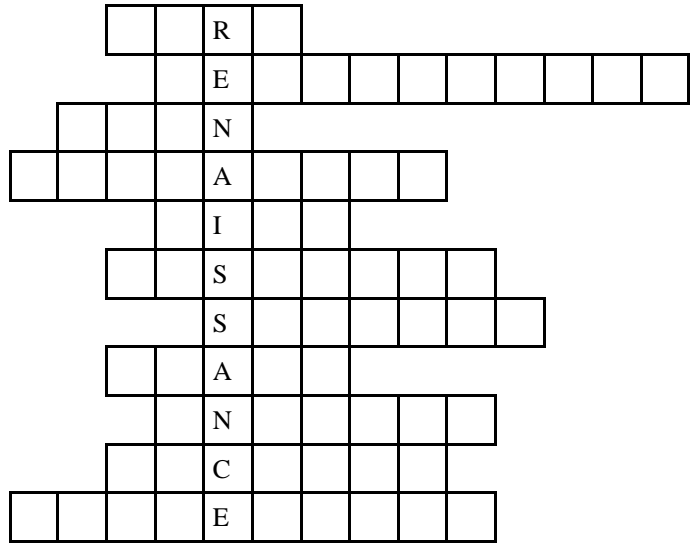


# Worksheet.

**1. Complete the word puzzle by using the clues below.**

**CLUES**

1. This composer is considered to be one of England's greatest Renaissance composers.
2. The era between 1400 and 1600 is called the ..... Era.
3. The Mass, the Motet and the ..... are different forms found in Renaissance music.
4. This device is when one voice introduces an idea and the others copy or imitate it.
5. This instrument was the most important string instrument of the Renaissance six strings.
6. This composer murdered his wife and her lover.
7. This instrument is an early type of trombone.
8. This instrument is an ancestor of the oboe.
9. What nationality was William Byrd?
10. Renaissance music was either Sacred or .....?
11. This composer wrote a numbers of secular madrigals but was 'embarrassed' by them.



**2. Give a brief explanation of each of the following terms**

Motet \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Isorhythm \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Polyphony \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**3. What are the differences between these instruments?**

The Renaissance Trumpet and the Modern Trumpet \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

The Viol and the Violin \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

The Lute and the Guitar \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



**4. List three different key elements of the Renaissance era and give a brief explanation of each of them.**

a. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**5. What was one of the main characteristics of the music composed by Carlo Gesualdo?**

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**6. What is word painting? Give a brief example.**

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**7. What nationality was the composer William Byrd?**

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**8. Other than Byrd and Gesualdo, name three other Renaissance composers.**

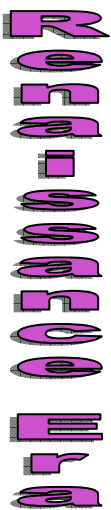
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## 9. What is imitation?

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*The word **Renaissance** is a French word meaning new birth*

*The Renaissance was a period of exploration and adventure. Two explorers from the era were Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan.*

*The dominant intellectual movement, humanism, focused on human life. Humanists were fascinated by the cultures of Greece and Rome and passionate about the ancient Greek and Latin languages.*

*Realism rose to the fore with art no longer showing flat, 2 dimensional images but ones with perspective and a sense of space and depth.*

*Education was considered a status symbol by the upper middle class and every educated person was expected to be trained in music.*

*The spread of learning was accelerated as a result of the invention of printing with moveable type. Previously all books had to be hand copied and were very expensive.*

10. Find out about a Renaissance composer.

MEET

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*in a nutshell*

*Some prominent pieces of music  
and other bits and pieces*