

THE CHANSON IN THE 16TH CENTURY

The chanson genre underwent several significant changes during the period of roughly 1490-1510. Chief among these differences were the gradual abandonment of the *formes fixes*; the addition of a voice under the tenor; and the movement to approximate equality between all voices. Josquin and his contemporaries continued to use *cantus prius factus* as the compositional basis for many of their chansons, but moved toward a model of using motifs and the development thereof to form the architectural bases of their works. This freedom from the architectural restrictions imposed by the Medieval scaffolding model allowed for increased expressivity through imitation, alternation of texture, and text-painting. Additionally, the abandonment of the *formes fixes* is not synonymous with abandonment of repetition schemes; systematic use of repetition (often where the musical form corresponds to the poetic form) can still be seen alongside through-composed chansons.

It is important to remember that, while popular with some significant composers, the progressive abandonment of the *formes fixes* was not universal; several chanson composers continued to compose according to the older poetic schemes. A further distinction should be made between Franco-Flemish chansons of Josquin and his peers, with their emphasis on imitative counterpoint, and the Parisian chansons of Sermisy, Janequin and Certon, with their more homorhythmic textures; *superius*-dominated textures; more syllabic text setting; and wider range of more “popular” texts which rejected the Petrarchian drama of courtly love.

An additional subgenre within the group known as “chansons” are those works known as motet-chansons, which were generally for three voices, with the lowest voice employing a chant basis in Latin and the other two voices presumably singing in the vernacular. However, many extant motet-chansons include only the Latin text, which suggests the possibility of instrumental use for those lines; it also makes it difficult to discern the precise size of this repertory. Obrecht’s *Parce Domine* is a notable example of a piece in the style of a motet-chanson but with only Latin text. Chief composers of motet-chansons include Josquin, Agricola, and Compère.

Le Pléiade

Le Pléiade was led in part by Jean-Antoine de Baïf and advocated for the elevation of the French language to a literary status equal to that of the ancient languages. In the 1560s, le Baïf devised a method of translating the quantitative metrical patterns of Greek and Latin verse into accented French verse, known as *vers mesurés*, and advocated that his neo-classical poetry should be set to simple *airs* (which led to the development of the *air de ceour*) to allow maximum understanding of the poetry while the music was being performed. The way in which the accented French text was set to music (with longer syllables set to longer notes than short syllables, with occasional semi-quavers for variety) resulted in a music set in irregular groups of two or three beats, which is most easily notated without bar-lines. Although the *Académie de Poésie* which was begun by de Baïf did not last long, the group’s innovations had far-reaching influence over the course of French secular composition into the 17th century. In particular, Claude le Jeune’s *Fiere cruelle* reflects many of the influences of *musique mesurée*.

The Printers

Music printing was one significant feature of the Renaissance business of music; because music no longer had to be copied by hand, it became accessible to a larger market (although the considerable expense of printing and, therefore, of purchasing printed music still kept it out of the hands of the “unwashed masses”) and could be more easily disseminated across Europe.

Petrucchi (Venice): Published music of considerable variety: Josquin; Ockeghem; Obrecht and Agricola. Most notable publications are his three-volume *Odhecaton*.

Antico (Rome): Favored the French writers, particularly Fèvin and Mouton.

Attaignant (Paris): Favored the “Parisian” chanson composers, especially Sermisy. Published over 50 collections consisting of more than 1,500 works.

JOSQUIN DES PREZ

- c. 1450 Born in the Eau Noire region of France, although there is considerable debate regarding his exact place of origin. Possibly a choirboy at the royal collegiate church at San Quentin.
- 1477 Takes a position as a singer in the chapel in Aix-en-Provence under the patronage of Duke Renè d'Anjou.
- 1481 Most likely transferred to the service of King Louis XI of France in Paris along with many of the Duke's former singers after his death.
- 1484 Travels with Cardinal Ascanio Sforza to Rome.
- 1489 Employed as a "cantorem duchalem" for Duke Gian Galeano Sforza.
- 1489 Joins the Papal Chapel as a singer (1489-1495).
- 1498 By December, has probably left the Papal Chapel and re-entered employment with Ascanio Sforza.
- 1500 Returns north, enters service of the King of France.
- 1503 Moves to Ferrara; begins employment as *maestro di cappella* for Duke Ercole d'Este.
- 1504 Leaves Ferrara; begins a post as provost of the collegiate church at Notre Dame in Condè-sur-l'Escaut which he retains until his death on August 27, 1521.

SELECTED OUTPUT

Masses and Mass sections

Motets and ritual works

Secular works: 55 chansons for 3vv to 6vv

3 motet-chansons

Frottole

SALIENT STYLE FEATURES

- Use of Pre-Existent Material
 - Josquin's use of pre-existing material changes over the course of his career.
 - In his earliest chansons, such as *La Plus des Plus*, the borrowed material is primarily used in the tenor voice while the other voices operate independently or, more often, in canon.
 - Middle-period chansons, such as *Bergerette Savoyenne*, would present popular tunes, most often in the *superius* voice, with each line of text being "anticipated" in the lower voices.
 - Later-period chansons, such as *Regretz sans fin*, tend to make use of no pre-existent material.

- Form: While Josquin used the *formes fixes* early in his career (as in his use of the *rondeau* form in *Cela sans plus*), these were soon abandoned. The question of whether poetic forms changed in response to musical demands or vice versa seems to be more or less a "chicken or the egg" question; Kate van Orden discusses this topic in her chapter, entitled "Chanson and Air", in European Music: 1520-1640. Whatever the case, the *formes fixes* began to be abandoned in the years surrounding 1500 in favor of simpler, more freely-constructed forms.
 - This manifests in Josquin's chansons in a musical structure which is reflective of the poetry's rhyme scheme, but not strictly bound to a predetermined musical structure. Poetic phrase repetition is reflected through musical repetition, and texts are carefully set with natural

text declamation (*musica reservata*) in mind. Natural, intelligible rendering of the text is of utmost concern.

- *Faulte d'Argent* adheres to an ABCA' musical form, with a poetic quatrain of *aaba* rhyme scheme:

Faulte d'argent, c'est douleur non pareille.	<i>Lack of money is sorrow unequalled.</i>
Se je le dis, las, je scay bien pourquoi.	<i>If I say this, alas, I well know why.</i>
Sans de quibus il se fault tenir quoy.	<i>Without money, one must remain silent.</i>
Femme qui dort pour argent se resveille.	<i>A woman who sleeps will awake for money.</i>

- Texture: One of Josquin's primary contributions to sacred and secular polyphonic development was his refinement of the imitative technique. In his chansons, canon is used extensively to create the musical architecture:
 - Josquin will often alternate strict canon or points of imitation, especially paired imitation, with contrapuntally-enlivened homophony.
 - An additional feature of Josquin's as well as French chanson writing is the use of short melismas at cadential points. This is a major point of departure between Josquin's generation and that of his predecessors, who tended to use melisma more extensively throughout phrases.
- Harmony: Josquin made frequent use of harmonic hierarchy:
 - In a poetic quatrain, cadences at the end of the first three lines would be of a "weaker" nature, for example VII-I or II-I, while cadences at the conclusion of quatrain would be of a "stronger" nature, such as V-I.
 - In *Faulte d'Argent*, the tune is essentially unaltered until the very end, so the harmonic structure (D Dorian) becomes somewhat ambiguous in the second and third lines of text as the tune ends on notes other than the final (see score excerpt).
 - Josquin cadences on G at the end of the second and third lines, then "resolves" this harmonic ambiguity with stronger cadences on D in the final "A" section.

PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- Will you use instruments? This debate has gone on for years, with no end in sight.
- Proper pronunciation of 15th and 16th century French should be taken into account.
- Tuning may prove to be tricky, especially given Josquin's tendency toward progressive modalism. The conductor will also have to make decisions regarding *musica ficta*.
- Number of singers: As in his motets, Josquin's chansons are best approached with a smaller group.

CLAUDIN DE SERMISY

“French composer. He was one of the recognized masters of the Renaissance chanson and a significant composer of religious music...Associated with the royal court of France under several monarchs (particularly Anne of Brittany, François I and Henri II) as well as with the Ste Chapelle du Palais in Paris and was one of the most important contributors to the earliest French publications of polyphonic music. The numerous instrumental transcriptions and contrafacta of his compositions attest to the esteem in which he was held in his time.” (Grove)

c. 1490	Approximate date of birth, most likely in the Noyon region, probably in Picardy.
1508	Listed as clergyman at Ste. Chapelle. Later that year, many prominent French nobles “plundered” the choir of Ste. Chapelle for their own courts. (And it continues.....) Sermisy was recruited for the court of King Louis XII.
1510	Listed as a member of the choir at the Queen’s private chapel as well as a cleric in the Noyon diocese.
1515	Accompanies Francois I, the new King of France, to his home duchy in Venice.
1533	By this time, Sermisy has become the <i>sous-maître</i> of the musicians at the Royal Chapel, in which position he remained until around 1555.
1562	Dies in October and is buried in the lower chapel of Ste. Chapelle.

SELECTED OUTPUT

Sacred vocal works

148 chansons for 2vv to 4vv

1 madrigal

SALIENT STYLE FEATURES

- Texture
 - Sermisy’s chansons are characterized by a simple texture consisting mainly of strict homophony alternating with contrapuntally-enlivened homophony. The most common textural progression would be a homophonic opening, followed by sections of light imitation and a return to the opening musical material, then a short conclusion.
 - Although Sermisy did not use imitation to the extent that the Franco-Flemish composers did, it was an element in his musical construction. A large number of his chansons, particularly those for two or three voices, feature imitation in the opening.
 - Some of his chansons for 4vv feature the rhythmic displacement by one or two tacti of one voice.
 - Unlike the Franco-Flemish chanson composers, who moved toward a model of approximate equality of all voices, Sermisy’s chansons feature a texture often dominated by the *superius*, although often the third voice will move in parallel to the *superius*. And although the lowest voice is generally for the purpose of providing harmonic function, melodic material does occasionally appear.
- Text: Sermisy’s generation of Parisian chanson composers preferred the poetry of their contemporaries, particularly Clément Marot, as opposed to the stylized, formal poetry of the previous generation. Preferred subject matter moved away from the theme of courtly love and toward more “everyman” concerns. Sermisy’s texts tend to be “lyrical”, as opposed to the “narrative” texts preferred by Janequin.

- Melody
 - Sermisy's melodies became extremely popular; many showed up in anthologies or in *chansons spirituelles* (a subtype of chanson with moralistic or sacred text, composed primarily by those sympathetic to the Protestant cause).
 - The length of the melodic line typically corresponds to the length of the poetic line; cadences will often appear at the end of a poetic line, regardless of whether or not there is an enjambment.
 - Melismatic flourishes often appear before cadential points.
- Harmony
 - Sermisy's chansons tend to feature simple harmonic structure, with the majority of cadences being of the V-I variety.
 - Lydian and Dorian are the modes most favored by Sermisy and his peers.
- Form
 - Sermisy's poetic texts tend to be decasyllabic, with a rhyme scheme of abba. His musical repetition schemes tend to follow an ABCAA or ABCAA' form.
 - In the case of longer poems, repetition would be used at the end, for ABCADD; AABCDD; or ABABCDEE.
 - Whatever the number of poetic lines, his melodic structures tend to be quadripartite, with the internal sections (B and C) markedly unstable and framed by more stable exterior sections.

PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- Because Sermisy was careful in providing text underlay for all parts, some of the difficulties one would encounter in deciphering Josquin's textual intentions are lessened here.
- When text underlay is missing, it is generally at the conclusion of a chanson, possibly indicating some sort of instrumental "postlude". The conductor will have to make a decision on whether or not to include that in his or her performance.
- Pronunciation issues when performing late 15th and early 16th century music are present here, especially since Sermisy often set more "popular" texts.

CLÉMENT JANEQUIN

- c. 1485 Born in Châtellerault
- 1523 Entered service of Jean de Foix, the Bishop of Bordeaux. Probably “completed his studies leading to the priesthood” at this time; begins receiving some minor, not very lucrative prebends.
- 1529 de Foix dies and the church administrators declare all prebends vacant; Janequin is forced to seek another means of income.
- 1530 By this time, has written the chanson *Chantons, Sonnon, Trompettes* in celebration of François I’s entry into Bordeaux.
- 1530’s Janequin’s period of most prolific output—four volumes of chansons and one (lost) volume of motets, which were published by Attaignant**
- 1531 Serves briefly as Master of Choirboys at Auch Cathedral.
- 1534-37 Serves as *maître de chapelle* at Angers Cathedral
- 1540 First of Moderne’s *Difficile des Chansons*, which contains exclusively works of Janequin, is published.
- 1549 Becomes a student at the University in Paris.
- 1558 Makes his will; leaves everything to his housekeeper, who had been working without payment.
- 1558/60 Dies in Paris
- * It is worth noting that Janequin never held a significant regular post at a cathedral or court.

SELECTED OUTPUT

2 Masses

2 motets

1 “Italian Song”

Over 250 chansons

A boatload of psalms and *chansons spirituelles*, many incomplete

SALIENT STYLE FEATURES

- Text
 - Janequin, like Sermisy, preferred the poetry of Marot and his peers for his shorter chansons; he also set some texts by François I. Many of his shorter chansons are also composed of clever narrative poems tell a raucous story or involve “everyday” characters.
 - Perhaps the subtype of chanson for which Janequin is the most well-known are the onomatopoeic chansons, which are set so as to imitate the sounds of the story they tell. Examples of this subtype include *Le chant des oiseaux*; *La chasse*; *Le cris de Paris*; and *La Bataille*.
- Rhythm and Melody
 - Janequin seems to have been more interested in aligning the music to the textual rhythm than reflecting the meaning of the text in the music. Occasionally, this resulted in repetitive rhythmic formulas, but generally the rhythmic flow is flexible and flows easily from duple to triple as needed for the rhythmic structure of a word or phrase.
 - Melodic phrases are often comprised of short bits of text that are repeated and called back and forth between voice parts.
- Texture
 - Janequin sometimes features close imitation in the opening moments of his chansons, as in the initial bars of *Les Chant des Oiseaux*.

- Janequin's textures often display the Parisian convention of having the *superius* and tenor lines essentially in a duet, with the bass line for harmonic support and the alto line to provide complementary melodic interest. This can be seen in *Chanton, Sonnon, Trompettes*.
- Harmony: Janequin's harmonic structures tend to be somewhat static, so that points of interest come mainly from rhythmic and melodic variation and clever text-painting.

PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- Rhythmic complexities combined with Renaissance French diction and a lot of text make for a significant challenge
- Tuning and interval work would almost certainly need to be planned into the rehearsals—especially alternation between half and whole steps. This is probably more of an issue for less experienced groups, but it should still be taken into account.
- The conductor should provide a good translation—the onomatopoeic chansons derive much of their interest from sound effects, so the choir must know what they are singing about and be able to “play it up”.
- If they are done well, these chansons can be a great way to add some light-heartedness and fun to a program.

LE CHANT DES OISEAUX

*Réveillez vous couers endormis,
Le dieu d'amours vous sonne.
A ce premier jour de may
Oiseaux fermont merveilles
Pour vous mettre hors d'esmay,
Destoupez voz Oreilles.
Vous serez tous en joye mis,
Chacun s'I habandonne
Car la saison est bonne.
Vous orrez a mon advis
Une douce musique
Que fera le roy mauves
D'une voix autentique.
Rire et gaudir c'est mon devis
Chacun s'I habondonne.
Rossignol du boys joly
A qui la voix resonne,
Pour vous metter hors d'ennuy
Vostre gorge jargonne.....
Fuez regretz, pleurs et souci,
Car la saison est bonne.
Arriere maistre coqu,
Chacun vous est mai tenu
Car vous n'estes qu'un traistre...
Par traison en chacun nid
Pendez sans qu'on vous sonne
Réveillez vous coeurs endormis,
Le Dieu d'amours vous sonne!*

THE SONG OF THE BIRDS

Wake up, sleeping hearts!
The God of Love calls upon you!
This first day of May
The birds will work wonders
To dispel your worries.
Unstop your ears!
Everyone will be
Filled with joy
For the season is pleasant.
And the song-thrush
Will make sweet, original music.....

Everyone laughs and rejoices.
The nightingale sets the woods
Ringing with a twittering throat.

Flee, regrets, tears and cares!
The season is pleasant.
Away master Cuckoo,
Everyone regards
You as a traitor....
“Cuckoo”...treacherously laying
Eggs in each nest uninvited!
Wake up sleeping hearts,
The God of Love calls upon you!

PIERRE CERTON

“It is worth noting that Certon does not seem in any of his music to have been a very inventive composer of melodies”. –Grove

1529	Appointed matins clerk at Notre Dame in Paris
1530	Summoned before the chapter for refusing to attend services and for playing ball in the square of Notre Dame; is spared excommunication and imprisonment.
1532	Becomes clerk at Ste. Chapelle under Canon Odon de Colligny, who was the son of Gaspard de Collogny and brother of the Admiral of France.
1536	Appointed Master of the Choristers. Holds this post, in addition to various benefices, until his death.
1562	Composes a six-voice <i>déploration</i> , which was published in 1570's <i>Les Meslanges</i> , modeled after that which Josquin had composed on the death of Ockeghem.
1572	Dies in Paris.

SELECTED OUTPUT

Masses (8 of which are extant)

Mass movements and Magnificats

Motets

Psalms and *chansons spirituelles*

Around 285 (!) chansons

SALIENT STYLE FEATURES

- Career: Certon's career seems to consist of three distinct style periods.
 - In the first period, melodies are made up of patchworks of short motifs that correspond to textual fragments, with one continuous melodic line based on a progression of text being more the exception than the norm. Influence of Sermisy and Janequin is evident in these early chansons.
 - The middle-period chansons display a more syllabic style akin to that of Sandrins, particularly in *Si par desir* of 1544.
 - His later chansons, especially those composed during the middle of the 16th century, employ a syllabic and homorhythmic structure of strophic song, especially in the form of the *voix de villes*, which had become popular in Paris. The *Primier Livre de Chansons*, published by Le Roy & Ballard in 1572, consisted exclusively of this type of chanson and was quite successful. This more syllabic style may also have been due to the influence of *Les Plèiades*.
- Melody: Regardless of the assertion that his melodies were not particularly inventive, Certon possessed great skill in relaying the rhythmic nuances of the poetry and the meaning of the text.
- Profound understanding of the Northern contrapuntal style is displayed in conjunction with the Parisian chanson style.

PERFORMANCE CONSIDERATIONS

- As with his contemporaries, Certon's music presents some difficulties of pronunciation.
- Some difficult intervals appear, along with voice-crossings.
- A great deal of ability for independent internalization of the beat will be required in order to keep some of Certon's chansons together

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