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| The Renaissance was a time of rebirth in learning, science, and the arts throughout Europe. The rediscovery of the writings of ancient Greece and Rome led to a renewed interest in learning in general. The invention of the printing press allowed the disbursement of this knowledge in an unprecedented manner. The invention of the compass permitted the navigation of the world’s oceans and the subsequent discovery of lands far removed from the European continent. With Copernicus’ discovery of the actual position of the earth in the solar system and Martin Luther’s Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church lost its grip on society and a humanist spirit was born. This spirit manifested itself in the painting and sculpture of Michelangelo, the plays of Shakespeare, and in both the [sacred](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/ren/index.html#josquin) and secular [dance](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/ren/index.html#dance) and [vocal](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/ren/index.html#madrigal) music of the greatest composers of the era. painting of Renaissance musicians in church procession**Dance music of the Renaissance** Throughout the Renaissance instrumental dance music flowered and thrived, and was composed, or more likely improvised, by many people. Musicians whose names have come down to us collected much of this existing music and had it published in various volumes over the years. The *Terpsichore* of **Michael Praetorius (c.1571-1621)** and the dance music of **Tielman Susato (c.1500-1561)** represent some of the outstanding examples of dance music from the late Renaissance. A piece such as [La Spagna](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/MP3/dance.mp3) , (attributed to [Josquin des Prez](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/ren/index.html#josquin)) is an excellent example of the buoyant rhythms and sounds of the Renaissance dance. Many of these dance forms were modified and developed by later composers and found their way into the [Baroque](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/bar/) *dance suite*. sheet music and sketch of Josquin des Prez**The Golden Age of Polyphony** **Josquin des Prez (Born: (Burgundy), c. 1440; Died: Condé-sur-Escaut, Aug. 27, 1521)**Not much is known about the life Josquin des Prez, but it is generally agreed that he studied under the earlier Renaissance master **Johannes Ockeghem (c.1420-1495)**, who was the first great master of the *Flemish* school of Renaissance composers. There are references to Josquin’s having served at several courts in Italy and France, and at the Sistine Chapel in Rome. He died while serving as canon of the collegiate church at Condé. Among his surviving works are more than a dozen *masses*, a hundred *motets*, and a good deal of secular music. The serene, almost otherworldly choral sound of the Flemish school’s style can be heard in the **Gloria** from Josquin’s [Missa L’homme armé](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/MP3/massarme.mp3). Flemish composers of the time often based the *cantus firmus* on a popular melody of the day, composing new music for the other voices in counterpoint to the tune. The simultaneous interweaving of several melodic lines (usually four: *soprano, alto, tenor, bass*) in a musical composition is known as *polyphony*. Polyphonic music of the Renaissance could be very complex and intricate, often obscuring the words and the meaning of the text which had been set. **Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina** (**Born: Palestrina, near Rome, ca. 1525; Died: Rome, Feb. 2, 1594)** painting of PalestrinaPalestrina spent much of his career in Rome, serving as organist and choir master at both the Sistine Chapel and at St. Peter’s. A productive composer, he wrote over a hundred mass settings and over two hundred motets. At the same time, he managed a very successful furrier business, from which he died a very wealthy man.In keeping with the strictures of the Council of Trent (1545-1563) to rid the music of the Catholic rite of the "worldly excesses" of the Protestant Reformation, Palestrina composed in a purer, more restrained style. Gone are the vocal lines based on popular melodies. Instead, each voice part resembles a chant melody, each with its own profile and crystalline line. In the opening **Kyrie** from Palestrina’s most famous work, the [Pope Marcellus Mass](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/MP3/popemass.mp3), the classic, pure lines of the text set clearly amidst the various voices of the choir can be heard. Palestrina’s polyphonic writing is of such quality that many later composers (including [Mozart](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/clas/mozart.html), [Beethoven](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/clas/beethoven.html), and [Brahms](http://www.ipl.org/div/mushist/rom/brahms.html)) spent their early years studying counterpoint in the "Palestrina style" as set down in a book by J. J. Fux. |