

# Renaissance Period - Harmony and Tonality

## Amy Linington Music

General characteristics of harmony and tonality in the Renaissance period

- Harmonies in the Renaissance period usually came from the combination of polyphonic melodies.
- The overall tonality of the music was based on modes - types of scales found in the Medieval and Renaissance periods - or major, or minor, scales.
- The chords created by polyphony were mainly major or minor.
- As the era progressed, newer forms like the English and the Italian madrigal embraced the tonal music that remains popular to this day.
- Tonal music places strong emphasis on cadences at the end of sections /pieces
- Occasionally, the final chords had no third and were neither major or minor
- Early Renaissance music, like that of Guillaume Dufay, maintained the harmonic rules of Medieval music from the late Middle Ages. But as new styles emerged over the course of the sixteenth century, Renaissance music began pushing boundaries and introducing moments of dissonance.
- Dissonant notes in chords had to be prepared and resolved.
- False relations were used to create harmonic interest.
- Drones were often used as a basic accompaniment.

## Harmony from polyphony

Polyphony is characterized by multiple voices with separate melodic lines and rhythms. Each voice has its own independent melodic line, and the independent voices blend together to create harmonies.

## False relation

A false relation is a type of dissonance that occurs in Renaissance music. It is a harmonic clash that happens when a note in one part is played or sung at the same or immediately before or after a chromatically altered version of the same note in another part.

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### Influential Renaissance Composers

The musical literature of the Renaissance has not endured to the degree that Baroque, Classical, and Romantic era music has. Still, several Renaissance composers remain highly influential to this day.

**1. Josquin des Prez:** a prodigious composer of both church and secular music. His liturgical motets are widely recognised examples of Renaissance harmony and notation. He was particularly known in his lifetime for composing 32 religious masses.

**2. Carlo Gesualdo:** Better known in his lifetime as Gesualdo da Venosa - a late Renaissance composer - perhaps the most famous of his era to emerge from Italy. He was also notorious for several murders he is alleged to have committed! Gesualdo published six volumes of Italian madrigals, which featured chromaticism that would not be equaled until late into the Baroque era.

**3. Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina:** known as Palestrina to most, he was a Roman School composer and is sometimes credited as the link between Renaissance and Baroque music. Palestrina's counterpoint was among the most renowned of his era. Palestrina was known for his masses, such as the *Missa Papae Marcelli (Pope Marcellus Mass)*, which made him famous in his own lifetime.