Adam De La Halle And Ars Antiqua Time Period Essay, Research Paper

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Life Summary

Adam de la Halle is often referred to as the greatest of the long succession of

post Medieval musicians. He was a poet, musician and innovator of the earliest

French theater. He became famous for his use of polyphony and his theatrical

productions. Adam originally trained for the clergy (the people of the church).

Marriage interfered with his musical career; but with the help of some noble

benefactors he was able to pursue musical studies at the University of Paris.

The remainder of his life was spent in service of noble patrons.

His Music

Adam de la Halle was of French origins. All of his lyrics were written in French.

Much of his early music was monophonic which shortly after became homophonic and

then transformed into polyphonic. Much of his polyphonic work was set for 3

voices or instruments. If a piece of music is monophonic, then it has only a

melody line and no harmony. Much of the medieval music was monophonic. If the

music is homophonic then there is only one melody line, but it may be played by

two or more instruments. Many of the songs that were originally monophonic were

easily transformed into homophonic by add extra voices or instruments.

Polyphonic is the type of music we hear today. Polyphonic is when there is a

melody line accompanied by harmony. A considerable amount of Adam de la Halle’s

polyphonic work was designed for plays. One of Adam’s manuscripts contains the

oldest known existence of the sharp sign. In 1872 his music was officially

published.

Ars Antiqua Time Period

Ars Antiqua is Medieval Latin for “ancient art”. Ars Antiqua was the period of

musical activity in 13th century France. The music was characterized by the

increasing sophistication of counterpoint (the art of combining simultaneous

voice parts). Modern music historians classify the whole 13th century as Ars

Antiqua where as older historians classified only the later half of the 13th

century as Ars Antiqua. This was the time period when music started to become

more formal. In this time period, musical plays were just becoming popular and

in 1283 one of the first operas was performed.

Most of the music of the Ars Antiqua time period is anonymous. Two important

figures stand out among the anonymity. P?rotin, who became famous in the late

12th century, composed the earliest known music for four voices. Franco of

Cologne, who flourished in the middle of the 13th century, was a theorist who

organized a new, more precise system of rhythmic notation, the direct ancestor

of modern notation.

The most important style of music to originate in the Ars Antiqua is the motet,

which retained its popularity for centuries. The essence of this style of music

is the simultaneous presentation of more than one text. It originated with the

addition of a new text to the upper voices of a sacred polyphonic composition.

The lower, slower moving voices retained the original text.

Ars Antiqua was the time period when music as we know it was just beginning.

Composers were considered innovators because they invented a great deal of what

is used in modern music (for example harmony and modern notation). The music we

listen to today is comprised of everything these composers created. Without this

great musical minds, music today would be significantly different.