

Renaissance Polyphony: Theory and Performance

A course integrating musicianship, composition and conducting

Join us in exploring the vocal traditions of the 14th through the 16th centuries through the lens of music theory as we de-construct musical pieces from Gregorian chant to Renaissance masses and motets, putting them back together through novel composition, rehearsal, and performance techniques. Only basic background in reading staff notation is needed.

Theory

This course bridges the gap between the study of music theory and the practical aspect of music performance through the lens of Renaissance Music.

In the theory half, students learn to read Early Music notation, create their own scores, critique recordings, and compose new music. In the performance half, which proceeds concurrently, participants take turns directing their classmates in rehearsals of their own compositions as well as traditional pieces.

The course culminates with a final project and concert, which synthesize the complementary aspects of theory and composition, editing and conducting, and performance and critique.

What happens when two partbooks for Robert Hunt's gorgeous setting of Stabat Mater go missing from Peterhouse College, Cambridge in the 16th century? Journey with us as we transport our minds to 1535 AD and re-imagine (and re-compose) a piece from the 16th Century as our final project.

Composition

Discover how to read original manuscripts from the Renaissance period and how to create your own performance editions using the freely-available music notation software MuseScore. Mark up your editions for singing and conducting and use them in the final performance at the end of the course.

Editing

Experience a chamber chorus from both sides of the baton! Conduct your own compositions and those of the Renaissance masters in parallel sessions throughout the course in preparation for a final concert.

Conducting

Critique recordings of the semester's pieces in seminar format and learn to transfer what you hear to markings on a score.

Critique

Perform Renaissance polyphony informed by the study of the underlying theory to expressively communicate the nuances of the text to your listeners. Be prepared to sing with the emotional capacity demanded by the music from brand new editions created by you and your fellow students!

Performance