

Medieval Music (c500 - 1450)

Music has been part of our lives for thousands of years. It can be traced through pictures and writings before the time of Christ. Music was mainly found in places of worship and became known as "the language of God". Because of this music has always played an important part in Church services. In the early Church all music was vocal; and the purpose of the **melody** was to support the meanings of the words. Music was composed as a single-line to be sung in **unison** without any **harmony** to support it. The rhythm was called "free rhythm" as it was similar to the rhythms of speech.

Definitions:

Melody is the tune of a piece of music.

Unison is where people sing or play at the same pitch (the same tune).

Harmony is the selection of notes put together to make the tune.

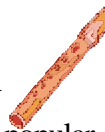


Medieval Instruments

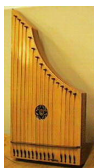
In Medieval music indoor and outdoor instruments are used. Here are some of the instruments that would be used.

Indoor instruments:

The RECORDER



This was a very popular instrument in Medieval Times. All members of the recorder group were used: bass, tenor, treble, descant and soprano. Sometimes they played **solos** (by themselves) and sometimes they played **consort** (as a group).



The PSALTERY

This was a box-like instrument with strings stretched across it. It was plucked with a plectrum. It was used to accompany solo songs.

Outdoor instruments:

The BAGPIPES



These are loud and so were played outdoors. Air is blown into a bag that is usually made out of animal skin. The bag was squeezed when the air was needed in the pipes, allowing the piper to breathe when he wanted. The pipe that he breathed into was called a mouthpiece and the one he fingered was called the chanter.



The HURDY GURDY

This mechanical instrument looked similar to a violin but was placed on the knee. A wheel was turned and its rim touched the strings. This made the strings vibrate. By stopping the strings you could make a melody while the rest of the strings created a **drone** (a note that is played all the way through a section or the whole piece of music).

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Homework:

1. When can music be traced back to and how?
2. Why did music become important in the Church?
3. How many different sizes of recorder are there?
4. What was a plectrum used for?
5. How did the bagpiper create sound from the bagpipes?
6. In what way is a hurdy-gurdy similar to a violin?
7. Do you still see any of these instruments today? If so, which ones?