

LS 280.73

Syllabus: "The Glory of the 'Quattrocento: How Music, Painting and Architecture Operated at the Nexus of Spiritual, Political and Intellectual Power in Fifteenth-Century Italy"

Wednesdays, 6:15-8:45 p.m.

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"The disciplines are interconnected, and a person cannot master one unless he seeks light from another." Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, 1450.

Course overview

You can lose yourself in the magnificent *Duomo* of Florence, completed by the great fifteenth-century architect, Filippo Brunelleschi. You can also lose yourself in a painting by Piero della Francesca, or in Guillaume Dufay's brilliant music for the Catholic liturgy, pieces like the *Missa Se la face ay pale*—lose yourself in the sense of tasting a vast and brilliant world that leaves the petty concerns of day-to-day life behind. Fifteenth-century Italy enjoyed a strong tradition of art designed with this in mind. Composers, painters and architects used the full range of intellectual and emotional power available to them to create a transcendent world, and they did so through the patronage of powerful people who expected something in return. That is how the themes of art, spirituality, intellect and politics intersect, and that is how some of the greatest artistic achievements ever known were created. Much of it is still around for us to enjoy and understand today.

Our study of the visual arts begins with *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* by Michael Baxandall. Each student will write a brief paper on a painting, taking Baxandall's themes as a point of departure. From there we turn to Ross King's *Brunelleschi's Dome* for an introduction to the Cathedral of Florence, finished in the mid-1430s. This massive structure proclaimed the wealth and power of this city and the Church on an unprecedented scale. It also reflected Brunelleschi's rarified aesthetics. A motet was commissioned from Guillaume Dufay, the most famous composer of the day, for performance at the dedication ceremony for the high altar in 1436. Dufay's monumental and luxuriant piece is based on mathematical proportions that mirror those of the dome. Dufay also achieved a stylistic breakthrough by bringing the lyric melodic style associated with love songs to a genre that was traditionally conceived very differently. He thus articulates an approach to spirituality that channels sensual desire through devotion to the Virgin Mary. These two artistic explorers, Brunelleschi and Dufay, worked for the most powerful patrons in Europe. They brought their invention and skill to projects that were as much about spirituality and intellectual rigor as they were about politics. To understand the contexts in

which they worked, we will study all of Brunelleschi's buildings for Florence and we will listen to secular and sacred music composed by Dufay.

From Florence we move to Rome, with Ross King's *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling* as our guide to the Sistine Chapel and its famous paintings. By the mid-1490s, Josquin Desprez, the most famous composer of the day, had earned a position there. Among the pieces he composed were two mass-cycles based on the *L'homme armé* song. This well known tune was first of all a song about mounting a crusade to recover Constantinople, lost to the infidels in 1453, second about conquering the devil, and third about patriarchal power. By 1505, the Pope's choir was singing a magnificent piece by Josquin that celebrates patriarchal power using the very themes depicted in Michelangelo's famous paintings on the ceiling. Thus, these two leading artists of the time are linked by a building, just as Brunelleschi and Dufay were linked seventy years earlier in Florence. Josquin wrote another piece that is no less powerful and expresses sympathy—no doubt reflecting the inclinations of a patron—with Savonarola, the religious reformer and arch enemy of the papacy who was publically executed in Florence in 1498. The piece thus adds another dimension to our understanding of 'quattrocento spirituality, as it manifested through art and politics.

Each student is encouraged to select another city in Italy to work on for a term project. The goal is to see how the themes we are talking about in Florence and Rome played out there. Milan, Ferrara, Venice, Siena, Bologna and Naples are obvious choices, but there are many charms and surprises to discover in smaller cities, too, for example, Padua, Rimini, Urbino, Arezzo, Modena, Verona, Pavia, Genoa, and Perugia.

Prerequisites: none. The learning goals of this class are: 1) to gain general knowledge about fifteenth-century music, painting and architecture; 2) to understand how themes of spirituality, intellectual life and politics intersect in the arts; 3) to develop writing and research skills.

Required purchases: Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the History of Pictorial Style*; Ross King, *Brunelleschi's Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture*; Ross King, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*; David Fallows, *Dufay*; Course pack with selections from Patrick Macey, *Bonfire Songs: Savonarola's Musical Legacy* and other course materials, including an overview of the liturgy for the mass. All listening assignments have been posted on Blackboard.

Grading: Term paper, weekly assignments and class participation. Please meet with the instructor early in the term to discuss your term project, which is due on the last day of classes. It is useful to decide on a topic early in the semester. Reports on your term projects will be given during the final class meeting.

Week 1: Plainchant and paintings for the Christian liturgy.

Listening: Plainchant for the Christian liturgy: 1) the antiphon *Venit ad Petrum* (source of the *Caput* melody); 2) the hymn *Pange lingua* (source for a mass by Josquin); 3) psalm tones and the antiphons *Ave Maria* and *Salve regina* (sources for motets by Josquin); 4) *Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus* and *Agnus Dei* from the mass ordinary. Recordings of these and all other pieces discussed in our course are available as sound files on Blackboard. Individual documents giving the verbal texts are also on Blackboard.

Assignment for week 2: Read Part 1 of Baxandall's book, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*; Part 1 of *Dufay* by David Fallows.

Week 2: *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, part 1. The career of composer Guillaume Dufay; motets by Dufay and Dunstaple

Listening: *Balsamus et munda cera* by Dufay, written for performance in Santa Maria in Trastevere, one of the oldest churches in Rome; *Preco prehemencie* by Dunstaple. Discussion: *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*; Dufay's early career; symbolism, function and style in early fifteenth-century motets.

Assignment for week 3: *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, part 2; Fallows, *Dufay*, songs and motets.

Assignment for week 4: Choose a painting and write a brief paper on it, with your paper divided into three sectional headings. Circulate your choice of paintings to your classmates and to me via email in order to avoid duplication. Please use these sectional headings for your short paper:
 1. Using *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* to understand [the title of your painting]
 2. Additional observations about [title of your painting]
 3. Things for the class to look for when we see [title of your painting]
 Use section 1 to demonstrate your command of Baxandall's arguments. In section 2, bring at least one additional source (books or articles) to the study of your painting. Use section 3 as a one-page handout to be distributed in class; walk us through the handout with the painting on display via classroom computer hookup.

A list of paintings to choose from for this assignment:

Florence:

Giotto in Santa Croce

Masaccio's Trinity in Santa Maria Novella

Masaccio's cycle for the Brancacci Chapel

Fra Angelico in the convent of San Marco

Fra Angelico in the museum of San Marco

Ghirlandaio in Santa Maria Novella

Rome:

Fra Angelico's Chapel for Nicholas V in the Vatican

Botticelli in the Sistine Chapel

Perugino in the Sistine Chapel
 Rosselli in the Sistine Chapel
 Pintoricchio's Borgia Apartments in the Vatican
 Pintoricchio in Santa Maria in Aracoeli

Week 3: *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy, part 2; the invention of the cantus firmus mass cycle.*

Listening: *Missa Caput*: the anonymous English mass and Ockeghem's mass
 Discussion: *Painting and Experience, part 2.*
 Assignment for week 4: *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy, part 3.* Follows Dufay, Masses.

Week 4: *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy, part 3; Dufay's songs and Nuper rosarum*

Listening: *Nuper rosarum* and *Salve flos* by Dufay; songs by Dufay.
 Discussion: Brief presentations on paintings that you wrote about. An introduction to the *Duomo* in Florence.
Hand in today: brief papers on a painting.
 Assignment: Ross King, *Brunelleschi's Dome*, chapters 1-5, 9 and 11; 6, 7, 8 and 10 are optional. Discussion leaders assigned in class. The duty of a discussion leader is to summarize the main points of your chapter. Two volunteers for next week to report on this book: *The Gates of Paradise: Lorenzo Ghiberti's Renaissance Masterpiece* NB 1287.F6 G43 2007.

Meet with the instructor to discuss topics for your term project, if you haven't already.

Week 5: Brunelleschi's Florence; Dufay's *Missa Se la face ay pale*

Listening: Dufay's *Missa Se la face ay pale*; Discussion: *Brunelleschi's Dome* and Ghiberti's doors. Brunelleschi's Florence: the Pazzi Chapel at Santa Croce; the Sacristy at San Lorenzo; Santo Spirito; Hospital of the Innocents and Piazza Annunziata.

Assignment for week 6: finish reading *Brunelleschi's Dome*, chapters 12-19
 Assignment for week 7: 1) Pick a city for your term project and prepare an annotated bibliography; be prepared to discuss one book or article.

Week 6: *Brunelleschi's Dome; Dufay's Missa L'homme armé*

Listening: The *L'homme armé* song and Dufay's setting for the Mass.
 Discussion: *Brunelleschi's Dome*, chapters 12-19.

Week 7: Other Italian cities and the Renaissance; Josquin's *Ave Maria* and *Missa L'homme armé*

Listening: Josquin's setting of *Ave Maria* and the *L'homme armé* masses.
Hand in today: annotated bibliography for your term project. Discussion: brief presentations on one book or article relevant to your term project.
 Assignment for week 8: Read King's *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, chapters 1-10

Week 8: *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*; Josquin's *Missa Fortuna desperata*

Listening: The secular song *Fortuna desperata*; Josquin's *Missa Fortuna desperata*. The "Goddess" Fortuna in antiquity and in the fifteenth century.
 Discussion: *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, chapters 1-10.
 Assignment for week 9: Read King's *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, chapters 11-20.

Week 9: *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*; Josquin's *Missa Pange Lingua*.

Listening: Josquin's *Missa Pange lingua*. Discussion: *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, chapters 11-20.
 Assignment for week 10: *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, chapters 21-31.

Week 10: *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*; Josquin's *Salve regina*

Listening: Josquin's setting of the antiphon *Salve regina*. Discussion: *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling*, chapters 21-31.
 Assignment for week 11: Macey, *Bonfire Songs*, chapters 1, 2, 4 and 8.
 Assignment for week 12: compare two recorded performances of the same piece of fifteenth-century music and write 1-2 pages.

Week 11 Savonarola; Josquin's *Miserere mei Deus* and the *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariae*

Listening: Josquin's motet *Miserere mei Deus* and *Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariae*; songs related to Savonarola. Discussion of Macey, *Bonfire Songs*, chapters 1, 2, 4 and 8.

Week 12 Comparing performances of 15th Century Music

Listening: Presentations on two recorded performances of the same piece of fifteenth-century music. Hand in today: 1-2 pages on your performances.

Assignment for week 13: Reports on term projects and hand in term papers; prepare a one-page handout for each class member for your report.

Week 13 Final class: Pot luck; reports on term projects.

Pot-luck gathering. Reports on term papers. Everyone hand in term papers.

Reserve list

These items have been placed on reserve for our class:

- Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the History of Pictorial Style* 759.5 B355 P148 1988
 David Fallows, *Dufay* ML410.D83 F355 1987
 Ross King, *Brunelleschi's Dome: How a Renaissance Genius Reinvented Architecture* NA5621.F7 K56 2000
 Ross King, *Michelangelo and the Pope's Ceiling* ND623.B9 J55 2003
 Carol Lewine, *The Sistine Chapel Walls and the Roman Liturgy* 755.2 L672 S623 1992
 Patrick Macey, *Bonfire Songs: Savonarola's Musical Legacy* ML 3093.M33 1998
 Richard Sherr, ed., *The Josquin Companion* ML 410.J815 J68 2000
The Gates of Paradise: Lorenzo Ghiberti's Renaissance Masterpiece NB 1287.F6 G43 2007.

Reserve CDs placed on reserve in the Music Media Center (lower level of Music Building):

- Intégrale des motets isorhythmiques/Guillaume Dufay* CD 16080
Flos Florum/Dufay CD 10969
Dunstaple, CD 6095
Secular Music/Dufay CD 10996
Missa Se la face ay pale/Dufay CD 997
Missa L'homme armé/Dufay CD 520
Quadrivium/Dufay (Nuper; Balsamus) CD 10943
Popes and Anti-popes (Balsamus) CD 6771
A Musical Book of Hours CD 5520
The Spirits of England and France (Missa Caput) CD 4680 v. 4
Missa Caput/Ockeghem CD 6152
Missa Hercules Dux Ferrariae/Josquin (Ave Maria) CD 10380
Missa Pange lingua/Josquin CD 15135
Missa Fortuna desperata/Josquin CD 7465
Missa L'homme armé/Josquin CD 13795
Stabat Mater Josquin (Salve Regina) CD 8425