

So just what the heck is a motet?

Perotin sez: “it’s a substitute clausula with added words in the upper voice(s).”

de Vitry sez: “it’s a sacred work with a slow-moving isorhythmic tenor and two faster-moving voices, all with independent texts.”

but Dunstable sez: “it’s a work of sacred poetry set for multiple voices. Period.”

Comparison:

Philippe de Vitry *In Arboris* (1320)
John Dunstable, *Quam pulchra est* (early 15th century)

de Vitry

Dunstable

3 voices:
tenor, motetus, triplum

3 voices:
tenor and two upper

sacred text; original poetry

sacred text; straight from Bible

multiple texts

single text

slow-moving tenor

voices move close to same rate

rhythmically independent parts

often homorhythmic

tenor taken from chant

newly-composed tenor

organized with isorhythmic tenor

organized by sections of text; throughcomposed

rhythm independent of text

rhythm influenced by rhythm of text

tenor composed first;
upper voices scaffolded on top

all voices composed together

Perfect intervals treated as consonances

Sixths and thirds also treated as consonances
A “pan-consonant” style

Les Formes fixes (aka, the polyphonic chanson):

Machaut sez: “I like perfect intervals; 3rds and 6ths are fine, but they don’t provide that acoustical stability at cadences that I love so much.”

Dufay sez: “3rds and 6ths??? Love, love, love them!!”

Comparison:

Machaut: *Rose, liz, printemps, verdure* (mid 14th century)

Dufay: *Se la face ay pale* (1430s)

Machaut

Dufay

follows **strict** rondeau form

loose interpretation of ballade form
each line determined more by text

theme of courtly love

theme of courtly love

4 voices: two-voice structure (cantus and tenor)
added counter-tenor and duplum

3 voices: two-voice framework with
with added counter-tenor

long melismas at beginning of lines

long melismas at ends of stanzas

treble-dominated

treble-dominated

voices move at same rate

voices move at same rate

secular poem

secular poem

frequent rhythmic syncopation

frequent rhythmic syncopation

sometimes jagged lines, moving by leaps

mostly smooth lines, moving by step

perfect intervals treated as consonant

3rds and 6ths also treated as consonant