MEDIEVAL MUSIC

With the invention of the score in the Middle Ages, in about the year 1000, the history of music began.

HISTORY AND SOCIETY
The Middle Ages (from around 500 to 1500) lasted for a long period of time, starting with the fall of the Roman Empire, when barbarians broke into their long borders, to the discovery of the American continent.
The society was feudal, all of the power was held by nobles and those in high positions in the Church.

MUSIC
Music played an important role in the society and the culture of that period. Religious music was sung in monasteries and cathedrals. Non-religious music, which is known as secular music, was present in castles and villages. Both types of music were very different and had different functions.

1. Medieval religious music
1.1. Gregorian Chant
Music was very important in the Christian Church all around Europe. Mass and other religious services were sung instead of spoken, always in Latin, the official language of the Christian Church. Monks spent many hours learning religious songs by heart. Instruments were forbidden inside the church (they were considered sins), so all the medieval religious music was only vocal.
In the early Middle Ages, religious music consisted of a single melodic line, without any harmony or accompaniment (which is called monophony). The rhythm was free, unmarked, and determined by the text. The tempo was slow. It is said that Pope Gregory I compiled the existing melodies during the sixth-century, and for that reason they received the name Gregorian Chant.

How was Gregorian Chant written?
In the beginning, music was not written; monks learnt it by heart. Later, they began to write some signs over the text as a reminder of the melodic movement. This signs were called neumes.
Later, they decided to include a line which represented one sound; thus, the neumes above the line were higher than that sound, and the ones below were lower than the sound of reference. After this first line, they decided to add more lines representing more specific sounds, so that they created a system formed by four red lines. The neumes also changed into square forms, representing different durations.

1.2. Origins of the polyphony

In the ninth century, music theorists in the Church experimented with the idea of singing two melodic lines simultaneously at parallel intervals, usually at the fourth, fifth, or octave. These polyphonic forms evolved towards more complicated forms in the following centuries.

The first period of the polyphony is known as **Ars Antiqua** (11th-14th cents.), which means ‘old art’. The places where this style was composed were cathedrals, the most important being **Notre Dame Cathedral** in Paris, and the main composers were Léonin and Pèrotin.

The second period of the polyphonic medieval era is known as **Ars Nova** (14th-15th cents.) which means ‘new art’. The main composer of this style was **Guillaume de Machaut**.
2. Medieval secular music

During the Middle Ages, music was not only used for religious purposes. It was also used for entertainment. This kind of music, the non-religious music, is also known as secular music. Secular music was performed by two kinds of musicians: troubadours and jongleurs.

Troubadours were noblemen, even kings, who composed and sang their own songs, usually about love and expressing emotions. The texts were in their own language and they accompanied the song playing an instrument. These musicians received different names depending on their countries, but the word troubadour is used as the generic one (Troubadours, the most famous, were from the south of France, Trouvères in the north of France and in Germany Minnesingers. There were also female composers, known as Trobairitz).

Some famous troubadours were William IX Duke of Aquitaine, the English king Richard the Lionheart, and the Spanish king Alfonso X the Wise.

Jongleurs or jesters were musicians from a lower social class. They went from village to village, or from castle to castle, playing, singing and performing tricks, earning some money for entertaining the nobility. They did not compose the songs they sang, nor write the lyrics of these songs.