
Josquin des Prez was born around A.D. 1440 in France. He is typically classified as one of the greatest – if not the greatest – composers of the Renaissance period. It has been said of Josquin that he was one of the first composers to show true genius in Western music. The Protestant reformer Martin Luther said of Josquin, "He is the master of the notes. They must do as he wilts; as for the other composers, they have to do as the notes will."

As a composer, Josquin des Prez showed a remarkable ability to combine the musical elements, devices, and novelties of the time period into music that would endure without being dated.

The music of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance showed signs of advance in the use of counterpoint (the pitting of one melody against another). Josquin showed an unusual ease in his compositions in the use of counterpoint and depth of emotion that had not been seen before in the music of the Middle Ages or Renaissance.

An extremely prolific composer, during his lifetime Josquin wrote 18 settings of the Roman Catholic mass, 6 settings of different mass sections, 112 motets (vocal pieces for three or four voices), and 70 chansons (songs with three voices, in which either one or two of the lower voices are instruments). The number of motets that he wrote is interesting because the mass was the primary sacred composition of the day. However, the motet allowed the composer to experiment more because it wasn't tied so closely to the church service. The motet, then, became the main vehicle that composers used to explore the newly developing compositional techniques of the Renaissance period. Josquin's motets and mass settings are the most creative of the time and show his talents well. Josquin was the first of many great "transition" composers in music history. He helped to close off the Medieval period and launch the musical world into the Renaissance.