## Intro to White Mensural Notation

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Prepared for KWDMS 2013

### Clefs

- **C Clef**: The line through the clef is Middle C
- **G Clef**: The line the clef curls around is G above Middle C
- **F Clef**: The line through the clef is F below Middle C

### Mensurations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Note</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>More (or Less)</th>
<th>Modern Equivalent</th>
<th>Rest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Longa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Breve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semibreve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semiminim (Crotchet)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fusa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mensuration Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Tempus</th>
<th>Prolatio</th>
<th>Divisions</th>
<th>Reccommended Modern Time Signature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perfectum</td>
<td>Perfectum</td>
<td>ImPerfectum</td>
<td>ImPerfectum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Minor</td>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Special Mensuration Signs

- Line through Mensuration Sign Called Alla Breve
  - Italian for “At the Breve”
  - Same Mensuration, but twice as fast.

- Alla Breve
  - Still ImPerfectum Minor
  - 3 Indicates Minims are in groups of 3

Other Stuff to Know

- Custos
  - Occurs at the end of a line.
  - Tells what the pitch of the note on the next line is.

- Flat

- Repeat Sign
  - Sometimes one like this is at the end of a piece....

- Sharp

- Signum Congruentiae
  - Cadence Point (All voices come together) or Sign for where to start or end a canon.
# Ligatures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cum-cum</td>
<td>desc.</td>
<td>B L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>asc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sine-cum</td>
<td></td>
<td>L L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cum-sine</td>
<td>desc.</td>
<td>B B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sine-sine</td>
<td>asc.</td>
<td>L B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.o.p.</td>
<td></td>
<td>S S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rule of Thumb: Don’t change syllables on a ligature.

L = Long
B = Breve
S = Semibreve

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## Punctis Augmentionis

Only in Imperfect Mensurations

Dots act like in Modern Notation:
Add one half the length of the note

If Imperfect Mensuration, this would have the value of 3 Crotchets

Apel, Willi (1961). The Notation of Polyphonic Music, 900-1600
Imperfection

In Tempus Perfectum, Breves are by default worth 3 Semibreves

In Tempus Perfectum, Breves are Sometimes worth 2 Semibreves

In the following examples, the modern notation has been halved for clarity.

Tempus Perfectum Prolatio Minor

If a Breve is followed by a note or rest that has a length of a Breve or greater, the Breve is Perfect—worth 3 Semibreves.

If a Breve is followed by 3 Semibreves, the Breve is Perfect.

If a Breve is followed by a group of smaller notes that equal 3 Semibreves, the Breve is Perfect.

If a Breve is followed by 2 Semibreves, the Breve is Perfect.
(The second Semibreve turns into an Imperfect Breve. This will be explained later.)

If a Breve is followed by 1 Semibreve, the Breve is Imperfect—worth 2 Semibreves

If a Breve is followed by 1 Semibreve worth of notes, the Breve is Imperfect—worth 2 Semibreves

If a Breve is followed by more than three Semibreves, the Breve is Imperfect.

If a Breve is preceded by 1 Semibreve, the Breve is Imperfect

If a Breve is preceded by more than three Semibreves, the Breve is Imperfect.

If a Breve is preceded by and followed by a Semibreve, the Semibreve following the Breve does the Imperfecting.

Rests cannot be Imperfected.

Rests can Imperfect Breves.

These are Guidelines.
They are not hard and fast rules.
**Imperfection**

Tempus Perfectus Prolatio Major
Tempus Imperfectum Prolation Major

Minims can Imperfect Semibreves.

Minims can Imperfect Breves and Longas. This is called Partial Imperfection.

This leads to weird combinations, especially in Tempus Perfectus Prolatio Major. For example, you can get recursive Imperfection.

The weird stuff doesn’t happen often in actual music, but it’s written about at length in music treatises.

**Alteration**

Alteration occurs when there are two Semibreves following a Breve. The second Semibreve turns into an Imperfected Breve.

**Punctis Divisionis**

In Perfect Mensurations (Everything Except Tempus Imperfectus Prolation Minor), a dot after a note can indicate that the rules of imperfection are to done differently than expected.

For Example:

The Dot indicates that the Semibreve before the dot Imperfects the Breve before the dot. The two Semibreves form the alteration discussed above, thus the second Semibreve becomes an Imperfect Breve.
What’s Not Covered In This Handout

Coloration
Sometimes in music written in white notation some of the notes are colored black or red. This is a way of changing the meter mid-piece. To find out more, check the Recommended Reading.

Proportions
Sometimes there will be numbers or fractions written in the music. This is another way to alter the meter mid-piece. To find out more, check the Recommended Reading.

Musica Ficta
Often there will be notes in the music that need to be altered even though no accidentals are written in the music. A general rule of thumb is if there’s a tritone between the cantus firmus (usually bottom line with lots of long notes) and an upper line, alter the upper line note to fix it. OK alterations: B – Bf; F-Fs; E-Ef; C-Cs. There’s a bit more to it than this, but this will get you pretty far.

Where to Find Facsimiles

- Laborde Chansonnier
- Chansonnier Cordiforme
- Early English Books Online http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home
  - You may have access through your University
- Lots of English Madrigals
- Digital Archive of Medieval Music http://www.diamm.ac.uk/
  - GB-Lbl Add. 31922
    http://www.diamm.ac.uk/jsp/Descriptions?op=SOURCE&sourceKey=1238

Recommended Reading

- The Notation of Polyphonic Music 900 – 1600 by Wili Apel
  - The book that all of the other sources quote. You Should probably own it if you want to do transcription. Available on Amazon new for under $30 at the time of this writing.
- http://stdionysius.lochac.sca.org/collegeprojects/twmnlt.html
  - Was originally going to use this as the “textbook” for the class.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mensural_notation
- http://anaigeon.free.fr/e_mensur_intro.html
- The Notation of Western Music by Richard Rastall
  - Discusses these topics. If you have to pick one book, I recommend Apel’s book.

Tools Used for Handout

- LibreOffice Impress
- Lilypond
- OooLilypond Plugin
Galliarde 29 from Claude Gervaise’s Fourth Book of Dances

Upper Part from Ave Regina Caelorum ~ Dufay

◊◊ = alteration  ◇◇ = perfection

◊ = imperfect  ◇ = perfect
29 Galliarde
From Pierre Attaignant's Fourth Book of Dances
Claude Gervaise
Ave regina celorum


[S.] valde decora, Et pro nobis semper

[C.T.] valde decora, Et pro nobis semper

[T.] valde decora, Et pro nobis semper


[S.]

[C.T.]

[T.]