

Hexachords in Late Renaissance Music: Routledge Revivals

Hexachords, six-note musical scales, played a pivotal role in the development of Western music during the Renaissance period. This article delves into the intricate world of hexachords, exploring their origins, evolution, and profound impact on the musical landscape of the late Renaissance.

Origins and Evolution The concept of hexachords has ancient roots, traceable to Greek music theory. However, it was not until the Middle Ages that hexachords emerged as a fundamental element of Western music. These scales, consisting of six notes arranged in a specific pattern, provided a framework for understanding and composing melodies and harmonies.

The earliest hexachords, known as "natural hexachords," were based on the diatonic scale. They were denoted using Greek letters and distinguished by their range and starting note:



Hexachords in Late-Renaissance Music (Routledge Revivals) by Lionel Pike

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

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- **Hexachordum naturale durum** (B-C-D-E-F#-G#)
- **Hexachordum naturale molle** (G-A-Bb-C-D-E)

As music evolved, the hexachord system expanded to include "accidental hexachords," which incorporated accidentals (sharps and flats) into the scale structure. These hexachords allowed for greater melodic and harmonic flexibility.

Systematization and Solmization In the late Renaissance, musical theorists and composers systematized the hexachord system, leading to the widespread adoption of solmization: a method of naming notes using syllables. The syllables "do," "re," "mi," "fa," "sol," and "la" were assigned to the notes of each hexachord, enabling singers and musicians to easily identify and sing musical intervals.

Hexachords and Modes Hexachords were closely associated with musical modes, which governed the arrangement of musical scales. The Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, and Mixolydian modes, each had their own specific hexachordal structure. By transposing hexachords to different starting notes, composers could create melodies and harmonies in various modes, enriching the musical palette.

Hexachords in Composition Renaissance composers skillfully employed hexachords to construct complex melodies and harmonies. They used hexachords as building blocks, combining them to create larger melodic

phrases and cadences. The use of hexachords provided a coherent framework for understanding and organizing musical material.

Theoretical Treatises Theoretical treatises from the late Renaissance, such as those by Heinrich Glarean and Gioseffo Zarlino, provide valuable insights into the hexachord system. These treatises expounded on the mathematical foundations of hexachords, their relationship to modes and intervals, and their practical applications in composition.

Influence on Music Theory and Practice Hexachords had a profound impact on Western music theory and practice. They influenced the development of music notation, the understanding of consonance and dissonance, and the emergence of polyphonic textures. Their legacy can still be seen in modern music theory and composition.

Hexachords in Notable Works The influence of hexachords is evident in the music of renowned late Renaissance composers such as Josquin des Prez, Orlando di Lasso, and Palestrina. Their polyphonic compositions, including masses, motets, and madrigals, demonstrate the masterful use of hexachords to create intricate and expressive musical textures.

Hexachords were a fundamental element of Western music during the late Renaissance. They provided a framework for understanding and composing melodies and harmonies, influencing musical modes, composition techniques, and music theory. Their systematic use and association with solmization enabled singers and musicians to navigate

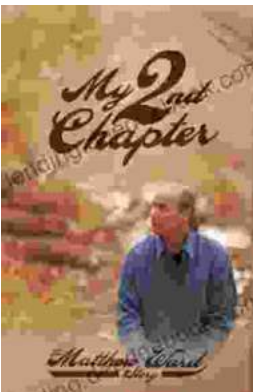
complex musical structures with ease. The legacy of hexachords continues to resonate in modern music theory and practice, showcasing the enduring impact of this musical system on the development of Western music.



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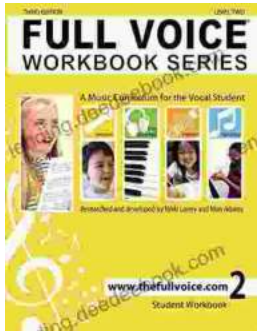
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