

chanting, composers began separating the notes, eventually having voices sing two, three, and four tones simultaneously or in and around each other, creating contrapuntal as well as polyphonic (multi-toned) music.

Composers and musicians increasingly realized that some tonal relationships blended more readily, more harmoniously than others—some were “perfect concords,” such as a root tone, a fourth, a fifth, and an octave; some were “imperfect concords” and only blended in specific instances, such as a third or sixth relationship; and some were out-and-out “discords,” such as a second, a seventh, and sometimes a fourth.

By the end of the middle Renaissance in the 1400’s, composers of both religious and secular music (including folk songs by troubadors) increasingly used chromatic notes to alter tonal relationships that did not work in the modal system; thus, the modes were altered for the sake of harmony.

To make tonal transitions smoother, the B of the Dorian and Lydian modes was often altered to a B-flat, making the Lydian a truly “major” scale and the Dorian a modern “minor” scale. Similarly, especially in secular music, the seventh tone of the Dorian and Mixolydian was sharpened to smooth the transition to the final resolving tone of the scale, the octave.

By the end of the sixteenth century all the modes had undergone chromatic alterations. Pure melody was not as interesting to composers as expanding polyphony and writing harmonic music. The five chromatic notes were accurately determined and developed during the Renaissance, and music was increasingly liberated from religious control. The Catholic Church attempted to revitalize the modes and the sanctity of music in the late Italian Renaissance by encouraging the work of Giovanni Palestrina and others. But it could not stop the rising tide of music by composers patronized by the nobility and wealthy merchants throughout Europe.