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## Faburden

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## Faburden

A distinctive English musical technique in which a simple form of three-voice polyphony is created by the addition of two extemporized voices to a preexistent plainsong. The term may also refer to the whole complex of voices, or simply to the faburden proper, the lowest voice, from which the technique takes its name. In this technique the plainsong voice, or mean (because musically it is in the middle), is doubled at the fourth above by the treble. The bass part, or faburden, proceeds mainly at the third below the chant, singing a fifth beneath at the beginning and end, and at the ends of words. Harmonically speaking, the result is a chain of parallel  $6/3$  sonorities, bounded and inflected by  $8/5$  sonorities. Continental "fauxbourdon" derives philologically and in terms of sonorous ideal (though not in the details of practice) from English faburden.

The technique of faburden seems to have been codified early in the first quarter of the 15th century, though its roots go back about two centuries in both oral tradition and in a repertoire of unpretentious three-voice written polyphony for the liturgy. It is particularly associated with the performance of lengthy processional and antiphonal choral chants, such as hymns, litanies, processional psalms, the Te Deum, and the Magnificat. Though a single faburdener could invent a new faburden for each performance, in practice (especially if several voices were to sing the line) a version would come to be fixed in a choir's repertoire. For reference purposes these traditional faburdens were copied into collections of monophonic bass parts, and they were also added into chant manuscripts as dots, strokes, or plainsong symbols directly on the same staves as the plainsong. Faburdens were also potentially squares; that is, some were incorporated as a *cantus prius factus* (preexistent melody used as a structural basis) into more elaborately composed polyphony of the later 15th and 16th centuries, said then to be "on the faburden."

Faburden was taught to boys and singing men as one of the fundamental skills that singers of the liturgy had to have. It is described in a number of 15th- and 16th-century treatises in English (rather than Latin) so as to be particularly accessible to this audience.

Peter M. Lefferts

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