Concert echoes Middle Ages

By Elizabeth L. Schuster
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Tonight, a group of OSU musicians will perform pieces spanning five centuries of European music.

The OSU Collegium Musicum will present a concert featuring Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque repertoire at 8 p.m. in Hughes Hall.

Martha Maas, professor of music history, teaches Music 680, the class presenting this performance. She said the program reflects variety in musical style, nationality and instrumentation.

The concert features groups of three to eight players, depending on the instruments involved, Maas said. Some pieces like dances, are simple to perform, while others require more skill. Maas said earlier music from the 14th century is among the most complex.

"The people of the late Middle Ages liked intricacy," she said.

She said some later pieces from the Renaissance and early Baroque periods became more simple in nature with fewer independent melodies and more accompaniment for each player.

Tonight's concert involves music from France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and other European countries.

Maas said an advantage of varied repertoire is everyone in Collegium Musicum can perform at his own level of skill.

Early music involves many instruments no longer common on stage. "It's been real exciting for me to play a novel instrument that not many people have the chance to play," said lutenist Daniel Elwell, a junior from Columbus.

Like many members of the group, Elwell is not majoring in music major, but said his interest in early music spurred him to learn more about it. He said in Music 680, students learn to read early music notation and study the instrument they play.

The lute, a string instrument which sounds like a guitar, was popular from the Middle Ages until the time of Bach in the 1700s, Elwell said.

Like many Collegium Musicum members, he has continued in the class beyond one quarter. Elwell said he learned to play lute by reading about it and listening to recordings.

Maas said many early instruments come in sets of different sizes depending on their musical range. Lutes, wooden flute-like instruments called recorders and viols fit this category, Maas said. Viols are the string instruments which preceded violins.

Hand-held drums and cymbals, j-shaped wind instruments called krummhorns and brass instruments like sackbutts and cornets will also appear in the concert. Describing the cornet, Maas said, "it sounds like a trumpet with a cold in its mouth."

Instruments like cornets and krummhorns require a great deal of air to play, Maas said.

Elwell said the lute, which can have as many as 22 strings, is a challenge to play in tune. "Some people say lutenists spend half their time tuning, and the other half playing out of tune," he joked.

Tonight's concert in room 109 is free and open to the public.