Through a comparative investigation of the Medieval Motet and the Mashup, my paper reveals some of the surprising similarities in these genres’ compositional processes, aesthetics, perspectives, sources of commission and trends in popularity, all of which can be located in their mutual evolution; an evolution driven primarily through technological development. The paper begins with a brief discussion of musical notation as the technology driving the development of the motet from a polyphonic decoration of a pre-existing chant to an independent composition of distinct melodic lines. This is followed by a discussion of the role of Franconian notation in permitting the development of the repeating rhythmic structures of the isorhythmic motet.

At this point the topic shifts to a description of the development of the mashup, beginning with turntablning and the development of sampling instruments and culminating with OOPS (Out of Phase Stereo) technology, laptopping and the internet as the technologies which facilitated the explosion of the mashup in the first decade of the 21st Century. These two narratives of development reveal that both technologies share a developmental arch based on the composer’s ever greater control of the individual pitch.

The greatest part of the investigation, however, is dedicated to a comparison of the genres’ aesthetics including their often polyglot composition, the intertextuality of their conception, and their common emphasis on the “horizontal” aspect of composition. In commission, both genres’ are shown to have been employed polemically in an expression of a state or ruler’s modernity and power. Finally, the decline of both genres are also shown to follow a similar path, first reaching for an expression of excess that undermines their popular artistic value even as they saturate the mainstream. Their presence in the mainstream then leads to an eventual blurring of their identifying traits. In all, this investigation offers a unique perspective on the musical adoption of technology in its emphasis of what has remained the same despite the great advances in contemporary technology.