
UNIT III

The Middle Ages

10

The Culture of the Middle Ages

"Nothing is more characteristic of human nature than to be soothed by sweet modes and stirred up by their opposites. Infants, youths, and old people as well are so naturally attuned to musical modes by a kind of spontaneous feeling that no age is without delight in sweet song."—BORNIUS (c. 480-524)

The relics of the ancient civilizations—Sumar, Babylonia, Egypt—bear witness to a flourishing musical art. In the antique world, religious myth and tradition ascribed divine powers to music. The walls of Thebes rose and those of Jericho fell to the sound of music. Dāvid played his lyre to cure the melancholy of Saul. In the temple at Jerusalem the Levites, who were the musicians, "being arrayed in fine linen, having cymbals and psalteries and harps, stood at the east of the altar, and with them an hundred and twenty priests with trumpets."

Only a few fragments have descended to us of the music of antiquity. The centuries have forever silenced the sounds that echoed through the Athenian amphitheater and the Roman circus. Those sounds and the attitudes they reflected, in Greece and throughout the Mediterranean world, formed the subsoil out of which flowered the music of later ages. They became part of the heritage of the West.

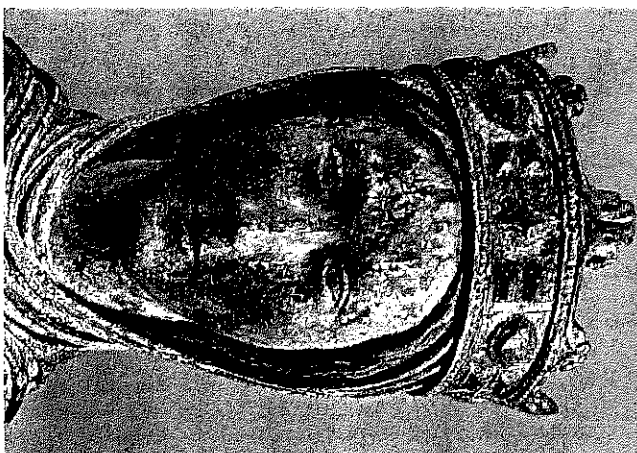
The Middle Ages extended over the thousand-year period between the fall of Rome, commonly set at A.D. 476 and the flowering of the culture of the modern world. The first half of this millennium, from around 500 to 1000 and often referred to as the Dark Ages, should not be viewed as a period of decline, but rather of ascent, during which Christianity triumphed

over paganism throughout Europe. In this society all power flowed from the king, with the benign approval of the Church and its bishops. The two centers of power, Church and state, were bound to clash, and the struggle between them shaped the next chapter of European history. The concept of a strong, centralized government as the ultimate dispenser of law and order found its embodiment in Charlemagne (742–814), the legendary emperor of the Franks in whose domains Roman, Frankish, and Teutonic elements intermingled. This progressive monarch, who regretted until his dying day that he did not know how to write—he regarded the ability as a talent he simply did not possess—encouraged education and left behind him an ideal of social justice that illumined the “darkness” of the early Medieval world.

The culture of this period was largely shaped by the rise of monasteries. It was the monks who preserved the learning of the ancient world and transmitted it, through their manuscripts, to European scholars. In their desire to enhance the church service, they extensively cultivated music. Because of their efforts, the art music of the Middle Ages was largely religious. Women too played a role in the preservation of knowledge and in music for the church, for one of the important societal roles of women in this era was as a nun. One woman stands out in particular, Hildegard of Bingen, abbess of an abbey in a small town in West Germany. She is remembered today for her writings on natural history, medicine, and for her poetry and music for special services of the church. During this period, too, the Church consolidated its political power to such a degree that the Pope could challenge the supremacy of kings and even dictate to them.



The Virgin, seen as the sweetly-loving Mother of God, in this detail of a statue from the Ile-de-France, c. 1200, by an unknown artist (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Francis Warden Fund)



The High Middle Ages, from around 1000 to 1400, witnessed the building of the great cathedrals and the founding of universities throughout Europe. Cities emerged as centers of art and culture, and with them came the townsman, the bourgeois, who was destined to play an ever expanding role in civic life. National literatures developed and played their part in shaping the languages of Europe: the *Chanson de Roland* in France, Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1307) in Italy, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (1386) in England. These literary landmarks have their counterparts in painting with Giotto's frescoes for the Arena chapel in Padua (1306), Duccio's panels for Siena (1308), and Orcagna's *Last Judgment* for Florence (c. 1355).

Although feudal society was male-dominated, idealizing as it did the figure of the fearless warrior, women's status was raised by the universal cult of Mary, the mother of Christ, and was further enhanced by the concepts of chivalry that sprang out of the age of knighthood. In the songs of the court minstrels—the troubadours and trouvères—woman was adored with a fervor that laid the foundation for our concept of romantic love. This poetic attitude found its perfect symbol in the image of the faithful knight who worshiped his lady from afar and was inspired by her to deeds of daring and self-sacrifice.

The Middle Ages, in brief, encompassed a period of enormous ferment and change. Out of its stirrings, faint at first but with increasing clarity and strength, emerged the profile of what we today know as Western civilization.

Mass and Motet in the Middle Ages

"When God saw that many men were lazy, and gave themselves only with difficulty to spiritual reading. He wished to make it easy for them, and added the melody to the Prophet's words, that all being rejoiced by the charm of the music, should sing hymns to Him with gladness."—ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM (345-407)

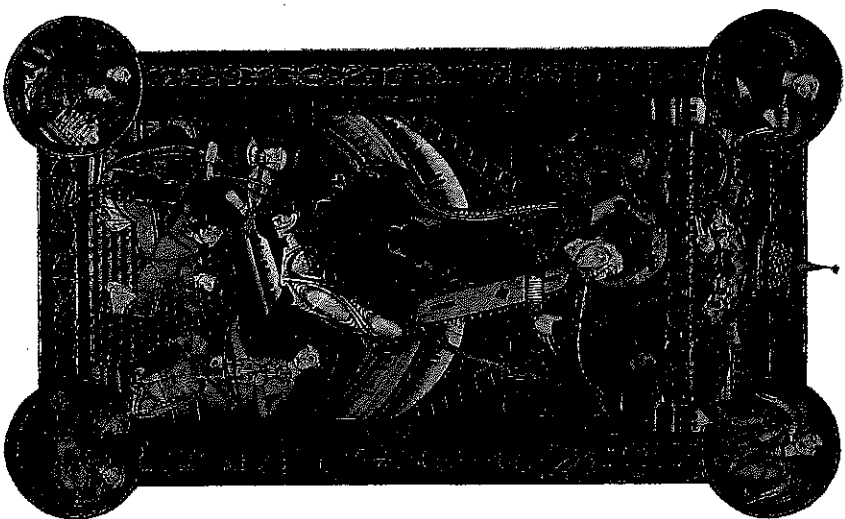
The early music of the Christian Church was shaped by Greek, Hebrew, and Syrian influences. It became necessary in time to assemble the ever growing body of music into an organized liturgy. The task extended over several generations but is traditionally associated with the name of Pope Gregory the Great, who reigned from 590 to 604.

Like the music of the Greeks and Hebrews from which it descended, *Gregorian chant* (also known as *planchant* or *plainsong*) consists of a single-line melody. In other words, it is monophonic in texture and does not know the third dimension of harmony and counterpoint. Its freely flowing vocal line is subtly attuned to the inflections of the Latin text. Gregorian melody is generally free from regular accent. Its unmeasured flow embodies what may be called prose rhythm in music, or free-verse rhythm, as distinguished from metrical-poetry rhythm such as we find in the regularly accented measures of duple or triple meter.

The Gregorian melodies, numbering more than three thousand, formed a body of anonymous melody whose roots reached deep into the spiritual life of the people. In melodic style, Gregorian chant avoids wide leaps and dynamic contrasts. Its gentle rise and fall constitute a kind of disembodied musical speech, "a prayer on pitch." Free from the shackles of regular phrase structure, the continuous, undulating vocal line is the counterpart in sound of the sinuous traceries of Romanesque art and architecture.

At first the Gregorian chants were handed down orally from one generation to the next. As the number of chants increased, singers needed to be reminded of the general outlines of the different melodies. Thus came into being *neumes*, little ascending and descending signs that were first written above the words to suggest the contour of the melody, and which developed into a musical notation with square notes on a four-line staff (see page 62).

As far as the setting of text is concerned, the melodies fall into three main classes: *syllabic*, that is, one note to each syllable of text; *neumatic*, generally with groups of two to four notes to a syllable; and *melismatic*, with a single text syllable extending over longer groups of notes. The melismatic style, descended from the rhapsodic improvisations of the Orient, became a prominent feature of Gregorian chant and exerted a strong influence on subsequent Western music.



Decorative manuscript page from the Hunterian Psalter (c. 1115) depicting King David tuning his harp, surrounded by his musicians playing bells, rebec, fiddle, triple duct pipe, banner psalter, and harp-gurdy. (Ms. Hunter 229. Courtesy the Librarian of Glasgow University Library)

From Gregorian chant to the Baroque era, Western music used a variety of scale patterns or *modes*—including not only the major and minor modes, but also several did not have as strong a sense of gravitation to a tonic note as marks our modern major-minor system.

The modes served as the basis for European art music for a thousand years. With the development of polyphony, or many-voiced music, a harmonic system evolved, based on modes. The adjective *modal* consequently refers to the type of melody and harmony that prevailed in the early and later Middle Ages. It is frequently used in opposition to *tonal*, which refers to the harmony based on the major-minor tonality that came later.

The Mass

The Mass is the most solemn ritual of the Roman Catholic Church. It constitutes a re-enactment of the sacrifice of Christ. The name is derived from the Latin *missa*, "dismissal" (of the congregation at the end of the service). The aggregation of prayers that make up the Mass fall into two categories:

Modes

ings

mes

bant

per and Ordinary

those that vary from day to day throughout the church year dependent upon the particular feast celebrated, the *Proper*; and those that remain the same in every Mass, the *Ordinary*. (A chart of the organization of the Mass with the individual movements of the Proper and Ordinary appears in Chapter 14, page 91.) The liturgy, which reached its present form about nine hundred years ago, is supported by Gregorian melodies for each item of the ceremony. In this way, Gregorian chant was central to the celebration of the Mass, which was and remains today the most important service in the Catholic Church.

A Gregorian Melody: Haec dies

A fine example of Gregorian chant is *Haec dies*, the Gradual from the solemn Mass for Easter Day. *Gradual* is the name of the fourth item of the Proper or variable part of the Mass. Derived from the Latin word for steps (because the melody may have been sung from the steps of the altar), the term was applied to the singing of portions of a Psalm in a musically elaborate, melismatic style. The Gradual is performed in a responsorial manner, that is, as a series of interchanges between soloist and chorus in which one answers the other. The solo passage is known as a *verse*, the choral answer is the *respond*. The Gradual therefore involves the contrast between two dissimilar bodies of sound, and is monophonic in texture.

Haec dies opens with a brief introductory passage for a soloist. The choral response occupies the first half of the melody. The second half is given over to the verse of the soloist, which is followed by a brief choral conclusion. (See Listening Guide 2 for the text, which is drawn from two Psalms.) The melody moves by step or small leap within a narrow range and consists of a series of tiny motives that grow like cells and expand in a natural process of variation. Striking is the way in which certain key words are extended over a series of notes. This melismatic treatment brings into prominence such important words as *Dominus* (Lord) or *exultemus* (we will rejoice), setting them apart from the others.

Grad.
2

mi-nus : ex-sulté-mus,
et lae-té-mur in é-a

Melismatic setting

*ing of the
Haec dies, in
ian notation.*

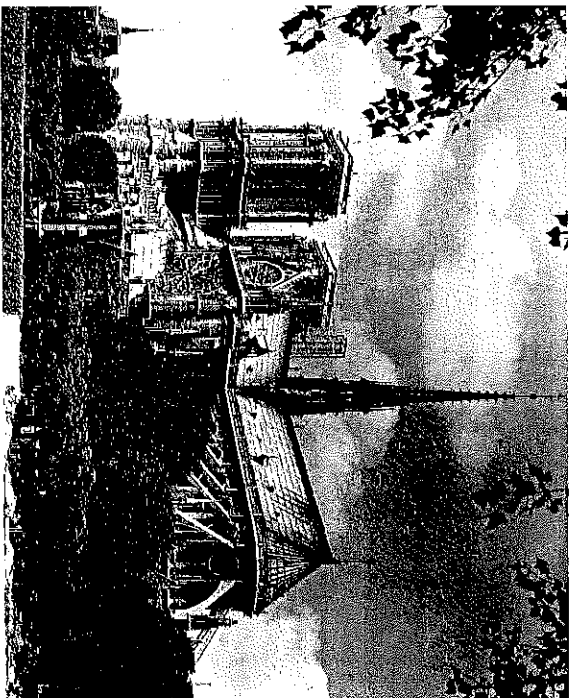
The Rise of Polyphony: The Notre Dame School

Towards the end of the Romanesque period (c. 850–1150) began the single most important development in the history of Western music: the emergence of polyphony. (You will remember that *polyphony* combines two or more simultaneous melodic lines.) This occurred at about the same time that European painting began developing the science of perspective. Thus hearing and seeing in depth came into European culture together.

Once several melodic lines proceeded simultaneously, the flexible prose rhythms of single-line music disappeared. Polyphony contributed to the increased use of regular meters that enabled the different voices to keep together. This music had to be written down in a way that would indicate precisely the rhythm and the pitch, which necessitated a more exact notational system not unlike the one in use today. (For an explanation of our modern notational system, see Appendix I, Musical Notation.)

With the development of exact notation, music took a long step from being an art of improvisation and oral tradition to one that was carefully planned and preserved. The period of anonymous creation drew to a close and the individual composer began to be recognized.

This development took shape during the Gothic era (c. 1150–1450), a period that witnessed the rise of the cathedrals with their choirs and organs. The learned musicians, for the most part monks and priests, mastered the art of constructing extended musical works through the various devices of counterpoint discussed earlier (Chapter 4, pages 19–21). Their prime interest at this point was in the structural combining of musical elements,



In both architecture and music, the Gothic period saw great advances in the techniques of construction. The Cathedral of Notre Dame, Paris (1103–1235)

Development of notation

Organum

which explains the derivation of the word "composer" from the Latin *componere* "to put together." The creative musician of the late Gothic period thought of himself primarily as a master builder.

The earliest kind of polyphonic music was called *organum*. This developed when the custom arose of adding to the Gregorian melody a second voice that ran parallel to the plainchant at the interval of a fifth or fourth above or below.

The way was now open for the development of a polyphonic art in which the individual voices moved with ever greater independence, not only in parallel but also in contrary motion. In the forefront of this development were the composers whose center was the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Their leader, Léonin, is the first composer of polyphonic music whose name is known to us. He lived in the latter part of the twelfth century and appears to have won considerable fame.

It was self-evident to the Medieval mind that the new must be founded on the old. Therefore the composer of organum based his piece on a pre-existing Gregorian chant. While the tenor sang the melody in enormously long notes, the upper voice moved freely and rapidly above it. This is known as *organal style*. In such a setting, the chant was no longer recognizable as a melody. Its presence was symbolic, anchoring the new in the old, inspiring and guiding the added voice.

A contrasting style in Notre Dame organum set the original chant in a faster moving, rhythmic version that paralleled the movement of the freshly composed upper voice. This is known as *discant style*, as distinguished from organal style. Both could occur in contrasting sections of the same piece.

An Example of Organum: Haec dies

The organum *Haec dies*, is based on the same Gregorian melody that we just studied. Here, however, it appears in extremely long notes in the lower voice while the upper presents the newly composed organal part. The long notes of the Gregorian melody were often supported by the organ, as in the performance that you will hear. The upper part is written for a high male voice, a countertenor or male alto. (See Listening Guide 2 for the text.)

This too is a Gradual for Easter. The solo sections are answered by choral ones. The organal style sections alternate with those in discant styles, which are more rhythmic, with fixed patterns of long and short notes repeated or varied. Already European music was on its way to the metrical patterns that were to make Western rhythms so accessible to the ear.

A fragment of Gregorian chant might also be used for the basis of a short composition that was sung to one or two words of a single syllable. Such a piece was known as a *clausula*. The organum *Haec dies* includes such a passage, which gives the effect of being freely improvised.

As *Haec dies* clearly shows, the Gregorian melodies are remarkable for their gentle flow, their organic unity, and the way they shape themselves to the natural inflections of the Latin text. Our richest legacy from the period

of pure monophonic music, they nourished more than a thousand years of European music.

The Early Medieval Motet

While Léonin limited himself to polyphony in two parts, his successor Pérotin extended the technique by writing for three and four voices. He is remembered today as the foremost member of a school that laid the foundation for a magnificent flowering of polyphonic art. Toward the end of Pérotin's life, clerics began composing new texts for the previously textless upper voices of organum. The addition of these texts resulted in the *motet*, the most important form of early polyphonic music. This term is applied loosely to a vocal composition, sacred or secular, which may or may not have had instrumental accompaniment.

The early motet illustrates how Medieval composers based their own works on what had been handed down from the past. They selected a fragment of Gregorian chant and, keeping the notes intact, gave them precise rhythmic values, usually of very long notes that contrasted with the more active movement of the other parts. This served as the structural skeleton of the piece, and became known as the *cantus firmus* (fixed melody), to which the composer added one, two, or three countermelodies of his own. (A *countermelody* is a melody heard against another.) The cantus firmus therefore served as a point of departure, and could be repeated as many times as necessary to fill out the length of the piece. The part containing the cantus firmus was called the *tenor*, from the Latin *tenere* ("to hold"), so called because the tenor "held" the long notes. (It should be noted that terms such as tenor, countertenor, alto, and bass did not signify specific ranges until a later time.) The second, third, and fourth parts were known respectively as *duplum*, *triplum*, and *quadruplum*. However, nomenclature in the Middle Ages was far from standardized. Different names were used at different times and places.

The term "motet" derives from the French *mot* (word), referring to the words that were added to the vocal lines. The duplum and triplum might present two different Latin texts at the same time; or one might have Latin words while another French. In this way a sacred text might be combined with a quite secular—even racy—one. The basic Gregorian theme, hidden among the voices, fused these disparate elements into a unity—if not in the listener's ear, at least in the composer's mind.

An Anonymous Motet: O mitissima—Virgo—Haec dies

Like the two examples that preceded it, our next is based on the Gregorian chant *Haec dies*, which is now heard in a motet for three voices, each with a different text. (The title of such a piece gives the opening words of all three parts.) The Gregorian melody in the bottom part is set to only two words, *Haec dies*, which are stretched out to such lengths that the syllables lose all verbal meaning and function simply as sound. This part, instead of

Pérotin

Early motet

Cantus firmus

being sung, could be played on a vielle (the Medieval ancestor of the violin). The interchange of vocal and instrumental music has persisted into our own time, where a popular song may be taken over by an instrumental work, or a symphonic theme can become a popular song.

This anonymous thirteenth-century motet is found in two versions in different manuscripts. In one, all three voices are in Latin, the upper two presenting two different poems in praise of the Virgin Mary. This is the version you will hear, which appears in Listening Guide 2. In another, the top voice sings a love song in French.

The opening and closing sounds as well as the cadences—resting places that punctuate the music—are based on open fifths and octaves, which have a hollow sound to our ears. Yet these intervals must have delighted Medieval ears, as they did composers of the modern era such as Debussy, who, as we shall see, loved the Medieval sound and tried to recapture it.

The motet is in triple meter, which to Medieval listeners symbolized the perfection of the Trinity. Its rhythm is based on an alternation of long and short notes sung at a rather lively tempo. Music has clearly come a long way from the slow, circuitous movement of Léonin's time. The two upper voices move in similar rhythm; they lie in the same range and cross each other in a lively interchange. The bottom voice, on the other hand, unfolds a repeated rhythmic pattern based on the notes of the chant, in the order long-long-short-long. A repetition of a musical pattern—melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic—is commonly known as an *ostinato*. Since all three voices move to light, fluent rhythms, the overall effect is of a vivacity that belies the supplicating Latin text.

Listening Guide 2



ant, Organum, and the Motet

Gregorian chant: *Haec dies*

vt. Psalms 118:24 and 106:1

ant type: Gradual, from Proper

vation: Easter Sunday

formance: Responsorial (solo and chorus)

the: Elaborate and melismatic (melisma on "Domino")

Text

to intonation
oral response

Haec dies,
quam fecit Dominus
exultemus et
laetemur in ea.

to verse

Confitemini Domino,
quoniam bonus
quoniam in saeculum
misericordia
ejus.

Translation
This is the day
which the Lord hath made;
we will rejoice and be
glad of it.
O give thanks to the
Lord, for he is good:
for his mercy
endureth
forever.



2] B. Organum: *Haec dies* (excerpt)

Date: c. 1175

Composer: Notre Dame School of Paris, in style of Léonin

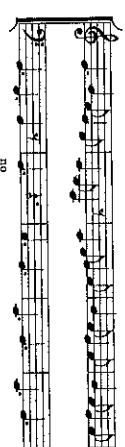
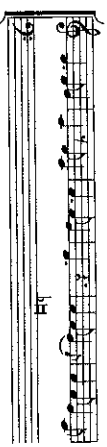
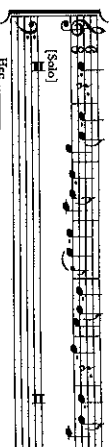
Voices/Tenor: 2-voice, both with *Haec dies*

Characteristics: Alternates organal and discant style

Upper voice—freely composed, rhythmic, fast moving

Lower voice—contains *Haec dies* chant

Organal style—chant in long notes in lower voice



3] Discant style—chant in shorter, rhythmic notes in lower voice

Performance

Soloists

Chorus

Soloists
Soloists

Text

Haec dies

quam fecit Dominus
exultemus et laetemur
in ea.

Confitemini
Domino quoniam bonus
quoniam . . .

Description

Organal style
long melisma, two words
only
Monophonic chant

Organal style
Clausulae: discant style
2-part, polyphonic

4] C. Motet: *O mitissima—Virgo—Haec dies*

Date: 13th century

Composer: Anonymous

Voices/Text: 3 voices, each with different text

Characteristics: Polyphonic, all voices rhythmic

Bottom voice (Tenor) with chant notes, very melismatic on two words only (*Haec dies*)

pe VOICE:
 mississima Virgo Maria,
 scie tuum filium,
 nobis auxiliam
 et et remedium
 contra demonum
 libiles astucias
 : horum nequicias.

O sweetest Virgin Mary,
 beg thy son
 to give us help
 and resources
 against the Demon's
 deceptions and
 their iniquities.

DDLE VOICE:
 ligo virginum,
 men humanum,
 eformasti hominum,
 ue porcasti Dominum,
 r te Maria,
 cur venia,
 ngelo nunciantes,
 ligo es post et ante.

Virgin of virgins,
 light of lights,
 reformer of men,
 who bore the Lord,
 through thee, Mary
 let grace be given
 as the Angel announced:
 Thou art a Virgin before and after.

OTWOM VOICE: (played instrumentally)
 zec dies

This is the day

oet opening: ostinato pattern bracketed (long-long-short-long)

Secular Music in the Middle Ages

12

"There are many new things in music that will appear altogether plausible to our descendants"—JEAN DE MOURS (1319)

Alongside the learned or art music of the cathedrals and choir schools there sprang up a popular literature of songs and dances that reflected every aspect of Medieval life. The earliest secular songs that have been preserved were set to Latin texts, which suggest their origin in university towns rather than in the villages. Typical are the student or Goliard songs of the period, many with lewd texts, which express the seize-the-moment philosophy that has always inspired youthful poets. Both poetry and music celebrate the joys of the bottle, the impermanence of love, the beauty of springtime, and the cruelty of fate. Seven hundred years later the German composer Carl Orff resurrected their spirit in his *Carmina burana*.

Goliard songs

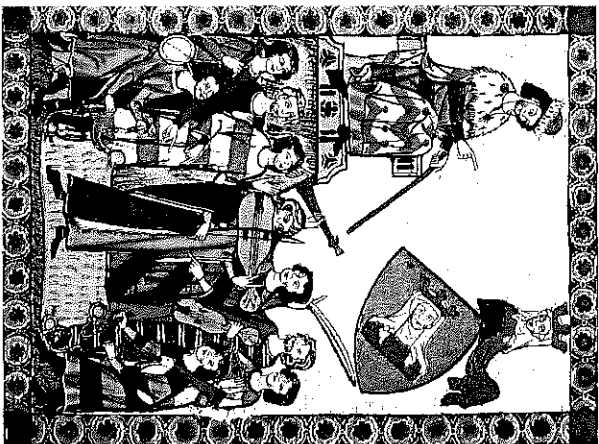
Jongleurs, Troubadours, and Trouvères

The *jongleurs* emerged as a class of musicians who wandered among the courts and towns. These were versatile entertainers who played instruments, sang and danced, juggled and showed tricks along with animal acts, and performed plays. In an age that had no newspapers, they regaled their audience with gossip and news. These actor-singers were viewed as little better than vagabonds and thus lived on the fringe of society.

On an altogether different social level were the poet-musicians who flourished at the various courts of Europe. The *troubadours* were Medieval poet-musicians who lived in Provence, the region roughly equivalent to southern France, while the *trouvères* were active in the provinces to the north. Both terms mean the same thing—finders or inventors, implying that these musicians presented original material, as distinguished from the Church musicians who based their art on melodies that had been handed down from the past. Troubadours and trouvères flourished in aristocratic circles, numbering kings and princes among their ranks; but an artist of more humble birth might be accepted among them if his talent warranted it. They either sang their music themselves or entrusted its performance to a minstrel. In Germany they were known as *minnesingers* or singers of courtly love.

Secular music became an integral part of Medieval court life, supplying the necessary accompaniment for dancing, dinner, and after-dinner entertainment. It was indispensable in the ceremonies that welcomed visiting dignitaries, at tournaments and civic processions; military music supported campaigns, strengthened the spirit of warriors departing on the Crusades, and greeted them upon their return. Among the royal minstrels were Alfonso

Roles of secular music



Heinrich von Meissen, called "Frauenlob" or champion of ladies, is exalted by musicians playing drum, flute, shawm, fiddle, psaltery, and bagpipe. Frauenlob was a minnesinger (singer of courtly love), the German counterpart of the troubadour (Heidelberg University Library)

the Wise of Spain and Richard the Lion-Hearted of England, whose mother, the legendary Eleanor of Aquitaine, presided over a famous court of poet-musicians. Whether in France or Germany, England or Spain, the aristocratic singers were creating a literature that would exert a profound influence upon European culture.

The poems of the troubadour and trouvère repertory ranged from simple ballads to love songs, political and moral ditties, war songs, laments, and dance songs. They exalted the virtues prized by the age of chivalry—valor, honor, nobility of character, devotion to an ideal, and the quest for perfect love. Like so many of our popular songs today, many of them dealt with the subject of unrequited passion. The object of the poet's desire was generally unattainable, either because of her exalted rank or because she was already wed to another. This poetry, in short, dealt with love in its most idealized form. Significantly, the songs in praise of the Virgin Mary were cast in the same style and language, sometimes even to the same melodies, as served to express love of a more worldly kind.

Moniot d'Arras: Ce fut en mai

Moniot d'Arras (fl. 1213–39), one of the last trouvères, was a monk in the abbey of St. Vast. His work in his native Arras marked the end of the trouvère tradition. Characteristic is his love song *Ce fut en mai* (it happened in May). The poem tells of an unhappy lover who finds solace in religious feeling. (See Listening Guide 3.) The music is folklike and charming, and makes

no attempt to express the unhappiness described in the text. The song is monophonic in texture, consisting of a single line of melody heard against an accompaniment that was improvised. In our recording the accompaniment is played on a psaltery, a dulcimer, and a vielle. The *psaltery* was a Medieval folk instrument like our zither, consisting of a soundbox over which were stretched four or five melody strings and a larger number of accompanimental strings; these were plucked. The *dulcimer* resembled the psaltery, but its strings, instead of being plucked, were struck with little hammers. And the *vielle*, as you may remember, was an ancestor of the violin.

The poem consists of five stanzas, with an elaborate rhyme scheme; the melody unfolds in two short sections, each of which is repeated. The overall musical form is *strophic*, meaning the same melody is repeated with every stanza of the poem. A brief instrumental interlude is repeated between the stanzas. The use of a poem based on stanzas dictates the repetition of a musical section. When only one or two lines were repeated at the end of each stanza, the repetition took shape as a musical refrain. Thus, music responded to the fixed forms of poetry in the most natural manner, creating an intimate relationship between the words and music.

Listening Guide 3



1A/4



1A/5

Trouvère song: *Ce fut en mai*, by Moniot d'Arras

Date: mid-13th century

Genre: Chanson, strophic setting of 5 stanzas, each of 12 lines

Musical form: A-A-B-B (two short sections, each repeated)

Rhyme scheme: aababcbcb (for each stanza)

Melody of song, with two sections shown

Text	Rhyme Scheme	Music Form	Transition
<i>Ce fut en mai</i>	2	A	In early May
<i>Au douz tens gai</i>	2		When skies are gay
<i>Que la saisons est bele</i>	b		And green the plants and mountains

Guillaume Machaut and the French Ars Nova

The breakup of the feudal social structure brought with it new concepts of life, art, and beauty. This ferment was reflected in the musical style that made its appearance at the beginning of the fourteenth century in France and somewhat later in Italy, known as *Ars Nova* (new art). The music of the French *Ars Nova* shows greater refinement than the *Ars Antiqua* (old art), which it displaced. Writers such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Chaucer were turning from the divine comedy to the human; painters would soon begin to discover the beauties of nature and the attractiveness of the human form. So, too, composers turned increasingly from religious to secular themes. The *Ars Nova* encompassed developments in rhythm, meter, harmony, and counterpoint that transformed the art.

Its outstanding figure was the French composer-poet Guillaume de Machaut (c. 1300-77). He took holy orders at an early age, became secretary to John of Luxembourg, King of Bohemia, and was active at the court of Charles, Duke of Normandy, who subsequently became King of France. He spent his old age as a canon of Rheims, admired as the greatest musician of the time.

Machaut's double career as cleric and courtier impelled him to both religious and secular music. His poetry reveals him as a proponent of the ideals of Medieval chivalry—a romantic who, like Sir Thomas Malory in his lament for King Arthur, exalted the moral and social code of an age that was already finished.

Machaut: Hareul hareul le feu—Helas!—Obediens

The secular motet came to full flower in the art of Machaut. He expanded the form of the preceding century to incorporate the new developments made possible by the *Ars Nova*, especially the greater variety and flexibility of rhythm. Characteristic is the motet *Hareul hareul le feu/Helas! ou sera pris confors/Obediens usque ad mortem*. Since the three simultaneous parts have different texts, the listener is obviously expected to follow the general idea rather than the individual words. The top voice, the triplum, sings a poem on a favorite theme of fourteenth-century verse—the suffering of the lover who is consumed by his desire. At the same time, the middle voice, the duplum, sings a fifteen-line poem in a similar vein. (See Listening Guide 4 for the texts.)

The tenor is taken from a plainsong Gradual that refers to Christ, but Machaut chooses only the section that goes with the words *obediens usque ad mortem* (obedient even unto death), a sentiment appropriate to the chivalric love described in other poems. The notes of this *cantus firmus* are arranged in a rhythmic pattern that is repeated again and again.

This procedure identifies *Hareul hareul le feu* as an *isorhythmic motet* (*iso* means "the same"), based on a repeating rhythm or an *ostinato*. The *cantus firmus* was probably played on an instrument, such as the slide trumpet (an early type of trumpet, with a single slide rather than a double, like today's trombone).

Maint me leval, J'ot m'alai Lez une fontecle. En un verger Clos daigleterre Oï une vield; La vi dancier Un chevalier Et une damoisele.	a a b c c b c c b	A A B B B B B B	At break of day I rose to play Beside a little fountain In garden close Where shone the rose I heard a fiddle played, then: A handsome knight That charmed my sight Was dancing with a maiden.
I Cors oreat gent Et aretant, Et molt très bien dangoient; En acollant Et en baisant Molt bien se deduisoient. Au chief du tor, En un destor, Doi et doi s'en aloient; Le jeu d'amor Dessus la flor A lor plaisir faisoient.	a a b a a b c c b c c b	A A A A B B B B B B B	Both fair of face, They turned with grace To tread their Maytime measure; The flowering place, Their close embrace, Their kisses brought them pleasure. Yet shortly they Had slipped away And strolled among the bowers; To ease their heart Each played the part In lover's games on the flowers.
I J'ai avant, Molt redoutant Que nus d'aus ne me voie Maz et pensant Et desirant D'avoir ainsi grant joie. Lors vi lever Un de lor per De si jong com j'estoie Por apeler Et demander Qui sui ni que queiroie.	a a b a a b c c b c c b	A A A A B B B B B B B	I crept ahead All chill with dread Lest someone there should see me, Bemused and sad Because I had No joy like theirs to please me. Then one of those I'd seen there, rose And from afar off speaking He questioned me Who I might be And what I came there seeking.
V J'ai vers aus, Dis lor mes mans, Que une dame amoise, A cui iolans Sans estre faus Tot mon vrant seroie, Por cui plus trait Paine et esmai Que dire ne porroie. Et bien le sai, Que je morrai, Sele ne mi ravoie.	a a b a a b c c b c c b	A A A A B B B B B B B	I stepped their way To sadly say How long I'd loved a lady Whom, all my days My heart obeys Full faithfully and steadily, Though still I bore A grief so sore In losing one so lovedly That surely I Would come to die Unless she deigned to love me.
V Tot belement Et doucement Chascuns d'aus me ravoie. Et dient tant Et Dieus belement Merroit de ceci jote Por qui je sent Paine et torment: Et je lor en redioie Merci molt grant Et en plorant A Dé les comandioie.	a a b a a b c c b c c b	A A A A B B B B B B B	With wisdom rare, With tactful air, They counselled and relieved me; They said their prayer Was God might spare Some joy in love that grieved me Where all my gain Was loss and pain So I, in turn, extended My thanks sincere With many a tear And then to God commended.

The texts

Isorhythmic motet

The upper two voices move at a much faster rate, in a compound meter we could call 6/8 time. Though they occupy the same range, the triplum generally stays at the top of that range, the duplum near the bottom. Such a highly stylized art may lack the directly emotional expressiveness of some later music, but its delight in structural sophistication tells us something important about the society for which it was created.

Listening Guide 4



MACHAUT: *Harren! harren! le feu—Heias!—Obediens*

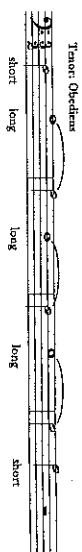
Date: mid-14th-century

Genre: Isorhythmic motet, 3-voiced

Text: 3 different texts (2 French, 1 Latin)

Form: Based on rhythmic ostinato pattern: short-long-long-short. Repetitions of ostinato: 6 in very long notes, 6 in diminution (half as long)

Ostinato pattern:



TRIPLUM VOICE

Form Text Rhyme Scheme Translation

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Harren! harren! le feu, le feu, le feu
Dardant desir, qu'enc si ardent ne fu, | a | Help! Help! Fire! Fire! Fire!
My heart is on fire with burning desire |
| 2 | Qu'en mon cuer a espriz et soustenu
Amours, et s'a la joie prenu | a | Such as was never seen before.
Love, having started it, fans the flames, |
| 3 | D'espoir qui doit attempier telle
ardure.
Lasi se le feu qui ensement l'art dure,
Mes cuers sera tous bruis et escins, | b | Withholding all hope of joy which
might put out such a blaze.
Alas, if this fire keeps on burning,
My heart already blackened and
shrivelled. |

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | Qui de ce feu est ja nercis et teins,
Pour ce qu'il est fins, loiaus et
certains: | c | Will be burnt to ashes.
For it is true, loyal, and sincere. |
| 2 | Si que j'espoir que deviez yert, eins
Que bone Amour de merci l'asseure
Par la vertu d'esperance seure. | c | I expect I shall be mad with grief
Before gentle Love consoles it
With sound hope. |
| 3 | Car pour li seul, qui endure mal
meine,
Pité defant, ou toute hiant meins,
Dures y regne et Dangiers y remeint, | d | It alone, suffering much Hardship,
Is devoid of pity, abode of all beauty.
Instead, Harshness rules over it and
Haughtiness flourishes. |
| 4 | Desdeins y vit et Loyautez s'i feint | d | Disdain dwells there, while Loyalty is
a rare visitor |
| 5 | Et Amours n'a de li ne de moy cure.
Joie le hec, ma dame li est dure, | b | And Love pays no heed to it or to
me.
Joy hates it, and my lady is cruel to
it. |

Diminution of ostinato

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Et, pour croistre mes dolereus
meschiés,
Met dedens moy Amours, qui est mes
chiés, | e | To complete my sad misfortune,
Love, my sovereign lord, |
| 2 | Un desespoir qui si mal entechiés
Est queicous biens a de moy
estrachiés, | e | Fills me with such bitter despair
That I am left penniless, |
| 3 | Et en tous cas mon corps si desnature
Qu'il me convient mourir malgré
Nature. | b | And so wasted in body
That I shall surely die before my
time. |

DUPLUM VOICE

Long note ostinato

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | Heias! ou sera pris confors
Pour moy qui ne yai nés que mors?
Quant riens garentir ne me puet | a | Alas, where can I find consolation
Who am as good as dead?
When my one salvation |
| 2 | Fors ma dame chiere qui vet
Qu'en desespoir mature, sans plus,
Pour ce que je l'aim plus que nulz, | b | Is my dear lady,
Who gladly lets me die in despair,
Simply because I love her as no other
could. |
| 3 | Et Souvent pour ensaprir
L'ardour de mon triste desir
Me moustre adés sa grant bonité | d | And Memory, in order to keep
My unhappy desire alive,
Reminds me all the while of her great
goodness. |

Diminution of ostinato

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| 1 | Et sa fine vralie hianté
Qui doublement me fait ardoir. | e | And her delicate beauty,
Thereby making me want her all the
more. |
| 2 | Ensi sans cuer et sans espoir.
Ne puis pas vivre longuement,
N'en feu cuers humeins nullement
Ne puet longue dure avoir. | f | Deprived thus of heart and hope
I cannot live for long.
No man's heart can long survive
When once aflame. |

The English Carol

Burden

The English carol took shape as a Medieval strophic song, with a *refrain* or a repeated section of music and text that was called a *burden*. It originated as a dance-song in a lively rhythm, with an English or Latin text on a religious subject, especially one associated with Christmas. We still today sing Christmas carols. The subject might also be a particular event or occasion. The carol was in polyphonic texture, for two or three voices. From earliest times English part-songs had favored vocal lines that moved in parallel thirds and sixths, at a time when vocal polyphony on the Continent featured open fifths and octaves. As a result, the English carol had a remarkably "modern" sound in comparison with its French or Italian counterparts.

An Anonymous Carol: Deo gratias, Anglia

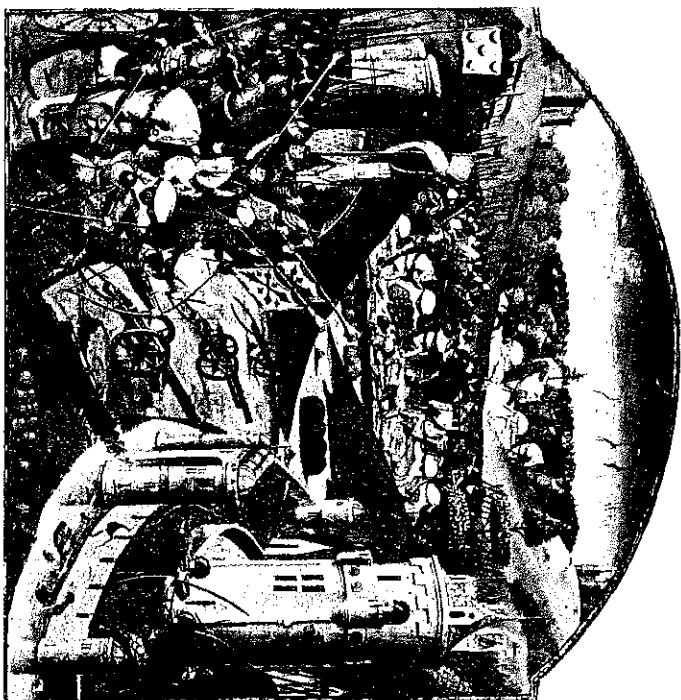
The anonymous carol *Deo gratias Anglia*, popularly known as the Agincourt carol, celebrated the victory of the English King Henry V over the French at Agincourt in 1415. It was a victory of the English archers, who with unerring aim shot their arrows at the eyes of their heavily armored foes. The battle took place as the age of knighthood was drawing to a close. Shakespeare immortalized the battle in the ringing lines that conclude the King's exhortation to his nobles just before they fought (*The Life of Henry the Fifth*, Act IV, scene 3):

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in England now abed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here;
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

This victory song, in a lilting triple meter, had six verses or stanzas of text, of which our recording presents three. These are sung in old English, with the refrain or burden in Latin: *Deo gratias, Anglia, reddite pro victoria* ("England, give thanks to God for the victory.") The verses are set for two voices, the burden for three. In our recording, voices are doubled by wind instruments, especially the cornetto, an early instrument consisting of a wooden tube with fingerholes and a cup-shaped mouthpiece (see page 79). Percussion instruments were added as well to give the requisite martial sound.

Early Instruments and Instrumental Music

The fourteenth century witnessed a steady growth in the scope and importance of instrumental music. Though the central role in art music was still reserved for vocal works, instruments gradually found more and more uses. As we have seen, they could play a supporting role in vocal music,



Three mounted trumpeters sound the attack of a fortress, from *Le livre de la destruction de Troyes, 1467* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale)

doubling or accompanying the singers. Instrumental arrangements of vocal works grew increasingly popular. In dance music, where rhythm was the prime consideration, instruments found early and abiding employment.

The "learned" vocal music of church and court was routinely written down, in part because its complexity made it difficult to remember, in part so that it could be carried from one place to another and even preserved for future generations. Much instrumental music, on the other hand, was improvised, like jazz, and never written down at all. (If it were not for recordings, we would know very little about jazz of the past—and, indeed, we only know indirectly what jazz was like before it was recorded.) We can therefore only speculate about the extent and variety of the instrumental repertory during the late Middle Ages. But our speculation can be guided by an ever growing body of knowledge. Some of the instruments themselves survive, in museums and private collections. Paintings and sculpture contain many representations of instruments—not always reliable in detail, but informative about their use and playing technique. Historical documents, such as court payrolls, tell us about the size and makeup of musical establishments. From these—and from such instrumental music as does survive—scholars have in recent years reconstructed a remarkable body of information about Medieval and Renaissance instruments.

These old instruments were more limited in range and volume than their modern counterparts; yet today we have abandoned the notion that they

Improvisational nature

were nothing more than primitive versions of their descendants. It has become increasingly clear that these instruments were perfectly suited to the purposes of the societies that devised them. There were no large concert halls to be filled; there was no need for the smoothly blended colors of the symphony orchestra. More delicate timbres were cultivated, and also softer, more raucous ones; in fact, instruments were divided into "indoor" and "outdoor" categories.

In those days, too, each individual instrument was a unique handcrafted item. The kind of standardization we take for granted today, the result of mass production, simply did not exist. No doubt this was one reason why composers do not seem to have been much concerned about which particular instruments were used in the performance of their music. In fact, the surviving sources of Medieval music contain no instrumental indications; it is only with the late Renaissance that such things begin to be specified.

But there is also another reason—the essentially contrapuntal nature of most Medieval and Renaissance music. Counterpoint, we saw, was an art of line rather than color; of unfolding horizontal voices rather than vertical chordal masses. What was important to composers of the time was not the specific color, but that each line stand out. Otherwise, instruments were regarded as pretty much interchangeable.

The revival of early music has burgeoned in recent decades, as scholars and performers have endeavored to reconstruct the appropriate performing conditions. A growing number of ensembles specialize in this repertory, and their members have mastered the playing techniques of old instruments. Their concerts and recordings have made the public aware of the sound of old instruments to a degree that was undreamed of fifty years ago. What was once considered esoteric or "scholarly" has now become the regular fare of many music lovers.

In our recorded performances of Medieval vocal music, we have already encountered a number of instruments from the period. Although a complete survey is naturally beyond the compass of a book such as this, let us briefly mention some of the principal types.

Early instruments fall into the same categories as modern ones—that is, strings, winds, brass, percussion, and keyboard. String instruments further divide into plucked and bowed instruments. The elaborate concert *lute* of today has ancestors going back to antiquity, in many shapes and sizes. Instruments with frets, like the guitar, are also very ancient; the *lute*, with a more rounded body than the guitar, is of Middle Eastern origin and apparently reached Europe around the thirteenth century. It has been brilliantly revived in the twentieth century by artists such as Julian Bream.

Playing on strings with a bow seems also to have come from the East. There were two principal types of bowed instruments in the Middle Ages: the pear-shaped *rebec* and the *vielle* or fiddle, whose figure-eight body proclaims it the ancestor of the violin. The *rebec* was particularly associated with popular song and dance, while the *vielle* was primarily cultivated by the privileged classes.

Among the woodwinds, today's flute inherits a long tradition, although in earlier times it was made of wood rather than metal, and lacked the



The *Virgin surrounded by angel musicians performing the motet Ave Regina caelorum* by Walter Frye, the English composer. Accompanying instruments include (counterclockwise from top left): shawm, harp, portative organ, lute, vielle, recorders, and hammer dulcimer. Mary, Queen of Heaven, by the Master of the St. Lucy Legend, c. 1485. (National Gallery of Art, Washington. Samuel H. Kress Collection.)

modern system of keys. There was also another type of flute, with a whistle mouthpiece, played vertically, known as the *recorder*; its tone is more delicate and breathy than that of the transverse or horizontally played flute. Made in many sizes, the recorder remained in use until the eighteenth century, and has been widely revived in our own day. The other principal family of winds, you will recall, uses reeds to produce the sound. The *shawm*, the ancestor of the oboe, came in a variety of sizes, and still survives in many folk traditions of Europe, Africa, and Asia, retaining its loud nasal tone. Less raucous were instruments in which the reed was covered by a reed-cap, such as the *crumhorn*.

Medieval "brass" instruments were not always made from brass; other metals, ivory, horn, and wood were also used. The *cornetto* developed from the traditional cow horn, but was made of wood; its fingerholes made possible the playing of scales (valves for brass instruments were not invented until the nineteenth century). Another early device for filling in all the scale tones was the slide, as in the trombone; in the Middle Ages, besides the *sackbut*,

"Brass" instruments

String instruments

Wind instruments

Keyboard instruments

the ancestor of the trombone, there was also a type of *slide trumpet*, mentioned earlier. Medieval *trumpets* were not always coiled in the modern fashion, and could be as much as six feet long—impressive to see as well as to hear at court ceremonies.

Several types and sizes of organ were already in use in the Middle Ages. There were large ones, requiring a team of men to pump their giant bellows and often several more to manipulate the cumbersome slider mechanisms that opened and closed the pipes. At the other end of the scale were *portative* and *positive* organs, miniatures with keyboards and a few ranks of pipes. One type of small organ, the *regal* took its name from one of the reedy stops of the larger organs.

A fifteenth-century ancestor of the piano was the *clavicordia*, in which a keyboard was used to set strings in vibration; its very gentle tone was suitable only for private practice and intimate settings. Soon the harpsichord—and later the piano—would achieve greater carrying power, without superseding the charm of the smaller instrument.

Ample evidence indicates that many kinds of percussion instruments were common in the Middle Ages and Renaissance; what we do not know is precisely how they were used musically. Here, modern performers are very much on their own. The small drums known as *nakers*, which usually came in pairs, are mentioned in Marco Polo's account of his travels in Asia. The *labar* was a larger, cylindrical drum, while the *tambourine* is still used today in Spanish and Italian music.

Now we shall turn to an example of instrumental dance music from this period. Characteristic of the fragmentary state in which this type of music has been handed down to us is the fact that the composer is unknown to us.

An Anonymous Dance: Saltarello

Professional instrumentalists of the Middle Ages must have been both skilled and sophisticated, since historical evidence indicates that their earnings were often quite high. However, many of them did not read or write musical notation—they didn't need to, for most of their music-making was improvised; consequently little of their music has survived. This particular Saltarello dates from the fourteenth century, when it was among several tunes added to the end of a large manuscript of Italian vocal music.

The saltarello is a lively Italian "jumping dance." This early example consists of short sections of varying lengths, alternating in the pattern a-b-a-c-a-c-a. Each section has two alternate endings, one a step above the other. These were known as "open" and "closed"; the open ending leads back to a repetition, while the closed finishes that section and prepares the next. Each new section uses melodic figures from the preceding one. This chainlike construction obviously permits additional repetitions should the dancers have energy for more.

The wild, piercing sound of the shawm (used as the solo instrument in our recording) seems quite appropriate for this energetic, even frenetic dance. Aside from the melody, everything about this performance is conjectural, resting upon the educated guesses of a knowledgeable and sensitive

SECULAR MUSIC IN THE MIDDLE AGES

scholar-musician: the tempo, the phrasing, the embellishment or melodic decoration of the written music, the rhythmic backing by nakers, tabur, and tambourine, the addition of a sustained single note (known as a *drone*, a common feature of folk music around the world) here played on a trumpet. But the results are musically convincing, breathing fresh life into music of which only the skeleton has survived the ravages of time.

Listening Guide 5



1A/7



1V/7

Saltarello (Anonymous)

Date: 14th century, Italian

Form: Sectional, with repeats; A section as refrain; much embellishment on melodic lines
Instrumentation used in recording: Shawm (loud, double-reed instrument), sustaining (drone) instrument, and percussion

Character: Fast and lively, leaping dance

- 7 A section (called *prima pars*, or first part), played twice (recording takes second ending each time)



- 8 B section (*secunda pars*), short section, played twice



A section, played twice

- 9 C section (*tertia pars*), short section, played twice (high note is held longer than indicated)



A section, played twice, much embellishment

C section, played twice

A section, played twice, much embellishment, ends on long, high note