

## CHAPTER XI

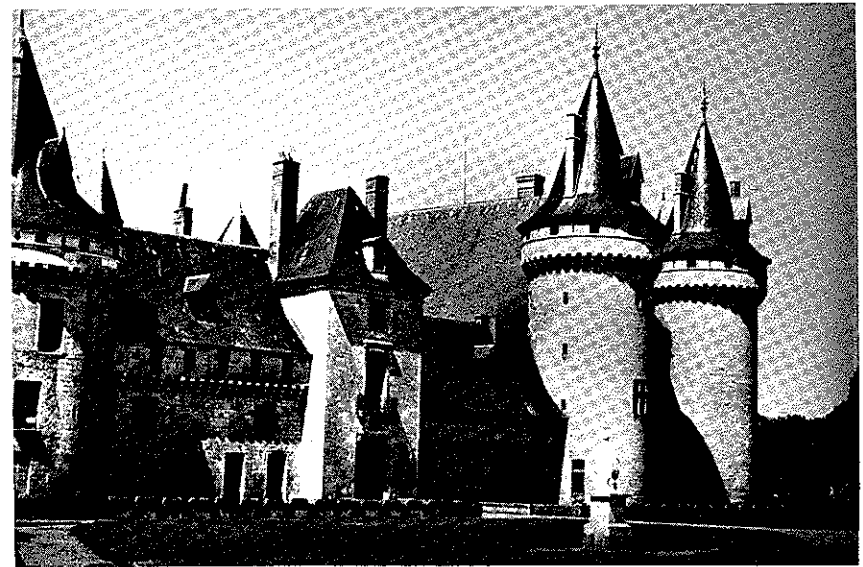
### Secular Monophonic Song, I: Latin and Provençal Lyrics

The accidents of history have made it seem that music remained for centuries the exclusive property of the Church. It is highly improbable, however, that song and dance played no part in secular amusements at all levels of society. Unfortunately, information about these amusements before A.D. 1000 is scanty indeed, and whatever music there was has vanished almost without a trace. Not until the rebirth of European civilization in the eleventh century did conditions become favorable for the development and preservation of secular songs. Even then, scribes often copied the poetry without the music or used a notation that cannot now be read. But we do begin to have tangible evidence that the secular spirit, as well as the religious, stimulated the creation of poetry and song. From this time on, the influence of that secular spirit on the development of music will be enormous. Its most immediate effect will be the additional insight we have into the pains, pleasures, and vices of medieval man, so vividly recorded in the lyric poetry of the Middle Ages.

#### LATIN SONGS

The origin of Latin lyric poetry in the Middle Ages is probably to be found in the hymns of the Church rather than in the classical poetry of antiquity. Verses of Horace, Vergil, and others occasionally received musical settings, but for the most part the development of secular songs in Latin paralleled the later history of liturgical poetry. Indeed, the dividing line between sacred and secular lyrics is often difficult to determine. Here, as everywhere, the two aspects of medieval life were inextricably entwined.

We may begin to explore the limits of the two areas of Latin songs in the works of Venantius Fortunatus, "the oldest medieval poet of France." Born in Italy about 530, Fortunatus "had his youth and learning in Ravenna."<sup>1</sup> Hence, he has also been called the last of the Italian poets. Why Fortunatus came to the North we do not know, but from his poetry we learn that he spent some years at Frankish courts before



Castle-fortresses, such as the famous one at Sully, dominated the medieval landscape, providing the setting for the courtly art of secular song.

settling in Poitiers, where he became a priest and eventually Bishop of Poitiers. He died in 609. Perhaps it is not just a coincidence that, after several centuries had elapsed, the region of western France south of the Loire valley should also produce both the sacred lyrics of the Limoges school and the secular art of the troubadours. Because of his years as a courtier-poet, indeed, Fortunatus has won still a third title: "the first troubadour of the Western world."<sup>2</sup>

Much of Fortunatus's poetry may be classified as occasional, brought forth by specific events, situations, or personal relationships. Even his magnificent *Vexilla Regis prodeunt* (The banners of the King go forth; LU, p. 575) celebrated the arrival of part of the True Cross in Poitiers. This "greatest Processional of the Middle Ages"—the favorite hymn of the Crusaders five centuries later—may well be regarded as the ancestor of the conductus. Other types of subject matter that Fortunatus established as worthy of poetic treatment reappear in later Latin lyrics. Poems extol the virtues of kings and queens or celebrate their coronations and marriages. Princes of the Church and the ceremonies of their installation received similar honors. Epitaphs subsequently enjoyed considerable importance. Apparently intended for the funeral service, rather than for engraving on a tombstone, they anticipate the later *placatus* (lament) on the death of a famous person. Laments too may have formed part of funeral or commemorative services. In some cases, at least, the presence of a doxology or prayer at the close, followed by an Amen, suggests a liturgical function.

However, laments soon outgrew this rather limited function when

1. Helen Waddell, *The Wandering Scholars*, p. 25.

2. L. Schrade, "Political Compositions in French Music of the 12th and 13th Centuries," *AnM*, 1, p. 12.

the range of lamentable subject matter was broadened. They became an important element in liturgical drama and appear in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the vernacular poetry of the troubadours and trouvères. Occasional examples, in Latin or the vernacular, continue to receive musical settings throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. With the rise of opera in the seventeenth century, laments once again become a conventional element in dramatic forms. In the same period, lute and keyboard composers, especially in France, transformed the lament into the instrumental *tombeau* (tombstone or memorial).<sup>3</sup>

This long and varied history of the lament makes it doubly regrettable that we do not know more about the earliest examples. Several planctus from the seventh to the eleventh centuries exist in various manuscripts, but their melodies, when present, are written in staffless neumes. Two of the oldest, each of which is still called an *epitafion*, commemorate the Visigothic king of Spain Chindasvinthus (641–652) and his queen, Recimberga (d. 657).<sup>4</sup> A more famous example is the *Planctus Karoli*, a lament for Charlemagne that must have been written shortly after his death in 814.<sup>5</sup> Despite the neumatic notation of these early laments, we are not left entirely in the dark as to the nature of their melodies. As we noted in Chapter VI, a few sequences with double cursus are actually laments. Their melodies, too, are lost to us; but other sequences with double cursus, such as *Rex caeli*, suggest what their musical characteristics may have been. More positive evidence comes from a number of sequence melodies that are entitled *Planctus*. A particularly instructive example is the *Planctus cygni* (Lament of the swan), a melody mentioned as early as the third quarter of the ninth century which served for several different texts in the years 950–1200. Formally, the *Planctus cygni* is a regular sequence, with eight double verses framed by single verses at the beginning and end. The distinctive aspect of the melody is its almost excessive reiteration of a single motive in slightly varied forms. This motive stands at the beginning of phrase 1, but it does not begin to dominate the melody until after the material has been transposed up a fifth in phrase 5. As may be seen in Example XI-1, the motive in its original form and in the four- and six-note variants (*a*<sup>1</sup> and *a*<sup>2</sup>) provides almost the entire substance of phrases 6–8.<sup>6</sup> Such dependence on one motivic figure—not at all characteristic of sacred chant—may well represent the contemporary style of secular song, at least for texts similar to the lament in form and content.

3. A more recent example is *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, a suite for piano by Maurice Ravel.

4. For facsimiles from a tenth-century manuscript, see H. Anglès, *El Còdex musical de Las Huelgas*, 1, p. 26.

5. See E. de Coussemaker, *Histoire de l'harmonie au moyen âge* (Paris, 1852), Plate II.

6. For the complete melody, see B. Stäblein, "Die Schwanenklage. Zum Problem Lai—Planctus—Sequenz," *Festschrift Karl Gustav Fellerer* (Regensburg, 1962), p. 494.

### Example XI-1: Motivic Reiteration in the *Planctus cygni*

#### PHRASE 1



#### PHRASE 6



#### PHRASE 7



#### PHRASE 8



The real development of secular Latin poetry intended for singing begins in the eleventh century. Probably we should regard it as a by-product of the secular spirit that increasingly pervaded monastic and cathedral schools. Study of pagan poets—Vergil, Horace, and Ovid among them—became commonplace. Ostensibly this study was for the purpose of learning to write poetry in classical meters. In reality, it seems to reflect the more worldly interests that characterized the period. Certainly the study of ancient authors often resulted in poetry that was anything but sacred. What was particularly prized was "a mixture of scholarship with a measure of obscenity."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the obscenity sometimes got out of hand, and medieval scholars did not shrink from writing verses that modern editors have not dared to publish, even in the decent obscurity of Latin. The great bulk of poetry in classical meters—and it was produced in enormous quantities in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—was not intended for singing. Nevertheless, its authors acquired a skill in versification that they put to good use when they came to write lyric poetry in the new rhythmic forms. The development of these forms parallels the development of sacred poetry touched on in previous discussions of tropes, sequences, and liturgical drama.

### THE CAMBRIDGE SONGS

One of the oldest collections of Latin songs is found in an eleventh-century manuscript now in the University of Cambridge library—hence the more than forty poems in this collection are commonly called the "Cambridge Songs." This is somewhat of a misnomer. Earlier, the

7. F. J. E. Raby, *A History of Secular Latin Poetry in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1934), 2, p. 177.

manuscript belonged to the Augustinian monastery at Canterbury, and the songs themselves seem to be of continental origin. With few exceptions, the melodies of these songs have been lost to us; but the texts illustrate the wide range of subject matter that the Latin lyric was now able to encompass. Religious poems mingle with laments, songs in praise of kings and bishops, comic folk tales, and erotic poems that the good Augustinians evidently felt obliged to erase or blot out with varying degrees of success.<sup>8</sup>

Several of the Cambridge Songs appear in another manuscript with titles that include the word *modus*. This term evidently indicates a well-known melody to which the poem is to be sung, but the titles are now generally attached to the poems themselves. The subject matter of these pieces varies greatly. A purely religious poem bears the title *Modus Qui et Carelmanninc*, which means that it and a song on Charlemagne are sung to the same melody. The *Modus Ottinc*—which phrase appears in the opening lines—glorifies the Saxon Emperors Otto I (936–973), Otto II (973–983), and Otto III (983–1002). It may have been written for the imperial coronation of Otto III in 996 and is perhaps the oldest of the Cambridge Songs. The poem sung to the *Modus Liebinc* (Melody of the song of Liebo) puts into learned language the facetious legend of the Snow-Child, a tale that has been judged fit for the Decameron. This story, together with a fourth poem, a liar's tale, involves Swabians, and both poems bear amusing witness that ethnic jokes are nothing new. The real interest of these poems, however, lies in a relationship that their disparate texts fail to suggest. Their titles remind us of those for sequence melodies, and all four of the poems are written in the form of a sequence.<sup>9</sup> Thus the texts clearly establish a close relationship between sacred and secular song, even though the melodies remain unknown.<sup>10</sup> We may even regard these secular sequences adapted to preexisting tunes as supporting evidence for the theory that elements of popular song found their way into the melodies of liturgical sequences.

One of the Cambridge Songs is of particular importance because a happy chance has preserved its melody. *O admirabile Veneris idolum* (O lovely image of Venus) is a lovesong to a boy, apparently written in the neighborhood of Verona on the Adige River. Each of the three stanzas has a single rhyme, and the learned style and Greek expressions “stamp it as a typically monkish tour de force.”<sup>11</sup> This poem is one of only two that have musical notation in the Cambridge manuscript,

where staffless neumes appear above the first two stanzas. A Vatican manuscript (Vatican, lat. 3327) couples this poem and a pilgrim's song, *O Roma nobilis* (O noble Rome), with the same poetic form and the same melody, again in staffless neumes. Still a third manuscript, this time from Monte Cassino, preserves the more respectable text with its melody notated in letters of the Guidonian hexachord.<sup>12</sup> It thus becomes possible to “restore” the melody of *O admirabile Veneris idolum* as it appears in the Cambridge Songs (Example XI-2).<sup>13</sup>

#### Example XI-2: *O admirabile Veneris idolum*

1. O ad-mi - ra - bi - le      Ve - ne - ris    i - do - lum,  
 2. Cu - ius ma - te - ri - e      ni - hil est    fri - vo - lum,  
 3. Ar - chos te pro - te - gat      qui stel - las    et    po - lum,  
 4. Fe - cit et ma - ri - a      con - di - dit    et    so - lum.

5. Fu - ris in - ge - ni - o      non sen - ti - as    do - lum,

6. Clo - to te di - li - gat,      que ba - jo - lat    co - lum.

O lovely image of Venus, in whom there is no flaw, may Archos, who made the stars and the heavens, the earth and the seas, protect you. May you not suffer from thievish cunning. May Clotho who bears the distaff love you.<sup>14</sup>

The melody in Example XI-2 is of considerable interest for a number of reasons. Because it remains within the hard hexachord (on G) and also ends on G, it seems to be in the major mode, an effect that will be characteristic of many troubadour and trouvère songs. The simple, almost completely syllabic style of the melody seems to reduce the pretentious learning of the text to the level of a popular song. In this connection, it is noteworthy that the later versions in the Vatican and Monte Cassino manuscripts provide a more elaborate and extended cadence for the final phrase.<sup>15</sup> The rhythms and note values in modern transcriptions, of course, represent no more than editorial opinions. Probably the melody should be sung freely, with the rhythms adapted to fit the sometimes different word accents of the individual lines. This

8. K. Breul, *The Cambridge Songs*, includes a facsimile of the manuscript.

9. The four poems are printed in *ibid.*, but *Modus Ottinc*, *Modus Liebinc*, and *Modus Florum* are more readily available—with English translations—in E. H. Zeydel, *Vagabond Verse*, pp. 212–31.

10. For a facsimile of the opening lines of *Modus Ottinc* with the melody in staffless neumes, see Coussemaker, *Histoire*, Plate VIII.

11. Zeydel, *Vagabond Verse*, p. 213.

12. Facsimile in NOHM, 2, facing p. 221.

13. The version given here differs in some details from Ex. 86 in NOHM, 2, p. 221. The latter purports to be a transcription of the Cambridge version, but it introduces some variants from the Monte Cassino manuscript.

14. The complete text with a poetic translation may be found in Zeydel, *Vagabond Verse*, p. 235.

15. For *O Roma nobilis*, see Gleason, EM, p. 7.

repetition of several poetic lines to the same melody is the most interesting aspect of *O admirabile* and one of the surest indications of its age. In the first stanza the first four lines are sung to phrase *a*, and the last two, to phrases *b* and *b'*. The second stanza has seven lines, and phrase *a* now serves the first five. These multiple repetitions recall procedures in the sequence with double cursus, but they also suggest a relationship with the method of performing long narrative poems such as the chansons de geste (see Chapter XII). With a minimum of musical material, the wandering entertainer, goliard, or jongleur could sing poems or stanzas of any length. The melody of *O admirabile* may well be characteristic of popular song both in its own and in later times. When more aristocratic and sophisticated levels of society began to cultivate the secular song, the musical forms became much more varied and complex.

WANDERING SCHOLARS, GOLIARDS, JONGLEURS

The question of who created and who performed the Latin lyrics of the later Middle Ages is difficult to answer. Many of the poems are anonymous, and it has long been the custom to use the terms "wandering scholars" and "goliards" as interchangeable designations for their unknown authors. In reality, the two terms are not synonymous. The wandering scholars might more properly be called wandering clerics who failed to procure a permanent position in the Church or who preferred an independent and vagabond life. We may regard them as freelance writers whose talents were at the disposal of whatever patron would provide them with a livelihood. Nevertheless, they remained clerics; and, however badly some of them may have behaved, they enjoyed the privileges of their class and the protection of the Church. The goliards, on the other hand, were dropouts from the religious life. The name is believed to derive from a combination of *gula* (gullet) and *Golias* (Goliath), reflecting the goliards' reputation for gluttony. Golias thus became the mythical head of an equally mythical Order of Goliards and figures as the supposed author and hero of many songs which celebrate the pleasures of the tavern—eating, drinking, and gambling—or the delights of amorous adventures. By the thirteenth century, *goliardus* was a term of reproach and of contempt, but it did not apply to men such as Philip the Chancellor or to the three great poets of the twelfth century: Hugh Primas of Orléans, Walter of Châtillon, and the Archpoet.<sup>16</sup> Their subjects may often have been unscholarly, but these were educated men, poets of great skill and power who were rightfully proud of their artistry.

Even lower than the goliards in the social scale stood the wandering

16. Zeydel, *Vagabond Verse*, gives information about these men with examples of their poems.

entertainers known in Latin as *joculatores* or *histriones* and in French as *jongleurs*. The literal meaning of *jongleurs* is "jugglers," but these men—and women—were much more than that. Jacks-of-all-amusements, the jongleurs functioned as dancers, singers, and instrumentalists; as acrobats, mimes, and storytellers; as performers of sleights of hand, and trainers of dancing bears. Such varied entertainment was enthusiastically received in ecclesiastical and secular courts as well as in the marketplace, but the entertainers themselves remained social outcasts. Better a cleric should become a grocer or a baker than a jongleur. Nevertheless, the jongleurs performed a useful function in society that went beyond mere diversion. As a rule uneducated and neither poets nor composers, the jongleurs were singers of other men's songs, and their vagrant life gave those songs the widest possible dissemination. In this way, at least, the jongleurs contributed to the flowering of both the Latin lyric and the vernacular songs of the troubadours and trouvères.

THE CARMINA BURANA

Of all the manuscripts that preserve secular Latin songs, the largest and most notorious is the so-called *Carmina Burana*. This collection was apparently assembled late in the thirteenth century at the Benedictine monastery of Benediktbeuern, south of Munich. Commissioned by some wealthy patron, perhaps an abbot or bishop, the manuscript remained in the library of Benediktbeuern until 1803. It was then confiscated and brought to Munich, where it is now Codex latinus 4660 in the Bavarian State Library. In 1847, the librarian J. A. Schmeller published the poems and gave his edition the title *Carmina Burana* (Songs of Bene-

One of the less serious aspects of medieval life, as represented in the *Carmina Burana* (Munich, Bavarian State Library).



diktbeuern), by which the collection has been known ever since. An undetermined number of pages are missing from the manuscript, but even so it contains over 200 poems.

The notoriety of the *Carmina Burana* rests largely on its gambling and drinking songs, its irreverent and sometimes blasphemous parodies of religious songs and services, and its love songs that often flaunt an "unmatched obscenity." But other, more serious kinds of poems are also included. Some 55 songs belong in a class generally described as "moral-satiric," and the manuscript contains six religious plays. The bulk of the collection, however, consists of 35 vagabond songs and 131 love songs.<sup>17</sup> Within these large categories, the songs are divided into more than twenty smaller groups. On the whole, related subject matter determines the contents of these groups, but occasionally poetic form is the deciding factor. Many groups close with a "versus" in classical Latin meter after a series of poems in the rhymed and rhythmic forms found in sacred poetry and liturgical drama. Another peculiarity of the *Carmina Burana* is its inclusion of about forty-eight songs in German. The dialect of these songs is Bavarian, and some are based on poems by Minnesingers of the late thirteenth century. While the German texts thus help to establish the manuscript's place and date of origin, the Latin songs represent the poetic activity of all of western Europe over a much broader span of time. Other copies of the Latin texts occur chiefly in manuscripts of French and English origin, and some of the poems were written in the twelfth century or even earlier. It is the international and all-inclusive aspects of the collection that give the *Carmina Burana* its importance in the history of medieval Latin song.

We know very little about the melodies for the poems in the *Carmina Burana*, but we may assume that all or most of them were meant to be sung. Several poems have melodies notated in staffless neumes, and in some cases space has been left for musical notation. Fortunately, a number of poems appear in other sources with a notation that can still be read. From these few examples, we may gain some idea of the musical forms and styles associated with Latin lyric poetry.

Most of the *Carmina Burana* poems that occur elsewhere with a legible musical notation are found in manuscripts devoted primarily to sacred music. Occasionally, a love song found its way into a collection of tropes and sequences, but chiefly settings of moral-satiric poems have been preserved. No fewer than eighteen such poems turn up in the Notre Dame manuscripts. Some are polyphonic conducti for two or three voices, but the large collection of monophonic pieces in *F* also includes a few poems from the *Carmina Burana*. One of these will demonstrate how close the relationship between sacred and secular song could be.

17. The count is Zeydel's (ibid. p. 38).

*Olim sudor Herculis* (Once the sweat of Hercules; AMM, No. 39) is preserved in several sources; and in both the *Carmina Burana* and the Florence manuscript it appears among other poems in sequence form. It is significant that the *Carmina Burana* designates these poems as *jubili*. Evidently the scribe still recognized the connection between sequences and the melismas of Alleluias, no matter what the subject matter of his poems might be. Although it appears among love songs in the *Carmina Burana*, *Olim sudor Herculis* is actually a "song against love." In typically learned fashion, the poet uses the classical story of Hercules to make his point. Entanglements with women dimmed the renown Hercules had won by his twelve great labors. A refrain then drives the moral home: Love tarnishes glory. The lover does not regret time squandered but rashly dissipates himself under the yoke of Venus. Moral as the poem is, we are far from the normal subject matter of the religious sequence.

In its poetic and musical form, *Olim sudor Herculis* also differs strikingly from the contemporary sequence as exemplified by the works of Adam de St. Victor. Indeed, the differences are perhaps more notable than the similarities. To justify classification as a sequence, four double stanzas—or pairs of stanzas—have four different melodies, each of which is repeated for the second member of the pair. But there the resemblance to the sequence ends. The first and most obvious departure from the norm is the presence of a refrain, although there is some doubt as to when and where it should be sung. Some sources indicate its performance after each half-stanza, eight times in all. In *F*, the refrain—with its music—follows stanza 1a; thereafter, the text incipit of the refrain occurs only after stanzas 1b, 2b, and 4b. Its omission after stanza 3b may have resulted from lack of space. In any case, we have some justification for assuming that performance of the refrain after each pair of stanzas was an acceptable procedure. The resulting combination of sequence structure with a refrain would give the form *aaR bbR ccR ddR*.

Closer inspection of *Olim sudor Herculis* reveals other ways in which it differs from religious sequences. Instead of the formal simplicity and regularity of later sequence texts, the individual stanzas of this poem are longer and more complex. Moreover, each pair of stanzas has its own rhyme scheme and its own distinctive arrangement of long and short lines. The variety and complexity of these different forms may be seen in the schematic representation below where letters indicate lines and rhymes, and subscript numbers the number of syllables in each line. Use of the same letters in each rhyme scheme is merely a convenience and does not mean that the same rhymes recur in all stanzas or even in both members of a pair. A few rhymes do appear in different stanzas, and in the first two pairs some rhymes in the first member recur at the same place in the second. This procedure evidently proved too difficult to maintain, and the rhymes in the last two pairs of stanzas are completely independent.

### Stanzaic Forms in *Olim sudor Herculis*

Stanzas	Forms
1a & b	a <sub>7</sub> b <sub>7</sub> b <sub>7</sub> a <sub>7</sub> c <sub>4</sub> c <sub>7</sub> d <sub>7</sub> d <sub>7</sub> e <sub>7</sub>
2a & b	a <sub>7</sub> a <sub>7</sub> b <sub>8</sub> c <sub>4</sub> d <sub>7</sub> d <sub>7</sub> b <sub>8</sub> c <sub>4</sub> c <sub>7</sub> b <sub>8</sub>
3a & b	a <sub>6</sub> b <sub>6</sub> a <sub>6</sub> b <sub>6</sub> b <sub>7</sub> b <sub>7</sub> c <sub>7</sub> d <sub>7</sub> d <sub>4</sub> e <sub>7</sub> c <sub>4</sub> c <sub>3</sub>
4a & b	a <sub>7</sub> a <sub>4</sub> b <sub>7</sub> b <sub>4</sub> c <sub>4</sub> c <sub>7</sub> d <sub>7</sub> d <sub>4</sub> e <sub>3</sub> f <sub>7</sub> f <sub>4</sub> e <sub>3</sub>
Refrain	a <sub>7</sub> b <sub>3</sub> a <sub>7</sub> b <sub>3</sub> c <sub>4</sub> c <sub>4</sub> c <sub>4</sub> b <sub>3</sub>

The intricacy of poetic structure in *Olim sudor Herculis* naturally affects the musical setting, but the differing phrase lengths do not always correspond with the poetic lines. Because lines of three or four syllables do not make satisfactory musical phrases in syllabic style, they are generally combined or attached to longer lines. The end result, however, is an irregularity of phrase structure in sharp contrast to the equal phrases of the later religious sequence. Both textually and musically, *Olim sudor* more closely resembles the forms of the vernacular lai (see Chapter XII).

Motivic repetition does not play an important role in organizing the melody of *Olim sudor Herculis*, but we should note the four sequential phrases at the close of stanza 1 and the exact repetition in the fourth and fifth phrases of stanza 2. Stylistically, the melody retains at least some of the syllabic character of the sequence. The most obvious departure occurs in the opening melisma, but ornamental figures from two to six notes in length appear frequently throughout the piece.

Not all nonliturgical sequences are equally restrained in their use of vocal ornament. As an extreme example, we may cite *In hoc ortus* (In this garden), the sequence that follows *Olim sudor* in F (fol. 417v). Shorter melismas occur in all of the different melodies for the three double stanzas, but the closing melisma of the second stanza reaches a peak of vocal extravagance (Example XI-3). We might almost conclude that the piece was written to show off the coloratura singing of a virtuoso performer.

Example XI-3: *In hoc ortus*, Closing Melisma of Second Stanza (F, fol. 418)



To illustrate a completely different kind of Latin song, a setting of one of the finest love poems in the *Carmina Burana* is included in AMM, No. 40. *Sic mea fata canendo solor* (Singing thus I ease my sorrows) appears to be a typical song of youth and love. Yet the poem can hardly be

the product of a callow dropout from school. Years of experience must lie behind such craftsmanship. Comparable skill and sensitivity went into the fashioning of the unexpectedly simple melody. By subtly varying a minimum of musical material, the composer enhanced the emotional content of the poem without disguising its complex structure. The net result is music of haunting beauty that ranks among the great achievements of lyric song in the Middle Ages.

In the *Carmina Burana*, *Sic mea fata* has a third stanza that modern editors reject as a later addition. An older and better version of only the first two stanzas appears with music in a manuscript from the Abbey of St. Martial in Limoges.<sup>18</sup> One would like to imagine that the monks devoted their spare moments to the creation and enjoyment of such beguiling poetry and music. In any case, the presence of *Sic mea fata* in a manuscript from Limoges brings us back to the region of southwestern France that had already seen the creation of the vernacular love lyric by the troubadours.

## THE TROUBADOURS

Why the region of France south of the Loire and west of the Rhone river valleys should have become the birthplace of vernacular song remains a mystery. Like all mysteries, it has received many and often divergent explanations: the relative peace and prosperity of the region as a whole; the wealth and luxury enjoyed by the aristocracy; the survival of Latin culture; contact with the Moslems in Spain; even an opposition to Catholicism stemming from the monotheistic heresy of the Visigoths. Whatever the truth of these explanations may be—and they all may have some measure of validity—it is undeniable that the history of lyric poetry in the modern languages of western Europe begins with the troubadours. (The name comes from the Provençal verb *trobar*, meaning “to find” or “to compose in verse.”)

The first known troubadour is William IX, Count of Poitiers and Duke of Aquitaine (1071–1127). William’s technical skill as a poet suggests that he had models from which he learned the art of versification, but the nature and identity of those models remain controversial. Almost equally controversial are questions concerning the literary language in which the troubadours wrote and what that language should be called.

The one demonstrable antecedent for both the poetic forms and the melodic style of the early troubadours is the Latin repertory of St. Martial, particularly the *versus*.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, *vers* was the first general

18. Paris, Bibl. Nat., lat. 3719, fol. 88.

19. J. Chailley, *L'École musicale de Saint-Martial de Limoges* (Paris, 1960), p. 370 ff.

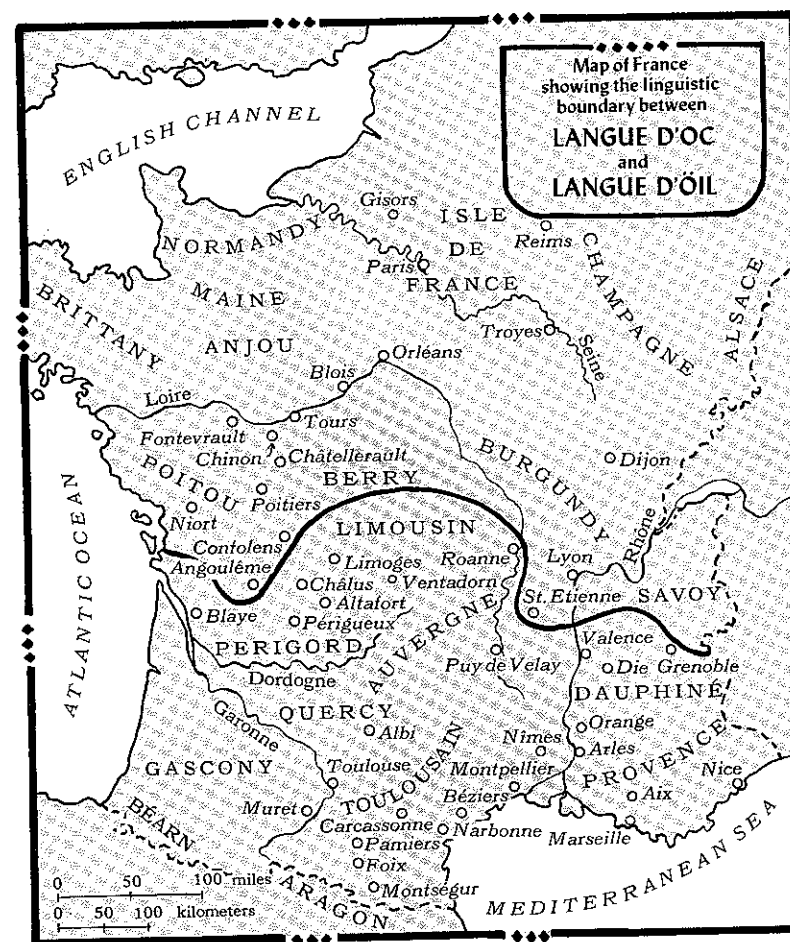


designation of troubadour songs in the vernacular. That vernacular goes by several names: one is *langue d'oc*, which distinguishes it from the *langue d'oïl* of northern France on the basis of the different words for yes: *oc* and *oïl* (*oui* in modern French). Another name commonly given to the language of the troubadours is *Provençal*. Objections to both names arise from the existence of former provinces in southern France known as Provence and Languedoc. Few troubadours had any connection with Provence, and *langue d'oc* was spoken far beyond the boundaries of both provinces (see Map 4, p. 269). The French have recently adopted a third name, *occitan*, as the official designation of both the medieval and modern language of southern France. This name has the advantage of applying to the entire area south of the linguistic boundary with French, but it has yet to win general acceptance outside of France. Particularly in English-speaking countries, the name *Provençal* remains so firmly entrenched that its continued use here should cause no confusion. It need only be remembered that we are talking about Old Provençal and that the region of Provence was far from being the center of troubadour activity.

William IX's titles already suggest that the troubadour movement began in the westerly regions of southern France, and most of the early activity took place at aristocratic courts in the areas surrounding Poitiers, Limoges, and Toulouse—the provinces of Poitou, Limousin, and western Languedoc. It was in these regions that the troubadours created a literary language and a poetic style that were adopted wherever Provençal was spoken and imitated in many other languages. These developments came quickly, but not quite as soon as might have been ex-



Portraits of two early troubadours, William IX of Aquitaine and Folquet of Marseilles (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale).



Map 4: Map of France showing the linguistic boundary between *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl*.

pected. William IX of Aquitaine stands alone as the only known troubadour in the first quarter of the twelfth century. Eleven of his poems survive, but without music except for one incomplete melody. Poetic activity and the number of troubadours increased only slightly in the twenty years after William's death. From this period, the names of three important poets are known to us: Cercamon, Marcabru, and Jaufre Rudel. Although their medieval biographies say that Marcabru learned his trade under Cercamon, the two men seem to have flourished at approximately the same time. Marcabru must also have known Jaufre Rudel, for he closes one poem with the wish to send "both words and tune to Jaufre Rudel beyond the sea." Rudel apparently took part in the second Crusade (1147–49), from which he did not return.

Of Cercamon, some eight poems without music survive, whereas we have over forty poems and four melodies of Marcabru, seven poems and four melodies of Rudel. Even this increase of productivity scarcely prepares us for the tremendous outpouring of troubadour poetry that occurred in the second half of the twelfth century. During this time, the Provençal lyric reached the high point of its development and began to make its influence felt outside of southern France. Before the activity of the troubadours came to a close in the latter part of the thirteenth century, they had produced an astonishing amount of poetry. We cannot know how much has been lost, but approximately 2600 poems by more than 450 authors have been preserved. The music for these poems, unfortunately, did not fare as well. About 275 melodies by 42 troubadours are all that have survived.<sup>20</sup> In Table 10, some of the most important troubadours are listed in approximately chronological order. The periods of activity are also approximate and necessarily overlap to some extent.<sup>21</sup> Additional numbers in the last column indicate melodies that have been "discovered" because they appear with other texts, usually Latin or French, that have the stanzaic forms of particular troubadour songs. There is no proof, however, that we are dealing with contrafacta whose melodies originated for use with the Provençal texts.

Table 10: *The Poetic and Musical Legacy of Important Troubadours*

Period of Activity	Troubadours	Number of Poems	Number of Melodies
1086-1127	William IX of Aquitaine	11	¼ + 1
1130-1150	Cercamon	8	—
	Marcabru	40	4 + 3
	Jaufre Rudel	7	4
1140-1190	Bernart de Ventadorn	45	19 + 1
	Berenguier de Palazol	12	8
	Arnaut de Maroill	26	6
	Guiraut de Borneill	80	13
	Bertran de Born	45	1 + 3
1180-1220	Peire Vidal	50	13
	Pons de Capdoill	27	4
	Folquet de Marseilla	27	13
	Arnaut Daniel	18	2
	Raimbaut de Vaqueiras	32	7
	Gaucelm Faidit	64	14
	Peirol	34	17
	Raimon de Miraval	47	22

20. F. Gennrich has published 302 melodies with Provençal texts in *Der musikalische Nachlass der Troubadours*, SMMA, 3 and 4. Not all qualify as troubadour songs, however. Some are sacred; some are taken from a *Mystery of St. Agnes*; a few are polyphonic motets.

21. Figures for the number of poems come from A. Pillet and H. Carstens, *Bibliographie der Troubadours* (Halle, 1933). The count of melodies is from Gennrich, *Nachlass*.

1220-1290	Peire Cardenal	70	3
	Uc de Saint Circ	44	3
	Guiraut Riquier	89	48
	Anonymous	about 250	23

The concentration of names between the years 1140 and 1220 clearly reveals the period when the art of the troubadours was at its height. The sudden decline and disappearance of that art must be blamed in large part on the so-called Albigensian Crusade against heretics in southern France (1209). One of the more infamous episodes in the history of Christianity, this misnamed war between the North and South utterly destroyed the civilized society in which the troubadour movement had flourished. With few exceptions, those troubadours who survived found shelter and patronage in Sicily, northern Italy, and at the courts of Spanish kings. Their influence on vernacular song in those countries will become apparent in Chapter XIII. The latter part of the thirteenth century produced only one great Provençal poet, Guiraut Riquier (c. 1254-84), "the last of the troubadours," who spent much of his short life in Spain.

The appearance of troubadour poetry marks the beginning of a new era in the history of Western literature and music. Vernacular song now flourishes side by side with Latin, which it first stimulates and then replaces. The influences that vernacular and Latin secular song exercised on each other are difficult to trace, for many of the same poetic forms and themes appear in both. There can be little doubt, however, that the troubadour movement contributed much to the brilliant flowering of the Latin lyric in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Even more important was the influence of the troubadours on the development of vernacular song in other regions of western Europe. In addition to stimulating the production of such song, they developed many of its poetic forms and techniques and established most of its literary themes.

## TYPES AND FORMS OF TROUBADOUR POETRY

Until the end of the twelfth century, the troubadours most often used the term *vers* to designate any poem destined to be sung. During this same period, however, they began to attach more precise names to particular types of poems. By far the most important of these types was the love song, known as *canso*, or *chanso* in the northern dialects (*chanson* in French). We now tend to think of chansons as being merely songs in general, but for the troubadours the *canso* was exclusively a love song. In it they established the conventions of *l'amour courtois* (courtly love); to it they devoted their best efforts; and from it they won their greatest acclaim.



The next most important type of song, at least from the point of view of quantity, was the *sirventes*. Because a *sirventes* normally adopted the poetic form—and melody—of a preexisting *canso*, one explanation of the name sees the song itself as a servant. In the more generally accepted view, the *sirventes* was originally a “song of service” for the noble lord in whose household the troubadour was a retainer (*sirven*). Later, the term was used for a song on almost any topic except love. Many *sirventes* were devoted to personal, literary, or moral satire. Personal and literary satire often sank to the level of insults, invective, and ridicule of physical defects; but some of the moral satires give a vivid picture of contemporary life and manners. Other *sirventes* deal with political subjects or call for volunteers in the Crusades. Even the infamous Albigenian Crusade found apologists to write some of these propaganda pieces. More impassioned and more moving are the *sirventes* of later troubadours, such as Peire Cardenal, which deplore the aftermath of the Crusade. With bitter irony, these *sirventes* attack clerks, the French, and—above all—the Inquisition as the causes of their distress. The most famous author of *sirventes*, however, was the earlier troubadour Bertran de Born, who left us some twenty-five poems in this genre. Perhaps the strength of Bertran’s partisan attacks was partly responsible for the severity with which Dante meted out his infernal punishment (see p. 285, fn. 2).

Two subspecies of *sirventes* worthy of mention are the *enuieg* and the *planh*. In the *enuieg* (French, *ennui* = “annoyance” or “nuisance”), the poet vents his spleen on aspects of life he finds particularly irritating. The *enuieg* thus gives another and often highly personal view of contemporary social conditions. Even more personal, though in a different way, was the *planh*, the Provençal form of the Latin *planctus*. In some cases, these laments express grief with a sincerity and an emotional intensity that many other poems fail to achieve.

After the *canso* and *sirventes*, a third category of troubadour poetry includes several species that make use of dialogue in one way or another. Among these, poetic debates were especially popular. When the argument developed freely, the poem was usually identified by the general term *tenso* (dispute). Many *tensos* are the work of two troubadours who reply to each other in alternate stanzas, sometimes with a good bit of personal invective and ridicule. Disputes with supernatural beings, allegorical figures, animals, or inanimate objects, on the other hand, are obviously the work of a single poet. Closely related to the *tenso* is the *partimen* or *joc parti* (a divided or shared “game”). The *partimen* more closely resembles a modern debate in that the poet proposes alternatives and allows his adversary to choose which he will defend. Such debates often close with an appeal to arbiters who decide the winner of the argument.

An entirely different kind of debate occurs in the *pastorela*, a type of

pastoral poetry that enjoyed an astonishing vogue. A knight, riding in the countryside, meets a shepherdess whom he addresses with frankly dishonorable intent. After a more or less extended discussion between the two, virtue usually—but not always—succumbs. Such a stereotyped pattern could have interested so many poets and, presumably, so many audiences only because it was the manner of presentation, not the subject itself, that mattered. Perhaps too the attraction lay in devising new arguments for seduction and new ways of countering them. The possibility of failure on the part of the knight may also have introduced an element of suspense. We may presume that the encounters described in *pastorelas* are usually imaginary. If they do represent knightly manners of the time, it is no wonder that the shepherdess so often has a father, brother, or lover within hailing distance.

Another important type of troubadour poetry is the *alba* or dawn song. Its traditional theme was the separation of two lovers at dawn (*alba*), after they had been awakened by the call of a watcher or the singing of birds. The poems generally concentrate either on the regrets of the lovers at parting or on the urgent warnings of the watcher. Usually, each stanza ends with a refrain that announces the coming of dawn. In the famous *Reis glorios* (Glorious King) of Guiraut de Borneill,<sup>22</sup> for example, the refrain is “et ades sera l’alba” (and soon it will be dawn). It is symptomatic of twelfth-century morals that in *Reis glorios* a watching companion asks God’s care for his amorous friend. Also symptomatic—and even more curious—are thirteenth-century *albas* that reveal the influence of the Inquisition. Night, the dawn, and the day now become Christian symbols of purity and salvation. But such aberrations could not erase memories of the *alba*’s original content and meaning. Shakespeare recalls it in the tender dispute between Romeo and Juliet as to whether they heard a nightingale or a lark, “the herald of the morn” (Act III, scene 5). And Richard Wagner, writing an opera on the medieval legend of Tristan and Isolde, appropriately makes the second act an *alba* almost as long as the night itself.

## DANCE SONGS

A final poetic type is the dance song, called *balada* or *dansa*. These were often put in the mouth of a woman and commonly issue gay and carefree invitations to enjoy life, to love, and to revile the jealous, that is, husbands. Some of their texts suggest a connection with May Day festivities in which choral song and dance played a prominent part. The troubadours produced only a small number of dance songs celebrating the joys of returning spring, but two are among the most famous Pro-

22. HAM, No. 18c.

vençal songs. *Kalenda Maya* (The first of May), by Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, is in the form of an instrumental dance known as *estampida*, or *estampie* in French (see Chapter XIV). The medieval account of Raimbaut's life is probably correct in reporting that he wrote the poem to fit the tune of a dance he heard two French jongleurs play at the Court of Montferrat. *Kalenda Maya* is actually a love song addressed to a lady to whose husband the poet wants to give real cause for jealousy. A more typical dance song is the anonymous poem *A l'entrada del tens clar* (At the beginning of the fair season). To show how much she is in love, a queen described as "April-like" (*avrilloza*) invites all maids and bachelors to join the joyous dance.<sup>23</sup>

## POETIC AND MUSICAL FORMS OF TROUBADOUR SONGS

To a large extent the structure of troubadour poems is independent of their content. With few exceptions, poetic types are not associated with particular poetic or musical forms. Whatever the poetic type, the form is almost invariably strophic, with an indefinite number of stanzas identical in structure and sung to the same melody. After the regular stanzas, many poems conclude with one or more *tornadas* (*envois* in French), usually addressed to some person: a lady, a patron, or the arbiter of a debate. As a rule, a *tornada* consists of three or four lines with the same forms and rhymes as the concluding lines of the last complete stanza. They would therefore be sung to the corresponding phrases at the close of the melody. English poetry has adopted the term *envoy* from the French *envoi* with its meaning unchanged. The Provençal and French terms *cobla* and *couplet*, on the other hand, refer to complete stanzas and do not correspond to the English *couplet*, a pair of verses that rhyme with each other. The terms *cobla* and *couplet* frequently occur in discussions of troubadour and trouvère poetry, but to avoid confusion only the term *stanza* will be used here.

It would be a mistake to regard the constant use of strophic form as evidence of monotonous sameness in the structure of troubadour poetry. On the contrary, poets sought to create a new structural pattern for the stanzas of each new poem and to devise new ways of linking those stanzas together. In so doing, they managed to produce an incredible number of stanzaic forms that anticipated almost all later methods of organizing lyric poetry.<sup>24</sup> The striking contrast between the variety of forms and the sameness of themes in troubadour poetry clearly shows

that what mattered was not the subject itself but the manner of its presentation. The language of love is limited, after all, and the conventions of l'amour courtois further restricted the content of troubadour love poems. It is precisely in these poems—the cansos—that the troubadours exercised the greatest ingenuity in devising new stanzaic forms. As a rule, poems on subjects other than love are structurally less complex and use simpler rhymes and rhyming patterns. Many sirventes, it is true, adopted the form and melody of a canso, but even then the identity of rhymes was not always strictly maintained. This use of preexisting melodies for the sirventes probably accounts for the small number that have been preserved with music.

Narrative and dance songs generally have simple rhyme schemes and stanzaic forms that often include refrains of one or more lines. Refrains are particularly characteristic of dance songs, where, presumably, the entire group sang the refrains in alternation with a soloist who led the dance. A characteristic example is the balada cited above, *A l'entrada del tens clar* (see p. 274 and footnote 23). The first three lines in all five stanzas end with the refrain word "eya" (an interjection expressing joy and exhortation, such as "hey!" or "come!"). In addition, a complete refrain of indeterminate poetic structure closes all the stanzas. In some baladas, the refrain appears within the stanza and also at the beginning and end. Dansas, on the other hand, rarely have refrains, but when present, they are introductory and closing, not internal. The troubadours do not seem to have developed fixed patterns for their dance songs—partly, perhaps, because they wrote so few of them.<sup>25</sup> It remained for the trouvères of northern France to standardize the poetic and musical forms of dance songs with refrains.

A completely different kind of poetic and musical form is represented by the *lai* and *descort*. The distinction between these names is unclear and is usually based on identifications in the texts themselves. Also unclear is the intended meaning of *descort*, a term that seems to have been a troubadour invention. It has been variously interpreted as referring to the presentation of a sentimental disagreement (*descort*), to the use of different stanzaic forms within a single poem, or to some other irregularity. In a famous *descort* by Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, each of five stanzas is written in a different language: Provençal, Italian, French, Gascon, and Portuguese. The usual determining characteristic common to both *lai* and *descort* is a succession of stanzas that differ from each other in rhyme scheme and rhythmic structure. Each stanza, therefore, must have its own melody. Individual stanzas are normally subdivided into two or more units that have the same poetic structure and can be sung to

23. For both *Kalenda maya* and *A l'entrada*, with their complete texts, see F. Gennrich, *Troubadours, Trouvères*, pp. 16 and 22.

24. The forms are catalogued in I. Frank, *Répertoire métrique de la poésie des troubadours*, 2 vols. Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, 302 and 308 (Paris, 1953–57).

25. *Ibid.*, 2, p. 70. The author lists only nine baladas and thirty dansas, of which some half dozen survive with their melodies. A dansa of Guiraut d'Espanha is published in Gennrich, *Troubadours*, p. 20. Frank's list (2, p. 58) of troubadour songs with refrains includes only three dansas.

the same music. The resulting overall form resembles that of the Latin sequence, particularly as it appears in such secular poems as *Olim sudor Herculis*, discussed earlier in this chapter. The texts of some descorts also suggest a relationship to the sequence with double cursus. Unfortunately, very little of the music for these poems has survived. Out of twenty-eight descorts and four *lais* in Provençal, we possess the melodies for only two descorts and two *lais*.<sup>26</sup> It seems best, therefore, to delay further consideration of the form until we find more numerous examples with music in the repertory of the *trouvères*.

To illustrate some of the ways in which the troubadours organized and related the stanzas of a poem, we shall examine the three songs included in AMM: Nos. 41–43. The first, *Quan lo rius de la fontana* (When the flow of the fountain), is a *vers* by Jaufrè Rudel, famous for his fidelity to a distant love. (The second stanza of the poem, incidentally, destroys the myth that Rudel's love was strictly platonic.) Each of the five seven-line stanzas uses the same five rhymes: “-ana,” “-ol,” “-ina,” “-am,” “-anha.” In the first two stanzas, these rhymes appear in the pattern *abcdace*; but in the last three, they are rearranged in the order *cdabcae*. Further subtleties include the similarity of the feminine rhymes (“-ana,” “-ina,” and “-anha”) and the assonance of “-ana” and “-anha” with the masculine rhyme “-am.”

*Non es meravelha s'eu chan* (It is no wonder if I sing), is a typical *canso* of Bernart de Ventadorn. It has a simpler, more symmetrical stanzaic form in which all eight lines of the stanza have eight syllables and end with masculine rhymes in the pattern *abbacddc*. Again the same rhymes occur in all stanzas, and again their order differs. In this case, however, only the similar rhymes “-an” and “-en” (a and c) are constantly interchanged so that the last rhyme of each stanza becomes the first rhyme of the next. The following diagram will clarify Bernart's method of linking the successive stanzas of his poem:

Stanza 1	a b b a c d d c
Stanza 2	c b b c a d d a
Stanza 3	a b b a c d d c
etc.	
Stanza 7	a b b a c d d c
Envoy	d d c

Marcabru found still another means of relating the stanzas of *L'autrier jost' una sebissa* (The other day by a hedge-row). In this *pastorela*, twelve stanzas are grouped in pairs (*coblas doblas*), with the same rhymes in both stanzas of each pair. Using a simple scheme with only two rhymes, *aaabaab*, Marcabru changes the first rhyme in each new pair of stanzas.

The b rhyme (“-ana”) thus functions as a refrain rhyme in all twelve stanzas. Moreover, the fourth line of every stanza ends with the refrain word “vilana,” while stanzas 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10 expand the refrain to include the entire line “‘Senher,’ so dis la vilana” (“My lord,” said the peasant girl). In typically paradoxical fashion, Marcabru places the shepherdess in the better light. Her cutting and often enigmatic retorts to the banal proposals of the knight eventually reduce him to despair and silence. The complete rhyme scheme of this charming poem is as follows:

Stanzas 1 & 2	a a a b a a b
Stanzas 3 & 4	c c c b c c b
Stanzas 5 & 6	d d d b d d b
Stanzas 7 & 8	e e e b e e b
Stanzas 9 & 10	f f f b f f b
Stanzas 11 & 12	g g g b g g b
Envoys	g g b
	g g b

It should be apparent that the understanding and appreciation of troubadour verse depend on the careful examination of complete poems. Students of troubadour melodies have long faulted literary scholars for neglecting or ignoring the musical side of troubadour art. But musical scholars err in the other direction when they present only the first stanza of a poem with its melody. However valuable the practice may be as a space saver, it does a grave disservice to the poetry. We get a false impression of the music if we fail to recognize the repetition of rhymes or the presence of a refrain. To give the poet-composers all the credit they deserve, let us not overlook the intricate and subtle structures that the troubadours gave to their best poems. By combining these structures with the lovely sounds of the language, Provençal poetry becomes marvelous music by itself. Sensitivity to that music can only enhance our enjoyment of the melodies that the troubadours regarded as essential and worthy of their best efforts.

## MUSICAL FORMS AND STYLES

Troubadour melodies are on a par with the poems in the ingenuity and diversity of their formal structures. Some melodies are continuous, with a different musical phrase for each line of text. Others repeat one or more phrases in a variety of patterns that often have little to do with the structure and rhyme scheme of the poems. In this regard, it will be instructive to compare the musical and poetic forms of the three pieces from AMM that we have just discussed.

26. The four melodies are published in Gennrich, *Nachlass*, Nos. 184 and 280–82.

In Jaufre Rudel's *Quan lo rius de la fontana*, repetition of musical phrases results in the pattern *ababcb'd*. We might even regard phrase *c* as a variation of phrase *a*. Its closing notes echo those of phrase *a* and provide the same link with phrase *b'*, which now accommodates a feminine rather than a masculine rhyme. Only the final phrase stands in complete contrast to the others and thus enhances the effect of the seventh line's refrain rhyme. The differences between musical form and poetic rhyme scheme may be seen in the following diagram. (Letters indicate musical phrases and rhymes; figures, the number of syllables in a line. For feminine rhymes, a prime sign—'—follows the figure.)

*Quan lo rius de la fontana*

Poetic form: a<sub>7</sub>' b<sub>7</sub> c<sub>7</sub>' d<sub>7</sub> a<sub>7</sub>' c<sub>7</sub>' e<sub>7</sub>'  
Musical form: a b a b c b' d

In *Non es meravelha s'eu chan* of Bernart de Ventadorn, repeated phrases produce an entirely different form: *abcbdaef'd*. Similarities of range and melodic contour relate phrases *e* and *f* to phrases *b* and *c*, but it is the exact repetitions of phrases *a* and *d* that give the melody its distinctive form. Here, that form obviously reflects the poetic form, at least in part. As the *a* and *c* rhymes change places from stanza to stanza, they remain attached to the same two musical phrases. Each half-stanza is set to a continuous melody, however, despite its rhyme scheme of *abba*. A diagram will make clear these correspondences and divergences:

*Non es meravelha s'eu chan*

Poetic form: 1. a<sub>8</sub> b<sub>8</sub> b<sub>8</sub> a<sub>8</sub> c<sub>8</sub> d<sub>8</sub> d<sub>8</sub> c<sub>8</sub>  
2. c<sub>8</sub> b<sub>8</sub> b<sub>8</sub> c<sub>8</sub> a<sub>8</sub> d<sub>8</sub> d<sub>8</sub> a<sub>8</sub> etc.  
Musical form: a b c d a e f d

Phrase repetitions in Marcabru's *pastorela* contrast with the rhyme scheme in another way. The simplicity of that scheme in no way suggests the sophistication of the musical form *ababcc'd*, in which only the repetition of phrase *c* reflects a repeated rhyme. The music completely ignores the refrainlike function of the *b* rhyme, particularly in the fourth line of each stanza. Again, a diagram will clarify the discrepancies between poetic and musical structures.

*L'autrier jost' una sebisca*

Poetic form: a<sub>7</sub>' a<sub>7</sub>' a<sub>7</sub>' b<sub>7</sub>' a<sub>7</sub>' a<sub>7</sub>' b<sub>7</sub>'  
Musical form: a b a b c c d

Attempts to classify the forms of troubadour song tend to be more confusing than enlightening. By trying to reduce the many different

forms to a few basic types, modern scholars tend to obscure the diversity that the troubadours took such pains to create. To designate musical forms by the names of poetic types can also be misleading. Many writers identify continuous melodies as *vers* or *hymn* form, and they also use the term *canço* for melodies in which a repetition of the first section produces an overall *aab* form. The result is utter confusion. As we have seen, *vers* was a general name for early troubadour poetry, and *canço* specifically designated a love song. Neither term implied a particular musical form, and the forms they supposedly represent may appear in any type of poetry. Of the three songs in AMM, the *canço* of Bernart de Ventadorn has its own special form, Rudel's *vers* and Marcabru's *pastorela* use variants of *aab* form. These variants, indeed, prove that the designation *aab* form is itself a misleading oversimplification. The form is not really tripartite, for, as a rule, the first section with its repeat (*aa*) is approximately the same length as the *b* section. Moreover, the *b* section may be organized in a variety of ways. We have already found the forms *ab ab cb'd* and *ab ab ccd*. Other variants may result in patterns such as *ab ab cde* or *ab ab cdb*. With longer strophes of eight or ten lines, the possible number of variants is greatly increased. To clear up the confusion, then, it seems best to avoid using the names of poetic types to designate musical forms.<sup>27</sup> Only with the later development of fixed poetic forms (*formes fixes*), may we safely give the same name to both the texts and the equally fixed musical forms (see Chapter XII). For the troubadours, neither poetic nor musical forms were fixed. On the contrary, the infinite variety of formal structures—both poetic and musical—in troubadour song constitutes one of its greatest charms.

As has already been noted, the predominant influence on melodic style must have been the music of the Church. The relationship is most obvious in settings of the rhymed poetry of hymns and *versus*, but in range, melodic direction, intervallic progressions, and cadential formulas, troubadour melodies scarcely differ from Gregorian Chant in general. Moreover, a surprisingly large number of melodies adhere to the system of eight church modes. For the most part, the style is basically syllabic, with occasional ornamental figures of two to four or five notes. These figures tend to come near the close of phrases, where they emphasize rhymes and strengthen the cadential feeling. Thus they seem to serve a musical function rather than being associated with particular words. It is significant, however, that variants of the same melody in different sources most frequently involve the ornamental figures. Such variants suggest that singers felt free to modify vocal ornaments, or in-

27. Personal experience of the confusion has come from trying to explain why an *alba*, *Reis glorios*, is labelled "Canço" in HAM, No. 18c. The melody of the five-line stanza has the form *aabcd*, but the last line of text is a refrain. A more accurate indication of the form would show the refrain by a capital letter (*aabcD*). Its presence goes unrecognized, of course, when only the first stanza is given.

roduce new ones, as they saw fit. Perhaps they even varied the ornamentation from stanza to stanza as they sang the melody to different words.

Whether or not singers took liberties with the ornamentation of melodies, they were forced to decide for themselves what the rhythms of those melodies should be. As in plainchant, indeed in all contemporary monophonic song, the notation of troubadour melodies gave no indication of note values. Musical scholars have been almost unanimous in accepting the hypothesis that the secular songs were sung in the triple meters of the rhythmic modes. They often disagree, however, as to how those meters should be adapted to specific texts. Literary scholars, when they considered the matter at all, have tended to reject the use of triple meters in the monophonic songs of the time, whether in Latin, Provençal, or French. In none of these languages does versification depend on the regular alternation of strong and weak syllables—on the use of poetic meters, in other words. The number of syllables in each line, the total number of lines, and the rhyme scheme were the only criteria for making the succeeding stanzas of a poem correspond with the first. Within these limits, constant variation of metrical patterns proves to be one of the subtlest techniques of troubadour verse. Carl Appel has shown, for example, that no two lines in the first stanza of *Non es meravelha* (AMM, No. 42) have the same distribution of accented and unaccented syllables.<sup>28</sup> To devise a single metrical pattern to fit all eight lines is an obvious impossibility. This situation is typical of Bernart de Ventadorn's poems, and Appel strongly opposed metrical transcriptions in which melodic and textual accents do not correspond. The scholarly editor of Bernart's poetry and melodies argued that regular meters and even measured note values should not be used in modern transcriptions. Instead, the performer should reproduce the natural rhythms and accents of the text.<sup>29</sup> That medieval performers probably did so may be inferred from the continued use of unmeasured notation for some time after clear ways of indicating note values had been developed in polyphonic music.

#### PERFORMANCE WITH INSTRUMENTAL ACCOMPANIMENT

From both literary and pictorial evidence it seems that instruments participated in the performance of troubadour and trouvère songs. Unfortunately, the evidence tells us little as to the degree or manner of that participation. Musical sources are of no help, for they contain only the

vocal melodies. Suggesting appropriate instrumental accompaniments therefore becomes difficult. We know that *vièles* (fiddles) and small harps were used, and one of the easiest solutions would be to accompany troubadour songs with a bowed string instrument playing in unison with the voice. The instrument might also play the opening phrases of the melody as a prelude. The closing phrase or phrases could then serve as interludes between the stanzas and as a postlude at the end. Should a singer accompany himself on the harp, especially if he had had some ecclesiastical training, he might well improvise a simple form of free organum. Drones—sustained notes in the manner of melismatic organum—are still another possibility. In any case, it is well not to be dogmatic in this matter. Performance practice in the Middle Ages was surely flexible enough to permit singing these pieces either with some sort of instrumental accompaniment or as unaccompanied solo songs.<sup>30</sup>

It is obvious that the troubadour melodies as they have been preserved give a most inadequate picture of how they were performed. They must be given rhythmic life, instrumental accompaniment, possibly a varied ornamentation from stanza to stanza of the text. Contributions of this nature can probably not be expected of most present-day performers. It is to musical scholars that we must look for practical editions that will bring troubadour song to life without doing violence to the spirit or the musical techniques of the Middle Ages. Of all medieval music, the monophonic secular songs are perhaps the most difficult to reconstruct, yet the task is worthy of successful and satisfactory completion. Only then can we fully appreciate and enjoy this attractive legacy of a vanished culture.

#### LIVES OF THE TROUBADOURS

It is commonly said that the troubadours—as well as their French and German counterparts, the trouvères and Minnesingers—were aristocratic poets who composed their own melodies but left the performance of their songs to jongleurs. Almost every aspect of this statement demands qualification. Among the poets, it is true, we find kings, princes, counts, even bishops. Yet most of these men were no more than gifted amateurs. Really significant contributions to the art came primarily from professionals, men who placed their talents at the service of powerful and wealthy patrons. Numbers of these men too belonged to the aristocracy; but they were often younger sons, and therefore without inheritance, or lesser nobles with no fiefs, and therefore without income. Belonging to the nobility was by no means a prerequisite for

28. C. Appel, *Der Singweisen Bernarts von Ventadorn*, p. 18.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–4. Similar arguments are advanced in H. Van der Werf, *The Chansons of the Troubadours and Trouvères*, pp. 35–44.

30. Van der Werf, *Chansons*, pp. 19–21, argues that the songs should be unaccompanied on the grounds that their texts do not refer to the use of instruments and that literary and pictorial evidence is ambiguous.

becoming a troubadour, however. Some of the best and most famous troubadours were men of humble birth. By their poetic and musical gifts these men gained an entry to the aristocratic society that fostered and enjoyed their art.

Much of our knowledge about the lives of the troubadours comes from medieval biographies (*vidas*) that appear in manuscript collections of the songs. Supplemental information comes from the commentaries (*razos*) that relate some poems to the events of a troubadour's life. Neither the lives nor the commentaries are completely reliable sources of information. Most were written long after the troubadours themselves had died, and fancy is often indistinguishable from fact. In their reporting, however, the biographies are sometimes consistent enough to make clear what men of that time believed to be true. If they are in part responsible for romantic notions about the troubadours, they also provide a good deal of information that contradicts those notions. In the matter of birth and social status, for example, we learn that Cercamon was a jongleur whose name showed that he had "roamed the whole world" (*cerquet tot lo mon*). Marcabru was a foundling "left at the door of a rich man." Bernart de Ventadorn was the son of a servant in the castle of the Count of Ventadorn. Gaucelm Faidit was the son of a bourgeois and became a jongleur after he lost all his possessions playing dice.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to information about the lives and loves of the troubadours, the biographies also provide contemporary critical judgments. Gaucelm Faidit wrote very good tunes and poems but sang worse than any man in the world. Jaufre Rudel wrote good tunes but poor poems. Pons de Capdoill was a good singer, composer, and player of the *vièle*. Guiraut de Borneill, known as the "master of the troubadours" because he was better than any who came before or after him, spent his winters studying. During the summer, he travelled from court to court with two jongleurs to sing his cansos. Peire Cardenal also travelled with a jongleur, although he "read and sang well."

Statements such as these—and many more could be cited—clarify several aspects of troubadour life. In the first place, numerous references to the composition of *mots et sons* make it obvious that troubadours usually wrote both the words and the melodies of their songs. It is exceptional to find that Uc Brunet "did not compose tunes." We should remember, however, that the medieval practice of adapting old tunes to new texts—making *contrafacta*, in other words—also occurs in the repertory of the troubadours and *trouvères*. A single text, moreover, may appear with different melodies in different sources. We therefore cannot say categorically that every melody was written by the author of the poem with which it is associated. Nevertheless, it remains true that the

troubadours normally functioned as both poets and composers. Many also functioned as performers. Even when the biographies make no mention of singing ability, there is no reason to suppose that noble amateurs never entertained—or bored—their households and friends with performances of their own songs. We should probably assume that most of the troubadours did sing, some with considerable skill.

It is worth noting that the biographies designate a number of troubadours as jongleurs and speak of their wandering life. What raised these men above the lowly and anonymous ranks of mere performers—what made them troubadours, in other words—was their creative ability. They continued to perform, however, and by their travels they helped to spread the influence and example of troubadour song beyond the confines of southern France.

31. The *vidas* and *razos* in Provençal are collected in J. Boutière and A.-H. Schutz, *Biographies des troubadours*, rev. ed. by J. Boutière (Paris, 1964).