

CHAPTER XIII

Secular Monophonic Song, III: The Diffusion of Vernacular Song in Other Countries of Western Europe

SECULAR SONG IN GERMANY

In Germany, as in northern France, secular song in the vernacular existed before the influence of the troubadours made itself felt. From the time of the migrant German tribes, singers known as *scops* had been active in social, military, and religious life. As the peoples of Germany adopted a more settled and stationary way of life, wandering entertainers (*Spielleute*) replaced the scops. Counterparts of the jongleurs, the *Spielleute* ranked very low on the social scale, but they played an important role in the preservation of Germanic traditions and the dissemination of Germanic culture. Some of the oldest secular songs, as we might expect, are in Latin. It is probable, however, that folk tales such as those in the Cambridge songs (see above, p. 260) also appeared in the vernacular repertory of the wandering entertainers. Another part of their repertory consisted of epic poems, comparable to the *chanson de geste*, that preserved the ancient legends and pre-Christian mythology of the Germanic peoples. Unfortunately, none of the music for this early repertory has survived, and again we are left with only a few hints as to the nature of an important musical tradition.

THE MINNESINGERS

Despite the existence of this older tradition, the history of German secular song really begins with the development of lyric poetry by the *Minnesingers*, the German equivalent of the troubadours and trouvères. The name reflects their preoccupation with the subject of courtly love (*Minne*), a concept evidently taken over from their Provençal and French predecessors and contemporaries. Depending on their nationality—and degree of chauvinism—European scholars have either emphasized or played down the extent to which the Minnesingers imitated the troubadours and trouvères. Yet the art of the Minnesingers obviously owes much to French influences. Quite apart from their subject matter, which was not totally restricted to courtly love, the Minnesingers

adopted the poetic types, imitated the techniques and forms, and even borrowed the melodies of French and Provençal songs. This debt cannot be ignored.

Most of the poetic types that we have observed in the troubadour and trouvère repertories reappear in the songs of the Minnesingers. Laments of women (*Frauenstrophe*) over the absence or infidelity of lovers are comparable to the *chanson de toile*. Lovers part in songs announcing the dawning of the day (*Tagelied*). The Provençal *tenso* and the *jeu parti* find their counterpart in the *Streitgedicht* (dispute-poem). The *pastourelle* influenced, if it did not provide the chief inspiration for, the many songs that describe rustic revels celebrating the return of spring. The Crusades produced the *Kreuzlied*, and numerous songs deal with other religious or political topics. The German *Leich* corresponds to the French *lai*, both in its treatment of sacred or secular subjects and in its formal characteristics. And finally, of course, there are the songs of courtly love that gave the Minnesingers their name.

Acceptance of the French concept of courtly love in Germany depended upon the existence of an aristocratic society that lived—at least in principle—according to the code of chivalry. Such a society came into existence in the latter half of the twelfth century, particularly at the courts of the Hohenstaufen line of Holy Roman Emperors: Frederick Barbarossa (1152–90), his son Henry VI (1190–97), and grandson Fred-



Two knights in combat illustrate a manuscript of *Parzival*, by Wolfram von Eschenbach (National Library, Vienna).

erick II (1197–1250). In 1156, Frederick Barbarossa married Beatrix of Burgundy and thus established a direct link with the French. At least one trouvère, Guiot de Provins, is known to have been a member of Beatrix's court. (A small town east and somewhat south of Paris, Provins is not to be confused with Provence.) The imperial court also knew the Latin songs of the Archpoet, author of *The Confession of Goliath* and perhaps the greatest of the vagabond poets.¹ The Archpoet's patron from about 1161 to 1166 was Reginald von Dassel, Archbishop of Cologne and Chancellor to Frederick Barbarossa.²

These cultural crosscurrents inevitably stimulated the development of German poetry. Henry VI was himself a Minnesinger and—in one of the ironies of history—held the royal trouvère Richard the Lionhearted for ransom after saving him from death at the hands of the duke of Austria. French influence and the development of the Minnesong were not confined to the imperial court, however. In 1161, the Count of Thuringia sent his sons to the court of Louis VII to receive the education of French princes. One of these sons, Hermann, became an enthusiastic admirer of French poetry and an equally enthusiastic patron of Minnesingers.

The first period of Minnesinger activity extends roughly from 1160 to 1220, the same years that saw the first flowering of trouvère song in France. During this time, interest in the production of lyric poetry and song spread throughout Germany, and Minnesingers came from many different and widely separated places. Dietmar von Aist was an Austrian nobleman, Heinrich von Veldeke came from the region near Maastricht, now in southeastern Holland. Between these extremes, Friedrich von Hausen came from the Rhineland near Mainz; Hartmann von Aue was a Swabian; Rudolf von Fenis was a Swiss count; Heinrich von Morungen came from Thuringia, Wolfram von Eschenbach from Bavaria, and Walther von der Vogelweide from the Tyrol. At one time or another, several of these men were associated with Count Hermann of Thuringia or with the Hohenstaufen emperors. Minnesingers from the higher levels of the aristocracy had their own courts, of course, and did not depend on patronage. Members of the lesser nobility, however, often travelled from court to court as some of the troubadours had done before them. Of these wandering singers, perhaps the most notable and certainly one of the best poets was Walther von der Vogelweide (c. 1170–1228). Despite the widespread activity of these and other men, almost no melodies from the first period have survived. Some of the poems obviously imitate or paraphrase Provençal or French models, and

1. Original text and translation of the *Confessio* in H. Waddell, *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (Baltimore, 1952), p. 182.
2. Reginald's request that an epic poem celebrating the emperor's Italian campaign be completed in a week drew an indignant refusal, but the Archpoet on one occasion did receive Frederick's applause. *Ibid.*, p. 338.



A portrait of Walther von der Vogelweide, from the *Manessische Handschrift* (Heidelberg).

scholars have reconstituted a repertory of early Minnesongs by adapting the melodies of these models to the corresponding German texts.³ This procedure is somewhat dubious, especially when similarity of poetic form is the only indication that the German text is a contrafactum. Even more dubious is the application of triple meters to the Minnesinger versions. German prosody, unlike Provençal and French, was based on the number of accented syllables in each line. Unaccented syllables could be added or subtracted, either within or at the beginning of a line. Thus the number of syllables in each line does not remain constant, and notes must be added or combined in ornaments to make the French melodies fit the German poems. These difficulties, and the uncertainty as to whether the Minnesingers actually did borrow their melodies from the troubadours and trouvères, make examination of the early repertory somewhat pointless. One of the few poems for which we possess the complete melody is the famous *Palestine Song* of Walther von der Vogelweide.⁴ According to Gennrich, even this melody is based on one by Jaufre Rudel. In reality, the two melodies bear only slight resemblance to each other, and Gennrich's claim seems a bit extravagant.⁵ We may perhaps allow that here, at least, we have an original Minnesinger tune.

3. In Gennrich, *Troubadours, Trouvères*, the first ten German songs are listed as contrafacta of troubadour or trouvère songs. Similarly, in Seagrave and Thomas, *Songs of the Minnesingers*, all but two or three of the first fifteen songs are contrafacta.
4. The piece has been many times reprinted: NOHM, 2, p. 253; HAM, No. 20b; and Seagrave and Thomas, *Songs*, pp. 89–91, in three different rhythmic versions.
5. Gennrich, *Troubadours, Trouvères*, note 6b on p. 71. The two pieces appear on pp. 12 and 51.

Walther von der Vogelweide represents the high point in the "classic" period of Minnesinger activity, yet his poems already depart from the classic ideal of courtly love. The artificiality of this ideal had produced a "deadlock in the love-lyric" that Walther broke "by removing its prime cause—the unattainable lady."⁶ Love, as with the Latin poets, again became mutual and human. The same humanity pervades Walther's political and moralistic songs, and it has been said that his chief contribution lay in raising such songs to a high literary level.⁷ Known as *Sprüche* (proverbs), songs of this type are obviously related both to the moral-satiric poems of the *Carmina Burana* and to the sirventes of the troubadours. During the thirteenth century, *Sprüche* became increasingly popular with German poets, who—like their French counterparts—came more and more from bourgeois rather than aristocratic circles. With this development, interest in courtly love declined still further, and other types of songs began to appear. Monophonic song in Germany was embarking on the path that would lead to the Meistersingers of the Renaissance.

The trend away from songs of courtly love is even more evident in the poetry of Walther's younger contemporary Neidhart von Reuenthal (c. 1190–after 1236). A knight of limited means, Neidhart sang at courts in Bavaria and Austria, but he used the techniques and forms of aristocratic poetry to depict rustic life and manners. Almost all of Neidhart's poems fall into two classes: summer songs or winter songs. In these poems, as a rule, a description of the season precedes a realistic narrative of some incident in which the poet often participates. The final stanzas usually take a more personal turn, sometimes give Neidhart's name, and provide the little information that we have about his life. Because the summer and winter poems often describe revelry and dancing, many scholars have assumed that the songs themselves were intended as music for dancing. The assumption seems unlikely for a number of reasons. Refrains may not be an essential feature of dance songs, but their complete absence in the poems of Neidhart already arouses suspicion. Furthermore, neither the length and content of the poems nor their sophisticated poetic and musical forms resemble in any way the known dance songs of the time. If anything, Neidhart's poems suggest a mocking, perhaps semidramatic portrayal of rustic manners by a skilled soloist for the amusement of an audience conscious of its superiority.

Whatever their function may have been, Neidhart's summer and winter poems established a vogue that lasted for many years and produced many imitators. As a result of this popularity, Neidhart is the first Minnesinger for whom we possess a relatively large number of melodies. The most extensive collection of songs attributed to him dates

6. A. T. Hatto and R. J. Taylor, *The Songs of Neidhart von Reuenthal*, p. 3.

7. Seagrave and Thomas, *Songs*, p. 81.

from the fifteenth century. It contains 132 poems, each of which is preceded by staves for the melody; but the copyist entered only forty-five melodies. Of these, fifteen belong to poems generally acknowledged as genuine Neidhart. The rest, classified as pseudo-Neidhart, are by later and inferior imitators. Two or three more genuine poems with melodies appear in other manuscript sources.⁸

The summer songs are generally regarded as belonging to the earlier period of Neidhart's activity. Their poetic stanzas tend to be short and relatively simple in form, and the two surviving melodies for these poems are continuous with no pattern of phrase repetition. The winter songs, on the other hand, have longer stanzas as a rule with elaborate tripartite forms. The melodies reflect these forms by their use of the pattern *aab*, the so-called *Bar form* that characterizes German song for several centuries to come. (The German names for the *a* and *b* sections are *Stollen* and *Abgesang*.) *Bar form* is obviously related to the *canso* and *chanson* of the troubadours and *trouvères*, but it never led to forms that included refrains, such as the French *ballade*. Instead, composers contented themselves with creating different patterns of phrase repetition within the overall *aab* structure. The *b* sections might be entirely new, or they might repeat one or more phrases from the *a* section. When both sections close with the same phrase or phrases, the result is known as *rounded Bar form*.

Two examples of Neidhart's songs will illustrate the differences between the two types (AMM, Nos. 48 and 49). The summer song *Ine gesach die heide* (I never saw the heath) has stanzas of eight, rather short lines. The first two pairs of lines could be sung to the same music to produce a tripartite form. However, each of them, and each of the remaining four lines, has its own musical phrase. Thus the melody ignores the structural pattern suggested by the rhyme scheme *ab ab ccdd*. The stanzas of the winter song *Owê, lieber sumer* (Alas, dear summer) are more complex. Their ten, considerably longer lines have the rhyme scheme *abc abc deed* and a melody in typical *Bar form*. The large aspects of this form are obvious, but the subtle interrelationships of the internal phrases lend themselves to different interpretations.

The German method of notating Minnesongs often confronts the modern editor with many problems, a fact that accounts for the variants one finds in transcriptions of the same song from the same manuscript. Unlike French *chansonniers*, which set the first stanza under the melody, German manuscripts normally put the melody—without words—in a blank space above the poem. Single notes predominate, with occasional two-note ligatures. With only a few exceptions, note values are unmeasured, and the ends of phrases are not indicated. The repeated section in *Bar form* is often not written out. Even when the melodic style

8. See Bibliography for various editions of both genuine and pseudo-Neidhart songs.



Neidhart von Reuenthal depicted with his followers in the *Manessische Handschrift* (Heidelberg).

is almost completely syllabic—as is the case with Neidhart's songs—such a notation presents problems for the modern editor. The number of notes and the number of syllables rarely agree, and adjustments of some kind must be made. As a result, we are even less sure than with the troubadours and trouvères that published versions of the Minnesinger repertory present a true picture of what medieval performers actually sang. The lateness of most manuscript sources only adds to this uncertainty.

It is possible, nevertheless, to make some comments about the musical style of Neidhart's songs and about German songs in general. The accentual nature of German poetry—in contrast to French and Provençal—makes the application of regular meters much easier, although it is uncertain whether those meters should be duple or triple.⁹ In either case, the rhythmic solidity and stiffness of German song contrasts sharply with the more fluid grace of French and Provençal. German songs also tend to be more angular in outline, with more and wider skips and frequent triadic progressions. These characteristics may be related in part to the frequent use of scales that are essentially or completely pentatonic. On the other hand, it is sometimes said that the Minnesingers adhered more closely to the system of the church modes than did the troubadours and trouvères. To some extent this too may be true, but modal purity may also be the result of revisions by later generations of singers. Some of the older melodies are modally ambiguous,

9. See the three rhythmic versions of Walther's *Palestine Song* in Seagrave and Thomas, *Songs*, pp. 89–91.

with phrases that seem to alternate between different modes, none of which agrees with the final of the piece. Neidhart's *Ine gesach* is typical. On the whole we may say that, despite certain Germanic traits, the melodies of troubadours, trouvères, and early Minnesingers have much in common. More than anything else it is the different languages with their different types of prosody that distinguish the three groups of poets and composers.

MINNESONG IN THE LATER THIRTEENTH CENTURY AND BEYOND

Some fifty melodies belong to poems that Neidhart's German editors consider to be the work of inferior imitators. Already evident in these pieces is the tendency toward stereotyped musical forms that became even more marked in succeeding centuries. More and more, composers were content to work slight variations on the rounded Bar form. They carried this formal principle so far, indeed, that the second section often consists of but one new phrase, followed by still another repetition of the complete first section. One of the more successful examples of this form, which we may indicate as *aaba*, is the well-known *Maienzit* (May-time), a strictly pentatonic, pseudo-Neidhart song that is often included in musical anthologies.¹⁰ On the whole, however, use of the form suggests poverty of invention rather than economy of means.

In addition to the anonymous imitators of Neidhart, the thirteenth century produced numerous Minnesingers whose names and songs are known. Only slightly younger than Neidhart were Reinmar von Zweter and Tannhäuser. The latter's songs are of interest primarily for the information they give about his life. The second half of the thirteenth century, in Germany as in France, saw the production of monophonic song pass largely from aristocratic to bourgeois poets and composers. Among these men, some of the more important are Meister Alexander (also known as "wild"), Konrad von Würzburg, Herman der Damen, Der Unverzagte (The Undaunted), and Heinrich von Meissen (d. 1318), better known as Frauenlob. The most famous Minnesinger of his day, Frauenlob travelled widely throughout Germany but spent the last years of his life at Mainz, where he was buried in the cathedral. According to an unfounded legend, Frauenlob established the first singing school of the Meistersingers, at Mainz.

Despite the predominance of bourgeois composers, some members of the aristocracy continued to write songs even in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Prince Wizlaw von Rügen (c. 1268–1325) was a contemporary of Frauenlob. Nearly a century later, Count Hugo von

10. Gleason, *EM*, p. 21; Gennrich, *Troubadours, Trouvères*, p. 55. The songs in *HAM* (Nos. 20c and 20d) are also pseudo-Neidhart.

Montfort (1357–1423) wrote poems but retained a musician, Burk Mangolt, to compose the melodies. At about the same time, an otherwise unknown “Monk of Salzburg” was writing songs for the aristocratic court of Archbishop Pilgrim II von Puchheim (1365–96). Finally, the long line of Minnesingers ends with one of its most colorful figures, Oswald von Wolkenstein (1377–1445).¹¹ Both Wolkenstein and the Monk of Salzburg wrote polyphonic as well as monophonic songs. Thus they conclude the development of medieval monophony and begin the history of the German polyphonic Lied in the Renaissance.

The history of the Meistersingers also belongs primarily to the Renaissance. Descended from the bourgeois fraternities of poets and composers (*confréries* in France), the guilds of the Meistersingers established rigid rules for determining the status of their members, for judging the quality of songs, and for governing their singing schools. The inevitable result of such rules was a “sterile and mechanical craftsmanship” that delighted in highly complex poetic forms and rhyme schemes. Gennrich cites a poem of Michel Behaim in which every syllable somewhere has its rhyme “as a curiosity which nevertheless mirrors the spirit of the time.”¹²

For the student of medieval music, the songbooks of the Meistersingers are important because they preserve tunes (*Weisen* or *Töne*) attributed to well-known Minnesingers of earlier times. It is impossible to tell, of course, whether the tunes are genuine, or how much they have been ornamented with the Meistersingers’ characteristic melismas known as *Blumen* (flowers). Matching these tunes with their presumably original texts is an uncertain process at best and usually requires considerable manipulation of the melodies. By this means the song repertory of early Minnesingers has been increased, but the authenticity of the result is open to serious question.¹³ For this and other deficiencies in the manuscript tradition, then, German song remains one of the most enigmatic—and, at the same time, most fascinating—areas of medieval secular monophony.

MONOPHONIC SONG IN ITALY

The kingdom of Sicily, which included Naples and the southern third of Italy, saw the birth of Italian poetry during the reign of Frederick II (1197–1250). Son of Henry VI, Frederick was the last of the great Ho-

11. For a brief account of Oswald’s life and adventures, see GD, 9, p. 351, and Seagrave and Thomas, *Songs*, p. 213 ff.

12. Gennrich, *Troubadours, Trouvères*, p. 11.

13. See Seagrave and Thomas, *Songs*, pp. 93–96, for the textless version of Walther’s *Lange Ton* and the “free adaptation” of this melody to his poem *Ich saz uf eine steine* (I sat upon a stone).

henstaufens to become Holy Roman Emperor (1220–50), yet a king less German would be difficult to imagine. Inheritor of Sicily through his mother, Frederick grew up in the South and did not even visit Germany until 1211. Throughout his life, Sicily and southern Italy remained the scene of Frederick’s major interest and activity. His court won fame and notoriety for its almost Oriental splendor, and his personal gifts won him the designation *stupor mundi* (wonder of the world). More than on the material magnificence of his court or even on his achievements as a statesman, Frederick’s claim to lasting fame rests on the intellectual pursuits that he stimulated and in which he participated. Scholars of all sorts—Christians, Jews, and Moslems; philosophers, scientists, and men of letters—made the Sicilian court the most cultured of its day. Frederick himself wrote a learned treatise on birds and, in lighter moments, joined other writers in the production of lyric verse.

Pope Gregory IX (1227–41) once complained that political expedience rather than conviction accounted for Frederick’s seemingly orthodox belief. The accusation may have contained some element of truth, for, in addition to tolerating Jews and Moslems, Frederick sheltered troubadours who had fled from the horror of the Albigensian Crusade and the terror of the Inquisition. These were not men to spread abroad the concept of love as platonic service, but they did introduce the conceits and conventional themes of troubadour poetry, which the members of the “Sicilian” school then used for frankly sensual expression. Unfortunately, the melodies of these first Italian songs do not survive.

A somewhat different situation prevailed in northern Italy. Here the influence of the troubadours was so strong that Provençal remained the poetic language of choice throughout most of the thirteenth century. For a time, even Dante (1265–1321) debated whether he should write in Provençal or Italian. Of the Italian troubadours who did write in Provençal, the most famous and influential was Sordello of Mantua. Famous for the number of his mistresses and as a seducer of married women, Sordello influenced poets who wrote in the vernacular by his devotion to the concept of spiritual love for an unattainable lady. Faithful but fruitless service to a lady glimpsed briefly, preferably at Mass in the homeland of the troubadours, became an accepted poetic convention. Guido Cavalcanti had his Mandetta; Dante, his Beatrice; and Petrarch, his Laura. The first poets of northern Italy regarded themselves as exponents of a *dolce stil nuovo* (sweet new style), but love—now metaphysical and ethereal—remained the exclusive theme of their lyric verse. This disembodied love seems to have provided little inspiration for composers, and—to the detriment of both poetry and music—the two began to go their separate ways. The tradition of the troubadour as poet-composer declined. Few, if any, of the major Italian poets set their verses to music or even intended them to be sung. *Canzoni* and *sonetti* (little

songs) became songs in name only. Not until the fourteenth century did secular poetry—usually of a less exalted nature—attract the attention of composers. This development belongs primarily to the history of polyphonic rather than monophonic song (see Chapter XVIII).

LAUDE SPIRITUALI

Although Italy produced little secular monophony, we do possess about 150 vernacular songs known as *laude spirituali* (literally, “spiritual praises”). (The word appears in two forms: *lauda*, singular, and *laude*, plural; or *laude*, singular, and *laudi*, plural.) These songs of praise are religious in nature; but, with their Italian texts, they are obviously non-liturgical. They apparently originated in a curious way. From about 1250 to 1350, the devastation of wars and of plagues led to the formation of wandering bands of penitents who sought to atone for the sins of the world by practicing flagellation and, perhaps not simultaneously, by singing *laude*. Some of the older songs in a thirteenth-century manuscript in Cortona are simple and folklike in character and might well have been sung as processional or marching songs. Later songs in two fourteenth-century manuscripts in Florence are considerably more elaborate and suggest performance by expert soloists.¹⁴

Melodically, the *laude spirituali* reveal the influence of Gregorian Chant, of the troubadours, perhaps also of folk song. A popular element is evident too in the obvious derivation of formal characteristics from the round dance with refrain. The basic structure of all *laude* includes an opening refrain (*ripresa*) that recurs after each stanza. However, the *laude* display considerable variety in the internal organization of their melodies and the different ways they relate the stanza to the refrain. The two sections may be completely independent or almost identical. Stanzas longer than the refrain may close with all or part of the refrain melody. When the stanza begins with a new melody that is repeated and then concludes with all of the refrain melody, the form becomes that of the Italian ballata or the French virelai (*AbbaA*).¹⁵ It is probably a mistake, however, to regard the forms of the *laude* as variants of, or deviations from, the fixed form of ballate and virelais. They represent, rather, the developmental stage already observed in French secular song during which round dances with refrains evolved their distinctive and finally “fixed” forms. In Italy, that development is much more evident in the *laude spirituali* than in the secular ballate, which did not make their ap-

14. F. Liuzzi, *La lauda e i primordi della melodia italiana*, contains facsimiles and transcriptions (rhythmically dubious) of *laude* from the Cortona and Florence manuscripts.

15. For characteristic examples of different formal patterns, see the three *laude* in NOHM, 2, pp. 268–69 and three others in HAM, No. 21.

pearance in musical sources until about the middle of the fourteenth century.

A particularly charming *lauda* from the Cortona manuscript, *Laude novella sia cantata* (Let a new song of praise be sung), is addressed to the Virgin Mary (AMM, No. 50). The form of the poem is typical. Stanzas of four lines alternate with a two-line refrain that has the same rhyme for both lines. The first three lines of the stanzas use one rhyme, different each time, but the fourth line always returns to the rhyme of the refrain. The musical form is somewhat less typical. Each line of the refrain has its own melody, but the stanza does not begin with repeated phrases. Instead, it opens with the first phrase of the refrain and closes with the second, both slightly modified. Only the two middle lines of the stanza introduce new phrases. The combination of these poetic and musical procedures may be represented as follows:

Rhyme scheme: AA b bba AA c cca AA d dda etc.
Musical form: AB a'adb' AB a'adb' AB a'adb' etc.

Even more remarkable than the form of *Laude novella* is its tonal organization. The mode is Dorian throughout, except in phrase *d*, which descends into the Hypodorian range. Phrases *a* and *b* both begin with upward skips of a fifth, *d–a*, while phrases *c* and *d* have downward skips, *d'–f* and *f–d*. This emphasis on the notes *d–f–a* continues within the phrases and becomes even stronger in the cadences, which end only on these notes in the order *ad affd ad*, etc. The careful balance of this structure makes the tonal center as obvious as it is in any nineteenth-century tune. Analysis of the way phrases are at once related and contrasted will reveal equal care and artistry. Only the most skillful craftsmanship can have fashioned this little masterpiece of melodic art.

THE GEISSLERLIEDER

The penitential fever soon spread from Italy to Germany, but it did not become particularly virulent north of the Alps until the great plague known as the Black Death devastated most of Europe in 1348–49. Hoping to avert the plague—but probably helping to spread contagion—bands of *Geissler* (flagellants) travelled from town to town throughout Germany. A contemporary chronicle by Hugo von Reutlingen describes a visit of the *Geissler* and records the words and music of some half dozen songs (*Geisslerlieder*).¹⁶ Other manuscripts preserve the

16. The complete chronicle is published in P. Runge, *Die Lieder und Melodien der Geissler des Jahres 1349* (Leipzig, 1900), pp. 24–41.

words but not the melodies of a few more Geisslerlieder. Such a small repertory would scarcely be worthy of mention were it not for its sociological and historical interest. That the flagellants represented a popular religious movement may seem incredible, but that movement was only one expression of an extreme and often excessive piety in the later Middle Ages. And to the Geissler, at least, we owe some of our oldest examples of religious folk songs.

Three of the songs quoted by Hugo von Reutlingen were used in processional or "traveling" songs. The other three accompanied the actual flagellation ceremony. Some scholars have professed to find an influence of the Italian lauda on the Geisslerlieder, but that influence, if it existed at all, must have been very slight. The sophisticated diversity of the laude spirituali contrasts sharply with the simplicity and sameness of the German songs. Rhymed couplets constitute the basic structural element of all the texts, and a limited number of musical phrases are repeated in pairs (*aabb*) or in alternation (*abab*). The songs for the flagellation ceremony illustrate both procedures as well as the general style of all the melodies (Example XIII-1). In the opening stanza of the first song, *Nu tret herzuo*, three lines of text are sung to the first musical phrase, an irregularity that recurs on the second phrase of the fourth stanza. The remainder of the poem is entirely in rhymed couplets, and all stanzas except the last use only phrases *a* and *b*. In the final stanza a new phrase (*c*) alternates with phrase *b* transposed up a fourth (*b'*). The distribution of these three different phrases in the seven stanzas of *Nu tret herzuo* is as follows:

- | | |
|------|---------------------------|
| I. | <i>aaa bb</i> |
| II. | <i>aa bb</i> |
| III. | <i>aa bb bb bb</i> |
| IV. | <i>aa bbb</i> |
| V. | <i>aa bb bb</i> |
| VI. | <i>aa bb bb bb</i> |
| VII. | <i>aa cb' cb' cb' cb'</i> |

The second and third flagellation songs use the melodic phrases of the first. The third includes textual and, of course, musical quotations from both of the first two; and all three end with the same final stanza (VII above). This "refrain" serves both a musical and ceremonial function, for it occurs each of the three times that the flagellants prostrated themselves in the form of a cross. In the third song, a new phrase in the penultimate stanza (*d* in Example XIII-1) adds to the climactic effect. Repetitive in itself, phrase *d* is stated three times in the middle of the stanza, the complete form of which is *aa ddd b'b'b'*.

Example XIII-1: *Phrases of Flagellation Songs, with First Stanza of Nu tret herzuo*

Nu tret her-zuo der dds - sen wel - le
Flie-hen von die hais - sun hel - le
Lu - ci - fer ist dds ge - sel - le

Wen er be-hapt mit bech er lapt
Des flühn wir in hab wir den sin.

Now approaches the deluge of evil. Let us flee from burning Hell. Lucifer is an evil companion. Whomever he seizes, he besmears with pitch. Therefore we want to shun him.

The melodic phrases of the processional songs are equally short and simple. Two of the songs are musically related and use repetitive formal patterns such as *abcb* or *abcbb*.¹⁷ The third consists of fifty-seven rhymed couplets that are all sung to the same two phrases, each of which is followed by a different refrain. The first line of every couplet concludes with "Kyrie eleyson"; the second, with "Alleluia: Globet sis du, Maria" (Praise be to thee, Maria). The first couplet of this song is given in Example XIII-2. It seems likely that one or two leaders sang the changing texts of the rhymed couplets and the entire group responded with the refrains. This manner of performance would emphasize the close relationship of the song to the Latin litany, a liturgical chant with congregational responses that was sung on more orthodox occasions. To a lesser extent the influence of the litany is evident in the repetitive forms of all the *Geisslerlieder*. It is these forms, together with the folk-like quality of the melodies, that distinguish the *Geisslerlieder* from the more elaborate and more consciously artistic *laude spirituali*. Although the Italian songs may have absorbed some popular elements, they owe much more to the sophisticated art of the troubadours.

17. Reese, MMA, p. 239, gives one of the processional songs (incomplete).

Example XIII-2: Processional Geisslerlied (First of 57 Couplets)

Ma-ri-a, un-ser fro - we Ky-ri-e-ley - son.

Was in goet-li-cher scho - we, Al - le - lu - ia! Glo-bet sis du, Ma-ri - a.

Mary, our Lady, Kyrie eleison.

Who, in godly sight, Alleluia. Praise be to thee, Maria.

THE SPANISH AND GALICIAN-PORTUGUESE CANTIGAS

Monophonic song in Spain, even more than in Italy, must be regarded as a direct outgrowth of the troubadour movement. From the time of William IX, contact between the ruling families of southern France and the Christian kings of Spain was frequent and close. The large retinues that accompanied these rulers on their many visits to each other naturally included troubadours and jongleurs, who also travelled widely on their own. French troubadours found a ready welcome at Spanish courts, and Provençal became the language of poetry south of the Pyrenees as it did south of the Alps. In the thirteenth century, however, songs in the vernacular speech of the Iberian peninsula began to make their appearance. The oldest examples are seven *canciones de amor* (love songs) by Martin Codax, for which six melodies survive. Codax came from the Galician town of Vigo on the west coast of Spain just above Portugal, and the language of his poems is Galician-Portuguese. Both texts and music are simple in form and style and suggest a derivation from folk idioms or dance songs rather than from the more sophisticated love songs of the troubadours.¹⁸

A much larger and more important collection of songs in Galician-Portuguese, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, was assembled at the court of Alfonso the Wise, King of Castile and León (1252-84). A patron of learning and letters, of troubadours and jongleurs, Alfonso himself may have contributed some of the more than 400 anonymous songs in the collection. In any case, the *Cantigas* originated in a cultured and aristocratic society that numbered troubadour song among its many amusements.

Among the more unusual aspects of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* are

18. The songs are published in I. Pope, "Mediaeval Latin Background of the Thirteenth-Century Galician Lyric," *Speculum*, 9 (1934), pp. 3-25. One song is available in NOHM, 2, p. 261.



A portrait of King Alfonso the Wise and his musicians, from a manuscript of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Madrid, Escorial).

the unity of their subject matter and the systematic arrangement of the collection as a whole. The great majority of songs recount miracles performed by the Virgin Mary, one song for each miracle. Every tenth song, from No. 10 to No. 400, punctuates the series with a more general song in her praise. The regularity of this arrangement is broken only at the beginning of the collection, where a sung Prologue precedes the first song, which is also a general song of praise. In the manuscripts of the *Cantigas*, the songs are carefully numbered; rubrics identify the subject of each; and miniatures of musicians performing on different instruments further distinguish each of the songs of praise.¹⁹

The texts of the *Cantigas* are not as far removed from the traditions of the troubadours and trouvères as they might at first seem. Indeed, the texts themselves establish a relationship. The Prologue, which may have been written by King Alfonso himself, lists the qualities needed to compose well (*ben trobar*), and the author of the song of praise *Rosa das rosas* (Rose of roses) would be the "troubador" of Our Lady.²⁰ We may note further that the last of the troubadours, Guiraut Riquier, who spent ten years or more at the court of Alfonso the Wise, celebrated the Virgin Mary in many of his songs. For the benefit of the Inquisition, other poets also proved the purity of their love by substituting Mary for an earthly lady. We need not accuse them all of hypocrisy, however. The cult of the Virgin was very strong in the thirteenth century, and many of the songs addressed to her must be sincere expressions of common religious feelings. Those feelings found further expression in accounts of the numerous miracles attributed to the Virgin Mary. More than all the other saints in heaven, Mary entered people's daily lives to provide miraculous solutions for their insoluble problems. One of her special provinces was the protection of errant women from the consequences of their sins, but men—if they were not faithless husbands—might also

19. A facsimile of a manuscript from the Escorial is included in the monumental edition of the *Cantigas* published by H. Anglès (see Bibliography).

20. For the stanza with a translation, see Reese, MMA, p. 247-48.



This lavishly illustrated manuscript of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* provides a wealth of information about medieval musical instruments. Note especially the fanciful bagpipes on the right (Madrid, Escorial).

receive her aid. Mary's miraculous performances had already attracted poets before the time of Alfonso the Wise. Perhaps the most famous collection of stories was *Les Miracles de Notre Dame* by Gautier de Coincy (d. 1236), a trouvère who was also a Benedictine monk. Gautier did not mean his narrative poetry to be sung, but he varied his stories of Our Lady's miracles by introducing some thirty-seven songs with their melodies. At least in part, therefore, *Les Miracles de Notre Dame* established a literary and musical precedent for the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, and both works evidently fulfilled contemporary needs. The survival of Gautier's *Miracles* in no fewer than eighty-four manuscripts attests to the work's enormous popularity and influence. Delight and belief in the miracles may have been genuine enough, but the detailed accounts of Boccaccio-like situations that called for Mary's intervention suggest that audiences enjoyed the sins at least as much as the salvation.

Modern scholars regard the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* as "one of the greatest monuments of medieval music," and the four different manuscripts that preserve the songs indicate an equally high regard on the part of their contemporaries. In one manuscript the staves for the music were left blank, but the other three contain both texts and melodies. As a result of their unexpected use of mensural notation, the *Cantigas* are unique in being the only large repertory of monophonic song that can be transcribed with assurance in modern meters and note values. Many songs are in triple meter, sometimes transcribed as 6/4 or 6/8. Others are clearly duple. Songs in triple meter do not always adhere to the rhythmic modes, and some do not maintain a regular meter throughout but change from triple to duple or vice versa. Songs of this kind may reflect an older, more freely rhythmic style, or they may merely record the licenses of contemporary performance. In any case, the various meters of the *Cantigas* should probably not be used to justify the application of similar meters to repertories in unmeasured notation.

In addition to the unity of their subject matter, the *Cantigas* display a uniformity of poetic and musical form remarkable for a collection of this

size. The great majority of poems begin with a refrain that is repeated before each stanza and again at the end of the poem. The music of the stanza proper begins with one or two new phrases that are repeated and then concludes with all or part of the refrain melody. The form common to many *Cantigas*, that is, may be represented as *A bba A bba A*, etc., the pattern of the French virelai, the Italian ballata, and some laude spirituali. Despite the seeming rigidity of this form, it allows for considerable freedom in the distribution and relationship of phrases within the larger sections. Thus, analysis of individual phrases reveals many variants of the basic form. *Rosa das rosas* (No. 10) has the pattern *AB ccdb AB*.²¹ A much more economical form, *AB a'a' ab AB*, appears in *Aque serven todo'los celestiaes* (She whom all celestial beings serve).²²

Santa Maria amar (We should love Holy Mary; AMM, No. 51) is almost equally economical in its setting of a much longer text. Here, three or four different phrases provide all the melody for a refrain of six lines and a stanza of twelve:

ABA' ABC dba' dba' aba' abc ABA' ABC

Once again, however, the letter designations are somewhat misleading because they conceal interrelationships of seemingly different phrases. The third phrase (*A'*) varies the first three notes of phrase *A* by rhythmic displacement and one change of pitch. The rhythmic pattern of phrase *A'* then begins phrase *C*, which ends with the cadential formula of phrases *A* and *A'* transposed down a fifth. Following phrase *C*, the only one to end on the final of the mode (**d**), the striking entry of phrase *d* an octave higher marks the beginning of the stanza. Yet phrases *A* and *d* are rhythmically identical, and their last two measures are melodically identical as well. Just as phrase *C* is the only one to end on the low **d**, phrase *A* is the only one to begin on that note and phrase *d* is the only one in which the melody reaches the upper octave (**d'**). By the placement and restricted use of these pitch extremes, the unknown composer has shaped the simple yet subtly varied and interrelated phrases into another masterpiece of melodic art.

Both the origin of the form common to so many *Cantigas* and the sources of their melodic style have been the subject of speculation and controversies. It must be stressed here, however, that the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* are the first songs to make extensive use of the form that later became fixed in the French virelai and Italian ballata. In melodic style the *Cantigas* are simple, concise, and essentially syllabic. Ornamental figures are few in number and rarely exceed two or three notes to a syllable. Melodic motion is chiefly stepwise, with occasional skips of a third. Larger skips usually occur only between phrases. The relatively

21. Reese, MMA, p. 247.

22. HAM, No. 22c. Two more *Cantigas* in HAM and five in NOHM, 2, pp. 262-66 provide further examples for analysis.

short phrases that result from the syllabic style are defined by clear cadences, by their rhythmic shape, and by the repetitive nature of the forms. All of these characteristics combine to produce melodies that are often dancelike, almost popular in tone. Some writers find in the *Cantigas* "a flavour which is unmistakably Spanish."²³ Usually, however, the ingredients that create the flavor are left unspecified. One wonders how much it depends upon the presence of a Spanish text. Whatever one's answer may be, the *Cantigas* bestow upon us some of the most attractive and tuneful melodies in the entire repertory of monophonic song. If we accept in the proper spirit the naive accounts of miracles and the situations that called them forth, we can experience today the pleasure and amusement that the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* provided for the court of Alfonso the Wise.

MONOPHONIC SONG IN ENGLAND

For a number of reasons, England contributed little to the history of medieval secular monophony. Eleanor of Aquitaine, it is true, patronized troubadours and trouvères, but their art apparently gained little foothold in England. In the twelfth century, we must remember, England was only a small part of a much larger continental empire that included Normandy, Anjou, and Aquitaine. Eleanor's husband, Henry II (1154–89), spent more than half his reign on the continent. Their son, Richard the Lionhearted, was in England for only six months during his ten years as king (1189–99). Moreover, the language of the court was Norman-French, and any songs produced there would belong to the literature of the trouvères. Even after much of the continental territory passed from the English to the French kings, French remained the language of the English court throughout the thirteenth century and much of the fourteenth as well. Only scattered examples of vernacular poetry and prose survive from the period preceding the first flowering of English literature in the second half of the fourteenth century with Wycliffe's Bible, William Langland's *Vision of Piers Plowman* (c. 1370), and the works of Chaucer (c. 1340–1400). We need not be surprised, therefore, to find that the Middle Ages produced only a handful of songs with English texts.

The oldest English lyrics that survive with their melodies are three songs attributed to St. Godric, a Saxon hermit in northern England who died in 1170. Legend has it that the songs were dictated to Godric in angelic visions, and they give an impression of being liturgical songs in the vernacular. Two are prayers—one to the Virgin Mary and one to St. Nicholas. In the third, angels sing "Kyrie eleison," before and after a

23. NOHM, 2, p. 263.

song by Godric's dead sister, who tells of her treatment in heaven.²⁴ The notation of these songs is unmeasured, and they should undoubtedly be sung in the free rhythms of the liturgical music they resemble.

English songs of the thirteenth century are only slightly more numerous. One of the best, *Worldes blis*, has been published a number of times.²⁵ The pessimistic tone of this lament for the transience of earthly joys is matched by another song that reminds man of the brevity of life itself: *Man mei longe him lives wene* (Man may think his life will be long).²⁶ In both poems, the first four lines of the stanzas have the rhyme scheme abab, which the melodies reflect by repetitions that remind us of the form often used in the continental canso and chanson. The repetition is exact (abab) in *Man mei longe*. The first phrases of *Worldes blis* have the pattern abcb, but phrase c twice repeats a motive from phrase a. Both songs also end with modified versions of their opening phrases. More purely secular, but scarcely more joyous, is the fragmentary song *Mirie it is while sumer ilast*.²⁷ One of the rare English love songs that has been preserved with its melody is *Byrd one brere* (Bird on a briar; AMM, No. 52). The song was copied on the back of a twelfth-century papal bull, but its mensural notation proves that it must date from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.²⁸ Although longs, breves, and semi-breves are clearly differentiated, transcription is still problematical because the written values do not always result in regular meters. The version in AMM follows the values of the original and makes no attempt to achieve metrical uniformity by means of editorial changes. Only the text of the first stanza was placed under the melody, and further difficulties arise from discrepancies in the number of syllables in some lines of the second and third stanzas. In the fourth line, for example, the upbeat apparently serves only the first stanza. If it is not omitted in the others, it must become the first beat of a measure in 4/4. Another problem arises from the notation of the second staff in the original, which begins with the word "Rewe" (mercy). The unusual upward skip of a sixth in the middle of a phrase suggests that the scribe may have used the wrong clef. If he did, the melody from this point onward should be read a third lower. Finally, the disposition of text and music in the manuscript indicates that the song may have been intended as a polyphonic piece. The first part of the text—to "Rewe" again—has

24. For the prayer to the Virgin, see HAM, No. 23a. The song of Godric's sister is printed in Reese, MMA, p. 241. All of the songs are in J. B. Trend, "The First English Songs," ML, 9 (1928), pp. 120–23, with a facsimile on p. 119.

25. HAM, No. 23b; NOHM, 2, p. 251. Facsimile in Parrish, NMM, Pl. XIX.

26. Reese, MMA, p. 243.

27. Facsimile in Stainer, *Early Bodleian Music*, 2, Pl. 3. The melody is in part illegible, in part completely missing.

28. Facsimile in J. Saltmarsh, "Two Medieval Love-Songs set to Music," *Antiquaries Journal*, 15 (1935), facing p. 3. (The other "medieval" song dates from the reign of Henry VIII in the sixteenth century!)

two staves drawn above it, with the lower left blank. The rest of the text has only one staff above it, but the two lines of text are separated by enough space to accommodate another complete staff. It would seem that the scribe who copied the text anticipated a two-part piece written in score in the characteristically English manner (see Chapter XX).

Despite these uncertainties with regard to *Byrd one breve*, the attractiveness of both its text and its melody makes us wish that the English had been less reticent in giving musical expression to their amorous moods. Indeed, from the quality of the extant songs it is evident that England must have enjoyed a high level of vernacular musical culture in the thirteenth century. How many pieces have been lost we shall never know, but none of those that do exist can have been the only work of an inexperienced composer. It is unfortunate—and frustrating—that we should possess such scanty remains of an obviously rich heritage.

CHAPTER XIV

Sacred and Secular Polyphony in the Thirteenth Century

The thirteenth century witnessed a new relationship between musical activities that had hitherto followed separate paths. From the beginning, polyphony had been the province of church musicians, who used it as an ornament of liturgical chant, including tropes and sequences, and for settings of religious or moral Latin poetry. Purveyors of music for secular entertainment in the vernacular had confined themselves almost entirely to monophonic song. With the appearance of the secular French motet in the thirteenth century, the two paths began to cross. Monophonic songs continued to be written, even into the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but they were soon overshadowed and eventually stifled by the luxuriant growth of secular polyphony that quickly followed the creation of the motet. The effect of this new form on liturgical polyphony was even more immediate and therefore more dramatic. By 1225 the composition of organum appears to have ceased, and by the middle of the century the conductus too was nearly extinct. The motet was now, and for the next fifty years remained, not merely the preeminent, but almost the sole form of polyphonic composition. We are adopting the attitude of its contemporaries, therefore, when we regard the sacred or secular motet with Latin or French texts as the representative form of thirteenth-century polyphony.

The addition of secular French texts to discant clausulae appears to have followed closely on the creation of motets as sacred tropes (see Chapter X). This is evident from both the oldest motet repertory and the name of the form itself. In the thirteenth century, *mots* (words) commonly designated the text of a secular song. Hence the Latinized form *motetus* was an appropriate name for a clausula with a secular French text. This derivation of the name from French rather than Latin is an indication that the early motet with Latin text was not yet regarded as an independent form. At that time, a clausula with an added Latin trope would have still been a clausula, but now *cum littera* (with text), a phrase that applied to any polyphony in syllabic rather than melismatic style. From the beginning, presumably, clausulae with French texts were intended for secular entertainment and had no functional connection with organum. As pieces with Latin texts more gradually lost that connec-