

Music 160: Secular Medieval Music

[Keri McCarthy]: So you've listened to some church music at this point from the Middle Ages, and we've discussed a little bit the fact that there is a lot of popular music. There is a lot of popular music from this time period. The documentation of it is missing, and this is something that comes up often in student essays, and I just want to clarify, was there music outside of the church? Yes. Was there lots of it? Yes. Did people go out to the bar on the weekends and get crazy and bring their *veiles*, which is an early violin? Yes, we know this happened, but we don't know what it sounded like, which is why often textbooks sort of shy away from discussing that type of music, but remember, what types of artifacts do we have? We have drawings, we have descriptions, and in some cases we have examples of instruments left over from this time period, so yes, there was a very large and active popular music scene in the Middle Ages, don't worry.

Unfortunately, the people who were literate and interested in preserving this were preserving it for their own means and needs, and that would not have extended to the lower class, which was a large majority of the people who were active socially during the Middle Ages. We have the church, which we've talked about, and the other venue for performance would be in the courts, and so that music has been largely preserved.

One interesting aspect that I want to talk with you a little bit about court music would be the troubadours and trouveres. They were French artists around the 1100's and 1200's. These were people, very interestingly, who could move from lower class into upper class through intellect and training, through their artistry mostly with word. Troubadours and trouveres were known very much so- and by the way, troubadours come from, what was it, North of France, trouveres from the South of France. They spoke two different languages, but they share a similar heritage. Troubadours came first and we're going to talk about the Countess of Dia. She herself was a troubadour. This was a group of artists who were known mostly for their writing, for poetry, and that poetry is largely collected or was largely documented at the time and continued to be used, and therefore we still have the poetry from that time period. Often times that poetry was set to music, which was perhaps a secondary function- that it would be nice to be able to sing it as well it would to recite it, and so the music is not as prolific as what we have in terms of the writing. And these people were considered artists mostly on the written word rather than on their ability to write a beautiful melody, but nonetheless, we do have music from this time period thanks to the troubadours. They were traveling musicians; they would go from court to court, and they would be able to, say, eat at the servants table at the noble's place and have a place to sleep and provide entertainment night after night in one court and then move to the next court, maybe provide gossip or some sort of interesting information about what was going on in the court next door, and so that was sort of a useful function that they served within the community, and, again, if you were lower class but had the ability to write or recite really beautifully, to create artistic language in the poetry or possibly to create some sort of music associated with that language or with other people's poetry, you had the ability to elevate yourself, to entertain and work within a noble court, within a noble household, and that was something that was though unusual a real

possibility for somebody at the lower level, in the surf community, and something that was just unheard of in most places in the community during the Middle Ages.

Countess of Dia, as you can probably figure out, was a woman married to a Count, so she was already in the upper class but had a gift for her writing and her music. You're going to hear a piece from her called, "I Sing." The troubadours were a bunch of whiners, and they liked to complain a lot about love. *Fin'amor* is what they called it, and it was this idealized sense of love where they were in love with somebody with the court next door, and they were madly in love with them, and they would be in love with them the rest of their life, but they couldn't have them because they were married or some sort of problem emerged where these two people could not be together, and so that was very often the topic for troubadour music or troubadour poetry, and you hear that with Countess of Dia as she's singing about how "I sing about that- I would rather not because he's in love with someone else" or he's not in love with her despite her intelligence, despite her looks she can't get him to pay attention, and so you'll hear that. As you look through your textbook, we've got translations in there so and you may want to take a look at those.

It may be useful to think about the fact of language as you're listening to musical examples as the course progresses, can you hear that this is in an early French language or at least can you hear that this is not in Latin? It's a good way to identify pieces that are sacred, Latin, versus secular, vernacular. Vernacular would be the language that was in use at the time that most people spoke in the streets, so we have things like Old French, Old English, Italian. Those would be vernacular languages. The sacred language was always Latin, which leads to the interesting question of did people understand the Latin enough when they went to church on Sunday to be able to understand what was being sung to them? And apparently that was sort of a problem because no, they weren't being educated in Latin, and so over time you would develop sort of a habit or an understanding of what was occurring, and sometimes you would be allowed to sing in the church. There were certain congregational Gregorian chants that were allowed like the Credo, but the "I believe" portion where they wanted everybody to share together- but for the most part, popular music was sung in the vernacular and would have been the music of the people that they would have understood independently.

Notice also in terms of time period how similar this **DaDia** piece is- it has instrumentation, which means it wasn't used in the church. Instruments were largely not allowed in the church. Organ comes over time and would have been allowed during the Middle Ages, late Middle Ages, to be used like in the **Puritan**, but the **DaDia** uses an instrument that sounds more like a guitar, a strummed stringed-instrument. That is a good indication, if you're listening on an exam, that it is not a sacred piece of music because instruments were not allowed in the church. They could not further the word of God, and therefore, they obscured it, and so for that reason, they were not used, so we hear this and we think it's definitely secular because of the language, it's definitely secular because there's an instrument being used, and- however, listen to how similar this music sounds otherwise to that of Hildegard. You have a single- a female singing long line without rhythm because this is an early example of Middle Ages polyphony, and the melody stays largely

within small intervals, so if you can hear all that and relate the music across from the time period, these two pieces of music are very consistent with what early music from the 1100's sounds like from the Middle Ages and polyphony being less important or less available due to notation. So go ahead and give a listen to that.