

PROGRAM NOTES

The sophisticated art of trobar (Occitan poetry) went hand in hand with the instrumental virtuosity of the jongleurs (troubadours). The jongleurs' music was not notated, and a very small part of the medieval dances and instrumental music has come down to us. Nevertheless, we know from numerous texts that the art of improvisation and ornamentation and the transformation of song into instrumental form—and vice versa—were skills that the jongleurs perfected. To add to the elegant Occitan courtly style of trobar, we include instrumental dances and improvisations based on melodic and modal material drawn from jongleur songs. They speak for themselves as homage to the talent of these anonymous minstrels.

The program's music raises a fundamental issue concerning the historical transmission of the medieval Occitan and northern French lyrics: what essential role did the jongleurs play working alongside the troubadours and trouvères. The majority of the songs on the program are in Occitan, the language of the troubadours. These poets all shared the language and the art that they termed "trobar." They composed both texts and music, and sometimes also performed their own creations. This tradition first appeared in the Limousin region (of central France) at the close of the eleventh century, with the earliest of the known troubadours, Guillaume IX (Guillaume, the ninth Duke of Aquitaine and seventh Count of Poitiers). Because he was a performer, he was considered to be a buffoon by the clerical chroniclers at his court. The term "troubadour" relates to the image of the jongleur, a word which derives from the Latin *joculator*, the name coming from *joc*, meaning play or sport. From antiquity, a *joculator* was regarded as a person of ill repute in the same category as prostitutes and was criticized by the Church as mocking the divine image that each man carries within himself. "Trobar" was thus associated with "joglar."

Guillem Augier Novella, a jongleur in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, opened a debate with a certain Bertran d'Aurel, saying, "Bertran, you who are used to frequenting thieves...." Guillem asked Bertran which profession was the more dishonorable—that of jongleur or that of thief. Bertran replied that Guillem could well know that for himself, since he had exercised both professions! In the mind of an average medieval person, the words jongleurs and thieves were interchangeable and accorded well with the reputation attached to Guillem.

Vidas, brief narrative biographies about the Occitan troubadours, often appear as introductions to their collections of poetry. By the late thirteenth century, the frequently used title "jongleur" had apparently lost its derogatory meaning.

Cercamon, for example, one of the earliest Gascon troubadours, is called a jongleur, since he composed both texts and music that he sang as he traveled the world—hence his name, meaning "seeks the world." One of his contemporaries, Marcabru, is referred to as a trobador, which indicates that the two terms were used interchangeably. In the romance describing the celebrations of the marriage of Flamenca, we discover a passage that exemplifies the musical and poetic role of the jongleurs who performed on all kinds of instruments as they presented their stories.

Whoever knew a fresh viol tune,
a song, a descort or a lay,
did his best to make himself heard....
One plays the harp, another the viol,
one the flute, another whistles ...
one speaks, another accompanies his words....
One makes marionettes dance,
another juggles with knives....
None neglects his calling ...

(vv. 592-616)

The final two pieces demonstrate one way in which we can interpret troubadour music. Poems preserved in manuscript are not always accompanied by their musical notation, but were transmitted orally until they were eventually written down towards the end of the thirteenth century. Additionally, they were recorded in Italy, far

from their place of origin. This “double distancing” has caused irredeemable losses: only some ten percent of troubadour music remains. But at the same time, it gave rise to *contrafacta*, music with one text substituted for another without substantial change to the metrical patterns. Modern interpreters can therefore rely on the musical notation accompanying more recent poems to add music to the poetry of earlier troubadours. In fact, not unlike poets of the past, this practice allows modern interpreters to become jongleurs in their turn.

In this way, the poem by the Comtesse de Die, which lacks the original musical notation, is sung on the contrafactum of an Aquitaine poem that has the same metrical structure. The multilingual descort of Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, which has no music, is sung to a melody with the same metrical form belonging to a poem by Guiraut Riquier, the “last troubadour.” (A prolific poet in every genre, he lived in Narbonne in the thirteenth century.) Poems circulated with their music throughout all the lands that spoke *langue d’oc* (the Occitan language). They also reached Italy, Catalonia, France and Galicia, as this rich selection of pieces shows. Jongleurs adapted words and languages to the metrical and musical structures, which they then played with all their instruments.

To compose and sing was the troubadour’s practice. Did they accompany themselves on instruments? Iconographic sources, such as painted manuscripts and sculpted capitals (though of a later date), attest to this fact. Jongleurs and jongleresses (the texts and iconography show that the profession also was practiced by women) were well received by the public—especially when they enlivened their performances, memorizing a profusion of texts along with the rhythms and melodies. To cite a specific example, the *vida* of some troubadours relate that Gaucelm Faidit had an unpleasant voice or could not sing, although he could compose; a jongleur would therefore accompany him in order to display his talents. This role could have been filled by a woman, as can be seen in a picture that shows a woman playing a large tambourine. It is from the margin of a manuscript containing love poems.

The theme of love is central: love betrayed, love that has gone cold, or love that drives the lover mad to the point of uttering desperate words and composing disjunct melodies to express love’s sufferings. Jaufré Rudel exclaims, “It is sharper than thorns/the pain that is cured by sexual fulfillment.” The game of seduction increases or decreases the distance between the poet (purveyor of words and melodies) and his lady (mistress of her attractions who plays on the other’s heart as on a subtle instrument). The art of trobar contributes to the development of the worth, the merit, and the value of what is known as *courtoisie* between the participants in the game: the troubadour and his lady.

Trobar, as an expression of the ideal of *fin’amor*, or refined love, brings together the values that in the course of the twelfth century became the prerogative of the principal southern-French courts. It was a means to counter the unpleasantness of day-to-day relationships. The texts and music of the troubadours were perceived very early on as a rich source of inspiration and hope. Through our modern interpretations, once again we can experience the joy and pain they must have felt singing about love.

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—English translation edited by Margaret Panofsky