The "Not-so-precisely Measured" Music of the Middle Ages

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Abstract
Evidence from medieval writers, musical notation, and variant readings in the sources all suggest that troubadour and trouvere songs were performed in more or less equal note values and in a manner that presented the poetry clearly.

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The term "mensural" refers to the ability of this system to describe precisely measured rhythmic durations in terms of numerical proportions between note values. Its modern name is inspired by the terminology of medieval theorists, who used terms like musica mensurata ("measured music") or cantus mensurabilis ("measurable song") to refer to the Music must first be defined and distinguished from speech, and from animal and bird cries. We discuss the stages of hominid anatomy that permit music to be perceived and created, with the likelihood of both Homo neanderthalensis and Homo sapiens both being capable. The earlier hominid ability to emit sounds of variable pitch with some meaning shows that music at its simplest level must have predated speech. The possibilities of anthropoid motor impulse suggest that rhythm may have preceded melody, though full control of rhythm may well not have come any earlier than the perception of music abo...