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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 trouvère songs were performed in more or less equal note values and in a manner that presented the poetry clearly.

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He is not a man, he is just a machine; What an ass you are!; the childhood of mankind; the dogs of war, a film star. Not only objects can be compared in a metaphor, but also phenomena, actions or qualities: Some books are to be tasted, others swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested (F. Bacon); pitiless cold; cruel heat; virgin soil; a treacherous calm. Comparative constructions are not regarded as simile if no image is created, viz., when the object with which something is compared, is not accepted as a generally known example of the quality: John skates as beautifully as Kate does; She is not so clever as her brother, John is very much like his brother. Dora plunged at once into privileged intimacy and into the middle of the room. (Shaw). Mensural notation is the musical notation system used for European vocal polyphonic music from the later part of the 13th century until about 1600.

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 that 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... The editor and reviewers' affiliations are the latest provided on their Loop research profiles and may not reflect their situation at the time of review. Table of contents. Abstract. 2. Paleontologists measure man's evolution partly through the changes in flint implements, the earliest of all found in the Olduvai Valley Gorge in Tanzania. 3. Flint tools are roughly made and show little understanding of the nature of the substance from which they are formed. 4. There is a narrow range of tools, but each type is already adapted to do a different job. 5. Standardization was not understood by the civilizations of the Ancient World. 6. The medieval maker was perfectly capable of the kind of structural logic, economy and ingenuity. 7. The tile industry in the Middle Ages was less After some years of independent work on French music in the thirteenth century I have returned to this dissertation and found many points of agreement. For further material of interest and importance, see McGee, T. J., 'Medieval Dances: Matching the Repertory with Grocheio's Descriptions', *The Journal of Musicology*, 7 (1989), 498–517, and Stockmann, D., 'Musica Vulgans bei Johannes de Grocheio', *Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft*, 25 (1983), 3–56. 13 This passage has been much discussed; see Van der Werf, H., 'The "Not-So-Precisely Measured" Music of the Middle Ages', *Performance Practice Review*, 1 (1988), 42–60, and Stevens, J., *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama 1050–1350* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 433et passim..