



TROUBADOURS

ART ENSEMBLE

MEMORIAL CHURCH

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

THURSDAY, MARCH 4, 2010

6:30 PM

Collaborative Workshop:

with Students and Faculty of DLCL and Music

TUESDAY . MARCH 2

3:30 PM - 5:30 PM

CENTER FOR COMPUTER RESEARCH IN
MUSIC AND ACOUSTICS (CCRMA)

THE KNOLL
660 LOMITA DRIVE

Performing Trobar:

*with Visiting Scholars Judith Peraino (Cornell)
and Marjorie Perloff (Stanford, Emerita).*

FRIDAY . MARCH 5

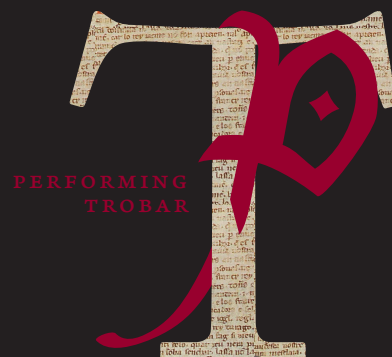
9:00 AM - NOON

TERRACE ROOM
MARGARET JACKS HALL

BUILDING 460
4TH FLOOR

ALL EVENTS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

The visit of the Troubadours Art Ensemble and curriculum development project is co-sponsored by the Stanford Institute for Creativity and the Arts; Trob'art Productions; Division of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages; Department of French and Italian; Department of Music; Center for Medieval and Early Modern Studies; France-Stanford Center for Interdisciplinary Studies; and The Stanford Humanities Center.



TROBAR.STANFORD.EDU

Performing *Trobar*

During the brief period from 1100 to 1300, a tradition of poetry took hold in southern France that combined passion and restraint, desire and song, and that still remains part of our cultural heritage. Emerging in aristocratic courts, this poetry revolutionized the Western imagination. These songs were not about war or God, but were dedicated to an inaccessible and unnamed lady—a celebration of erotic and sensual love. The art form was of an essentially musical nature, and was perhaps inspired by contemporary religious and popular secular cultures. However, it drew from these cultures to become a distinctive musical and artistic experience as well as a highly cultivated art. As these poets, who called themselves troubadours, were often the spokesmen of their lords, their love songs could also articulate feudal politics and other social agendas. Today scholars consider this episode the beginning of the Western tradition of secular love poetry; many educated people are familiar with the immediate legacy of these poets, a medieval love tradition that celebrates erotic desire and the figural movements of the heart, later codified in Arthurian romance as “courtly love.” At its height, this art form developed into a tradition in which the representation of love and erotic desire was bound up with the invention of original melodies using a storehouse of common themes and variations in metrical structures. A dominating element of this poetry was performance: the poet-lover, as a ‘finder’ of a song (*trobar* means to find), had to prove him or herself worthy as a lover not only as composer of an original song, but as a performer of that song before a live audience.

As both performers and interlocutors about performing, the Troubadours Art Ensemble provides a vital experience of medieval culture as an event: the fusion of music and song, and of performer-poet-composer and audience. In exposing the Stanford community to the rich aural and verbal texture of the medieval world, we can move closer to the original performative environment that constitutes the very nature of this poetic tradition. Further, the workshop and colloquium will contribute to students’ and specialists’ discussions of literary versus musical interpretations of premodern texts, and the creative receptions and adaptations of the troubadours in modern poetry. How does the reinvention of this poetic tradition look at different times in history, or from the perspective of musical or literary reinterpretation? How can we relate the modern literary reinterpretation of the troubadours by someone like Ezra Pound to the act of musical *trobar* practiced by the Troubadours Art Ensemble in Europe, often in the original castles and cities of troubadour culture? Moreover, how do we reconcile the historical aspects of medieval music, essential to the performance and understanding of troubadour lyric, with contemporary expectations and idealizations (national, regional, institutional) of medieval lyric and culture?

Rather than viewing the ensemble’s performance of these lyrics as the staging of archival objects—a staging of how poetry was—we should consider that a dominating element of this poetry is performance, and in what manner the present-day performance of this poetry situates itself in relation to both the original song environment and our modern day horizons. Indeed, we can never get around the fact that no medieval sounds have come down to us.

With a view to literary, historical, and musical reconstruction, a live performance of medieval song provides an aural knowledge and vocabulary: for instance, the repeated rhythmic cadence or melodic shape of a stanza that unfolds within the duration of a *canço*, along with its repeated rhymes and linear progression. Even an intuitive familiarity with these features allows one to approach the wisdom of secular poetry appreciated by medieval people: *trobar* as a polysemous, cross-sensory language shaped by acoustic effects (e.g. puns) and sonorous patterns. Rarely transmitted with musical notation, these lyric texts most likely constitute mere blueprints or aural skeletons of remembered improvisation before a live audience. As engaged spectators and listeners of this performance, how can we view the performance of *trobar* as remaining true to the inherent quality of these texts—inviting re-invention through live performance? How can we understand their fluid and permeable nature through a set metrical or aural framework?

It remains a challenge for teachers of medieval lyric to make the musical and performative nature of the troubadours—the originators of the love song—accessible for students in a historically responsible and creative manner. Opportunities to listen to or watch performances of modern love songs seem ubiquitous today through radio, live concert, iPod or YouTube. Yet despite the ease with which the digital age allows for personal engagement with all sorts of recordings, the sensual experience of a live concert has not yet lost the impact of shared reception, live presence, and the communal, visceral reaction to the gestures of a performer and the auditory movements of a song. As in other forms of premodern art, the teacher must provide an immediate access to texts and be wary of anachronistic or facile reimaginings of medieval culture. This is not an easy task. Relatively little has come down to us out of a primarily memorial culture in which many vernacular and secular texts, including troubadour poetry, were transmitted orally. Further, particular fictions of what constitute “the medieval” permeates contemporary culture—one only has to think of the Harry Potter series, Monty Python, and Renaissance Fairs—making it all the more important for the teacher to provide a kind of accessibility that distances itself from popular familiarity. The task of historical reconstruction aside, there is also the task of translation. The songs of the troubadours are in Old Occitan, a medieval language that in its day was a poetic lingua franca in the areas of southern France, Spain, Northern Italy, and Portugal, but today seems daunting to American students mainly versed in English and perhaps one other modern language. Finally, even when the songs have been transmitted with musical notation (which is rare compared to sacred music or other secular vernacular traditions), it is often difficult to reconcile the musical aspects of this lyric with its already complex poetic content.

My experience with students who hear troubadour music for the first time, with only a vague idea of medieval culture, much less Occitania, has proven useful in thinking through how we can engage with the live performance of troubadour song. In this vein, we are fortunate to have an ensemble like Troubadours Art Ensemble: they have performed before diverse audiences, and have bridged the academic study of the troubadour corpus with outreach to a broader, uninitiated public.

Their concerts include events in local churches that have encouraged a historical appreciation for medieval landmarks, as well as concerts for children in local castles that have engaged young people in the history of their towns and regional dialects. The forums around their visit to Stanford occasion the opportunity to probe the various receptions of this lyric in different environments, from local, oral or popular traditions (rap, etc.) to scholarly conversations. Many of those who hear troubadour music for the first time immediately make connections to vernacular cultures that are historically or anthropologically related: the still performed religious poetry of North Africa, the folk songs of Andalusia, or even Native American tribal chants. Even without prior knowledge of the troubadours, this common reaction is useful for approaching a lyric poetry conceived in a nonliterate culture. Such aural resonances emerge given that this poetic art was at its height an international phenomenon that formed the foundation of numerous vernacular poetic traditions (French, Italian, Iberian), and that it drew from the secular lyric influenced by contiguous Arabic cultures in northern Spain. There are also important characteristics of premodern, orally transmitted vernacular cultures that need to be addressed, such as our lack of documentation of exactly how these songs were actually performed, or the fact that there is no 'fixed' text (and thus songs are improvisations). Composed in a vernacular apart from literate Latin, troubadour lyric was not put down in writing until at least a generation later (although the performers may have had written props lost to us today).

This brochure provides contexts and translations so that we can hear and discuss the interpretive choices of the performers, and perhaps consider several versions of particular songs with the participation of the audience (as I have done with the ensemble in my encounters with them).

I hope that this kind of working situation and the ensuing engagement between the audience and the ensemble will broaden horizons concerning medieval lyric and culture, especially for those who have only read lyric texts or listened to recordings. For those who have prior knowledge of the troubadours from a literary or musicological standpoint, a conversation with the musicians after their performance will open new possibilities of interpretation and understanding.

The ensemble is composed of professional musicians and soloists who have performed troubadour music both in international festivals and for student audiences throughout southern France. Their director, Gérard Zuchetto, is a scholar, researcher, and performer of *trobar* familiar with the challenges of interpretation and performance practice. He has dedicated himself to not only publishing editions of the lyrics and music of the troubadours, but promoting Occitan culture and the history of the troubadours. This dedication and passion was confirmed in his role as director and founder of the Trobar-Na Loba center in Carcassonne-Pennautier (1993-2003), an institution for research and diffusion of troubadour culture. The ensemble also includes accomplished English, Spanish, and French soloists of medieval instruments (medieval clarinette, hang, medieval shawm, vielle à roue tenor). They bring knowledge of various traditions of medieval and early modern music. .

With the ensemble's visit, let us dwell on the challenges of interpreting these poems as both verbal documents and musical events improvised and adapted to particular audiences, and take seriously the idea of reading medieval literature through the live performance of *trobar*.

Marisa Galvez,
Department of French and Italian
Stanford University



TROUBADOURS ART ENSEMBLE

Sandra Hurtado-Ròs : chant, serpati, hang / soprano, Indian harmonium, hang
Gérard Zuchetto : chant, clarins, direction / voice, medieval clarinette, musical director.
Denyse Dowling – Macnamara : flutes, chalémie / recorders, medieval shawm
Patrice Villaumé : vielle à roue ténor, psaltérion / Tenor hurdy gurdy, psaltery.
André Rochard : guiterne, ûd, vièle à archet/ oriental lute, sarrazin guitar, medieval fiddle
Thierry Gomar : percussions, daf, derboka, zarb



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