

there is no justification for "free rhythm" in Grocheo or any other medieval theorist; but we have no proof that it never existed. We must be content with the best explanation of the facts that can be devised. "Free rhythm" is not such an explanation. How can we accept that "the use of a rhythmically noncommittal notation in times when a metrical script was available indicates a free or optional rhythm" (Sachs 1953: 178), when examples abound of motets and conductus in non-mensural notation? Anonymous IV tells us that such pieces were read "by the understanding alone, by saying, 'I take this note as long, and that one as short' . . ." and on the evidence available there is no reason to suppose that a similar practice was not applied to monodic songs in non-mensural notation.

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### *Concerning the Measurability of Medieval Music*

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I am very grateful to Neal Zaslaw for his invitation to add some commentary to J. E. Maddrell's article printed above. Understandably I am also very appreciative of Mr. Maddrell's acknowledgment of having been influenced by some of my writings, and I am happy to respond to some of his "observations, offered in the hope of provoking discussion." I welcome this opportunity especially since Mr. Maddrell directs attention to medieval theory, a source of information I have not touched upon in my publications in journals, although I have not at all ignored it in my research.

I am very much intrigued with Maddrell's evaluations of some of the medieval statements in relation to rhythm and meter in medieval music, but

I hope that his article is not a return to evaluation of medieval music as it was prevalent early in this century and before. It was customary in those days to concentrate on treatises for one's information on medieval music, without simultaneous evaluation of the preserved music in all its sources; at that time this approach could be pardoned in part because the treatises were much more accessible than the practical sources. Maddrell turns to actual music only once when prompted by Grocheo's mention of four actual songs, three of which occur in the *Chansonnier Cangé*. I suppose that I have no reason to be disappointed that Maddrell does not refer to my evaluation of the notation in that chansonnier, but I think I am justly disappointed by his own evaluation of it and by the lack of evaluation of the other ten sources in which these same chansons occur. One cannot simply say that the *Chansonnier Cangé* "clearly uses longs and breves for single notes." Interestingly, one of the three chansons under discussion, *Quant li rossignol* (R 1559), occurs twice in the *Chansonnier Cangé* (on fols. 110 and 117) and, if it was the scribe's intention to indicate the meter of this chanson by using longs and breves, he must have changed that meter drastically from the first to the second notation.

I had specific reasons for omitting discussion of medieval theories from my article on declamatory rhythm in the chansons of the trouvères. There was first the practical concern of keeping the article reasonably short in order to make it qualify for inclusion in a journal. I hope to have an opportunity to fill this gap in my forthcoming book on the songs of the troubadours, trouvères, and Minnesinger. But there was a second and more important reason for leaving this part of the discussion for a later publication: I have my doubts about the practical value of Grocheo's writing on this whole subject. But before explaining these doubts I would like to question some specific observations made by Maddrell. I fail to see how Grocheo's remark—whatever it may mean—about the ductia, which have no text, can shed any light on the performance of the chansons, which do have text and which, in the opinion of many medievalists, were poems in the first place. I also wonder about Maddrell's observation that Grocheo "tells us that the *cantus coronatus* was performed with instrumental accompaniment" and that this fact is "difficult to reconcile with 'free rhythm' as it is generally understood." Why are free rhythm and instrumental accompaniment so difficult to reconcile? Furthermore, where does Grocheo say that the *cantus coronatus* is accompanied? There are two very cryptic passages in the treatise (Rohloff, p. 52 and p. 63) in which the words "*viella*" and "*cantus coronatus*" occur within the same sentence. Both passages are so obscure that even ardent advocates of instrumental accompaniment hesitate to rely upon them. In addition, there is a rather questionable translation by Albert Seay of a passage (Rohloff, p. 50) in which the word "*coronatur*" is translated as "is accompanied . . . (i.e., instrumentally)" rather than as "is crowned" (i.e., in a contest). (*Johannes de Grocheo Concerning Music*, translated by Albert Seay, Colorado Springs, 1967, p. 16.)

I would also like to question Maddrell's interpretation of the famous statement by Anonymous IV quoted at the very end of the above article. Why is it so certain that the unknown author is referring to clearly measurable music? Is it not possible that there were long and short notes in free rhythm? I for one would think so, although such longs and shorts would not be in a ratio of 1:2 or 1:3.

When trying to pry information about meter and rhythm in medieval music from statements by theorists we have to keep in mind the peculiar tradition of treatises about *Musica*; above all we have to realize that the word *Musica* as used by the learned writers of the Middle Ages is not necessarily synonymous with our word *music*. Indeed many treatises hardly touch upon the latter; instead they discuss numerical laws, partly inherited from the Greeks, which were supposed to govern all movements and functions of the bodies in the universe, of human beings, and of what we call music, the latter seemingly including poetry. It is obvious that in many instances *music* owes the privilege of being discussed in treatises about *Musica* exclusively to its property of being the only readily measurable element in the entire realm of *Musica*. In such treatises we find discussion about scales, about the ratios of intervals, and about verse feet in classical Latin poetry and certain Ambrosian hymns. This poetry was extremely suitable because it was based upon an alternation of long and short syllables in a ratio of 2:1. The entire discussion of duration in medieval music is given in such a way that it is clear that, even if all medieval music had been performed in free rhythm, it would have been unlikely that there would have been a place for something as unmeasurable as free rhythm in a discussion about *Musica*. There are also instances in which learned authors of the Middle Ages write primarily about actual music, but the concept that *music* is part of *Musica* very often makes the authors prejudiced; they insist upon taking it for granted that *music* has all the properties of *Musica* and that therefore *music* must be measurable in all aspects, regardless of whether the author could discern this measurability or not. Thus free rhythm was something medieval theorists tried to circumvent or at best it was mentioned without giving it the proper name. In the statements from Grocheo quoted by Maddrell the distinction between *music* and *Musica* is so blurred that it is impossible to distinguish clearly and consistently between the two. And perhaps the only safe conclusion one may draw is the observation that not all medieval music was as clearly measurable as Grocheo would have liked it to be; in other words, all music was measurable as long as one did not measure too precisely.

When giving his own division of music Grocheo does not lump plainsong and secular monody together, as Maddrell rightly points out, but neither does he lump secular monody together with measurable music. And he may have had good reasons for his division of music into three groups other than a preference for tripartite divisions. One could perhaps argue that, if all chansons by troubadours and trouvères had been performed in some form of clearly measurable meter, Grocheo or some other theorist of the time

would have amply described it. Yet we find no such discussion in treatises about either *Musica* or rhetoric, and treatises on the latter certainly present extensive discussions on the art of writing chansons.

Next I would like to respond to Maddrell's observation that "it is, surely, an editor's duty to minimize discrepancies between medieval and modern choices [of "rhythmization"] by choosing on behalf of the performer a rhythm likely to have been chosen by his medieval counterpart." I realize fully that the terms "free" and "declamatory" by themselves do not solve the problem of how each individual chanson was performed seven or eight centuries ago nor how it should be performed now. But, I trust, my discussion of free rhythm in *Die Musikforschung* has made it sufficiently clear that we have to examine each chanson on its own merits, and that different performers and editors are likely to come to different conclusions regarding the choice of rhythm and tempo. One can certainly advocate that an expert editing medieval songs which are to be performed in a free rhythm should notate these songs in such a way that the non-expert also may know how to perform them. Thus there is some reason to publish such songs in modern notation with notes of different length and perhaps even with barlines. But such an editor should certainly go as far as to work out a "rhythmization" for each stanza because of the differences in meaning and distribution of accents from stanza to stanza. And certainly such "rhythmization" should be accompanied by an emphatic statement that these indications for duration and accentuation should be taken very freely.

Although much may be said in favor of this way of editing, one can also make strong objections. The first requirement for performing these chansons is a clear and perfect understanding of the text; fulfillment of this requirement should make "rhythmizations" by the editor superfluous, perhaps even a hindrance. By presenting a chanson as rigidly as our notational system requires one risks asking too much attention for the melody, and one may well obscure one of the most important characteristics of a chanson: it is a poem performed to a simple and unobtrusive melody in such a way that the text receives the almost undivided attention of performer and listener alike.

I would like to take this opportunity to follow Maddrell's example and present some observations of my own in the hope of provoking discussion. When in the treatises about *Musica* the learned authors turn to measurability in time, they all agree that music is measurable. They are specific and clear when discussing measurability in modal or mensural notation and in Latin poetry based upon classical quantitative verse feet, but they are vague, circuitous, or even incomprehensible when discussing duration in plainchant and other monophonic music, as well as in polyphonic music predating modal and mensural notation. For a long time it was acceptable practice to take it for granted that all or most medieval music, especially polyphony, was clearly measurable in time and that determining the exact meter of a given piece was up to the modern researcher. Perhaps it would be more practical to assume that a given piece of medieval music was conceived in

free rhythm unless there is good evidence for the opposite interpretation. Mensural or modal notation in one source of a given piece is not necessarily sufficient evidence that the piece was conceived as such; it only indicates that the scribe of that particular manuscript was of the opinion that the piece concerned should or could be performed in the meter indicated.

I also venture to question the usual theories regarding the origin and development of polyphonic music as based upon discussions by medieval theorists. The order in which the successive theorists introduce polyphonic music does not necessarily represent the order in which it originated and developed, only the order in which it gradually became acceptable for inclusion in discussions of *Musica*. No one writing about *Musica* in the eighth or ninth century would have considered discussing "underdeveloped" polyphony, which was measurable in time, in which the singers were not very much concerned about "staying together," and which showed no clear preference for beautiful ratios in the intervals between the different voices. Simultaneously we have to question the assumptions that polyphony was started by the person who was the first to add consciously a second part to a pre-existing melody, that this was first done in the frame of the liturgical music, and that even these earliest polyphonists were consciously trying to "stay together." Instead it may be more in keeping with the findings of anthropological and ethnomusicological studies to assume that the chaotic cacophony of primeval men gradually developed in two different directions: one development led towards singing in unison, the other towards various forms of primitive polyphony—or heterophony as some may call it—which in turn led to the very sophisticated compositorial techniques developed by Western composers from the late 12th or 13th century on. Even if it were possible to distinguish unequivocally between cacophony and primitive polyphony it would probably be impossible to determine now which one of the developments was the first to come to fruition: the branch leading towards unison singing or the one leading to polyphony. One development is likely to have influenced the other, and both are likely to have been influenced by solo singing. A question for which we may be able to find an answer is: how did polyphonic singing creep into the Christian liturgy, an area in which so much symbolic value seems to have been given to singing in unison?

The above observations are not intended to question the general value of the medieval treatises about *Musica*. Although the value of individual treatises differs widely, as a group they are precious sources of information on medieval philosophy, aesthetics, mathematics, astrology, astronomy, and the like. However, as far as the reconstruction of early Western music is concerned, their practical value has been somewhat overrated, while the study of ethnomusicology—or comparative musicology, as some prefer to call it—has been far underrated.