



(LEMS 8005)

ENGLISH MEDIEVAL SONGS
Music of the Middle Ages Vol. 5
The 12th & 13th Centuries
Russell Oberlin, Countertenor
Seymour Barab, Viol

Very few early English songs have been preserved; the eight on this record are most of what has been left to us. Various historical reasons for this are possible, such as the destruction of the property of the Roman Catholic Church in England, including of course, the monastic libraries.

It is possible, too, that there was not in medieval England any large repertory of monodic songs. It seems, at least in the predominantly Celtic portions of England, that singing in parts was more popular than solo or unison singing. Nor was there any large scale movement of song writing as such, comparable to that of the Troubadours in southern France, or that of the poet-musicians writing in Galician in Spain. But any thoughts on the original extent of this English repertory can be only conjectural, though of course it was far greater than what has been preserved.

Nor, with so few examples, is it possible to come to any definite conclusions concerning the nature of this early English repertory. However a few things can be said. First, it would seem, as has already been suggested, that these English songs are not part of the lyric poetry movement that took place on the continent in the XIIth and XIIIth centuries, of that whole complex of ideas concerning poetry and song that came up out of Spain and spread through France and the northern countries. (This "complex of ideas" probably originated with the Arabs, though this contention, as well as that of placing the European origin in Spain, has been much debated.)

However, it is much easier to say what these English songs are not than to say what they are. Throughout the Middle Ages English music of all kinds, most clearly English polyphony, was always very different from continental music. Though all musicians of the Middle Ages were working at a common problem, that is, the construction of a system of music for the expression of the Christian mysteries and the ideals of medieval Christendom, the English musicians made a solution of this problem that was strikingly different from that of the continental composers. (No doubt what must be behind this different solution is a very ancient, and pre-Christian, British concept of music, but no examples of that music have survived.) In English polyphony - part songs, motets, settings of the Ordinary of the Mass, conductus, etc. - this difference is clear and, because there is a good deal of material preserved, something can be said concerning the nature of it. But with English monody, where this amount of material is lacking, I can only venture to say this: that the modal formulas underlying most continental monody do not seem to be here. Of course English monody is modal, but the formulas making up the modes and used to construct it by continental composers, are not the same as those used in these English songs. Certainly some system underlies them, however, this was a thoroughly worked out and perfected system. That, it seems to me, is evident simply because the songs are as beautifully composed as they are.

A NOTE ON THE LYRICS

The selection of songs on this record comprises an unusually accurate cross section of the variety of lyrics remaining from one of the most musical centuries in English history, and in addition one group, the Godric hymns, represent the oldest English poetic tradition, while "Stond, wel, moder" undoubtedly is an example of the kind of sequence that developed eventually into the Mystery Plays, the earliest form of modern drama. Thus these pieces serve as a gateway between the literature of the far distant past (unfortunately, most of has been lost to us) and that of the present. Since they come from a time when

lyric poetry was, as its name indicates, intended to be sung, it further delineates the roots of the richest poetic tradition of our time.

Saint Godric, a native Englishman, was apparently one of the earliest of self-made merchants. He started life as a peddler; eventually he became a ship-owner and traveller, and after visiting Rome, Jerusalem, and other holy places a pilgrim, he became a hermit near Durham, far north of his native Norfolk. The stanzas he wrote, two addressed to the Virgin, one to Christ and Mary, and one to St. Nicholas, are deeply moving in their simple sincere tone, and while they keep the ellipsis and word order of earlier times are called by George Saintsbury the beginning of modern English prosody. Presuming that these hymns, were as the medievals believe (to the extent that they were copied all over England), they must date from before 1170, the year of the saint's death. It is particularly touching that he should write one hymn to St. Nicholas, apparently Nicholas of Bari, whom we remember as Santa Claus (from the Dutch Sint Niklass), the patron of mariners and merchants. Although St. Nicholas has always been a popular saint, he must have been particularly notable to a merchant, mariner, and pilgrim of the 12th Century, for his body was stolen from Myra and brought to Bari in 1087, thus Godric must certainly have visited his famous shrine.

Many evangelical devices were used by the Catholic Church in the middle ages; in addition to the ceremonies in the parish churches and the widely-distributed religious houses, friars would preach in the village squares much as do members of the Salvation Army today. The mass of material extant from that time is of a religious nature—sermons, saints' lives, exempla, etc. Two of the lyrics in this collection, "Man Mei Longe" and "Worldes Blis", seem to be rhymed sermons set to music. Each disparages worldly concerns and expresses the "you can't take it with you" attitude toward wealth. Both must have been very widely known about the middle of the XIIIth Century, for they are preserved in manuscripts dating that far back from various parts of England. The first stanza of "Man Mei Longe" is inserted in the famous Kentish sermon "Ayenbite of Inwit" while the other contains echoes of the 12th Century "Poema Morale". These occurrences plus the nature of the manuscript-collections of moral works—in which the texts are found, indicates that they were among the best known moralizing lyrics of the day.

Multitudes of medieval poems are addressed to the Virgin or to Christ, and a number commend on or describe the pathetic scene of Mary witnessing the crucifixion (See "Jesu Criste Milde Moder" in Volume 4 of Music of the Middle Ages, LEMS 8004). "Sond Wel, Moder", although,

like the others probably derivative of the Latin sequence "Stabat iuxta Christi crucem", tells the story in the words of Christ and Mary, and there is evidence that it was sung from the pulpit, perhaps antiphonally, but certainly with the participant taking the roles of the mother and son.

"Bryd one Brere" is entirely different from the others in every respect. This love song was written on the back of a Bull of Pope Innocent III of 1199, and is preserved in King's College, Cambridge. Although it contains the exaggeration typical of conventional love songs (pity me or dig my grave), the song is full of the earthy details that make English medieval songs fresh and lively. The poet addresses a bird on a hawthorn, describing his love as courtly, white of limb, lovely, true, in a bubbling good humor that mocks the pretension and artificiality of courtly love, seems utterly spontaneous, and gives us a picture from the past of that rare creature of literature, a happy lover.

Middle English (c1066-c1500) differs from Modern mainly in that the long vowels were sounded with the values they are given in continental European languages, and words were spelled exactly as they would have been sung, by a countertenor of the royal court, using expressions and pronunciations of other parts of the country, but with a London accent.

-- WILLIAM BITTNER

Section 1

1. The St. Godric Songs
(British Museum Ms. Reg. V,F. VII.) These are the earliest known songs in the English language. St. Godric died in 1170, so we may safely date these songs at approximately 1150. After a varied career, evidently including piracy. Godric retired into Wales, and spent the last forty or fifty years of his life as a hermit there. These four songs are preserved in a Latin biography of him written about twenty years after his death by a monk from a monastery near Godric's hermitage. From this biography we learn that the songs were dictated to St. Godric in visions, the biographer being present on these occasions. a) Crist and Sainte Marie: (transcription by Gustave Reese.) After Godric's repeated prayers to learn the fate after death of his sister's soul, she appeared to him accompanied by angels. The angels and a Kyrie (on this recording performed on the viol) and then Godric's sister sang to him of her happiness; at the end of the song the angels completed the Kyrie. In the original manuscript this

alternation is clearly indicated. b) Sainte Marie Virgine: During a temptation of St. Godric by the Devil, the Virgin and St. Mary Magdalene appeared to him and sang this prayer, explaining that this song would aid him in overcoming his temptations. c) Sainte Marie Cristes bur: There is no specific vision mentioned for this song. Perhaps, this being also a prayer to the virgin, the biographer meant to include it with Sainte Marie Virgine.

d) Sainte Nicolaes Godes drud: Godric's biographer tells us that, during a visit to the hermitage, he was awakened one night by Godric's lusty singing. In the morning Godric explained that St. Nicholas, with a company of followers, had appeared to him, and their singing was so infectious that he had been compelled to join in.

These four songs stand outside the problems discussed at the beginning of this article. Probably because of their very religious nature, they follow fairly closely the formulas of liturgical chant.

2. Worldes blis ne last no throwe.

(About 1260. Bodleian Library Ms. Rawlinson G. 18 Transcription from the article on medieval song by J.A. Westrup, in the New Oxford History of Music, Volume II.) These long sermons in song seem to have been very popular in medieval England. There are a number of such poems extant, and, besides the two recorded here, a fragment of third (Mirie it is while sumer ilast) with music. That most of them had music once is quite possible. Certainly the effect of the repeated melody, as the poem continues, is extremely powerful. This melody is remarkable for its adherence to movement by step; rarely does an interval as large as third appear.

3. Bryd one brere

(About 1300 Cambridge, King's College muniments 2 W.32 The song is written on the back of a Papal Bull.)

This song is the earliest English love lyric that has been preserved with its music. Those differences between English and continental monody discussed earlier in these notes are perhaps put forth more clearly in this song than anywhere on this record. A comparison of this song with the love lyrics of the Troubadours, Trouveres, Minnesingers, etc., will show how unique this English music is.

4. Man mei longe him liues wene

(About 1270. Maidstone Ms. A 13. Transcription by Manfred Bukofzer.)

The subject matter of this song is closely related to that of Worldes blis ne last no throwe, the structure of its tune is quite different,

bolder in outline and more dramatic in quality. Again, the repetition of the tune, plus the repeated exclamation "welaway", is powerfully contrived for the needs of the text.

5. Stond wel moder under rode

(About 1300) British Museum Ms. Royal 12 E 1. Transcription by Denis Stevens. The music for the last five verses of this song is not included in the original manuscript. The scribe was running out of room on his page, so he stopped including the music-evidently feeling that everybody knew the tune-and only wrote down the text. In the manuscript from Cambridge that also contains this piece, the page is torn away after the fifth verse. Consequently, the recording here had to be incomplete. However, the full text is given in the leaflet that accompanies this record.) The text of this song is one of the many English translations or adaptations of the Latin sequence *Stabat iuxta Christi crucem*, of which there are several musical settings also. (*Jesu Cristes milde moder* is one which can be heard in a two-part setting on LEMS 8004.) Each verse of the text is in two equal sections. The melody is the same for each section, but changes with each verse. In this way the composer has been able to build a long and beautifully sustained , melodic structure.

Again, the questions concerning English monody discussed earlier do not apply to this song. The continental modal formulas are very much in evidence here, as might be expected since this a translation of a Latin sequence from the continent.

(In cases where sources for transcriptions have not been given they are my own, as are also the accompaniments for tenor viol.)

---SAVILLE CLARK

Stond well moder as recorded here is based on a manuscript in the British Museum (Royal 12 e:i) which gives the complete literary text but only half the music, as the poem is a free Middle English translation of the *Passiontide* sequence *Stabat Iuxta Christi Crucem* (compare also *Jesu Christes milde moder* on EA-0024) it was thought that the melody might be borrowed from the sequence. Examination of the 13th century Sarum Missal in the *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*, Paris, proved this assumption to be correct. The first part of the melody agrees note for note with that of the six verses in the British Museum manuscript, and the latter part fits the remainder of the text perfectly. This affords ready proof of the close relationship between sacred and secular songs in the Middle Ages.

--- DENIS STEVENS

A. CRISTE AND SAINTE MARIE

Crist and Sainte Marie

Swa on SCAMEL me ILEDDE
That ic on thisse erde NE SILDE,
Wid mine bare fote ITREDIE.

Stool lead
unshielded
tread

B. SAINTE MARIE VIRGINE

Sainte Marie Virgine

Moder Jesu
Cristes Nazarene
ONFO schild help thin Godric
Onfang bring hegelich
With thein Godes RICHE.

Receive shield
kingdom

C. SAINTE MARIE CRISTES BUR

Sainte Marie Cristes BUR

Maidenes CLENHAD modernes FLUR
DILLIE min sinne rix in min MOD
Bring me to winne with the SELFD
God.

bower
cleanliness (of)/
flower (of)
Efface mind
very

D. SAINTE NICOLAES GODES DRUD

Sainte Nicolaes Godes drud

Tymbre us faire scone hus
At thi burth at thi bare
Sainte Nicolaes bring us wel thare.

darling
Build polish
bier

2

Worldes blis ne last no throw,
hit WIT ant WEND a-wey a-non;
The lengur that hich hit i-knowe
The lasse hic finde PRIS ther-on,
for al hit is IMEYND syd kare,
mid sorewe ant wid UUEL fare,
ant at the laste POUERE and bare
hit let mon, wen hit ginnet a-gon.
al the blisse this here ant there
BI-LOUKETH at HENDE WOP ANT MON.

short space of time
departs goes
value
mixed
evil
poor
abandons begins
encompasses
end lamentation

Al shal gon that her mon HOWET,
al hit shal wenden to NOUT;
the mon that her no GOD NE SOWET,
wen other repen he WORTH BIKAKT.
thenc, mon, FORTHI wil thu hauest MYKTE,

haves
nought
good sows (not)
will be beguiled
therefore
might

that thu thine GULTUS here ARIKTE, ant WRCHE god bi day an nikte, ar then thu be of LISSE ILAKT. thu nost wanne crist ure DRIKTE the asket that he hauet bitakt.	guilts aright work before joy seized lord committed
Al the blisse of thiss LIUE thu shalt, mon, HENDEN IN WEP - of HUSE ant home ant child ant WYUE. SELI mon tak there-of KEP! for thu shalt al BILUEN here	life end in weeping house wife simple care relinquish
the EYKTE were-of LOUERD thu were; wen thu LIST, mon,up- on bere ant slepest a SWYTHE DRUYE slep ne shaltu haben wit the no FERE butte thine WERKUS on an HEP.	possessions lord liest very dreary companion deed heap
Mon, wi SEESTU LOUE ant herte on worldes blisse that nout ne last? wy THOLESTU that te so ofte smerte for loue that is so unstedefast/ thu LIKEST humi of thorn iwis, that seest thi loue on worldes blis for ful of BITTERNIS hit is. ful sore thu mikt ben OFGAST, that dependes here HEIKTE amis, WER-THURTH ben in-to helle icast.	sets thou endures thou licks bitterness terrified possessions whereby
Thenc, mon, war-of crist the WROUKTE ant do wey PRUDE ant fulthe MOD. thene wou DERE he the BOKTE on RODE mit his swete blod; him-sef he gaf for the in PRIS. to BUGE the blis yf thu be wis. BI-THENC the, mon, ant up aris of SLOVTHE, an-gin to worche god WIL time to worchen is, for elles thu art WITLES ANT WOD.	wrought pride filthy mind dearly redeemed cross price buy consider sloth while else witless and mad
Al day thu mikt understode ant ti MIROUR bifor the sen,	mirror

wat si to don an to WONDEN
ant wat to holden ant to FLEN;
for al day thu sigst wid thin EGVEN
wou this world went ant wou men DEIGET.
that wite wel, that thu shalt dreigen
DET, al so an-other DET.
ne helput nout ther non to LIGEN,
ne may no mon BU det ageyn.

undertake
flee
eyes
die
suffer
death did
lie
be

Ne wort ne god ther UNFORGULDE,
ne non uuel ne worth UNBOUKT;
wanne thu list, mon, UNDUR MOLDE
thu shalt hauen as tu hauest wrokt.

unrequited
unpunished
under mould

bithenc the wel forthi; hic rede,
ant clanse the of mine misdede,
that he the helpe at thine nede,
that so DURE hus haued iboukt,
ant so heuene blisse Iede
that euere LEST ant faillet nout. Amen

dearly
endures

3
BRYD one brere, brid, brid one BRERE
KYND is come of loue, loue to CRAUE.
Blithful biryd, on me thu rewe
Or GREYTH, lef, greith thu me my graue.

Bird briar
Nature crave
pity
prepare
beloved

HIC am so blithe, so BRYIT brid on brere, I
QUAN I se that HENDE in halle
Yhe is QUIT OF LIME, louveli, trewe,
Yhe is fayr and FLUR of alle

bright
when gracious
white limb
flower

MIKTE hic at wille HAUEN
Stedefast of loue, loueli, trewe,
Of mi sorwe yhe may me SAUEN
Ioye and blisse were Eere me newe.

might have
save

4
Man mei longe him lieues WENE,
ac ofte him LIYET the wreinch;
fair weder ofte him went to RENE,
an ferliche maket is BLENCH.

expect
lies trick
rain
wonderfully
sunshine

thar-vore, man, thu the BITHENCH,-
al sel valui the grene.

bethink
shall

wela-vey! nis king ne Quene that ne sel drinke of deth-is drench. Man, er thu falle of thi bench, thu sinne aquench.	green (youth) death's draugh
Ne mai strong ne starch ne kene AGLYE deth-is WITHER-CLENCH; yung and old and brith AN-SIENE, al he RIUETH an his streng. VOX and ferlich is the wreinch, ne mai no manthar TO-YENES, wei-la-wei! ne iweping ne BENE,	rigid escape hostile grasp beautiful rends ready in opposition prayer reward, craft leech's draugh
mede, liste, ne leches dreinch. Man, let sinne and lustes stench, wel do, wel thench!	
Do bi SALOMONES REDE, Man, and so thu SELTH wel do. Do al so he the TOTHE and sede what thin endinch the brinch to, New SELTU NEUERE mis-do. Sore thu MITH the a-drede, weyla-vey! suich WENTH wel lede long lif and blisse UNDER-UO, thar deth LUTETH in his SWO to him for-do	Solomon's advice shall taught ending shalt-thou might expectations receive lurks shoe
Man FWI NELTU the bi-thenchen? Man FWI neltu the BISEN? of FELTHE thu ert isowe, WEIRMES METE thu selt ben. HER NAUEST TU BLISSE DAYS THRE,	why wilt thou not give heed filth worms meat here havest thou not three blissful days
al thi lif thu DRIST in wowe; wela-vey! deth the sal DUN THROWEN thar thu WENEST heye STE. In wo sal thi wele enden, in WOP thi GLE.	suffer throw down suppose ascent welfare weeping glee
Werld an wele the BI-PECHETH,	deceive

iwis HIE both tine iuo;	they
if thi werld mid wele the SLIKET	flatters
that is far to do the wo.	
thar-fore let lust ouer-gon,	
man, and eft it sal the liken.	
Wela-vey! hu sore him wiket	fails
thar in one stunde other two	time
wurh him PINE euere-mo.	pain
ne do man swo!	

5 STOND WEL, MODER, UNDER RODE

"Stond wel, moder, vnder RODE,	cross
bihold thi child wyth glade mode,	
blythe moder MITTU BEN",	might thou
"Svne, QUU may blithe stonden?	who
HI SE thin feet, hi se thin honden,	I see
nayled to the hard TRE."	tree (cross)

"Moder, do WEY thi wepinge;	endure
hi THOLE this ded for mannes thinge-	
for owen gilte tholi non."	
"Svne, hi fele the DEDE STUNDE,	time of death
the swerd is at min herte grunde,	
that me BYHYTTE symeon."	Simeon foretold

"Moder, reu vpon THI BERN!	pity child
thu WASSE away tho blodi TEREN,	wash tears
it don me werse that me ded."	
"Sune, HU MITTI teres WERNEN?	how might I
	restrain
hy se tho blodi flodes HERNEN	run
HUTH of thin herte to min fet."	out

"Moder, nu y may THE SEYN,	(to) say thee
bettere is that ic one deye	
than al man-kyn to helle;	
"Sune, y se thi bodi SWNGEN,	hanged
thi brest, thin hond, thi fot THUR-STUNGEN-	pierced
no SELLI THOU me be wo."	strange that

"Moder, if y dar the tellen,	
yif y NE DEYE thu gost to helle;	I die not
hi THOLE this ded for thine sake."	suffer
"Sune, thu BEST ME SO MINDE,	so mindful of me

WITH me nout; it is me kinde
that y for the sorye make." reproach nature

"Moder, merci! let me deyen,
for adam ut of helle BEYN,
and al mankin that is for-loren." redeem

"Sune, wat sal me to REDE?
thi PINE pined me to dede,
let me DEYN the bi-foren." advise
pain
die

*"Moder, MITARSTthu mith leren,
wat pine THOLEN that childre beren now for the first
time
wat sorwe hauen that childre beren (you) suffer
wat sorwe hauen that child FOR-GON." lose

"Sune, y wot y kan the tellen.
BUTE it be the pine of helle except
more sorwe ne WOTH y non." know

* At this point in the original manuscript the music breaks off,
therefore these 5 verses were not recorded

"Moder, REU of noder kare!
nu thu wost of moder fare,
thou thu be clene mayden MAN." one

"Sune, help alle at nede,
alle tho that to me GREDEN- wail
mayden,wyf and FOL wyman." foul

"Moder, y may no legur duellen,
the time is cumen y fare to helle,
the thridde day y rise upon."

"Sune, y wyle we'the funden,
y deye ywis of thine wnden,
so reuful ded was neuere non."

When he ros that fel thi sorwe,
the blisse sprong the thridde morewe,
wen blithe moder wer thu tho.
Moder, for that ilke blisse,
bisech vre god, vre sinnes lesse, shield
thu be hure CHEL ayen hure fo.

Blisced be thu, quen of heuene,
bring us ut of helle LEUENE flames
thurth thi dere sunes mith.

Moder, for that hithe blode
that he sadde vpon the rode,
led us in-to heuene lith. Amen

The instrument used on this record is a tenor viol, with frets, made in England by Dolmetch.

Note: Words and phrases in the original old English texts that might be difficult for the modern listener to understand are in bold print. Their translations appear at the right.

Russell Oberlin, Thomas Hunter professor of music emeritus and director of the Collegium Musicum at Hunter College, is an internationally acclaimed singer widely recognized as America's foremost countertenor. A graduate of the Juilliard School of Music, Oberlin was founding member of the legendary New York Pro Musica. He had recorded extensively, given recitals, and appeared as soloist with leading orchestras throughout this country and abroad. Operatic roles include appearances at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, where he sang the part of Oberon in the London premiere of Benjamin Britten's "A Mid-Summer Night's Dream." A senior Fulbright research scholar, Oberlin had taught and lectured extensively in the U.S. and England.

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