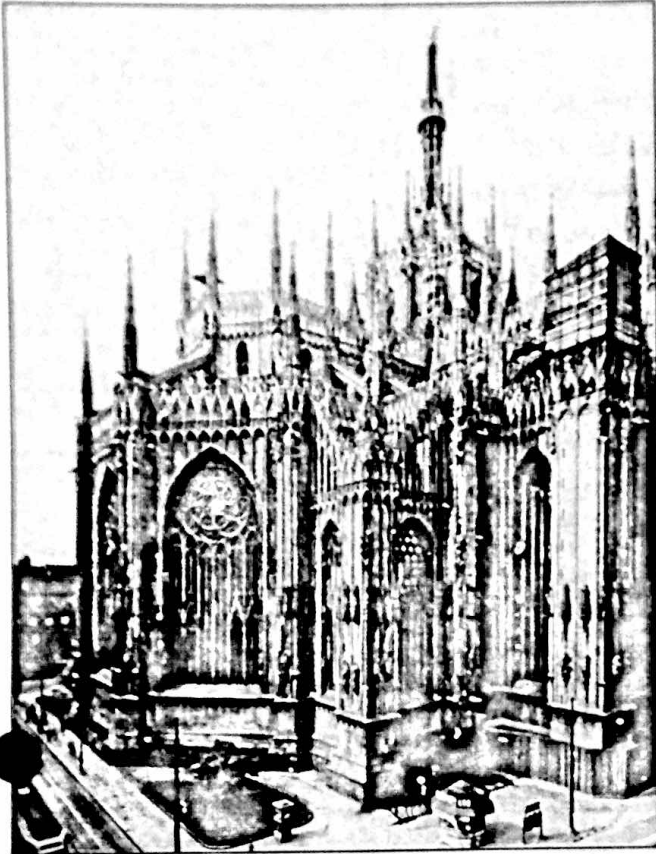


Cathedrals



The cathedral of Milan, begun in 1386

Most musicians in the Middle Ages worked for the Church. It was in fact the main employer of artists in all fields, from the builders of the great cathedrals to the stonemasons who did the carvings to the people who wrote and sang the music for its services.

The cathedral was the most important place of worship in any diocese, and the seat of the bishop. In a way, the cathedral was the bishop's court and it had to be magnificent. There was a great need for music to enhance church services and attest to the glory of God so that the congregation, from royalty down to the ordinary peasant, would be impressed by the splendour of Christianity and its earthly manifestation in the Catholic Church. In addition to the daily mass, there were special services for special days in the church calendar, like Christmas and Easter and other feast days, and music was required for the texts that were particular to that day. Most church musicians were in

holy orders. They would compose the needed chants, sing in the choir, and perhaps serve as music director for the cathedral. Most musicians got their training as choirboys. Cathedrals had choir schools attached to them, and they had competitions to attract young choristers. The boys learned how to sing and play an instrument, and were able to find work as church or court musicians when they left school.



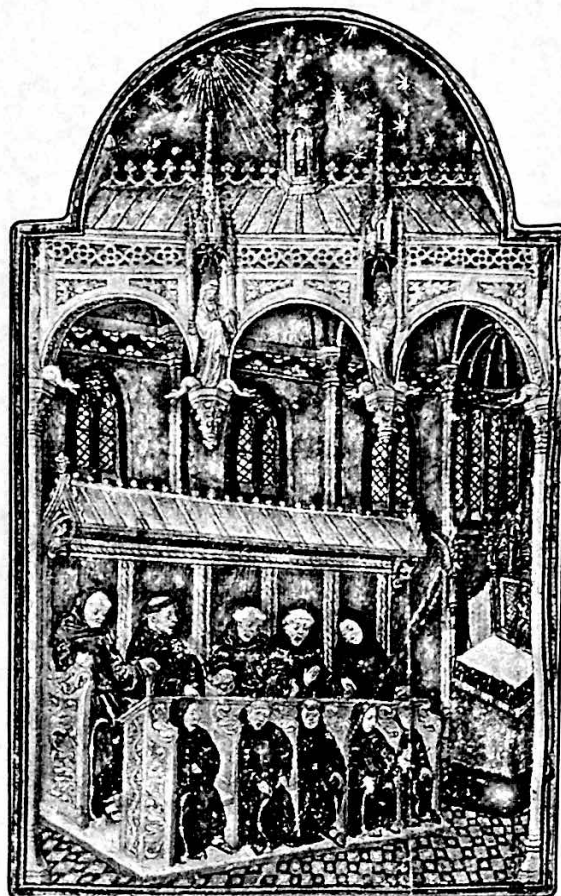
Pisa Cathedral, 1053-1272

No one attending a service in this cathedral could fail to be impressed by the splendour of the Church.

Monasteries

Music also played an important role in the monasteries. Life in a monastery was organized around its services. Monks and nuns spent a good deal of their day in prayer. Every day there was a mass, of course, but there were also eight other services that took place from two or three in the morning until early evening. These services were largely sung, so a large number of chants were required. Monks would compose new music and make small changes to traditional melodies. Music was seen as an act of prayer; it enlarged the devotional experience. There were no congregations to impress in the monasteries and the music was not intended to gratify an audience, but to please God.

Monks were often music scholars and there was much debate about the philosophical and theoretical aspects of music. Many of the dissertations on music theory written in the Middle Ages were by monks.



This manuscript illustration shows a group of monks in their choir stalls chanting the text for one of the many services that took place in the religious day.



A group of monks reading the music from a manuscript



Monks singing

Musicians, poets and minstrels



A troubadour entertains two ladies while accompanying himself on a vielle, a mediaeval fiddle.

There was, of course, music outside the churches. There was a continual struggle for power between the Church and the nobility, and the kings and barons used music as a way of increasing the prestige of their courts. Gradually, as the nobility's influence grew, the Church lost its position as the only sponsor of the arts. The courts developed their own musical culture based on secular songs that reflected the lives lived there. Certain aristocrats in particular had reputations as patrons of the arts, like Eleanor of Aquitaine, who was married to King Louis VII of France and later to Henry II of England, and was one of the most powerful women of the Middle Ages.

The court poet-composers—called troubadours in the south of France, trouvères in the north, and minnesingers in German-speaking regions—were the most important composers of secular music. The words troubadour and trouvère mean “finder,” or in musical terms, composer. Many of them were aristocrats themselves, like Guillaume IX of Aquitaine, and Richard I of England, called Richard the Lion-Heart. The troubadours flourished in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Provence, and the tradition moved into the courts of northern France when Eleanor of Aquitaine married Louis VII and brought her southern traditions to the court in Paris. Their works, which established the form for secular songs for several centuries, were strongly influenced by chivalry and the ideal of courtly love. It is known that there were women troubadours, but all the known trouvères were men.



A woman troubadour, the Countess of Die

In the south of France, women too wrote songs about courtly love.

Musicians, poets and minstrels

Musicians were also hired to entertain the courts. Music was needed as an accompaniment for dining, dancing and tournaments and to enhance court ceremonies, civic processions and military campaigns. Instrumental music was much more prominent in secular music than in the church, where it was distrusted as likely to inflame the passions rather than promote worship.

At the bottom end of the social scale were the minstrels, or jongleurs, men and women who wandered from town to town. They sang and played instruments, juggled, did tricks and animal acts, and generally entertained the artisans and peasants. Sometimes they performed the well-known troubadour songs, other times they wrote their own, often weaving into them the news and gossip of the day, an important function in a time when newspapers did not exist.



A pair of minstrels, a juggler and a flute player



A wandering minstrel playing a lute