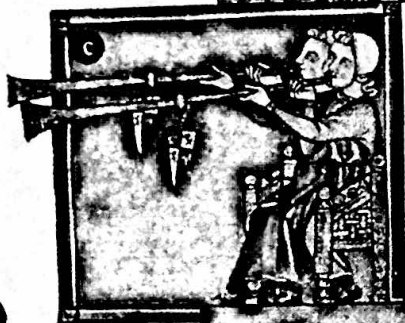


## Instrumental music

Although vocal music still played a central role, by the 1300s instrumental music was increasingly popular. Instruments supported vocal music, either by accompanying singers or, most likely, by doubling their notes using a simple drone. Sometimes instrumental arrangements were made of vocal works, and of course instruments were essential for dance music. Instrumental music tended to be improvised and therefore was not often written down, but some written works remain to give us an idea of what it was like. The instruments themselves are often represented in paintings and books, and some early examples survive in museums.

Early instruments fall into the same general groupings as modern ones; there were strings, woodwinds, brass, percussion and keyboard instruments. They were divided according to whether they were soft (*bas*) or loud (*haut*). Instruments with a soft sound were generally used indoors and louder ones were used for outdoor entertainments. String instruments that were plucked, like the lute, the harp and the psaltery, or bowed, like the *viele* and the *rebec*, were used indoors, as were recorders and flutes. Outdoor instruments included the bagpipes, the shawm (an ancestor of the oboe), and the slide trumpet, which developed into the sackbut, a kind of early trombone. There were other instruments that were used indoors and out, like the crumhorn, a J-shaped woodwind with a double reed and a softer sound than the shawm, and the cornetto, a wooden horn with a mouthpiece like a brass instrument and finger holes like a woodwind. Drums included the large cylindrical tabors and small, bowl-shaped drums called *nakers*. Other percussion instruments were cymbals and bells. Organs were also used in the Middle Ages: large ones with no stops so that all the pipes sounded at once, requiring several men to pump the bellows, and smaller portable organs, with only one rank of pipes and a bellows the player could pump himself. Another popular instrument was the hurdy-gurdy, a kind of mechanized fiddle, with melody strings that are played through a keyboard and drone strings that sound when a wheel is turned.



- a) string instruments
- b) psaltery
- c) horns
- d) set of bells
- e) flutes
- f) bagpipes
- g) hurdy-gurdies

## Dance music

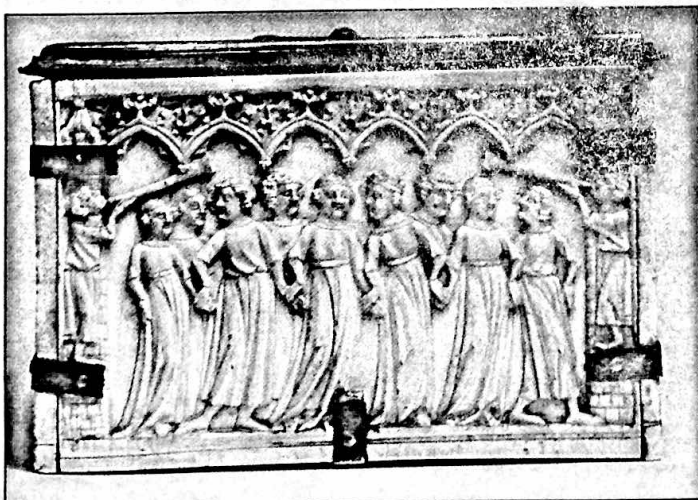
There were a number of dance forms in the Middle Ages, many of them chain dances in which the dancers held hands and danced as a group. The carole was a ring dance performed as the dancers sang ballads. In the branle, the chain of dancers made a side-to-side movement by alternating large steps to the left and the same number of small steps to the right. The music was always in 4/4 time, but the speed varied. The farandole was also a chain dance, but the dancers followed the steps of a leader who wound through the streets of town accompanied by pipes and tabors playing in 6/8 time. The estampie was one of the first dances for couples, a slow stately dance accompanied by vieles. The music followed an aa, bb, cc form repeated up to seven times. Estampies are some of the earliest instrumental music that still exist. One of the most famous troubadour songs, "Kalenda Maya," was written to an existing estampie melody. The saltarello followed the estampie as an afterdance in the fourteenth century. It was a fast, leaping dance for couples in triple metre, either 3/4 or 9/8.



A group of aristocrats dancing a ring dance



Peasants doing a chain dance, accompanied by a bagpiper



An ivory box carved with dancing women



Lorenzetti, *The Roundelay of Young Women*

## Religious composers



An illumination from one of Hildegard von Bingen's manuscripts, showing her enveloped by the fire from heaven that came down to inspire her

Much liturgical music of the Middle Ages has come down to us marked Anonymous, but there are some composers whose names are known. One of the earliest was a woman, **Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)**, who was the prioress of the Benedictine monastery of Disibodenberg. Hildegard was given to the Church when she was quite young by her noble parents because she was their tenth child, a practice called tithing. She took her vows at the age of 15 and became Mother Superior of the order when she was 34. Something of a mystic, she experienced visions from the time she was a child. After the Church authenticated them, she recorded them in a book entitled *Scivias*. In 1147, she established a new Benedictine monastery in the Rhineland near Bingen and was involved in politics and diplomacy through her correspondence with popes, kings and archbishops. She wrote a large quantity of monophonic plainsongs, and a morality play called *Ordo virtutum*, or *The Play of the Virtues*, which depicts the battle between the Devil and the Virtues for the soul, Anima. Her *Symphonia armonia celestium revelationum* is a collection of 77 lyric poems, each with its own music.

There were two masters of music at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris in the twelfth century. The first was **Léonin (c. 1135-1201)** and the second, **Pérotin (c. 1160-1240)**. A large group of musicians were at the Cathedral, working under the leadership of Léonin, and his student Pérotin. Léonin is credited with developing organum, and he is believed to be the author of the *Magnus liber organi* (*The Great Book of Organum*), a collection of two-part organa for the whole church year. Léonin was also responsible for introducing definite rhythm patterns. Pérotin was the first to incorporate more than two voices, and he is known to have composed at least two four-part works. He also made additions to Léonin's *Magnus liber organi*.

## Troubadours and trouvères

We do at least know the names and a little bit about some of these poet-composers. One of the earliest troubadours was **Guillaume de Poitiers, the Duke of Aquitaine (1070-1127)** and Eleanor's grandfather. Another was a commoner named **Macabru**, who died around 1150. He was a foundling, raised by a rich man and apprenticed to a troubadour. **Bernart de Ventadour**, who lived in the second half of the twelfth century, was in service to Eleanor of Aquitaine before he retired to the abbey of Dalon. His work is thought to be the finest of all the Provençal poets. Eighteen of his complete musical compositions survive.

Well-known trouvères include **Richard the Lion-Heart (1157-99)**, son of Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine, probably better known as a crusader and for taking back the crown of England from his brother John, and **Adam de la Halle (c. 1237-87)**, a commoner. Adam was born in Arras, studied in Paris, and lived and travelled in Italy. His most famous work is *Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*, a secular drama about a knight's wooing of a shepherdess, which is regarded as a precursor of French comic opera. Many of his works survive, both monophonic and polyphonic.



Macabru depicted in an illumination

Ch'oumeade li jeus de Robm et  
de maion cadans fist. *M*axons.

obms ma  
me obms ma  
Robms ma demante li madi-Bo  
bms macata corele delcar lae lorne  
et lele soukame et chamuuele aleu  
ua Robms ma me obms ma w  
fr cheuo  
here.

A page from Adam de la Halle's  
*Le Jeu de Robin et Marion*

## Composers of Ars nova



An illumination from the *Roman de Fauvel* by Machaut

**P**hilippe de Vitry (1291-1361) was one of the most prominent promoters of the Ars nova, and the author of the music theory text from which the movement got its name. He was educated at the Sorbonne and rose to be a bishop. He was a clerk in the royal household in Paris and served Duke Jean of Normandy. In his treatise *Ars nova*, he explained the new theories of mensural notation, and introduced symbols for new note durations. He was important in the development of the motet. His surviving musical works are primarily secular motets in Latin on political subjects.

**Guillaume de Machaut** (c. 1300-77) was perhaps the outstanding composer of the Ars nova, and his complete works are preserved in a series of illuminated manuscripts prepared for members of the French royalty. He was born near Rheims, took holy orders

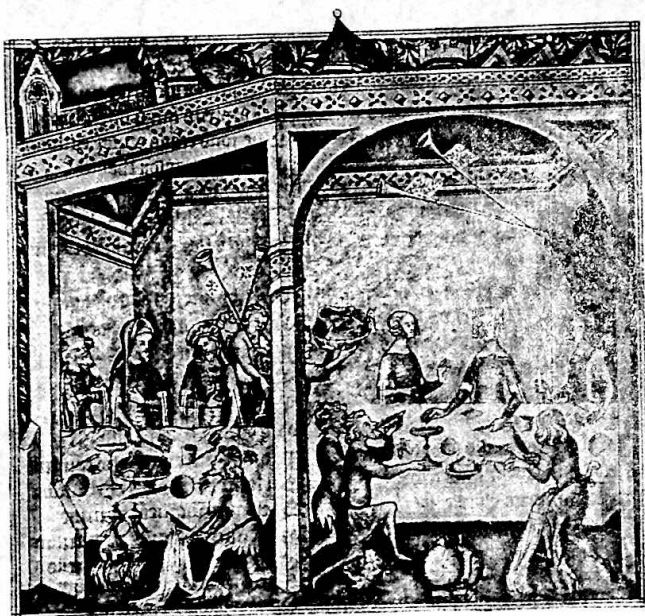


The beginning of Machaut's lai *Le Remède de fortune*

while still young, and then became secretary to John of Luxembourg, the King of Bohemia. He also served Charles, Duke of Normandy and King of France. As both a priest and a courtier, it is not surprising that he wrote both religious and secular music. All of his music has been preserved in 32 manuscripts and much

of what we know about the music of his period comes from them. He is best known for his *Mass of Notre-Dame*, one of the earliest

polyphonic mass settings. It was also one of the first to deal with the different sections of the mass as if they belonged to a unified whole. Most of Machaut's music is secular. Twenty-three motets survive, but he is also important for his monophonic lais and virelais, which preserve the tradition of the trouvères, and for his development of polyphonic ballads and rondeaus.



An illumination from *Le Remède de fortune*