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PART I

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To the Reader

History ceases to be a dull procession of dates and events when its student, in a single, almost imperceptible moment, stumbles over a small connection, some circumstance or detail that suddenly infuses history with a familiar colour, sound or smell. This connection introduces entire sensory fields absent from the historical record by linking the student with something that she has experienced herself. Of course, the danger of pursuing this connection is that the student might eventually mistake history for her own experience. The advantage, though, and one that far outweighs the danger just mentioned, is that she can now understand something about history that had initially eluded her, and indeed may have eluded most students and experts before her.

Something like this happened to me during the writing of this book, when I began reading medieval condemnations of dance music and love songs. From the moment I discovered in these condemnations a personal point of connection, I ceased to write about medieval song for this or that audience, academic or otherwise, and began writing – the reader has a right to know – mainly for myself. For what I had found in history was my own experience. It, rather than some impressive scholarly study or handsome parchment book, now moved me to write. Before relating that ‘point of connection’, however, let me briefly lay out the circumstances that led me to embark on this book in the first place.

I began research on this topic in the year 2000, while completing a tally of all surviving Old Occitan and Old French melodies for an earlier book on troubadour and trouvère music.¹ I had encountered several songs that did not quite fit into either the ‘troubadour’ or ‘trouvère’ category, such as the Old French tropes on the Epistle reading for the feast of Saint Stephen discussed in Chapter 5 of this book. Most of these pieces, although in the vernacular rather than Latin, pre-dated the troubadours. That same year my friend the renegade-academic Robert Lug pointed me to a source then recently published, a multi-volume catalogue and bibliography of

¹ John Haines, *Eight Centuries of Troubadours and Trouvères: The Changing Identity of Medieval Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 20–4.

all known texts in Romance languages published by Barbara Frank, Jörg Hartmann and Heike Kürschner.² Their *Inventaire systématique des premiers documents des langues romanes* became my guide on a journey of discovery into songs performed in Romance languages before the troubadours. Throughout this journey, I continued to learn much from philologists such as Barbara Frank, whom I eventually had the pleasure of meeting a few years ago at a conference organized by my Toronto colleague Dorothea Kullmann. Over the years, linguistic specialists in Romance philology have generously offered me much-needed assistance, among them Ulrich Mölk, Samuel Rosenberg and my former teacher Robert Taylor.

Between 2002 and 2005, I gathered information on the different pieces listed in Hartmann and Frank's catalogue, travelling to study the manuscripts in which these pieces were found. It became clear to me that this significant corpus of songs had received little musicological attention. The propitious appearance in 2004 of Pierre Bec's article on 'Las! Qui ne sun sparvir' (number 5 in Part II of this book) confirmed for me that musicologists were not the only ones to have neglected these songs.³ During my years of travel and research, I was lucky to receive funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in the form of a short-term junior research 'chair', actually more of a grant than a chair, a so-called Tier II Canada Research Chair (CRC II). Without this funding, I could not have visited Europe as often as I did to study medieval manuscripts. I worked in large libraries, of course: the British Library in London and the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. I also travelled to smaller libraries, sometimes cumbersome to reach but always a pleasure to visit. I am especially grateful to J. Mancal of the Stadtarchiv Augsburg, to Mathieu Lescuyer and his friendly staff at the Bibliothèque du Patrimoine – Clermont Communauté in Clermont-Ferrand, to Michèle Neuveu and Catherine Joliet at the Médiathèque de Chartres, and to Anne-Bérangère Rothenburger and Séverine Montigny at the Bibliothèque Louis Aragon in Amiens. During this same period, I also received help from others, including Andrea Langer of the Universitäts- und Forschungsbibliothek Erfurt, Étienne Rouziès of the Bibliothèque municipale in Limoges, my then-retired colleague Virginia Brown and Dom Faustino Avagliano in Monte Cassino, Susan L'Engle at the Knights of Columbus Vatican Microfilm

² Barbara Frank, Jörg Hartmann and Heike Kürschner, *Inventaire systématique des premiers documents des langues romanes* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1997), 5 vols.

³ Pierre Bec, 'Prétrobadouresque ou paratrobadouresque? Un antécédent médiéval d'un motif de chanson folklorique *Si j'étais une hirondelle*', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 47 (2004), 153–62.

Library at Saint Louis University (Missouri, USA), as well as Riccardo Luongo and Ambrogio Piazzoni at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana while that library was closed to researchers. In July 2009, as I finished writing these pages, Virginia Brown died. In the mid-1990s, Virginia had taught me palaeography and codicology; later, when I returned to Toronto as a faculty member, she was an ideal colleague, who at one point helped me organize a conference on music and liturgy in medieval Italy. That the musical form of Virginia's beloved Beneventan script found its way into this book of mine would have pleased her very much, I think. For their work later in the production of this book, I must thank Mark Laver for re-editing pieces 7–10 and 12 from my outdated digital transcriptions into elegant 'Sibelius' settings, Sarah Gordon for her work on the bibliography and Tristan Major for his on the footnotes; their salaries were paid by the CRC II.

Following the period of travel and research just mentioned, I began to write my book. This was around 2007. After a time, desperate for more information about singing in early Romance languages, I began reading medieval sermons and laws, a literature I barely knew and in which I was educated by Dorothy Haines, in the hopes of finding a few isolated comments on singing in the vernacular. To my surprise, I found in these medieval sources not only more information than I had expected, but sentiments and even expressions that reminded me of things I had heard often in childhood and adolescence.

I was raised in a strict religious environment where singing was what one might call a regulated activity. Devotional and worship songs, specifically composed for spiritual edification, were the most desirable songs of all. Light-entertainment music could be listened to, so long as one was not moved to irreligious behaviour such as dancing. And then there was just plain wicked music. For fundamentalist Christians in the 1960s and 1970s, that was rock'n'roll, from Elvis Presley to Led Zeppelin and everything in between. As children, we understood, mostly without being told, that listening to such groups as the Beatles was unacceptable; the commandment was implicit. As adolescents, though, we had to be reminded. One event stands out in particular. I was 14 when a preacher came to our small English-language school in rural Southern Germany. Weeks before, we had been made ready for the great man's arrival, and when he came, his greatness walked in with him. The glamorous perfume of an authentic American pulpit shaman swirled in the air around him. We later found out he came from Western Canada, but no matter. For us he had all the allure of a Wild-West evangelist, with a gait and speech that oozed swagger and truth.

The day of his talk, entitled 'Rock'n'roll, the Bible and the Mind', was a

damp Thursday night in the autumn of 1979, and I shall never forget it. He began speaking calmly, as if nothing were going to happen, thanking those who had made his advent possible. Slowly, he picked up the pace. In undulating, weird tones he began to tell how he himself as a young college student had been held captive by rock'n'roll, how he had wallowed in its demonic sound and had nearly remained a permanent prisoner until, standing at the edge of hell's precipice, he had realized the error of his ways. He told us of the power of rock'n'roll, of its evil force and mighty clutch, of how many young people such as ourselves had fallen into depravity and remained scarred for the rest of their lives. He told us harrowing tales of Alice Cooper consorting with demons, of Linda Ronstadt seducing men of God and of John Lennon claiming that he was better than Jesus Christ. We sat trembling at his tales and at the wicked sounds that we foolish adolescents had unwittingly taken in for years. We were now made to believe that rock'n'roll, with its wild, pulsating rhythm, had misled us into accepting the un-Christian practices of its stars. Dancing, drunkenness, drugs and sexual debauchery, the preacher said, became the inevitable habits of those who dared consort with rock.

When, thirty years after these events, I began reading medieval condemnations of love songs, I suddenly found myself on eerily familiar ground. Echoes of the preacher on that fateful Thursday night jumped out at me from the pages of medieval sermons and laws. All the themes of his sermon, implicit and explicit, were there: middle-aged apprehension of youthful energy; adolescent desire for rhythm and beauty; the devil and his drums; voluptuous women and effeminate men dancing to Satan's beat and singing diabolical songs; and the power of song to seduce and damn to hell. In reading medieval churchmen, I had both discovered a new connection with the Middle Ages and begun to make peace with my own conflicted past. I continued writing on medieval music by filling in the blanks with the sounds and fears of my own experience. Medieval song in early Romance languages had come to life.

Sermons, laws and other sources also brought up for me another unexpected element in the history of song. More often than not, churchmen condemned women, not men, for singing and dancing. Perhaps the idea of girls dancing to frenetic music appealed to ecclesiastical male imaginations. Yet the theme of women singing love songs, laments and other kinds of workaday music returned so frequently and in such a variety of sources, that I knew this must refer to an actual practice widespread in the Middle Ages. Naturally, as a man I lacked the personal experience to empathize with the experiences, musical and otherwise, of the medieval women I was

reading about. And as a middle-aged academic man, I was potentially more likely to side with my medieval counterparts than with the women they happily harangued. Still, the experience of studying these many women through the twisted lenses of their learned judges began to make me consider how peculiar my own privileged position was as a writer in modern academia, a kind of medieval church in its own way. Gnawing feelings of guilt over my masculine advantages only intensified during the last phase of writing when, for the first time in ten years of academic employment, I was granted a research leave. I became spoiled with more time than usual to study and write, in peaceful and undisturbed bliss. Over the course of that year I sat and wrote while women of all kinds whirled around me, from mothers dropping off their children at school in the morning to weary workers slumped on a subway seat as they headed home. I clung to the hope that, in its own limited way, my writing about medieval women and their marginality in male-dominated histories would compensate for the injustice of my own privileges. In my better moments, I have taken inspiration from all these women, both the medieval ones and those around me, as I have meditated on their strength and work.

One woman I must thank most of all: my dear wife, Dorothy Haines, with whom I celebrated twenty-five years of marriage while putting the finishing touches to this book. Certainly, I am grateful to the generosity of university administrators, to the bestowed bounty of the mighty Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, to the amiability of European librarians, to the courtesies of academic colleagues and friends along the way, to the labour of academic journal editors and anonymous readers for their occasional acceptance and publication of my essays leading up to this book, especially to Vicki Cooper at Cambridge University Press for shepherding this book to acceptance, to two anonymous readers for their critique, and most especially to medieval women and men working and writing so that I could study them centuries later. But none of these can compare to the countless kindnesses, many of them large but most of them small and unnoticed, that Dorothy has bestowed on me over the three decades that have passed too quickly since we first met in a little German village walled off from the outside world.

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1 | Song

What is song? It would be easy to misconstrue song as something trivial and unworthy of thoughtful consideration. The English expression ‘for a song’ means ‘for a mere trifle, for little or nothing’, as in Charles Dickens’ statement that ‘the things were going for a song’.¹ This expression implies that a song is worthless or at least of very small worth. In his recently published memoirs, however, Jean d’Ormesson assigns song a much higher rank than this. He reviews the musical accomplishments of his fellow humans in the following sentence: ‘We composed masses, operas, symphonies and concertos, cheerful little pieces and songs to make you lose your head.’² In d’Ormesson’s description, the genre of song tops humanity’s musical achievements. Song is saved for the end of his list; it is the only music that goes to one’s head. What contradictory assumptions about song! Can it be both worthless and intoxicating? Having barely started this chapter, our subject of song seems a slippery paradox standing somewhere between cheap and priceless, between ephemeral and unforgettable.

Yet a few things may safely be said about song. Song survives as one of the most common species of music. More often than not, it is a casual, occasional act of creation, written for a time and then discarded. Often a new song recycles an old one, preserving little parts of it until eventually that new song morphs into the next new song and so on, until traces of the old generating song can no longer be detected. As most of us have personally experienced, the best songs are the catchy ones. Indeed, most songs are simple, with obvious and universally human themes. Songs generally treat loving, killing, dying or believing. Despite their humble sound, then, songs are great and memorable music – perhaps the greatest and most memorable music that human beings have made or will ever make, to paraphrase d’Ormesson. Unlike a symphony, a song seldom aspires to greatness; unlike a chant, a song usually makes no special claims to divine

¹ J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), vol. XV, p. 1004.

² Jean d’Ormesson, *Une Fête en larmes* (Paris: Laffont, 2005), p. 292: ‘Nous avons composé des messes, des opéras, des symphonies et des concertos, de petites pièces très gaies et des chansons à perdre la tête.’

communion. A well-known song, a great song, is as unpretentious and as mortal as the human that sings it. Song, it seems, is the right measure of human beings. Its perennial themes of love, war, death and belief speak to our universal experience. Song may be great, but only just great enough to be quintessentially human music.

In considering the vast field of medieval song, it is difficult to say exactly what would have made any given song popular. One might venture that what made a song memorable in the Middle Ages was probably what makes a song memorable today: one or more instances of a simple but quirky alliance of word and melody that makes it stick in one's head. This is so universal a thing as hardly to require a footnote. What does require a footnote is the peculiar modern scholarly notion that certain melodies and words were somehow governed by impassive principles whereby certain pitches and word patterns regularly coincided – and this for most of the period we call the Middle Ages. The idea would be ludicrous were it not for the fact that a substantial amount of the printed material on medieval vernacular song fusses over such questions. Did troubadour songs observe a downbeat on the penultimate syllable in paroxyton verse?³ Were all rhyme syllables lengthened and followed by a pause in Middle High German songs?⁴ In the end, all of this has little to do with the essence of song as fundamentally human music: its simplicity, infectiousness and, above all, its ability to metamorphose.

If I have struggled to define song in the opening pages of this book, I am not the first to do so. My subject is early medieval Romance song, and it is reassuring to know that medieval authorities are not always in agreement on how to define song (nor 'Romance', for that matter – on which, see below). The most common Latin equivalents for 'song' are *cantus* and *carmen* (plural *carmina*). The sixth-century writer of that ubiquitous music textbook *The Fundamentals of Music*, Boethius, uses in addition to these words the term *cantilena*. Boethius does not usually specify whether a song is religious or not, although often the passage betrays a secular context, as when he writes of the 'sweet song' (*cantilena dulcis*) that soothes children.⁵ Quite impenetrable is the definition of *cantus* by the ecclesiastical encyclopaedist writing a century or so later, Isidore of Seville. Isidore calls *cantus*

³ Haines, *Eight Centuries*, p. 221.

⁴ James McMahan, *The Music of Early Minnesang* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1990), p. 45.

⁵ Boethius, *Traité de la musique*, ed. Christian Meyer (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), p. 28, lines 13–14: 'Inde est enim, quod infantes quoque cantilena dulcis oblectat.' Boethius' use of *carmina* occurs in his discussion of the three types of music, one of which is making songs (ibid., p. 94, line 27).