

# The Music of Bretonnia

Contributed by Dave  
Monday, 21 March 2011  
Last Updated Thursday, 24 March 2011

Greetings Round Table Members,

As a music teacher and performer, I am always curious and speculative in regards to the music of fantastical nations and races. In November, 2010, I posted a contemplative discussion thread in the Great Hall about music in Bretonnia and invited the members of the Round Table to contribute their ideas. Below is a reworking of my original post that includes:

I: An expanded summary of Medieval (and some Renaissance) music

II: Lists of instruments heard in period-accurate performances

III: My expanded musings on the state of Bretonnian secular and sacred music

IV: A large, updated list of musical clips to inspirational Bretonnian-esque pieces (some of which are period, some of which are significantly more modern)

V: Credited user contributions from the Great Hall topic thread.

Please enjoy!

~Gastion le vaillant

Medieval/Renaissance Music Overview:

Keep in mind that this is a VERY generalized outline of the evolution of music throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and serves as a foundation for my speculations in the rest of the article. I tried to make this as understandable to non-musicians as possible, but please let me know if any issues of comprehension occur...

What we consider to be "medieval music" is any music composed between approximately 500 and 1400 A.D. Within this nearly 1000 year period, the evolving art of music went through distinct alterations in composition techniques, orchestration, harmonic and melodic focus, and even the context of performances. As with everything during the Middle Ages, there was a distinct separation between the sacred and the secular.

The evolution of Western music as we know it can be traced from the early chants of the Catholic Church. What began as monophonic (one-voice/melody only) chant unique to the various regions of Christianity (early chant in Spain is distinctly different from early chant in Italy, for example) became a standardized, pan-Church set of specific chants under Pope Gregory I. Though texts of chants were standardized, their structure was not. Around the year 1000, monks began experimenting with their chants by adding another vocal line above the primary chant. These two-voiced chants were called organum. Organum not only allowed crucial harmonic experimentation, it also paved the way for further music to come.

During the High Middle Ages, the Notre Dame School (a compositional style associated with the great cathedral in Paris) further developed voices singing simultaneously (polyphony), incorporated complex rhythms, and established early notational systems for writing and reading music. Polyphony was still only used for sacred music. This period of sacred music was known as the Ars Antiqua (Old Technique). At this point, the troubadours and trouveres were in high demand at the courts of the nobility, and highly poetic lyrics were juxtaposed with magnificent melodies and virtuosic performers.

In the early 14th Century, two different movements of musical thought emerged. The first, called the Ars Nova (New Technique), was primarily based in France. During the Ars Nova, the integration of complex polyphony into secular music became commonplace, and intricate, meticulously composed pieces of music with multiple voices were no longer reserved for the Church. Major composers throughout this period also began to compose entire masses. Where in previous periods, they would compose certain components of the Liturgy, now they would craft a grand work to act as a single mass. Many of the distinct forms and ideas regarding composition that are still prevalent today originated with the Ars Nova.

Occurring simultaneously with the Ars Nova, the Trecento was the secular musical movement in Italy. It generally involved three vocal parts - one on melody, the other two in support - with smooth, florid melodies. While in the Warhammer World this music may be more typical in Estalia or Tilea, it is still important to understand because it influenced Renaissance and late medieval music.

The final movement of Medieval music is known as the Ars Subtler (Subtle Technique). Not only did this movement see the height of polyphonic complexity, with many different parts performing their own complex lines that fit incredibly well together, it also included the most intricate rhythms and rhythmic structures seen in Western Music until the 20th Century. Not only was the music itself highly complex (more so than even the most late Romantic compositions), it was also composed in highly creative ways. For example, the sheet music of the chanson "Belle, bon, sage" was written to visually resemble a heart.

The exact transition between Medieval and Renaissance music is difficult to pinpoint, much as the transition between the

Middle Ages and the Renaissance itself is difficult to pinpoint. While I will not deeply delve into Renaissance music, it is worth mentioning that the Catholic Church (and critics as well) began to discourage the use of ultra-complex polyphonic compositions as it hindered comprehension of text. The sacred music of the Renaissance therefore achieved an extremely pure sound, with a great deal of motion and sweep. Focus shifted from complexity to aesthetics, and I personally believe that the choral compositions of the Renaissance remain the most beautiful works of music ever created. This was when homophony (melody with harmonic accompaniment) truly took center stage, and where Western music as we know it emerged entirely into the light.

#### Medieval Instruments:

Secular ensembles and traveling groups of musicians performed with a variety of instruments during the Middle Ages, and I would imagine all of these instruments (and more) would be found within Bretonnia. The following link shows many, many of the instruments used during the Middle Ages and Renaissance and even describes their function and sound&hellip;

<http://www.music.iastate.edu/antiqua/instrumt.html>

#### Bretonnian Music Speculation:

**Bretonnian Secular Music:** Secular music includes any and all music within Bretonnia that does not reference the Lady (or amongst the larger cities, religion in general). A vast majority of secular Bretonnian music would be passed down orally, much as it was during the Middle Ages. As a result, the lowborn peasantry would probably have a vast plethora of folk songs within their repertoire. Additionally, the typical "tavern band" would be in existence, utilizing a variety of instruments that I will discuss later. The small population centers of Bretonnia (compared to the Empire at least) make me hesitant to believe one could find Bretonnian opera, symphony orchestras, or established Schools of Music. However, the wandering troubadour/trouveres would certainly travel from court to court to entertain the nobility and teach those who wished to learn their craft (for a pretty penny, of course).

**Bretonnian Sacred Music:** I picture the real "meat" of Bretonnian music to be the sacred vocal compositions performed at chapel services. This music would be PURELY acapella much like the Medieval and Renaissance music of the Catholic Church. Chapels and cities would employ composers to create the most sublimely beautiful chants and choir works to praise the Lady, with the wealthiest houses of worship competing amongst each other to hire the most accomplished musicians. Promising singers would be selected at childhood, their skills nurtured and honed throughout their lives to

become the most accomplished vocalists within the Old World. I see Bretonnian prayer services as being filled with song, and I imagine many specific Bretonnian prayers to have melodies attached. On feast days, elaborate staging and oratorios would commence, entertaining as well as sanctifying all assembled to behold them.

**Bretonnian Vocal Tradition:** If one assumes that Bretonnian sacred music is exclusively acapella and that there is a lucrative and competitive business surrounding the employ of musicians by the chapels, it is easy to conclude that all singers must be highly trained in proper, healthy vocal techniques. As a result, all major (aka wealthy) chapels would have a choir master and vocal teachers/coaches. Sought-after tone would presumably be pure and ethereal, with proper breath support and a strong, confident quality to the sound. As singers would not be accompanied by an orchestra, volume alone would not be an issue and great attention would be paid to subtleties in vocal color, warmth, and blending within choral situations. Because of the Bretonnian Chanteur's rigorous lifetime of training, vast experience in choral and solo situations, and ability to transfix an audience merely with the sound of their voice, I conclude that they are not simply the most versatile singers in the Old World, they are also the most accomplished and sought-after vocalists across the nations of Mankind. A truly successful Chanteur might be hired to perform at the grand concert halls of Altdorf, or lured away from their homeland to become the star performer at some Tilean city-state's opera house.

## Examples

Below, I have linked to some YouTube selections of music that I believe would be found in Bretonnia, and describe where/how I envision them being performed.

**Period Pieces:** The following pieces derive from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance, and reflect said time periods extremely well. I hope you enjoy!

1) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOBFeiD\\_-jI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOBFeiD_-jI)

"Ja nuls hom pres" was a High Middle Ages trouvère (northern French wandering minstrels) piece that was actually composed by King Richard the Lionheart (perhaps our King Louen might be an amateur composer as well?). There are several versions up on YouTube, but this performance not only had the most graceful French, it also lacked the usual academic/antiquated vibe generally associated with the modern day Early Music. This would be a court piece, performed for a lord or lady and their retainers and families.

2) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJv3Oz094J8>

This clip is a set of performances by an Italian ensemble presenting troubadour and trouvère music. There's a grounded folk vibe in their sound, and I almost feel like this could be the music of the wandering band of fools and artists in search for a roof and an evening's meal.

3) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFK7JsmWmMo&feature=channel>

The hammered dulcimer is one of the most underrated and beautiful instruments from the periods of early music. It is currently seeing a resurgence in the world of film music, and I was lucky enough to see a group of dulcimer players perform during my undergraduate years. This particular selection is absolutely hypnotic.

4) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KAfqDKgxkb8&feature=related>

This trio performing a winter solstice concert shows off a variety of early music instruments and secular vocal styles. I can see it being performed either within a lord's hall, or outside beneath the stars as the lowborn dance 'till dawn.

5) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HEKhr002Ts>

The monks of the Middle Ages awoke early in the morning and sang praise to God. They then sang several more times throughout the day, praying and humbling themselves at specific hours with specific prayers set to song. These Gregorian Chants (named for the Pope) added both ritual and routine to the life of a monk. Perhaps our Grail Knights who guard the sacred places of the Lady sing similar such chants.

6) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dlr90NLDp-0>

The "Deus irae" is undoubtedly the most well known of the Gregorian chants. I enjoy this recording because it incorporates treble voices alongside the typical lower male timbre.

7) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtnjyH05Yek>

If our Grail Knights sing individual/small group chants throughout the day, perhaps they would sing polyphonic (many voices) pieces of sacred music as they are assembled together.

8) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJxRDhejtwo>

Medieval polyphony flourished at the turn of the 13th Century, and few embodied this type of music more effectively than Perotin. This is soaring, magnificent, transcendent music that could echo high to the vaulted ceilings of the Grail Chapels.

9) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4U7mPwGx7Ls>

This recording is part of Guillaume de Machaut's Messe de Notre Dame, one of the first complete masses ever composed. What I find so fascinating about this particular performance is the vocal style utilized. It is much less refined than most. A group of Questing Knights galloping through the muck could totally pull this off.

10) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PR1jNb7pFNw>

The oldest recorded piece of six-part polyphonic music, "Sumer Is Icumen In" is a Middle English round that is essentially the original "Row, Row, Row Your Boat". Legend has it that peasants sang this tune whilst laboring in their fields, and a passing monk transcribed it to written music. Of course, this legend is highly disputed. Still, one could imagine our soiled peasantry toiling during the spring thaw as they keep a rhythm with this song.

11) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKJgwLPjmlw>

Written by one of my favorite Renaissance composers, Josquin des Prez, "El Grillo" is a tongue-in-cheek frottola exhibiting the kind of acapella singing one might hear within Bretonnia. I dare you not to get it stuck in your head.

12) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNm9tNZePew>

Click the link. Close your eyes. Sit back for five minutes and allow the magnificence of Josquin des Prez's music wash over you. This piece is the embodiment of what I envision Bretonnian sacred music to be: absolutely pure vocal technique, perfectly in tune, flawlessly executed, transcending life and hope and dreams, and dwelling within the grand uncertainty between our pedestrian world and the heavens above.

13) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRsDgtqtx5Q>

"L'homme arme" (The Armed Man) is probably the single most popular piece of music from the Middle Ages. It is quoted by several composers in their own compositions across nearly all movements of medieval music and is still found hidden within pieces of the Renaissance. A rousing, militant, stirring song, I picture the entire Bretonnian army singing such a piece as they march upon their foes.

14) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtnjyH05Yek>

Guillaume Dufay was without question the most accomplished composer of the late 14th Century. This Kyrie quotes "L'homme arme" in several of its vocal lines. It's an interesting fusion of the martial with the sacred, something very clear in Bretonnian society.

15) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92JkdbW181Y>

Here's an example of a Josquin des Prez Agnus Dei that quotes "L'homme Arme", albeit a bit more subtly than the previous Dufay example.

Inspirational Stuff: The following songs/pieces are just plain inspiring to me. They are not necessarily "medieval", but I enjoy listening to them whilst painting or writing Bretonnian fiction.

1) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13FrLGB\\_oK8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13FrLGB_oK8)

I absolutely ADORE Kenneth Branagh's Henry V film, and this hymn-like piece of music entitled "Non nobis domine" that plays over the aftermath of the battle of Agincourt is nothing short of spellbinding.

2) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtcnt\\_VkvGU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtcnt_VkvGU)

The Sci-Fi Channel's Children of Dune miniseries was interesting, though not perfect. Its soundtrack, however, introduced us to this blood-pumping gem of a theme song perfect for the charge.

3) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bP5wmtOXCQ&feature=related>

I love Mozart. I very much enjoy the band Evanescence. When the two are fused together, magic happens.

4) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5FyRZbqfeM>

The Da Vinci Code was a horrible adaptation of a mediocre book, but its soundtrack was EXTRAORDINARY. Hans Zimmer is definitely one of the most versatile and talented composers working in the film industry, and when he's allowed to unleash himself, his music is magnificent. There are many pieces of his that I listen to, but "Chevaliers de Sangreal" seems most Bretonnian to me.

5) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dt7DazRff38>

The soundtrack of Dragon Age: Origins was quite excellent, but no track was more impressive or alluring than "I am the One (Dark Fantasy Version)".

6) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIL\\_-5VfQJI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIL_-5VfQJI)

Two Steps from Hell is a movie trailer music company that has created some seriously epic pieces of music. I believe this one, entitled "Protectors of the Earth", is the most Bretonnian.



7) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BPVrej8LI1Q>

What good Bretonnian doesn't appreciate the slightly-flawed but incredibly enjoyable wonders of Dragonheart? The late Jerry Goldsmith's incomparable theme song is a staple of fantasy geeks worldwide.

8) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ZRR-MerxIA>

The band Nightwish is a Finnish symphonic metal band that utilizes operatic female vocals amidst some really phenomenal orchestration. "Ghost Love Score" is my favorite of their pieces.

9) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XYfySVrQxto>

Please don't spear me with a lance for including part of a Disney movie score. It's actually a gorgeous piece of music, and flavored with the joviality of a medieval marketplace during a fair.

10) [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5KOERF\\_akc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5KOERF_akc)

I know, it's from another kid's movie. However, the score for How to Train Your Dragon was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Score here in the US, and this wonderfully driving, vibrant, victorious theme really kicks in at about 1:10 into the song.

11) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezFNllyGT2o>

Welsh composer Karl Jenkins wrote a variation of "L'homme arme" for his Mass for Peace that is simultaneously powerful, inspiring, and tragic. As a chorus geek, my enthusiasm for this piece knows no bounds, especially once things really get cooking about 4:00 in.

12) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPHg47YDSjE>

Dutch goth/symphonic metal band Within Temptation has a pretty phenomenal set of pieces, rivaling Nightwish at the top of the genre (in my opinion at least). "Stand My Ground" never fails to get my adrenaline pumping, and it always seems like my writing spills forth twice as fast whenever the song comes on my play list.

13) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqaARDsiJv4>

Mozart's Requiem Mass was unfinished at the time of his death, and there is a deep mystery surrounding the period of time he spent writing the work. The Dies irae is the most intense movement of the work, and has been used in countless films, commercials, and previews. For those of you unfamiliar with Mr. Mozart's darker side, please listen and enjoy!

14) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjgdBPGdL7E>

American metal band Manowar is considered one of the worst bands in the world. Their lyrics are horrendous, their orchestrations are a bit on the clumsy side, and their presentation is an absolute farce. Still...I have to confess that Manowar is a powerful guilty pleasure of mine, and this song always manages to get my blood boiling in anticipation. Be warned that you will probably laugh hysterically when you realize these guys take themselves seriously. To quote one of the YouTube comments...Conan the Barbarian has this on his iPod.

15) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oN24yo0yg6c>

Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves was a terrible movie. Its only saving grace was the incomparable Alan Rickman's portrayal of the Sheriff of Nottingham. Otherwise, Mel Brooks' parody, Robin Hood: Men in Tights was a far superior adaptation of the Robin Hood myth (and unlike Kevin Costner, Carey Elwes could speak with an English accent). Still, Prince of Thieves did have one of the most identifiable and victorious theme songs. This is the sound of a Bretonnian's gallant triumph in battle to me, and I always grin like a traveling fool when its unmistakable tones begin to play.

User Additions

The response to my original post was really quite wonderful, and many of you have contributed pieces of music. Below, I've listed each user who contributed music alongside the links that they provided.&hellip;

KingdomofunHeaven: Blackmore's knight- one of my all time favorite bands.

This particular one, just call my name, reminds me of the Lady of the Lake,

<http://video.tagged.com/#v=ed6uyNqh-pY>

This one, All for one, makes me think of something someone would sing to raise morale the night before/after a battle

<http://video.tagged.com/#v=K-EXfyd8L9Y>

Artinam: I made a playlist on Youtube with Medieval Music. There is a guy named Aran Zoltan who makes some really nice ones.

Naturally, I can't be certain if the songs sound as they did in the past but many of them sound very interesting. They are more Troubadour like though.

[http://www.youtube.com/view\\_play\\_list?p=60B8CD6C48161846](http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=60B8CD6C48161846)

Sir Guy des Bontemps: A piece of music that, to me, captures the spirit of Bretonnia is Loreena McKennitt's "The Lady of Shalott", the lyrics for which come from the poem of the same name by Alfred Lord Tennyson.

Loreena McKennitt is a great favourite of mine, so I frequently listen to this track.

The song is featured in this YouTube video, which unfortunately ends prematurely (probably to fit the video).

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vw\\_cZGrVFqw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vw_cZGrVFqw)

If you want to hear the full, unabridged version of the track, it's on her album entitled "The Visit".

And here's some more Medieval / Renaissance music accompanying a nice video clip of some 'medieval' knights.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2RaPZQh5I&feature=related>

Please feel free to contribute additional pieces of music in reply to this article. Sharing music is a highly rewarding experience, and I look forward any and all comments :D!

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