



Poetry, Music and Dance in the Castle, in Medieval Times



In medieval Europe, poetry, music and dance were important parts of everyday life. People did not have televisions, computers or phones, so they shared stories, sang songs and danced together to relax, learn, celebrate, and to connect with God and angels.

These arts helped people remember history, express feelings and feel connected to one another, whether they lived in small villages or large stone castles.

Poetry and Storytelling

Poetry in medieval times was usually spoken or sung aloud. Most people could not read or write, so stories were passed on by listening. So, poetry was largely oral, meant to be spoken or sung rather than silently read.

Travelling poets, called *trouvères* in the north, and speaking regions composed love, heroes, and ideals. Their language with music melodies, emotions to travel from court

Within a castle, poetry might the great hall, praising a lord of ancestors... These town to town and from castle about brave knights, exciting creatures and faraway lands. events happened faraway, and if they were like 'living But always they used to do it in artists.



troubadours and minstrels, minnesingers in German- verses celebrating courtly poetry united refined allowing stories and to court.

be recited by candlelight in the castle and his family, his poets/singers moved from to castle. They carried stories adventures, magical They used to share news of therefore they also acted as newspapers' or TV news... artistic ways. They were

In those times, some poems told of love and friendship, while others shared lessons about courage, honesty and loyalty, or were prayers. Some people used to listen to 'chants' (songs) to evoke feeling of gratitude, of love, towards God. The Gregorian chants are very famous. Nuns and monks used to sing this way, or to remember Jesus' life. Actually, the medieval period saw the creation and adaptation of systems of music notation. This is when the music notes started to be written on paper to remember a melody. Usually, chants were sung "a cappella", which means without musical instruments.



Inside a castle, a poet might stand in the great hall near the fire and perform for the lord of the castle, the lady and their guests. Everyone would listen carefully, as poetry was a way to learn, imagine and dream.



Lute



Vielle

Funded by the European Union.
Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



Psaltery



Recorder

Music

Music filled medieval life with sound. Musicians played instruments such as lute, harp, vielle, flute, drums and bells. Music was used for many reasons: during feasts, weddings and festivals, but also during religious ceremonies. In castles, quiet music could be heard in the chapel during prayers, while louder, happier music played in the great hall during celebrations.

Music helped make the cold stone walls of a castle feel warmer and friendlier. It brought people together and made long days and dark winters easier to bear.





Serpent

Dance and Celebration

Dance was a joyful way for people to move together and have fun. Medieval dances were often simple, with people holding hands and moving in circles or lines. Everyone could join in, from young to old. In castles, dances were more polite and carefully planned, especially for nobles, who followed rules about posture and movement.

During special occasions like weddings, feast days or victories, castle courtyards and great halls would come alive with music, colourful clothes and dancing feet. People danced to secular (non religious) music. Dancers rarely touched each other. There were court dances and country dances. The Egg Dance, for example, a country dance, was a dance done in a marked off section, with raw eggs scattered in it. The goal was to dance without breaking eggs. Most of the dances had a set pattern of steps, jumps, or kicks, that you had to learn.

As we have seen in previous podcasts, life in a medieval castle could be hard and serious, with strict rules and daily duties. However, poetry, music and dance brought joy, colour and imagination into people's lives. They helped people share stories, express emotions and celebrate important moments. Even long ago, people loved to sing, dance looking each other in the eyes, and dream, just like we do today.



Medieval Greek short poems, often found in Byzantine anthologies like the Palatine Anthology, include personal, witty epigrams on love, nature (like cicadas), daily life, and classical themes, often drawing from Hellenistic epigrams (Anacreontics), showing intense emotions, clever ways of using words, and fragments of wisdom, contrasting with epic traditions but preserving Greek lyricism in short, impactful forms.

This an example: Anacreontic (Cicada). Praising the cicada's music and wisdom, a common metaphor of enjoying simple pleasures.

Cicad

Anakreonteia, date uncertain

People like to think of you, cicada,
when you sing down from the treetop,
having sipped the clear dew,
happy, high, and full of music
as a king, that you speak praise
of everything you see, the farms,
the woods, and under you the farmer,

grateful that you damage nothing,
holds this prophecy in honor,
portent of the summer fruit.
Even the Muses love your voice,
vibrating, as if out of the sun itself.
And old age never comes to you,
but only the earthborn wisdom
of your song, no hint of suffering,
or of the blood of passion, spirit,
we say, almost equal to the gods’.

In the previous podcast we spoke about Saint Hildegard. We tried her biscuits.
Now we listen to a chant that she composed. It’s an example of Gregorian Chant.

Here is an example of Gregorian (religious) Chant:

<https://youtu.be/v6qFCYRQKVA>

The following is a nice video of choir and instruments performing a famous chant by Saint Hildegard:

<https://youtu.be/HYzPR0nwcmY>

This is an example of medieval not religious (secular) music:

<https://youtu.be/dfI GA9ob378>

The following: ‘Come follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me to the greenwood ’ is a famous short medieval song, sung by today’s singers:

<https://youtu.be/gT2gLXR9QxQ>

and this ‘Come follow me’ by children:

<https://youtu.be/3kvZ4w-WWMw>

SUGGESTIONS FOR A PODCAST:

Narrator:

Close your eyes... and imagine travelling back in time.

No cars. No electricity. No screens.

The year is 1250, and we are standing outside a huge medieval castle.

Sound effect suggestion: wind, distant bells

Narrator:

In medieval Europe, poetry, music and dance were very important parts of everyday life. People did not have televisions, computers or phones, so they shared stories, sang songs and danced together.

Narrator:

These activities helped people relax, remember history and celebrate special days. They also helped people feel close to one another, especially inside the cold stone walls of a castle.

Narrator:

Poetry in medieval times was usually spoken or sung aloud. Many people could not read or write, so listening was very important.

Troubadour (cheerful):

"I am a travelling poet! I bring stories of brave knights, great castles and exciting adventures!"

Narrator:

These poets were called troubadours or minstrels. They travelled from place to place, sharing stories about love, friendship, courage and long journeys.

Sound: crackling fire

Narrator:

Inside a castle, a poet might stand near the fire in the great hall. Lords, ladies and guests would listen carefully and imagine the stories in their minds.

Narrator:

Music filled medieval life with sound.

(Audio file: Medieval instrumental music)

Musician:

"I play the harp and the lute. Others play flutes, drums and bells."

(Sound effect: gentle tapping or humming)

Narrator:

Music was played during feasts, weddings, festivals and religious ceremonies. In a castle, quiet music could be heard in the chapel during prayers.

(Audiofile: Gregorian chant)

Narrator:

Louder, happier music filled the great hall during celebrations. Music helped make the castle feel warmer and more welcoming.

Narrator:

Dance was a joyful way for people to move together.

Dance Leader:

“Hold hands! Step left, step right, and turn!”

(Sound: clapping or footsteps)

Narrator:

Medieval dances were often simple, with people moving in circles or lines. Everyone could join in.

Narrator:

In castles, dances were more polite and careful, especially for nobles. During weddings or festivals, the courtyard or great hall would be full of music, colourful clothes and dancing feet.

Narrator:

As we have seen in previous podacasts, life in a medieval castle could be hard and serious. People had rules to follow and many daily tasks.

Narrator:

But poetry, music and dance brought joy, colour and imagination into their lives.

Narrator:

They helped people share stories, express feelings and celebrate together.

Narrator:

Even long ago, people loved to sing, move and imagine...

Narrator:

Just like we do today.

Narrator:

And now listen to this wonderful medieval song that we sing even today.

These are the lyrics:

Come, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me!

Whither shall I follow, follow, follow, whither shall I follow, follow thee?

(Come, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me!)

To the green with, to the green with, to the green with, green with me...

(Whither shall I follow, follow, follow, whither shall I follow, follow thee?)

(Come, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me!)

Come, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me!

(To the green with, to the green with, to the green with, green with me...)

(Whither shall I follow, follow, follow, whither shall I follow, follow thee?)

Whither shall I follow, follow, follow, whither shall I follow, follow thee?

(Come, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me!)

(To the green with, to the green with, to the green with, green with me...)

To the green with, to the green with, to the green with, green with me...

(Whither shall I follow, follow, follow, whither shall I follow, follow thee?)

(Come, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me!)

Come, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow, follow me!

(To the green with, to the green with, to the green with, green with me...)

(Whither shall I follow, follow, follow, whither shall I follow, follow thee?)

Audiofile:

<https://youtu.be/3kvZ4w-WWMw>