

## PROGRAM NOTES

The German poets of the high middle ages recreated out of the material of their own lives the image, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, of the archetypal scop. The wandering epic singer of tribal Europe was of uncertain social status, but he took great satisfaction in his role as culture-bearer, and advisor to kings.

In the grand feasts there existed an idealized reciprocal relationship between poet and patron: the skillfulness of the poet's song should be rewarded lavishly. Over the centuries the fierce pride the poet took in his social function changed very little:

It is an art which all revere  
To play well on a fiddle's strings;  
The fiddler makes our spirits light,  
But song shall have my praises here.  
Song teaches woman, men and kings,  
Song makes God's table still more bright.  
To song the sounds of strings belong,  
Who loves them more than minnesong  
Will have to do without my praises.  
Song can be writ in words and phrases  
To cure the world of its malaises.

—der Unverangle (12th C).Sengrave and Thomas

But when the minnesinger felt that the mutual agreement between feudal ruler and subject was violated in any way, he became angry, even susceptible to corruption, as a result of his own humiliation and lack of station.

The Hohenstaufen emperors, Frederick Barbarossa and his descendants (c1150-1250), by the very nature of their personalities and political accomplishments, affected the identities and concern of German singers. Artists now often came from the ranks of the nobility and served the court as stewards or secretaries. They yearned for permanence and stability. Walter von der Vogelweide is said to have shouted for joy when he was granted a parcel of land. Neidhart von Reuenthal complained that the taxes on his property were too high and promised to sing his patron's praises for the rest of their days if only he was granted some financial relief.

The brilliant Hohenstaufen courts attracted scholars and intellectuals from all over the known world. Provençal troubadours exerted a considerable influence on 12th C minnesingers. The topics, poetic and musical form of the Germans are strongly derivative of the troubadours' art. For example, Oswald von Wolkenstein's "Es seust dort her von orient" is in many ways a classic aubade, or dawn song. The lovers lament the coming of day and their imminent separation. They complain of the watchman's movements, and of the birds' songs, which waken them. They are suspicious of gossips and informers, being an illicit pair. Oswald's poem is, however, much more sexually explicit than the Provençal models.

The summer and winter songs of Neidhart are intended for a courtly audience, and are sophisticated compositions which make use of French forms and structural devices. Neidhart seem to harken back to older Teutonic traditions. He created a persona and dramatic situation so bitterly antiheroic as to be a kind of negative pattern based on the Widsith prototype. The legendary Neidhart is etched in acid. He despises the peasants he lives with, but in many ways he operates on their debased level. The visionary mead-halls of the Teutonic war-lords are replaced by peasant beer-halls, depicted by Neidhart with all the vividness of a Peter Breughel painting. Neidhart falls in and out of favor with patrons and whines about it. The pride of the scop is supplanted by the bitterness of the poet separated from his proper audience.

The landless scop was free-floating; he seems to exist not only out of place but out of time. Historians think that the poems of minnesingers contain much legitimate biographical material; nevertheless their lives conform to the ancient patterns to remarkable degree. While itinerant singers lower on the social scale frequently took on romantic-sounding theatrical names, like Widsith (the Wanderer), or Der

Unversagte (the Undaunted), it was unusual for an artist from the nobility to do so. Neidhart's upper-class name is doubtless authentic enough; on the other hand, it may also be allegorical. Neidhart can mean "The one who hates," and Teuenthal "place of woe." Neidhart's literary self took on a life of its own for many years after the poet's death. Other minnesingers' lives also imitate art: Thannhauser's story of prodigality and redemption may be both actual and fabulous. Oswald von Wolkenstein was blind in one eye, as was Machaut, and wandered the earth like a 15th Century Wotan.

The moralizing verse of the high Middle Ages was called spruch, and minnesingers (courtly-love poets) could be spruchdichers as well. Der Unversagte and Meister Alexander both specialized in the spruch genre; the former concentrated on political morality, the latter on religious allegory. Alexander's Hie bevorn do wir kindern is one of the outstanding spruch poems, with its haunting evocation of lost childhood innocence. The adults in the poem seem more to be despoilers of an idyll than benevolent guardians. The snake in the grass is a reference to Dan, son of Jacob, who became a horned serpent, biting at passing horses. The final stanza combines the parable of the foolish virgins with the complaint of the lover in The Song of Songs. Thus, this is a richly evocative, regretful commentary on choronological and spritual coming-of-age.

Wandering musicians weren't the only medieval people to gain an extensive knowledge of lands other than their own. Merchants and explorers are known to have voyaged as far as Greenland and China. The high-born minnesingers and spruch poets of the 12th and 13th Centuries often got their travelling experience in the performance of their knightly duties rather than in the service of their art. As fiefs of dukes, kings, and emperors, they were liable to be called up for military service in local campaigns, or on the Crusades to the Holy Land.

Spanish kingdoms before the inquisition of the late 15th Century, practiced religious tolerance to an extraordinary degree. Christians, Jews and Moslems lived side by side, and one of the many salubrious results of this association was the mixing of Mediterranean musical practices and poetic styles. Musical instruments from North Africa, most importantly the lute, found their way into northern hands. There is, arguably, some mark of the East on the collection of melodies to be found in the 12th Century Cantigas de Santa Maria. The extent of Arabic influence on troubadour courtly-love poetry is still debated among scholars.

The songs of women, known as a genre to Europeans variously as Cantigas de Amigo, Frauenstrophe, or chansons de toile, could be Moorish in origin. The most sophisticated Arabic singers and instrumentalists were women, highly educated entertainers, like the Japanese Geisha. The practice of having verse sung by a chanteuse travelled to Moslem Spain. Fragments of women's songs began to appear as tags, in the local dialect, appended to Arabic and Hebrew Poetry.

The Cantigas de Amigo of Martin Codax are the earliest women's songs to be found in a Romance language. The dialect in which they are written is known as Galician-Portuguese. Nothing is known of the poet, except that he came from the town of Vigo, and served as court poet to a Spanish king. The Cantaigas de Amigo form a dramatic whole; they are dependent on their sequence for much of their effect, and thus can be called the first song-cycle in Western music.

As a rule, most women's songs share one narrative commonplace: A woman sings about her absent lover. In Northern Europe, the woman tends to be isolated and powerless. Frequently, she is more or less under house-arrest, in the custody of her family or husband. If she is married, the union is unhappy and often abusive. She has near her no one she can trust, and often fears informers. She is the other voice in the adulterous relationship cultivated in troubadour poetry. The Southern woman, on the other hand, often has a more dynamic role. She goes to see her lover, and her songs are frequently addressed to her trusted mother or sisters.

In the Codax poetry, small but crucial bits of dramatic detail emerge song by song. The sixth song, to which there is no longer any music, is the most enigmatic. The true interest and value of the Cantigas de Amigo is in the vivid sense of atmosphere created by the verse. The undulation of the singer's emotions are like the pulsations of the sea. The listeners are made to feel them with her; there is no need for a poet of such skill to spell out the metaphor. Masterful use of the repetition of words and sounds creates a mesmeric effect, allowing the hearer to feel that he or she is the companion of the singers, sharing her closeness to the movements of the waves in the moonlight.

Mary Springfels

## TRANSLATIONS OF THE LITERARY TEXTS

### Der kuninc Rodolp

King Rudolf loves God and is a loyal man. King Rudolf keeps away from many a shameful deed. King Rudolf is an impartial judge and hates false advice. King Rudolf is a hero unwanting in virtue. King Rudolf honors God and noble women. King Rudolf often shows himself in splendid honor. I wish for him good, proportionate to his generosity. The master's singing, fiddling and storytelling he likes, but gives them as a reward - nothing.

I am a guest of strangers, and a host of the senses; and I search for a rich noble man to see whether he is friendly. As a guest I receive gifts the year over from noble men. May God reward those who give for God's sake, to reap honor. Such men will I highly praise in my songs; as far as I may go abroad. I shall think of them well. The shameless dodger, however, I refuse to praise. I will widely announce their shame, quiet as I may be as long as I am at home with them.

Those noblemen who are alien to arts give to people who are alien to the arts. They do so in order not to have to give large gifts. How should one thank them for it? Who should praise them? They should be praised with beer; there is no honor in praise with beer. Masters of song and of the fiddle would be glad in their need to receive even a little gift. When they can spare something, the noblemen should give it to them. It would be better spent this way than if given to duds. The praise of beer boozers does not reach far.

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### SINC, EIN GULDIN HUON

Sing, my golden cock, I'll give grain  
(at her voice  
I rejoice)  
spoke the pretty maid for whom I sigh.  
Thus a dunce's hopes are raised in vain  
seasons through  
Were it true,  
no none's spirit then would be so high,  
no one else's heart would beat so light.  
Will her careless gaiety  
ever free  
me from all the sorrows of my plight?

Move out all the chairs and clear the floor  
take the tables  
to the stables  
and we'll dance till feet and ankles hurt.  
Open up the windows and the door;  
let the breeze  
cool their knees,  
blowing through each village wench's skirt.  
When the leaders stop to rest a little,  
then we'll all, great and small,  
short and tall,  
step a courtly dance once in the fiddle.

Listen! Hear the dancing at the inn!  
Every man  
go who can,  
there the women wait, a metty throng.  
Soon we'll see the ridewanz begin.  
Tarradiddle  
goes the fiddle,  
lusty peasant youths break forth in song.  
Each in turn sings out his verse with  
pride shakes the room with lungs of brass.  
Noblegrass  
dances with a maid on either side.

Never has bumpkin looked so grand,  
nor so flighty;  
God Almighty,  
how he struts in line before the rest!  
More than two hands wide the leather  
band of his sword,  
like a lord  
in his new and gaily colored vest,  
scraps of every shape and hue are there,  
fancy shirt, embroidered pants,  
see his prance  
in a garb no other fool would wear.

Sinc, Ein guildin Huon (continued)

His attire is rustic as can be,  
it's absurd.  
So I've heard.  
he's been wooing Engel's daughter, Pearl.  
All such hopes are futile, I foresee.  
She's a prize  
of shape and size  
to win the admiration of an earl.  
Good advice I'll give him: let him  
try someone else; for all his pain  
what he'll gain  
he can take to Mayence in his eye.

Though his clothes are colorful and gay  
and he's dressed  
in his best,  
he should know, she simply can't abide him.  
He has hung around her every day;  
I became  
red with shame  
when I saw her sitting down beside him.  
If I win this maide who looks so pretty.  
I shall give to her my all.  
Reuenthal,  
for her own: this is my fabled city.

-Seagrave and Thomas

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HIE BEVORN DO WIR KYNDER WAREN

Long ago, when we were children,  
in the time that spanned the years  
when we ran across the meadows,  
over from those, now back to these,  
there, where we at times  
found violets,  
you now see cattle leap for flies.

I remember how we sat  
deep in flowers, and decided  
which girl was the prettiest.  
Our young looks were radiant then  
with the new garland  
for the dance.  
And so the time goes by.

Look, there we ran to find strawberries,  
ran to the beech from the fir-tree,  
over sticks and stones,  
as long as the sun shone.  
Then a forester called out  
through the branches  
'Come along, children, go home!'

All our hands were stained,  
picking strawberries yeaterday;  
to us it was nothing but play.  
Then, again and again, we heard  
our shepherd calling  
and moaning:  
'Children, the forest is full of snakes!'

One child walked in the tall grass,  
started, and cried aloud:  
'Children, right here there was a snake!  
He has bitten our pony-  
it will never heal;  
it must always  
remain poisoned and unwell.'

'Come along then, out of the forest!  
If you do not now make haste  
it will happen as I say:  
if you are not sure to be gone  
from the forest while there is day,  
you will lose your way  
and your joy will become a moan.'

Do you know that five young women  
loitered in the meadow-lands  
till the king locked up his hall?  
Great were their moans and their distress-  
for the bailiffs tore  
their clothes away,  
so that they stood naked, without a dress.

- Peter Dronke

## DER MAY

May with its charming host  
covers all the land,  
hill and plain, mountain and vale  
resound with sweet bird call;  
dove and lark, thrush and nightingale  
sing lusty songs.  
The cuckoo comes aflying after them,  
a terror to the little birds.  
Listen to what he says:  
cu, cu, cu, cu, cu, cu, cu,  
pay me my due,  
I must have that from you.  
Hunger makes my stomach almost ravenous.  
Alack a day! You would  
that I should? so spoke the small birds.  
Kungel, siskin, titmouse, lark, now we come  
a singing:  
oci and toowee, toowee, toowee, toowee

Oci...  
fi...  
ci...  
ci ri...  
And all the while the cuckoo sang only:...  
Caw, said the crow,  
Indeed I sing well too  
but I must be full;  
my song goes thus:  
Shovel it in! all in! must be full!  
Liri...  
so sang the lark, so sang the lark, so sang the lark.  
I the little thrush sing clearly, I...  
You pipe, you preen yourselves,  
you rock, and wave  
to and fro  
just like our priest.  
Cidiwigg...  
Nightingale, she and her song lightened our woe.

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## ES SEUST DORT HER VON ORIENT

There comes sighing from the East  
a wind, called the Laventer.  
It knows all of India,  
passes quickly through Syria;  
it does not stop in Greece;  
through the land of Barbary  
it has soon assailed Granada,  
blazed across Portugal and Spain.  
The noble element reigns  
over the four corners of the earth.  
It is sent as messenger of the day,  
which follows it through the firmament.  
The west wind rushes in to meet it,  
the western race rejoices.  
A sweet maid hears the storm,  
held in close embrace of love's desire.  
She said: "I hear the struggle,  
the daylight routs the night.  
Wake up, my treasure! the starlight  
deserts the fields of heaven.  
Watchman, false guard,  
you bring me grief.  
Oh cease, who told you to torment me  
so that my heart breaks in sorrow?  
How will I grieve, if misfortune  
overtakes him as he departs,  
betrayed by your indifference."  
Then she began to pummel him  
to rouse him from sleep,  
to pull him towards her lovingly  
draw tightly close;  
so that he begin to complain  
to awaken, to rebuke her,  
to chastise lovingly.

The boy cried out in confusion.  
"Say, love, how should I understand this,  
that in sweet embrace here you began  
to cry out angrily against me?  
Have I done you wrong?"  
"oh, no, you peerless man,  
I sorrow that you must leave me,  
for that I lose heart.  
Listen to the birds' song!  
They announce the day ceaselessly,  
each one expresses its pleasure  
with sweet voice in the tree branches.  
For this reason my heart must sorrow,  
day has over taken us."  
"In truth, dearest lady, your  
heart's grief robs me of much joy.  
I drew great joy from your honor,  
without misfortune.  
There is such murmuring of gossipers,  
who spy on us everywhere  
arrogantly seeking to shame us.  
I would rather be an animal,  
like the nightingale,  
so that the gift of your sweet body be without guilt  
And may the envious one  
take no pleasure in yapping at you.  
Oh watchman, your warning call  
did not reach us today."  
She ran her little tongue quickly  
into his mouth.  
Blind love knows no reason, She  
felt hot tears pour from her  
eyes, drank them without tiring,  
let them flow.

Es Seust Dort Her Von Orient (continued)

"Alas, lass, I am yours,"  
said the sweet maid.  
"My great joy has dwindled,  
since, peerless one, I must sun you by daylight.  
On North Wind, how have you forgotten me,  
left me in such pain,  
that you have let the South and East  
grow powerful, and burst in upon us.  
O West Wind, the day  
has pushed through the barricades.  
And Morning Star, firm in brightness,  
you let yourself grow dim,  
so that I, poor maid, must leave my love."  
"Lady, don't cloud your bright eyes!  
Your lovely little mouth has healed  
me with true love,  
so that nothing can hurt me.  
I care nothing for sorrow.  
Your heart will heal your body,  
which orphans me in its absence.  
May Saint Balthasar guard your honor,  
which has certainly not been diminished by me,  
no, without any doubt,  
I testify to that by the hosts of the angels.  
Lift up your little white arm!  
I dare stay no longer."  
"Friend, don't delay your return!  
Saint Peter will protect you."  
The maid pulled him into her,  
into her warm little mouth --  
a flash of white teeth --  
of Saint John's love,  
There two embraced,  
strained together,  
with quick and sure motion.

- Sylvia Huot

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CANTAGAS DE AMIGO

1. Waves of the sea of Vigo,  
should you see my friend,  
oh Lord! would that it be soon.

Waves of the mischievous sea,  
should you see my love,  
oh Lord! would that be soon.

Should you see my friend,  
he for whom I sigh,  
oh Lord! would that it be soon.

Should you see my friend  
for whom I have great concern,  
oh Lord! would that it be soon.

2. Sent with me,  
because my friend comes:  
I will go, mother, as I live!

With me sent,  
because my love comes:  
I will go, mother, as I live!

Because my friend comes,  
and he comes well and alive  
I will go, mother, as I live!

Because my love comes,  
and he comes alive and well  
I will go, mother, as I live!

Cartigas de Amigo (continued)

Because he comes well and alive,  
and a friend of the king:  
I will go, mother, as I live!

Because he comes alive and well  
and a favorite of the king  
I will go, mother, as I live!

3. My beautiful sister,  
you will go with me  
to the church in Vigo,  
where the salty sea is,  
and we shall watch the waves.

My beautiful sister,  
you will go gladly  
to the church in Vigo,  
where the mischievous sea is,  
and we shall watch the waves.

To the church in Vigo,  
where the salty sea is,  
and there I shall see, mother,  
my friend  
and we shall watch the waves.

To the church in Vigo,  
where the mischievous sea is,  
and there I shall see, mother,  
and we shall see the waves.

5. How much you know of love, friend,  
you will go with me to the sea of Vigo  
and we shall swim in the waves.

How much you know of love, love,  
you will go with me to the mischievous sea,  
and we shall swim in the waves.

You will go with me to the sea of Vigo,  
and we shall see it my friend,  
and we shall swim in the waves.

7. Oh waves that I came to see,  
would that you knew how to tell  
why my friend is so long without me.

Oh waves that I came to watch,  
would that you knew how to tell  
why my friend is so long without me.

-Sharon A. Fechter

4. Oh Lord! would that my friend knew  
how alone I am isolated in Vigo,  
and in love.

Oh Lord! would that my love knew  
how I am greatly alone in Vigo,  
and in love.

How alone I am in Vigo,  
and no cares are with me,  
and I in love.

How I am greatly alone in Vigo,  
and bring no cares with me,  
and I in love.

And no cares are with me,  
thay you may lift my eyes that cry with me,  
and I in love.

And no cares I bring with me  
that you may lift my eyes that both cry,  
and I in love with you.

6. In holy Vigo  
a beautiful body was dancing:  
love, eh.

In Vigo, the holy,  
a thin body was dancing  
love, eh.

A beautiful body was dancing,  
one that never had a friend,  
love, eh.

That never had a friend,  
that you lift up in holy Vigo,  
love, eh.

That never had a love,  
that you could lift up in Vigo, the holy,  
love, he.