

Introduction

I began this project in response to a need I perceived in the SCA: People are eager to learn and listen to medieval music but often find it inaccessible.

Medieval music can be difficult for the modern ear to relate to for a variety of reasons, but one of the most universal difficulties is caused by the difference in language. Providing a translation of the lyrics can help, but it can't mimic the experiences the original audiences must have had when they understood the words as they were sung. Most of the time, simply singing the literal translation of the lyrics isn't possible, since translations usually don't have the same structure as the original text (in terms of number of syllables, stress patterns, etc.).

In order to provide material that people could use to perform medieval songs in modern English, I began to write translations that are "singable"; that is, they have the same syllabic structure, stress patterns, and rhyme schemes as the original lyrics, while also adhering as closely as possible to the literal meaning of the original.

I don't think these will ever replace the practice of singing songs with their original text—much of the beauty of the poetry is lost in translation, and translated lyrics have a much less direct relationship with the music. However, I am convinced that these translations will allow more people to enjoy medieval music. I also hope they will enable people who already enjoy medieval music to experience it in a more personal, organic way.

My goals for translating follow (generally in this order of priority):

- Preserve the number of syllables and the stress pattern of the original text, employing inconsistencies only if the original lyricist was also inconsistent. Note that sometimes linguistic stress in the translation may not align with modern ideas of which notes ought to be musically stressed; in these cases, I follow the stress of the original text.
- Preserve the rhyme pattern of the original text, both within each stanza and throughout the piece, again employing inconsistencies only if the original lyricist was also inconsistent.
- Make no changes to the pitches, rhythms, or phrases of the original music (when these are explicitly notated by the composer). In a very few cases, I made changes to rhythm and phrasing in order to preserve stress pattern and/or rhyme.
- Express the meaning of the original text as literally as possible. For each translation I wrote, I looked at as many direct translations as I could find. I also consulted dictionaries.
- Preserve, as much as possible, the mood and vocabulary style of the original text.
- Musically emphasize the same words and phrases that were emphasized in the original text.
- Choose words that are easy to sing (e.g., avoid consonant clusters in fast tempos, use vowels that modern audiences consider attractive on long melismas, etc.).

So far, I have found that no translation is able to accomplish all of these goals with equal success, so readers will find that I have made compromises. In addition, I apologize for any inconsistencies in the formatting of the scores; I have been working on this project for over six years, and as I have

worked, my preferences regarding minor style issues (the placement of the composer's name in the score, the necessity of repeat signs in songs with multiple stanzas, and so forth) have evolved.

I found the pieces I chose to translate in a variety of sources; however the original words and melodies are naturally no longer subject to copyright law. My own translations are available under Creative Commons BY-SA. This means that anyone is free to copy, redistribute, and transform the translations for any purpose, as long as I am credited and any changes are subject to the same license. For more information, see creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/.

Moving forward, I hope to round out the selection of pieces I have translated, particularly by including songs from a wider variety of cultures. Since beginning the project, I have also translated a handful of Renaissance songs, and I would like to include more of those, as well.

Learning about medieval poetic styles and conventions has been exceedingly helpful to me as a musician, composer, and writer, and I have very much enjoyed seeing the world through the perspectives of the poets and composers who wrote these pieces. I hope that they are equally enjoyable to others who are able to study, sing, and listen to these pieces in translation.

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